

# Easter gift books

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that, even in the central post office in Geneva, I was not allowed to get the number myself. I was courteously given a chair and a magazine and was respectfully requested to wait whilst the assistant would do her utmost to obtain the number for me, in less than immediately, if monsieur would but possess himself in patience.

Outside, the shops, their neon lights glittering through the growing dusk of the lake, dazzled my eyes with watches, silk stockings, perfume — the luxuries, in fact, of the world, for Geneva to-day is the world's shop-front. You could even buy there, if you wanted to, the latest model Austin or Morris. But not many want to.

A fast train to Lausanne, where I had too much caviare for fourteen francs, another change at Montreux, and then round the winking lake up the Bernese Oberland railway to Gstaad, where I was met by a sleighman who covered me in heavy furs and took me, bells ringing through the clear night, to the chalet that was my destination.

The rest of my stay — for one who had seen the seamy rather than the dreamy side of Europe for six years — was too good to be true. The blue clarity of atmosphere, the suffused whiteness of snow, the coruscating brilliance of the ice; at night, gleaming lakes, ripe, effulgent moons, good 'skis' and 'shees' and san fairy ann.

In brief, Gstaad has become a centre for displaced royalty, having beaten St. Moritz, where the Palace has but recently opened, by a short head. Davos, with its fog of sanatoria, is less popular with the 'socialites' than with the skiers. Zürich stands out in my memory as a gem, a showpiece of material prosperity. The Veltliner Keller there is better than ever. It specializes, as always, in young goat, and the Veltliner wine is excellent. Should you order crêpes suzettes there, you get about a dozen, going through all the liqueurs (especially brandy, benedictine, curacao, cherry brandy and, strangely enough, dom) and finishing with gin and whisky. You are then asked which you liked best and given two of those to be going on with.

The standard of skiing has naturally improved tremendously throughout Switzerland during the war, particularly the jumping. There are also some very promising young girl skaters to be seen there.

The great question for every foreigner in Switzerland is that of money. Unless you are lucky, you will not succeed in getting Swiss francs in England. However lucky you are, you certainly won't in France (the reply of every 'bureau de change' still rings in my ears: 'notre pauvre franc'). In Switzerland you can buy English pounds two a penny — unofficially of course. I met only one other Englishman during my stay there. He was a millionaire's son and hadn't a bean. American soldiers on leave are left uncomfortably (and, I must confess, amusingly) short. This may account for their fine record of behaviour there, which has made them, as Arnold Lunn put it in the latest copy of the British Ski Year Book, 'such excellent ambassadors of their country.' I bought a book with an Italian girl. She paid twelve francs for hers. Coming out of the shop, she gave me a happy smile.

'That cost me 1,000 lire,' she said.

Everything is obtainable, everything — relatively — cheap. (I usually paid three to five francs for a night's dancing in a bar, which included three or four

liqueurs and perhaps two glasses of whisky.) The Swiss are looking after themselves, physically and morally. Throughout Switzerland a truly magnificent feeling of trust and goodwill prevails. For instance, when it became hot one could leave one's ski coat, full of money, out on the hills with perfect confidence of finding it there later in the day. My guide was quite insulted when I first doubted this. The shadow of fear has not visited this country. Maybe the secret is that the Swiss have all they want. All I know is that, returning to England through Paris (which cost me three times as much as before, owing to the devaluation of the franc and the consequent increase in prices to meet that devaluation) it was depressing to find such lack of trust, to find a country where, to quote Cyril Connolly in January's *Horizon*, the 'consumption of tobacco and alcohol has practically doubled, you will pay two hundred and fifty pounds for a hideous leather armchair which Ribbentrop may have sat in, you will plank down three quid for a bottle of Scotch, you can't be trusted with a railway towel or a piece of hotel soap, the club nail-scissors have to be kept on a chain, you'll queue a mile for a black market lipstick, you talk about 'putting the vedge in the fridge,' and smoke all through meals, your manners are dreadful, you're full of hate against other countries, you talk of Frogs and Yanks and Wops, and write to *The Times* against Picasso.'

It is the precise absence of this which characterizes Switzerland to-day.

In one of our best-known daily papers the Paris correspondent recently quoted a Frenchman as having complained to him of 'la nouvelle mentalité' with the words, 'For instance, if a doctor had too many supplementary petrol coupons on his hands in England, he'd take them back.' I wonder!

The contrast between a junior common room in 'respectable' Oxford, where the weekly papers vanish after a day, and the third-class compartment of a Swiss train, where the railway company confidently leaves magazines for the comfort of the meanest peasants, is too great to be anything but depressing.

There are many things that make a man more profoundly unhappy than seeing people killed in battle. Until the mind develops its callous veneer, he is shocked at watching carnage — but the shock is at the physical mutilation, not at its implication. A hungry child is far more significant of the indifference of man to a civilised life. Grabbing the last corner seat in a crowded railway carriage is a better gauge of our development than the barbarisms of the bomber.

### EASTER GIFT BOOKS.

We wish to draw the attention of our readers again to two recent publications of the Lomshie Research Centre for Anthropology and Race Biography, Londonderry, which were advertised in this paper, namely: "The Swiss Contribution to Western Civilisation" by Dr. R. E. G. Armatloe, with a foreword by Professor Julian Huxley, F.R.S. (5/3 post free), and "The Golden Age of West African Civilisation" by the same author (8/6 post free).

Both books are making interesting reading and are suitable for Easter gifts. They can be obtained at the Office of the "Swiss Observer," 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.