

Salute to Switzerland

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SALUTE TO SWITZERLAND.

by
CICELY WILLIAMS.

To-day, from dawn until sundown, groups of Swiss citizens carrying huge loads of wood will be on their way from their towns and villages to the surrounding heights to make ready the great bonfires that to-night will blaze up all over the country.

It was on August 1st, 1291, that the Swiss Confederation, now the oldest republic in the world, was born. Three sturdy Swiss met on the field called "Rütli" in the mountains above the Lake of Lucerne and swore that the little Swiss States would stand faithfully together against the oppressors from the surrounding powers.

From that time on Freedom has been the keynote of Switzerland's history. Events within the frontiers of the mountain democracy have shaped the history of Europe. The battles of Morgarten, Sempach and St. Jakob an der Birs, fought by a handful of Swiss against armed hordes from Austria and France, prevented those countries from becoming all-powerful in Europe. Popes, Emperors and Generals have struggled across the Alps on their journeyings from the Tiber to the Rhine. Poets, artists and musicians have lived and worked in Switzerland. Rousseau, Byron and Gibbon, owe a debt to their sojourn among the mountains. The Reformation had its beginnings there in the work of Zwingli and Calvin.

Switzerland is a small nation of only four million inhabitants, without colonies, with no great natural resources, speaking four languages, holding both the Protestant and Catholic faiths. And yet she has no minority problem, no racial or religious difficulties. Her citizens are not conscious of minorities or of majorities.

Freedom is the basis of Swiss life and history, but the word "freedom" changes its meaning when it crosses the Swiss frontier. There is no liberty for the individual to live at his own sweet will, oblivious of the rest of the community. Rather does it impose a high degree of self-restraint and self-sacrifice upon the people as a whole, that all may enjoy personal freedom within the framework of the Swiss Constitution. "One for all: all for one", is the national motto and it is strictly adhered to.

The Swiss detests being dictated to from outside, but he is prepared to accept strong national authority from within provided that the saving democratic principle of distribution of power in the Government is maintained.

Swiss democracy is both conservative and progressive; it is based on careful thinking, on the dignity of hard work and on the nobility of self-imposed discipline,

O. BARTHOLDI, 4-6, CHARLOTTE STREET, W.1

Although my present stocks are limited, I shortly hope to be in a position to satisfy the pre-war requirements of my old friends. When stocks are received and I commence manufacturing again, an announcement will be made.

combined with a true respect for the rights of the weak and of the individual. It remains, in fact, faithful to the Christian origin of our civilisation.

Throughout the eighteenth century, when every other state on the continent was a despotism, travellers spoke with envy of the breath of liberty that pervaded Switzerland. Down the centuries men of steady foresight have carefully planned ahead, and Swiss history, like our own, is pre-eminently the history of a people, moulded by the character and will of the people.

Swiss neutrality was guaranteed by the European powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Switzerland regards this neutrality as her duty and as her right. The passes across the Alps and the railways which run beneath them, indispensable arteries of continental life, she looks upon as a European legacy held in her own right which she must defend against all aggressors. In the great struggle which has just ended the *reduit national* centred around the S. Gothard watershed. Alpine soldiers, brought up on the idea of liberty, would have defended it to the end.

The Swiss themselves are hard-working and individualistic. The family is the basis of the nation and the Swiss loves his home and his personal freedom. His dread of slavery, his contempt for the aggressor gave him unbounded sympathy for the enslaved peoples of Europe. Throughout the war years the Swiss rendered untold humanitarian service to the suffering nations around them.

And what of the love and admiration which some of us have for Switzerland — we who have been exiled for six whole years? We long for the Alpine synthesis of northern grandeur and southern charm; for the challenge of rock and snow, for the benediction of the Alpine sun. Like stars after a storm, memories come flooding back. Memories of difficulties tackled on some great peak with trusted Swiss friends; memories again of sparkling snow and frosted pines as our skis winged their way down the slope through the forest to the valley below.

How we loved the simple things! The gentle "Grüss Gott" of the peasants, the cheerful ding-dong of the station bells, the hot coffee and cherry jam in the Buffet at Basle.

The war has given us cause for even greater gratitude to Switzerland. But for her, our prisoners would have been in sorry plight. The work of the International Red Cross is admired by all and has accomplished extraordinary feats. In the summer of 1940 half a million allied prisoners were saved from immeasurable disaster by help rushed from Geneva. And the story is yet to be told of what Switzerland did for our men in Germany when the Nazis became frantic in the hour of defeat.

All through the war, the Swiss believed in Britain. In June 1940, when our best friends the world over feared and believed that we were finished, it was a Swiss official in London who said quietly: "The R.A.F. will save Britain — and the world." The soul of one free people responded to the courage of another.

Tonight the great bonfires of freedom will blaze up to the Alpine sky from the little mountain stronghold that still shelters the persecuted — a cell of democracy in the heart of the continent; the playground of Europe in time of peace; the healing place of nations in time of war.

1st August, 1945.