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Autor: Epstein, Eugene V.

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

EUGENE V. EPSTEIN

I've never met anyone in all my years in Switzerland who wasn't an expert on the country. This may seem to be an exaggerated statement, it may smack of yellow journalism, it may be irresponsible to the core. But it's true. Everybody *is* an expert here: I'm an expert, and so are my wife and my children and our cleaning woman. That's one of the risks of living in Switzerland. Everybody expects us to know everything about the country—its history, its weather, its culture and philosophical thought, its train schedules, plane schedules, its voltage, boats and ski lifts. We must know its museums and cinemas and restaurants, and its culinary specialties we must not only have tried, but must also vouch for—on penalty of death or something worse.

We are also considered guilty of perjury should we fail to anticipate the exact cost and degree of enjoyment of a night on the town, including goulash soup at midnight. Actually, it may come as a bit of a surprise to visitors that most of us here (I take the liberty of speaking for my fellow Americans) find it necessary to work for a living. What we do, of course, varies, but what we have in common is that we are constantly boning up on facts and figures about Switzerland in anticipation of the avalanche of tourists who drop in on us both regularly and unexpectedly.

The technique of dropping-in generally follows a pattern, although I should point out that there are two distinct breeds of dropper-inners. The first is the friend of a friend who heard, mind you, that we were now living in Switzerland, and isn't that just grand and what do we recommend for him to see. The other variety—and this form should not be taken lightly—is the visiting fireman, either an executive of the company we represent abroad or, sometimes worse, another company with which we do a reasonable amount of business. Whichever direction the visit takes, the questions asked are similar. In the hope that our readers will bear with us, we reconstruct here a typical battle of wits:

Question. "Is this really the Year of the Alps?"

Answer. "Why, yes indeed, it really is."

"I thought that the Alps were in Switzerland every year. I mean, is there a difference this year?"

"Well, you see, this year is different because it's the centennial of the establishment of St. Moritz and Davos and Schlabouch as world-famous Alpine winter resorts."

"Oh! St. Moritz *is* in Switzerland. How nice, and I knew it all the time. And Davos I know and what did you say was the name of the other place?"

"Schlabouch. That's where we go every year, sometimes twice a year. It's sort of—well, you could call it a Shangrila, if you wanted to coin an expression. Schlabouch is a very special kind of resort."

"Please tell me about it, I'm all ears. I mean, it's *off* the beaten track, isn't it?"

"It's both off and on the beaten track, depending on what track you take. But the magnificent thing about Schlabouch is its setting—right on the most beautiful Alpine terrace imaginable, where the people are quadrilingual and where the weather is always perfect. If it's raining in Zurich, the sun is shining in Schlabouch. And there's always snow, and the food is magnificent—a combination of the best of the French, Italian, German and Liechtenstein cuisines—at prices almost anyone can afford. What's more, there's always room in Schlabouch, and there's no traffic to speak of and the air is clear and

there's a lake for swimming and fishing in summer and for ice skating and curling in winter. And in the fall there are sailboats and in the spring it's a bird sanctuary. All in all, Schlabouch has everything." "But does it have local color, too, and night life?"

"Sir, the expression *après ski* was created in Schlabouch, where life after dark would startle Paris. And as for local color, Schlabouch reminds one of the quaintest Swiss music box, the chalets with their checked curtains dot the slopes surrounding the village and the cows wear genuine guaranteed Swiss cowbells. Schlabouch, in short, is perfection itself—for the tourist, and for the indigenous population. Need I emphasize that in Schlabouch even the women have the right to vote?"

"And there are festivals, festivals galore, especially this year, the Year of the Alps. Here again, Schlabouch is something out of the ordinary. In summer, there is the traditional kirsch-drinking competition, with participants from eighteen countries, and a small plot of ground for the winner. And I'm sure you've heard of the famous Swiss bell-ringers and flag-wavers."

"It all sounds so *won-der-ful*!"

"Not only that, but as Switzerland's most famous poet, Gottfried von Unten, wrote almost a century ago, Schlabouch is 'ein wunderbarer Platz'. Furthermore, in the second stanza of *An Ode to My Swiss Abode*, he wrote that Schlabouch has absolutely no horseflies. In fact, the only thing wrong with Schlabouch is that nobody can pronounce it."

Alte Brückenbauerkunst diesseits und jenseits der Alpen. Oben: Brücke über die Töss zwischen Rorbas und Freienstein im Kanton Zürich. Unten: Doppelbrücke über die Verzasca bei Lavertezzo im Verzascatal, einem nahen, mit den Cars der PTT erreichbaren Ausflugsgebiet Locarnos.

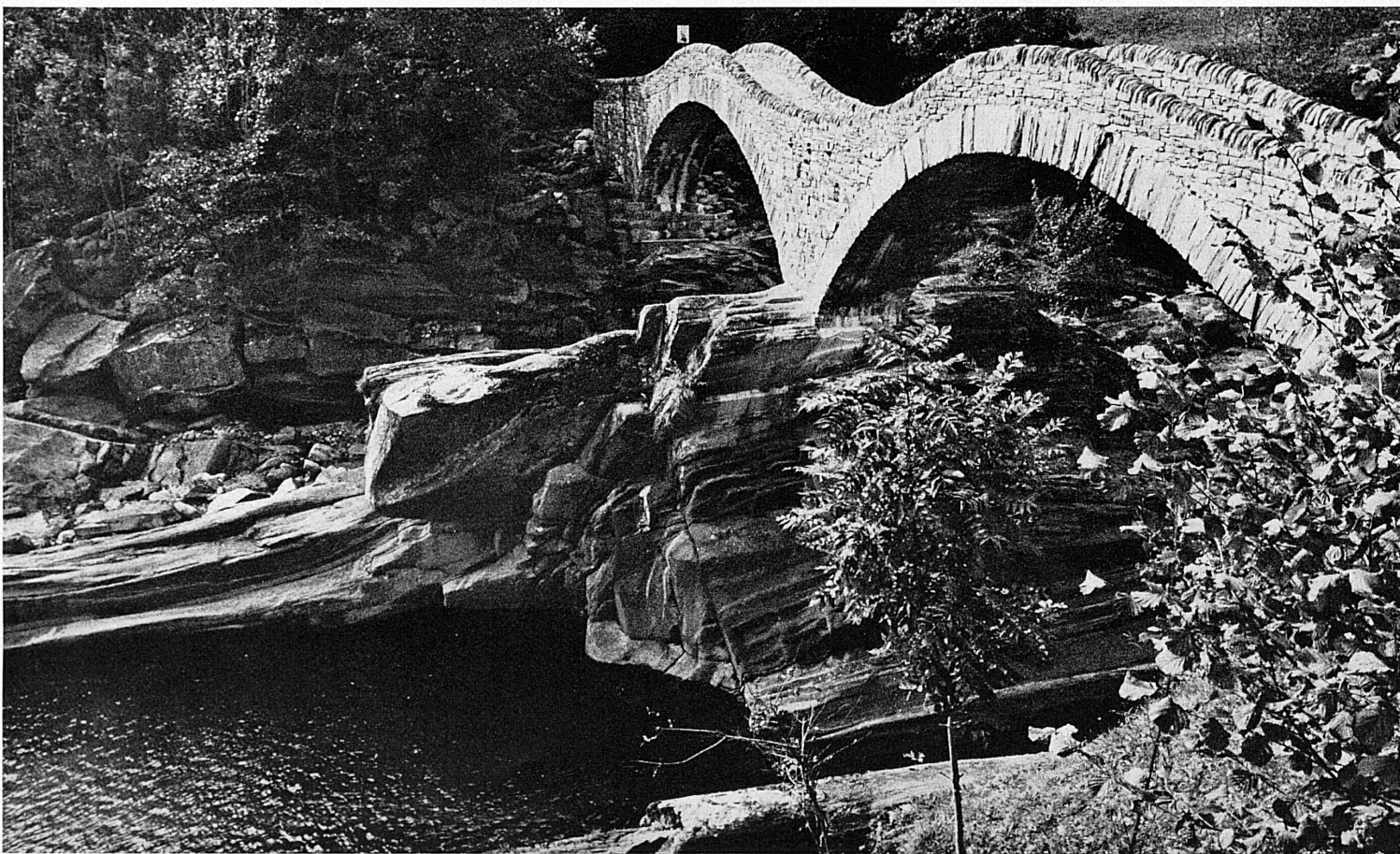
Photos Kirchgraber

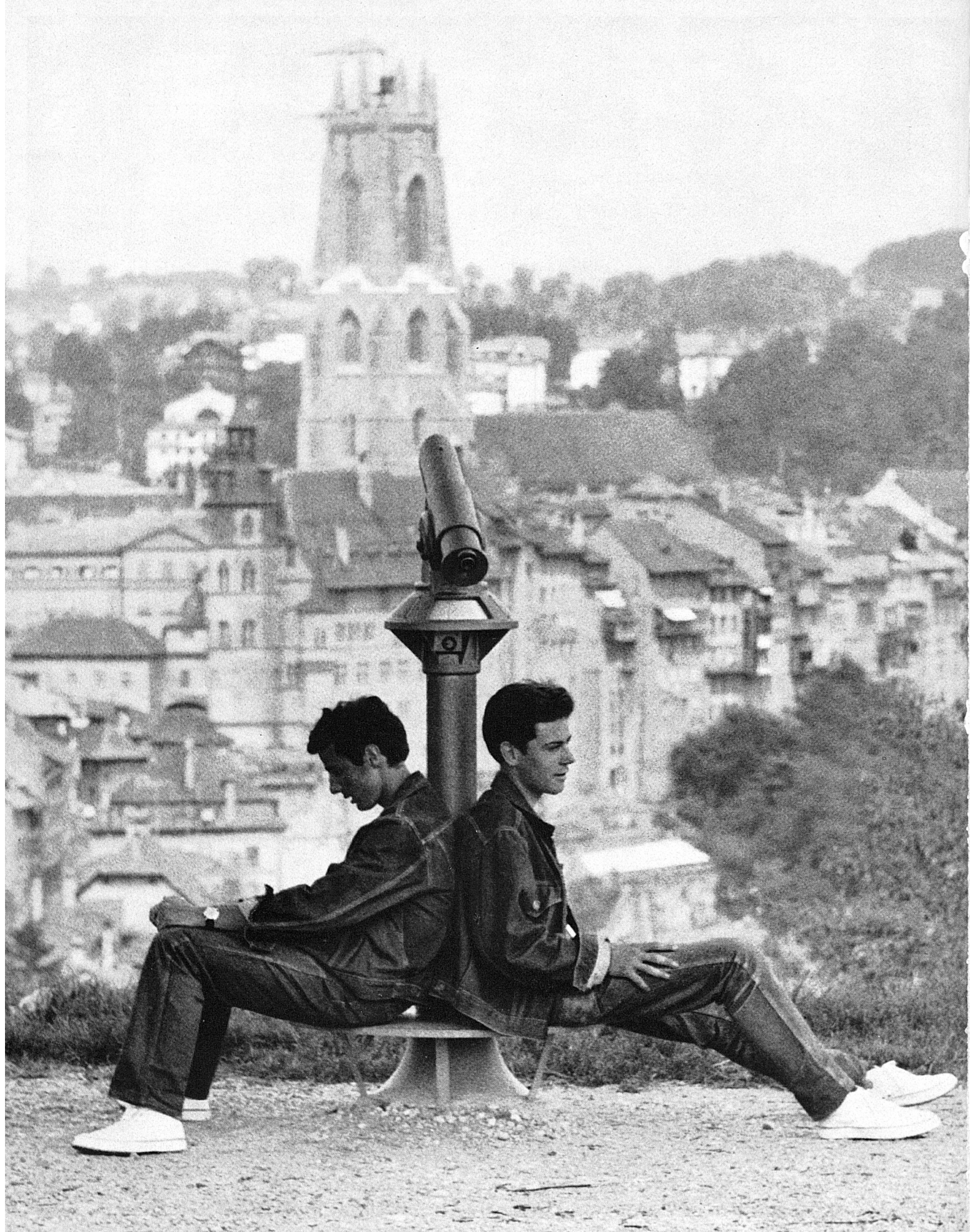
Deux chefs-d'œuvre des anciens constructeurs de ponts, de ce côté et de l'autre des Alpes. En haut: Pont sur la Töss entre Rorbas et Freienstein dans le canton de Zurich. En bas: Pont double jeté sur la Verzasca près de Lavertezzo, dans le val Verzasca — que les cars postaux rendent facilement accessible aux touristes.

Antichi ponti di qua e di là delle Alpi. In alto, ponte sulla Töss, tra Rorbas e Freienstein, nel Cantone di Zurigo. In basso, ponte a due arcate e a schiena d'asino in Val Verzasca. Questa valle, pittoresca assai, s'apre non lungi dalla nota località turistica di Locarno, ed è percorsa dalle autocorriere postali.

Examples of the bridge-builders' art to the north and to the south of the Alps. Above: Bridge over the river Töss between Rorbas and Freienstein in the Canton of Zurich. Below: Twinarch bridge over the river Verzasca near Lavertezzo in Verzasca Valley, beautiful excursion point reached easily by Swiss Postal Motor Coach from Locarno.

As I said earlier, everybody living in Switzerland soon becomes an expert on the country. And, after a time, we begin to develop preferences—for the Grisons, for the Bernese Oberland, for Zermatt or Wengen or Flims, for resorts with automobiles, for resorts without automobiles. Preferences are a personal thing, a matter of taste, like wines and wives and cameras. That's why I always recommend Schlabouch—the resort that has everything—even though it's fairly hard to find.







Mittelalterliche Städte, Wanderziele zu Füßen der Voralpen. Oben: Wappenfries im Schloss Rapperswil, der Dominante des mittelalterlichen St.-Galler Städtchens auf einer Landzunge zwischen dem oberen und unteren Zürichsee. In dem um die Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts erbauten Schloss ist heute das lebendig gestaltete Museum des Schweizerischen Burgenvereins untergebracht. Links: Rast hoch über der Saane vor dem vom Fluss dreiseitig umschlungenen Städtemonument Freiburg, das sein mittelalterliches Anlitz in seiner Gesamterscheinung bewahrt hat. Aus den Häuserzeilen der von Herzog Berchtold IV. von Zähringen gegründeten Siedlung steigt der unvollendete Turm des Münsters Saint-Nicolas. Photos Kirchgraber

Les cités moyenâgeuses du pied des Préalpes sont le but d'agréables excursions pédestres. En haut: Fresque héraldique dans le Château de Rapperswil qui domine la petite ville saint-galloise du même nom, construite sur le cap qui sépare les parties inférieure et supérieure du lac de Zurich. Edifiée vers le milieu du XIII^e siècle, cette forteresse abrite le très vivant musée de la Société pour la conservation des châteaux suisses. A gauche: Repos en face du Fribourg médiéval, entouré de chaque côté par la Sarine. La ville a été fondée par le duc Berchtold IV de Zähringen. La tour de la Cathédrale de Saint-Nicolas est demeurée inachevée.

Cittadine medievali ai piedi delle Prealpi. In alto: Insegne gentilizie in una sala del castello di Rapperswil. L'edificio costruito nella seconda metà del XIII secolo è oggi sede dell'interessante museo dello «Schweizer Burgenverein». La cittadina di Rapperswil si stende, in terra sangallese, su di una penisola della riva destra del lago di Zurigo. A sinistra: Friburgo. Sosta su di un terrazzo panoramico dominante la Sarina il cui corso racchiude la città da tre lati. I quartieri medievali han conservato pressoché immutata la loro primitiva configurazione. Oltre la fila delle case, svetta il campanile incompiuto della Cattedrale di San Nicolao. Fondatore della città fu il duca Bertoldo IV di Zähringen.

Mediaeval cities are perennial attractions for hikers. Above: Coats of arms in Rapperswil Castle. Built in the 13th century and picturesquely situated at the high point of the mediaeval village of Rapperswil at the north-east end of a promontory jutting out between the upper and lower parts of Lake Zurich, the castle today houses a museum maintained by the Swiss Castle Association. Left: Two hikers take a welcome rest at a vantage point overlooking the River Saane, and the "picture-book" architecture of mediaeval Fribourg. Founded in 1157 by Berchtold IV, Duke of Zähringen, Fribourg has grown up around the unfinished belfry of its cathedral.