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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1941

at

CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1 on AUGUST 2nd, 1941.



"It was not the number of our Ancestors, but their Unity that steeled their arm and crushed their enemies."

Albrecht von Haller.

On August the 1st Switzerland celebrated her 650th birthday, this memorable day was dedicated to the heroes of old, who won for her freedom against overwhelming odds.

The Swiss Colony in London assembled in a great patriotic rally at the Central Hall, Westminster, on Saturday, August 2nd, 1941, to pay tribute to the men, who for centuries had stood steadfast, and laid down their lives to preserve the independence and liberty of our country.

Glorious are the pages written in the annals of Swiss history of valiant deeds on the battlefields of St. Jakob an der Birs, Näfels, Sempach, Morgarten, etc., but no less conspicuous are the services rendered by our country in the sphere of humanity.

In a war-torn world, Switzerland has continuously stretched out a helping hand to those who have suffered and been stricken down through the ravages of war; thousands have in the past and the present found a harbour of refuge within the borders of the Confederation.

Once again the furies of war and strife have been let loose, and with awe we are witnessing to-day the greatest and bloodiest struggle the world has ever seen. Whilst around our frontiers, and throughout four continents countries are involved in a life and death struggle, Switzerland, by the Grace of God, still stands untouched, like an oasis in a desolate desert, and it behoves us to lift up our hearts and to bend our knees in humiliation and gratitude for the mercies shown to us by a divine providence.

Sweat and tears are indeed the inheritance left to our generation; threatening are the clouds and disturbed are our hearts, and only the firm belief, that in the end right must prevail, fortifies our minds and gives us courage and strength to look forward to the parting of the clouds, when the golden rays of the sun

will, once again spread their light over a world of Peace.—

Who amongst us has forgotten previous Swiss celebrations at the Central Hall? True enough these were held under more favourable conditions, but one thing is certain, never before have our countrymen met in this great Metropolis with greater enthusiasm, and with a deeper feeling, that we are all children of the same country, that country which we are proud to call our homeland.

Shortly before the official part of the programme started, there was not a vacant seat to be seen, and according to information received, about 2,600 people were present, an attendance which beats all previous records, and which is a splendid example of Swiss solidarity and patriotism.

The Hall was gaily decorated with huge Swiss flags and the twenty-four cantonal escutcheons. Mr. Godfrey, who, as hitherto was in charge of the decorations told me that some of these flags were already displayed on the occasion of the 600th anniversary celebration of the Confederation, which was held fifty years ago at the Star and Garter Hotel in Richmond, but these were not the only veterans, nearly a dozen of our compatriots who had attended this celebration were also present.

I have never quite grasped why, in order to open a patriotic gathering at this Hall, a cow bell must be sounded, it does not seem to me much of a compliment to an audience of intelligent people; in any case the bell without a cow "hanging on it" is only half the thing, and I hope that on future occasions one of our four footed friends will be found to go round to summon the faithful, although I for one, would suggest that an "Alphorn" might be used instead.

The programme started with the singing of the Swiss Hymn "Sur nos monts, quand le soleil" with

the accompaniment of the organ, and was followed by the prayers and exhortations of the three clergymen of the Colony, in our national languages.

Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the Organisation Committee then introduced the Swiss Minister, who was present with Madame Thurnheer and the entire staff of the Legation, he said :

Monsieur le Ministre, Madame Thurnheer,
Compatriots and Friends,

We have been called together by the kind invitation of our Minister to celebrate the 650th Anniversary of the foundation of our country. On behalf of the Organising Committee I am proud and happy to be able to welcome here such a vast and representative gathering of Swiss citizens resident in Great Britain, and I wish to express the committee's hope that this solemn function may ennoble our thoughts, may refresh the pride we feel in our citizenship of Switzerland, and may redouble our sense of gratitude to the memory of our forefathers who have worked and prayed and fought for us during these six and a half centuries.

We have received a message of congratulation from home which I will read to you :—

LE SECRETARIAT DES SUISSES A L'ETRANGER ADRESSE DE SCHWYTZ ET DU RUTLI MINISTRE THURNHEER ET COLONIE SUISSE VOEUX PATRIOTIQUES ET FERVENTS. FELICITE CHACUN POUR COURAGE OPTIMISME ESPRIT DE SOLIDARITE. VOTRE EXEMPLE FAIT DU BIEN. ALLONS AVEC VOUS DE L'AVANT CONTRE LA TEMPETE JUSQU'AU NOUVEAU MATIN ET AUX JOYEUX REVOIR SUR SOL SACRE DE LA PATRIE. BRIOD.

to which our Minister replied as follows :—

VOUS ACCUSE RECEPTION AIMABLE TELEGRAMME. TRANSMIS IMMEDIATEMENT PRESIDENT COMITE ORGANISATEUR SUTER NSH. VOTRE MESSAGE SERA LU SAMEDI A L'ASSEMBLEE DE LA COLONIE SUISSE. TRES TOUCHE PAR SENTIMENTS EXPRIMES A CETTE OCCASION VOUS REMERCIER SINCEREMENT AU NOM DE TOUS. THURNHEER.

We have, on our part, transmitted the following messages of loyalty to our Authorities in Switzerland :—

AU GENERAL GUIBAN. E.M.G.A. EN CAMPAGNE. LES OFFICIERS SOUS OFFICIERS SOLDATS ET TOUTE LA COLONIE SUISSE EN GRANDE BRETAGNE ASSEMBLES POUR COMMEMORER LE PREMIER AOUT VOUS EXPRIMENT LEUR GRATITUDE ET TOUTE LEUR CONFIANCE. ILS SONT RECONNAISSANTS POUR LES ADMIRABLES SACRIFICES FAITS PAR NOTRE ARMEE. SI LES EVENEMENTS L'EXIGENT COMPTER SUR EUX.

THURNHEER AU NOM DU COMITE ORGANISATEUR.

AU PRESIDENT DE LA CONFEDERATION. SCHWYTZ. LA COLONIE SUISSE EN GRANDE BRETAGNE ASSEMBLEE A L'OCCASION DU 650EME ANNIVERSAIRE DE LA CONFEDERATION VOUS TEMOIGNE SA FIDELITE ET SON DEVOUEMENT INEBRANLABLES ENVERS LA PATRIE. PUISSENT NOTRE HONNEUR ET LIBERTE ETRE PRESERVES PAR LE MEME ESPRIT ET LES FORCES QUI CREERENT NOTRE INDEPENDANCE.

SUTER PRESIDENT COMITE ORGANISATEUR.

These messages of loyalty to our country which we have sent to Switzerland on your behalf we know to express the true feelings and convictions of every

one of you present here, and indeed of the whole Swiss colony in Great Britain.

It is my pleasure also to announce that the "Edelweiss" which have been distributed to you are the personal gift of our Minister. We express our thanks to Monsieur Thurnheer for this kind and thoughtful token of his personal contact with each of us.

Monsieur Thurnheer on ascending the platform received an enthusiastic reception, he said :

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Dear Compatriots,

We are celebrating to-day the 650th Anniversary of the foundation of Switzerland, the oldest Republic in the world. It is evident, that the men who so long ago lay the foundation for this solid construction must have been men of great vision and foresight. We are therefore justified on this day to go back into our history and study the events which led up to the time from which our Constitution dates. With your permission, and I hope it will not tire you, I will go *far* back in history.

In the stone age, about 6000 years B.C., the territory which is to-day Switzerland was already populated; the number of the inhabitants was very small; their livelihood depended on fishing and hunting. By and by the population increased and in the later stone age, about 2500 B.C., primitive agriculture became known to them. The country was at this period almost entirely covered by forests. The lakes and rivers were the only means of communication between the different settlements or villages, which were then built on water along the river and lake shores. This way of building developed to such a state of perfection that the historians consider them the best type of lake dwellers abode. The inhabitants of Switzerland at this time were the Etruscans, the Ligurians, and the Celts. The Celts were a highly intelligent race. They settled in different parts of the European Continent as well as in England. — The Bronze age saw the beginning of contact, across the Alps, between the North and the South which developed still more in the Iron age, which covers the thousand years immediately preceding the birth of Christ. Although the exact time of the arrival in Switzerland of the Helvetians is not known, one knows for certain that they inhabited the territories between the Alps on one side, the Rhine and Jura on the other and between the lakes of Geneva and Constance. After these sturdy people our country got its first name, Helvetia, and rightly so, as the Helvetians were the first to occupy almost the whole territory of later Switzerland north of the Alps.

The knowledge we have of these periods is entirely based on findings and traces left by the former inhabitants. The great Julius Caesar is the first person who has written a document concerning the Helvetians. He tells us, how a great number of them, 368,000, started to move towards the south, passing through the region of Geneva and how his legions succeeded, after very hard fighting, to stop them and to induce them to return home. This was in the year 58 B.C. (About the same time Caesars legions penetrated for the first time to England). The influence of Roman culture and administration made itself felt for centuries. On the Gotthard, the frontiers of four different Roman provinces met.

To-day, in three Swiss cantons bordering on the Gotthard, three different languages, all derived from the Latin, Romantsch, Italian and French, are spoken. Christianity came to Switzerland with the Roman administration and in the year 400 A.D., we had our first bishop.

About this time, the decline of the Roman Empire started. The Roman troops were withdrawn from England, from positions along the Rhine and partially from Switzerland. This was caused by the great migration of peoples which brought parts of the Alemanic tribes to the eastern part of Switzerland and parts of the Burgundians to the West. Although the power of these invaders of Switzerland became great, they did neither extinguish the then existing inhabitants, nor ruin their culture or trade. We know that specially the Alemanic tribes had a considerable export of cattle from north of the Alps to Italy. Thanks to the good roads made by the Romans, one could already trade with far distant countries. At this time, English wool and cloth were much in demand. The Alemanic tribes being heathen, they drove Christianity out of the eastern part of our country which they had conquered. An Irish Monk, Gallus, was the one who much later on introduced Christianity to these parts again. He was the founder of the famous Cloister St. Gall. The rest of Switzerland, the western part, became Christianized by Rome.

Coinciding with the time of the Burgundians' and Alemanic tribes' arrival in Switzerland, a period of transition set in in Europe which lasted until the foundation of the Empire of Charles the Great. The organisation of this Empire was strong. Switzerland, though making a part of it, became for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire again an entity, with the Tessin included. However, at Charles' death, the Empire split up. While in France and in England well organised monarchies developed, the German Empire was divided up more and more into small parts, ruled by cloisters or by the nobility.

In Switzerland, the Habsburgs became one of the most important of these ruling families. They were ambitious and grasping for power. In central Switzerland, the Waldstätten, the spirit of independence was exceptionally strong and the majority of the people were free landowners. They formed the Markt- und Landsgemeinde. Rudolf von Habsburg, elected German King, did not approve of these democratic Waldstätten and took measures to control them. He built castles on strategical points and appointed sheriffs to look after his interests. The Waldstätten realised that their independence was in great danger. Immediately after the death of Rudolf, they met at Rütli and declared their independence. They drew up the rules for a constitution, the first constitution of Switzerland from which all the others derive, and put their seals on this document, the Bundesbrief. It is interesting to note what happens around this time, 1283 to 1295, in England. The historian Green writes: "The long period of national formation had come practically to an end. With the reign of Edward 1st begins modern England, the constitutional England in which we live."

In the Bundesbrief, the three cantons provided for a perpetual league entered into, in view of the evil of the time and with the purpose better to defend themselves and their own. They promised each other help to resist attacks of evil-doers and to avenge injustice and injuries. The help should as a rule only be given when asked for, and then without any compensation, but when it was evident that one of the members was surprised by an attack so sudden and so unexpected that he had no time to ask for help, the others should give it without being asked. In case of a dispute between the three members, prudent men of the Confederation should come together to settle it in a form that seemed right to them. The party which rejected such judgment, should be considered an enemy to the other Confederates. No judge who obtained his office for a price or one who was not a native or a resident should be recognised. The judgment of the judge should be respected, there were articles concerning different crimes, mostly with the intention of taking away the revenge from the private person and to leave restoration of justice in the hands of the judge. Concealment of fugitives from justice and contempt of court should be punished. The leading thought in creating the league was the conservation and protection of the rights of each of the three countries as well as their members. For this purpose they got united on the basis of equal rights within the league.

The perpetual league is the solid rock on which Switzerland was built and from which it developed till our times.

The famous document starts with the words: "In the name of Almighty God." This is a proof that the people who made it were deeply religious; they knew that the perpetual league could not depend alone on the will of human beings. It is a document of democracy and freedom, both so dear to every Swiss. It is an expression of our national motto: "One for all and all for one," and was written by men for men who had the advantages of traditions going centuries back, who lived a modest and hard life in remote valleys of the Alps, but who had a good knowledge of what was going on in the world around them. They got news from travellers crossing the alpine passes and as often as not were travelled men themselves. They were strong and self-reliant people who dared to take this courageous step for their independence.

From that day up to now this our document of freedom has remained a treasure in our hearts and inspired us in times of strife, internal and external difficulties. It has changed several times both in form and contents, but never in spirit. It lives in the heart of every Swiss citizen; in the beginning it united 3 cantons — now 22. The guarantee of territory is no empty word, we have fought for this territory, we have shed our blood in many battles in the past; to-day our army is mobilised and ready to defend Switzerland at all costs. Finally, a peaceful sign of our attachment to all what is embedded in our Constitution lies in the fact that lately an uninterrupted stream of Swiss people, from every part of the country, men and women, young and old, have been going to the Rütli, this unspoiled place of dream and beauty, to pray for their country.

Dear compatriots, the 1st of August celebrations in Switzerland were this year, because of the earnestness of the times, simple and dignified. According to a comment in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," our chief of the Army, General Guisan, had for this one night the intention of lifting the black-out ban, to enable us to follow our ancient custom of lighting fires on our mountain tops. I am convinced, that those at home, must have been deeply moved by this sight, thanking God for the past and praying for the future welfare of Switzerland. Let these fires be a symbol of our ever-burning love for our country!

The Minister's speech was much applauded.

The first part of the programme was concluded with the singing of the "Rütli Lied," Mr. E. P. Dick being at the organ. This mighty song, rendered with patriotic fervour, glorifying the spot where the birth of the Confederation took place must have awakened in many happy memories.

On the programme it was mentioned that "Würschtli hot and tender, and Türtli sweet and frail" would be served during the interval in the Crush Hall; I do not know whether the latter name is a fancy one, we used to call it the "Foyer" which sounds much more refined, but whichever is correct, it truly lived up to its first mentioned name.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid, who, as of old were in charge of the catering, are to be heartily congratulated on their fine display, considering that they must have been handicapped through the rationing regulations. The large staff of helpers had to cope with a hitherto unknown onslaught, their efficiency and smiling faces avoided, what at one time seemed to become a rather dangerous crush.

Unfortunately many had to go without the "Würschtli and Türtli," all they got was an appetising smell, and a distant view of them, but, of course, neither Mr. Schmid, nor Mr. Bartholdi, who supplied the excellent "Würschtli," could guess that they had to feed such a large multitude.

Whilst the battle for food was still raging in the Crush Hall, the more peaceful and less materially minded people flocked back to their seats and took part in the community singing; never before have I realised how prolific, Swiss folk-lore is.

Swiss-dialect, French, Italian and Romantsch songs followed each other at a bewildering pace. Young and old joined in and lustily sang those songs which many of them have learned and sung in their youth, even some of our English friends were caught in the turmoil of melodies, and a friend of mine, hailing from Scotland, made a frantic effort, not without success, to spell and sing: "My Aetti ischt an Appenzeller."

In former times the Swiss Orchestra used to lead the community singing, unfortunately our fiddling friends were not available, but Mr. Dick at the organ was a good and efficient substitute.

After a time some of the throats showed signs of becoming "cracked," and it was therefore a welcome relaxation when it was announced that the second part of the programme would start with a film.

The lights were switched off, and on the screen appeared lovely coloured views of our beautiful canton

of Ticino. What a host of memories were awakened by pictures showing the lakes of Lugano and Maggiore, the towns of Lugano, Locarno, Brissago, the villages of Gandria, Morcote, Melide and Ponte Tresa. How proud we all are of this little jewelled corner of Switzerland, where the sun seems to shine so much brighter, and where the rain, at times, comes down so much more persistently than in other parts of our country.

The film picturing the "Fête au Camélias" held at Locarno was on various occasions interrupted by loud cheering, especially the featuring of the procession of the flower covered chariots, and the amusing dancing scenes.

Another sound film passed in review all the cantonal capitals, this gave vent to an orgy of "Kantönligeist" which was most amusing, judging by the applause, I think the capitals of the cantons of Geneva and Ticino were easy winners, with a probable second of Berne. (I am a Bernese!)

When the lights were switched on again, eight or nine young Ladies, dressed in the Ticino national costumes, appeared on the platform and sang some of their popular folk songs, the performers seemed rather bewildered by their large audience, but in spite of an apparent shyness, which I thought added to their charms, fully deserved the acknowledgment for their efforts.

A Swiss gathering without yodeling is like roast beef without dripping, and when our friend Mr. v. Bergen put in an appearance dressed in his "Mälcherchüttli" we knew that we were in for a good thing, and let it be said at once, he did not disappoint us, both his singing and yodeling was most enjoyable, especially the rendering of the song "dr Köbu, dr Chrigu u dr Sopp." I am sure we all could have listened to more, unfortunately the shortness of time available deprived us of that pleasure.

Some time ago the rumour went around in the Colony that the Swiss Choral Society was "as dead as mutton," I had my doubts about this, and I was glad to see that this Society, which has given us so much pleasure in the past, has celebrated on this occasion a splendid resurrection. Mr. Dick, its vivacious conductor, assembled around him nearly forty valiant singers, who gave us two songs "Z'Heiweliied" and "Noch ruhn im weichen Morgenglanz," both excellently intonated, especially impressive was the "Wach auf" refrain.

Again the lights were switched off, and a further film was shown, illustrating an attack of Swiss army units on a fortified enemy trench, supported by an intense artillery barrage, with heavy and light machine guns, trench mortars, flame throwers, hand grenades and portable mines for blowing up barbed wire obstacles, it was a very vivid picture full of excitement and the thunderous applause which greeted this performance proved once again that the small but efficient Swiss Army has a tender spot in our hearts.

Once again Mr. Suter climbed on the platform to address the gathering, he said:

Before bringing our Celebration to a close, will you permit me to say a very few words to you?

Monsieur Thurnheer, You have been one of us at this solemn function and your words have given us courage and enlightenment. The essence of your

speech has been the significance of that wonderful pact of 1291 on the Rütli:— A noble treaty between noble people and one which has produced noble deeds for 650 years. It was a simple, straightforward and unvarnished pact of friendship between neighbours for mutual assistance and common defence against a common enemy; this pact makes it very clear that nothing should be attempted and nothing could be achieved without the help of God: it confers no manner of right or privilege or advantage to any one person in the Confederation, high or low, without exacting a corresponding duty or obligation. This pact is the true and fundamental basis of our Swiss citizenship; such was the faith of our forefathers, such is our faith to-day.

May I say therefore, Monsieur le Ministre, that you have a very safe colony of sound Swiss to look after. We may at times be stubborn, and even obstinate, but — that is the nature of every good Swiss and always will be so. We are very conscious of our good name in this hospitable land of England, and we mean to keep it so. If many of our sons are to-day fighting with the British Forces, this does not imply any loss of the patrimony of our birth-right, but it does mean that these sons of ours are fighting for identically the same ideals as we should under the pact of 1291:— THE DEFENCE OF HONOUR, THE DEFENCE OF TRUTH AND THE DEFENCE OF FREEDOM.

On behalf of the Committee I express our gratitude to our Minister, to the Artists for the enjoyment which they have given us and to you all for your demonstration of sincere loyalty and solidarity.

The 650th Anniversary celebration of the Swiss Confederation ended befittingly with the singing of our National Anthem.

In summing up we can all be proud of the way in which this celebration was conducted, without pomp, simple and dignified, and in accordance with the times we are passing through.

Thanks are due to the organisers, the performers and not least to those Ladies who, by wearing their national costumes added greatly to the brightness of the occasion. I would also heartily congratulate my old friend Gallus, the poet laureate of the Swiss Colony, who dedicated his cleverly composed "Sonetten Kranz" to the Swiss Colony. If I am permitted to voice a disappointment it would be this, that very little of our Swiss dialect was heard in the official address. —

Across the sea, back home where on the 1st of August the church bells were ringing, and where on the mountains the fires were shedding their lights as symbols of liberty, our people have remembered their brethren in foreign lands, many of whom are facing grim dangers, they have sent us their greetings and assurance that our hearts are beating as loyally as ever before for our country which we know is facing hard and bitter times, and across the Alps we are sending them this message: "Be strong, be faithful to the tradition inherited which gained us the respect of the universe, be humble before God and courageous before man, God bless you and protect our land;" and let me end with these words: The destiny of Switzerland may yet be a mission.

ST.

SERVICE AT EGLISE SUISSE. 79, Endell Street, W.C.2.

Sunday, 3rd August, saw a very large gathering at the Eglise Suisse in Endell Street, prettily and tastefully decorated with flowers and the Swiss flag, where the French and the German-speaking Protestant Communities of the Swiss Colony in London came together and in a simple and very dignified manner to give thanks to the Almighty who by his great wisdom has thus far preserved our dear homeland from the ravages of war, and to pray fervently that of His unbounded goodness He will further spare the land of our fathers.

Every seat in the church was taken and the ushers were hard put to find sufficient chairs for the late arrivals. It is doubtful if ever so many people were assembled in that building which in itself is a bit of Switzerland.

And how befitting it was as a continuation or perhaps a closing act of the preceeding day when French and German speaking Swiss sat next to one another in the vast Central Hall, that in this more confined space of the Eglise Suisse they sat even closer together and worshipped God each in his or her own way and language as it is but right and as it should be.

The sermons given by the Rev. Pradervand and the Rev. E. Jornot in French and German respectively, were earnest and to the heart of everyone and I am sure made deep and lasting impressions on all those present.

The Minister and Madame Thurnheer attended the service, the impressiveness of which was enhanced, if such were possible by the two exceedingly well rendered solos by Miss Sophie Wyss.

SERVICE AT ST. PETER AND ST. EDWARD, Palace Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

There was a very representative congregation at St. Peter & St. Edward, the Garrison Church to the Wellington Barracks near by and which church was gratuitously put at the disposal by the Cathedral Authorities to the Swiss Colony for the Roman Catholic Service in commemoration of the 650th anniversary of the foundation of Switzerland.

The Swiss Minister and Madame Thurnheer were welcomed on arrival by the Rev. A. Lanfranchi, two "prie dieu's" covered with the Swiss flag were placed near the sanctuary for the Minister and Madame Thurnheer whilst the altar and the pulpit were artistically decorated with flowers and the national flags.

At the beginning of the mass the congregation sang the Swiss National Anthem, during the "Credo" the Swiss National Hymn whilst during the "offertory" the choir recruited from members of the "Unione Ticinese" sang the "Ave Verum" and the "Salve Regina" was played at the organ during the communion.

In his sermon Father Lanfranchi exhorted the congregation in German, French and Italian and concluding in English to live up to the christian ideals, faith, hope and charity of our forefathers who with the words: "In the name of God the Almighty"