

# Letters from Switzerland

Objektyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1975)**

Heft 1710

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

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## AND ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT . . .

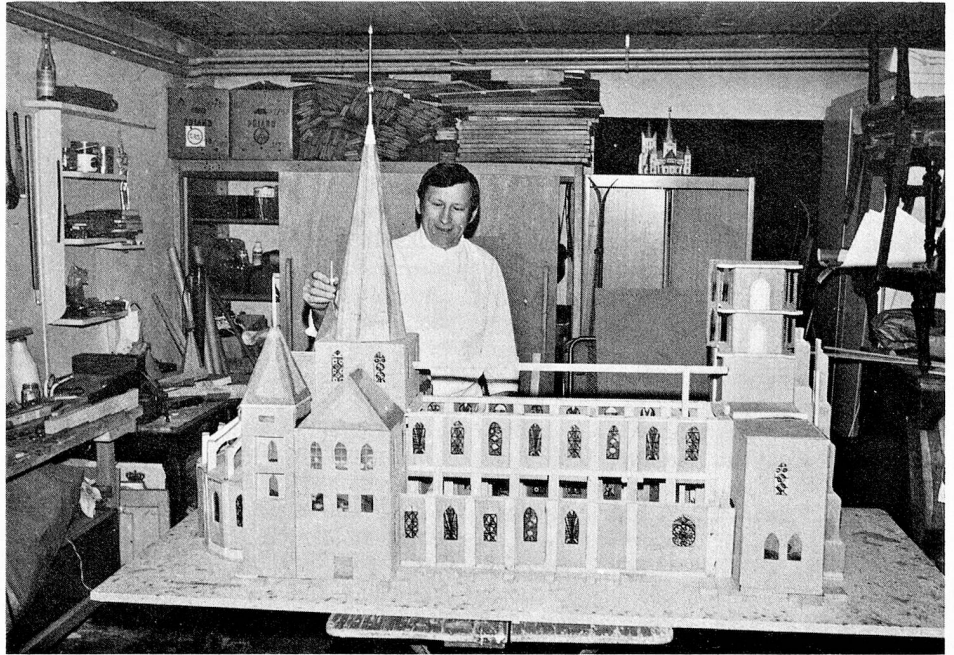
For the first time in 45 years, the First August celebrations on the Isle of Wight were not held at the premises of Mr and Mrs W. Zuber in Ventnor, but on the lawn of Barton Manor Farm, the home of Mr and Mrs Richard Orlick, near Cowes.

Lanterns and candles illuminated the traditional decoration of Swiss cantonal flags and the richly-laden table on which, to our delight, stood Mr Zuber's enormous sponge cake displaying the Swiss flag (spread with raspberries, with a white cross in whipped cream).

Whilst Swiss folk songs were being played on the record player, the 27 guests enjoyed the sandwiches and cakes provided by our hostess. Mr Zuber gave a speech, to remind us all again of the true meaning of the First August. The children walked around with lanterns until fireworks ended our gathering.

We all hope that next year's First August celebration can be held again at Barton Manor Farm and take this opportunity of expressing our sincere thanks to Mr and Mrs Orlick for their kind hospitality.

Hella Büchler



*This 150 scale model of Lausanne Cathedral was made from wood by M. Barbate, the chef de cuisine of the Hotel Beau Rivage in Lausanne, to celebrate the Swiss National holiday.*

# LETTERS FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

## Recession deepens

The Swiss National Bank has made it known that it has started consultations with several of the biggest banking concerns in the country with a view to *abolishing the so-called numbered accounts*. This does not, of course mean, that the banking secret will also be abolished. Numbered accounts, as is well known, have been the cause of a good many unwarranted attacks against Swiss banks in general and the so-called "Gnomes of Zürich" in particular. If the Swiss National Bank would now like to see them abolished, this is because it is felt that they have really outlived their usefulness. They were, it is only fair to recall, first "invented" to protect victims of Nazi prosecution who, by means known only to them, had succeeded in getting sums of money out of Germany and into Swiss banks and who had reasons to fear that ordinary, normal accounts might become known to the Nazi authorities. The motive of their creation was thus, at the time, a very honourable one. But it may also be true that they have, in some cases, been misused for tax evasion and similar purposes at the time when it was much easier to open such a numbered account than it would be today. How the big banks are going to react to the National Banks' initiative to abolish them now, is not, as yet, known. If they are abolished, some of the silly attacks against Swiss banks may now stop.

This letter is being written in the middle of August. The summer is already beginning to give way to autumn, with days getting shorter, and some of the first leaves turning yellow. June was, generally speaking, an exceptionally wet month, while the second half of July and the first of August were characterised by gloriously sunny weather, blue skies and quite high temperatures. *Economically* things are not too bright in Switzerland and there are, as yet, no signs visible anywhere which point to an early end of the present state of economic recession. Again and again one reads about small firms being closed down for good and larger and even very large industrial enterprises introducing shorter working hours and reducing their output. The latest well-known firm to close down is the General Motors Swiss Assembly Plant in Biel (Bienne), which has been assembling — and in many ways smartening up — American General Motors cars which had been imported in a semi-finished condition into Switzerland, ever since 1936, with interruptions during

world war two. Some 1,000 workers and employees have been given a farewell party with beer and sausages and some 150 foreigners amongst them have been handed several 1,000 franc notes and a single ticket to their home countries.

Some of the well-known Swiss newspapers are also in difficulties. Thus the *Nationalzeitung* in Basle has had to give notice to 20 of its staff members, some of them in fairly high executive positions and some from the editorial side. And as regards the *Basler Nachrichten*, its Editor-in-Chief was recently interviewed on the radio. He revealed that he had received strict orders to economise in the editorial budget and that one way in which he could live up to these instructions was to start reducing the high cost of direct messages from abroad. This will inevitably mean more reliance on big news agencies for the coverage of foreign news, and this in turn is bound to lead to a change in the outlay, presentation and character of the paper. One of the main reasons for these

somewhat grim developments inside these two important organs of the Swiss Press is the reduction in the size and number of advertisements placed, which in itself is a sign of the present economic climate. Round about last Christmas there were still some around who kept predicting that an economic turning point would be reached by mid-summer — but mid-summer has come and gone and the turning point has not come. At best, one is told now, a fundamental change may come about by mid-summer 1976.

*Politically* much interest is already focused on the elections for the two chambers of the Federal Parliament in October. As usual a number of National Councillors and Councillors of State have already made known their decision not to stand for re-election. This means that quite a number of candidates for election are already busy jockeying for positions and some of them are so eager to reach Berne that they are already making the mistake of over-egging the pudding. Even though Swiss parliamentary candidates do not go canvassing from house to house and kissing babies on the way, they also have their methods of making themselves known to the public. The actual elections are still two months away, but in many ways the campaign is already under way.

## Unpopularity

Some of our highest magistrates seem to be more popular than others. Several of them attended the opening Gala Night of the Swiss National Knie Circus in Berne. They were Federal Councillors Graber, Gnägi, Furgler and Brugger. The owner of the circus was understandably pleased to see so many prominent politicians under his canvas tent, but nevertheless made the mistake of welcoming them one by one over the loudspeaker system. While Messrs Graber, Gnägi and Brugger — especially the latter — were given a big hand by the applauding audience, the name of Mr Kurt Furgler was greeted by whistling (which in Switzerland means disapproval) and a chorus of boo-calls. It has for some time been known that Mr Furgler does not enjoy popularity — but to expose him to a public showing of disapproval has rightly been considered a disgrace by many a commentator. In fairness to Mr Furgler the reasons for his lack of popularity must be mentioned. The fact is that he is simply considered to be too much of a perfectionist, too industrious and efficient a worker, too polished in his speeches and immaculate appearance, not sufficiently “shirt-sleevy” like some of the others and, it is generally agreed, “anyway the best brain of the lot”. Probably Mr Furgler — some months ago the *Schweizer Illustrierte* dedicated some pages to his lack of popularity — has long since learnt to live with this sort of thing, finding his satisfaction in the highly efficient way in which he does his work and administers his department.

## AND MORE FOR AUGUST

“Let us stick to the principles that we found right in the past.” That was the theme of an address by Consul-General Horace Jaques when members of the Manchester, Liverpool and Yorkshire Swiss Clubs met in a Cheshire hotel for the annual National Day celebrations.

Said Mr Jaques: “Even if times are difficult — and you know very well that they are, not only in Switzerland — should we not, despite the very hard realities, try to count our blessings?”

“Don’t we have, all of us, enough to eat, a roof over our heads and, last but not least, peace — however fragile this peace may be?”

“For that, I believe, we should be most grateful.”

Mr Jaques referred to many annual reports of corporations and societies that he had been reading recently.

“All express concern, but none is desperate,” he said. “We have to accept the changes that are shaking the world and we will have to adjust to them.”

This was the second National Day get-together attended by Mr Jaques since taking charge of the Swiss Consulate in Manchester.

He said he wanted to express his gratitude to the President and committee members of the Manchester Swiss Club

who, throughout the past year “have successfully worked to give their members many occasions to meet and thus keep well alive the Swiss community”.

Club president, Dr A. V. Lang, had a special welcome for members of the Liverpool and Yorkshire clubs, who helped to swell the number of people attending the celebrations past the 180 mark.

The First August event was one of the highlights of an ambitious programme drawn up by the Manchester Swiss Club for this year.

Already there has been a film show — which included a tribute to General Guisan — and the ladies have been on an outing to North Wales, which proved so successful that it is to be repeated next year.

Twenty-three cars competed in a Swiss Club treasure hunt through Cheshire and Staffordshire. At a barbecue afterwards at the home of the president, Dr Lang, an engraved pewter tankard was presented to the winner, Mr Peter Reisen, who is secretary of the club.

Other events lined up for the rest of the year include a September barbecue, a photographic competition and a dinner-dance.

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