

Letter from Switzerland

Autor(en): **Epstein, Eugene V.**

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

EUGENE V. EPSTEIN

Everyone who visits Switzerland has the desire to express himself in writing, for the creative urge is strong in the Alps. According to a recent survey, however, only one traveller out of twenty-seven thousand actually places pen to paper with the intention of describing what he has seen and felt in Switzerland. The others want to write, though, and it is only a question of helping them shed their frustrations and complexes, and teaching them that almost everyone can become a world-famous writer.

Over the years, Switzerland has been chosen as the scene of many literary works—from Sherlock Holmes to the modern spy thriller. The country seems to cast a strange, magnetic spell over visiting authors. Its role is generally a passive or scenic one, for, as everybody knows, nothing quite compares to Swiss scenery.

The Swiss are interested in encouraging the mention of their country in international literature. That is why a new organization has been founded to further latent literary talents among tourists. This group, called the Swiss Writers Inspiration Guild (SWG), is dedicated to the basic philosophy that "If you cannot describe it to your wife or husband, however can you write about it?" SWG has an enormous job to do, and the organization's efforts are worthy of the highest recognition. Its first project, known as "Operation Big Alp", involved handing out two million leaflets with the rules of SWG's first international contest, which promised free holidays to those visitors who could best describe a Swiss mountain, either in prose or poetry.

The President of SWG, Louis M. Quinze, announced recently that he was extremely heartened by the results of this first contest. Many people who never wrote before have now done so, and, according to Mr. Quinze, the country is "literally crawling with authors."

"Some camera manufacturers have complained that tourists are taking fewer photographs," Mr. Quinze added, "but, by the same token, sales of ballpoint pens and paper have more than trebled in recent months." He also mentioned that "tourists are examining everything more carefully than they did in the past. Whenever they see a lake, for instance, they try to establish its color—blue, green or brown—then its size, then the surrounding area."

We are pleased to present here some of the first efforts of tourists to describe the natural wonders of Switzerland. Mrs. Arthur Choke, a visitor from Baker, Alaska, submitted the following description on her contest form:

*Look up at the mountains! Are they not something
Upon which to look at up to? Why did I
Not come sooner so that I could look up
At them from down here earlier?*

There is inspiration in these lines. The steering committee of the Geneva Automobile Society (GAS) considers Mrs. Choke's simple description to be among the most poignant it has ever received. Another entry in the SWG holiday contest was this delightful poem by a New York housewife. It was written on a postcard to her sister-in-law in the Bronx:

*Youse guys who never seen this land
Are missin' out on somethin' grand!
There's nothin' here like old Broadway,
No Gimbel's, Macy's, ladies' day.
But they got lots of lakes and mountains,
Plenty of ice and drinking fountains,
Pretty girls and cheese and watches,
And herring which the Swiss call matjes.
All in all, it's lots of fun here.
I'll tell you more when I am back, dear.*

One of the most remarkable efforts to be submitted to the SWG contest judging committee was a short story by a young man from Threadington Briar, Coates-on-Hookes, England. For reasons of space, we can reproduce only the beginning of this story, but readers will immediately notice that herein lies a budding talent:

"The night was dark and murky. Wisps of fog stood guard over the river, and the lights of the quay formed strange reflected patterns in the quiet water. An occasional gull flattered its wings and broke the quiet with its nasal call. All was still, for it was midnight in Zurich.

"James Blond stood on the Vegetable Bridge gazing at the undulating ribbons formed by the lights on the River Limmat. He was thinking. The smoke from his gold-tipped cigarette curled serenely up over his powerful forehead and into the endless night, where it disappeared in the blackness. He was waiting.

"James Blond, secret agent zero-naught-cipher, suave, Continental, wily, shrewd—and dangerous! His knowledge of Europe's highways and byways, cobblestone lanes and back alleys had been put to good use by his government. It was in Switzerland, at the Reichenbach Falls, that Blond had single-handedly uncovered the super-secret Russian counter-espionage agency SCHNOOK and its master spy, Kropotkin, known as Krop the Pot. But that was years ago...

"Now it was thirty-five minutes past midnight on the Vegetable Bridge. James Blond flicked his cigarette into the Limmat and exhaled his last draught of tar-filled smoke. He was waiting.

"Special agent MNX, Blond's boss in London, had told him of the importance of this mission. If the Russians were to discover the secret formula of a newly developed Swiss fondue, they would steal it, and everybody in the world might then be crying for holey cheeses. James Blond knew what this meant. He had faced up to difficult situations before.

"The bells of the Grossmünster tolled one o'clock. Quiet now, thought Blond, he should be along any minute... any minute. To his left, across the river and through the trees, Blond caught a glimpse of Kropotkin's chartreuse Oldsmobile turning regally into the Limmatquai. Blond jumped into his Ashton-Marlin, which was parked nearby, turned on the radarscope and headed out across Switzerland—towards Lucerne and Interlaken—in his continuing pursuit of Krop the Pot."

SOMMERLICHE KUNST- UND KULTURMANIFESTATION

Zum sechstenmal veranstaltet diesen Sommer der Graubündner Kurort Klosters oben im Prätigau seine *Klosterser Kunstwochen*. Sie haben ihr eigenes Gepräge und damit auch ihren eigenen Reiz. Während anderwärts – so ungefähr lesen wir in einem programmatischen Geleitwort – sommerliche Musik-, Kunst- und anderlei kulturelle Festwochen vielfach auf die Anziehungskraft internationaler Prominenz abstellen, lag den Initianten und Organisatoren in Klosters von Anfang an daran, Gäste und

Einheimische vor allem mit dem künstlerischen Schaffen ihrer engeren Heimat vertraut zu machen. «Klosters im Zeichen bündnerischen Kunstschaffens»: das ist das Motto dieser jährlichen Veranstaltung, und so steht auch im Mittelpunkt der 6. Klosterser Kunstwochen, die vom 15. Juli bis 14. August dauern, eine Gemäldeausstellung der Bündner Maler, neben der aber in vier Konzerten auch die Tonkunst entsprechend zu Ehren kommt.