

Comments from readers

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furthermore, there are other wonderful landscapes in of Swiss economic life are not situated in the Alps. And Switzerland, which could claim to be as typical as the mountains, like for instance the lakes and their shores or the vineyards of Vaud and Geneva. Why were the mountains chosen as the typical Swiss image? The first reason for this choice is that the image of Switzerland as the country of mountains coincided with the picture of the Swiss as farmer and herdsman. Lonely mountains, rocks, alpine pastures are the natural and convenient surroundings of what had been pictured as the ideal Swiss, rural, modest and straightforward. The second reason is a more historical one. As suggested before, the period when all these concepts of the Swiss national ideal were first given expression to, was the period of the so-called enlightenment. The ideal of the writers of that period consisted of what Rousseau called "Retour à la nature", in a kind of counter-movement against the over-fine, over-civilised artificiality that century had brought. The picture they gave was, of course, an idealistic one, it was the dream of a life full of sunshine and harmony, a life in a natural environment, a life with cattle and sheep, and a life full of music, joy and dance. Poets and writers like Rousseau and Voltaire who, described in their poems, such an idealistic Swiss landscape, were all very fond of the mountains; they loved the wild, uncultivated and untouched atmosphere of the highlands. At that time, too, the first paintings of mountains began to appear, and for the first time, mountaineering became fashionable.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the British in particular contributed a great deal to this movement. In the late eighteenth century, a school of thought existed in Britain, called "Philhelvetism", and many British poets, like the Duchess of Devonshire, wrote enthusiastic poems about the Swiss mountains, and many British painters, like William Turner, used to go to Switzerland to portray the mountain landscape. And let us not forget either that the first man to make the Swiss mountains really famous all over the world, was also British, namely Edward Whymper, who, exactly one hundred years ago, succeeded in climbing the Matterhorn for the first time. All this had an enormous impact upon Swiss thought and Swiss self-consciousness. The idea of Switzerland as the country of mountains was quickly adopted and put in the centre of the whole range of ideas forming the Swiss national image.

And the third reason for the formation of this concept is the fact that the simple shape of mountains is the easiest form to keep in mind. Mountains are monumental

and impressive, and they lend themselves in many ways much more easily as symbols than lakes, vineyards or pleasant valleys would. The whole image of Switzerland as a country of mountains was effective during the whole of the nineteenth and also in the twentieth century. The concept of national defence which General Guisan designed during the second world war, the "Alpenréduit", undoubtedly received additional strength by emphasising the symbolic centre of Switzerland, the mountains. And it is sure that the determined will of the Swiss people to defend the country against any aggressor was, to some extent, also buttressed by the emotional forces emerging from this "alpine redoubt" concept.

(To be continued.)

WORTH THINKING ABOUT

Es gibt auch heute noch Leute genug, die immer Alpenrosen im Munde führen, aber nie gemerkt haben, was schweizerisches Recht und Freiheit eigentlich sind.

These words were written by Gottfried Keller who was born on 19th July 1819 and died on 15th July seventy-five years ago.

COMMENTS FROM READERS

Mr. B. Albertolli writes from Portsmouth:

"As one who has pride in his dual nationality and whose family has conducted the Continental Café Restaurant in Portsmouth (63-65 Commercial Road) for over 72 years, thus knowing the difficulties of the trade both here and in Switzerland, I should like to say how grieved I am to hear recent criticism of Switzerland by English visitors. In former years there was always praise of Swiss catering and hospitality."

Mr. Albertolli then goes on to say that perhaps the reason for recent criticism lies with some of the tourist agencies' "all in" quotations which may be rather low, and then such important things to the English visitors as a cup of tea has to be charged at rather a high price. *Another item we could add here is the daily bath charged extra to the annoyance of many visitors. Ed.*

Mr. Albertolli would like to have comments, and he hopes that the discontent felt by some visitors may only be a passing phase and "that the praise we have so often heard of everything Swiss will soon return again".

* * *

An anonymous reader has sent the Editor a cutting from the "Daily Express", telling of Yul Brynner having given up his U.S. nationality because America will not grant citizenship status to his Swiss wife and daughter. The famous actor was born in the Far East as a Swiss citizen 47 years ago.

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