

# Holiday observations

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## HOLIDAY OBSERVATIONS.

Obviously the job of the editor of the "Swiss Observer" is — to observe. This, whilst having occupied the editorial chair for nearly 30 years, I have done to the best of my abilities by reporting all the many social events which are held throughout the year in both London and the Provinces, such as banquets, dinners, dances, cocktail parties, receptions, weddings, funerals, Press conferences, "Gemütliche Abende", as well as meetings, concerts, lectures, and so on.

I have also kept my eyes open on happenings in the home country with regard to both news and political and economic developments.

Once a year, however, I lay down my pen, pack my bag, take leave, and travel "back home" principally for a rest, but also for new inspiration. During this time I fight shy of any official functions, refuse to listen to speeches, cut out cocktail parties and receptions; in short I try to live the life of an ordinary human being.

Having recently returned from a holiday in Switzerland, I was asked at a meeting of one of the Swiss Societies to relate some of my experiences, which I did very briefly, and in order to encourage some of my readers to give an account of *their* experiences, I will repeat and perhaps enlarge upon the statement made on this occasion.

If, therefore, I pass some criticism on various — perhaps small but nevertheless aggravating — matters, I do so without malice or pettiness, solely to aim at rectification.

Early each year I write to a number of places and hotels in Switzerland for information and terms, and invariably I am almost smothered with prospectuses and pamphlets. Beautiful coloured literature of the respective hotels and their surroundings swells my daily mail. (Let it be said that some of the pictures concerning the hotels are not always true to fact, but I will let it go at that.)

The offers relating to accommodation — without exception — speak in glowing terms as to the comfort which is provided for the "Verehrte Gäste" (honoured guests), and here I wish to make a few observations from personal experience during recent years — experience in good "middle class" establishments, not *de luxe* hotels.

Before going any further I voice the opinion that Swiss hotels in general compare well with hotels in English and Scottish holiday resorts as to price, if it were not for the various "extras" which invariably make their appearance on the bill.

One point which has always puzzled me is that whilst no charge is made in hotels in this country for baths (unless one books a room with bath) charges in most Swiss hotels vary between 2.50 and 3.— frs.

Being used to keeping reasonably clean, bearing in mind the saying "Cleanliness is next to Godliness", I find it an expensive item in my holiday budget. On many occasions I have found that the water supplied was only luke-warm, and on complaining on one occasion I was told by a cheeky chamber-maid that the "honoured guests" were not supposed "to soak" for any length of time. True enough nearly every room is fitted with a wash-basin, but I found this always most uncomfortable to sit in!

Then, again, the use of deck-chairs in the hotel

grounds is often charged for at a minimum rate of 1.— fr. per chair. (At one establishment I was charged 1.— fr. for the morning and an additional franc in the afternoon, which induced me to sit on the grass.)

Heating is usually charged for during the winter, which I accept, but I was charged in mid-August 1.— fr. per person per day because, apparently, some old dear could not muster enough heat.

The various items mentioned above are, to say the least, irritating. I consider that it would be a far better policy to include these items in the quotation, and so avoid causing any resentment or creation of a feeling that one has been "rooked".

Such extras when added up, say over two to three weeks, are not inconsiderable, and are liable to upset any budget based on the quoted terms; and a holiday which seemed in the first place reasonable becomes an expensive affair.

Invariably, on the occasion of the 1st of August celebration in London the programme starts with community singing; may I suggest that in future the first item on this programme should be the song "Teure Heimat" (dear country)? This would be most appropriate!

On putting the question regarding "extras" before one of the hotel managers I utterly failed to convince him of its giving cause for annoyance. As a parting shot he smilingly retorted that "after all, the 'verehrte Gäste' are not charged for the lovely views which they are enjoying", which, of course, is not quite true, considering that one pays more for a room "with a view" than for one "without a view".

It may interest my readers to hear of a happening

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with which I met some time ago at a well-known holiday resort in German-speaking Switzerland. I was entering the gardens of an establishment a few minutes before 5 p.m., with a party of five, when the orchestra, without any warning, packed up and disappeared, perhaps not liking the looks of my party! When finishing dinner and asking for the bill, I found on it an item of 4.50 frs.; on enquiring the reason for this charge I was told that it was "for the music". On saying that we heard only a few bars, I was told by the waitress that the instructions were to charge from 2 to 5 p.m. for "musical entertainment". On my refusing to pay — for reasons of principle — the manager was summoned, to whom I politely explained that we heard the orchestra for exactly two minutes, to which he answered "rules are rules", to which I replied that "rules can also be broken if they are unreasonable".

To cut a long story short, the manager turned to the waitress saying "If these people cannot afford to pay, strike it off". I gave this gentleman a piece of my mind in good old "Bärndütsch".

For some considerable time we have published in this paper reports of the very alarming increase of traffic accidents throughout our country causing the loss of many lives. Can one wonder? There is apparently no speed limit in operation, with the result that some motorists consider roads as "speed tracks". I challenge anybody to say that the crossing of streets, especially during rush hours, in towns such as Zurich, Geneva or even Berne, is devoid of danger, even on points where the traffic is supposed to be controlled by a policeman — who always reminds me of a man suffering from convulsions, and whose physical extortions I have never yet been able to follow. Let it be said that motorists are, however, not the only culprits; many of the pedestrians seem to take little notice of, for instance, traffic lights. In years gone by I invariably took out a special insurance when travelling by air; I found this a waste of money. It seems to me that it is far safer to cross by air than to cross the streets of some of the Swiss towns.

With these remarks I will close, but not without mentioning an item which impressed me considerably,

and, may I add, with pleasure. In olden times — on festive occasions — public and historic buildings, churches, etc., were floodlit, which greatly added to their attractiveness; this now seems to have become universal. I need only refer to the fine illumination, for instance, of the buildings around the Limmatquai in Zurich, the Palais des Nations in Geneva, or the Minster and the Houses of Parliament in Berne. I noticed that now the buildings of the Banks have been added, surely not for their beauty, but, no doubt, to convince the world of the "mighty power of the Swiss franc".

To still further enhance the attractiveness of our country, may I suggest that in future all restaurants, inns, casinos, night clubs and "pubs" are lit up nightly, thus producing an atmosphere of light and cheerfulness and so fully justifying the reputation of our country as really and truly becoming the

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ST.

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