

The Swiss seen by a Swiss : "Gay Paris"

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1952)**

Heft 1183

PDF erstellt am: **25.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690623>

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The Swiss seen by a Swiss . . .**"GAY PARIS!"**

When I reached the Gare Saint-Lazare on Good Friday, my heart was full of joy in anticipation of a glorious week I was going to spend with some friends of mine. Indeed, there they were, and after the first Cinzano I had had for quite some time, we made for the Left Bank.

Here is a short account of some edifying observations I made as far as Swiss people are concerned. First of all, I found that they like to invade towns by the hundreds, packed in coaches, and all wearing a distinctive badge. This badge, so I understand, is to prevent members of the "Chanson Vaudoise" being mistaken for adherents of the "Ostschweizer Frauenverein". They love giving brass band recitals at the Place de la Concorde, and many a song has reached the skies from the top platform of the Eiffel Tower.

Twelve noon at the Place de l'Opéra. The terrace of the Café de la Paix is densely populated with lovers of the daily "apéro". From a table near mine comes the sound of Homeric laughter and the familiar aroma of a Rössli-cigar. Yes, I have heard that one before! To my right is another charming scene. Three young and neatly dressed Confederates have treated an even number of "midinettes" to a glass of champagne. They seem to make rapid progress, which, I fancy, is due rather to their beautiful gold watches than to their good manners or their French accent.

Along the Seine, some hours later. Two youths are sitting by the riverside, counting their money. As

I pass by, the younger of the two exclaims: "Jitzig han ich bimäid scho d'Hälfti verbruucht!"

The same night, shortly before the first act of "Manon" at the Opéra-Comique. Violent exclamations in French from a very indignant usherette. I look up and notice how an elderly gentleman takes fifteen francs from his purse and adds them to the five already given. "So ne Gemäinhäit", he murmurs. (I could not agree more!)

One morning, trying to get from the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe. A Swiss car slowed down to let some ladies pass who had made several attempts to cross the road. The immediate result of such courtesy was an orgy of angry shouts, continuous hooting and swearing cab-drivers, together with the horrible sound of rusty brakes. Very encouraging!

Strolling down Boulevard Haussmann. A little boy asks his mother who is busy admiring shop windows: "Muetti, werum darfi hüt em Abe nid mit em Vati und em Unggle Schang go schpaziere?" I wonder whether Mummy found a satisfactory answer.

Swiss people can be seen at their best on many other occasions, for instance when they are trying to find the nearest Métro-station on a dilapidated map, jiving in the "Caveau de la République" or bargaining with Moroccan leather-sellers.

When eventually, after many more adventures, my trip to France had come to an end, one of my friends told me with a grin on his face: "Au fond, on les aime bien, les petits Suisses!" You can take it from me that he meant it.

Helveticus.

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