When the gaesum came to britain [to be continued]

BRITISH-SWISS RELATIONS THROUGH THE CENTURIES

When the gaesum came to Britain

Roman times

Alpine soldiers armed with a particular kind of short spear (gaesum) — as used predominantly in the upper Rhine and Rhone regions — are deployed by the Roman occupiers on the northern front against the Caledonians, probably because of the similarity of the terrain.

Seventh century

Irish monks from Bangor in Ulster, among them the Saints Gallus and Columbanus, Christianize the Alemannic areas of Eastern Switzerland. St. Gallus founds a monastery which still exists today and around which the city of St. Gall evolves.

Eleventh century

Ermanfroid, Bishop of Sion (upper Rhone valley), is sent by Pope Alexander II as his envoy to crown William the Conqueror, at Winchester in 1070 and restore the Anglo-Saxon clergy's discipline along the papal lines.

Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries

With Peter of Savoy (whose house stood on the grounds now covered by the Savoy Hotel in the Strand), a favourite of Henri III, acting as an intermediary, various families of Western Switzerland send members to England for service at court or in the armed forces.

Most notable are the Squires of Grandson. Othon I of Grandson was royal envoy to mediate between Savoy and Habsburg, commander of the English army and member of the king's council. Jean of Grandson (Othon's nephew) was Bishop of Exeter and builder of Exeter cathedral. The title of Viscount of Grandison still exists in Ireland.

Fifteenth century

The Swiss, who had defeated Charles (the Bold) of Burgundy in three battles (1475-1477) and finally killed him, become a military power to reckon with. It is now said' "To whomsoever the Swiss incline, he is like in time to be Lord of all". This marks the beginning of England's interest in the Swiss cantons for the sake of her policy of balancing the powers.

Thomas More, who depicts his Utopia as a state that does not go to war itself but employs mercenaries, obviously has the Swiss in mind. Switzerland on the other hand, too poor a country to feed all its people, relies heavily on manpower exports of this kind.

Sixteenth century

The reformation in Zurich, Basle, Berne, Geneva and Schaffhausen further awakens English interest in these cantons and vice versa.

On the threshold of this new era appears the question of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The Swiss prelate Cardinal Matthias Schiner of Sion is delegated by the Pope to persuade Henry to stay in the fold of the Church, offering an alliance against France.

Henry later consults the best of European scholars, with Simon Grynäus (successor of Erasmus at the University of Basle), who was then in London, acting as intermediary.

Judgements from Switzerland are given by Boniface Amerbach and Ecolampade, renowned lawyer and theologian respectively of Basle, as well as Zurich's reformer Zwingli — all against the divorce. Henry, not heeding their advice, remarries anyway, breaks with the Pope and at first turns

towards Lutheranism but then discovers that Zwingli's concept of a state controlled by the Church suits English traditions better.

It is thought that the lack of a unified doctrine of Protestantism, especially after the emergence of Calvin in Geneva, determines the English crown, in the person of Elizabeth I, to adopt a faith proper to England, halfway between Lutheranism and Swiss Puritanism. But the English Church nevertheless continues to look to Zurich for examples, whereas the Scottish Church inclines towards Geneva.

Spiritual incentives from the "Carolinum" in Zurich and the "Académie de Genève" are picked up by temporary English refugees in the Swiss cantons and are also conveyed by the freely operating book printers of Switzerland. The famous firm of Froschauer in Zurich prints the so-called Zurich Letters, which contain correspondence between the leaders of the Reformation and English bishops.

John Hooper, future Bishop of Gloucester and others who are to become Bishops of Winchester, Salisbury, Norwich and York, study at the "Carolinum". Hooper later describes Calvin's Académie de Genève as "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the apostles". John Knox visits Zurich in 1547.

In 1535 a complete English text of the Bible is printed in Zurich by F. Froschauer.
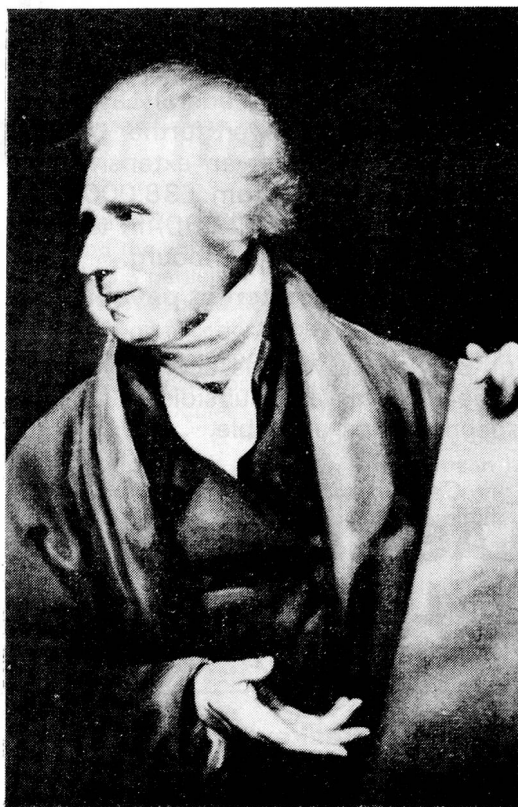
Seventeenth century

Cromwell, pursuing his grand design of a political alliance among the Protestant powers, accredits John Pell in Zurich as an ambassador with functions on the whole Continent (1635-1658). He in turn receives an envoy from the Protestant Swiss cantons on a temporary mission, trying to mediate in an armed conflict between England and the General States (Holland), the rival naval power.

Cromwell's plans for further co-operation with the Protestant Swiss cantons (like a joint conquest of Savoy) fail because of differing interests.

The creation of the Bank of England (1694) and the parallel evolution of the Stock Exchange attract Swiss investors and bankers to London. Relations between London and major Swiss cities are also furthered indirectly by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) which causes many Protestant financiers to leave France and settle in neighbouring Protestant countries.

Particularly close personal links are established between the cities of Geneva — then the financial centre of Switzerland — and London. Two direct descendants of Swiss in London are later to rise to the position of Governor of the Bank of England: Peter Gausson (1777-1778) and Sir Augustus Prevost (1901-1902).

In return the Swiss National

Heinrich Füssli (1741-1825)

Bank has in the 1960s and early 70s a Vice Governor with British ancestry, Alexandre Hay, who is at present the chairman of the international committee of the Red Cross.

Eighteenth century

Generally speaking, mutual interests in religious matters form still a key element in Anglo-Swiss relations, but other developments open new channels for contacts, for instance banking as already mentioned.

Philosophically it is the call of "Back to Nature", almost simultaneously voiced in the British Isles by James Thomson, Thomas Gray, George Keate and William Wordsworth and in the foothills of the Alps by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Albert von Haller, which brings the once dreaded mountains to the attention of British travellers.

Switzerland soon becomes an integral part of the continental "Grand Tour". Sizeable communities of British residents appear in Switzerland, mainly along the Lake of Geneva. Increased personal contacts between Britons and Swiss awaken the latter's interest in British liberalism and culture in general.

Ulrich Bräker, a poor journeyman and village teacher, comments in a forcefully sincere way on 12 plays of Shakespeare. Voltaire mocks the Anglophile Genevans by saying

that they imitate Egland as the frog imitates the bull.

The growing Swiss colony in London begins to organise itself by creating social and mutual aid societies, a Swiss Church and facilities for hospitalisation.

Swiss artists and scholars flock to Britain and many of them achieve high positions in the host country's public life. George Michael Moser from Schaffhausen (1704-1783) drafts the first constitution of the Royal Academy and becomes its first Keeper; Heinrich Füssli (Henry Fusely) of Zurich (1741-1825) excels as a painter and professor of arts; he too is later appointed to the position of Keeper of the Royal Academy.

Other Swiss assume high offices in the administration, like Sir Frederick Haldimand of Yverdon, Governor General of Canada from 1777 to 1786, or Sir Lukas Schaub of Basle (1690-1758), one of the foremost British ambassadors of his time.

Many serve with distinction in the armed forces. Daniel Beat Christin of Payerne (1745-?) returns from India as a major. Having made a sizeable fortune, he acquires the mansion of Glyndebourne, which one of his descendants later turns into the well-known Glyndebourne Festival Opera House.

To be continued

George Michael Moser (1704-1783)