Noble papal guard not to be abolished

" DEM GEWISSEN VERPFLICHTET "
ALT-BUNDESRAT WAHLEN'S SPEECHES A BEST SELLER

The speeches by the former Federal Councillor Prof. Dr. Friedrich Traugott Wahlen have always been significant and extremely interesting. Many of them are masterpieces and contain words of wisdom which will never lose their value. Extracts from speeches by the great statesman, made between 1940 and 1965, have been published in book form by Fretz and Wasmuth AG Zurich/Stuttgart, under the title "Dem Gewissen verpflichtet". It is edited by Alfred A. Haesler who, in his preface, gives the background to Mr. Wahlen's life and activities. The selected extracts range from " Plan Wahlen " to " the Red Cross and the Confederation", from "Hochkonjunktur und Menschenwürde" to "A Word to the Young Ones". They cover subjects like responsibility, threatened democracy, freedom and the message of the Church. An address to the Swiss Abroad at their Assembly in Lausanne in 1959, as well as his speeches when he was elected Federal Councillor on 11th December, 1958, and when he bid Parliament farewell on 8th December of last year, form part of the collection.

It is not surprising that the book is already in its fourth edition, and since its publication on 1st March, 15,000 copies have been sold. A French edition is being prepared for publication this autumn.

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The Canadian University Laval in Quebec awarded Alt-Bundesrat Wahlen an honorary doctorate earlier this year, in recognition of his great qualities as statesman and scientist as well as of his attachment to Canada where the former Federal Councillor spent seven years as agronomist.

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The Egyptian Government has been working on an agricultural scheme for the past three years. At the request of UNO and FAO, Prof. Wahlen went to Egypt on an extensive tour in order to give his considered opinion. His findings have just been published; he recommends continuation of the scheme, but with considerable changes, especially with regard to cattle breeding. (*Mainly A.T.S.*)

NOBLE PAPAL GUARD NOT TO BE ABOLISHED

" How many divisions has the Pope? ", Stalin reportedly asked.

Recently, eighteen recruits of the Swiss Guard were sworn in on the occasion of the annual celebration of the unit's military feat of 1527. The " divisions " of the Pope — the Swiss Guard, the Noble Guards, and the Palatine Guards — have a total strength of 650 men and a few officers.

If the Noble Guard leads the Vatican forces in rank (with its fifty aristocrats whose titles have been in their respective families in Italy for over 100 years), and if the Palatine Guard is the most numerous (500 men, all citizens of Rome and responsible for the Musical Corps), the Swiss Guard is by far the oldest — 460 years compared with about a century for the other two.

It was the " Impetuous Pope Julius II ", as Stendhal called him who created the Swiss Guard. Swiss mercenaries were highly regarded in all the principalities of the early XVIth Century, and so it was that the Pope sent his commander, Pierre von Hertenstein, to the " Confédération d'Allemagne Supérieure " to recruit 200 soldiers. On 21st January of the following year, the Swiss troops entered Rome and received the benediction of Julius II.

In those times, they did not have to wait long to show their mettle; in 1527, the Bourbons took Rome, laying it to waste. The Pope — then Clement VII — took refuge in the Château of Saint Ange, where he was protected by 42 Swiss Guards. The remainder of the Guard, 147 men, had been killed in defence of the Vatican. Their Captain, a certain Roust of Zurich, was massacred in St. Peter's itself and his wife put to death on his body.

On 7th June, 1527, the Château of Saint Ange was placed under siege and the Swiss Guards annihilated. Twenty years later Pope Paul III reformed it.

Until 1870 the Swiss Guard fought valiantly in the wars of the Vatican against enemy princes. The unity of Italy and the end of the temporal powers of the Pope sounded the death knoll for the Guard's military prowess.

A bellicose Colonel under the very peaceful Pope Pius X attempted to " militarise " the activities of the Guard. He lead the Guard in weekly military manœuvres at which it was his custom to arrive in full battle regalia, armed with field glasses and a brief case full of maps.

Colonel Repond's dream was to mount his canons on the terraces of the Basilica. " But what on earth for? , cried Pius X, overcome with astonishment. Disconcerted, the Commander of the Guard was forced to abandon his plans to fortify His Holiness against his enemies.

But the Swiss Guard owes much to Colonel Repond — that which has contributed more than anything else to their celebrity: their stunning uniforms, which are reproduced by the millions on toy lead soldiers sold in the souvenir shops of Rome. The costume, attributed to Michelangelo, was revived by the good Colonel, much to the delight of the tourists who want that prized photograph at the side of a Swiss Guard.

The defence budget of the Vatican unlike that of most modern states and some not much larger than it, is not a heavy drain on finances. Equipment for the Guards amounts to a total of 100 mausers and a hundred halberds.

Their colours is a flag of five horizontal bands of blue, red and yellow on which are attached the arms of the reigning Pope, Julius II and the Commander of the Guard.

Re-organised in 1959 by Pope John XXIII, the Swiss Guard Corps which has often been threatened by disbandment, was reduced in size. It now includes seventy men, two drummers, twenty-three non-commissioned officers, a chaplain and four officers including the Commander, Robert Nunlist.

Their quarters are decorated with old mosaics discovered during excavations under the Vatican. The young Swiss, which are still recruited from the Helvetian Cantons, enlist for a period of at least two years and have the right to a pension in Swiss francs after twenty years of service.

But their military functions, in this age of the atomic bomb, are limited to the guard of the external gates of the Vatican and the antichamber of the Pontifical Apartments The Swiss Guards, more than any military corps, is a symbol of peace, and force in the service of the spirit.

After the closing of the Ecumenical Council, it was rumored that Pope Paul VI was contemplating to drastically reduce, or abolish, the Swiss Guard, but it now appears that the plan has been set aside for many reasons, concerning the security of the Vatican and the many thousands of visitors.

That the Guard will remain seems confirmed by the recent admission of 18 new Swiss recruits.

(*" Swiss Journal " California*.)