

H.S.H. Lecture [to be continued]

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N. S. H. LECTURE.

A very interesting lecture was given by Mr. Eric Kessler on "Recent Political Developments in Switzerland" on the occasion of the monthly meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, which took place on Wednesday last.

Amongst the many prominent members of the Swiss Colony, who attended the lecture, were Messieurs Ch. de Jenner and W. de Bourg, Councillors of Legation, and M. W. Rüfenacht, 1st Secretary of Legation.

An animated discussion followed the excellent *exposé* of Mr. Kessler in which, some of the younger members of the Colony took a prominent part.

We have great pleasure in publishing here-with an extract of the lecture, in two parts, and we trust that our readers will avail themselves of the opportunity to voice their opinion on a subject which plays an important part in the political life of our country.

Mr. Eric Kessler said:

When asked by the Nouvelle Société Helvétique to deliver this lecture, the choice of subject was very kindly left to me, so that to talk about the recent political developments in Switzerland seemed a very tempting theme. I thought then, however, that my audience would consist of the small group of the faithful friends of these monthly gatherings. But on hearing that an attempt was to be made, to drag some of the young Swiss, resident in London, I became alarmed. Not that I underestimate the knowledge of the elder group, nor their warmth of interest, but as long as I thought I would have to deal with them, I felt on safe ground. For various reasons I cannot say the same thing with the younger present. Firstly, because I know they feel so much more on the subject than I or the elder people do.

When I say "*feel*," I must give an explanation; we all "*feel*" about it somehow or other. But whereas those who live more or less permanently abroad, and I may add especially in England, feel particularly anxious when they discover, *looking homewards*, reasons to think that, what we love most in the political institutions in the old country might one day perhaps soon be in danger—I mean the freedom of the Swiss as citizens—those who live at home, and especially the younger generation, may for many good reasons feel about a much greater variety of subjects *than we do and can*. And that is why I am slightly disturbed at the prospect of having among my critics young people who have every right to think that I, after all, do not really understand what moves them and what is in their opinion the underlying force of the malaise, *which we all know is there*.... I have tried, wherever the opportunity to do so turned up, to bring in their point of view. After all I may not quite belong to what one calls the younger generation—I wish I had more time to say more about this—but as I have already tried, to understand what was going on at home and when doing so, made a point of being in contact with what those not yet in power though and felt—I still hope to be able to get their approval for at least some of the things I have to say.

You all know the facts which have brought about the discussion of what we may call the political crisis in Switzerland. They have had some repercussions abroad, fortunately for us, with not too many evil consequences. The foreign powers, who matter most in the field of international politics, still hold the view that the political instinct of the Swiss will prove strong and resourceful enough to weather the storm.

On March 11th Switzerland rejected the proposed Public Safety Act with a majority of some seventy thousand votes and the majority of the cantons. The measure intended to strengthen the hand of the Authorities against rioting, popular demonstrations and subversive agitation; but the combined forces of the Socialist and the Fronten proved strong enough to bring this somewhat belated effort of the Federal Council, to do something about the situation which, as the Geneva incidents had shown, had become serious enough,—to fall. The day after the vote was taken, Berne was overcome with the excitement of a ministerial crisis. We may have to wait some time until we get the exact history of what happened then and how it came about. But one is on safe ground to say that Bundesrat Musy, who followed his colleague Häberlin in retirement,—the retirement actually took place on the 1st of May,—wanted the resignation of the Federal Council in corpore. The Federal Council however did not think it wise to give way to his feelings and reading of the situation. I am not in any position to say if his reading was an exact one, as far as

the popular feeling then went, but I have heard and read that a great many people thought then, that we would have been able to get a more or less new team to start on the very difficult task without any serious damage to the country. I am not quite sure about that.

The crisis had made the malaise evident. It had, everybody knew, been there for some time. Most people felt it. I do not think that those in power did not. But it is their duty to go on, which does not mean, not to take any notice of it, but to take it in and to try in going on and governing to mitigate its causes. They thought they did. Some people did with them. But a great many thought they were no longer up to their task. Amongst those who thought and still think so, there are no doubt a great many who do not believe that a change in the political system would help. They take a very sober and reasoned outlook; they judge that most of our troubles are economic and that there is no political cure for them. They would like to see the bitterness of our party strife abolished, at least, with sacrifices all round, made less acrimonious; but they are, no doubt, in the minority. The majority has very strong feelings about those matters which form the topics of the public discussion, to mention only on one side the plight of the Volksbank, and the financial situation on the other the responsibility for the rejection of the Public Safety Act. But as a whole, looking from abroad, I cannot yet see an approach to the difficulties on the lines of the one we have watched in the last two years in England, where at least some of the groups of the political world have for some time now been able to sit together and to do their best to make a show of what unites them. The Federal Council still represents to the outward world, what once was considered a very excellent working team, incorporating the representatives of our so-called Bourgeois Parties with the exclusion of the Socialists. But what is necessary to-day, if one thinks it at all desirable, that we should in the handling of an avowed complicated situation show the spirit which in the past helped us to overcome similar ones, is not only the more or less smooth working together of some elderly politicians and statesmen, nor the camaraderie of a few, but the giving of a new value, a new meaning to our old and so often misused, I mean so often in the wrong places talked about, national motto. There can be no doubt that this approach is only possible, when everybody agrees to give up some of his political beliefs. This does not mean that parties have to give up for good, what they think to be their most precious intellectual luggage, it means only that in order to get some real work done, which helps all those who are behind the parties, who, after all, give them strength and look to them for something in return, they would have to drop their differences. If that were possible, in a not too distant future, I mean, a recovery which would not only give work to those who have no work now, but all all with confidence in our economic future, I would be prepared to say, that a great many of those who *to-day vociferate* about the necessity of sweeping alterations in our political institutions would soon be silent. This is a very materialistic consideration, and I would not be surprised to be told, that it would not reconcile the younger among those who range against the Government Parties, neither Socialist nor Frontists. But it may stand for those who are middle-aged and they would be strong enough to pull the country through.

There are to-day, I am told, five or six so-called mostly German-Swiss Fronten and at least two groups with more or less Fascist leanings in the western part of Switzerland. They all seem to have abundant financial means, most of them have their own newspapers, if not dailies, at least weeklies, and they all have, in imitation of the German and Italian hierarchy, their Leader. There is the Bund Nationalsozialistischer Eidgenossen, "la Fédération des Confédérés Nationalsocialistes" whose founder an Architect named Fischer, from Zurich, has, in the past two years more than once been seen at Propaganda Meetings in Germany, representing his party. There is the *Nationale Front*, who promises to his followers the financial, political and moral renaissance of Switzerland from below. They are the declared enemies of Liberals, Marxists, Socialists, Jews and Freemasons. They have definite plans about the reorganization of the constitution, favouring the Corporations as they have been put into practice in Italy and Austria. They have their fighting squads wearing a white shirt and a black tie, they rise their right hands to greet you and say, instead of, "Gute abig," "Horus" There is besides them the "Eidengössische Front" whose adherents have strong religious-Protestant leanings; they are against all Liberalism in any form. There is then the *Neue Schweiz*, la *Nouvelle Suisse*, a group of people who want to reintroduce under more or less new

cover, the Guilds, Zünfte and Innungen. They fight against department stores, they too want the Parliament run on Corporation lines. There is, last not least, the "*Bund für Volk und Heimat*." Its members are supposed to be first class patriots, which means they have to do and to stick to all the things the leaders of this movement have decreed, to be of first rate patriotism. They are against what they call Party Government, against red tape, against centralization and Etatism and against Anti-Militarism.

I realise that it is *quite impossible* in this very short lecture to give you an idea of the wealth of the forthcoming rejuvenating forces. I am even quite sure that many who *feel*, that something is wrong with the old parties, have honestly tried them, only *to be*, in view of the not very encouraging attitude of the older generation, terribly disappointed.

What all the Fronten have in common is a very pronounced animosity towards Socialism in the form represented by the Social Democratic Party and the Trade Unions of Switzerland. With some of them at least with their most prominent members, for instance of the "*Bund für Volk und Heimat*" this hatred dates back to the General Strike after the war, when the Socialist Leaders, assembled then in Olten, tried to dictate the conditions of peace. You know that their attempt failed, that the Swiss Federal Council, working together with the superior commanders of the army, and with the help of the quickly organized Bürgerwehren, were able to deal with the danger represented by the left wing movement and not altogether free of foreign, it was then Soviet Russian, influence. The Socialists have since been considered as traitors in the eyes of a great many people, and even the fact that some of those, who were responsible for the extreme demands then put forward, have since then to a certain extent lost their prestige with some of their followers, has, been overlooked.

It is due to this very strong feeling against the Socialists, that some people, dissatisfied for false or valid reasons with our Government system and executive, turned abroad for inspiration.

There can be no doubt that the majority of the Fronten have gone to school in Germany, and whatever one may think about the necessity, or the excellency of the National Socialist experiment in the Reich, the fact that Swiss people thought it was worthwhile to imitate it entirely or partly, is *disturbing*. Foreign influences we have always had, but you all know that in the political field, we had, when looking for inspiration, and wanting to copy,—it was only more or less a copy,—always looked west, to France and to England. Even then we merely took some technicalities; the right spirit was always there, and even before the French Revolution, in the times of Patrician Government in towns and aristocratic Landcantons, there were always people who knew, and saw to it that it was not forgotten by those in power, that there must be an *element of consent* coming from the part of those who were governed.

There has, for centuries, been in Switzerland a wealth of communities of all sorts, some political, many non political, military some, cultural others, all of them demonstrating that our national life depends on this continuous intercourse between individuals and State, as Professor Fleiner said recently. You may have had at the head a system which was essentially aristocratic, the expression autocratic covers it better, but there was always an *fond* an element which was democratic. So that, when after the French Revolution and later again in the third and fourth decade of the nineteenth century, we began to build the house as we know it now, the foundations were already there. We have always, whatever we did, tried to combine the conservative forces with those who push forward; it is not merely a party combination, as some people would like us to believe now; it is *essentially Swiss* and whenever we created new rights, new constitutional rights and values, we took care, to see, that our traditions and popular feelings were not overlooked.

To go abroad now, to envy a course, as some do, which cannot be ours, to try to adopt it at home, just because things are not what they used to be, and because one thinks that our neighbours are doing much better, is *surely* a dangerous procedure. We have always quarrelled about the attributes of the really good Swiss, and why not? It was a good stimulating quarrel and made those, suspected of failings, redouble their efforts. *I do not see* how we could ever, assuming even that it were desirable, which I personally don't believe, achieve that certain uniformity in outlook, political, religious, cultural, which is now the pattern ideal of our neighbours in the north. I have read some time ago that National Socialists realise it immediately, when they are with a countryfellow who thinks and feels

exactly like them. Well, somehow I feel, that if this is an ideal condition of citizenship, we need not strive after it, because we have got it. Just as the French and the English have it and have had it for ages. There may be a difference in colour and in poise, but it is there, it is the residue of tradition. I have talked to many Germans about it: when they are in what I should like to call their more enlightened moods, (even very fanatic Nazis, are accessible then,) they admit that it is just that what they want. They feel others have it. *They say they never had it.* It is their business to find their way, and if in doing so they find obstacles on the road, well that makes for German history and fate. But, mind you, and this is what I want to underline, there is nothing in store for us in the field of international politics as far as adventures are concerned. All we have to do, is to keep, what we have.

(To be continued).

THE COMING "FETE SUISSE."

The Committee of the "Fête Suisse" introduced this year a charming novelty. They called on the poet of the Colony "Gallus" to sing about the traditional family gathering, which reunites yearly all the children of "Mutter Helvetia".

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This chain of patriots and friends
Is shortly to be forged anew,
Counting on every link that tends
To make it whole—It counts on YOU!

Then let us join in song and pray'rs,
In homage to dear Switzerland
And banish daily woes and cares;
Come, clasp each-other's friendly hand.
The white cross in its shield of red
Shall find its sons united thus
And may HELVETIA'S spirit spread,
So that she can be proud of us!

TROST.

Elf Worte hab' ich einst gelesen
Als mir das Herz so schwer und feig.
"Danke Gott für Glück und Segen,
Dann vergisstest du dein Leid."

Oft irrt unsere bange Seele
In dem Dunkel hin und her,
Gleich als ob das Steuer fehle
Unserem Schiff im Lebensmeer.
Doch nur einen Blick nach oben
In des Lichtes ew'ger Quell,
Und vom Glanz und Strahl da oben
Wird auch, in uns, es wieder hell.

Vieles Glück scheu wir versinken
In die Flut der Ewigkeit,
Neue Hoffnung lässt uns trinken
Aus dem ew'gen Born der Zeit.

Mancher wird daran genesen
Der viel Leid und Schweres trug,
Milde heilet auch die Wunden
Die der harte Tod uns schlug.

Erhebet uns auf lichten Schwingen
Über Kummer Leid empor,
Wir uns neuen Frühling bringen
Macht uns wieder lebensfro.

H. E.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

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Tuesday, June 5th at 8 o'clock (Supper 7.15 p.m. sharp). City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting at Pagani's Restaurant, 42 Great Portland Street, W.1. (See Advert).

Wednesday, June 6th — Société de Secours Mutuels—Monthly Meeting at 7.30 p.m. at 74 Charlotte Street, W.1.

Wednesday, June 20th — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Monthly meeting at 19.45, to be followed by a talk by Mr. P. Lerian on "L'Union Helvétique, son activité et ses membres," at Swiss House, 34/35, Fitzroy square, W.

Thursday, June 21st, from 7—10.30 p.m. (Tea from 6 o'clock, buffet from 8—9 o'clock) — Fête Suisse — At Central Hall, Westminster (opposite Westminster Abbey).

Saturday, June 23rd, at 2.45 p.m. — Swiss Sports — At Herne Hill Athletic Grounds.

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CONFIRMATION.

Am Pfingstsonntag wurden confirmiert:

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Alfred SCHMID von Ober-Stammheim (Zürich) geb. am 2. 12. 1917.

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