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LETTERS FROM SWITZERLAND

By
Gottfried Keller

Early on in October a new 100 franc banknote came into circulation. It is somewhat smaller in size than the present note and shows on one side the face of Francesco Borromini (a famous Ticinese builder and architect of the seventeenth century) and on the other the Church of San Ivo in Rome which he built. This new note has already been criticised heavily by the public; it will, incidentally, in due course be followed by new notes for 10, 20, 50, 500 and 1,000 francs, all of them showing Swiss personalities whose activities became known outside as well as inside their country of origin. They are: the Basle mathematician, Leonhard Euler; the Genevese geologist, Horace de Saussure; the Zürich scientist, Conrad Gessner; the Bernese doctor, Albrecht de Haller; and the Vaudois psychiatrist, Auguste Forel.

The introduction of the new series of banknotes which will be printed by Orell Füssli in Zürich – former Swiss notes were printed by De la Rue's in London – will cost between 60 and 80 million francs. A life without banknotes is today unthinkable – yet originally the Swiss took slowly to the first series of notes which were introduced by the newly created Swiss National Bank some 70 years ago. Today the notes in circulation have an approximate total value of

18,000-19,000 million francs, which, according to experts, corresponds to between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of all the money in circulation. Up to the foundation of the Swiss National Bank in 1907 some 51 different kinds of banknotes were in use, five different ones alone from the region of Fribourg.

As regards the new 100 franc note, many people criticise the fact that a church in a foreign country is being shown on it instead of an object in Switzerland. However, the new series will be of great help to people with reduced or without sight: the new paper money will have special dots and dashes in relief print which will make them easily recognisable: one to three dots in a corner for the values of 10, 20 and 50 francs and two to four dashes or lines for the higher values of 100, 500 and 1,000 francs. Apart from this unique novelty, all notes will from now on have silver threads and watermarks incorporated which will make it much more difficult than hitherto to forge or fake them.

Alexander Solzhenitzyn, who had to leave the Soviet Union as a dissident two-and-a-half years ago came to Switzerland in February 1974. Together with his wife and children he lived in a house which the Zürich town administration, to which it belongs, put at his disposal. Solzhenitzyn's arrival in Zürich was, at the time, quite a sensation and the exiled writer and author of the "Gulag" books was enthusiastically received as a fighter against communist suppression. However, Solzhenitzyn's constant warnings against the policy of détente, justified as these exhortations might have been, soon brought about a change in the public's feeling towards him and some people, both in the U.S.A. and in Switzerland, began to compare his attitude with fascism.

Now Solzhenitzyn has apparently bought a farm in Vermont in the U.S.A. and his family have followed him there. All his belongings have been packed and forwarded to America and the house in which the Solzhenitzyns had lived is to be let once again. The really interesting thing about this is, I think, the reason behind Solzhenitzyn's move.

For he has made it quite clear that he did not feel safe any more in Switzerland and more than once asked the Zürich police for protection. He felt surrounded by secret Soviet agents of the ominous KGB and feared that his wife and children might one day be kidnapped and abducted in order to blackmail him either into silence or into returning to the U.S.S.R.

More about Solzhenitzyn

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The Zürich authorities did not, it seems, believe in Solzhenitzyn being threatened, but did, nevertheless, in a half-hearted way agree to give him some kind of police protection. It seems to be true that Solzhenitzyn received a number of threatening letters, some written in the Russian language and one particularly disquieting one showing a Berne (!) postmark. KGB agents in Zürich?

A written question has now been handed in to the Zürich town council, stressing that the public has a right to know the background of Solzhenitzyn's and his family's hasty departure. KGB agents in Zürich? The public has indeed a right to know and will, I expect, scrutinise the reply to the question with lively interest.

FLOWER POWER - GAUER POWER

Three members of Berne's Gauer family recently lined up for the launching of the 1976 Orchid Festival at the Gauer-owned and operated Schweizerhof Hotel in the Swiss capital.

The festival has become a popular annual attraction since Mrs. Anne-Marie Gauer first decided 12 years ago to decorate the 180-bed Schweizerhof with blooms donated from her own orchid garden. The 1,000 blooms and 50 varieties comprise the most extensive privately-owned orchid garden in Switzerland.

CULTURAL EVENTS

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Monday, 15th November – Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.45 pm – *Tamas Vasary* plays Mozart's Piano Concerto in G with the London Mozart Players, under Peter Susskind.

Saturday 20th November – Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.45 pm – *Frank Martin's* Chamber Cantata *Et la Vie l'emporta* is given its first British performance by the Thames Choir and the Thames Chamber Orchestra under Michael Dolson (also in the programme: works by Handel, Mozart and Haydn).

Sunday, 21st November – Royal Festival Hall, 7.30 pm – *Martha Argerich* plays Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the London Symphony Orchestra.

22nd November to 22nd December – Edinburgh College of Art – Exhibition of *Swiss Award-Winning Books and Posters*.

Tuesday, 23rd November – University of Sussex, Falmer-Brighton, 7.30 pm; Thursday, 25th November – University of Bristol; Thursday, 2nd December (provisional) – French Institute Theatre, London – The actress *Heddy Maria Wettstein* presents monodramas, in German.

Wednesday, 24th November – Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.45 pm – *Honnegger's Concerto for Flute* (Richard Adeney) and *Cor Anglais* (James Brown) is one of the works played by the English Chamber Orchestra.

Thursday 25th November – Royal Festival Hall, 8 pm – The soprano *Edith Mathis* sings Concert Arias by Mozart with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bernhard Klee.



This is Salina, an Italian girl I and my wife had the pleasure of meeting during our recent holiday in her country. But the story she had to tell was not pleasant – in fact it was downright disturbing. For details see the next edition of the Swiss Observer.

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