

Letter from Switzerland

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Lucerne should attract even more visitors. Perhaps it will be possible at last to muster a reasonably large contingent from Great Britain. The Ambassador was there, Consul and Mrs. Adams, and a few others from various parts—but altogether not even a dozen. When one thinks that from Germany, there were well over 70, and from Africa

there were more than from Great Britain. South America showed up particularly well with nearly a score. So let's make an effort next year—it is well worth it. I have yet to meet a man or woman who, once having been to an assembly, will not come again. Au revoir, then, at Brunnen!

(MM)

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by Eugene V. Epstein

When I first visited Switzerland some years ago, I enjoyed walking. This had less to do with athletic inclination than with my personal financial status at the time. I simply preferred walking to starving, and if I had spent more money on riding around the place, I would have eaten less. This may sound complicated to those who have never led the free, easy life of a student in Switzerland, but to me it was a question of pure economics.

As I slowly began to climb life's ladder rung by rung, I soon obtained my first conveyance: a gleaming Swiss bicycle. It was a fine bicycle, and it served me well, even though I was rather uncertain of myself in traffic. At night, I parked my bicycle in a little alleyway next to the house where I lived. In the morning it was still there, sometimes covered with a light dew, sometimes not. But the point is, it was always there. I occasionally locked my bicycle in the beginning, but after a while I didn't bother anymore. There were two reasons for this: first, I wasn't so convinced that such a simple lock on the back wheel would discourage a genuine bicycle thief; and second, the lock eventually got rusty and ceased to function properly. I was shocked that a Swiss bicycle lock would ever get rusty, but when I examined it, I discovered that it was manufactured in Liverpool.

I was convinced at first that someone would walk—or ride—off with my beloved bicycle, once they discovered it was not locked up for the night. But it was always there in the morning, covered with dew (and sometimes not).

The question of why that bicycle was always there in the morning began to fascinate me. Could it be that the Swiss were just not interested in stealing bicycles, or was there a special Swiss law which was especially hard on bicycle thieves. I began to experiment.

One day I bought a book and left it on the rack on the back of my bicycle. I left it overnight, and it was there in the morning. I left it the next night, and it was still there. I left it a third night. When I looked for it the next morning it was gone. "Happy days!" I exclaimed to myself, "the Swiss are indeed capable of stealing things!"

But then I noticed the book on the pavement behind the bicycle. It had simply grown tired of all this experi-

mentation business and had fallen off its precarious perch on the bicycle rack.

I began to worry about the Swiss, to wonder just what was wrong with them. I studied the newspapers to see what other crimes these perfect people were likewise not perpetrating. My favourite newspaper at the time was the *Neue Basler Bratwurst*—for I was living in Basel—and it had a small daily section dealing with crime. But, in all honesty, there were very few crimes of any importance, with the exception of an occasional murder or two, many of which seemed to occur in intimate family circles.

I continued my experiments. The book on the bicycle soon became a pound of coffee, which was also still there in the morning. I added a small bottle of whisky, and it too was there—untouched—the next day.

"Ha!" I thought. "I'll catch these super-people at their own game. I'll provide something for them to steal that will tempt their perfect little souls!"

I went out and bought some artificial jewelry: a few strings of pearls for two francs and a rather genuine-looking pair of gold earrings (two francs and forty centimes). I placed them carefully in a paper bag, with a small string of pearls hanging out, and put the whole collection on the rack of my bicycle.

I could hardly sleep that night. What scientist can rest in the midst of an important discovery? I had a strange, disquieting feeling. Would the jewelry be there in the morning? Did I really want the jewelry to be there or would I rather have it disappear? In other words, did I want to lose my faith in the Swiss people and demonstrate—once for all—that they were as human as anybody else, despite some theories to the contrary. I tossed and turned and eventually dozed off. I awoke when the dawn's early light entered my room. I dressed as quickly as I could and rushed down to the alley. My heart was pounding and I was out of breath. The bicycle . . . the bicycle, where was it? There . . . there . . . against the wall, where it always was in the morning. It was covered with a light dew—as it so often was. But there was nothing on the rack in the back. My jewelry was missing. Oh joy! My jewelry was missing. Or had it simply fallen off?

I looked underneath my bicycle. I looked all over that alley. It was gone! Filthy criminal, you have absconded with my genuine family jewels. How can one ever forgive thee?

I went upstairs and prepared my usual austere bohemian breakfast of eggs, bacon, cheese, steak, waffles, cake, coffee and ginger ale. As I was musing on this successful conclusion to months of planning and experimenting, the telephone rang.

"Hello", I said into the mouth-piece.

"This is the police department," came the answer. "My name is Dr. Lombardo P. Funderli of the Lost and Found Department, Valuable Stones Division, and we've just received a package containing jewelry which ostensibly belongs to you. Are you missing something or other?"

I told the man I would be right over. When I arrived at the police station, Dr. Funderli explained that one of the good citizens of Basel had seen a package on the back of a bicycle in an alleyway near where I lived. Upon closer examination, Mr. Basel Citizen discovered that some pearls were peeking out of the bag. Our anonymous friend quickly removed the entire package from the bicycle and brought it to the police station.

"That's very thoughtful," I remarked. "But tell me, how did you know the package belonged to me, and that I had forgotten it on the back rack of my bicycle?"

"Elementary, my dear sir," said the policeman. "We sent a squad of detectives down to the scene of the crime to investigate. They examined the bicycle, checked with the manufacturer, took down the serial numbers of all vital parts as well as the number of your bicycle license. The evidence clearly pointed to you as the owner of the said vehicle."

"Are you going to imprison me for my laxity and sloppiness?" I asked.

"Of course not!" said Dr. Funderli. "But we are going to return your

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jewelry to you, which, as it turns out, is completely worthless trash. However, you will have to leave a voluntary contribution of, say, five francs for the Good Citizen who meant so well. In the future, please be kind enough to wear

your jewelry rather than leaving it sitting around on old bicycles covered with dew. And, furthermore, don't ever again try to lose anything in Switzerland!"

By courtesy of "Switzerland" (SNTG)

ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ITEMS

International Hydraulics and Pneumatics Exhibition

The 5th International Oil Hydraulics and Pneumatics Exhibition, to be held in Zurich from October 29th to November 3rd next, will enable specialists to compare the latest international novelties in the field of oil-hydraulic and pneumatic control and drive systems as well as accessories. The 160 stands, displaying the products of some 450 manufacturers from Europe and overseas, will give laymen too an opportunity of getting to know the very many possibilities of use of these systems in modern technology. Finally, and for the first time, a special thematic instructional scheme and demonstration is being arranged this year to give future specialists in the field a number of concrete examples: actual solutions will be demonstrated and explained by means of three objects from the most varied fields of industrial production.

"50 Million Flowers" Exhibition in Lausanne

Horticulturists, nurserymen, landscape gardeners, seed merchants and florists from all over western Switzerland are at present busy preparing the wonderful French-Swiss Flower Show to be held at the Palais de Beaulieu in Lausanne from October 14th to 18th this year, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the French-Swiss Horticultural Association. This exhibition devoted to 50 years of French-Swiss horticulture will provide eloquent proof of its vitality and "say with flowers" its participation in this year's scheme for the protection of wild-life.

The first "under-the-lake" car park

The centres of towns are becoming more and more congested with cars and new parking spaces are beginning to be impossible to find. Before people are finally persuaded to use public transport alone, a great deal of water will have flowed under the bridges of Geneva and, in particular, over the first under-the-lake car park, which this town will soon be able to boast. This new garage, covering a total of 367,000 sq. ft., on 4 levels, will provide parking space for 1,540 vehicles. Zschokke Co. Ltd., the Geneva public works concern

which originally conceived the idea and is responsible for the construction work had to take certain vital factors into account, not the least of which were the presence of a drinking water mains in the bay and the fluidity of traffic. Built into the actual bed of the river Rhône, this huge underwater car park will form a self-contained caisson completely sealed off and insulated from the bottom. After drying out the lake behind a double curtain of sheeting-piles which serves at the same time as a road providing access to the building site, the firm started work on the construction of the outside walls consisting of cast elements. Stability requirements preventing a general excavation, the work of construction is proceeding by successive stages. The whole project, the cost of which is estimated to be in the neighbourhood of S.Fr.28 million (US \$6.5 million) is being financed entirely by private enterprise (banks, firms, etc.). The new car park will be completely submerged and will therefore in no way detract from the beauty of the famous bay of Geneva.

Waking to order

In Switzerland, the land of punctuality, some 30,000 to 35,000 people are woken by telephone every day. In order to reduce the work of telecommunications staff, use has been made since 1953 of a waking system automatically executing orders, after recording by an operator. The automatic reception of orders marked a further step forward in the rationalisation of the waking system; the instructions recorded on a perforated tape are transferred by an operator to an automatic transmitter. Recently, the Swiss town of Solothurn put into service the first fully automatic waking service in the world, which receives and executes orders without any human intervention. The telephone subscriber can use this service occasionally whenever required or for a specific period of time; a user who has asked to be waked at a precise time each day can very easily cancel this order if exceptionally he wishes not to be called on a particular morning. The Solothurn installation, made by a specialised Swiss firm, handles 350 orders daily; it has had such success that it is planned to extend it to other towns throughout the country.

European innovation in a big Swiss bank

The Swiss Credit Bank, one of Switzerland's big banking establishments, recently acquired the first plant in Europe for the tele-processing of data required in banking. In 1967, for lack of space in its main premises, the Swiss Credit Bank in Geneva was obliged to move its electronic calculating centre; this decentralisation led to loss of time. With the new plan it is possible to obtain in a matter of seconds any information required on any holding of securities. The questions put to the ordinator arrive at the calculating centre over the normal telephone system; the answers are transmitted instantaneously back to the branch, where they are received either on a screen or in writing by means of a teleprinter. In order to ensure that the ordinator is kept continually up-to-date, its brain is fed daily with some 3,500 items of new data concerning the latest rates, conditions and modifications of holdings, etc. At any moment, it can supply a structural analysis of a holding, which is invaluable when it comes to offering advice regarding investments. All branches of the Swiss Credit Bank in different towns will soon be connected to the ordinator in Geneva.

The smallest watch in the world is manufactured in the Swiss Jura

The watchmaking industry is going through a period of intense change and development, and in the sector of traditional watches the very keen competition is compelling firms to review their structure. Industrial mergers are becoming more and more numerous, for they make it possible to rationalise manufacture and distribution. The solutions offered to the Swiss watchmaking industry are many. One adopted by a firm at Villeret (Bernese Jura) is particularly interesting in the sense that it reconciles a watchmaking tradition of very high standard, that of the luxury jewelry watch, with the needs of modern mass production. This firm, created in 1735, specialises in fact in small calibre ladies' watches. It creates exclusive models and models to order, intended in particular for the big competitions, as well as models in gold set with precious stones, which are sold either on an exclusive basis or in limited numbers. The smallest calibre that it produces measures 11.85 mm in diameter, which makes it the smallest in the world. However, as jewelry watches are not very well suited to mass production methods, the firm in question has become a member of the powerful Swiss Company for the Watchmaking Industry, for which it produces all the small calibres for ladies' watches sold by the company. The Jura factory exports the bulk of its production to all continents and in particular to the American market. In this way it ensures the continuance of high-class watchmaking while accomplishing an effort unique in watchmaking tradition.

(By courtesy of OSEC)