

Letter from Switzerland

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Letter from Switzerland

BY

GOTTFRIED KELLER

Having twice been asked recently to give talks on my 38 years as a London correspondent in general and on Anglo-Swiss relations in particular, I have been going through old records, cuttings, photographs and documents of all kinds.

Memories of years gone by have come flooding back. On looking through my notes, I have noticed that during those years I have seen nine Swiss Ministers, and later Ambassadors, come and go, as well as eleven British governments. When I arrived in London in 1934, the Chef de Mission was Mr. Charles Paravicini – a grand seigneur in the best sense of the word whose connections to the Court of St. James's were such that he was frequently asked to spend his weekends in Windsor Castle.

When he retired, soon after the beginning of World War II, he was followed by Mr. Turnheer, who did not stay very long, and who was in turn followed by the unforgettable – and surely for all who knew him unforgotten – Mr. Paul Ruegger. Mr. Ruegger – he was 80 last summer – lives in retirement in Florence.

Some of his former collaborators in London have published a charming and well deserved tribute to their former chief in the shape of a book which I am very pleased to have in my library. After Mr. Ruegger – the War was over by then – came Mr. de Torrenté.

He used to give marvellous parties in his country home in Virginia Water, as well as concerts in the grand style in the Goldsmith's Hall, which, together with half the New Philharmonia Orchestra he hired for the purpose. When the de Torrentés moved to Washington, they were followed by Mr. and Mrs. Armin Daeniker.

They stayed for about nine years and under Mrs. Daeniker's energetic guidance the Hostel for Swiss Girls in Hampstead was founded. They live in retirement in Berne and the Hostel's first highly respected Warden, Miss Rosie Preiswerk, lives in her native Basle.

Mr. and Mrs. Beat de Fischer were the last ones to reside in Bryanston Square, before the old building was demolished. The residence was then, for several years, moved to Upper Brook Street while the diplomatic and consular offices were housed in Gloucester Place.

When, after three years, Mr. de Fischer reached retiring age, he was succeeded – for one short year only – by Mr. Olivier Long, now Secretary-General of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in Geneva. Mr. and Mrs. René Keller were the next ambassadorial couple to occupy Upper Brook Street and it was to the great regret of many members of the Swiss Colony, including myself, that Federal Councillor Graber – now retired – wanted René Keller in Berne. "La patrie vous appelle", he was told and he had, of course, no other choice but to obey. It was he who laid the foundation stone for the new, the present, Embassy-cum-Residence building.



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Its first resident became Mr. Albert Weitnauer, who is at present in an important position in Berne and who, if rumours come true, is soon to receive the new title of Under-Secretary of State.

About Anglo-Swiss relations a book could be written, especially about their state during World War II. While in peacetime they are usually so good that they are hardly ever mentioned, since hardly any bilateral problems exist between the two countries, this description did not apply to the war years.

The Royal Air Force kept violating Switzerland's air space, which caused anger and consternation in Berne while the Swiss who were in an extremely difficult position — being sandwiched between Hitler's and Mussolini's totalitarian states — were forced to render Germany economic services, which caused anger and consternation in London.

The two wartime Swiss Ministers Turnheer and Ruegger had the most difficult and delicate task of having to deliver innumerable Swiss protests at the Foreign Office while at the same time trying to smooth ruffled feelings about

the Swiss deliveries to Nazi Germany. Neutrality was not very highly rated at that time — at least in some of the Ministries in Winston Churchill's war cabinet.

However, it should never be forgotten that towards the end of the war, when Stalin refused a Swiss proposal to establish normal diplomatic relations — and called the Swiss "swine" in a conference with the British Prime Minister — it was the latter who sent a historic memo to his then Foreign Secretary Eden, instructing him to try to ease Stalin away from his negative stand on Switzerland. (According to documents published by the eminent Basle historian, Professor Edgar Bonjour, Stalin at one time even contemplated and proposed sending troops through Switzerland.)

All this, and much more — oh, so much more — has been flooding back in my memory and if I have put down some of the names and events involved, I hope this letter may have interested at least some of those London compatriots who were part of that closely knit Swiss community in Britain during those world-shattering years of World War II.

CIBA-GEIGY 1977 WORLD SALES

Ciba-Geigy Group sales during 1977 totalled 9,940 million Swiss francs, 5% above the 1976 figure of 9,490 million Swiss francs.

The growth figure of 6% recorded in the interim report has fallen to 5% for the year as a whole, due principally to unfavourable developments in currency exchange rates. Sales and earnings, during the fourth quarter in particular, were adversely affected by the strong upsurge of the Swiss franc. The parity changes of 1977 depressed the year's growth figure, expressed in Swiss francs, by 5%.

Growth during the year in the individual Divisions varied quite widely. Dyestuffs sales were impaired by the sluggish state of business in the textile industry and the previous year's figure was not achieved. The value growth in Pharmaceuticals is due primarily to increased volume, since there was little or no possibility of increasing prices in a number of countries. Agrochemicals Division was able to make up the ground lost during 1976 and the Plastics and Additives Division and the Ilford Group both showed gratifying results. Airwick was in a re-structuring phase during 1977.

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