

Swiss Yodlers in London

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SWISS YODLERS IN LONDON.



Some years ago I had a heated argument with some friends of mine as to whether a "yodling" concert was a fit performance for a concert Hall. I strongly objected to it, because I took the view that the necessary atmosphere for such a display was lacking. I had always connected "yodling" with mountains, or at least, surroundings quite different to the one of, *i.e.*, the Albert Hall. —

Having attended now for the last three years, a performance of the famous "William Tell" Yodle Choir of the Swiss Federal Railways, on the occasion of the yearly Reunion of the Polytechnic Tours, which took place as usual at the Albert Hall on Saturday last, I have completely changed my opinion.

The performance of this wonderful choir has achieved, what I always held to be impossible, namely to create an atmosphere which makes one forget the immediate surroundings; I do not know whether any other choir would be able to achieve the same object, but anyhow this one did.

I attribute the magic spell they cast over an audience of nearly 10,000 spectators, principally to their fine singing, apart from the yodling. Here we have a choir, which is wonderfully blended, and which knows the art of good singing. There *pianissimo* was a pleasure to listen to, and the *ensemble* was faultless, there was not one flaw in their execution.

The Choir started the programme by Krenger's "Lengi Zyti" (Homesickness), with yodel solo by M. E. Sommer, the champion yodler of Switzerland. Having lived in this country for a good many years, I am not prone to attacks of this illness, but their beautiful rendering has never-the-less brought a lump into my throat.

I am not going to mention every item, with which they entertained an enthusiastic audience: they were billed for 5 numbers, but in the end they nearly had to double this number by encores.

They sang of spring, of love, of our glittering mountains, of the silvery lakes and sun-kissed hills; which after these dreary dull days of winter, brought thoughts of the warm sunshine coming and the budding trees and flowers. I am sure I was not the only one who felt like this, for all round one could see smiling faces made happy by these lovely thoughts and memories.

Whilst threatening clouds were gathering on this Saturday in the political firmament, there was assembled in this imposing Hall the large Polytechnic family, to spend a few happy hours together and to exchange remembrances of hours spent on travels in Foreign countries under perhaps happier auspices. Perhaps, where the jolly laughter of Tourists used to echo, the guns will roar again; what a stupid world! Why must this mistrust, jealousy and discontent embitter this all too short life of ours? — I could not forbear but to reflect on this, but when amongst great applause, Gritli Wenger in her picturesque Bernese costume, with her plaits hanging over her shoulders appeared, all was forgotten. It is a wonderful thing how these simple and unassuming songs touch one's imagination. There is no Prima donna touch in Gritli Wenger's singing. I

have heard in the very same Hall, some of the most famous singers, and yet they have given me no bigger thrills than this little lady who sat in that enormous big Hall, hugging her harmonica and singing those songs of the life and doings of simple folks. Yes, Gritli Wenger is, in the realm of folk lore, a great singer because she puts all her innermost feelings into her songs.

As an *encore* the choir rendered a song entitled the "Echo over the Lake of Thonue," which brought the house down, seldom have I heard such applause at the Albert Hall. The "star" turns were Messrs. Sommer and Tanner, who enjoy a great reputation as yodlers in our country; one of the singers was situated in the gallery, no doubt to give the impression that he was on a mountain, whilst his partner "down below" suggested the echo. This was some of the finest yodling I have ever heard.

As a special turn, the choir brought along Franz Hug, the champion flag thrower of Switzerland, a tall, broad shouldered man in a coat superbly embroidered with silk patterns of Edelweiss; and with the accompaniment of Gritli Wenger's harmonica playing he was twirling, in a most amazing manner, the Swiss flag into the air. It was a marvellous exhibition of skill, and the audience was not sparing in their applause.

After the conclusion of the choir's turn, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini appeared on the platform to shake hands with the performers, he also spoke a few words to the vast audience, assuring them that they will always find a hearty welcome in our home country. —

On Sunday morning the choir paid a surprise visit to the French Hospital at Shaftesbury Avenue, where they entertained both patients and nurses for nearly an hour, amongst the formers were some of our compatriots.

On Monday, the "William Tell" choir left for Bristol where they gave a similar Concert in the largest Hall of the Town, and where they received a great ovation from a packed House. Two days later (Wednesday) they sang at Leeds before an equally packed house. Both concerts were broadcasted, and the singers were introduced to their invisible audience by commander R. G. Studd, D.S.O., R.N., who gave a short outline about the history of Switzerland.

This all too short visit of our countrymen to this country has been a great success, and they can well be satisfied with their achievement; they have literally sung themselves into the hearts of British people.

From a propaganda point of view this visit must rank very highly, and seems to me of infinite greater value than a number of advertisements in the Daily Press, or some, not always very artistic posters. I do not know who is responsible for this splendid idea of sending this famous choir over here, but whoever it is, is to be congratulated on this far-seeing piece of advertising.

They have also managed to dispell from me an uneasy feeling which I have had for some time, when reading of the ever increasing deficits of our State Railways; a concern where the staff still can, and do sing is not yet doomed, and in spite

of the recent reduction in their remuneration they looked a "bonny" lot.

Thank you, Yodlers for the few hours of intense enjoyment which you have given your countrymen far beyond the sea and to the people of this land, you have shown to them that besides possessing fine scenery we are also a land of happy songs.

ST.

PERSONAL.

The many friends of Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Sommer, of "Hepple Lodge," Holly Park, Crouch Hill, N.4, will sympathise with them in their loss, Mrs. Sommer's father, Mr. Peter, Fr. Schär, having died in Berne, at the age of 70.

Mr. Schär was for 47 years a preacher of the "Evangelische Gemeinschaft," and in later years, although still preaching frequently, occupied the post of "Verwalter" of the "Christliche Verlagshaus" in Berne.

NATURALIZATION IN SWITZERLAND.

The "Swiss Observer" has on several occasions referred in its columns to the naturalization practice in Switzerland.

As far back as September, 1933, when dealing with the "Fronten" movement, ST. wrote as follows:

"One bright spot in the endeavours of the 'Fronten,' is the one, to remedy the laxity existing in the naturalisation laws; and here they deserve the wholehearted support of every Swiss citizen, who has the welfare of his country at heart. The present position is a farcical one, and will remain so, as long as this most important matter is left at the discretion of the cantonal and local authorities. The deciding factor *who* should and *who* should not enjoy Swiss citizenship, should be left to a Federal Dept. The granting of naturalization papers, for, in many cases, ridiculously small sums, has degenerated to nothing less than a 'Kuhhandel,' and most of the troubles, we had to contend with, in the last few years, can be traced back to the laxness with which this matter has been treated. The Federal Council has shown here a leniency which is simply amazing. For months and months, agitators of foreign origin, were allowed to preach without the slightest interference, — revolution —; as a result we had to register the disgraceful happenings at Zurich, Fribourg and Geneva.

If the 'Fronten' succeed in bringing radical changes in this direction, they will go a long way towards gaining the sympathies of those, who at present are standing aloof.

Hand in hand goes the vigorous campaign against the Communists and Marxists, the 'Fronten' demand a sweep with an iron broom, and rightly so. For centuries Switzerland has kept an open door, has given an asylum to all political fugitives, and it would be expected, that these people, who were hounded out of their respective countries, should be grateful for being able to enjoy the hospitality of a free country. Nothing of the sort; with a few exceptions, they have started to poison the minds of our working classes, they have continued to preach the dogmas, for which they had to leave their own country, they have sown the seeds of class hatred, they have insulted, ridiculed and besmirched the honour of our army, and as a recompense for their mischievous work, they have entered the council chambers of our constitutional governing bodies.

On some rare occasions they have been told to behave as good boys, or they would have to quit. — I have been given to read some of the shorthand notes taken from speeches which were held in public, which made my blood boil, and yet if one of these foreign agitators calls at the 'Gemeindekanzlei' of one of our smaller communities, with a bundle of banknotes, he will be welcomed with joy, into the fold; should a question be asked in Parliament, the reply will invariably be, that the Federal Authorities are incompetent in the matter, and that the sovereignty of the cantons must not be violated. — *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité!!*"

Recently we have read in the Swiss press, that Dr. Klöti, Mayor of the town of Zurich and Member of Parliament, has, in an interpellation in the States Council (Ständerat) asked the Government, whether they were aware, that a number of communities throughout the country, were granting naturalization to Foreigners, who have never been even residents in the respective communities or cantons. He asked the Government to take energetic steps to prevent in future, that Foreigners who have not the necessary qualifications should be granted civic rights. He urged emphatically that the traffic with regard to naturalization should be stopped forthwith. —

So far so good, we rejoiced, that at last, this cause, which has been nothing short of a scandal for some considerable time, had found such an ardent champion.