

Something about Yodeling

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Catholic tradition of pre-Christian Europe, by which even the Protestant cantons are unconsciously influenced. The Swiss realise that both power and property must be widely distributed if the State is to remain free. The strong regionalism of the cantons, nowhere more strong than in the Catholic cantons, is an effective check to tyrannical centralisation. Recent legislation has reinforced the traditions which in the past operated against the development of great landed proprietors.

I have often wondered how the Swiss contrived to prevent the concentration of land in the hands of the few. "Well, it's very difficult" said a Swiss friend of mine, "to persuade a peasant to sell. He says 'land is worth more than money!'".

What infinite wisdom is crystallised in that saying! Land, of course, does change hands in small quantities. Anybody who wanted to buy enough land to build a chalet with a garden would have no difficulty, but once a man starts to buy land as a mere speculation difficulties begin. A member of the Swiss Parliament told me that in his valley a rich refugee was ready to buy any land that was for sale, but the word went round "Don't sell", for the peasants instinctively felt that their way of life was being threatened.

The son of a wealthy Swiss manufacturer was used as an agent to buy part of an alp for his father-in-law, who foresaw that war was inevitable and who felt that if he owned an alp he would, at least, be sure of butter and cheese, but the Government stepped in and forbade the sale on the ground that he was not a farmer and would have to hire somebody to run the alp for him. Ruskin would have been delighted, for the tendency of such legislation is in accord with the Ruskinian principle, "property to whom proper".

Swiss democracy works because it is both conservative and progressive, the Tory democracy of which Disraeli dreamed, but which he never achieved. "In those 15 months" writes Mr. Eugene Bagge in his book "The Heathen are Wrong", "I came to regard Switzerland as the finest democracy in the world, a democracy based on the effort of hard thinking, and the dignity of hard work and the beauty of self-imposed discipline. It was the one democracy in Europe that was on the one hand truly democratic, and on the other hand worked; and this was because of all the European democracies it remained most faithful to the Christian origin of our civilisation. It was the most advanced of the European nations, because it was the most conservative".

. SOMETHING ABOUT YODELING.

An article on the Swiss Alphorn in your May issue has made very good reading and I, like, I am sure, many others, are greatly indebted to the contributor, M. Widmer, for it. Especially is this the case for Swiss residents of New Zealand who have left their old, but still beloved, country many years ago. In many of those old compatriots it must have awakened memories of old and many are wondering if at least some of the old customs are still in existence there. What about the Swiss yodel? What stirs up the heart of an old Swiss in foreign parts more than a good Swiss yodel. But what is a yodel? Very often it fills the place of the chorus part and enhances the beauty of a Swiss song. Then again, it is a way of alpine residents to express their content and happiness in song without words.

A yodel is something very original and it would even be very hard to find a composer for it. This is especially the case with the Appenzeller yodel. I am an Appenzeller myself, and although I cannot yodel, I remember quite a bit about it. Alfred Tobler in his song book "Sang und Klang aus Appenzell" has written some "Zäwerli" or Yodels, but failed to trace a composer for them. They are traditional songs without words, and are perhaps 100 years old if not more.

Once upon a time a tourist travelling through this Canton met a school-boy who, while sitting on a rail fence, relieved his happy feelings with a yodel.

The traveller, quite enchanted with this singing, asked the boy if he learnt that at school. "No fear," the boy replied, "it needs a better ear for music than that".

Of course, I do not mean to say that yodeling is confined to Appenzell, and I think there are not many Cantons without their yodels. The Canton Berne seems to take pride of place, and its yodels quite often come to us in New Zealand over the air. When the peace celebration was held on the Pilatus, we were fortunate in getting a very good broadcast and some beautiful yodels of Unterwalden and other Central Cantons could easily be recognised. A local friend of mine, a New Zealander, who had travelled on tour through Switzerland many years ago, used to tell me that in the Bernese Oberland the people there were that religious, that on a Sunday after church they would congregate in the street and sing hymns. They took the yodels to be hymns of exceptional beauty.

Now we have to come back to the Canton of my birth and its yodels. Here the yodel, or as we call it "Zauren" has its uses. An old Swiss friend of mine a resident of New Zealand of over 50 years, told me once that when milking cows in Switzerland, they used to hum a yodel and that the cows, quite enchanted with charm of the melody would let down the milk much easier. Even cows can be endowed with an ear for music, a fact which is even recognised in this country. I have been on farms here in New Zealand where a radio set was installed in the cowshed.

This is one of the practical uses of the yodel. Many years ago I read in a Swiss publication of its use of a different kind altogether. In the alpine regions where cows and goats grazed during the summer months and where the men are practically cut off from the outer world, a man may become a victim of sickness or an accident without being able to send for help. So it is the custom of these alpine dwellers to go about sunset before their hut and give a loud yauchoz or a short yodel which will be answered by the next say "Alp A" and perhaps "B" and "C". That means that everything is all well, but if such a reply does not come forth those mountaineers know that something is amiss and that it is their duty to investigate.

The charm of the yodel has also attracted the musical ear of other countries, but the quality of their production can never reach the Swiss standard. Bavaria, Tyrol and other states with their germanic mother tongue, have their way of yodels. These, although original and melodious, are something quite apart from our style, but other countries have in latter years copied our yodel but they are not and never will be up to our standard.

W.U.

..... SWISS NATIONAL DAY.

The Wellington Swiss community will hold their celebration on Saturday August 10th in the Clubrooms of the N.Z. Educational Institute, Evening Post Building, Willis Street, as before.

Invitations will be sent to all compatriots in the Wellington district and we shall be very glad to see any countrymen who happen to be in Wellington on that date.

In Auckland there will be a gathering at the Overseas League Rooms in Queen Street, on August 3rd, as already announced.

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NEW MEMBER;

We are pleased to enrol another new member - Mr. F. Steiner, Cussen Road, Tatuani, Morrinsville.