

Letter from Switzerland

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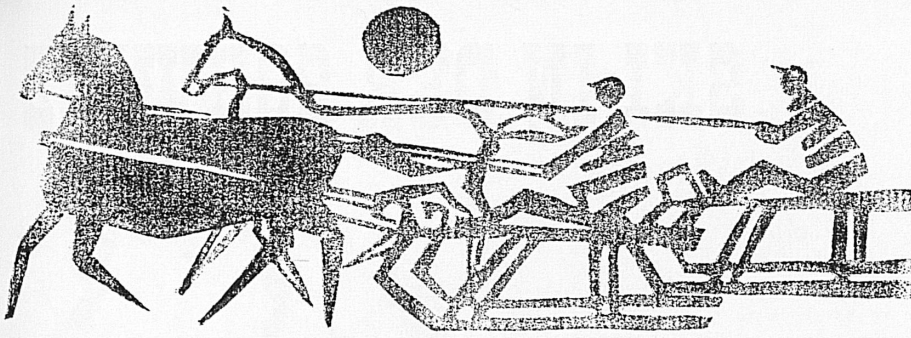
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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

EUGENE V. EPSTEIN

During the recent annual congress of IMAGE (International Mission Advocating a Gorgeous Europe), the Swiss delegation submitted an interesting and rather startling resolution. In presenting the details, the chief Swiss delegate, Adalbert Spargel, announced that we must all be aware of one fundamental fact. "The image of Switzerland outside the country does not reflect all that we want it to be", said Mr. Spargel. "It may be an accurate image, but it is obviously not an authentically Swiss image." He continued:

"We may, on occasion, deplore—or adore—the attitudes and idiosyncrasies of our countrymen, or we may not, as the case may be. But we must be certain, at all times and in all ways, that the name and honor of Switzerland is maintained in every crook and nanny of this world, wherever there are men and women who can read. My delegation has therefore charged me to propose that a serious effort be made to mention something genuinely Swiss—at least twice in every sentence—in every document and newspaper story, in all advertising copy and slogans, in all books and periodicals. We further propose that, whenever possible, a Swiss village or town be mentioned—whether in context or not—and that these words be emphasized through the use of cursive, or *italic*, type."

The proposal was greeted with mixed feelings. Amid shouts of "impossible", "unwarranted", "wonderful" and "insane", the Swiss delegation held its ground. The Printers' Union of Switzerland calmly announced that it was ordering a two-year supply of italics from the Monotype Corporation. The Federal Historical Association undertook a preliminary study of town and village names, coming to the conclusion that such a proposal was good but impractical.

Adalbert Spargel, himself the publisher of a leading Swiss newspaper, announced that his journal would be the first to adhere to the conditions of the new resolution. Two days later, the following headline appeared in his paper, the *Neue Basler Bratwurst*:

Grandson Grabs Gals, Says Court

On page six of the same edition, readers found these stories:

Castro at Root of Misery
Champagne Sales Harder, Crusch Apples
Laura Nods to Fellers, Moron in Brig

Little did the unsuspecting readers of the *Neue Basler Bratwurst* realize it, but Mr. Spargel had cleverly inserted the names of eighteen Swiss towns in these headlines, and had proved, once for all, that it could be done.—Now, other villages began vying for the honor of being represented in the *Neue Basler Bratwurst* and in the many other newspapers which began making use of the Spargel technique (*Spargelzeit*, in German), as it came to be known. Soon, all of Switzerland was swept up in a frenzy of word games, and the original

resolution—which seemed so absurd at first—was actually ratified and put into effect. Those people who wrote letters to newspaper editors also made use of the now-popular technique, in the hope that their hidden writing talents would be discovered by at least one publisher. Telephone and telegraph offices all over the country were swamped by callers seeking information on villages whose names might lend themselves for future use. All English correspondence sent out of Switzerland was required, according to the resolution, to have at least two such names in each sentence, as were the broadcasts of the Swiss Short Wave Service.

Almost everyone hoped that the more out-of-the-way places in Switzerland would thus come to the attention of the prospective tourist. And there were soon definite signs that the new system was producing results abroad, especially in Australia. The Swiss Federal Office for the Inculcation of Tourists published a brochure with the following text:

"In the Anglo-Saxon world, *rain* is not unknown. But in Switzerland, where the weather is the *envy* of the world, you will be *schmitten hard*. From your *first egg* in the morning until your last *filet* at night, Switzerland is prepared to offer you not only a small fling, but a real, old-fashioned *diepflingen*. Remember, there is no *misery* in this lucky country. There are Swiss *gais* and *gals* just like yourselves, and you can meet them any evening in a lovely Swiss *taverne*, having *grub* or drinking *gingins* and tonictonics. To be *concise*, this is all according to the *motto*, 'Switzerland is a *Grande-vent*!' Switzerland is the *envy* of everyone, this is why we like to blow our *horn*, in the hope that we shall be heard by young and old, *ins* and *outs*, by every *feller*, *moron* or *sage*—in short, by all those whose *yens* do not include the *Orient*. So, no matter how you measure this country, a *landquart* is as good as a landmile. Take full advantage of everything from *apples* to *champagne*, and there's always an interesting *curio* to be sent home to the *missy*. Take your pen right now, dip it into your *inkwil* and write to us—you'll never *rue* the *day*. Soon you will personally be saying *hallau* to Switzerland for the *first* time!"

An Arab sheik happened to read the above text shortly after it was published, and, following the exhortation, hastened to write to the Swiss Federal Office for the Inculcation of Tourists. Shortly thereafter, he flew from Bahrein to Zurich and began looking for the towns he claimed had originally been settled by his ancestors. The Swiss to whom he posed his questions were confused at first, but soon he found his way.

"Allah be praised!" he shouted, as he located the towns on a map of Switzerland. "They're still here, just as great-grandfather said they were. There's Malapalud and Agasul, and over here are Tolochenaz, Ftan, Sfazù and Pagig. And look, I've found Faoug, Aeuja, Azmoos, Fajauna and Stierva. Oh, Allah be praised! Wonderful country, Switzerland!"