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Autor:	Epstein, Eugene V.
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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

EUGENE V. EPSTEIN

Many traditions in this world have become well-established simply because no one has seriously questioned them. As a result, they are treated almost reverentially, and anyone who suggests a change is likely to be labelled anarchistic or, at the very least, anti-Establishment.

All right, then, perhaps I'm a bit of an anarchist at heart, because I now have every intention of challenging one of Switzerland's most perfidious traditions. Let the chips fall where they may—I am clearly and openly against paying extra for bread and rolls when I eat in a Swiss restaurant.

Everyone knows that Swiss restaurants are generally excellent. It is, in fact, quite the usual thing to employ the word "cuisine" when referring to the culinary specialties of Switzerland. And this is rather impressive if you consider that most of us would be happy if they even used the word "food" in connection with several other countries I know of.

So what am I complaining about? I am clearly complaining about the fact that I am forced to count the wonderfully crisp Swiss rolls I consume during a meal. Then, at the end of each and every repast, I am required to state—virtually under oath, with right hand solemnly raised—that I stuffed three or four of them into my voracious gullet. I insist that charging for individual rolls is an unmistakable violation of human rights and personal freedom, and I intend to take up the matter with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

Perhaps I'm hypersensitive. But I simply dislike informing complete strangers that my body needs so-and-so-many carbohydrates in order to subsist. I openly admit to some degree of corpulence, but this is my own business and no one else's.

There are many other reasons why I am so devoutly against this particular Swiss tradition. First of all, I have considerable difficulty in remembering how many rolls I have eaten. Then, I find it humiliating to add a few trifling centimes to a bill which may well come to fifty or sixty francs anyway. And, from the business and good-will point of view, what has a restaurateur actually accomplished if he collects fifty francs for a first-class meal, then loses the costumer permanently because of a disagreement over whether he had two or possibly three *Brötlis*? In addition to the fact that one is expected to pay a fifteen per cent service charge or tip on every last flaking one of them.

This service business usually finishes me off for the day anyway. How in the name of Heidi's favorite goat am I expected to calculate fifteen per cent of twenty-five centimes in the first place? And would the waiter or waitress be satisfied with *exactly* fifteen per cent? No indeed, the costumer is expected to round up the figure to show that he's not only a glutton but generous to boot. Those of us who remember the ten per cent service charge were quite sympathetic when it was raised (by fifty per cent) to fifteen per cent, despite the fact that food prices themselves were constantly rising. So now we pay more for the food, we pay more for the service and we pay more for the bread. Then, as if this were not yet enough, we are more or less expected to add a few percentage points to the whole blooming mess. I tell you, it's enough to make one lose his appetite, which is what often happens to me after I have eaten.

The problem, though, has nothing to do with me, for I have lived in Switzerland for a number of years and have some idea of what to expect. What about the unsuspecting tourist? He might enter a restaurant and order, say, a *Wiener Schnitzel* with French-fried potatoes. It could be—assuming that he is an American—that he likes ketchup, not only with schnitzels but with French-fried potatoes as well.

So he orders ketchup. And the waiter nods appreciatively. Our tourist can hardly believe his eyes. Amid all these foreign dishes—Austrian veal and Gallic potatoes—there now stands a bottle of genuine old-fashioned American red-blooded ketchup. It's enough to make a person cry or even burst out in song. After singing the middle stanza of "God Bless America", he proceeds to pour ketchup all over the schnitzel, the potatoes and his iridescent tie. Then he eats, relishing the magnificence and munificence of Swiss quality and quantity.

My mouth waters at the enticing thought of what that tourist is experiencing, perhaps at this very minute. But to continue this tale of gustatory delight, our American acquaintance finishes off his meal, daintily mopping up every last drop of ketchup and schnitzel juice with a golden brown Swiss roll. He then washes down the entire mess with a quaff of genuine Swiss apple cider, burps discreetly and asks for the check.

The waiter brings the check immediately, and our tourist studiously examines the hastily scrawled document. After deciphering it, he notices that the ketchup is included at fifty centimes, or approximately 15.5 centimes per shake and glob. The guest turns a distinctly ketchupy shade of red, no doubt because of the indignity of paying for ... for ... so help me! ... ketchup.

"Paying for ketchup," the tourist thinks to himself. "I'll break the damned bottle over that waiter's square head!" Then, tempering his temper, he calmly asks the waiter why the ketchup. "Ketchup costs money," says the waiter. "One bottle, one franc and forty-five centimes."

"But I didn't use one-third of a bottle," says the tourist.

"Doesn't matter," replies the waiter. "You could have."

"Had I but known," says the American, "and I would have emptied the whole thing on the floor. As a matter of fact, I think I will!"

"Sorry, sir," replies the waiter, "but this order came from the manager. There's nothing I can do about it—an order is an order. *Jawohl!*"

And so the guest reluctantly agrees to pay. He hands the waiter a twenty-franc note to cover the total of twelve francs and sixty centimes. The waiter begins to count out the change, then suddenly stops.

"Did you have any rolls?" he asks.

"Rolls? What do you mean rolls?"

"Did you have any rolls with your meal?" the waiter repeats.

"Of course I had rolls," our friend groans impatiently. "That's what they're on the table for, isn't it?"

The waiter finally convinces his irate guest that such information is of crucial importance because, not only must he pay for the rolls, but these facts are regularly passed on to the Federal Bureau of Statistics, not to mention the Foreign Police.

"O.K., Buster," says the exhausted tourist. "I had three. How many million golden Swiss francs do you want for them?"

"Let's see," says the waiter. "Three rolls at twenty-five centimes makes seventy-five centimes which means you get six francs sixty-five back."

"Thank you," says our relieved visitor from the New World.

"Without service," adds the waiter.

"How much is that?" the prostrated American now asks.

"Fifteen per cent or exactly 2.0025 francs, including service for rolls and ketchup."

"Whaddya means rolls and ketchup! I pay for rolls and ketchup—which is ridiculous in the first place—and you add fifteen per cent. How about adding a service charge for adding up the service charge?"

And so the story goes. I want to stress here that paying for ketchup is most unusual in Switzerland, except that it happened to me, and in a rather well-known Zurich restaurant. When I tried to provoke a charge for ketchup during a second visit to the same restaurant, I learned that a new owner had taken over, and that service was now included, although the *Wiener Schnitzels* were smaller. Or perhaps the humidity on that rainy day made them shrink a bit.

In any case, the fact remains that most restaurants in Switzerland charge for rolls, if not for ketchup. And anyone who seriously tries to eat Swiss rolls without accounting for them is making a great mistake. The crumbs have a habit of sticking to one's clothing, and you can't dispute such evidence when the police arrive to question you. I know, because I've tried it.

SWISS CULTURAL EVENTS DURING FEBRUARY

Forthcoming events in the artistic life of Western Switzerland

The retrospective show of the art of Théophile Alexandre Steinlen at the Lausanne Museum of Art, to remain on view until the end of February, may be considered an event of outstanding importance since this artist, who originated from Lausanne, lived from 1859 to 1923 and is no longer so widely known, is one of a group of artists from Western Switzerland it included Charles Gleyre, Félix Vallotton and Le Corbusier—who achieved fame in Paris. Only a large exhibition can illustrate the versatility of Steinlen as painter, graphic artist, illustrator, caricaturist and brilliant critic of his day who portrayed his epoch from both the social and human aspects. In Geneva, the Museum of Art and History will be displaying drawings by Victor Hugo from February 12 comprising little-known pictorial works by the greatest French writer of the 19th century.

Swiss tours by foreign orchestras

The music to provide the highlight of the forthcoming second half of the season is to be embellished with guest concerts by foreign ensembles. Pride of place is given to concert tours by two well-known orchestras. From Cologne comes the Gürzenich Orchestra, named after the historic building where a large concert hall was provided following reconstruction. Under the baton of Günter Wand performances are to be given on February 16 in Berne and on the three subsequent evenings in Zurich, Lausanne and Geneva. Music by Debussy and Tschaikowsky as well as a work by Ernest Bloch with the solo part interpreted by the cellist Zara Nelsova will be heard.

Then on March 8 the BBC Symphony Orchestra from London will open its Swiss tour in Basle, to be followed by concerts in Lausanne, Zurich and Berne. Colin Davis conducts works by Hector Berlioz and Harrison Birtwistle, followed by the Symphony No. 4 in G-major by Gustav Mahler. The final movement of this eloquent work completed by the Viennese master, who died sixty years ago, in 1900, will feature the distinguished soprano Margaret Price in a rendering of the delightful air from the "Himmlische Freuden". The Orchestre symphonique de Strasbourg is to play in Olten on March 1 and in Frauenfeld the following evening. The Chamber Orchestra of the German South-West Radio from Pforzheim is very well-known in Switzerland and it is to give concerts in Fribourg on February 15 and at the CERN centre near Geneva the next day. The Wind Quartet of the South-West Radio from Baden-Baden is to appear in Geneva on February 26 and 27 while the Wurtemberg Chamber Orchestra will play in La Chaux-de-Fonds on March 2. There are also to be several string quartet concerts in Swiss towns.

Neuchâtel plays host to Africa

In addition to guest performances by the "Théâtre de Saint-Etienne" and the "Théâtre populaire romand" at the Neuchâtel Theatre during February as well as performances of popular works by Molière and Sacha Guitry, time has also been allowed for a Gala Evening (on February 17) of the "Grand Ballet du Sénégal". The colourful programme presented by this group of Black African dancers has already met with an enthusiastic recep-

tion in various Swiss towns. The pictorial art of the Negroes is then also to be featured until February 21 in the Neuchâtel Jura. In La Chaux-de-Fonds the Museum of Art is to present an exhibition entitled "Unknown Swiss collections of works of art from Black Africa". It thus appears that there are still hidden treasures of wood-carving and other artistic products of the Negroes concealed here and there which are worth displaying and should find admirers.

Enterprising modern art

With commendable devotion our art associations are endeavouring to make known the most diversified trends in contemporary art. Collective exhibitions are being presented of widely varying styles. The unusual venue for the temporary exhibitions is the Jura town of Olten. They can be found on the tenth floor of the new council house where the large windows of the rooms afford wonderful views of the Jura and the growing town, for it is not yet stipulated that all four walls of exhibition rooms must always be window-less! At the Berne Art Gallery a show is to be held by Bridget Riley, while at the All Saints Museum in Schaffhausen the Zurich artist Alex Sadkowsky is presenting his pictorial fantasies. The Zurich Art Gallery is to introduce the unusual creations of Edward Kienholz, an American artist of Swiss extraction, to open new visual frontiers.

A time for masquerades

The irrepressible carnival spirit reaches the Ticino first, where during the days between February 18 and 23 Bellinzona, Lugano, Locarno and other places will be the scene of the annual revelry. The nutritious tradition of risotto eating will return once again to the open squares where the cooks steam and fresh energy is gained for the festivities. There are also lively processions and ceremonies at this time of year in Lucerne, in the health resort of Baden, in Brunnen, Kreuzlingen, Solothurn and various other fun-loving towns and villages. For the second major dose of carnival a visit is recommended, above all, to the unique processions in Basle on March 1 and 3 and the traditional Masked Arts Balls from February 27 to March 1 at the Zurich Congress House where the fantastic decorations and the masked groups appearing for the grand prize-giving lend an air of enchantment to the proceedings.

Basle—an international venue for trade fairs

Basle is recognised far and wide in this country as being the city of the Swiss Industries Fair which exerts a special attraction every spring as a national trade exhibition. But it should also be borne in mind that other important events are held here in the course of the year. The spacious and varied halls of the site in Little Basle on the right bank of the Rhine and the outstanding organisation which is in permanent operation has led to the development of an international fair tradition for the benefit of many economic sectors. The 1971 exhibition and industrial fairs year will open with the Sixth Building Machinery Fair to be held from February 13 to 21. The Federation of Swiss Building Machinery Manufacturers and Dealers (VSBM) will take advantage of the enormous covered area to display the