

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

Your letter reached me just as we were returning from our annual holidays in the mountains. As you know, I'm not much of a skier, and I must therefore spend a great deal of my time explaining to everyone why I don't ski, why I cannot ski even I wanted to and why I go to the foremost Alpine resorts every year if I don't intend to. Basically, *not* skiing in Switzerland is quite a bit more difficult than giving in to the sometimes irrepressible urge to try. If you've ever heard a four-year-old child speak French and think that you ought to manage that language equally as well, imagine the feeling of despair to see the same child gracefully shooting down the slopes on skis. And as you clumsily step aside to let him pass, you hear his "mer-ci mon-si-e-u-r" trailing off into the distance. By this time you're rather certain that the child in question is really more than an ordinary four-year-old. No, to comfort your injured pride—your *doubly* injured pride—you convince yourself that he must be something special, a future Olympic champion at the very least. So you decide that a thirty-six-year-old American ought to do just as well, and you make the fatal decision to try once more.

You rent a pair of skis—the best available—and set out towards the local *Idiotenwiese*, or "meadow of the idiots", for reasons which should be obvious to any skier. I don't know which is more difficult—walking with skis on your shoulders, precariously balanced on crossed ski poles, or walking with skis on your feet. Both methods are surely the product of a perverse sense of humor, for neither of them work and neither seems to be simpler than walking without skis in the first place. Skiing, as I've indicated, is a tiring sport, and when you finally arrive at the beginners' slope you are already weary, both of the whole business as well as physically. Any good ski instructor—and there are hundreds in Switzerland—will warn you of the dangers of overexertion, so you decide to drop into the nearby ski hut before pressing on into the white wilderness.

Ski huts are a tradition throughout the Alps—they are informal and rustic, and they offer the exhausted skier a bit of nourishment when he needs it most. Needing it most after the 350-yard trek from my hotel, I sat down on a wooden bench and began to study the generations and generations of carved initials on the table before me. As I was contemplating these unique

designs, a waitress appeared and asked what I wanted. "Something hot" I replied. "Coffee, tea, Ovomaltine or grog", said she. Grog, I thought, would frighten away all remaining inhibitions, so I ordered one—with rum.

And there I sat, peering out at the omnipresent mountains through a window framed in calico. Romantic, no doubt of it, and the grog, welling up inside me, added to the atmosphere. The sun was brilliant on the shimmering snow as hundreds of ski enthusiasts on the surrounding *pistes* came rushing down towards the village.

It was all so exhilarating that I had no choice but to motion to the waitress for another grog. I relished in my new discovery; nothing enhances a day of skiing quite as much as grog sipped in the glow and warmth of a Swiss log cabin. I dreamed somewhat wistfully of attacking the ski runs at the 3000-meter level, of racing past row upon row of admiring onlookers—down, down, over the rocks, between the trees, fighting my spirited way ahead with deft movements of my ski poles. Now or never, I mused, and I paid and left the *Skihütte*, convinced of my own superiority.

As I started out towards the nearest chair lift, I wondered why I had never seriously considered becoming a ski instructor. How much I would enjoy living in such a village forever! There was the butcher shop, window literally bulging with sausages and hams, and I walked on past the bakery with its *patisserie* and accompanying aroma of bread mixed with mountain air. Then came the office of the village doctor, with its neatly lettered sign: "Dr. Armin Wädli, Spezialarzt für Hals- und Beinbruch." It was at that moment that I first noticed the parade of men and women on crutches going in and out of that village doctor's office. No, I thought—not that I'm afraid of a broken leg or two—after all, they are a badge of honor that good skiers wear with pride. But perhaps Dr. Wädli has no time for me today. He *does* seem busy, just look at all his patients.

Tomorrow is soon enough to start, I concluded. Unconsciously, I turned back in the direction from which I had come. Past the doctor's office, past the bakery and the butcher shop—all with neatly lettered signs—and into the *Skihütte*. In the door and back to my table with its carved initials. "Grog, please", I said, as I settled down for the afternoon in my new-found home in the mountains of Switzerland. *Eugene V. Epstein*

SYMPHONY CONCERTS BY ORCHESTRAS FROM ABROAD

Although the symphony orchestras of Switzerland present regular concerts of classical and modern music throughout the winter, guest performances by large music ensembles from abroad are always regarded as highlights of the packed concert season. It is therefore a pleasure to welcome once more the Czech Philharmonia, which will be conducted by Karel Ancerl in programmes of symphonic music by Martinu, Smetana and Dvořák. Performances will be given in *Basle* on February 28, in *Zurich* on March 1, in *Geneva* on March 2, in *Lausanne* on March 4, in *Fribourg* on March 5 and in *La Chaux-de-Fonds* on March 6. This tour is preceded by an equally busy Swiss tour by the Philharmonica Hungarica, which will be conducted by Miltiades Caridis in works by Rossini, Tchaikovsky and Bartók, with celebrated violinist Ricardo Odnoposoff in solo performances. These concerts can be heard in *Zurich* on February 12, in *Fribourg* on February 13, in *Basle* on February 14, in *Berne* on February 15 and in *Geneva* on February 16. The Stuttgart Philharmonia will give a concert in *Zofingen* on February 12.

MUSICIANS FROM MANY COUNTRIES

No introduction to Switzerland is required by "I Musici di Roma", who begin their new tour on February 27 in *Winterthur* and can then be heard on February 28 in *Berne*, on March 1 in *Geneva*, on March 2 in *Lausanne* and on March 3 in *Zurich*. The "Quatuor de Lisboa" will appear on February 8 and 9 in *Berne*, on February 11 in *Lausanne* and on February 12 in *Geneva*, after which the "Quatuor Borodine" from Moscow will be

giving recitals of chamber music on February 20 in *St. Moritz*, on February 25 in *Geneva*, on February 24 in *Lausanne*, on February 25 in *Neuchâtel* and on February 26 in *Vevey*. Also on tour will be the "Trio di Trieste", by no means in Switzerland for the first time. Its concerts will be presented on February 25 in *Zurich*, March 1 in *Glarus* and on March 4 and 5 in *St. Gall*. The "Lucerne Festival Strings", the accomplished Swiss string ensemble well known abroad will not be left out either. On February 14 a winter concert will be given in *Kreuzlingen*, the lively Swiss frontier town on Lake Constance.

WELCOME RETURN OF MARCEL MARCEAU

Eagerly awaited as always is that master of mime, Marcel Marceau, who practises this art with great virtuosity. A mute actor? A clown? A quick-change artist? Whatever he is gets the full treatment in his new programme: on February 15 in *Bienne*, on February 17 in *Schaffhausen* and on February 25 in *Delémont*.

ART OLD AND NEW FROM ITALY

The art of still-life painting in Italy "from the beginning to the present" will be represented till February 21 in the *Zurich Kunsthau* (Art Gallery) by works from a large number of collections. From the art works of the Late Renaissance and Baroque to the pictures painted by the masters of our own day, exquisite examples of still-life art, which reached its peak in the 17th and 18th centuries, will be featured on a grand scale.—The *Winterthur Kunstmuseum* (Art Gallery) will also be showing (likewise till February 21) works by five contemporary artists from Milan.