

FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... FEBRUARY 2016

I keep juggling these balls. Now and then I drop one, pick it up, and keep smiling. Enjoy every day; there's none to waste.

America, an Island surrounded by thousands of miles of ocean, is beset by future-fear and panic. Europe, an oasis of liberal tolerance, is surrounded by—let's make a list—Vladimir Putin's Russia, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, (education listed as United States Army War College), in Egypt. Various failed or threatened states line the Mediterranean rim: Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco. An assortment of thuggish, corrupt regimes rule the Balkans and further east. Wars ongoing in Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, and Iraq. In sub-Saharan Africa, a similar story unfolds.

The forgoing are all places where you can be tortured and disappeared by the security authorities. You wouldn't want to be a journalist there. Nor a secularist, any kind of free-thinker, or artist. Gay, lesbian, or trans-gender. Given a choice, you wouldn't want to be born a woman. Come to think of it, you might be happy you weren't born in one of those places. Look from here and shudder. If you're stuck there, you might think of moving to Europe. At risk of your life, you might leave because there's no hope where you are.

Now, if you're among the lucky citizens of Europe where millions of people are clamoring to get in, you are going to consider how this is going to affect you. The sheer numbers strain natural feelings of sympathy and accommodation. Many questions and no easy answers. What's to become of the European Union, and will it even survive? As I've remarked before, there's no shortage of experts on the nightly talk shows.

People in this area lived through dark times seventy years ago. They were desperate to get out of Germany then. I took a walk down on the Rhine this morning. Blowing snow tickled my nose, and no one was about but a woman walking her dog. The one-lane wooden bridge is not normally staffed, but we believe it is watched by cameras. The *Grenzkontrolle* has stepped up their activity, setting up frequent roadblocks. We don't imagine they're going to all this trouble to see if someone has brought over an extra kilo of meat, or liter of wine. We suspect they have other contraband in mind: drugs, large sums of cash, weapons, explosives, humans.

Much as I enjoy mocking the pundits, I'm as confused as anybody about events. It seems to me the Swiss are not so much afraid of terrorist attacks, as they are angry and resentful of a huge surge in crime rates. Burglaries, assaults, rapes, and muggings have never happened in such numbers. Most these crimes are committed by people who come from somewhere else. Three-quarters of the prison population is foreign born. A referendum is coming up on a law allowing for deportation of foreigners convicted of crime. Here is the point where politics confront popular will. I'm an *Ausländer* here myself, I don't need to mention.

We're beginning to hear birdsong now over the last few days. These little snowfalls never stick, didn't this morning. I felt happy and virtuous when I got my walk done early, as the snow turned to cold rain through the afternoon. A good day to start a newsletter. While I was at my desk, thieves pulled off a million-dollar jewelry heist in downtown Zürich, in broad daylight. They spoke *gebrochen Deutsch*, which is how the media describes criminals who come from somewhere else. Two very clear photos have already been posted on the Internet.

Edith says I should pick some less gloomy subject to write about. "Why don't you tell about the *Basler Fasnacht*?" she says. She says it's after nine, anyway, and time to take a break now.

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Plenty Good People, the new duo recording with W.C. Jameson, is out on Brambus Records, Switzerland and picking up favorable comment. Now available on Amazon, I'm really happy with this project—made in Texas by Texans, as the bumper stickers used to say. And we have a series of Texas dates coming up to celebrate, beginning March 14th at Poodie's Roadhouse, Spicewood; then Friday the 18th, Anderson Fair, Houston; and Saturday, the 19th at the Old Quarter Acoustic Café in Galveston; Thursday the 31st, Dabbs Railroad Hotel, Llano (duo with W.C.); and Friday, April 8th at the Good Luck Grill in Manor. Please check the website for times.

Good Luck to all, and I hope we see you at one of these shows.

Richard J. Dobson, Diessenhofen am Rhein

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www.richard-j-dobson.ch

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