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# OUIN-OUIN, THE SWISS ANTI-HERO

Anybody who has stayed for more than a few weeks in Switzerland, more especially in the five French-speaking Cantons, will have heard a Ouin-Ouin story. Ouin-Ouin (pronounced like pain-pain) is an ingenious, plain thinking Swiss, usually careful with his money and with his eyes wide open on the world. It is said that his legend originated in the Federal Railways and that he was initially created as a model train conductor. But his fame has spread out far and wide since these hazy days and Ouin-Ouin stories abound. The French know Ouin-Ouin particularly well because he typifies the traditional "thickness" of the Swiss. The following jokes are illustrative of Ouin-Ouin humour and many of them are universally known from Geneva to the Sarine. They should be mentally read in French as their "salt" resides in the clod-hopping Swiss accent in which they were originally told . . .

## Ouin-Ouin's common sense

Ouin-Ouin has lost an eye in a car accident.

"What hard luck!" comforts a friend. "You've now got to wear a glass eye!"

"Yes", says Ouin-Ouin, "and what's worse is that I've been had. I can't see anything with it!"

Ouin-Ouin is sitting with a friend on the terrace of a café enjoying a glass of Cardinal beer.

"Listen to this!" says the friend, who is reading the *Tribune de Lausanne* with great attention. "In London, a man is run over by a car every twenty minutes!"

"Another silly idiot!" comments Ouin-Ouin. "In his place I would have changed towns long ago".

Ouin-Ouin has been fidgeting in the waiting-room of the maternity hospital of La Chaux-de-Fonds for three hours. He will be a father for the first time. Suddenly a nurse appears and addresses the man seated next to him with a broad smile.

"You are the father of a superb boy!" she beams.

"Excuse me, Miss!" interjects Ouin-Ouin, "I was there first!"

Ouin-Ouin enters one of the 385 banks of Geneva, gets in the queue, and when his turn has come asks the counter clerk:

"Could you perhaps change this 20 franc note for me?"

The employee, a man who can only with difficulty be cheated in his specialisation, scrutinises the bank note with professional mistrust. After a thorough examination:

"Your note is a forgery!"

"I know it is", replies Ouin-Ouin, "this is why I've asked you to change it".

In deep mourning, Ouin-Ouin enters the publicity office of a large French-speaking Swiss daily. He approaches the secretary and asks with a whimper:

"What is your cost for an obituary notice?"

"One franc the milimetre," replies the employee.

Ouin-Ouin's face suddenly changes.

"Do you want to ruin me! My uncle measured one metre ninety".

Ouin-Ouin, who doesn't know Zurich very well, has somehow erred into a vegetarian restaurant, one of these establishments controlled by the formidable old maids grouped in the famous *Frauenverein*. Realising his error, Ouin-Ouin gets ready to leave, but a bowl of birchermuesli, a mixture of apples, grated carrots and oat flakes, has already been laid on his table. He eats them with stoicism. A plate of mashed potatoes with gooseberry jam and plum compote is then brought to him. On the verge of nausea, Ouin-Ouin asks for his bill. But the manageress of this establishment, a fierce-looking lady with teeth of yellow ivory, approaches the table of her new customer.

"So you are a vegetarian, I am pleased to see!" she says.

"Of course", answers Ouin-Ouin. "I live on potatoes and nothing else".

"Bravo! *Ich gratuliere Ihnen!* But how can one live only on potatoes?"

"It's quite simple", replies Ouin-Ouin. "I give them to my pig, and then I eat the pig".

Ouin-Ouin bursts in the café where he meets his mates every day. He is completely out of breath and orders an apéritif with his hands and gulps it down rapidly. His friends are worried.

"Why are you so pooped?" they ask.

"Instead of taking the trolleybus", replies Ouin-Ouin, "I ran behind it and saved 50 centimes".

"If you had been really smart", objects one of Ouin-Ouin's companions, "you would have run behind a taxi. In this way you would have saved five francs".

"A ticket for Stanislas", asks Ouin-Ouin to the counter clerk at Geneva station.

After a brief moment of inner reflection during which he has passed under review the 1,876 Swiss stations for which a ticket can be bought, the clerk answers:

"Stanislas? Are you quite sure?"

"Absolutely", replies Ouin-Ouin.

"Don't know it", says the clerk.

Ouin-Ouin turns round and points behind him.

"It's the man waiting for me over there with the suitcases".

Ouin-Ouin calls at Mrs. Genillard, the wife of one of his work mates. She receives him most heartily and hardly lets him slip a word in.

"Do come in Mr. Ouin-Ouin! My husband has so often spoken to me about you. What a pity that he's not here for the moment. But you will surely take a glass of Malaga. We've just won a bottle at the tombola of the Contemporary Friends. It's the best quality, the price is still on the bottle. Yes, my husband will certainly regret . . ."

"Er . . . it is precisely about your husband that I've come to talk to you", says Ouin-Ouin. "He has fallen under a steam-roller".

"Good Heavens!" cries Mrs. Genillard. "It's not possible. Couldn't you have said so earlier? Tell me frankly: Is he dead?"

"No, he's in hospital".

"What a relief, Mr. Ouin-Ouin! Can one see him?"

"Of course".

"Quick, the number of his room!"

"25, 26, 27".

Ouin-Ouin meets his friend, Mr. Dupont, in the street. Mr. Dupont has been brushing up his education by taking evening lectures at the University. He is very proud of his newly acquired education and likes to flaunt his knowledge.

"I know certain things which I'm sure you don't know, dear Mr. Ouin-Ouin, without, of course, wanting to make you look more silly than you are. Ludwig Van Beethoven—do you know who he was?"

"No", replies Ouin-Ouin.

"He was a great German composer. He wrote nine symphonies and the Egmont Overture. And Bismark, do you know him?"

"No".

"Bismark: 1816-1898, minister to the King of Prussia, active and full of energy. What about Goethe? Haven't you heard of him?"

"No".

"Immortal author, with purity and elegance of style, profound thoughts, Faustus".

"You do indeed know many people, Mr. Dupont. May I also set you a question?" says Ouin-Ouin.

"By all means!"

"Perruchet?—do you know him?"

"No", says Mr. Dupont.

"He's the man who takes your wife out for walks when you are at your evening lectures".

#### Ouin-Ouin and women

Ouin-Ouin, who has drunk a little too much at the *Croix Fédérale* café, is in an unusually sad mood.

"I've never had any luck with women", he confides to his friend Durussel. "The first one died, the second one left me, and the third . . . well, she's staying on".

Ouin-Ouin comes home one evening stumbling under the weight of two tyres.

"What took you!" cries his stupefied wife. "We don't need tyres, we haven't got a car!"

"Well, you've got a bra", snorts Ouin-Ouin.

Ouin-Ouin has decided to go to the concert. He speaks to his wife with an unaccustomed solicitude:

"Darling, you are not going to the concert with your old rumpled coat?"

"Certainly not", replies Mrs. Ouin-Ouin.

"That's what I thought, that's why I've only bought one ticket".

#### Ouin-Ouin's son

Ouin-Ouin's boy has been expelled from every school his father has tried to

send him. Finally, he is sent to one of the poshest institutes for rich children on the shores of Lake Geneva. Young Ouin-Ouin is greatly excited by his new school and enjoys it tremendously. He comes home at the end of the first term and the school fees happen to be delivered by the postman next day. His father is flabbergasted by the amount he has to pay.

"I say, son, you're costing me a lot of money!"

"But after all I'm the one who works the least".

Ouin-Ouin has sent his young son to Sunday school. The teacher does his very best to bring home some notions of the Scriptures to his pupils. Ouin-Ouin is always in the first row and full of good will, however he is totally impenetrable to the sacred teachings. The teacher attempts to explain to him for the tenth time, with evangelical kindness, the relationship between Christmas and the birth of Christ. At last he believes that he has been understood.

"Now, little Ouin-Ouin, what does Christmas mean to a good Christian?"

The young Ouin-Ouin scratches his head, and suddenly, with the certainty of those who are at last enlightened:

"The entry of Christ in the Confederation!"

#### Ouin-Ouin at work

Ouin-Ouin has become the head fireman of his village. He is masterfully conducting the fight against a gigantic fire in a saw-mill. He has got the book of regulations in his hand and follows its indications scrupulously. His men obey him with discipline. One of them suddenly approaches him and, having duly saluted and announced himself following the rules, says:

"We're short of 20 metres of pipe, what are we to do?"

"Get the fire nearer!" replies Ouin-Ouin.

Ouin-Ouin, who is the manager of a poor boxer, witnesses a particularly hard struggle in which his protégé gets punched left, right and centre. One particularly vicious blow closes his left eye. Another blow deprives him of his right eye. Completely giddy, out of breath and blind, he says to Ouin-Ouin:

"I can't see my opponent any more!"

"Doesn't matter, hit from memory", says Ouin-Ouin.

Once again, Ouin-Ouin is on the dole. He has read an insertion in *La Suisse* that the Republic and Canton of Geneva was engaging policemen. He immediately applies for the job and comes to the interview with his large, shaggy dog in the hope of making a good impression.

"I've come for the policeman's job", he says, "and I've also brought my police dog with me".

"It certainly doesn't look like a police dog to me!" cries the recruiting officer.

"Actually, he's from the secret police", retorts Ouin-Ouin shrewdly.

Ouin-Ouin, who has the right connections, has obtained a job as keeper of the watch-making museum of La Chaux-de-Fonds. He has put on his smart spinach-green uniform and placed his cap with golden stripes erect on his head. He is zealously concentrated on his duties when a visitor appears.

"Have you deposited your umbrella in the cloakroom?" demands Ouin-Ouin, pointing at the signboard with a reprobatory finger.

"I haven't got an umbrella", answers the visitor.

"Well if that's the case, go back home and fetch one", orders Ouin-Ouin in a peremptory tone.

Ouin-Ouin is employed in a factory which produces bicycles for the under-developed countries. As the wages are very low, Ouin-Ouin cannot even manage to afford a bicycle and has to walk every day to the factory. One of his mates tells him:

"Poor Ouin-Ouin, you're not very cute! You should do like we do. Every day, when you leave the works, you take a part away. At the end of a few weeks all you have to do is to assemble the parts and have a magnificent bicycle".

Ouin-Ouin follows this good advice with great care. A month has passed and he still goes to work on foot. His mate is astonished.

"Haven't you done what I told you?"

"Yes, I've done what you told me", says Ouin-Ouin.

"And you haven't managed to assemble a bicycle?"

"It's impossible. Every time I've tried I've produced a machine gun".

#### Ouin-Ouin in the Army

Ouin-Ouin is a rather special soldier. He always arrives late at his yearly repetition courses. This time, it's the same story over again. The company is





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already impeccably aligned when Ouin-Ouin rushes in out of breath. The captain complains bitterly and snarls at him in a stentorian voice:

"Go and stand at the end of the column!"

Ouin-Ouin races to the end of the column and rushes back to the captain.

"I can't Captain, there's already somebody there".

Like every Swiss, Ouin-Ouin has been mobilised in 1939. He buckles his sac, takes his gun and the 24 cartridges which every citizen keeps at home and is about to bid a heart-rending farewell to his wife, who has tears in her eyes.

"Cover yourself well!" she pleads. "Don't drink too much, write to me,

and if they want to fight, please don't interfere! Let them alone".

Ouin-Ouin has at long last been promoted to the rank of sergeant. He attends every repetition course with discipline. One day his commander calls him and tells him:

"Sergeant Ouin-Ouin, inform the company that the alert exercise will take place either in the morning or in the afternoon, depending on the weather".

Ouin-Ouin writes down his commander's order on a prescribed piece of stamped paper and pins it on the company notice board. It reads: "Captain's orders. If it rains tomorrow morning, the alert exercise will take place in the afternoon. If it rains in the afternoon, it will take place in the morning. Signed: Sergeant Ouin-Ouin".

on with our curling — I think you'll learn to like it after a time.

"The dolly, as I said, is extremely important, although, quite frankly, she — I mean, it — has virtually nothing to do with the game, other than serving as — well — a focal point of everything that's happening on the ice — I mean, the rink. Now, to continue, each team, consisting of four players each, shoots eight stones into the opposing house, and are directed to do so by their own skip who tells them to curl in or curl out. Curling is the name of the game and it comes from the fact that the stones are not bowled down the ice, but are 'curled' down, with an 'in' curl or an 'out' curl. The stones are then able to describe various curves so that they avoid other stones and so on.

"Now, one of the most important things to know about this marvellous game is that you can't play it without a broom in one hand".

"Now that's a sweeping statement", said Hermann. "Continue, I'm bristling with excitement".

"The purpose of the broom is to sweep the ice in front of the stones, but only when the skip says so. For example, if your skip wants a particular curve on the stone, he allows it to reach a certain point on the ice and then calls for the other two members of your team to sweep in front of it. This melts the ice a bit and prevents the curling stone from continuing its curve. The stone changes direction and ostensibly ends up where the skip wanted it to go in the first place. I forgot to mention from the very beginning that the skip stands at the other end of the ice and gives directions — using *his* broom to point to the spot where he wants the various stones. There are a lot of other details, of course, but basically the idea is for one team to get as many of their stones as close to the middle as possible without having an opposing stone between them. I mean, one stone near the tee or dolly counts one point, the next stone another point, but only one team can make points. Is that clear?"

"No, but with you nothing ever is".

"Now, when all sixteen stones — each, incidentally, weighing around 44 pounds — have been shot, that is called the end".

"Thank goodness!" cried Hermann.

"No, not the end of the game. Just the *first* end. Each game consists of nine or eleven or thirteen ends, depending on how the players feel. Then the whole thing starts all over again, but in the opposite direction. Fun, don't you think?"

"No, not especially. And, anyway, I don't like sweeping — I get enough of it at home. But I sure like to sweep late in morning. I can tell you!"

"The most important thing about the game is that the skip is always right. If he places his broom on a particular spot and says 'Play it', you play it. He's the boss. In other words, he

# THE ART OF CURLING

Eugene V. Epstein

Since curling is a rather old game — having originated somewhere or other in the fifteenth century — there are naturally a lot of old jokes about the sport. Old jokes are all right in their place, but they simply do not blend well with curling, which is a fine and difficult pursuit. To take the wind out of everyone's sails right at the start, I must state that curling simply isn't the old man's game it is thought by many to be.

"Then it's an old lady's game", said my friend Hermann, who had just been named president of the Swiss Anti-Curler's Klub (SACK).

I assured Hermann that I was closer to my own adolescence than to senility, and I liked the game very much.

"You like the game", Hermann replied, "because you don't have to wear skis on your feet to participate, and, furthermore, it's a heck of a lot easier than ski-ing".

"I don't travel into the mountains every winter to wear myself out". I told him. "I like the free and easy camaraderie of the curling clan. They are true sportsmen. Curling requires intense concentration; there is no ranting and raving and rushing about up and down the mountains. This is the difference, *old* man, though I'm still not sure you understand me".

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't . . . and I never want to!" Hermann said.

"Let me explain it to you. Imagine standing on the smoothest, most perfect piece of ice in the world — a shiny battlefield in the crisp, health-giving air of the Alps".

"Go on, old fellow", Herman interjected.

"Well", I continued, "there you are, wanting to learn something about the distinguished sport of curling, just

as I was last year at this time. And look at me today: a master curler already! Anyway, the first thing you notice is that somebody offers you some stones with handles on them. These are what our irreverent friends call hot-water bottles. But they're fine stones, heavy, polished granite from the Scottish quarries at Mauchline in Ayreshire or Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde".

"Firth things firth, please", said Hermann. "Or should I simply take you for granite?"

"Hermann", I countered, "I just finished talking about old jokes. For your information — once and for all — I know *every* curling joke you can think of. So be quiet, and learn something for a change!" I then continued my lesson:

"Curling is played on a rink by a rink. That is to say, there is a rink which is a number of yards long and then there are the teams, which are also called rinks. There are circles — called 'houses' — at both ends of the rinks, the ice rinks, I mean, not the people rinks. The circles contain a number of additional concentric circles to help scoring, although the individual circles have absolutely nothing to do with the number of points one gets. The centre of the house is called the tee, and on the tee there stands a 'dolly', which is like a bowling pin. The dolly is extremely important, but it can be removed anytime by the skip, who is the captain".

"If dolly is so important", asked Hermann, "why can she be removed by the captain, or would you rather skip that question?"

"Dolly is a thing, not a she, and stop your infernal punning! It must be terrible living with you. How in heaven's name can your wife stand all those horrible plays on words? Now, let's get