

Remembering Gottfried Keller

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GOTTFRIED Keller was born in Aarau on April 23, 1905, on an Easter Sunday morning. The whole family rejoiced – it was a son, an heir.

With two elder sisters he grew up in a well ordered family circle. His father was a lawyer, a politician and a member of the Federal Council for the canton of Aargau in Berne for many years.

His mother kept an open house for the family at large, the many guests his father invited home and all the children, who loved to go to the Jurastrasse for a party because Auntie Emmi was such good fun.

As was customary at that time the children were present at table when the parents entertained. The young boy must have absorbed a lot of the always interesting conversations and that must have stimulated his wish to take up an active part in the world of politics.

He was carefully educated and encouraged by his father to start law studies in Berne. But this did not satisfy him so he broke off his studies, much to the dismay of his parents.

He wanted to write, to be a journalist, which was not such an easy task at that time. There was no specific training for that job. One learned it as one went along.

So he first went to Paris to learn the language and was de-

It is with very great regret that the Swiss Observer records the death at Zollikon in Switzerland of our distinguished colleague, Gottfried Keller, whose final "Letter from Switzerland" appeared last month. During his long stay in London he gave much professional help to the Swiss Observer, and for many years was our honorary vice-president. To Mrs Keller we send our deepest sympathy.

lighted to be asked to send short messages to the Swiss News Agency in Berne. His next step brought him to London to the Swiss Mercantile School to perfect his English. This was at the time when Hitler kept the world in suspense. He was then working more regularly for the Swiss News Agency but now, of course, from London.

The next great political event was the occupation of the Rhineland by Germany and the League of Nations met at St. James's Palace in London. The space was limited so the representative of national agencies had preference.

Many well known European journalists came to London for this event, among them Mr Oeri, the editor of the Basler Nachrichten.

ten. Gottfried Keller's father was a colleague of his from the Federal Council in Berne.

Mr Oeri was not allowed into the conference rooms but the young beginner was because he represented a national news agency. So he was able to inform Mr Oeri of what was happening during the long drawn out sessions.

This personal relationship resulted in the appointment of Gottfried Keller as representative of the Basler Nachrichten in London the spring of 1939. It was a very busy time before, during and after the war.

It was that spring, too, that Gottfried Keller married, and he had his home in London throughout the war. He was exempted from military service because his presence in London was valuable as a neutral observer for Swiss papers through the agency and of course the Basler Nachrichten.

Once a month Gottfried Keller

gave a lecture to the Swiss colony at the then deserted Swiss Mercantile School to explain all the happenings behind the published news in the papers. At this time he became president of the Foreign Press Association for the first time for a duration of four years.

Much of his spare time was taken up with helping colleagues who had lost their homeland and their jobs due to Hitler's invasion of European countries. But he had little spare time as Gottfried Keller was dedicated to his job as a neutral observer and took no holidays during the war years.

Even in the darkest days he was convinced England would win through and so his messages always had a tone of optimism. At the end of the European war he was rewarded with a five weeks holiday to Switzerland, together with his wife – an unforgettable time for both of them.

Peace did not develop in the way everybody hoped. Difficult times continued with the so called "cold war". Gottfried Keller had a second period of being president of the Foreign Press Association. The governments exiled in London had returned to their native countries but London was still a centre of political developments and events.

Throughout his working time in London Gottfried Keller never had a dull moment. However life became more normal, he had regular working hours and thus time to play tennis on fine afternoons. He helped to organise the Globe lawn tennis club in Hampstead and became its first president from 1954 to 1958.

Time passed and towards the end of the seventies he decided to retire and return to Switzerland. He had nine years of retirement, first living in Küsnacht, Zurich, and for the last four years in Zollikon. He chose these environments because his and his wife's nearest relations lived there.

His interest in current events never ceased, nor his pleasure for a game of tennis which towards the end were doubles of course.

He died on the tennis court on September 22, just as he was starting another game.

Remembering Gottfried Keller

READER'S LETTER

Lost in the translation

I APOLOGISE for bringing up the subject of Joan Berger's letter again, but I was rather surprised to read the several very emotional replies which in the main dismissed her comments as "rub-bish".

In her defence I wish to point out that many of her comments were absolutely correct. Most of the readers who replied were English and admitted that they could not speak the language, and in my opinion herein lies the problem.

I feel strongly that in order to really understand a people one must be able to converse in their language and, as Joan Berger has worked for nearly seven years in Switzerland, she can obviously speak the language.

She has been married to a Swiss for more than 20 years, so please give her some credit of understanding the situation.

I think the Swiss, especially the

men, are very self-centred and egotistical. Male chauvenism has always been a very strong feature of Swiss life and as a Swiss female I have noticed this particularly and, while it may have improved a bit in recent years, it is still noticeable today.

One Swiss male recently said to me that all the world should do as the Swiss do. What arrogance!

I have been married to an Englishman for 20 years and I do not hate the Swiss male and certainly my own father was very liberal and understanding, but I hear people commenting all the time about the chauvenistic Swiss and a lot of it is true.

They are very smug and complacent and totally uninterested in anything else but themselves. When I recently discussed the street riots in the UK with a Swiss his answer was: "I could not care less, it is not my problem".

But wait, do I hear a stirring

among the Swiss youth? As I understand it from many conversations with Swiss people during a recent trip to Switzerland the young people especially are very dissatisfied and bored with materialism.

Working, eating and accumulating more and more money is not everybody's dream of a fulfilled existence. Aren't the young people telling us that all is not well?

I am glad that Joan Berger is broad minded and tolerant and has a sense of humour. She needs it, but then the English always have had this quality.

Now that the Swiss Observer has changed its style by publishing topics that interest all of us, I hope they will continue to do so in future. Exchanging of ideas is a healthy thing, even if we do not always agree. – Edith Bates, Chessington, Surrey.