

About Switzerland

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ABOUT SWITZERLAND.

**Madame Benziger talks to
Mrs. Josephine Mc. Neill.**

(Sunday Independent, Dublin.)

Mme Benziger, the wife of the Consul-General for Switzerland in Dublin, is rarely bored. She has so many tastes. "Too many tastes," she added with a smile.

"Too many accomplishments," I suggest. "No doubt you find it hard to get time for them all."

Mme Benziger is, in the first place, a sports-woman. She is a tennis enthusiast, and plays an excellent game. "Tennis winter and summer. Tennis every day, whenever possible." That is her ideal sporting programme, but many things, including weather, prevent it from being fully carried out.

Mme Benziger likes a well-ordered home, though she would not describe housekeeping as one of her favourite hobbies. She has many of those accomplishments which lend grace to home life.

She is a skilled needlewoman, four beautiful tapestry chairs in the drawing-room where we sat giving ample proof of her artistry with the needle. The seats and backs were entirely covered with tapestry, Mme Benziger's handiwork.

The legs and framework of the chairs were old Swiss. The old Scandinavian design, a brilliant floral pattern in greens and blues and reds on a black background, made the chairs extremely decorative. They were a monument of skill and patience.

Mme Benziger loves music, and sings in many languages. Her repertoire includes a wide selection of the old folk-songs of Switzerland.

She has yet another indoor accomplishment. She plays an excellent game of bridge. Obviously, Mme Benziger can take the climate as it comes. She has resources of her own for sun and rain.

We began to talk about Switzerland. Mme Benziger explained to me that though Swiss by adoption, she was Danish by birth (I thought there was a hint of the Viking in her sea-blue eyes). As Swiss housekeeping is proverbial, I asked her if she knew of any special reason to account for its excellence.

"Practically every girl in Switzerland," she said, "when she finishes her ordinary State education, does a course in cooking, laundry, and domestic economy. Thus each generation of Swiss women acquires a thorough knowledge of housekeeping, and the well-kept home becomes a tradition. It is only when the Swiss girl has completed a course in housekeeping that she turns for special training in whatever career she wishes to adopt, such as business, nursing, the various professions, etc."

Women in Switzerland have not the vote and they take no part in public life. There are no women members of Parliament, and women are not represented on municipal bodies.

Apart from their duties to home and family, Swiss women find pleasure in intellectual pursuits. They are very fond of literature and all through Switzerland—in the cities, towns, and villages—they make full use of such facilities for reading—libraries, etc.—as are available. They like to keep up with the latest literary developments and to read the latest books.

The Swiss are very fond of the theatre. Even in the small towns and villages, they have their dramatic societies. They like to perform their own plays, in dialect and otherwise, and also the plays of other countries.

The language position in Switzerland is very interesting. In view of the intense national consciousness of the Swiss and the determination with which they have preserved their independence down the centuries, it is a remarkable fact they have no national language.

As a rule, a national language is a strong unifying factor. The Swiss have managed to preserve their unity without it. Switzerland speaks four languages—French, German, Italian, and Romanche.

"Romanche is a native language," Mme Benziger told me, "but it is not the national language. It is spoken by about 40,000 people in Switzerland in the canton of the Grisons. It is an old Roman dialect and dates from the Roman occupation of that area."

"Romanche has always been the language of a part of the Grisons. It has its literature, newspapers, etc. Romanche is the language of the schools in that area and, of course, the language of the home."

"The Swiss nation, in general, feels a strong sentiment for the Romanche tongue. It desires to encourage its continued use, to preserve it and to give it a place of honour as part of the national tradition."

I gathered from Mme Benziger that there is no movement to extend its use outside its present boundaries, or to promote its development at the expense of the other languages spoken in Switzerland. Romanche is not spoken in the Swiss Parliament—French, German, Italian are the parliamentary languages, and it is only in these languages that laws and administrative notices are published.

I asked Mme Benziger if the influence of such powerful cultures as the French, the German, and the Italian did not interfere with the development of a distinctive Swiss culture.

"Not at all," she assured me. "French, German, and Italian influences have helped to make the Swiss culture more vigorous and diversified. We borrow from each of these great cultures, but we make our own of what we borrow. We adapt to Swiss circumstances—to the Swiss climate, the Swiss character, the Swiss setting—whatever we take from abroad, and the result has all the stamp of a Swiss product."

Our political ideas show a certain French influence; in art and literature, all three influences, German, French, Italian can be noted; in architecture, in the past French and Italian influences predominated, but our modern architecture seems to be influenced by German styles.

"We can always say that Swiss writers, artists, architects, educationists, statesmen give and have always given to their creations a definite Swiss character suitable to Swiss circumstances. For this reason, we feel we are enriched rather than impoverished by our linguistic contacts with outside cultures."

Mme Benziger talked to me of her husband's canton, Schwyz. Schwyz is an ancient and historic canton which remained Catholic throughout the centuries. The Benzigers are an old Catholic family, whose name as Catholic publishers is known all over the world.

Looking at a book on Swiss architecture, I came on the picture of the family house of the Benzigers—a fine 18th century mansion in the baroque style. Particularly attractive was the private chapel with its fine baroque altar, its antique pictures and statues.

The old houses of Schwyz have great charm. Finely proportioned, spacious houses with discreet ornament, attractive gardens with decorative wrought-iron gates and railings—old-world walled gardens like those we are familiar with in Ireland, in which flowers and vegetables grow side by side, the shady grove by the side of the house with seats ranged round in a crescent—a place of refuge from the summer sun.

Indoors, walls of finely panelled wood, old furniture of local origin in oak, walnut, etc., sometimes inlaid, sometimes carved in simple but decorative patterns—carved chests and sideboards, corner cupboards, massive bedsteads are distinctive features.

The Swiss cling to their antique possessions, Mme Benziger told me. They do not care for the modern style in interior decoration. In all classes there is a reverence for the family heirloom. The ancestors who bought a fine picture or piece of furniture is honoured by succeeding generations and his gift is cherished. The Swiss are a conservative race.

FOEHN.

Blow! — gently blow — thou listless — sweetest breeze — April's warm wind — from the far away seas — circles round the mountain sides — potent to be meek — sweeping majestically — the snow-capped peaks.

A flying wind — pursuing without spear — such is the scene — what now remaineth here? — snow cleared mountains — splendour around — one vast realm of wonder — transient found!

(Miss) Mary E. Brandwood.

PERSONAL.

Silver Wedding. On June 2nd, 1912, at Belgrave Congregational Church, Torquay (Devon) by the Rev. J. Ch. Johnston, Edmund James Fanconi, of Poschiava to Louisa Maria Zanoli. —

We extend heartiest congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Fanconi, on their approaching 25th Wedding Anniversary.

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