

Letters from Switzerland

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LETTERS FROM SWITZERLAND

By Gottfried Keller

DEATH OF A GREAT MAN

THE Earl of Avon, better known as The Rt. Hon. Anthony Eden, who passed away recently, was a great and genuine friend of our country. As President of the Foreign Press Association in London — during two terms, one lasting two and one lasting five years — I several times had the privilege to be his host at official luncheons.

Moreover, I met him at several other luncheon parties, as well as at a dinner arranged in his honour by the late German Chancellor Adenauer on the occasion of one of his official London visits. Anthony Eden was, as is well known, a man of great personal courage and immense skill at the negotiating table and as such a personality eminently suited to be Foreign Secretary. As Prime Minister, however, he was unlucky in practically everything he touched — particularly, of course, the ill-conceived military intervention in Egypt after Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

Anthony Eden was also a man of infinite personal charm with many interests and a profound historical knowledge, as well as a skilled linguist, able to read and speak the Persian language — amongst others — fluently.

On 3rd December, 1944, when Eden was still Winston Churchill's Foreign Secretary, the latter sent the former the following memo from Downing Street to the Foreign Office — quoted here literally:

"For the Record"

3 Dec., 44.

Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary

I put this down for the record. Of all neutrals Switzerland has the greatest right to distinction. She has been the sole international force linking the hideously sundered nations and ourselves. What does it matter whether she has been able to give us the commercial advantages we desire or has given too many to the Germans, to keep herself alive? She has been a democratic state, standing for freedom in self-defence among her mountains, and in thought, in spite of

race, largely on our side. I was astonished at U.J.'s (Stalin's) savageness against her, and, much though I respect that great and good man, I was entirely uninfluenced by his attitude. He called them "swine", and he does not use that sort of language without meaning it. I am sure we ought to stand by Switzerland, and we ought to explain to U.J. why it is we do so. The moment for sending such a message should be carefully chosen. . .

W.S.C.

Eden did, as he told me years later, wait for what he thought was the right moment to approach Stalin. Both the Prime Minister and he did thus render an immense service to our country and the present would seem to be a good moment to remember it with a feeling of deep gratitude.

BUDGETS ARE SLASHED

In view of the fact that the Federal Finances are in bad shape, the Federal Parliament has decided that the expenses for representation for 1977 should be stabilised on the level of those of 1975. This decision involved slashing the 1977 budget for this item by Sw.Fr. 700,000 or approximately £172,000.

Such a cut means that the representation expenses of all the 84 Swiss Embassies, 53 Consulates and 39 Consulates-General have to be reduced by between 5–10 per cent. In other words: lunches, dinners and cocktail receptions have either to be reduced in numbers, or fewer people can be entertained, or the drinks and canapés offered have to be a little less luscious. Buffets have to come down from the level of Fortnum and Masons, as it were, to what used to be called "Lyon's No. 4".

These measures, however, have not prevented Swiss foreign policy from entering into a very active phase. Federal Councillors have very much taken to what is called "travelling diplomacy" and the Political Department's Secretary-General, Ambassador Weitnauer, has become a modern "traveller around the world in 80 days" — but one who carefully balances his visits between West and East. He is a firm believer in personal

contacts and if Press forecasts become fact, our former London Ambassador will soon be given a new, as yet to be created, title — new in the hierarchy of Swiss officialdom that is — namely the title of Secretary of State.

The new era of travelling diplomacy with Federal Councillors participating does inevitably entail a certain amount of change in the function of the Swiss Embassies abroad. Negotiation, once considered the main art of classical diplomacy, has largely been replaced by the art of reporting all those developments in a guest country, the knowledge of which may be useful in the formation of Swiss policy. Nevertheless it remains one of the most important tasks of Swiss Ambassadors abroad to build up, cultivate and strengthen relations and connections — an activity which obviously takes time and cannot be left over to the moment when such connections are really needed.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lienhard Co. Ltd., at Erlen (Thurgau) has received an order valued at over 4 million francs from the American firm Northrop Corp. for the supply and setting up in Saudi Arabia of various two-level storage systems.

The steel foundries belonging to G. Fischer Co. Ltd., of Schaffhausen (Switzerland) have delivered a steam turbine housing, weighing 175 tonnes, to Brown Boveri & Co. at Baden.

This is the biggest steel casting ever made in Switzerland, and is the first of a series of seven destined for a nuclear power station in the United States.

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