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LETTERS FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

The following is a true happening which has caused a great deal of excitement in and around Zürich. During some seven weeks in March and April a healer from Israel, Yehuda Isk is his name, practised in a Zürich hotel and helped, so his numerous patients claim, a great many people suffering from arthritis and other ailments. Some of them, they say, have been cured completely and in some cases Mr Isk seems to have achieved considerable improvement in the patients' condition. This went on, as already mentioned, for some seven weeks and as Mr Isk's name became more and more known, more and more people flocked to the hotel where he practised.

But then on 15 May the Cantonal Police stepped in. At first they prohibited, with immediate effect, any further healing sessions. Then they confiscated his passport and issued a summons for him to appear at the Police Headquarters two days later. There he was given two days to leave the country and was told he would be banned from re-entering Switzerland during three years. This prohibition was also stamped into his passport with which he first travelled to London and from there to America. He had, he was told, committed an offence against the regulations of the Alien's Police as well as against the Cantonal Law on public health.

Mr Isk had, before his stay was abruptly terminated, several times asked to be examined and tested by the orthodox medical authorities, but had received no reply from them. He himself took his expulsion very placidly, adding the remark: "Maybe I shall soon be back in Zürich, because there are a great many people who are prepared to intercede on my behalf."

This is indeed the case. A young lady who has herself apparently been greatly helped by Mr Isk has started collecting signatures and wants to organise a protest demonstration in the streets of Zürich. What she hopes to achieve by her activities is a revocation of the three-year ban as well as a cancellation of the stamp in Mr Isk's passport. This stamp in his passport, Mr Isk's followers claim, is a very nasty piece of maltreatment, since it stigmatises the man unnecessarily at whichever frontier station he has to show his travel document on arrival.

Having once before, since starting these "Letters from Switzerland", written about the country's harsh police methods and having been at the receiving end of a very rude letter to the Publishers from a reader, I now refrain from commenting on the above purely factual narrative — leaving it to the readers to judge whether Mr Isk has become the victim of police-state measures or not.

Student unrest

A few students of the Technical School in Burgdorf have collected 117,119 signatures, which they have handed in to the Federal Chancellery in the form of a people's initiative demanding that every second Sunday in every month should be free of any private motor car traffic, private flying or motorboat use on the lakes. The collection was started during the oil crisis — winter of 1973/74, when the federal authorities imposed three consecutive motor-free Sundays. It was then that the romantic dream of 12 noiseless Sundays per year was first heard of and the collection of signatures has gone on ever since.

The initiative, if it is ever put to a nationwide vote, does not stand any chance of ever being adopted. Far too many people own and use cars and far too many people in the country — some 80,000 — depend directly on the motor and accessories trade for their living. Apart from them there are the motoring organisations, the owners of motor boats and private aircraft and all this means that the initiative is really nothing much more than an idealistic illusion. Nevertheless the figure of 117,119 signatures — more than double the number needed to launch an initiative — is astonishingly high.

If those idealistic students are to be blamed for anything, it is not their concern and care for the environment and for noise-free Sundays, but rather their lack of realism. Politics is, as everyone knows, the art of the possible and to try and incorporate 12 motor-free Sundays per year in the Federal Constitution without apparent economic need just does not seem possible. The one thing for which the eager students can thus be blamed is that by launching and handing in their constitutional initiative they are adding yet another burden to the already heavily overburdened list of subjects on which the Swiss citizen may one day be called to vote: 17 initiatives already handed in at Berne and 23 further ones pending Peoples' initiatives can — but must not — contain a withdrawal clause. This means that the initiators can withdraw their proposal before it is put to the vote if they realise that it has no chance of being adopted. As the initiative for 12 motor-free Sundays contains such a clause, the Burgdorf students are now being urged by some organs of the Press to withdraw it in good time and not to emotionalise the atmosphere further. Whether they will do so remains to be seen.

Village of Doom

The village of Acla in the Medel-Valley is doomed. Before the avalanches came down in April the tiny community of Acla (altitude above sea level 4300 ft) counted 40 inhabitants, 10 dwelling houses, one chapel and 23 stables. An avalanche killed 13 people and 79 animals and destroyed totally five of the 10 houses while damaging the remaining five to such a degree that they are beyond repair. On top of this the forest above the village, which up to the day of the tragedy had been its protector, has been completely flattened. Re-afforestation and rebuilding the village would cost more than 10 million francs and, to make matters still worse, the case of Acla has shown that insurance protection against such catastrophes in many of our mountain villages is totally inadequate. The remaining stricken villagers have, so far, been given shelter in the few neighbouring communities of that lonely valley, which leads up from Disentis to the Lukmanier-Pass. But now is has been decided to give up the village completely. The few remaining peasants of Acla have not only to be sheltered, but rehoused and reintegrated somewhere else and they have to rebuild a new existence for themselves. Of course, they have to be helped. In view of all this one of the Zürich dailies, *Die Tat*, has called for "quick, generous and unbeaurocratic help" by the Federal and Cantonal Authorities and by the general public as well. One can only hope that in this land of "still plenty" such quick, generous and unbeaurocratic assistance will not be wanting.

A CARDINAL DIES

Cardinal Charles Journet, a leading Swiss Catholic theologian, died in Fribourg's Cantonal hospital.

He was the author of numerous theological works and the founder, with Bishop Charrières, of the review *Nova et Vetera*.

He is remembered by many Swiss for his strong stand against anti-semitism, torture and Nazism during the war — at a time when the Catholic Church was not making her voice heard on these issues.

A requiem mass was held at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Fribourg in the presence of the Church's hierarchy and representatives of the government and other official bodies.