

Swiss presence in India

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laboratory for the development of his ideas of a new enlightenment, but could the same process be adapted to the medieval history of Rome itself? To Gibbon's romantic spirit, the crumbling arches and grass-grown amphitheatres presented an epitome of the whole process which so fascinated his contemporaries. Yet the seed did not germinate at once. Gibbon's mind returned to Switzerland, that Switzerland to which he owed so much: his intellectual formation, the friends of his life — Georges Deyverdun, Lord Sheffield — and to which he himself would return to spend his later years. Deyverdun thus became his German translator and in 1767 they published their first book in French. Some critics, including David Hume, attacked him for writing in French. Gibbon but dismissed them with impunity.

A monumental work

At length Gibbon decided to seize the whole problem: the decline and fall of Rome was transformed into the decline and fall of the Empire. That vast subject stretching from Antiquity to the Renaissance, from Europe through Arabia to China and covering over 1,300 years of history was extensively written after Gibbon's return to Lausanne in 1783 until its completion four years later. Journeying back to England for its final publication in 1787, he soon tired of life there and so returned to Switzerland the following year cherishing vague schemes of fresh literary activity. However, Deyverdun's death and the great thunderstorms of the French Revolution troubled his repose and, visiting London in 1793 to consult his physicians on some ailment, he was taken ill and died within a few weeks, on the 16th January, 1794.

What Gibbon had left posterity was more than just a monumental work; it was the criterion by which he had judged civilization and progress. It was the measure in which the happiness of men was secured, and of that happiness he considered political freedom an essential condition. A condition, so Gibbon tells us, which stemmed from his first contact with "... the temperate air, the serene sky, the silver orb of the moon reflecting on the waters of Lake Léman, and nature's silence — the forgotten past ... I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on recovery of my freedom and, perhaps, the establishment of my fame; but my pride was soon humbled and a sober melancholy spread across my mind that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatever might be the future outcome of my history the life of the historian must be short and precarious". Short and precarious it might be; but it had already been long enough to bring together and to answer in one majestic work, the problems which had exercised all the greatest historical minds of that most inquisitive, most penetrating, most inspiring of generations, the generation of the Enlightenment.

SWISS PRESENCE IN INDIA

During a trip to India last October, your Editor naturally had an eye for things Swiss in this vast country. In the following article, we report on evidence of Swiss commercial and industrial presence. We shall continue this report in the next issue.

The front page of the *Times of India* of 8th October last reported on an important loan agreement with Switzerland. A picture showed the Swiss ambassador to New Delhi, Mr. Fritz Real, and the Indian Secretary for Economic Affairs, Mr. M. G. Kaul, signing a document which provided for about 100 million francs of credits at very advantageous conditions for the purchase of capital equipment and the financing of a new power-transmission scheme.

This agreement, one of many that have been concluded between the two countries, illustrated the fact that India is the country receiving the greatest amount of Swiss aid. Given the size of its population, this is hardly surprising. The presence and importance of this aid is acknowledged by most literate Indians.

Switzerland's impact on Indian economy is strongest, however, in the field of private enterprise. Although Indian law requires that all "foreign" companies should be controlled by Indian capital and Indian executives, many important firms have Swiss names attesting to their Swiss origin. This is the case of Hindustan Brown Broveri, which is the major producer of electrical transmission and switchgear in the country. It employs over 2,000 workers. About forty per cent of its capital is still Swiss and there are still a handful of Swiss executives in the company.

While driving south of Madras, we were surprised to find a signpost standing

out of paddy fields pointing to the "Advani Oerlikon Electrode Factory". Buhle Oerlikon, a world leader in welding technology, had obviously exported their know-how to India.

A large textile business bearing the name of "Helvetia Trading Corporation" stands out on Waterloo Street, once an elegant Victorian road, now one of the decrepit, dirty and beggar-ridden streets of Calcutta. This establishment is round the corner to the Great Eastern Hotel, once the best hotel in West Bengal, and still the place to eat in Calcutta. "Helvetia Trading Corporation" is now owned by Bengalis. Only one of the dozen men whom I met there busy cutting and measuring cloth, could speak English. He was the Manager. He explained that the business had been sold by its Swiss owner a long time ago. The owner had gone back to Switzerland and died five years ago.

In the centre of Madras, a large and well lit tailor's shop stands prominently with the sign "Tailor of Switzerland". The owner was however a genuine Tamil who had learnt his trade in Switzerland.

The largest patisserie we have seen in India, a place called *Wenger* at Connaught Circus, in the centre of Delhi, might well have been of Swiss origin judging from the name and some of the continental cakes on sale. Owing to the presence of a large crowd of buyers, it was not possible to get confirmation from the Manager.



Street in Calcutta

The traveller eager to pick up traces of Swiss presence or influence in India could be misled when visiting the arts museums of Chandigarh and Mysore. Both give prominence to an artist called *Nicholas de Roerich* who painted the Himalayas in exactly the same way as Ferdinand Hodler painted the Alps. The resemblance of the two styles is so striking that one is immediately tempted to speculate that this man, de Roerich, knew of Hodler's art and chose to work in a country where he could seek similar sources of inspiration and not be accused of plagiarism. It turned out, however, that de Roerich was a Russian.

Switzerland is the fifth largest investor in India. Nestlé accounts for almost half these investments, but pharmaceutical companies such as Sandoz and

Hoffman la Roche have staked heavily on the Indian market.

Many visitors to India are surprised by the country's industrial development. In a sub-continent where one hears that beggars die of exhaustion in the streets of large cities, one is surprised to find that everything that is required by its people is manufactured locally. This applies to transistors and television sets, record players, fans, air-conditioning machines and other household appliances, diesel engines, cars and lorries.

The British and the Japanese seem to have helped the Indians to build their own electronics industry. Most makes of radios and television over there are in fact household names in Britain and Japan. Firms like Murphy, HMV and Sony have either set up plants or signed technical

assistance agreements with local firms. The Swiss have played a leading role in helping India satisfy its requirements in capital equipment. By far the largest machine-tool company in the country, Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT), one of the great post-independence achievements of India, has a sprawling factory about five miles away from the prosperous city of Bangalore, in South India. Over 50,000 workers are employed there in three shifts. Like other similar modern factories in India, Hindustan Machine Tools is protected by an impressive security system and photographs are strictly forbidden in the premises. This mammoth factory, which probably produces all the metal-working machinery India requires and manages to export some to other developing countries, was set up with the



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Members of Eurovan

help of Machine Fabrik Oerlikon (MFO), now part of Brown Boveri. In the middle fifties, there were some three hundred Swiss technicians and their families living in Bangalore.

A mile away from Hindustan Machine Tools factory stands a modern watch-making plant employing ten thousand. Although this company is part of HMT, it was built with Japanese assistance, judging from the photographs in the Reception Hall. One of these photographs shows former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru being offered the first watch produced by the factory, which was also the first Indian-made watch, back in 1961.

India evidently offers a tremendous watch-market. Despite the poverty of its masses, the majority seem able to afford a watch – in the cities anyway. We have seen poor people walking bare-footed wearing gleaming imitation-

gold watches. Although Switzerland still has a footing in the Indian watch-market, most watches worn by Indians are probably home-manufactured, Japanese or Hong-Kong produced “Swiss” watches. Cheap watches in India, rarely selling at less than £5, still appear to be more expensive than “cheap” watches in Switzerland and Britain.

The traveller can discover other evidence of Swiss presence, or former presence, in India if he is attentive. There were many Swiss in Textiles. Firms like Volkart Brothers had extensive interests before independence. The business conditions changed after 1947. Political circumstances and the new requirements regarding the ownership of capital and the seating of Indian directors discouraged many Swiss businessmen from pursuing their activities in India.

P.M.B.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO . . . FROM SAANEN IN THE CANTON OF BERNE TO NIPISSING

A LITTLE KNOWN EPISODE OF SWISS EMIGRATION TO CANADA

Some two hundred miles north of Toronto on the road to Burk's Falls, just outside Magnetawan, is old farm field, shoulder-high in hay. Tucked back in a corner of the field, barely visible from the road, is an old post archway. It is closed with pagewire fencing. Inside the fence, wild fern has all but totally obscured a pioneer graveyard, a memorial to Swiss settlers who helped to open up the country south of Lake Nipissing. Most of the inscriptions on the gravestones are still readable. The names they bear leave no doubt as to the Bernese origin of those buried here: Raaflaub, Matti, Hauswirth, Haldi and Reinhard. Pioneers' Cemetery with its Western style archway is the last place of rest of these immigrants who came mostly from the Saanen area. How did it happen?

Largely responsible for this emigration was Baroness Elise von Koerber, a gentle lady of European origin living in Canada. With the backing of the Canadian authorities, she conducted a campaign from 1873 to 1878 in Europe, and particularly in Switzerland, to foster the emigration of farmers to the sparsely settled Nipissing region. Madame von Koerber distributed leaflets, held press conferences and organised information meetings for prospective emigrants.

An exploratory expedition headed by the distinguished world traveller and professor of mineralogy Jacques Kaderli of Berne (1827–1874), toured the Nipissing region in October 1873 on behalf of Madame von Koerber and the Canadian authorities. In his report ‘Compte-Rendu de mon expédition sur les côtes sud-est du Lac Nipissing, au Nord de la province Ontario en Canada, octobre et novembre 1873’, Kaderli gave useful information about soil, climate,

harvesting prospects and also mentioned by name some of the few European farmers already there. Other members of the exploratory mission were Jakob Brunschweiler of St. Gall, Edouard Schmid of Basel and Edouard von Zuben of Alpnach, Canton of Obwald. Von Zuben was apparently the only one of this group to eventually settle in the Nipissing area.

Swiss authorities viewed Madame von Koerber's activities sympathetically, but refused to lend her any official support, since regulations prevented them from showing preference for any specific emigration destination. Even an offer by the Canadian Government to defray all the expenses of sending to Nipissing a neutral observer, chosen by the Swiss authorities, was turned down.

Nevertheless, Baroness von Koerber pursued her campaign in Switzerland. She presided over numerous public meetings in Berne, Liestal and finally in Saanen, where she must have been quite persuasive, since some farmers from the Saanen area soon disposed of their goods and left for the Nipissing/Magnetawan area. The “Amstblatt des Kantons Bern” (Official Gazette of the Canton of Berne) listed in its issue of March 20, 1875, the petition of five families from Saanen and nearby Gsteig, who wished to emigrate to Nipissing.

Some of the early Swiss settlers received Crown Lands near Hungry Lake (now Carmen Lake, Chapman Township) and later – because of the poor, rocky land first granted to them – moved to nearby Magnetawan, Nipissing and Croft Townships.

Between 1873 and 1890 approximately one hundred Swiss came directly from their native country to settle in the area just southeast of Lake Nipissing. By opening up the land, often under severe conditions, they contributed largely to the development of the Nipissing region.

On December 31, 1882, some of the settlers decided to establish a

protestant church in Magnetawan. The co-signers of the declaration prepared to this effect were mostly Swiss. In addition to those already mentioned, the early church registers list many Swiss names such as Aellen, Boo, Bossert, Brand, Courvoisier, Eidam, Gerber, Gutjahr, Grünig, Kernen, Knoepfli, Meier, Noll, Salzmann, Uelliger and Würsten.

Ties with the motherland remained strong. The only subscriber in Nipissing of a Saanen weekly caused much joy by regularly circulating his newspaper among the immigrants.

Today, many descendants of the Swiss pioneers still live in the area opened up by their ancestors one hundred years ago; they are successful farmers or businessmen.

The Government of Ontario is also interested in the history of the settlers who came from Switzerland. It plans to erect in the near future a historical plaque to honour the early Swiss immigrants and their contribution to the development of the Nipissing region.

(Fragments – Swiss Volksbank)

Berne celebrated its “Onion Market” on 26th November

In memory of the reconstruction work following the Great Fire of 14th May, 1405, in Berne – at which neighbouring Fribourg farmers gave the Bernese powerful support – Berne held a traditional “Zibelemärit” (Onion Market) on the fourth Monday in November – a huge market at which no fewer than some 350 market stalls crowd the Bundesplatz and its adjoining streets and squares. All kinds of useful and beautiful goods were on sale, but pride of place was given to the onions. Onions were the main agricultural product brought to market by the farmers of the region in former times, and thus it came about that the vegetable gave the name to the main Berne popular festival. More than 40 tons of onions are sold and bought on one day during Zibelemärit. And in the restaurants of the city centre the odour of onions is predominant, because anyone who has any claim to knowing Berne is out on Zibelemärit enjoying onion tart, onion soup or Zwiebelmus (onion mash and potato). But Zibelemärit is above all a festival of good humour and fun, with a fair and booths on the Schützenmatte, confetti battles in the Spitalgasse, the first roast chestnuts, and sometimes the first snow.

“Inter-Rail” Now Obtainable All The Year Round

As from 1974, “Inter-Rail” the European railway ticket for young people will be obtainable all the year round. Anyone under 21 years of age is entitled to this ticket which costs Fr. 305 for 2nd class travel and is valid for a month. Young people living in Switzerland can get tickets at half price for travel with SFR and all important private railway companies in Switzerland and can travel free of charge in 18 European countries.