

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1933)
Heft: 599

Artikel: O sancta simplicitas!
Autor: St.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690821>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 01.04.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

O SANCTA SIMPLICITAS!

On the 4th of this month, an article appeared in the "Daily Sketch," under the heading "Clergymen Prefer Cockles;" "The Swiss in Switzerland," by the Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott.

Had this article have been written by any ordinary mortal, we should have confined same to the Editor's Waste-paper basket, as its contents deserve no better treatment; having, however, originated from the pen of a Reverend Gentleman, who, in our estimation ought "to know better," we have taken the trouble to address to him "an open letter," which we publish herewith together with his literary exertions.

Daily Sketch, 4.4.33.

If you have not seen the Lake of Geneva — its surrounding hotels, and the comely chalets looking like birds' nests on a rocky, verdant slope; swans sailing gracefully on waters stabbed by innumerable little fish that fling themselves out for a moment, the sparkle of a sparkler, and the snow-capped Dents du Midi, glistening in a scorching sun, you have missed the sight that made Ruskin lyrical when he wrote: "Death must be upon the hills, and the cruelty of the tempests smite them, and the briar and thorn spring up upon them; but they so smite as to bring their rocks into the fairest forms; and so spring as to make the very desert blossom as the rose."

There is another aspect, and that a parabolic one, for Switzerland has committed suicide.

When sinister clouds clothe the mountains in swirling lace, and a cold wind blows unkindly, the waters lash the rocky shores in a fury that seems merely spiteful in comparison with the splendid anger of an English sea. Blue becomes sullen grey.

The Château de Chillon, immortalised by Byron, becomes in outward aspect (as I see it from Montreux) as sinister as the relics it enshrines.

* * *

Strange Laughter.

There was a party of young Americans there when I made my visit — the only Americans I have met abroad so far — and they tom-fooled through one chamber and another.

I could not bear to hear them laughing as they peered down the oubliettes through which so many bodies had been cast, and gazed at the gallows, the instruments of torture and the sepulchral chamber where men spent their last hours on earth.

Were I an Edgar Wallace I should have been devising a thriller. As I was a parson I prayed.

* * *

Hotels are Cheaper.

But this is an aside. It is leading me to suggest that the days of Switzerland are over, for many a day to come, despite its desperate effort to re-attract the visitor by some reduction in prices.

Few of the hotels have more than a few guests; some, with shuttered windows whispering of bankruptcy, are closed. An English visitor, here and in France, is made a fuss of now.

Hotels go out of their way to make an attractive country alluring. There are free passes to Kursaals.

But the root of the trouble is two-fold. The Englishman has no money to spend abroad. If he goes abroad from necessity, as I, he finds his little less. The franc is down, but there has been no general drop in prices.

Hotels are cheaper, yes. They had a great meeting a while back, and determined to reduce their rates. But shops lag sadly behind.

I have had a shave, a hair cut and a shampoo. In England I should have paid no more than two shillings. It has cost me nearly four. I took my razors to be set. That cost five.

* * *

Narcissi Are Free.

A five-shilling pipe costs seven. A small bottle of hair-cream, two. A tube of shaving soap, two.

And I leant heavily on the arm of my wife (as the French books would say) as we staggered from an hotel on the mountains where two cocktails cost five shillings, not including service. The only things that cost nothing are the narcissi at Les Avants, which cover the slopes with a greeny-white carpet, and may really be picked for nothing.

"Légumes," says the lady who improves my French daily, "are cheaper." But who wants to buy légumes? I may stagger into England with an armful of narcissi, and a box of rock plants which I hope, with English optimism, to raise in my garden; but carrots, artichokes and potatoes, no. Thrice No..

* * *

Plague of Cyclists.

The cities are as bad as the countryside. I shall never return to Geneva.

I went to Geneva in a motor-car to see the Chair of Calvin. Calvin has always fascinated me by his goat's beard.

To my grief our autobus circled round the church that enshrined Calvin's chair and was sweeping past the imposing home of the League of Nations before I could protest.

There is nothing worth seeing in Geneva, save an imposing waterside, and the plague of bicyclists is awful. Every soul rides a bicycle, and they pop up from nowhere.

Even Mont Blanc, when seen from Geneva, is as disappointingly squat as St. Peter's, Rome.

The daylight robbery continues. We travellers are worshipped, but our devotees have not the reverence of savages who, bowing down to wood and stone, do not raid the plate of rice the god possesses. The trouble is that one cannot "envisage" foreign coins.

* * *

Cockles v. Cocktails.

I am come home lighter, then, with my eye on a poor part of Southend as the only remedy, during my summer holiday, for the overdraught that is whistling through the corridors of my bank account.

As I write my heart leaps to Southend. Cosy Cot — a Home from Home for me — rather than Le Beau Rivage or the Hotel Splendide!

The view will not be so charming, nor shall I have an automatic lift to play with — a terrifying toy that provokes all that is courageous in me. I leave Switzerland to cope with its crisis, unaided and alone.

In Switzerland I pay five shillings for two cocktails. There twopence (or is it a penny?) for a plate of cockles.

Clergymen prefer cockles, anyway. They know what they're made of.

I still want to know of what a Maiden's Prayer consists. It may be uplifting, but it isn't entirely spiritual.

The Rev.

DESMOND MORSE-BOYCOTT,
LONDON.

Dear Rev. Sir,

I have read with both amazement and distress your literary outburst, which appeared in the *Daily Sketch* on the 4th inst., under the heading *Clergymen prefer cockles, Swiss in Switzerland*.

Switzerland being my native land, I am naturally very much interested to get your definition of a "Swiz" as I have never yet encountered such a specimen of the human race, nor have I ever heard the name before.

Assuming that your linguistic achievements are in keeping with your intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, it will undoubtedly be an easy matter for you to enlighten me on this point; or did you perhaps, dear Rev. Sir, try to impress those amongst your readers, who cannot claim any knowledge of foreign languages, with your particular skill in these domains? I should be loath to believe that you would play such a mean trick on your fellow-men.

Your description of the Lake of Geneva, for which you are indebted to Ruskin, is unfortunately spoiled through a trick, which, either knowingly or unknowingly the Editor of the *Daily Sketch* has played on you, in inserting the view of Fluelen, as seen from the Axenstrasse, which as you are undoubtedly aware, lies on the Lake of Lucerne; this is most unfortunate, and I trust, for your sake, you will acquaint the Editor with this regrettable mistake.

As to your pronouncement, that Switzerland has committed suicide, may I quote just a few lines of poetry, which I learned many, many years ago; here they are:

When all the blandishments
of life are gone,

The coward sneaks to death
the brave live on.

The Château de Chillon, immortalized by your famous countryman Byron seems to have impressed you, and I am grieved to learn that a party of young Americans have upset your meditations, but I am most grateful to learn, that it has forced a prayer from your lips, and Switzerland will thank you, in spite of your harsh judgment, for having prayed for its lost soul.

It is refreshing to hear that you are admitting that Hotels are cheaper, yet you utter in the same breath these prophetic words: *the days of Switzerland are over, for many a day to come, and you speak of shuttered windows whispering of bankruptcy.*

It is an old saying, that charity begins at home, but this is no reason it should not go abroad. A man should live with the world as a citizen of the world: he may have a preference

for the particular quarter or square, or even alley, in which he lives, but he should have a generous feeling for the welfare of the whole.—

I am not *au courant* on what date you have visited the country, where, using your own words, *daylight robbery* is a common occurrence, although the *franc is down*; I am, however, unaware that the franc has ever been down and this would account for some of the charges which you term as excessive. (But why blame Switzerland for this?) You are no doubt a very patriotic Gentleman, and therefore when indulging in such luxuries as hair-cream and pipes, you have chosen some well-known English brands with the obvious result. Perhaps, dear Sir, you have heard of the saying, "those readiest to criticise are often least able to appreciate."

I hope you are not accusing me of lacking a sense of humour, because this would be utterly wrong, I have much enjoyed your vivid description on your departure from a mountain Hotel, "heavily leaning" on the arm of your wife, after having partaken of cocktails (which by the way are not a Swiss product); this has happened to greater lights, but of course, I make no insinuation, especially as I bear your calling in mind.—

It is disheartening to hear of your vow never to set foot again in Geneva, as undoubtedly the citizens of this beautiful city will be the poorer for your visit. I do not blame you for your dislike of the City of Geneva, this is primarily a matter of taste, and taste plays some most remarkable pranks. But, dear Rev. Sir, I was amazed to read that the only fascination Calvin, the great Reformer, has for you, is his *goat's beard*; I am ignorant of your denomination, if you subscribe to the protestant dogmas I must confess your intended joke is somehow a poor one, if you belong to another denomination than the one of the great reformer., your utterance is, the least said Sir, in very bad taste. In the execution of your divine calling, you are no doubt exhorting your flock to indulge at times in deep meditation, may I, dear Sir, most humbly ask you to prescribe this most useful and appropriate medicine to your own use, you will no doubt emerge from it a wiser, if not a better man. But perhaps you tried to be humorous, and my simple brain cannot follow the intellectual flights of your celestial thoughts.

I understand that a vexing *overdraught is whistling through the corridors of your banking account*, which has compelled you to curtail your stay in Switzerland, and that you have decided to seek health and strength at Southend, *a home from home for you*, and I most sincerely hope that you will regain in that bracing spot your spiritual and physical equilibrium, which you seem to have lost on the shores of Lac Léman.

The picture produced in the *Daily Sketch* shows a long queue of people vending their way I suppose towards the pier at Southend, not a very inspiring view in my humble estimation, although I am rather fascinated by large crowds; but here again it is simply a matter of taste; but why oh why choose Southend? I could direct your attention to hundreds of places in this hospitable land of yours, where a tired body and soul would derive a greater benefit, but, there is a snag, those places, I bear in mind, do not cater for the "cockle fans." Some Gentlemen prefer Blondes, and Clergymen according to your statement, prefer cockles. Now cockles and cocktails are two entirely different things, as you have no doubt found out by now; after having partaken of the former no special assistance is required, unless they should not be up to the standard. Your inspiring article closes with a query, you are anxious to know what a "Maiden's Prayer" consists of, and indulging in that Christian spirit which is a virtue, or perhaps a privilege, of *your* calling, I offer to take you to a special place in this great Metropolis where you can freely indulge in "Maiden's Prayers" but I warn you, dear Rev. Sir, that they are not entirely "spiritual."

In spite of your rather ungenerous words, *I leave Switzerland to cope with its crisis, unaided and alone*. I bear you no grudge, if you will look after your cockles, we will look after the destiny of our country, aided by many of your countrymen, who know how to appreciate its beauty and achievements for the betterment of humanity.

I remain, dear Rev. Sir,
yours truly,

ST.