

A. Wild

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A. WILD.

One of the features of the "Swiss Observer" has been in the past, to acquaint its readers with the achievements of fellow countrymen, who have gained prominent positions or fame in their respective callings outside the borders of our country.

The purpose of these short biographical notes, which have appeared from time to time, is, in the first instance, to honour those, who have, by their efforts and by their tenacity spread the good name which our country enjoys all over the globe, and secondly, to be an example to our younger generation showing that hard work, coupled with untiring energy can still achieve results.

To-day we venture to pass in review some episodes in the life of our compatriot, Mr. A. Wild, whose name has, and still is, greatly honoured in the Hotel profession, both abroad and at home.

Mr. Wild has recently celebrated his 81st birthday anniversary, this occasion prompted us to seek an interview with him, which, we are glad to say, was willingly granted.

The interview took place recently at The Highcliffe Hotel in Bournemouth, of which Mr. Wild is Managing-Director.

The Hotel occupies one of, if not the most prominent positions, in this famous city of "Beauty and Health" overlooking the sea, with a splendid view over Bournemouth Bay, the Isle of Wight and the Purbeck Hills.

One's usual conception of an octogenarian is a person who, owing to his or her great number of years, shows all the symptoms, whatever they may be, of old age and failing health, but to our astonishment, as well as to our pleasure, we found a man, who, had we not known his age beforehand, we would have judged him to be in the late sixties early seventies.

Despite his four score years, we found Mr. Wild in the best of health, and still imbued with an adventurous spirit and remarkable vitality.

One of the first questions put to our interlocutor was, to let us know the secret of old age, "Well", he

said with a smile, "it is hard work and simple living, not giving way to temptations which in my profession, more than in any other, offer so many opportunities, and also the good Bournemouth air, and especially the good care and all the comfort I get from my wife, who is always most anxious about my health."

And then by questions and answers was unfolded to us his remarkable career which has brought him right to the very top of his profession.

Mr. Wild was born near Basle, and is a "Stadtbürger" of Zurich, and to refer to his family history we might mention, that his eldest son is managing a Film business in Geneva and Paris and is an officer in the Swiss army, whilst his younger son is in charge of the management of the Royal Court Hotel, Sloane Square, S.W.1.

After an apprenticeship he received an appointment, in the early nineties, as head-waiter at the Hotel St. Georges in Interlaken, but soon the "Wanderlust" got hold of him, and we see him next as a Receptionist at the Hotel Britannia in Venice.

In 1894, he returned to Switzerland where he obtained a post as Secretary at the famous Hotel Baur-au-Lac in Zurich. Due to his capabilities, integrity and a keen sense of responsibility, he was appointed, the same year, as Manager, at the early age of 25, and this post he held for five years.

Once again, the spirit of adventure took hold of the young man, without much ado he packed his bag, and this time departed for Egypt, which country at the opening of this century was one of the most fashionable of the worlds winter resorts; the playground of British, European and American Society.

In the city of Cairo, at which he arrived on the 1st of November, 1898, to take up the post of Manager of the Savoy Hotel, he began his startling career.

With great zeal and almost uncanny foresight, he set to work at once to improve and modernise the Hotel of which he had been put in charge; so much devotion to duty had its reward, the name of the energetic young Swiss, soon became known amongst the members of his profession, and his advice was sought and acted upon by his colleagues, many of whom were much riper in age and experience.

From this moment our friend never looked back. An engagement as General Manager of the George

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Nungovich Egyptian Hotels, comprising the following establishments came his way:— *Cairo*: Savoy Hotel, Grand Continental Hotel, Hotel d'Angleterre, *Pyramids*: Mena House Hotel, *Helouan*: Grand Hotel Helouan, Hotel des Bains Sulphur, *Alexandria*: Hotel Casino San Stefano.

During the eighteen years (1898-1916) which Mr. Wild spent in Egypt, this bred and born republican became "mine-host" to a galaxy of crowned heads and its contingent of Princes, Dukes, Barons, Counts and hundreds if not thousands of lesser lights.

It would be a difficult and extremely arduous job to compile a list of all the nobilities who visited the various Hotels under Mr. Wild's management during the brilliant years before the 1914-1918 war, but here are a few taken at random:

The late King George V (then Prince of Wales) and Queen Mary, King Albert and Queen of the Belgians, Queen Amelie of Portugal, ex Crown Prince and ex-King Manuel of Portugal, ex-Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Germany, the Empress Eugenie, Duke of Connaught, Prince Gustave Adolf of Sweden and Norway, King of Siam, Archduke and Archduchess of Austria, Grand Duke Boris of Russia, King Charles 1st of Rumania and Queen Elisabeth, who under the pseudonym of Carmen Silvia wrote many poems and novels, and autographed one for Mr. Wild.

Honours of all kinds began to be showered on our friend, he was appointed Court Caterer during the reign of the Khedive Abbas Helmy Pasha and received the title of Bey for his efforts in connection with the furthering of Tourism in Egypt, he became a Cavaliere of the Italian Crown, etc., etc.

Amongst the many famous functions held under his personal supervision were the betrothal of H.R.H. Princess Margaret of Connaught and H.R.H. Prince Gustav Adolf of Sweden. In 1912, Verdi's opera "Aida" was performed at the foot of the Great Pyramid, which attracted huge crowds from all over Egypt and Mr. A. Wild contributed largely to the realization of this great idea.

In spite of his heavy professional duties, he found time to take a keen interest in the Swiss Colony of Cairo, and for many years he was a member of the "Cercle Suisse de Caire."

During all the time of his great activities in Egypt he found in his wife a loyal and devoted help mate. Her work in the field of charity and benevolence became known all over the country and received due acknowledgment.

Unfortunately towards the end of 1915, her health began to fail and on medical advice it became necessary to seek a different climate.

It must have been a momentous decision for our friend to leave the sphere of his activities, where he had been so immensely successful and also to leave behind his great circle of friends.

In the year 1916, Mr. and Mrs. Wild left Cairo with the destination London.

His first venture in this great Metropolis was the purchase of the Hotel Petrograd in North Audley Street, in partnership with Mr. Montague Gluckstein, the Chairman of Lyons & Co., and Mr. Lionel Asprey.

During the Great War this Hotel was commandeered as a Canadian Hospital, so that in 1919, Mr. Wild acquired the Royal Court Hotel, Sloane Square, S.W.1, which establishment he at once began to improve. The Royal Court Hotel was one of the first Hotels to have hot and cold water and central heating installed in all rooms.

In 1943, control of The Highcliffe Hotel in Bournemouth was bought, which, after complete renovation and modernising was opened three years later, and is to-day one of the most up-to-date establishments in this fashionable health resort.

After so many years of strenuous work, crowned with undeniable success — none of the Hotels under Mr. Wild's administration ever failed — many a man would have gone into well-earned retirement, but not so our friend, although he leaves the actual Management of The Highcliffe Hotel in the capable hands of a Scotsman, Mr. Thomson, who is ably partnered by Mr. Locher (Swiss), in the capacity of Assistant Manager, he still keeps a firm grip on the affairs of his Hotels of which he remains Chairman of the Board.

* * *

This then, is in short, the life story of a man, who from small beginnings has reached the pinnacle of his profession, the story of a man, although much honour and praise has been bestowed on him by high and low, has remained modest and unpretentious; he can look back with pride on a life rich in achievements, a pride which we are happy to share with him, because we can call him "one of ours".

In concluding this all too inadequate narrative, we extend to Mr. Wild and his charming wife, our most sincere wishes for a happy and carefree eventide, hoping that they may long enjoy the fruits of their arduous labours.

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