

A study of Swiss women

Autor(en): **Gavin, Catherine**

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A STUDY OF SWISS WOMEN.

From CATHERINE GAVIN.

(The following article appeared in "THE BULLETIN & SCOTS PICTORIAL" of April 27th, 1950, and is reproduced with due acknowledgement.)

This month a Swiss woman's journal polled its readers on the ever-burning theme of the Ideal Bridegroom. "Would you rather," ran the principal question, "marry a Swiss who has lived all his life in the homeland, or one who has lived and worked for a time abroad?"

You will notice that this is a question which could hardly be put to Scotswomen of the present generation. So many bridegrooms in our country have willy-nilly spent considerable periods abroad as members of H.M. Forces.

In always-neutral Switzerland, however, it raised a great deal of interest, and a surprising number of votes were cast for the husband who had seen something of the world beyond the Alps-enclosed republic of Helvetia.

Strolling through the tidy, handsome streets of Zürich after a study of the magazine poll, I wondered if the voting did not reflect a certain trend among post-war Swiss women — a certain dissatisfaction with their admirably ordered progress from the cradle to the grave.

To the visitor from more troubled countries, life for middle-class women of the Swiss cities seems to be as soft as Alpine snow-drifts — or as the white, feather-stuffed eiderdowns that lie on most Swiss beds. For the educated woman, however (and Swiss education reaches very high levels), peace and comfort are not always quite enough.

I had often heard that among the aristocracy of Geneva, the dwellers in or near that street for which the slang is "Rue des Grands," there were a number of young married women who were not a little bored by their husbands' devotion to the Keep Fit movement. They yearned more for the sophisticated interests and recreations of Geneva's international set.

For a young as for an older Swiss husband, business comes first. The bank, the great watchmaking concern, the textile factory — these are his life. After hours, the rowing club (on Lac Léman) or the tennis court attracts him most — even if his wife is hankering to learn canasta, or discuss America's latest literary sensation, "A Rage to Live."

But the girls who voted for a travelled bridegroom in that magazine poll were not the slightly bored wives of prosperous business men. They were single women drawn from many fields of work. One was a waitress, one a schoolmistress, one a nurse.

They were holding down jobs that seemed to interest them and they wanted to marry men who, even for a brief time, had been interested in something outside the politics of the canton, the *Turnverein*, and the local harmonica club.

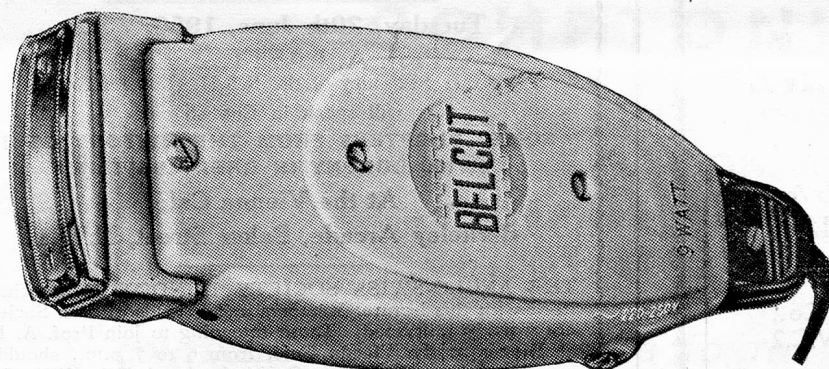
It may be a source of some wonder to women in this country to hear that Swiss women, who in our eyes have so many of the good things of life, are eager to change their lot. We could tell them, couldn't we, that there's "no future" in going to war, or being rationed, or being devalued? And that, if it comes to the question of careers, there's nothing so much to envy, under present conditions, even in being a woman member of Parliament!

But those clever and restless women of Geneva, Zürich, Berne and Basle — four cities which it is not far-fetched to compare with Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee — would probably remain unconvinced. What they hanker after, indeed, is not life on the British model, but something more in the American style, which can offer money and luxury and opportunity all at the same time.

Switzerland may be neutral, but she is not cut off from the main civilisation of Western Europe. In the cities, Geneva especially women are exposed to every new trend of thought and international influence. It is only natural that they should ask for more opportunities of public achievement than they can get through their Church schemes, or the numerous Swiss organisations for post-war relief work, in which they take a leading part.

As it is, the hotel industry seems to be the one in which able Swiss women are given most chance to shine. Another woman's magazine published in Zürich recently gave high praise to three ladies who appear to combine the functions of manageress and matron in three different health resorts.

"They have done more for the Swiss hotel industry," pontificated the article, "than the finest advertising!" But that piece, of course, was written by a man, and — if I don't miss my guess — some of his countrywomen are interested in things other than diet-sheets and the supervision of housemaids. Doubtless they would like to give the writer, and thousands like him a harder run for their money.



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