

Fading pictures

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The refugees, the central position of Switzerland in a continent at war, and the diplomatic staffs still maintained there have all contributed to an endless stream of rumours that drift in through the tightly woven net of censorship and are bruited about in restaurants and cafes. Political refugees of every colour bring in gossip from outside and pass it on to others who embellish it still more. Travellers from France and Germany tell of conditions there and speculate on future trends of policy; diplomatic couriers bring in news; petty spies pass back and forth across the borders.

Most of these rumours are exaggerated to begin with, and practically none can be confirmed with any certainty. Governments are wary of entrusting secrets to their diplomats in Berne, knowing how quickly they may leak to enemy ears. The Swiss aware of the danger of their jealously guarded neutrality, have done their best to combat the spreading of reports, and have introduced a self-supervised censorship on their press. But the rumours still persist.

As a centre of spying, however, Switzerland is not of great value any more. She is too much encircled, too vulnerable to Axis pressure, and the difficulties of passing on important details are too great. Moreover, the battlefields have moved away from her frontiers, and countries such as Sweden and Turkey have superseded her as a gathering place for secret agents.

But as a radio listening post for news from all of Europe, Switzerland is almost unexcelled. In this, she has acquired a new value, particularly to foreign newspapers, and the Swiss Government, reluctantly — for again Swiss neutrality is endangered — plays host to a growing crowd of correspondents from all over the world.

It may be that Switzerland's hour will strike. It is certain to if Germany wins the war, for the Third Reich cannot tolerate a democracy in the heart of its "New Order." But when that day comes, every citizen of democratic Switzerland will remember the words of President Etter, spoken in September, 1939, when his government was asked to dismiss the army. "We do not wish to doubt," he said, "that neighbouring states will keep their word. But, if contrary to all expectations their word is violated and war extends to our frontiers, it will find us ready — men, women, soldiers, civilians, old and young, all of whom swear to give their life to their country, preferring death to slavery."

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.
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FADING PICTURES.

Do you remember the old family album without which no home was complete? Did you also get some amusement from looking at the fading, yellowing, representations of our forebears in their quaint suits and dresses? Then the more recent portraits of those to whom you looked up, perhaps, during your youth, or who were outstanding figures at some time or other in your not-very-far-distant past? And, if you are blessed with some imagination, how easily those pictures become again real personages, peopling the room in which you sit day-dreaming. Suddenly faces and facts which you had long since forgotten come to mind, as though they were passing over a flickering screen depicting an old film.

Well, I must have been day-dreaming recently at *Swiss House*, when I heard that the somewhat checkered history of that building has come to the end of another chapter. The Lease held by the Swiss Mercantile Society is at an end, and the present emergency makes the outlook somewhat uncertain. So inevitably that house of many memories conjured up the past.

I see again that opening ceremony late in 1926 and some of the faces which were then present. There is the Swiss Minister, with his expressive eyebrows, twirling his pince-nez while he speaks, and Madame Paravicini, ever vivacious and charming; Pasteur Hoffmann-de-Visme; the Headmaster in cap and gown; and many others too numerous to see clearly.

Now there is a change of scenery, and I see the class-rooms, filled to capacity and over, with eager throngs of "boys and girls" aged from 18 to 60, all students and most of them industrious ones. Suddenly a bell shrills through the building. The lunch hour has arrived, and how they all pour out of the building, like a frolicsome mountain brook impatient to reach its destination. The Office is invaded by compatriots from all corners of Switzerland, all asking questions on every subject under the sun and expecting immediate answers. Somehow the "oracles" behind the counter manage to cope with the flood.

Again the scene changes. We are at a meeting of the Society's members, and the President has just announced that a Holiday Party is coming over from Switzerland. Two members are going to Tilbury as advance reception committee. (Do I see them sleeping under mosquito-nets? Anyway, I believe they came up to scratch.) Now I see the Party, a cheerful, bustling crowd, with Mr. Fritschi and his whistle as chief shepherd. And now they fade out.

Who is this now? A short man, with grey moustache and hair, full of energy, smiling all over his face, and addressing us in full-strength Appenzeller dialect. Of course, it's Papa Lutz, the doughty fighter who is Central President. With him is National Councillor Philip Schmid-Ruedin, Secretary-General, with the bald, domed, head of the thinker and with deceptively mild-looking eyes behind the rimless spectacles. They have come to see the home of the mother society's oldest living daughter abroad.

An interval, and once more I see Schmid-Ruedin, and with him a goodly company. They are the delegation from home to our Golden Jubilee: Alfred Gubser, Central President and in every way a worthy successor to Papa Lutz; Adolf Galliker, editor of the *Zentralblatt* and creator of the *Scheinfirmenbund* and other

educational activities amongst the Swiss commercial youth, a veritable Pestalozzi in modern guise; Carl Weigl, Vice-President, with booming voice and unquenchable humour in powerfully built body; an "Auslandsschweizer" in the person of O. C. Isler from Winterthur; Fritschi also, all proved men of integrity and understanding, pioneers amongst the workers for Swiss Commerce.

Here is a new face, Who is he? Why, Dr. Thurnheer, the new Swiss Minister, son of an old S.K.V. member, and himself a trained "commerçant"; he has come to establish contact with us and assure us of his interest and goodwill.

What do I see now? Beds again in Swiss House? Our home has become a refuge for any compatriots who may suffer raid damage and need temporary shelter. And here are the various leaders of the Swiss Colony and their ladies. They seem mighty busy. So they are, too, because everyone lends a hand to arrange the shelter as quickly and as comfortably as possible.

Has anything gone wrong? The picture before my mind's eye has become sombre and something seems to have gone wrong with our home. Now I can see it more clearly; it has been bombed, sadly damaged, a terrible blow to us all. Thank goodness nobody is hurt. Old Bossert is still bustling about; not even his whiskers are singed. But what an experience for him, and what a wonderful old chap.

With a sigh of regret, and yet with a feeling of happiness over past successes and pleasures, I become conscious again of my surroundings. We are in our members' room with its warm and congenial atmosphere. The walls attract the eye like a magnet does the needle. Small wonder, for they show us pictures of our homeland's natural beauty, scenes from the Fête des Vignerons, etc., all gifts from friends and well-wishers. And at the head of the table stands the President, Mr. Boos, the man who, undaunted by illness in his home, war in the land, bombs on the roof, has guided our destiny with wisdom, charity, and firmness withal, during a good few years already. Handicaps, these, which might well have robbed a weaker man of all energy; an example to us all, and a living admonishment to remain faithful to the S.M.S. whatever the circumstances.

He is telling us, that this is our last meeting in this room. Has this fact caused my day-dreaming? I have not been asleep; but I have seen, in the space of a few minutes, those figures from the years of the past.

Fading Pictures? Perhaps.

Forgotten Pictures? Never!

"Eavesdropper."

LETTER-BOX.

H. L., Berne and G. S., Basle. — We have just discovered the advice from our Giro account and have added your name to our mailing list; the subscription will carry you to our issue No. 1020, as we now go to press once a month only.

We must apologize for the omission which has been caused by the dislocation of our files and papers through enemy action.

E. B. and Others. — We thank you for giving us addresses of friends likely to be interested in our publication and regret that under existing restrictions we cannot forward propaganda copies unless they are pre-paid.

Mrs. Ch. — We thank you for your remittance and have posted the issue to the address given.

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of the Swiss Observer,
Dear Sir,

Most of your readers have no doubt read, or at least heard of, an article published recently in the "Daily Mail." This article caused a considerable amount of surprise and dismay not only among the Swiss Colony but also with a number of English friends of our Country. So far, however, nothing has apparently been done by the Swiss Legation to counteract its damaging influence and to rectify some of the glaring misstatements it contains. The heading itself (across four columns) is highly tendentious and should have called for an immediate official statement, particularly as the article seems to have been written with the object of influencing the negotiations which were then going on with the Swiss Trade Mission. Personally, I do not think that a letter from an unknown reader of the "Daily Mail" would have had sufficient weight to achieve the desired result. A reply, to be effective, must of necessity include facts and figures which nowadays are not easily obtainable but which should be available to the Swiss Legation.

Amongst the plethora of goods and raw materials which Switzerland is supposed to be exporting to Germany, the article in question mentions iron ore. The figures of Swiss Imports of that commodity during the last five years before the war should easily show the utter absurdity of such a statement.

No doubt the Swiss Legation and its Commercial Division have been extremely busy lately but, as the article appeared as far back as March 24th, I think it should have been possible by now to send an official statement to the "Daily Mail" refuting the numerous allegations.

Yours faithfully,

C. J. B.

"DROPPING THE PILOT."

(To G.A.M.)

They've dropped their pilot at the last Election,
A man who knew the Club Rules to perfection,
Was truly popular with ev'ry section
And studied any member's predilection.
Isn't it sad?

We humans are at times an odd collection,
Emotions pull in more than one direction;
Some tiny discontent spreads like infection . . .
Accepted formulas meet with rejection!
It's just too bad.

Our pilot, for his part, courts not dejection.
Why should he? — with an ample recollection
Of duty done, with zeal and circumspection,
An in-born tact, defying all correction.
He can be glad.

What is the moral of this brief reflection?
That public office rarely breeds affection,
Whilst service reaps scant thanks and no protection
Against obscure or undefined objection.
I've nought to add.

GALLUS.