

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1952)

Heft: 1186

Artikel: The Swiss seen by a Swiss : "Going West, Brother?"

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691981>

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The Swiss seen by a Swiss . . .

"GOING WEST, BROTHER?"

This is the story of what I saw and heard upon returning to my student circle in one of our Swiss University towns.

The heat was terrific, and everyone was gasping for fresh air. It was about tea-time when I entered the "Café Roxane" after two years' absence from this meeting-place of students and artists, this "den of the long-hair guild" according to the public opinion. I had a vague presentiment of revolutionary changes occurred during my absence, and this presentiment was justified the very moment I walked in.

Instead of the soothing sound of a slow-waltz or a tango, my ears perceived a cacophony of the worst sort, emanating from what was later described to me as a "juke-box", or a record-player. The place was so full that it was nearly impossible to move, but at length I discovered Pierrot and Noël in a far-away corner, surrounded by at least half-a-dozen American college girls. How they had changed, both of them! Pierrot had shaved his black beard and treated himself to a crew-cut, he was wearing a singlet and a pair of blue jeans, in addition to multi-coloured socks and moccasins. Noël was wrapped in a light-green (!) suit and had a yellow bow-tie with red spots round his neck. What a sight! Moreover, they were sipping Coca-Cola, and I am almost certain they were chewing gum.

I approached their table, with my dark suit and black shoes, and my face bearing the traces of London fog. The two recognised me.

"Hi, stranger! Whea you been? Come on, sid-down and meet the girls. This is Sally, Nancy, Judy, Betty, and Annie. Nice kids, ha?", shouted Noël, while slapping me on the back.

In my astonishment and indignation (for I am a convinced Anglophil) I managed a "Charmed, I am sure!", which threw the girls into fits of laughter and disconcerted me completely.

"Tâches-donc de perdre ton petit accent britannique, et tout ira bien, mon vieux", said Pierrot in a low voice.

Trying anything once, I ventured some sentences in movie-American, but the result was even more shattering. The girls were literally rolling with laughter, and they started buying me drinks, for in their eyes I was a complete "riot".

Well, that was some weeks ago. As you may well imagine things are a little better now, and I find myself using "I guess so" from time to time.

But there is just one thing. Why should we want to talk, act and dress in an even more American way than the Americans themselves? Isn't that carrying adaptation a bit too far?

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