

Switzerland in English literature

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Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1950)**

Heft 1139

PDF erstellt am: **08.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692139>

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SWITZERLAND IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

"Switzerland" by John Russell.

Batsford 15/- nett.

The fascination which Switzerland exercises on the mind of so many intelligent and observant travellers has found expression in a large number of books, most of them of a high literary order. There is no other country in Europe about which so much has been written; it has been described, dissected and analysed from every possible angle. And the spate (or is avalanche the more appropriate word?) of books on Switzerland and shows no sign of abating. Within the last few months English literature has been enriched by Professor de Beer's scholarly tour de force "*Travellers in Switzerland*"; Emil Egli's beautiful "*Swiss Life and Landscape*" translated from the German; Professor André Siegfried's mainly economic study "*Switzerland*" translated from the French; Miss Bradfield's primer "*A Pocket History of Switzerland*"; Ronald Clark's epic "*The Early Alpine Guides*"; Claire Engel's comprehensive "*History of mountaineering in the Alps*" and Lord Schuster's stylish and erudite "*Postscript to Adventure*."

The latest addition to the Swiss bibliography comes from the pen of John Russell, the well-known writer and literary critic: "*Switzerland*" published by Batsfords in their series of "*Books on the Countries of Europe*." It is an unusual, unconventional study, intended to supplement rather than to replace the established guides to Switzerland. Mountaineering and winter sports find no place in it. The Alps, the lakes and the natural beauties of the land are relegated into the background. Its cultural history and the works of man are Mr. Russell's primary and foremost concern. He possesses a keen and practised eye for architectural beauty and is more interested in, for example, the baroque splendours of Einsiedeln and St. Gall than in the grandeur of the surrounding landscape. He takes the reader to places that are seldom, if ever, found in the itinerary of the English tourist. Stein am Rhein, Arlesheim, Solothurn, Morat, Porrentruy and the lesser townships and villages in the Valais and the Tessin are among his discoveries. No

prominence is given to the popular resorts dear to the devotees of the tourist traffic and even the town of Berne is dismissed in one page. More space is given to Geneva-Zurich-Basel. The chapters dealing with these and other towns display a surprising knowledge of local history, including the names of long-forgotten architects and craftsmen responsible for the artistic creations Mr. Russell so much admires.

Switzerland, to quote Mr. Russell's introduction, is in fact a museum, not only of plain dealing and normal honesty, but also of solid, unexcitable European culture. And he gives a reply to the question why the English cherish an affection for Switzerland. The reason is simply that the Englishman is made to feel at home, is liked and respected even though the spacious times of the Milord are a thing of the past.

Intellectual and literary associations form the basis on which most of the book is built up. Geneva, still imbued with the spirit of Calvin and Rousseau, the city of which Voltaire wrote: "On y calcule et jamais on n'y rit" and so well described by Prof. Forel, occupies pride of place in the opening chapter. Lausanne where Sainte-Beuve lectured and, of course, Gibbons left his mark; Ouchy, beloved of Charles Dickens; Morges where Ramuz composed "*L'Histoire du Soldat*"; Vevey in which Gogol began writing his "*Dead Souls*"; elegant Coppet haunted by the ghosts of Necker and Madame de Staël; all these are fruitful subjects of Mr. Russell's lively prose and wide erudition.

The Valais, Ticino, the Grisons and Central Switzerland are studied, so is Basle with its quiet, unobtrusive wealth, its great historical past and the memory of Bachofen, Nietzsche and, above all, Burckhardt; St. Gall, the Bodensee area, Schaffhausen, finally Zurich is visited and explored, Zurich which James Joyce found next to Dublin the city that most perfectly suited his taste, and where the genius of Gesner and Bodmer still lingers. A pleasing biographical sketch of Gottfried Keller reveals Mr. Russell's extensive knowledge of German-Swiss literature, the whole book is in fact a monument of scholarship. Its essentially high-brow character is, however, relieved by a gastronomic aside in which two restaurants are named where one eats as well as in any French restaurant of good

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class, and by an almost unbelievable report on the night-life of Schaffhausen, of all places, in which mysterious town the author found a profusion of little *boîtes-de-nuit*.

The book is so accurate in its detail that it seems almost a sacrilege to point out a slip on page 107: Liestal is near Basle, not near Berne.

The Author describes himself as an enthusiast, yet he writes with a singular detachment and can be, at times, a shrewd and mordant critic. Here are some of his unorthodox comments, interesting both for their substance and for their lapidary style:

Vevey has still its expiring graces.

Montreux, a stupid, temporary town.

Chillon, the subject of more bad paintings than any other prospect in the world.

Neuchâtel, distinguished by a certain ossified elegance.

There is nothing really wrong with Lucerne except the people who go there.

The inhabitants of the Ticino Valleys are, in the main, disagreeable people with plenty to be disagreeable about.

Lugano is like Blackpool — those who dislike it are not compelled to go.

Basle is not a welcoming city.

To sum up, this is a clever book—almost too clever — brilliantly written with a Macaulayan self-assurance. It is illustrated by more than 90 photographs of great beauty and suitable choice, a delight to the eye.

The publishers Batsfords, are to be congratulated on a fine production worthy of their long-standing reputation.

J. J. F. S.

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WITH OUR SHARPSHOOTERS.

It is a well-known fact, that many a famous soldier has been equally efficient with his pen, as with his sword, and I could name a score of famous warriors who have left their mark in the sphere of literature and journalism.

But I have yet to learn of a journalist who has reached fame in soldiering; though there are, no doubt, some who have made a name for themselves in this martial occupation, and I shall be grateful if some of my colleagues will enlighten me on this matter.—

In accordance with an atmosphere which is full of rumours of war and strife, I decided, in order to march with the times to lay down my pen for a short time, and to handle a rifle instead. An opportunity was afforded to me, by the kind invitation of the President of the Swiss Rifle Association, M. Alfred Schmid, to attend one of their usual shooting practices at the shooting ranges at Bisley.

Sporting events in the Swiss Colony in general do not seem to enjoy favourable consideration with the weather authorities, and when I woke up on Sunday morning, June 25th, a steady down-pour greeted me. I felt half inclined to turn over and to dream of more peaceful things than handling a rifle. But a promise is a promise, and therefore I set out for Bisley with three of my good friends of the Swiss Rifle Association.

On my journey to Bisley, through the lovely country lanes of beautiful Surrey, I received from my companions a few hints and tips as how to handle a rifle, an instrument which I have not shouldered since 1914, when I was called back to defend my country in case of need.

We arrived at the enormous shooting grounds about 11 o'clock, and after some delay, shooting was commenced by the team which numbered about 12 members. I need hardly refer to some of the sarcastic remarks which were whispered around, when I laid down to fire the five shots which were allotted to me.

Not having ever claimed to be a crack shot, I was pleased, that I managed to hit the target twice, not a very creditable performance, I am sure, but the members present had great patience with a "beginner." I have, however, now decided to handle again my pen instead of a rifle.

One fact rather impressed me, and that was, that whenever I picked up my rifle, my friends kept at a respectable distance, no doubt they did not wish to interfere with my meditation whether "to shoot or not to shoot."

Some remarkable results were registered by some of the members, especially Messrs. A. Schmid, J. Wetter and W. Fischer, which shows that the team has got some first class material at their disposal.

It was a very enjoyable day, in spite of the rather unsettled weather, and the successful outing proved to me once again that the members of the Swiss Rifle Association are real sportsmen "on and off the field," and I am looking forward to spend another day in their pleasant company, and may it be soon.

ST.