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## WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US.

Swiss Impressions.

By EDNA MANNING.

My husband had never met his Swiss relatives, nor had he ever thought of doing so until I suggested going to Switzerland. We had heard from them during the war when they could only send cards saying that they were well, and nothing else. The cards arrived with the German censorship stamp upon them and the British crown. Before we left for Switzerland I began to doubt my own ability with strangers — particularly with people from abroad. What could I possibly say to them not knowing a word of German, and nothing really of Italian? How should I greet Annely's little boys, Peter and Felix? I need not have worried because in spite of the language difficulties we got on famously. The older people, Anna and Davit, had been in England many years ago, and had kept up the reading of our newspapers. What we failed to understand, Franz would either draw on cigar boxes, or else indicate by action (a rub on his posterior meant ham and he knew the English for eggs). When he wished to tell us about his trips taken on his motor-bike across some of the highest mountain passes, he would hold imaginary handle-bars and go 'brrrrr-pop-pop!' The children did not treat us as strangers. We were just Uncle and Auntie from England, and very quickly did they pick up English from us. Before the week was out, Peter aged six, could say without a trace of accent — "Goodmorning! I am a little boy, a good boy, a bad boy, a nice boy. Thank you! yes please! You — me! Goodnight! Sleep well!" Which was more than I could speak in German all the time I was there.

Aarau is in the north of Switzerland and comes within the Swiss plateau, a belt of fertile green land sheltered by the Jura Mountains, and although its population is only about 13,000 the wide thoroughfares and impressive buildings make the town look quite a large place. Our first impression of Switzerland was one of startling cleanliness, which remained with us all the time we were there. That arch-enemy of cleanliness, the cigarette-end, doesn't seem to exist in Switzerland, and the men seem to favour cigars.

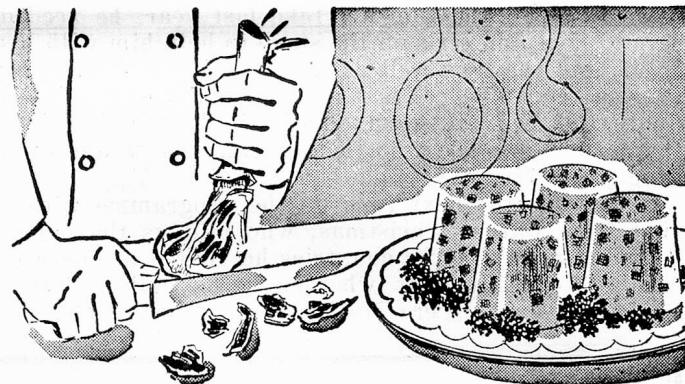
The most imposing buildings of the town are built around the station, a wise feature adopted by most cantons. Aarau has a very large post-office facing a square with a monument in its centre erected to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Aarau Rifle Range Club — a popular sport in Switzerland. From the square went the town's finest buildings, and pavements wide enough to take bicycle stands, which I thought was so much better for cyclists than having to leave bicycles propped up precariously on pavement curbs. The town's school for juveniles is in the main thoroughfare, and this one large building accommodates all children in the district from ages seven to eleven. There are no infant schools as we know them, and from this school the children are sent to a secondary school, and then enter the cantonal college, if graded.

It was odd to see the trams again in the street, and to hear their whistles warning pedestrians. We often saw milk trucks and goods wagons hitched on to a passenger tram. Buses only run occasionally for the

convenience of people arriving from the Juras, and once we saw a bride and bridegroom, the bride in her white veil and carrying a bouquet, jump into the back seat of a bus after the wedding reception!

Although so modern in lots of ways there is a high regard for anything old and lovely in Switzerland. Old Aarau is certainly the most charming part of the town. Carved window-boxes and balconies are carefully preserved, and the irregular buildings with overhanging eaves usually painted in mosaic design, are left unaltered. Here there remains cobbled roads and squares, arches with paintings on the walls of cavaliers and soldiers. And there are bells in Switzerland, almost everywhere. Not only the sonorous bells of the Catholic and Protestant churches, but bells on the necks of cattle, and bells on the stations sounding at the arrival and departure of trains.

Anna and Davit's house was built about thirty years ago and is made into three flats each containing five rooms and a bathroom, and surrounded with a large garden which the flat owners share. In the basement there is a communal wash-house equipped with a washing machine, electric clothes dryer, and sinks with hot and cold water laid on, other rooms serve as a machine and tool shop for the men, and a handy place to store wines, fruit, vegetables and home-made jam. In the sitting-room there is a Swiss "Ofen" which circulates heat from its top all over the room. The more recent houses have central heating installed. Every house has an outer window and shutters, thereby



## How to make ends meat....

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preventing draught in the winter, and keeping flies and the heat out in the summer.

Annely's room contained a divan, a writing desk which Franz christened the "information bureau", a table that could be pulled out to any length, a side-board holding a collection of silver trophies and medals won by Franz for his shooting and gymnastic achievements, and lovely lampshades made by both of them. A fine oil painting of Bernina hung on the wall with other scenes of Switzerland taken by Franz. Annely's kitchen is large, up-to-date and airy, and she cooked by electricity. She made us large squares of pastry filled with grated cheese and sliced onion submerged in a batter of egg and milk.

On the banks of the river Aar, women push old bassinets full of washing to hang out on communal wirelines supported by four or five goal-like posts. There is nothing depressing about these lines of washing, and even a stranger can share the pride the women feel when they gaze at their white clothes blowing by the river, and not only by the river but from the tops of luxury flats and hotels as well as from chalets and houses.

A man will raise his hat on chance meetings, and there is a great deal of handshaking done in the street, even among the children. On a train or a 'bus the men will give up their seats to women. There doesn't appear to be any quarrels over sex equality, men and women respect one another's qualifications, and although women have not got the vote there seems very little agitation on the part of the women for it. Some of

the women serve on local cantonal government, and they are represented in all trades and professions. On our estate lived a woman dentist.

The beer restaurants are next door to one another, and are very different to our public houses. Non-drinkers can enter these places without any form of embarrassment, and have tea or coffee and other non-alcoholic drink. Hard-boiled eggs and Swiss pastries are usually found on the tables, and meals are served. The regular clients eat and drink and play "Jass" a Swiss card-game, and sometimes there is a gramophone playing light continental music, and on certain nights a concert is given.

At one such restaurant we met Beaujolais, who came to our table and shook hands with us, beaming through closed lips as he did so. He was a big man with a round full face and bright dark eyes. He was Latin-Swiss and came from Poschiavo, in the Grisons. He owned a strong young airedale who followed him wherever he went. The men of our party got treated to some disturbing growls that were quietened at once by a soft word from Beaujolais. While Beaujolais talked the airedale curled up like a cat beneath the table, and remained there until his master moved again. Beaujolais knew a little English but was afraid to start in case we laughed at him. Tactfully we drew him out of his shell, and soon we were all talking and laughing together.

Beaujolais was highly amused at our licensing hours in this country, and suddenly he said "Come with me!" Beaujolais showed us his fine skittle alley. Skittle alleys and table tennis take the place of dart-boards in Swiss beerhouses. Beaujolais liked us and because of this led us down to the cellars. He showed us his kitchen with pride and a great sweep of his arms. Our faces reflected in the huge soup containers, and his electric cooker was spotless. He opened a large refrigerator and at his request we stepped inside. Then he took us to an adjoining cellar which was full of beer barrels. I found the system of pipe pumps which forces the beer into the tubes leading to the bar and tap as intricate as the inside of a wireless set, and as inexplicable. From the wine vaults we made a trip to the upper floor in a steel packing lift made to take exactly half our number without the additional weight of an airedale and several packing cases.

I noticed that the Swiss expects value for his money, and he gets it. When a man leaves work to go out for a meal a large dish of meat and vegetables is set before him so that he might help himself. In most cantons a restaurant would soon be out of busi-

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ness if they tried to cut his meals to a minimum amount allotted to one plate. The meals are not dear but they are not cheap, but like so many other things the Swiss manage to ride a happy medium.

Women and girls arrive in Aarau from the country and set up their stalls in the market place on a Saturday, and they are soon sold out. The market is just that much cheaper than the shops, and the Swiss are exceedingly careful people. They do not deprive themselves of all good things to make life easier and happier, but a true Swiss never wastes anything. He preserves his own supply of fruit and vegetables, and although the shop windows are full of tempting cake, he will make his own. Old garments are rarely thrown away but cut up into children's clothes. Every morning I saw bedclothes airing at the open windows, and the family wardrobe turned out on the line for an airing.

Davit took us to a nearby village, and we went through cool, emerald woods. Some of the trees felled had their bark scraped, and waiting for a team of horses to chain and drag them away. These trees were of great length, and mostly sixty to seventy years old. Workers are engaged by the canton to keep the forest clear of undergrowth, and to plant young trees.

Cantons and Districts are run on communal lines and are responsible for themselves, and the idea seems to get excellent results. The village we walked to owned a modern gymnasium hall and recreational fields, and several new houses were going up, including a new house and shop for the village baker with an all-tiled electric oven for his baking.

We went to Berne for an outing and met Arturo my husband's cousin, and Lawrence — a Swiss whose mother was English. Lawrence kept the conversation going in English, German and Italian; and Freddie — a University student, not only gave up his room for us but donned a white apron and acted as waiter. The boys served us royally with an ingenious meal of mushrooms, stuffed tomatoes and eggs, fried potatoes and rice, caramel ice with wine and coffee. This was given in their two hours off from work. They were most anxious to hear about Britain's recovery, and English football.



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Although Berne is the capital of Switzerland, it is chiefly residential. It is a lovely old city with stone archways built high up from the pavements and protecting shoppers in the winter from the cold winds and snow drifts coming from the Bernese Oberland. A city of tall bridges, spires, and carved balconies, cobbled streets, tall flat houses with shutters and gay window-boxes. We entered the Federal Palace, and I remember a painted ceiling depicting the trades and professions of the people, and I thought how much more sensible it was to decorate the ceiling of the Palace this way rather than with the grim reminders of battles.

When we said goodbye to our friends I gathered in that short time that the young Swiss have international affairs at heart; for their country is the oldest Republic and Confederation in Europe, and made up of French, German and Italian minorities, united under the one flag, and retaining three different major languages, four party politics, and the Protestant and Catholic faiths.

We went on our own to see Zurich, and the others had warned us that it would be "different" as it was a big industrial centre. But Zurich looked to our eyes as clean as any other place in Switzerland, but larger and busier, and we did see one or two steam engines on approaching the city. But even here the station opens out on to the best and most central part of the town, facing a wide river which flows through the centre of the city and joins a lake where yachting and bathing



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carries on in a thoroughly adult fashion — by that I mean no ice-cream cornets or amusement arcades within sight!

The river divides the impressive modern part of the town from the narrow back streets leading towards the Münster, and retaining their old Swiss character. The Münster looked surprisingly new, having been restored on its 12th century remains. Its interior was very different from our own cathedrals, having no altar, flags nor magnificent tombs.

We took a journey across three groups of Alps in a third-class compartment to a small valley community on the borders of Italy, and from here we returned via St. Moritz and Sargans to Schaffhausen. St. Moritz in the Spring had finished with visitors, the hotels were closed, and everywhere was very quiet, and the famous lake was partly thawed.

Schaffhausen is right on the German border, and a map of the canton shows bits of Switzerland surrounded by Germany, and pieces of Germany pushing into Switzerland, and on our return once more to Aarau we were forced to pass through a few miles of Germany which took us exactly six minutes. The Rhine-falls are the chief attraction at Schaffhausen, and here again the beauty spot is not spoiled by commercialisation.

Before we left Aarau we saw a game of football played between Holland and the Aarau Sports Club. The footballers played in silk shorts and shirts, and Switzerland presented a bouquet to Holland at the commencement of the game. Holland won easily, and was entertained truly well by Switzerland later at a dinner and a dance held at the Christian Science Hall in Aarau. We went along, and entered a magnificent hall large enough in itself to embrace hundreds of dancers. From a balcony we looked down upon the merry crowd. Dinner was just over and wine was being served, and the various headgears worn by the women from different cantons made the scene colourful. A band played upon the stage, and artists from the mountains came on the boards to yodel. I had thought I knew what yodelling meant until I heard these Swiss singers.

After the entertainment we went below to join in dancing. On the smallest space in the building we tried to waltz, tango and jig. All I can say is that we jigged most of the time! This was an international evening all right, for the band played and sang in English — "I'm going to take a sentimental journey" — and a rousing "Bless 'em all —". We went on gaily until we were stopped by a serious young man

who offered my husband a buttonhole. It appeared that the male dancers were expected to buy a flower for a dance! It was an embarrassing moment because just then we had no Swiss money on us — so my husband held out a handful of English coins. The young man who probably had no reason to use or inspect English money hailed us as Hollander, and the dancing went on!

Franz, however, knew this one and the other, and the news soon spread that we were "Englanders". When someone produced an English shilling our waitress put it in her pocket and said that she would go to England on it and marry an English boy! Later on in the evening the waitresses joined in the dancing on the floor — their duties not seeming to suffer in any way!

Before we left the hall an old cloak-room attendant almost cried when she knew that we were English, and called all the helpers to shake hands with us. It was very gratifying to be so popular just because one was British.

### CONFRERIE VAUDOISE.

Banquet and Ball.

The Winter Social Season of the Swiss Colony is gradually coming to an end, and almost at the tail end of it, our compatriots from the canton of Vaud, are celebrating their "Fête de l'indépendance" with a Banquet and Ball, on Saturday, February 4th, 1950, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Whilst this function is, so to say, a family affair, the Confrérie Vaudoise, nevertheless extends a hearty invitation also to their compatriots belonging to other parts of our country, even if their French is no match for theirs. They will be welcomed and made to feel at home. Our Vaudois brethren are big hearted and worthy members of the Confederation.

Judging by former celebrations held by the Confrérie this "Bal Romand" will indeed be a "Bal Charmant". There will be an excellent band, a fine dinner, a tombola, and best of all, a bevy of lovely "Vaudoises", whose charming smiles and equally charming manners will gladden every heart.

The Swiss Minister and Madame Henry de Torrenté will be the honoured guests on that evening.

We wish our friends from the sunny canton of Vaud a big success and a large attendance.

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