

The attitude of the British Foreign Office towards Switzerland in the 19th century

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THE ATTITUDE of the BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE TOWARDS SWITZERLAND in the 19th CENTURY.

Résumé of the Lecture given by Dr. Paul Lang under the auspices of the N.S.H. on May 26th, 1922, at the Central Hall, Westminster, S.W.

In 1814 Switzerland was beginning to breathe fresh air, so to speak, the Battle of Leipzig having shaken Napoleon's power. Yet in these times, when the divergencies between the reactionaries and the new generation were very pronounced indeed, Stratford Canning, then 28 years of age and sent by Lord Castlereagh on an extraordinary mission to Switzerland, rendered our country no small service by his moderating councils, and even more so by his insistence, when different cantonal constitutions were being remodelled, that the experience of the recent past should be considered. At the Congress of Vienna, which started in autumn, 1814, the help of the English was most valuable. The Genevese were able to better their frontiers considerably, so much so that d'Ivernois described their success in the following words: "En un mot, nous passons ici. M. Pictet et moi, pour les seuls envoyés au Congrès qui s'en retournent chez eux pleinement satisfaits." If Switzerland did not get the Valtellina at the time, it was not due to any lack of support on the part of the British, but rather to resistance to any such extension from many parts of Switzerland herself. The often talked-of declaration of neutrality, adopted by the Second Treaty of Paris, was drafted at the suggestion of Capo d'Istria and Lord Castlereagh by the Genevese, Pictet de Rochemont. Summing up the impressions resulting from these solemn assemblies, Pictet wrote: "C'est à l'Angleterre que nous sommes principalement redevables du succès définitif." And Clancarty said to d'Ivernois: "Never forget that every inch of ground is due to Lord Stewart and that in pleading your cause he surpassed himself." Up to 1847, whilst Switzerland was very often treated by the different diplomatists as a naughty and even dangerous child, she could always rely on the support of the English Ministers in Berne, who acted according to Lord Castlereagh's instructions, to the effect that they were "to foster the spirit of concord and goodwill amongst the different members of the Helvetic Confederation." One of the ministers, Charles Richard Vaughan, was even once styled, on account of his friendly attitude towards Switzerland, by the Prussian ambassador as "the official protector of revolutionism."

It was during the Sonderbund War, however, that England rendered Switzerland really formidable and unforgettable service. The Radical Party, which had gradually won power since 1830, tended towards centralisation, but the Conservatives clung to the well-nigh absolute federalism they enjoyed. In answer to the abolition of the monasteries of the Canton of Aargau, which were guaranteed by the Swiss Constitution, the Catholics of Lucerne invited the Jesuits to undertake the care of the education in their Canton. This led to the freeband raids into Lucerne territory in December, 1844, and spring, 1845. This in its turn induced Lucerne to form in December, 1845, in Sarnen, together with the Cantons Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, Zug, Freiburg and Solothurn, a separate alliance called the Sonderbund. Once this alliance entered into communication with alien governments, that is to say, with France, Sardinia and Austria, it was no longer a case of a different interpretation of the Constitution, but the simple question was now at stake: "Should there be one Switzerland or two?" Canton after Canton came to the conclusion that the Sonderbund

must cease and that, if it would not do so voluntarily, it should be compelled to do so by force of arms.

What was the rôle of British diplomacy with regard to this question?

In July, 1846, Palmerston had, after the fall of the Tory Ministry, Peel-Aberdeen, again become Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Reasons of high politics gradually made him more and more antagonistic to France, and the annexation of Cracow by Austria also alienated him from that country. In December, 1846, he gave express orders to Mr. Peel, the Secretary at the Legation, to stay at Berne and to congratulate the Vorort, which had moved there, in the usual way on New Year's Day. The other ambassadors demonstratively kept away from this horrible Radical Government. Peel was definitely appointed Minister in the beginning of June. Ochsenbein was elected, at about the same time, President of the Bernese Regierungsrat, which title involved the Presidency of the Diet. When Peel congratulated him, this received much public attention. Palmerston, who first had hesitated about intervening in the forthcoming conflict, seemed to interest himself in the matter precisely when things were already critical, that is to say, in August and September. Note after note was exchanged between the Powers, and he was never satisfied with the modifications proposed by his colleagues. When finally an agreement on the collective note had been reached, it was, thanks to his clever tactics, too late. The war was practically over and Lucerne had fallen. Everybody realised now how fundamentally weak the separatist cantons were. Still, all danger was not past, and Stratford Canning, sent on a special mission to Switzerland, had to moderate the punitive zeal of the victorious Radical Party. There was in January a new move on the part of the Conservative Powers to meddle with things Swiss, from which endeavours England, of course, abstained. But this danger was averted by the outbreak of the revolution in Paris on February 24th.

The second great opportunity for England to help our country was during the Neuchâtel crisis. Neuchâtel had become a republic by a revolution on March 31st, and the Swiss Constitution of 1848 had guaranteed this new government and its republican constitution. Yet the King of Prussia had never abdicated as Sovereign and Royalist plotting went on. It resulted finally in an upheaval on September 3rd, 1856, when the Castle of Neuchâtel was stormed by a gang of Royalists. The Castle was retaken next morning by an attack on the part of an immediately formed republican force and 480 prisoners were captured. To understand the diplomatic sequel it is necessary to know that Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia had signed in 1852 a document called the Protocol of London by which the King of Prussia was guaranteed the interest of the Powers in his claim to Neuchâtel, but which obliged him to act always in agreement with his co-signatories. The fact that 28 Royalists were kept in prison, after the preliminary investigation, gave the King of Prussia a chance to make a big case out of that event. Napoleon III, unfortunately, used the affair to foster his own ends in international politics, and by doing so nearly brought about a war. He posed as a mediator between Prussia and Switzerland, yet played a faithless and double game. England's interest, on the other hand, were absolutely identical with those of Switzerland. She did not want to allow the Constitution of 1848 to be endangered by the fancies of such a mentally unbalanced Prince as was Frederick-William IV, and supported the Federal Council throughout the conflict. The fluctuations of the diplomatic endeavours to settle things amicably are very interesting, but inextricably complicated. Suffice it to say that a series of conferences finally, when the danger of war was over, settled the affair in the spring, 1857. Switzerland obtained in the end all she wanted. The King had to give way step by step under heavy pressure, especially from England. Neuchâtel became entirely Swiss, and the fact that the King of Prussia was allowed to keep the title "Prince de Neuchâtel et Valangin," to gratify his vanity, did not alter anything of the result attained.

England was also ready to assist Switzerland in 1860, when Savoy passed over to France. The British Minister in Switzerland particularly, Captain Harris, was much in favour of her claim with regard to the betterment of her military frontier in the south, and sent excellent reports to London. But England and Switzerland, whose leaders, moreover, did not pursue a coherent policy at the time, were fooled alike by Sardinia and France.

In conclusion it may be said that during the last century Switzerland always enjoyed the friendship of British diplomacy at times of critical danger. Not because her case appealed to the personal feelings of this or that type of British statesman,

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but because a general idea lay behind the policy pursued by England. She, like Switzerland, has a strong interest in the equal distribution of power on the Continent. She, like Switzerland, is happiest when the influences of the different Continental Powers are fairly evenly balanced. But we must constantly bear in mind that the subtle machinations of diplomats are at all times deeply influenced by the more irrational tendencies by which the bulk of the peoples are animated. If we have found that there is a material reason for the friendship of England towards Switzerland, let us live according to our insight, let us consciously foster this friendship, which is to our mutual benefit, each of us according to our capacity.

LA NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE GROUPE LONDONIEN.

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL, WEDNESDAY, MAY 31st.
(Communicated.)

1. Three members were admitted, and notice was taken of two resignations.

2. The President read out several communications:—

- (a) No support was given to the appeal of the Swiss Football and Athletic Association to contribute towards their expenses when competing in London, as this Association received a contribution from us last year which was pooled for this year's events, the competition not having taken place last year.
- (b) A report from Dr. Latt, dealing with the proceedings of the last meeting of the shareholders of the "Neue Schweizer Zeitung," was heard.
- (c) The Committee was asked to deal, in agreement with Mr. Georges Dimier, with an appeal from the Society "Pro Juventute," requesting us to act as their representative in England.
- (d) Circular 29 of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger was read. It deals with the collaboration between the Swiss Abroad and the Bureau Industriel Suisse. This Bureau wants to find contributors amongst the Swiss abroad likely to write regularly for their economic Bulletin about the market conditions. Apply to the Secretary of the N.S.H.

3. The Secretary made a few communications on his press activity. He has published articles about Spitteler and Othmar Schoeck (International Festivals). A contribution of his to the "Saturday Review," in answer to two articles about Switzerland which had appeared in that periodical, was widely commented upon and was copied by "The Swiss Observer" (No. 46) and by the "Anglo-Swiss Review" (May issue).

The Secretary will pay a visit to Bradford, Liverpool and Manchester between June 7th and 9th.

4. In connection with press reports about the Day for Swiss Abroad at Basle on April 24th, the following resolution was adopted:—

"The Council of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, after having gone through the different press reports referring to the Fifth Day for Swiss Abroad of the Swiss Sample Fair at Basle, congratulate the S.S.E. heartily on the great success this gathering has proved to be.

"They would invite the Secrétariat of the S.S.E. to take into account the recommendation made by Felix Moeschlin in the 'National Zeitung' of April 25th re the advisability of preparing some kind of exhibition at the Basle Fair next year of a nature to enlighten the Swiss people and the home authorities with regard to the different kinds of activities of the Swiss abroad.

"The Council of the London Group wants in this connection to express its wish that the necessary arrangements will be made for travelling facilities earlier and more extensively next year in order that the Swiss abroad may be informed of them in good time and avail themselves of the advantages."

5. The President made a few communications with regard to our activity on behalf of the participation of the Swiss Colony in London in the Hyde Park Demonstration of June 24th, as planned by the League of Nations Union. Professor E. Borel will speak on the International Platform about Switzerland and the League of Nations. The Secretary is waiting for replies from the Swiss Societies with regard to the delegations they are willing to send to the procession.

6. The Secretary gave a report on a Joint Meeting of the Central Committee and the Committee for the Swiss Abroad of the N.S.H. which took place in Basle on April 23rd and which discussed mainly the likely position of potential groups in the United States within the organisation of the Swiss Abroad of the N.S.H. In reply to a request made by the S.S.E. the Council discussed the problem and came to the following resolution:—

"We are of opinion that, whenever the case of accepting a group consisting of Swiss living in the United States arises, the meeting of delegates should allow such a group to accept as regular members Swiss citizens having taken out the first naturalisation papers; that it be allowed, however, to accept only as passive members Swiss citizens having acquired the second naturalisation papers."

Dr. PAUL LANG,

London, June 3rd, 1922.

Secretary.

P.S.—Members are reminded that next Council Meeting, to which they are all invited, will take place on June 21st at 7.30 p.m. at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1. The next gathering of the Society will be a business meeting with a social, preceded by a dinner, and will be held on September 13th.

DES BIENFAITS DE L'ILLUSION A ASHTEAD.

"C'est comme la Suisse, comme le Jura! Tenez, voilà les Alpes, là-bas, dans la brume légère qui voile l'horizon..." Si vous aviez été à Ashtead. Lundi, avec les 84 Confédérés groupés sous l'égide de l'Eglise Suisse, c'est ce que vous auriez pu entendre plus d'une fois ce matin-là. Eh quoi, il fait bon vivre parfois un moment d'illusions, oublier un peu l'asphalte de la grande ville, le bruit des rues de Londres, pour se plonger dans les délices de la campagne silencieuse.

Que ces "commons" d'Epsom et d'Ashtead étaient beaux! Des buissons d'aubépine blanche et rose s'élevaient encore au soleil leur floraison merveilleuse, et la longue file claire qui serpentait parmi eux humait avec bonheur ces parfums printaniers. Puis, farandole légère, elle vint camper sous l'immense chêne dont la frondaison superbe domine tout le bois.

Qui dira tout le charme d'un picnic pris au vert, dans la douce lumière de la forêt, entre amis! On se croyait en course au pays: toujours l'illusion... Mais elle fut complète lorsque, en demi-cercle, nous fîmes monter au ciel, de toutes nos voix, les beaux chants de la patrie absente. L'un après l'autre, ils éclatèrent vibrants, disant tout notre attachement pour elle, toute notre foi en elle, en Lui aussi qui la protège.

Et puis ce furent, tout comme chez nous ensemble, occurrence, les jeux joyeux et gais qui s'élevaient à la jeunesse: ils y passèrent tous, colin-maillard, polonaise, saute-mouton même. Et quand la lassitude vint, avant d'aller se reconforter par un thé bien mérité, ce furent les productions individuelles de rigueur, sans préjudice de nouveaux jeux dans la prairie, une fois qu'on se fut restauré.

Mais tout a une fin. Quand le soleil baissa à l'horizon, force fut bien de songer au retour et l'illusion d'un jour de fête au pays fut décidément complète: les trains étaient bondés, ils avaient beaucoup de retard, et l'on y chantait!... Oh délices de l'imagination! Nous te bénissons de nous avoir transportés, pour 2/9... presque au pays!... JY. FUS.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que la prochaine

Assemblée Mensuelle

aura lieu le MARDI 13 JUIN, au Restaurant Nuthall à Kingston-on-Thames, et sera précédée d'un souper familial à 6.30 heures (sh. 6/6 par couvert).

Cet avis tient lieu de convocation. Tous ceux désirant y participer sont invités à s'annoncer en temps utile au Trésorier, M. G. Dimier, 46, Cannon Street, E.C. 4 (Téléphone: Central 1321).

Les dames seront les bienvenues car l'on dansera après l'assemblée.

Ordre du Jour.

Procès-verbal.
Admissions.

Démissions.
Divers.