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AN AMERICAN OPINION

HAPPY SWITZERLAND IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR VERY DIFFERENT PARTS

By NINO LO BELLO

St. Moritz, Switzerland — Sitting here in the middle of the map, minding its own business, Switzerland has no unemployment, no slums and no hatred or struggle among its four different language groups. Switzerland is a happy kind of country.

This is the country that invented the zipper and the bouillon cube, that gave to the world the beloved "Heidi" and International Red Cross—a country where the peasant menfolk eat five meals daily, engage in six-day yodelling contests and fiercely refuse women the right to vote.

In many ways Switzerland is an unreal country. Plunked squarely in the centre of Europe, this peekaboo nation is no bigger than half the size of Maine, and by all rights it should have disintegrated into a quartet of separate states a long time ago. But the Swiss, in their own way, are a remarkable people.

No War in 100 Years

Switzerland is sharply divided into four parts, each of which is culturally and linguistically distinct. One wonders how these four very "different" people have managed to get along so well for so long — especially considering the fact that the Helvetian federation hasn't been at war in over a hundred years.

Let's start with west Switzerland where the country is "French". French is spoken everywhere. In the towns and at the sidewalk cafes you are served crusty French bread and bubbling fondue cheese. The lovely lakeside cities like Geneva and Lausanne abound in old châteaux and Parisian gardens.

As you go east, you soon enter the region where German is the main language. The types of houses change completely, and you know you are no longer "Frenching" it. Now there is an orderly-like bustle and efficiency, especially in Zurich, where the delicatessens look like they were shipped out of Munich or Hamburg. And the beer is good.

Farther east, in the upper Rhine valley, you begin to hear a strange tongue. It's called Romansch, and it sounds something like schoolboy Latin. For some 45,000 Swiss this is an official language. It survived in its linguistic pocket of antiquity from the days when Roman soldiers inhabited the region.

Get 'Spaghetti Rain'

Southward you enter the Italian sector of Switzerland. From here on, the mountain chalets disappear and you are surrounded by villas and folks who speak Italian. In Lugano and Locarno you feel you are in Italy — but heaven help you if you try to tell these Swiss that they are "Italians".

In fact, the Swiss Italians (or the Italian Swiss, if you prefer) are wont to criticize their brothers over the border. They even refer to a certain type of rain as "spaghetti rain" because it comes down in long, thin streams like strands of pasta.

The one thing that unites Switzerland's five million people is their national pride. The French Swiss, the Germanic Swiss, the Swiss Italians and the Romansch-speaking Swiss may often poke fun at their respective characteristics, but when you come down to brass tacks, they're all Swiss deep in their souls and right down to their soles.

Another common characteristic of the Swiss is penny saving. All Swiss are mindful of the day after tomorrow, even though the country has been living in solid prosperity for many years, a factor that has made the Swiss franc the most stable of the world's currencies. The Swiss point with pride to the nearly two billion dollars they have in gold reserves at Fort Knox, which is about half the amount the United States has.

Switzerland is also the country where William Tell shot the apple from his son's head. That was some 670 years ago — but the natives here still bow to his historical bow. He is a symbol of the straight shooting Swiss.

(From "Milwaukee Journal", U.S.A.)

AN EXTRACT FROM "PUNCH"

The subject is a meeting between a Frenchman and a Swiss refugee who denounces in bitter, occasionally hysterical terms the tyranny of the Swiss régime. There's no choice, he complains; all the clocks show the same time, everywhere the air is uniformly pure, juveniles refuse to be delinquents, cows aren't allowed to sell their own milk, the Cold Peace is maddening, there's no point in being a thief or a burglar because nothing is locked away, and now that the Foreign Legion has been disbanded, the bored, oppressed, depressed Swiss citizen must seek political asylum in France where he can grumble to his heart's content with a whole nation of grumblers.

(28th November 1962.)

SWISS POLICEMEN IN LONDON

In September 1963 a British Fortnight will be held in Zurich. The City of London Police invited two officials of the Municipal Police Force of Zurich to come to London for four days to study the various problems connected with the Lord Mayor's Show which is to be held in Zurich during the British Fortnight. It was invaluable for the Swiss policemen to see how the City of London Police coped with this pageant and at the same time they used their stay to study the traffic problems here.

There was a press conference earlier on in Zurich in connection with the British Fortnight and the citizens of Zurich who happened to pass the Guild House "Meise" were surprised to see a double guard with pikes and harness, members of the Honourable Artillery Company, whose presence was to give a first reminder that the Lord Mayor of London will be visiting Zurich in state during the British Fortnight.

[A.T.S.]