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Autor: Steel, John A.

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THE COUNT WHO CAME TO BRITAIN FROM SWITZERLAND

By JOHN A. STEEL

The Soglio Story

Standing serenely on a mountain-side above the savage Val Bregaglia in the Southern part of the Engadine, is the beautiful village of Soglio, which is generally considered to have the finest situation in Switzerland. It has a setting like the castle of the Sleeping Beauty, for it is embowered in chestnut trees and from the village one looks across three miles of space to the sparkling emerald glaciers of the Sciora group of mountains with their fantastic, awe-inspiring peaks.

Dominating the square of Soglio is a magnificent Palazzo, which is a superb example of the typical, four-square Grisons style of architecture. It contains sumptuous vaulted ceilings, stone-flagged floors and iron-grilled windows whose ledges in summer are adorned with glorious red geraniums.

Nowadays the Palazzo is a hotel, but once it was the house of the patrician family of de Salis, a member of whom, Lt.-Colonel de Salis who is an Englishman lives in Wiltshire and no more fascinating story of a great family can be told.

Since time immemorial the family have lived in the Grisons, and their splendid palaces in Bondo, Soglio itself and other villages in the neighbourhood all bear witness to the power and exquisite good taste of the family. In the middle ages, they were the guardians of the Maloja Pass that was used by rich merchants of northern Europe when they went to Italy to buy silks and works of art or to trade their own merchandise.

The Maloja is one of Europe's famous highways and no doubt the de Salis family levied toll on every traveller who crossed it. Certain it is that they grew rich and made their homes a treasure house of lovely things.

First Count

Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, Peter, 1st Count de Salis, came to England, but although he himself did not settle there, his son Jerome stayed and eventually married Mary, the fascinating though strong-willed daughter of Viscount Fane.

Mary and Jerome de Salis lived partly in England and for a while in Soglio, but from all accounts Mary was not very enamoured of the Grisons or her husband's countrymen. She continually hankered for the salons of fashionable London and her husband soon gratified her whims.

So the English side of this illustrious family took root in England where it remains to this day, although all its members are still justly proud of their Swiss heritage.

Among the more distinguished members of the English branch were John Francis Charles, seventh Count de Salis, who served as British Minister Plenipotentiary to Monte-

negro from 1911-1916 and as Envoy to the Vatican from 1916-1922; Lieutenant General Rodolph, who was second in command of the 8th Hussars of the Battle of Balaclava and took part in the charge of the Light Brigade when he was a Major; and his younger brother, William, who became chairman of the P. and O. Company.

Family members

Another Rodolph was chairman of the Grand Junction Canal Company and of Singer Motors in the 1920's, and yet another celebrated member of the family was Admiral Sir William de Salis, K.B.E., who died in 1939, while the Admiral's younger brother Charles, was Bishop of Taunton from 1911-1930.

Sir Cecil de Salis, K.O.B., the brother of Rodolph, William and Charles and the father of Group Captain Arthur de Salis, O.B.E., D.L., the present Hon. Secretary of the de Salis family Association, was chairman of the Middlesex County Council from 1919-1924.

Memorials to some of the English branch of the family may be seen in the church at Harlington, Middlesex, while Dr. W. A. de Salis one of the leading members of the Swiss family has a delightful home at Silvaplana, not far from Soglio.

As has been said the de Salis Palace at Soglio, now a hotel belongs to Count Peter de Salis the last son of Count John. It is a charming place in which to spend a holiday, for the hotel is famous for its cuisine and classic cellar, and blossom time in Soglio is an unforgettable sight while in autumn no lovelier place exists as the leaves of the chestnut trees turn to glorious shades of gold and Titian brown.

Untroubled

Peace and calm reign in this untroubled valley where the silence is never broken except by the church bells in the Campanile as they chime away the hours, and the Swiss Postal Coach which arrives and departs twice a day.

When evening falls the lights go on in the Palazzo and candles glitter on the portraits, glass and silver in the dining room of the de Salis, that lovely room which always delighted Mary the English aristocrat who married Jerome the first de Salis to settle in England. Her loveliness and strong character became a legend in the Grisons. When she lived in Soglio, she loved to decorate her home with the wild flowers that grow so prolifically on the Alpine meadows. This custom of hers is faithfully observed to this day.

(From "The Scotsman", Edinburgh.)

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