

Zürich 1957

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passage on a dhow, and the crew had tried to rob us, and that Ahmed had been killed helping us to escape. The guard called another soldier who took us to a tent where we were given mugs of hot sweet tea and some clothes. We lay down on some rugs but I don't think either of us slept. David put his hand in mine; it gave each of us a feeling of security to know that the other was there.

The soldiers were very kind. Next day there was a truck going to Cairo. They hid us in the back of it, and in Cairo they gave us some money and put us on a train for Port Said.

«Best of luck, mates;» they called as the train pulled out.

We needed luck. We had a little money, but no papers or documents of any sort. Arrived in Port Said, we made our way through the squalid streets of the Arab town down to the waterfront. There was a big passenger ship alongside the landing stage. The passengers thronged the bazaars buying leather bags, pouffes, dirty postcards and Spanish fly. By careful listening we gathered that the ship would sail in a couple of hours for England. We waited round the waterfront trying to look like passengers, and when a large group of people made their way up the gangway, we joined them. In the confusion of claiming passports which the Egyptians always hold when passengers go ashore we slipped past the police and joined a group of people looking over the rail.

Eventually the ship up-anchored and sailed into the Mediterranean. We waited until the pilot went down the ladder and his launch disappeared into the night. Then we went to find the Chief Officer.

We knew what to expect. He would abuse us and then parade us before the Captain as a pair of stowaways. The Captain would read the riot act and we would be given some hard and very dirty work to do, for which we could never expect to be paid. When we arrived in England we would be landed in gaol, with a three month stretch for desertion, and another for stowing away.

As we waited outside the Chief Officer's door, David looked at me rather glumly.

«It's nice to be going home, Joe. I don't think I'll ever go to sea again.»

I thought of Ahmed and felt unhappy about him. I wondered if his body had been found. I pressed David's arm.

«Davie old boy,» I said. «We'll do our little stretch and then go west next time. To South America. What do you say?»

David grinned. «Where you go, Joe, I guess I go too.»

Just then the Chief Officer appeared. His face was as friendly as a sandstorm over the desert. But we were on our way home and it was too late for him or anyone else to do anything about it.

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A last minute change of plan had prompted Zürich as a starting point for a fortnight's holiday. At 31, one chooses one's holidays with care. Why Zürich, anyway? Why not Copenhagen, Amalfi, Dubrovnik? Why not

the certainty of sun, the pleasures of the South? Why not the assured welcome of the North? Why not, indeed?

To so many of us, Zürich is not its Lake or even the Fraumünster and Grossmünster. It is *The Circle* whose monthly appears as something of a miracle at English breakfast tables. Perhaps in no other country does its receipt give so much pleasure and its blessed continuity such an assurance of sanity. Surely, this was an excuse to start a holiday in Zürich and, perchance, to render personal thanks to the few by whose devoted labours alone *The Circle* continues to survive?

Nothing could have been less propitious than the wretched rain which closed round the D.C.-6 as it descended between the outlying hills to make a perfect landing at Zürich Airport. Memories of sun-drenched Alps and upland spring flowers fled before this gloom so greatly in contrast with an England but two hours behind and seeming blessed this year with eternal sunshine. There was, however, a welcome to make up for any bad weather and within an hour a feast of Mozart records provided the prelude to the most successful holiday of all.

For those who have not visited it, let it be said that Zürich has many attractions and is one of the few Swiss towns not fanatically devoted to the tourist trade to the exclusion of all else. This is no Lucerne or Interlaken replete with coaches of tourists and souvenir shops. It is German Switzerland and thus different, also, from Lausanne, and deeply rooted in German culture. Thus, the language is German but do not let that dismay you if you do not speak it for English alone will get you by quite well and, if you can add a command of French, your path will indeed be easy. If you can give the staff of *The Circle* some warning, you can be assured of an introduction to the ways of the town and naturally of a welcome to the meetings of *The Circle* which take place every Wednesday. These informal meetings can be regarded as an example of how such things should be conducted.

It is, however, about the general atmosphere that I wish to write. Zürich is a town virtually devoid of fear. Those of us who live with the dread of the unexpected upon our heads alone can know just how much that means. Here is a city where one can relax and (at the risk of being trite) live. I could never stop telling my friends how lucky they were to live in such an aura of tolerance. The result is, however, most startling. It is a city almost without vice. The absence of blackmail seems, to a great part, to remove from the scene those unfortunate creatures who yearly become more prominent from Bayswater to Tottenham Court Road. If we had the same tolerance in England, I believe that there would be an enormous decrease in homosexual crimes (to which a disproportionate part of publicity is given anyway) and a huge number of unhappy people would be able to look forward to lives of usefulness and their share of love.

You will meet people of all nationalities for this is the cross-roads of Europe. Germans predominate but there are many French and Italians. It is fascinating to be in the bars of a Saturday night and to watch the mingling of different races and listen to the hubbub of languages. An Englishman feels less insular than usual when he listens to, say, an

American trying to talk (and inevitably succeeding) to an Italian in a mixture of three or four languages.

Homosexuality is respectable in Zürich or should I say that homosexuals are respectable? Whichever it is, there is a pleasant absence of the aggressiveness which is often so repellent. Do not think, however, that, because the bars are fairly quiet and the people in them pretty decorous, there is no life. Such is far from the case as I discovered.

What of *The Circle* itself and of the monthly? The amazing thing is that it has survived and still grows slowly but surely. The greater number of subscribers are German speaking and hence the preponderance of German reading matter. More English speaking members are needed for there to be an extension of English reading matter.

I fell in love if not with Zürich at any rate in Zürich. So you will say that I am biased and perhaps I am. It is very true that places where you have really loved are imperishably happy in your memory. And they are few enough. I do not think, however, that you are likely to find another city in Europe (unless it be Copenhagen) where circumstances are more congenial to a lasting friendship or, for that matter, to a happy temporary one. Before this article appears, I shall have been back again. May it not be the same for you? W.H.N.S.

Mr. Gordon Westwood writes to our Subscriber 3266 (see July issue).

20 July 1957.

Dear Sir:

I was very interested to read in the June issue of Der Kreis your letter which followed the announcement of the research into the social implications of homosexuality that I am conducting on behalf of the British Social Biology Council. I hope it will be possible for us to meet and talk over some of the problems you mention in your letter. If you wish to write to me care of the British Social Biology Council at the address below, I can assure you that no-one, except myself, will read your letter, or ever get to know your name and address.

The basic aim of our research is to collect facts. There is no shortage of opinions on this subject, but what little factual information there is seems to be based for the most part on evidence collected from medical clinics or penal institutions. We believe that only such a field research as this can provide the information which is essential for a more rational approach to the whole problem of homosexuality.

The most important material for the research will be obtained from private interviews with individual homosexuals. But as it will be impossible to see all the people in England who have volunteered to give information, still less the people outside Great Britain, we shall also use a questionnaire at a later stage of the research.

I was particularly interested in your last paragraph when you suggested, «That Mr. Westwood shall not lose sight of the hearts behind the facts and that he will allow himself to be influenced, as I'm sure he will, by considerations other than those which are purely clinical».

I can assure you that we are very much aware that the emotional and spiritual sides are often the most important elements in a homosexual relationship. This research has been planned so as to make use of the valuable statistical and scientific techniques that have recently been developed to make social research more accurate and reliable; but we know that any results we produce would fail to give a true picture of the situation if they did not take into account the very strong affection that can exist between one man and another.

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