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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

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The Colony's Representatives in Berne

A thesis for a doctorate written by a young historian, Max Sauter by name, has recently been distributed by the Swiss Winston Churchill Foundation. It contains extremely interesting information about the personal relations between the great British statesman and a Swiss painter, Charles Montag, who lived in France and who became not only Churchill's painting teacher, but also a great personal friend and the chief driving force for arranging Churchill's stay in Switzerland in 1946.

In 1915, during World War I, Montag lived in Cassis, near Marseille where he knew an English lady, Madge Olivier, whose father Sidney Olivier had been a high official in India, later being made the first Baron Ramsden.

Madge Olivier was herself a painter and one day she learned through her father that a British politician, who had recently been made to resign as First Lord of the Admiralty, was looking for somebody who could act as a teacher and adviser in the art of portrait and landscape painting. A meeting between Churchill and Charles Montag was arranged to take place in Paris in the home of the Comtesse de Béhague in the Faubourg Saint Honoré. After lunch Churchill asked Montag — in the presence of Sir Douglas Haig, who later became Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in France — to look at some of his paintings, which were neatly hung up in the countess's gallery.

Montag studied them for a while and then said to Churchill: "*Si vous faites votre politique comme votre peinture, l'Europe est foutue...*" (If your politics are like your paintings, Europe is finished.) Churchill was at first stunned, then laughed, and from that moment onwards the two became friends.

During the years between the two world wars they met fairly regularly in the Ritz hotel in Paris, where they had long discussions about the technique of painting, leaving politics well aside. During World War II they met again in November 1944, in Paris, after its liberation, and afterwards they spent painting holidays together in the Provence, on Lake Como and in Morocco.

Their friendship lasted right up to Charles Montag's death in 1956. During World War II personal contact was, of course, not possible before Paris was liberated, but even though Churchill was more than occupied running the war and his country, the two were able to exchange some letters.

In one of them Montag told Churchill that it was indispensable for a painter to be tidy and orderly in his thoughts: "*ordonner le travail*" he called that. And when Churchill completed his mission in Paris in November 1944 he afterwards sent a card to Montag, on which he wrote "*J'ai ordonné le travail, tout ira bien.*"

BY GOTTFRIED KELLER

By the end of May 1946, at the instigation of Montag's, a committee was formed whose task it was to organise and finance Churchill's trip to and stay in Switzerland. It was at first planned to hire the Villa Suvretta in St. Moritz, but Churchill's physician, Lord Moran, thought the altitude of the Engadine too high. Finally the villa "Choisi" in Bursinel near Rolle on the shores of Lake Geneva was chosen. The organising committee consisted of representatives of such well known firms as Bally, Ciba, Sulzer, Volkart, Hofman la Roche, Geigy, Wander and others and the cost for renting and furnishing the villa Choisi, for a Swissair charter plane both ways, for Churchill's stay in Zürich and several other items came to Sw.Fr. 57,500.

Churchill had, from the very beginning, insisted on paying himself for his drinks and for other smaller expenses and he finally remitted a sum of Sw.Fr. 4,270, accompanied by a note in which he expressed regret that this sum was rather less than he had himself suggested, "but this is all that was left out of the exchange facilities which the Government granted, and I do not like to approach them again as they were rather difficult in the first instance."

No doubt some of these details will interest the older generation of readers of the *Swiss Observer* who remember Churchill and his masterly speeches, amongst them the famous one given in Zürich on 19th September, 1946.

BALAIR GOES TO SEA

Directors of Swiss charter airline Balair found themselves all at sea recently when the company held its annual press conference to present its financial report.

A special aircraft flew 70 journalists and other VIP guests from Switzerland and neighbouring France and West Germany to Genoa — where the party boarded the Italian liner *Eugenio 'C'* and then set sail for an 18-hour voyage to Barcelona in Spain.

The press conference was held during the cruise — and the *Eugenio* captain invited Balair managing director Mr. Heinrich Moser (right in photo) to navigate the 30,000-ton vessel. For many of the guests from landlocked Switzerland it was their first sea voyage.

Said Mr. Moser: "The idea of presenting Balair's 24th annual report during a sea voyage is symbolic of a successful airline which is constantly on the move."

He announced a net profit during 1976 of Sw.Fr. 2.1 million — slightly below the record Sw.Fr. 2.2 million gain of the previous year.

to them to spread information about the Fund in their communities.

The date of the next meeting was announced — 19th August in Lausanne. After business was concluded, a luncheon was given to the delegates at which Ambassador Weitnauer, Secretary-General of the Political Department, addressed the party.

On the day before the ASK meeting, I attended one of the *Commission on Information* meetings under the chairmanship of Dr. Guisan. The state of both *Echo* and *Review* was considered satisfactory, though the *Echo* needed more subscribers. Circulation had gone up, for this illustrated monthly in three national languages was popular and cheap at the price, although the present exchange rate makes it rather expensive in sterling.

The same afternoon, I took part in a meeting of the Council of the *Solidarity Fund* under the chairmanship of its President, Dr. Schelling. Annual report and accounts were discussed. The former clearly showed that in many countries compatriots never think of the Fund until danger threatens. Rhodesia is a typical example. The increase in membership has been disappointing. The Fund still only has 11,500 members. Lump sum compensation payments in 1976 amounted to Sw.Fr. 240,000, a drop of Sw.Fr. 205,000 compared with the previous year. It is hoped that compatriots in so-called "safe" countries would join more readily. Individual cases were reported showing just how important this unique kind of insurance is.

These meetings are always most stimulating, especially the ones of the Commission, the "Little Parliament", to which I am sent by the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK. Naturally, problems vary in the different countries, but what is the same all over the world: a deep attachment to the homeland. A lot of valuable work is being done, not only by our compatriots at home, but above all in the many Swiss communities in all parts of the globe. May I pay tribute here to my colleague and friend Dr. Hans-Rudi Bolliger, a staunch patriot of the best kind. I missed him at the meeting in Berne, and he will be missed for a long time to come.

MM

LONDON SWISS PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Wednesday, 29th June, 1977

Members' display, Letter "E"