

Art in Switzerland

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ART IN SWITZERLAND.

By Dr. WERNER Y. MÜLLER, Zurich.

(*"Swiss Industry and Trade,"* May, 1940.)

The student of ancient art will find that Switzerland, a country separated from the rest of Europe by lofty mountain ranges, was never content, even in the earliest times, merely to accept what other countries gave her. Her own activity in this sphere was always remarkable. As various objects found in caves in different parts of the country prove, our forefathers took an interest in art as far back as the Stone Age. A specimen of their work found in the "Kesslerloch" at Schaffhausen is the "Grazing Reindeer" which may be looked upon as one of the finest works of art of that period. Valuable utensils and other objects of art are kept in the different Swiss museums. Woven materials, pottery, weapons, gold and silver ware, bear witness to the artistic taste of our ancestors.

When the Romans under Julius Cesar invaded the country, Switzerland joined in the worship of the Roman gods and later still in that of the gods of Greece, thus adopting the civilization and the art of the nations on the shores of the Mediterranean. In almost every part of Switzerland we still come across ruins of Roman castles and amphitheatres, and traces of Roman roads, etc. Quite recently the bust of an Emperor in solid gold, probably made in this country, was discovered at Avenches, the ancient Aventicum, the capital of Roman Switzerland. In a later age Christianity, too, came from Rome and penetrated into Switzerland along the thoroughfares following the courses of the great rivers flowing from the Alps to the sea. In the 7th century St. Gall brought us the Gospel from Ireland and founded a monastery to which he gave his name. At this time there were two other important centres of civilisation, Geneva in the west and Bellinzona in the south. Thus Switzerland was, even at that early time, characterized by three different seats of learning which became more and more closely united in the course of centuries. We still possess specimens of gold and silver ware from the time of the great migration of nations, while the bequests of the early Middle Ages consist of famous manuscripts, such as the Psalter of the Monastery of St. Gall, reliquaries, ivory bindings and even mural paintings, as for instance, the Carolingian frescoes in the Abbey of Munster, whose importance in the History of Art in Europe is equal to that of the glorious work of Notker Balbulus or Tutilon in the history of music and Western learning.

In the Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance periods, Switzerland produced a vast number of works of art. The influence of Romanesque architecture is visible in churches all over the country, with strong walls, crypts, fantastic capitals and artistic portals. Everywhere it is easy to distinguish what is of foreign origin. The main parts of the buildings are always autochthonous, giving the whole an original character which is always perfectly unmistakable. The most beautiful Gothic cathedrals in Switzerland, at Lausanne, Geneva and Basle, all have certain characteristics which may be called purely Swiss; not one of these cathedrals could have been built in this particular style without the contribution of native Swiss art. All the marvellous works of art which are still to be seen in old Swiss towns also date from the Middle Ages. The houses almost always cluster around a

church occupying an elevated position and overlooking the surrounding country, the central point of the town. Mighty walls and fortified gateways, fine specimens of which may be seen at Basle and Berne, protect picturesque little alleys and streets whose ornamental fountains, mansions, townhalls and guildhalls, show what a healthy and prosperous people can achieve. Beyond the boundaries of the large towns, important market towns and castles, and sometimes even walls and fortresses, adorn the countryside. Such are the Château of Chillon, bathed by the waters of the Lake of Geneva, the Castle of Thun, and the "Munot" at Schaffhausen.

The altar dedicated to St. Peter, painted by Conrad Witz in 1444 for St. Peter's Cathedral at Geneva, marks an era in the history of European painting. In the 16th century, Swiss masters such as Nicolas Manuel, Hans Leu, Urs Graf, and great pianists, such as Hans Fries and others were very renowned. Before his departure for England, Hans Holbein lived and worked at Basle, where the best collection of his pictures may be seen. Accounts of the warlike exploits of the Swiss people fill countless illustrated chronicles. Popular music flourished, and great Swiss musicians were much appreciated abroad: Senfl lived at the court of the Emperor Maximilian, while Glarean was considered the best musician of his days in northern countries.

During the Renaissance and Rococo periods, Switzerland produced master-pieces of architecture which still fill us with admiration. San Lorenzo at Lugano is a noble specimen of classical architecture. At Zurich a builders' corporation built a "House" in the Post-Renaissance Italian style. The great monasteries and sanctuaries in Switzerland, we need only mention the monasteries of Einsiedeln and St. Gall, are marvels of architecture. Borromini, the genius of the Rococo style, went from Switzerland to Italy; a little later, the painter Graff, who painted classical portraits of German poets, met with overwhelming success in Germany, and the passionate Fussli, who knew his Homer as well as his Virgil and his Shakespeare, acquired great celebrity in London, while remaining a true Swiss. The latter part of the 19th century also abounds in artists of great fame. The romantic pictures of Calame and Diday were much admired in Russia; Buchser and Bodmer were favourably received in America; Böcklin, Stauffer and Léopold Robert worked in Italy and aroused great interest in the whole of Europe. Charles Gleyre lived in Egypt and in France. Modern times gave Switzerland another artist of great renown, Ferdinand Hodler. His works of art, truly Swiss in spirit, form a happy combination of the sentiment of northern countries and the clear style of the Latin race.

While the north exercised a particularly strong influence on Swiss minds during the 19th century, it seems that in the 20th century the attraction of the west and of the Mediterranean is greater. Corbusier, the great reformer of modern architecture, is a Swiss living in Paris. Arthur Honegger, the composer of "King David," "Jeanne d'Arc at the Stake" and "Nicolas de Flue," also lives in Paris. Many of the famous Swiss painters — Amiet, Giacometti, Tschanner, Jonas, Gubler, Vallotton, Bocion — and many sculptors — Haller, Geiser, Söldenhoff, von Niederhäusern, Raymond, Martin, Blanc — often visit France.

Which are the peculiar characteristics of Swiss art that have become increasingly noticeable in the course of the centuries? We find a healthy realism, a certain crudity, permitting of strong and daring expression, in which Latin clear-mindedness moderates and compensates northern outbursts of sentiment. A Swiss is not aggressive, he is kind and obliging. "Pestalozzi's gentleness and Tell's courage" as Edwin Arnet the poet of the Federal Festivals at the National Exhibition, so well expressed it, are also the qualities which most profoundly characterize Switzerland's art and give it its spiritual inspiration.

THE MOST RECENT OF SWISS INDUSTRIES.

("Swiss Industry and Trade," May, 1940.)

Who would have thought that Switzerland manufactured typewriters? And yet one can easily understand that the typewriter is a direct descendant of the old musical box which charmed the hours of our childhood! And is it not akin to the phonograph and the gramophone, and even to the watch and the clock? The story of the historical sequence of these industries is worth the telling.

On a high plateau in the Jura mountains, at an altitude of 3,300 ft., among pines and alpine pastures, is situated the town of St. Croix with a population of 6,000 inhabitants, formerly the home of the watch-making industry. There came a time of economic crisis, and the manufacturers of St. Croix directed their energy to the production of musical boxes, those amusing little caskets, ornately carved, which one finds even to-day in colonial homes overseas, where before the age of records and wireless, they kept children amused and made weary hours fly away. But the days of musical boxes came also to a close with the advent of those ancient and large-horned phonographs. With courage and perseverance, the manufacturers of St. Croix set about producing phonographs, and — later — gramophones. Then, following the path of progress, they made wireless sets and typewriters. If they have succeeded in their progressive enterprises, it is because their products are sealed with the mark of quality. *Quality First!* is their slogan.

The typewriter is the most recent product of Swiss industry, but not the last. In a few years, Messrs. Paillard, have created, both in St. Croix and in the pretty little neighbouring town of Yverdon, factories which alone place Switzerland third in the ranks of typewriter exporters. Our typewriters bear the name of Hermes, god of trade. Constructed with the greatest care of detail, continually improved, technically perfect, the Hermes typewriter in its various models, is the most modern and the most perfect machine on the market. Take for example the "Baby" model, cheap and light, but as strong as the big office model. This "Baby" has been round the world; its escapement is a miracle of mechanical precision, simpler, smaller and lighter than any other. As soon as it was put on the market, this model proved a success. Even in Finland the Baby-Hermes was quickly adopted and in one of the recent numbers of the "Hermes Magazine" is produced a photograph of the explorer Leif Geiges showing his own "Baby" model to school-children in Lapland in the Far North. The Hermes typewriter has been appreciated throughout the continents of America and Africa: and even farther afield — for the giant Clipper seaplanes on the

China-California line carry a Baby-Hermes for the convenience of their passengers: and so do the Atlantic Clippers, linking the New and the Old Worlds. Among the passengers of the first Atlantic Clipper flight from New-York to Lisbon, was the well-known American reporter, Miss Inez Robd, who wrote her impressions of that historic event on a Baby-Hermes. And last summer, the daily paper "Depêche de Saigon" (Indo-China) reported the theft of a Baby-Hermes from a respectable citizen of the town.

The fact that one factory alone should have placed Switzerland third in the rank of exporters of these machines must awaken interest for the initiative of the organisers of this concern who have maintained the tradition of Swiss industry: *Quality*.

SWISS RELIEF CENTRE.

The committee takes pleasure in informing the Colony that the Swiss Relief Centre is now completely equipped, and has already been in a position to give shelter to a number of our compatriots.

So that members of the Colony may have an opportunity of seeing for themselves the facilities which are offered, the committee has decided that the Centre at Swiss House, 34, Fitzroy Square, W.1, should be open for inspection on Thursday, 8th August, between 5 and 6.30 p.m., and Saturday, 10th August, between 4 and 6 p.m. Members of the House Committee together with the ladies who took so much pain in making the home as comfortable as possible will gladly show any of our compatriots over Swiss House on those days.

The Committee.

* * *

Mr. W. Thurnheer,
Ministre de Suisse,
18, Montagu Place, London, W.1.

Monsieur le Ministre,

On behalf of the Committee of the *Swiss Relief Centre*, I beg to thank you for your very kind letter of the 18th of July.

We are glad to know that Madame Thurnheer and yourself have been favourably impressed by the arrangements of the *Relief Centre*. The members of the House Committee, and the ladies who have helped them, feel well rewarded for their work by your generous appreciation.

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