

It happened in the canton of Geneva

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IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF GENEVA

High above the city of Geneva in the midst of the old town surrounded by ancient houses, stands the great medieval Cathedral of St. Peter.

In a way, the setting is reminiscent of that of St. Giles, except for the little chapel, the Auditoire, which nestles in the lee of the Cathedral. Today the Auditoire houses the Church of Scotland in Geneva and within its walls many of the most famous leaders of the Reformation have preached, including John Knox.

Now the town is half Catholic and half Protestant, but the Cathedral and the Auditoire remain an impregnable bastion of the Protestant religion.

By 1564, 1,500 French, 300 Italian Protestants, and smaller groups of Spaniards, English, Scots and Flemings had made Calvin's Geneva the "Protestant Rome" and a centre of international thought.

John Knox preached the new doctrine which spread to Scotland and later to New England.

The first English version of the New Testament to be divided into verses appeared in Geneva in 1557 as a result of the joint labours of the exiles William Whittingham and Miles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter.

Over the long period of 400 years, however, the winds of change have transformed Geneva so vastly that it has certainly become one of the least Calvinistic of European cities.

Calvin died on 27th May 1564. But the 400th anniversary of his death could not be commemorated on the actual date in spring owing to the festivities connected with the 150th anniversary of Geneva's entry into the Confederation. In November, there was a "Décade Calvinienne" which was opened by a ceremony in front of the Reformation Monument and by a service in the Cathedral, held by Pasteur Pradervand, Secretary General of the World Federation of Churches, who will be remembered by the Swiss Colony in Great Britain from the time he served the French-speaking community of the Swiss Church in London.

After the jubilees of the Rousseau Institute (50) in 1962 and the paper "La Vie Protestante" (25) in 1963, the last few months have brought a further number of anniversaries. At the end of September, it was ten years since CERN was founded; on 10th October ministers and scientists of the thirteen member states visited the Institute at Meyrin. This Commune, incidentally, has been given the rank of a town, the fifth in the Canton of Geneva, since it has over 10,000 inhabitants. Also in October, the International School celebrated forty years of existence, and in November, the watch manufacturing firm of Patek Philippe Co. was 125 years old. Early in December, the New Helvetic Society (Geneva Group), celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The Swiss Workers' Party (Communists) was twenty years old in December, as was their paper "Voix Ouvrière". Two Initiatives launched by this Party in Geneva were defeated by the electorate, one in June for cheaper flats, the other in October for an increase in family allowances.

In yet another volume, the Swiss Statistical Bureau published the results of the federal census of 1961, dealing with Geneva. There are forty-five Communes in the Canton of Geneva. Their population has increased by 27.8% from 202,918 in 1950 to 259,234 in 1960. The increase at Grand-Saconnex was 145.4% and at Jussy 1.7%. Only two Communes showed a smaller number

of inhabitants compared with ten years previously, Russin - 3.5% and Laconnex - 11.9%. The town of Geneva increased its population by 54.5% (30,710). At the end of November last year, the number of the town's inhabitants was nearly 180,000. The cantonal population increased by 404% between 1850 and 1960.

On 1st December 1961, 23.7% were foreigners, the largest number Italians. The latest figures published on 1st December last, show that there were 2,357 Italians, 15,666 Frenchmen and 11,731 Spaniards in the Canton.

As regards denominations, there has been very little change since 1860, always just a slight preponderance of Roman Catholics, though their majority has increased during the past few years on account of the many Italians and Spaniards.

Other numbers which have gone up in Geneva are the nights spent by tourists — over 10% more than in the previous year. This is partly due to several new hotels having been built. The motorway to Lausanne and the Mont-Blanc Tunnel have also contributed towards increased tourist traffic. The airport of Cointrin is to be enlarged, a project for a tunnel under Geneva's harbour has been accepted, there is now a municipal traffic engineer, and plans are being worked out to link the Rhone with the Rhine. For this purpose, a limited company "Transhelvetica" was formed last May. The first stage is to connect the Rhine with the Lake of Neuchâtel.

Building projects include a twenty-storey block at Carouge (hotel accommodation, flats and offices), flats at reduced rents, a staff wing for the "Asile des Vieillards Confédérés", extension of the natural history museum, an agricultural college. The Canton reduced its building programme by 30 million francs to 110 million. A special hotel for the staff of Swissair was opened at Cointrin at the end of October, and a new old age home of the "Priorats la Gradelle" in November. In December, the new building of the Commercial High School was inaugurated — the increase in population has meant an increase of about 2,500 school children, which in turn means an additional thirty primary and forty secondary school classes. The avenue de Châtelaine is to be widened, and a special zone in the region of the Palais des Nations has been planned to keep the area with its beautiful trees protected and for the sole use of large buildings for international organisations. Geneva is to have not only a watch and clock museum, but also a family planning centre. There is now a special trust fund in connection with the new arrangements between the Confederation and the Canton of Geneva regarding the provision of accommodation for international organisations. The new commission "International Geneva" has set up an action programme to foster contact between international officials and Geneva personalities. The European UNO Office asked for a booklet on Geneva, and this has been published, called "Genève, Cité Internationale".

There is a record number of students at Geneva University. During the present term no fewer than 4,600 students have registered, among them 1,300 new ones of whom 800 are Swiss. In December, medical students protested against the out-of-date laboratories of the University, and in January, the Students' Federation asked for new buildings for the Institute of Chemistry. A new pharmacists' centre was opened in the rue du lac (Eaux-Vives) in December.

The budget for 1965 for the town of Geneva visualises a surplus of over Fr.141,700.— with an income of nearly 99 million francs. The Canton proposed an increase in taxes — the press talked of “austerity politics” — and a Referendum is being launched by the opponents of higher taxation. The 1965 budget of the Canton predicts a deficit of Fr.4,449,201.— (income Fr.370,547,099.—).

Geneva is the only Canton which has no Cantonal Bank. In January, a proposal was put forward in the Grand Council to form a financial body which would act as Cantonal Bank.

The “Khidder Affair” made news in Geneva (and elsewhere) for many months. In July, the Algerian Government and the Politbureau of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) lodged an accusation in Geneva against Mohamed Khidder, former Secretary-General of the FLN, for having embezzled 60 million Swiss francs belonging to the Algerian State. In October, the Federal Council expelled Khidder for inadmissible political activities in Switzerland. Khidder appealed, but the Federal Council upheld the decision according to article 70 of the Swiss Constitution. Khidder left Switzerland on 30th October for Paris. Later, an official of the Arabian Commercial Bank in Geneva was arrested in connection with this affair.

Geneva has had its shares of unpleasantness. At the end of December, the “milk war” between the regional milk centre, the “Laiteries Réunies”, on one hand and the “Migros” on the other, could at long last be terminated. A fixed price was agreed for pasteurised milk (85 Rp.).

For some weeks in September there was a taxicab strike when most of the 244 drivers struck against the use of radio equipment which had been introduced by larger concerns. The market stall keepers in the Boulevard Helvétique protested against the decision to have the market moved in order to make the road an express route. The security police objected to a new service plan which, however, could be amended to their satisfaction and became valid on 1st January. Crimes committed in the Canton of Geneva range from theft of large quantities of furs and jewelry, a pouch containing Fr.240,000.— from a cycle messenger, forged travel cheques and also papers “worth” 300,000 dollars, to the murder of one named Desponds by an Italian. The Geneva woman Josette Bauer who was serving a sentence for murdering her father three years ago, disappeared from prison in September.

After the heavy explosion in a Chêne-Bourg store last June and the fire in the Cantonal Hospital in August, there was another extensive fire which destroyed the “Bâtiment Electoral” (Maison de la Presse) and caused damage to the extent of about six million francs, including one million for seventy telex machines. In October, there was a fire in Carouge, and in November, the Commune President and chief of the local fire brigade of Collonges-Bellerive lost all the fodder stocks through a fire which broke out on his farm.

Geneva is well suited as venue for conferences and meetings. Among the events which have taken place there in recent months, was a bull fight at Vessy last summer (against much opposition!), the “Fêtes de Genève (international folkloristic rally), and the “Rencontres Internationales” (with a lecture by “the father of the atom bomb” Prof. Robert Oppenheimer), three Federal Councillors spoke in Geneva, last year’s President of the Confederation and Federal Councillor Bonvin at the Party rally of the Conservative Christian Socialists, and Federal

Councillor Tschudi opening the World Congress on Political Science. The Argentine Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland, the Tenth Congress for Social Medicine, the “American Joint Distribution Committee”, and the “Institut Suisse des Architectes Navals” all met in Geneva. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Felix Schnyder, attended a conference of the “United Hias Service”, a Jewish agency working for refugees (80th anniversary of the organisation’s foundation), and a fortnight later, the federation “Switzerland-Israel” met for their G.M. Also in October, the twelfth “Salon des Arts Ménagers” took place in Geneva where 300 firms from seventeen countries exhibited their household gadgets and articles.

In June, the film star Stewart Granger married in Geneva, and among the famous visitors to the town — not counting the personalities who came to the meetings and conferences of world organisations — were Princess Grace of Monaco, Ex-King Leopold of the Belgians, the King and Queen of Siam (who are both former students of Lausanne University), various royalty on their way to and from the wedding of King Constantine of the Hellenes, the Patriarch of Moscow, the Emperor of Ethiopia and the Soviet Minister of Transport.

In October, the Geneva authorities gave an official reception for the retiring President of the International Red Cross Committee, Mr. Léopold Boissier and his successor Mr. Samuel Gonard.

The eminent conductor Ernest Ansermet has been awarded the highest Greek honour, the Grand Cross of the Order of Phoenix. The Geneva Council of State has honoured the artist Edouard Elzingre with the citizenship of the town, and the Administrative Council awarded him the Medal of Geneva. In October, the prizes were distributed to the prize winners in the International Music Composition. Among the nine successful young artists was one Swiss, Rocco Filippini (second prize for cello) from Lugano. Queen Marie-José attended the prize giving in her own award for composition, which was won by Abdré Kovach, of Brazilian origin and a teacher of music at the Lausanne Conservatoire.

From 27th February to 14th March, the valuable treasures of Geneva’s libraries and museums will be on show to the public, and conducted tours will take place to stores and workshops not usually accessible to outsiders. In December, two pictures sold by a Geneva art gallery realised record prices, a Braque was sold for Fr.272,000.— and a Renoir for Fr.266,000.—.

(Mainly based on news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

AUTOMOBILE SALON IN GENEVA

The International Automobile Salon in Geneva takes its title very seriously — in 1964, for example, there were exhibitors from twenty-one countries. This year’s Salon (11th to 21st March) will contain more than 600 stands, which will feature the latest in automobiles, auto bodies, boats, trailers (caravans), motorcycles, bicycles, camping equipment, even helicopters. Nearly all European railway systems are offering special reduced-price tickets to visitors of the Salon. The Swiss Federal Railways are offering a round-trip ticket for the price of a one-way fare, provided the user has the ticket stamped at the Geneva Salon. Early hotel reservations are strongly recommended. This year, in addition to the very useful souvenir catalogue, there will be a short pamphlet giving important Salon information in four languages.

[S.N.T.O.]