

The Swiss in London

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The Swiss seen by a Swiss. . .**"IT'S A LONG WAY. . . !"**

There are days when one does not feel like writing, and this is one of those. Six weeks ago, on a sunny and beautiful afternoon in July, I made my first acquaintance with an institution I hitherto preferred to talk about than be part of: the Army. Two syllables, so quickly pronounced, but so full of meaning!

The time is exactly 8.12 p.m. The place: Soldier's mess, Grenadier barracks, Losone, Ticino. Pierrot, with whom I have managed to be together once again, is reading a letter from America with a happy smile. Lucky boy! I am trying to concentrate. But how can you concentrate when you have a *rendez-vous* at a quarter past eight at Ascona Pier and you cannot be there because the sergeant-major confined you to barracks for a little dust on your bayonet? I'll be going mad within the next few minutes. . .

"Drüüblatt mit Stöck!" With a crash the heavy fist of a 2nd Company Grenadier lands on the table. Half the content of my glass of Valpolicella is splashed all over the manuscript. And that "lourdeau de Suisse Toto" doesn't even apologize! Pierrot looks up and says between his teeth: "Temper, temper, old boy!", and goes on reading.

Yes, he is quite right. And I have still got to write this article, for I want to be fair and laugh about myself for a change. Army life is never boring, for one is always doing something from dawn till nightfall. Whether these things are useful or of no use at all, well, that is no business of ours, we have to do them anyway. The greatest achievement as far as we recruits are concerned is the art of passing unnoticed, of neither being too keen nor too dumb. For instance, if the sergeant-major comes along and asks for someone who has travelled a lot, for goodness' sake don't move, for he'll only send you two miles away to fetch a Lieutenant.

As regards to food, we have an excellent motto: "Every man for himself". About sergeant-majors I can only say that they are like those in England, but without the moustache.

England! Only the other day, when I was lying in a muddy trench full of water, with my rifle beside me and two hand-grenades in my pockets, my thoughts went to London, to the lights of Piccadilly Circus, to the Thames. . .

Eleven weeks to go, and tomorrow a twenty-mile march with full pack!

Bang! Down comes the fist again. "Bock I hans Eu ja gsait, Unglück in der Liebe, Glück im Spiel. Ha, ha, ha!"

This time I just can't stand it any longer. I walk out whistling the refrain of "Smile, smile, smile. . ."

Helveticus.

THE SWISS IN LONDON.

Ambitious, filled with youthful hope,
He heard the call for wider scope

Across the narrow ocean
And, purposeful, with willing hands,
Set out to seek in distant lands

His fortune and promotion.

And so among us he appears,
In banking, shipping, trading spheres,
Dependable, efficient.

In science, industry and art
Of ev'ry kind he plays his part
In all of them proficient.

He serves in yet another guise:—
In all those caravanserais

For cheer and comfort noted,
He is conspicuous at his post
As an attendant or as host,
To our welfare devoted.

He's shrewd, endowed with common sense,
Abhors all shams and false pretence,

Preferring facts to fiction
And holds that man's equality
With discipline and loyalty
Stands not in contradiction.

He has his faults, is not a saint,
In speech and manner somewhat quaint,
By no means an ascetic.

He may be slow but is no fool,
Can be as stubborn as a mule
And in his views emphatic.

But faithful service is his goal
And he performs a useful role
In this great farflung city.

However humble he may be,
To him, with love and sympathy,
I dedicate this ditty.

J.J.F.S.

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