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Strong reactions to the 'Berger bombshell'

JOAN Berger's letter in your July issue brought me to the boil. It is a pity she cannot present a more balanced view of Switzerland. I get the impression she wears dark glasses all of the time.

Of course the Swiss have shortcomings, but then who hasn't? I have been married to a Swiss for over 25 years and I am very thankful for all the compensations. Over these years my associations with Switzerland have brought nothing but pleasure.

Yes, the Swiss do build walls around themselves, are mercenary and could enjoy a greater sense of humour. Much of this reflects a strong character and a deep sense of identity. Whereas we in Britain are often weak and could learn a good deal about patriotism.

Perhaps the Swiss are well fed and well dressed as Joan Berger describes, but at least this is hard earned through diligent work. They do not look to the State to provide all!

Agreed, the Swiss are bound by rules and regulations. They live in a small disciplined country where 'most' people make a virtue

of the law. Is there not a lesson there too?

It seems to me that much of the criticism levelled at Switzerland has an envious tone. It is a successful country, where people do work hard and enjoy the highest standard of living in idyllic scenery.

Affluence obviously affects their nature and like all who have, they strive hard to keep it. But from my own experience, once the Swiss accept you they are hospitable and generous. In our family, if there is one objective which unites us all, it is the desire to return to Switzerland as often as possible. — **Harold Lipscomb, Lt. Cdr. RN rtd.**

☆☆☆

I AM sickened and appalled by recent letters in the Swiss Observer. Their criticism and con-

demnation of Switzerland is totally unjustified. I expect soon that the Swiss Observer will be renamed the English Observer.

I have been married to a Swiss lady for 47 years and since my first visit to that country in 1933 my admiration for everything Swiss and what it stands for increases each year.

To be quite honest and frank I totally disagree with everything Mrs Berger has to say, apart from her remarks about the tearooms.

If she objects strongly to being reprimanded by a policeman — who, might I say, has a perfect right to do so — then my advice to her is, don't cross that bridge. When you are in Rome you must do as Rome does, whether you like it or not, and to object to his behaviour because she has "politely told him in no uncertain terms" is laughable.

I am as patriotic as the next, but "work" is a dirty word in England. In Switzerland you are brought up to work, to do your duty, to be conscientious and to be a good citizen.

The result is a prosperous country, no strikes, virtually no unemployment, very little violence — except stupid student manifestations, usually stirred up by foreign students — and a standard of living unheard of in England.

I say to them, may your banks get bigger, may your "giants" at Basle get richer, and good luck to all of you Swiss. You work for it — you deserve it.

Each year I marvel at your insignificant price increases as compared to England. Your beautiful chocolate, perhaps a 10 centime increase, and I could list many items whose prices are unchanged. I have bought postcard

First remove the beam . . .

I WISH to protest at the very biased letter of Mrs Joan Berger of Croydon in the July issue of the Swiss Observer. I think I can fairly say that as a dual national born of a Swiss father and an English mother, and having lived for long periods in both countries, I have a balanced outlook on both English and Swiss people.

Both have their faults, certainly, but I refute some of the statements made by Mrs Berger.

The Swiss do have a sense of humour, but perhaps one has to be Swiss to understand it. It is nothing like the English one, but they do have it.

Perhaps Mrs Berger's in-laws are not ideal, but certainly my friends and relatives who have visited this country have enjoyed it and thought it quite beautiful (if it weren't for all the rubbish in parks, street and on beaches).

Oh, how I wish that English people were half as clean and tidy as the Swiss. It is a pleasure and delight to walk in their parks and streets.

Certainly the Swiss are money-conscious. Perhaps it would be better if the English were a bit more so, relying more on their own resources and not expecting the State to hand out benefits to keep so many afloat. They are hard-working, and there are very few strikes. Could we take a lesson here?

To infer that Swiss people are mean is completely unfair. Certainly their firms are prosperous, but when I was living there any charity appeal was always met by a very generous response and individual people were invariably generous towards others.

They, too, help the underdog and never more so than during the last war when they themselves were cut off from food supplies for a long period.

Does Mrs Berger have any knowledge of the help that was given to English pilots who were lucky enough to land on Swiss soil — the many refugees who managed to slip into Switzerland,

either before the war or during it, the many thousands of French children who were given homes in Switzerland for varying periods towards the end of the war? I could go on at length.

The Swiss people are very hospitable towards foreigners, especially English people whom they admire — even today (although I sometimes wonder why). However if any of them read Mrs Berger's letter perhaps they will change their mind.

I don't know why Mrs Berger's relatives don't speak English. Certainly in my school days in Switzerland we of the German-speaking part learnt French, Italian and/or English and I know very few people in Switzerland who don't speak English.

Incidentally, the old joke about cuckoo clocks wears rather thin, as these are produced almost entirely for the tourist trade. Very few people in Switzerland own them.

Does the industrious Swiss Mr Berger, who is again out making

money for his family, know that he has a cuckoo in the nest?

I can only say that I feel rather sorry for Mr Berger. It seems to me he has a wife with a large chip on her shoulder. My mother and father, now sadly no longer living, were very happy, both understanding the other. Incidentally my father spoke perfect English, but we often switched languages.

This, also, is a personal view. I criticise the English when I am in England and the Swiss when in Switzerland and love both nations. All have their faults, but the Swiss no more than other nationalities.

Their faults may be different to ours in this country, but please, Mrs Berger, look at your own country and people with a clear view and remove the beam from your own eye first.

With all best wishes to everyone, Swiss and English, and congratulations to the new style Swiss Observer — it is a most enjoyable magazine. — **Miss J. Houlmann, Formby, Merseyside.**

albums for four years or longer and they are still the same price – Sfr. 12.50.

No, you people of Switzerland, don't be upset by such letters. I approve of over 90 per cent of all you do, while I regret to state I disapprove of about 90 per cent of what goes on in the UK.

I have only two complaints – the price of your wine and the compulsory wearing of seat belts.

I admire your administration and all it stands for. Always remember yours is the only true democracy in Europe.

We in England have very little say. Do you think any government in England dare ask the population to decide about capital punishment, immigration *laus* and so on? Of course not. They fear the answers.

Switzerland is ruled by the people and issues of great importance are put to the vote. Do you think 84 per cent of the people are wrong? Of course not. If England used the same sanity regarding its foreign workers we would no doubt see a reduction in our unemployment figures. You are quite right in your appraisal of the question of foreign workers. They are not forced to come to work in Switzerland. They come entirely on their own free will. They know the terms. If they don't like them, then the answer is simple – they must not go.

I abhor wearing seat belts, but I did not expect the authorities to make an exception for me and other similar minded Englishmen. I had to wear them this July and I cursed and swore each time I used the car.

May I, dear Swiss people, beg of you to carry on as you are, and only accept others ways and ideals when you consider them correct. You are so resourceful that I do not really expect you to accept many from other countries.

We, all of us, have so much to learn from you in the art of road making (the best in Europe), your railways, your tunnels and viaducts. Only this year I

marvelled at the work on the St. Gotthard route, Seelisberg tunnel and the viaduct.

I would like to finish my letter by thanking you Swiss, all of you, for a lovely wife. You are so kind and pleasant, you are so clean and proud, so independent and sensible.

Don't worry because you cannot speak English. That's no crime. I cannot speak German, and my French is very rusty, but we have laughs galore. In fact many of you have a keen sense of humour, contrary to what others might think, especially those of you in the French speaking cantons.

I love you all and all you stand for. Vive La Suisse. – **Burleigh Watson Miller, Sidmouth, Devon.**

☆ ☆ ☆

I READ with dumb, sad, fascination the letters from Mrs Joan Berger and Yole Rossi Bowman in the Swiss Observer.

Because after over 50 years of very close association with the Swiss I had reached similar conclusions. Dumb? – I kept mum. Sad? – they are so right. Similar, but different.

My forebears were Ticinesi; from the south, and from

Leventina, those few miles below the Gothard, the toughest granite in CH. Leventina sports some heads to match. Brentinis continue to lie in local cemeteries – until they are dug up for the plot to be resold. Without notice.

One grandfather eventually adopted GB plates after taking exception to the CH taxman. Odd thought today. So, three GBs in GB are outnumbered at least 20:1 by CH relatives mostly in CH.

Until 1939 nearly every childhood year saw us in CH. My parents had somehow imparted the impression that it was a duty, and with a grandmother in CH/TI this was natural. The impression lingered, reinforced by choruses from CH. Always: "When are you coming to see us?" (From the sitting position.) Beware missing one out! Guai! A big 'offesa' – huff resulted. We made some 37 double or triple visits after 1948, 50 perhaps since birth.

I did wonder about the huffs. Hang it all, we had gone 600 miles and they walked to the front door, or not at all if they had a maid. But the grub was good.

It is a wonderful country for holidays; so wonderful that my own was neglected until in middle age I decided to right the im-

balance.

Today the cries still come by various routes and intermediaries. Unchanged. Always from the sitting position. But now we are also told which method of travel to use – not the one we like.

It wasn't just one-way. In 46 years we have enjoyed some 10 visits from CH. Sometimes we are not even contacted. Or, lucky are we if notification arrives in time for us to get out to Heathrow to meet them. We must. It is expected.

In any case there is not time to reply that the date is awkward if not impossible, or that the tunnel is often blocked, parking is a horror. So we now take the tube, and thus put up another nasty GB black.

Or the phone rings at night: "We're here!" (From the same position.) "Sorry we can't come out but we are so tired after traipsing round London for a week and we're off tomorrow morning. Do come and see us, it's easy by taxi ..." This, when at 2.80/£1 taxis were not over-expensive. Exceptions to these examples are very few.

Mind you, they don't always choose hotels. Sometimes they don't mention where they will

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Preferable to permissive . . .

WHEN I came to England in 1948 I was full of enthusiasm, not only to perfect my knowledge of the English language but also to leave the parochialism of Switzerland and in particular Lucerne, as Mrs Berger describes it, behind.

In the ensuing years I have slowly at first and more rapidly lately come to the conclusion that this seeming narrow outlook is far preferable to the permissive and irreligious society which I have seen develop in the UK.

I have heard reproaches many times in earnest and as leg pulls such as: "How are the Gnomes

today?" Seriously, as Auslandschweizerin being kept informed by the Swiss Observer of the happenings in the Bundeshaus and developments at grassroots during annual visits to Switzerland, I ask: "Is it such a bad thing to go forward with caution? Are changes always for the better?"

I think not. Old and recent history have proved it. After all the Swiss are trying.

Look what they have done for us who live abroad for a start. At least they have got their priorities right.

I now live happily in North Wales and have a lot of friends

whose husbands sing in one or the other of the famous Welsh choirs, whereas my English husband stays at home in the evenings, just like my Swiss father did.

Come, come Mrs Berger. Take a stroll to your nearest pub one evening and see all the English husbands who like their glass of beer, game of darts or snooker.

People are the same everywhere. There are good, bad and indifferent ones and we as mothers have the choice to guide our children into the first. – **L. Burrows-Koch, Wrexham, Clwyd.**

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stay and the truth of duty dawns on us. Then, we do get a 'preavviso' which carefully avoids the matter of B&B but does give the flight number. Again, never time for us to get an answer – to our reply of invitation – in time.

Regrettably, I am now also fed up with endless exposés of how many 'analisi' and 'cure' (treatments) they have had since my last visit. In Bads and Bagni, mud and fanghi, sulphur, arsenic and carbonic acid have they wallowed. In 'waters containing earths' (sic). In brine too, applied externally or injected into any prescribed orifice. (The facilities near Tarasp seem out of favour in TI and are left to scrub out other over-fat European livers. That impossible Romansch?)

Fed up, too, with examining bagfuls of pills to be devoured with SBB-CFF-FFS punctuality – if you forget the internationals held up by those despicable Italiani. And with having to admire those two upper front choppers which cost unimaginable (but specified) thousands of Swissies. My NHS issue are just as chopperable.

Though Basle manufactures every pill and potion for every existent and non-existent malady (they have both), several of my dear Swiss insist on buying Danish because they are cheaper.

The Third World can have the home product whether they want it or not and whether it does them any good or not. Provided someone pays. Hardly the patriotism to be expected from the perennial display of all those enchanting

flags.

You may imagine perhaps that an internecine conflict exists between GB and our CH/TI connections. Not a bit of it. I have never had to use RAF language on them even when provoked by the incessant gossiping and the perpetual examinations (verbal) of the human plumbing system.

All this naturally leads to an abundance of very rich doctors and an adequate provision of neuroses. These seem to be important to the TI economy since a local establishment does quite nicely out of them at rates up to 4-star hotel level. Medication extra. Any seeming inefficacy of a sojourn there can at least ensure a return stay just to keep the pot boiling.

Happily I discovered quite by chance – it is universal, ignore the pouting – that the sense of humour found lacking in CH by some of your correspondents does exist in TI. Provided it is lavatorial. So we get on famously and it helps to knock out some stuffing.

I still love the country and all it has to offer. From roaming around Basle SBB-SNCF-DB to cog wheels and pastries and cows. They are prosperous from inventiveness and hard work. And to pick up Sfr. ½ million a year from a multinational, as an unpaid MP, does help a bit. They need all those banks to hold it all.

I loved them because personally they were generous (when not mean), systematic, efficient and polite. So long as they can stay put. So much cleaner than the much-bathed GBs expected: dust is chased

speck by speck before it lands on floors so waxed that they are hazardous to cross without crampons.

Clever too. Fancy adapting the legs of those photogenic cows to suit the gradients in VS! Missing no detail, their superb Hotel Guide tells you everything but the colour of the bidet. Free. For a change. They also learn fast. Once here, they can get their GB husband to do the shopping and cleaning. Try THAT on a TI hubby!

After some years of absence, today I know not, except that they have by no means lost many of these qualities and still have excellent coffee mixtures and chocolate at near half GB prices.

But they can hardly understand – if at all – what inflation like ours can mean and do. Between 14 and 450 per cent in 11 years or so is a gap which cannot be accommodated by sympathetic noises. With all that expenditure on analyses, treatments, teeth and pills, together with the expertise shown in counting, remembering and nattering about it, you would expect them to manage the odd percentage calculation.

Seemingly not. They now print their banknotes themselves, maybe lest our national disease should spread. Can't say that I blame them, but we have lost an export order. And the opportunity of pinching a few...

Please don't ever sack Gottfried Keller – **Terence Brentini**.

● Apparently the BS have been in GB since 1903. Our correspondent's paternal grandfather

was one of the band of Ticinesi restaurateurs of 100 years or so ago.

☆☆☆

I FIND Mr Gottfried Keller's "Letter from Switzerland" very interesting and often informative but I was particularly amused to read his most recent letter headed 'Courage that carried Britain through'.

I did not live in the UK during those black years of the last war, but have had the good fortune to live in Britain for the past 20 years. How I agree with Mr Keller's general theme – the English people's imperturbability – which has helped me too over difficult patches, not to mention my own husband who always shows these particular qualities.

My 'war experience' in the UK is confined to the recent riots in most major cities and as I live in the London area I took a particular interest in the Brixton situation. The shops looked a sorry sight with doors and windows gone. A hairdresser who was only left with the shell of his shop put up a notice saying, "Business as usual". The one that really took my fancy was a sign outside a smashed shop window saying, "Why steal it, it is cheap anyhow".

Recently, but nothing to do with the riots, our office building got burgled and when I walked into my office it almost looked as though a bomb hit it. My boss who stood among the rubble looked at me as I walked into the office and said: "I like your coat". The burglary hardly got a mention! – **Edith Bates, Chessington, Surrey**.

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