

# Efficiency- the code of the Swiss

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## EFFICIENCY— The code of the Swiss by Gee Lebon

In my young days Switzerland to me was a country as seen through the eyes of Hollywood . . . viz . . . James Stewart escaping from Germany and all the hazards that beset him before he reached the haven of the Swiss border . . . it was a place where wars were unknown and a certain brand of chocolate was made and, if you were fortunate some generous aunt or uncle gave you a watch for your birthday, made of course, in Switzerland. It was not until I was married that I had the pleasure of actually visiting this lovely country and seeing for myself all it had to offer.

As I said before, all the staff of the Scala, had descended en masse upon the little village, among them a very famous pianist who was a great and personal friend of Leoncavallo.

Leoncavallo was large of girth, and in spite of his disappointment a rollicking, good-natured fellow. His friend was as lean as Leoncavallo was large, with a lean face and a very long nose. These two would tease one another mercilessly.

The great evening came, a great hush descended upon the square as the cast began to sing, first Pagliacci, which was received with wild enthusiasm, then various songs and solos, ending with the Premiere of Zazá itself. It had been a stupendous evening. Finally the pianist, of whom my mother could not remember the name, acted as spokesman for all the guests.

"Dear, dear friends, what joy it gives me and all present on such a wonderful occasion. All our friends and myself wish you every success when the opera is eventually produced. However, for the moment I wish to present you with a little piece that I have written especially for you, to commemorate this occasion".

Leoncavallo was obviously deeply moved, he embraced his friend and said, "How can I ever thank you all for making such a journey just to hear my work, and you, dear friend, for your gift. Have you got it with you?"

"Of course, do you wish to play it now?"

"Indeed I would, please".

He sat his portly figure at the piano and started to play what seemed an enchanting little song, when suddenly he stopped. He looked puzzled. He started again, when he came to the same spot, he again stopped. He was more puzzled than ever, but he was not going to be defeated, so off he went again, with the same result. This time he was no longer puzzled, he gave his friend a long and suspicious look.

"All right! Out with it! Why can't I play this bit? There is a note too many. Can you play it?"

"But of course. It is simple".

Leoncavallo rose and gave the stool to his friend. His friend sat down and played the piece. When it came to the note that defeated Leoncavallo, with great panache he played the note with his nose, to the amazement and delight of the audience, which erupted into laughter. No one laughed more than Leoncavallo and his friend. The valleys and mountain that surrounded this delightful spot echoed and re-echoed with their laughter.

My first experience of Swiss efficiency was on our first trip when we discovered we had left out of our luggage the most important item . . . the cine camera! This, we decided would need a phone call to England to ensure we really had left it at home, and not lost it en route . . . with memories of previous phone calls made from France and Italy . . . we shuddered . . . our first day would surely be spent waiting for this call to go through . . . as in Italy when we had waited all day . . . to be told at night, "Tomorrow, Signor, maybe!" My husband asked the hotel clerk in the Luganso Hotel to put the call through, ordered some tea and we went to our room prepared for hours of "marking time". As we reached the door of our hotel room, the phone rang, "Your call to England" we were told. We just could not credit it! The next surprise was the number of pillar boxes and the frequency of deliveries, their postal service is wonderful. The cleanliness of all the hotels we

stayed at, even the smaller ones, is unique, with small tablets of soap, paper towels for razor blades and make-up, cups and saucers that gleamed with the best hot drinking chocolate I have ever tasted. It was in Switzerland too that we first saw the "open look" in shops, no window dressing just a clear view of the delightfully-filled stands. This idea has now been copied in England with much success. The Swiss way of bed-making with the big feather beds is so comfortable and the charm that goes with the furnishing of all the hotel rooms is a joy to behold, no wonder so many visitors enjoy staying in this wonderful country. All the hotels have such efficient staff who really seem determined to do their utmost to help visitors enjoy their stay, a really refreshing attitude in this day and age.

The saga of the cine camera continues. We asked a friend at home to post it on to us, as it had in fact been left behind — in an armchair where I had thrown my apron on top of it, completely hiding it, after finishing last-minute chores before leaving for our holiday. The camera duly arrived a few days after, alas broken in transit! Undaunted, by this time expecting miracles from the Swiss, we took it along for repair. "I regret the part that is damaged is not one we have in stock" we were told at the photographic shop. Our faces dropped, "Not to worry", continued the shopkeeper, "I will get it flown in for you and repaired by tomorrow". He did as well, for a nominal charge.

I must be frank, we did encounter one shopkeeper who did not live up to the high standards we had by this time come to expect. My husband was looking at some goods displayed outside the shop with thoughts of presents for friends on our return home. Out came the proprietor waving his arms speaking in German. "Don't look, buy", he shouted, my husband replied, also in German, to the effect that if we looked we would probably buy, his German is good but apparently not good enough for the answer came fast and furious "Oh, you English go away, you have no money!" I admit it shook us rigid but afterwards, we had to see the funny side of it because it was true, at this time, the Germans had far more money than we English were allowed to take out of England, even if we had it.

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