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## THE BATTLE OF ST. JACOB ON THE BIRS.

(26 August, 1444)

(A poem by "Gallus" published in the  
SWISS OBSERVER, 28 July, 1944).

When Zürich was invested and civil war was rife,  
She sought from mighty Austria assistance in her  
strife.

The Swiss sent out their foot-troops, they marched  
toward the Rhine,  
Laid siege to Farnsburg castle, stronghold of  
Falkenstein.

Whilst Frederick, the Emp'ror, looked westward where  
that day  
All powerful and dreaded, the King of France held  
sway.

Commanded by the Dauphin, his host of Armagnacs  
Should bring to heel those yokels who'd dared such rash  
attacks.

The allies' aim was Basel, a proud and wealthy town,  
They'd raise the siege of Zürich and strike the en'my  
down,  
Destroy and smash his forces wherever he may stand,  
Then conquer, aye, and plunder that much desired land.

As dull and grey the morning dawned on a sultry night  
The Dauphin's mighty army from Sundgau hove in  
sight.  
Soon Muttenz fell and Pratteln, helpless against the  
foe,  
An easy prey seemed Basel, she'd fall without a blow.

Meantime the Swiss were marching, the river Birs they  
crossed,  
Expecting but a vanguard, o'ercome at little cost.  
Instead it was the main force they found, to their  
dismay,  
As David faced Goliath, so now they stood at bay.

At this the en'my gloated, his hopes indeed ran high,  
There seemed no need to worry about such paltry fry.  
The Swiss took earnest counsel, they weighed the heavy  
odds :  
" We'll give the foe our bodies, our souls, howe'er, are  
God's ".

A grim and bloody struggle raged till the noontide sun  
Shone as the foreign legions swarmed o'er the ground  
they'd won.

At last the Swiss retreated, contesting ev'ry pace,  
They fought like angry lions and suffered no disgrace.

St. Jacob, wayside chapel and hospital beside,  
By solid walls surrounded, a strongpoint did provide.  
Within, the Swiss found cover, these weary men, hard  
pressed,  
Where they could tend their wounded, refresh them-  
selves and rest.

But shortlived was the respite, for soon the wall was  
breached,  
The Armagnacs surged forward, the danger point was  
reached.  
Yet worse was still to follow, the en'my's fire grew  
And set ablaze the buildings, the scorching flames swept  
through.

The gallant Swiss were striving to stem the dreadful  
flood,  
But many of them perished, gave willingly their blood.  
While others, nothing daunted, although their halberds  
broke,  
Continued grimly fighting amidst the fire and smoke.

For though the hafts were splintered, these halberds,  
used with skill  
As makeshift battle-axes, were deadly weapons still.  
And other deeds of valour does History report :  
How arrows from their bodies they tore when theirs ran  
short.

How, not content with trying their stronghold to  
defend,  
They launched repeated sallies, the en'my's line to  
bend.  
Great were the French troops' losses, by thousands  
were they slain,  
Till they became disheartened, their efforts seeming  
vain.

But as the day was waning, Von Rechberg's troops  
drew near,  
The Armagnacs, thus strengthened, forgot their tran-  
sient fear.  
The Swiss, well nigh exhausted, few being whole and  
sound,  
Determined and unyielding, held stubbornly their  
ground.

A knight, 'twas Munch von Landskron, in shining  
armour plate,  
Approached the crumbling ruins, beheld the broken  
gate  
And as he, high on horseback, the bloody field surveyed :  
" To-day we bathe in roses " with scornful laugh he  
said.

At which one of the warriors within that stricken place  
Picked up a jagged wall-stone and hurled it in his face.  
" Here ", cried he, " feed on roses ". — He'd thrown  
it with such force  
That, stunned, the haughty rider fell dying from his  
horse.

Reduced to but two hundred, those heroes gave not way,  
Unflinching and unconquered, they held the French at  
bay.  
Whilst of the Dauphin's army eight thousand men were  
lost,  
His confidence was shaken, too great he found the cost.

For him the fight was over, he sounded the retreat,  
He cannot now reach Basel, he dare not court defeat.  
A treaty signed soon after in Alsace close at hand  
At last brought peace with honour into the war-torn  
land.

Now, after five long cent'ries, St. Jacob points anew  
What fortitude, devotion and faithfulness can do.  
When on these deeds we ponder, our hearts with wonder  
fill  
And praised be God Almighty that Switzerland lives  
still.

—(Translated by J.J.F.S.)