

# Letter from Switzerland

Objektyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1973)**

Heft 1658

PDF erstellt am: **10.05.2024**

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# Letter from Switerland

## THE FORSYTE SAGA IN "BERLINERISCH"

According to a French proverb, journalism can lead one anywhere, provided one leaves it in time. Having moved back to Switzerland six months ago, I thought that I had left it for good — only to find myself reinstalled as regular contributor to the "Bund" in Berne on British problems, and now, it seems, as a kind of Swiss correspondent to the *Swiss Observer*. Since its Editor has told me that any contribution would be welcome, I intended to let him have a chatty kind of letter from time to time. This I do partly out of loyalty to the *Swiss Observer*, and partly because it enables me to reach my many British friends. I hope that this correspondence may perhaps become a kind of link between some of the Swiss in Britain and some of those who have gone back.

A recent visit in Berne brought my wife and I into contact with two former Ambassadors in London: Armin Daeniker and Rene Keller. We also met Mme de Fischer, wife of Ambassador Beat de Fischer. All of them were most interested to hear about life in England.

May I, in this first letter from Switzerland, be permitted to jot down a few impressions. One is the ease with which one now reaches Berne from Zurich on a motorway which allows you to go from one city to the other in less than hour. Another impression is of the difference between these two towns. Zurich is a city of haste, hurry, bustling activity and noise with enormous multi-carriage tramways clanging away, whereas Berne is still a small town full of old-world charm and "Gemutlichkeit", with people seemingly enjoying plenty of spare time for leisurely walks under those famous arcades.

Security of the high and mighty does not seem to be a problem yet in the Federal Capital. Wanting to pay a short

visit to Ambassador Keller (now Head of the Division for International Organisations at the Federal Department), my wife and I were able to walk about the first floor of the Department without being checked, without meeting a soul and without let or hindrance. Admittedly, we did perhaps not look like members of Black September, but it is true that we could easily have brought in enough bombs to blow the whole place skyhigh. May they never have cause in Berne to regret such trust and lack of security-mindedness!

In passing, I might mention that a new periodical for the English speaking community in Switzerland has been launched about three months ago. It is a monthly called *Contact*. It appears in Geneva and is edited by two young journalists, one English, one Swiss. It is beautifully and ambitiously laid out. Knowing from the *Swiss Observer* the difficulties faced by such magazines, I can only wish it success.

The Forsyte Saga is currently being shown on Swiss Television. It seems to captivate people here as much as it did in Britain. Although the dubbing has been well done, it still disturbs me when I hear Soames (Eric Porter) or any other Forsyte talk Berlinerisch.

There is also a documentary, running as a serial of 13 episodes being televised at present, showing in what mortal danger the Confederation found itself during those awful 12 years when Nazism held sway in Germany. It is the kind of documentary many fathers would want their youngsters to watch, even though the latter would prefer to see cops and robbers or red Indians.

Spring has suddenly come to Switzerland and the last patches of snow on the Albis, which I see across the lake, are fast disappearing. As I am writing these lines on my balcony the first butterflies are dancing around me.

The petrol stations are full of

people wanting to have their winter tyres taken off. Those who still keep them on their wheels do so in order to have a few last ski outings far up in the Alps. Lake Zurich is already full of sailing boats and even the first big public boats have made their appearance. From May onward, the last two remaining paddlesteamers, the *Stadt Rapperswil* and the *Stadt Zurich*, each capable of carrying a thousand passengers, will be coming into service again. The first of the two has just undergone an overhaul and refit during the last 18 months at a cost of one million 600,000 francs. This money has been contributed by towns and villages around the lake and by innumerable steamboat fans — including myself.

In my next letter, I intend to write on what the average Swiss thinks of the United Kingdom. I have collected enough material to risk writing about this. There is a funny craze here for English names, whether they fit or not. Even small villages suddenly boast a "City". There are pubs called the "Crazy Horse" and Zurich's huge underground passage beneath the Bahnhofplatz is called "Shopville". One could find many other examples.

Gottfried Keller

## GOTTARDO PIAZZONI, A SWISS ARTIST IN CALIFORNIA, 1872-1945

Thousands of Swiss emigrated to California during the second half of last century. Italian-Swiss (from the Canton of Ticino) were by far the largest group among the Swiss emigrants. They found their greatest economic opportunities in the rural districts of California, engaging primarily in dairying and viticulture.

After the birth of Gottardo Piazzoni, his father emigrated to California. When the father had managed to save some money, he bought a ranch in Carmel Valley and called for his family. Gottardo was fourteen years old when he arrived in California. Before long he tired of farm life and went to San Francisco to try his luck as an art student.

San Francisco was emerging at the time as an art center. Gottardo studied at the San Francisco Institute of Art. He continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Gottardo did not stay long in Europe and returned to San Francisco in the early 1900's. He became both a famous California artist and a highly regarded art teacher.

Ten large murals in the San Francisco Public Library are among his most important works. He was commissioned to paint these murals after twelve of his fellow artists signed a letter to the Library Trustees recommending him.

Scarcely known in his native Switzerland, the works of Gottardo Piazzoni continue to be highly prized in his beloved California, whose beautiful landscape he transposed so well in his works.

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