

Swiss in Great Britain in the eighteenth century [Continued]

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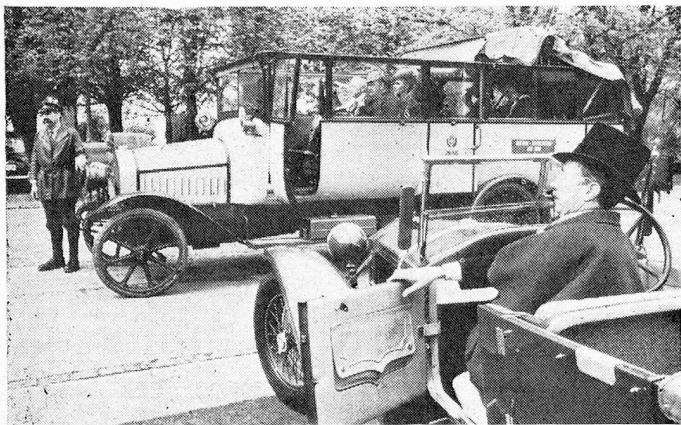
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From the Reuss into the Landwassertal, *via* Thalwil and Landquart to Davos. The visit to the Grisons was made in memory of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who, together with his two Swiss friends, the Branger brothers, had, on 23rd March 1894, crossed the Maienfelder Furka on the strange "Norwegian boards" in seven hours. A plaque was unveiled in the *Kurpark* at Davos, in honour of the first British skier. The 1968 party did the same journey in an antique steam train to Chur and in a modern rail-car to Arosa.



The Sherlock Holmes Friends in Lucerne.

"Ski-ing then and now" was the attraction on the Hörnli where modern experts competed somewhat unevenly with the Victorians who performed on ancient skis out of the local *Heimattmuseum*. In the 'nineties, Sir Arthur had predicted in "An Alpine Pass on Skis" that hundreds of British visitors would come to Switzerland to do ski-ing. Today, the British spend over half a million nights in Switzerland in a normal winter season.

Monday, 6th May, the last day of the tour, ended with a visit to the "Gnomes of Zurich". Let "Inspector Lestrade" himself report: "*The final effort was an unbelievable party in the Union Bank of Switzerland. I have tried to imagine the Bank of England being opened at such a time to let in a hundred-piece band, a foreign costumed party and TV cameras, with every counter occupied by maidens pouring wine while the gold reserves are thrown open for viewing. That's what happened in Zurich — and to crown it all, the "Gnomes of Zurich" came along and gave us presents of gold-covered chocolate coins (except that two of them were the REAL THING to help our own Reserves as a kindly gesture).*"

Thus this "remarkable — most remarkable" pilgrimage drew to an end; the curtain came down on the great charade when the party landed back in Britain "... and once again, Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents".

MM.

(Compiled from information received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse and Swiss National Tourist Office to whom we are also indebted for photos and blocks.)

"SWISS OBSERVER" PUBLICATION DATES

The "Swiss Observer" is published every second and fourth Friday of the month. Our next issue will appear on 14th June. We shall be glad to receive all articles and reports not later than Tuesday, 4th June. Short news items only can be accepted later.

Our next issue but one will be published on Friday, 28th June. Contributions for that number should be to hand by Tuesday, 18th June.

SWISS IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

Béat de Fischer

(Former Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.)
(Continued)

A second and powerful factor which helped the Swiss to blossom out in England in the eighteenth century was the interest that Protestant England, her sovereigns and the Whigs on the one hand, and the Reformed Cantons and Geneva on the other hand, took in each other.⁶

The accession of William of Orange to the English Throne was warmly welcomed by Geneva and the Protestant Cantons. His policy towards them remained that of his successors throughout the century: its aim was to check French influence in Switzerland, to rally to the Allied cause at least the Protestant Cantons, and to obtain soldiers from them. English and Swiss interests were not always fully in harmony, for each side acted upon very different motives. But on the whole the Swiss neutrality served singularly well the policy for European balance pursued by England. Apart from that, England saw in Switzerland — placed in the centre of the Continent and where so many foreign interests overlapped — a first-rate observation post. All this worked very much in favour of England's friendly policy towards Switzerland and Geneva, and it also motivated the despatch to our land of successive diplomatic missions.

But there also were very special reasons for the kindly dispositions towards Switzerland of the different sovereigns. William III came from a country long linked by a close friendship with Reformed Switzerland, and, already in the Netherlands, he himself had had in his service numerous officers from our country. It is natural that in England, too, he should have maintained his friendly feelings for them and continued to rely on their loyalty. In its turn the Hanoverian dynasty liked to surround itself with Protestant Swiss, Genevans and Neuchâtelais. Of German origin, slow to learn the English tongue and get used to the English way of life, these sovereigns and their equally Germanic wives were quite glad to welcome Swiss people who spoke or at least understood their own language, adhered to the same faith, belonged to the same culture or were familiar with it, and willingly served a court which was not always popular and sometimes struggled with financial difficulties. Moreover, after the founding in 1735 of Göttingen University, where many Swiss taught and studied, new links were forged between the royal family and Swiss circles. Was not A. de Haller a professor at that illustrious centre of learning? Did not King George III refuse to allow Haller to accept a Bernese diplomatic mission in London in order to keep him in Göttingen?⁷ And was it not typical that Ph. A. Stapfer, for instance, should spend a period there before completing his studies in England?

All this helps to explain the favourable welcome extended to some of the Swiss in England, a welcome which was all the more cordial because the Confederation kept no diplomatic agents in London, and it was precisely these Swiss who ensured regular contacts between their country and the English Court and Government. Our diplomatists and officers in the service of the Crown played a substantial part in Anglo-Swiss relations, notably where the Prussian succession to the Throne of Neuchâtel and the enrolment of Swiss troops were concerned.

Thirdly, it is worth remembering that, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, London, separated from our country by a long and difficult journey, was sheltering Swiss groups and institutions which had grown strong enough to give real help to newly arrived compatriots, guide them, and introduce them to those personalities and circles which could play a useful part in their future evolution.⁸

Indeed even before the eighteenth century there existed in London and in other parts of Great Britain a considerable nucleus of Genevans and Vaudois.⁹ The Genevans gathered in the 'Compagnie des Genevois' while the Vaudois, numbering 700 to 800, were not yet organised. In 1703, however, the Vaudois approached other compatriots and together they constituted the United Society of Swiss in London. In 1718 that organisation again amalgamated with another and then, after absorbing also the Ancient Company of Genevans, became in 1720 the powerful and solid Mutual Aid Society of the Swiss in London, which is still flourishing.

The Genevan and Swiss community of those days seems to have been quite comfortably off, since it is known that some of its members (with such names as Pages, Marcet, Favrot, Buisson, Saladin, Lullin, Perdriau, Favre, etc.) decided in 1703 to invest jointly in government bonds the substantial sum of £300,000, 'which would return an annual income of £20,000'.

Between 1722 and 1725 a Glarus man, Stehelin, and a Vaudois, Hollard, were the pastors of a bilingual 'Church of the Switzers', which depended on the Bishop of London and for which King George I had given the land near Charing Cross. (This particular piece of land was not used, however.) A second religious community was set up in 1762, in the form of a French-speaking 'Eglise suisse de Londres',¹⁰ whose first pastors were Antoine Bugnon (1762-1771), A. J. Roustan (1764-91), an admirer of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and himself a writer, and A. Sterky (1792-1839), French Reader to the future Queen Charlotte.

At that time there also existed a French Hospital (a different one from that founded in 1867) which was open to the Swiss and to which wealthy Genevans such as Anne Colladon and Pierre Gausson made important donations. Ten members of the Duval family, of Geneva, were successively directors of this institution.

These institutions soon lay at the heart of Swiss life in London. But one should not forget, either, the houses of diplomats, high civil servants and officers, the scholars' chambers and the artists' studios where Swiss who had already attained important positions gave their juniors, in a splendid spirit of mutual aid, the benefit of their professional guidance and social support.

⁶ Markus Meier, *Die diplomatischen Beziehungen Englands mit der Schweiz im 18. Jahrhundert* (Basel 1952).

⁷ Emil Boesch, *Albrecht von Hallers Lebenslauf* (Bern 1877).

⁸ Ernest Boos, *Die Schweizerkolonie in England nach Berufsgruppen* (Bern 1966).

⁹ There must have existed a small colony of Genevans in Ireland too. The father of General Dufour met it there when he emigrated (Marcel Du Pasquier, *La Suisse Romande, terre d'accueil et d'échanges*, Lausanne 1965, p. 85).

¹⁰ Albert Roehrich, Claude Reverdin, *L'Eglise suisse de Londres* (London s.d.).

(To be continued.)

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SERVICES IN GERMAN: at St. Mary Woolnoth Church, Lombard Street, Bank, E.C.3, every Sunday at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

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SUNDAYS: Holy Mass at 9 and 11 a.m. in English. At 7 p.m. for the Swiss community with regard to the different language groups.

HOLIDAYS of obligation: Holy Mass at 7.30 and 9 a.m., 1 p.m. and 5.45 p.m.

WEDNESDAYS and THURSDAYS: Holy Mass at 1 p.m. afterwards time for consultations.

CONFESSIONS: (German, French, Italian and English) Sundays, one hour before Evening Mass.

Saturdays: 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 5 to 7 p.m. or by appointment.

SWISS CATHOLIC YOUTH CLUB — Meeting every Sunday after Evening Mass (8-11 p.m.) at Westminster Ball Room, 30 Strutton Ground, S.W.1.

CHAPLAIN: Paul Bossard, St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street, S.W.1. Tel: 01-222 2895.