

Swiss national day celebration

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1946

at the STOLL THEATRE, KINGSWAY, W.C.2
on SUNDAY, 28th JULY, 1946

For the second time since the "cease fire" has sounded, the Swiss Colony in London has once again celebrated the anniversary of our country's foundation.

In my last year's reflections on this event, I expressed the hope, that now that the shadows of night which for so long had been spread over a war-weary world, had been pierced by the golden sunrays of Peace, a better and a more just world might arise from the ruins of the past; a world in which the family of nations could live in peace, sharing with each other the good things which Providence had so bountifully provided them with.

Very little of that hope which was so fervently expressed by all right thinking men and women, all over the four continents of the globe, has materialised.

Mistrust, bad faith, selfishness and pettiness are endangering the future; nations which fought heroically side by side, to end for ever, a ghastly domination by an irresponsible foe, are to-day squabbling over minor issues, accusing each other of cunning and craftiness.

Instead of trying in a spirit of goodwill, brotherly love and justice, to solve the manifold and admittedly intricate difficulties which beset the world to-day, harsh words are uttered across conference tables, and the spectre of war, more terrible than ever before, looms threatening on the horizon.

* * *

During this time when the fate of mankind is in the balance for generations to come, the Swiss community has assembled in a spirit of humility and thankfulness to commemorate the 655th anniversary of the Confederation.

As on previous occasions, and in order to give a chance to as many as possible to attend this celebration, it was decided that the London Swiss should meet on Sunday, July 28th, three days earlier than the actual date.

Again admittance could only be gained by ticket, and I am glad to state that it worked very well; there was no crushing and stampeding, and thus some of the not very edifying scenes which occurred in the past, were eliminated.

Owing to the fact, that a large number of our compatriots were able this year to spend their holiday again in our homeland, the attendance was less numerous than last year, but about 2,000 of our countrymen assembled at the Stoll Theatre.

It is to be regretted that this time no display could be made of the many Swiss flags and cantonal escutcheons, which on former occasions helped largely

to add "Stimmung" to the gathering. I was told that the L.C.C. regulations did not allow of such a display for reasons of safety in case of fire. There was, however, one large Swiss flag and the Union Jack, side by side, flown in front of the stage.

The programme started, as all patriotic meetings of old did, with an impressive prayer, given by Father A. Lanfranchi; it was followed by the reading of the Swiss Pact (Bundesbrief) by Pastor H. Blum.

The patriotic oration on this memorable day was delivered by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, who received a hearty reception from the entire gathering.

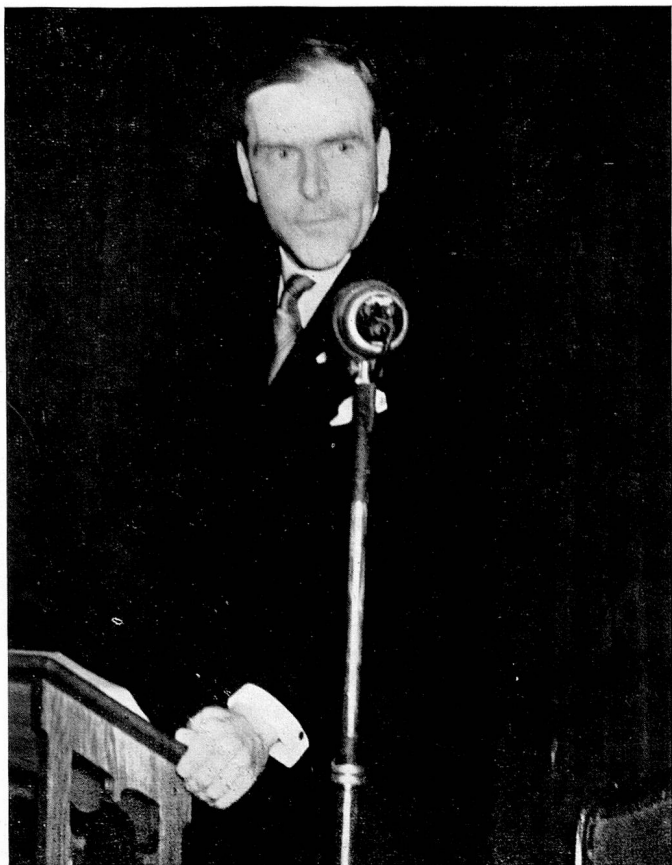
He said:

"Chers compatriotes Suisses de Londres,

Mes amis,

Le six-cent-cinquante-cinquième anniversaire de la Fondation de notre Patrie nous trouve réunis, unis dans l'atmosphère et dans l'ambiance qui, traditionnellement, entourent la Fête du 1er août à Londres. Nous assistons à cette fête, l'âme transportée par une vive émotion. Je remercie, tout simplement, très sincèrement tous ceux, toutes celles qui n'ont ménagé aucun effort pour que la date sacrée du serment du Grütli soit commémorée, comme il le sied, avec le concours de tous; ils ont bien mérité de la Colonie suisse en Grande-Bretagne.

Jamais, durant les années de guerre, les Suisses de Londres, de la Grande-Bretagne, de l'Empire britannique, n'ont manqué à l'appel spirituel de la Patrie. Ils sont restés fidèles au sol natal et ceux qui n'étaient pas à même de donner un concours actif à la défense de notre cher pays, ont rempli d'autres devoirs essentiels: celui de la solidarité surtout — cette solidarité prescrite dans le Pacte fédéral de 1291 — envers des compatriotes éprouvée par les circonstances, celui aussi de maintenir vivantes, dans nos familles suisses, les traditions ancestrales de notre peuple. Au moment où nous espérons voir poindre l'aube d'une période nouvelle de paix et de travail, la Suisse aura besoin, comme de tout temps, du concours de ses fils et de ses filles vivant à l'étranger. Les Suisses de l'Angleterre, de l'Empire britannique sont conscients de la responsabilité accrue qui sera la leur du fait même que les colonies suisses d'autres pays sont devenues plus clairsemées et que beaucoup de membres de celles-ci (60,000 en tout) ont du regagner le sol natal. A vous, à nous tous il incombera de maintenir ouvertes les avenues, non seulement des



THE SWISS MINISTER DELIVERING HIS ADDRESS.

échanges matériels et personnels de tout ordre entre notre pays, d'une part, l'Angleterre et les Etats du Commonwealth britannique, de l'autre, sais encore de cimenter, jour par jour, par des efforts individuels, la confiance et la compréhension qui unissent traditionnellement la Suisse à la Grande-Bretagne et à l'Empire.

Ce sera là un moyen de prouver à notre chère patrie, si miraculeusement préservée, par la grâce de Dieu, de la tourmente, l'attachement profond et indéfectible dont nous renouvelons, aujourd'hui, le serment.

But now, my dear countrymen and countrywomen, I will revert to the language which is that of most of your social gatherings, the language which is familiar to all of you and in which I have therefore been requested to give part of my short address. We meet amidst an all-pervading feeling of thankfulness. Of gratitude to our country, which stands undaunted and comparatively unharmed after the turmoil of war and with a high prestige — prestige in the simple, christian sense to which our people may aspire. I mean the recognition of loyal, honest efforts founded on tolerance, understanding and human solidarity. A feeling of gratitude fills us towards those who prepared in time the vessel of our state to be able to weather the raging seas and to those who manned it during the storm; of gratitude to our army and to its chief who has given back his mandate to the Federal Assembly; of gratitude to our peasants, to our workers, to our

women, all of whom bore determinedly their share of the common task of preserving our beloved country from outward danger, from famine and unrest.

The men who, six hundred and fifty-five years ago, in the beginning of August 1291, have laid the foundation of our Swiss Confederation, may rest in peace. The building they planned stands erect; their heritage has not been betrayed. Many and difficult tasks lie yet before our people, but, with the help of the Almighty, we may confide that they can be achieved.

The Swiss of London gathered here to-day, the other Swiss Colonies of England which will meet on or about the 1st of August, will pledge themselves to aid and help, as far as they can, in achieving these tasks of our people, in the spirit of the Federal Pact and also of the Constitution of 1848, the centenary of which will be commemorated in two years' time.

If we cast a glance backwards, we will remember that, barely two years ago, it was not possible or advisable, in view of the then existing danger of the flying-bombs, to hold a large-scale meeting of our Colony in the customary manner; and that, therefore, the greetings of our Federal Government were conveyed to you in a written message I sent to your homes. We remember that just one year ago, with a thrill of joy, we took up again, for the first time after a long and troubled period, the time-honoured custom of foregathering all to celebrate the date dearest to our hearts.

Since those days, and in spite of yet persisting difficulties, our path has been leading gradually, but steadily, upwards. The life of our Swiss colonies in Great Britain is stimulated again by the frequent personal and spiritual intercourse with our country which has resumed its former intensity. Trade agreements, monetary agreements have been signed last year, this year, and are being implemented by means of a constant friendly contact with the authorities concerned.

The network of our official and trade representation throughout the Empire has been expanding. In the Dominion of Canada a Legation has been created and we hope that, in a not far future, the decision likewise already approved by our Parliament to establish diplomatic missions also to the Commonwealth of Australia and the Union of South Africa may become effective. For all this, eminent servants of the Crown representing the mother-country and the Dominions concerned have been, here, most helpful.

The relations between Switzerland and all countries have been placed, as was our Government's and our people's earnest desire, on a normal basis. And I may recall here, and in this connection, like I did not long ago in another meeting, that it was, for a good part, in London that we had the privilege during the period which the Governments of friendly countries passed in exile in this hospitable city, of kindling the flame of mutual friendship until their return to their liberated capitals.

Likewise, we saw in London the birth of the new world organisation, the growth of which, as well as of the connected institutions is followed in

our country, as you all know, with the very keenest interest. Two principles guide the attitude of Switzerland towards the United Nations. Firstly, the great and sincere desire of our country to participate, as Switzerland has always done, in international co-operation in many fields. Secondly, the loyalty to a time-honoured maxim of State which has enabled our country to fulfil its mission. Its mission not only towards our own people and of shielding the Alpine passes, but the mission, of doubtless nobility, to maintain an inviolable basis of humanitarian activities. To-day we may already take it as assured that Swiss co-operation will be offered, and found acceptable by others and welcomed, in many fields connected with the activities of the new world organisation. Next week, for instance, a large-scale Conference of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration will open its session in the 'Palais des Nations' of Geneva. As to the possibility of taking part in the new central organisation, this will largely depend on the prospects as to whether, or rather at what moment, our traditional and peace-serving principle of State will be found to be, as it is indeed, a necessary corollary to a complete system of maintenance of peace. Our people do not forget, and hope others will remember and recognise, that the new world charters strive to realise, on a large scale, what our country has achieved since generations and centuries within its boundaries: solidarity and peaceful settlement of disputes, both prescribed already by the Federal Pact of August 1291 which we are happy and proud to commemorate to-day.

Liebe Landsleute,

Unsere Bundesfeier vermittelt uns, vermittelt allen Landsleuten in der Fremde Stunden, in denen wir das Gefühl haben, dass alle Worte unzulänglich sind, dass wir das Herz reden lassen müssen. Und es ist recht so. Wir alle denken mit Bewegung an die Heimat, an unser Land, das mit Gottes Hülfe intakt dem Sturm von zwei Weltkriegen standgehalten hat, das wie eine Insel herausragt, gestern aus einem Kontinent, der überflutet wurde, heute noch aus einer unmittelbaren Umgebung, in der Wirrnisse und Schwierigkeiten noch nicht überwunden sind.

Für all das müssen wir dem Himmel aufrichtig und tief dankbar sein, wenn auch unser Volk seine Pflicht getan hat, ebenso wie unsere Armee und ihre oberste Führung.

Euere Treue zum Land ist bewiesen und hat sich bewährt. Im Namen des Bundesrates kann ich Euch versichern, dass er Euere Probleme und Euere Bestrebungen kennt und dass er auf Euch zählt morgen wie heute, und wie gestern, als unsere Londoner Kolonie noch in der Feuerzone gestanden ist.

Cari concittadini ticinesi e delle valli italiane delle Rezia,

Non vorrei abbandonare una consuetudine che mi è cara e esprimo quindi nella vostra lingua un pensiero, un saluto che mi viene dal profondo dell'anima. La cara colonia ticinese è, nell'ambito della nostra più grande collettività svizzera di Londra, un elemento incostituibile e esemplare. Le



Top Row: (left to right) Miss R. Darani, C. Valchera, Mrs. E. Berti, P. de Maria, E. Berti, C. Berti, Jnr., P. Morosi, Miss J. Bassi, C. Berti, Miss M. Bassi, V. Berti.

Front Row: (left to right) Miss M. Andreazzi, Miss C. Allegranza, Miss S. Morosi, Mrs. F. McKenna, Miss I. Abate.

nostre famiglie, nella patria, saranno afferrate, la sera del primo agosto, dall'incanto dei laghi e dei monti; esse rivolgeranno il loro sguardo, il loro pensiero, come noi, verso la culla della nostra libertà, protetta ora dal gran *ridotto* della generale difesa, il di cui nucleo è oggi come ieri il Gottardo, montagna sacra del Ticino e della Svizzera. Na il loro sentimento patriottico, nel commemorare il giuramento del Grütli, non può essere più intenso, più radicato di quello che noi, Svizzeri di Londra, esterniamo col grido:

‘Evviva la patria, evviva la Svizzera.’ ”

The Minister's speech was loudly cheered by the audience.

Then followed the singing, rather timidly, by the company of the “Schweizerpsalm,” the Swiss National Hymn; I should suggest that this should be done in the future with organ accompaniment, so as to ensure a more impressive performance.

When the curtain rose again, Albert Ferber, our celebrated Swiss pianist, played Chopin's Nocturne in C. minor and Two Preludes by Rachmaninoff. A fair number amongst the audience had had the privilege to hear this gifted young artiste at some of his piano-forte recitals in London; his style and execution is improving every time we have the pleasure of listening to him.

The applause which greeted Albert Ferber after his excellent performance was well merited.

Next on the programme was Mr. A. L. Gandon with his accordeon, who played a Potpourri of popular Swiss songs. Dressed in his “Chüjerchüttli,” he played to his heart's content a number of those lovely simple songs, which all of us have sung many, many years ago in our homeland. What memories, of happy childhood days he evoked in his hearers by his excellent playing; but what has happened to his former “Playmates,” the Swiss Accordeon Club? Very likely they have all gone to Switzerland to gather new inspirations.

The lights were then lowered for the showing of two Swiss films; it was announced that some alterations had to be made, as some of the films billed on the programme had not arrived.

One of the films depicted the various branches of wintersport in Switzerland, such as ski-ing, tobaggoning, curling, horse racing on ice, etc., some of the scenery was magnificent, but personally I would have preferred to see some of the fine colour films which I have seen from time to time in Switzerland. The entire performance reminded me too much of propaganda for this or that “Kurveerein.” I am unaware who is responsible at home for choosing the films for our 1st of August celebrations; with some rare exceptions, they have not been very fortunate in the past in their endeavours. I am not passing any blame on to the 1st of August committee, as I full well know that they

are entirely in the hands of the selectors in Switzerland.

The second film showed us some interesting views from the lovely canton of Ticino, religious processions, “Alpabfahrt,” “Zibelemärit” in Berne, grape pickings, etc., as well as a liberal dose of repetitions from the previous film; these should have been omitted, and it goes to prove that our selecting authorities at home have displayed little skill in their choosing. It might be that the frequent repetitions were meant as a special compliment to the Bernese, who might have been too slow to follow the rather rapid actions in the first instance.

The two films concluded the first part of the programme, and an interval of fifteen minutes was announced.

This short respite gave everyone a chance to greet old friends and acquaintances, and make new friends; it was indeed a happy family party, and if a cup of tea or a bun could have been had, it would have added to the gaiety.

The second part of the programme opened again with the showing of films, amongst them one called “Une journée au Q.G. du Général Guisan,” from August 1939 to August 1945 commander-in-chief of the Swiss Army. It showed the daily routine of our General; we saw him, accompanied by his aide-de-camp, taking a morning ride, during which he got frequently into conversation with various soldiers, enquiring what they were doing; we saw him in commune with his chief of staff who is reporting to him the displacement of troupes. Another part took us to the various offices of the General's Headquarters, with all the intricate instruments used by Staff Officers.

Pictures of artillery and bombing manoeuvres watched by the General and a number of high army officers were thrown on the screen, and a conference between the commander-in-chief and his army commanders was also shown.

Most amusing was, to see, that General Guisan is also an adherent to the Swiss national “sport” of “Yassing,” in which we understand he indulges from time to time for relaxation.

Far into the night we see him working in his study, bent over maps and reading dispatches which arrive continuously all through the day and night. It shows, that a commander-in-chief, even of a non-combattant army, is a busy man.

This short and interesting film seemed to have been enjoyed by the audience.

When the lights were switched on again, the Corale Unione Ticinese made their appearance. It was left again to our brethren from the sunny Ticino to bring a little bit of colour and brightness into a hitherto rather drab atmosphere. Dressed in their picturesque national costumes, and smiling as if they hadn't a care in the world, they sang, under the vivacious conductorship of Sig. C. Valchera, lustily and heartily, and let me add beautifully, a potpourri of songs of their native canton. One felt oneself transported to the shores of their lovely lakes, in some hidden away osteria where gaiety knows no bounds.

The first number was followed by excerpts from various operas, with solo parts from members of the Corale and Sig. Valchera, who besides wielding a lively baton, has a pleasant and tuneful voice.

Grand opera, however, is an exacting task for a



company so few in numbers, and with a purely amateur status, and I would humbly suggest that Sig. Valchera and his enthusiastic collaborators should give preference to some of the lighter aspects of music, wherein lies their strength; their performance in "A Village Wedding" which they gave, on the occasion of last year's 1st of August celebration, was superb, and well within their sphere.

The *mise-en-scène* in Gounod's "Ave Maria" was effective and pleasing to the eye; the singing, I venture to say, was not up to the usual standard of the choir; mention should, however, be made of the exquisite violin accompaniment.

I sincerely hope that these few remarks will be accepted in the spirit in which they are meant, namely for a constructive purpose; our Ticinesi friends have given us in the past so much for which we have to be grateful, and we do hope that in the near future we shall again see them in one of their lighter musical comedies in which they are wellnight unsurpassed.

And now came the turn of the Swiss Male Choir; they opened their performance with an old folk song "Lueget vo Bärge und Tal" by Ferd. Huber, followed by Attenhofer's "Noch ruh'n im weichen Morgenglanz," and in conclusion they sang "Der Zapfenstreich" by J. C. Krähenbühl.

Unfortunately the holiday season has depleted their numbers, which was especially noticeable in the tenors, and it is to the credit of the conductor, Mr. E. P. Dick, anticipating such a happening, that he had chosen his programme accordingly. I liked best the "Zapfenstreich," which was sung with fervour and fine timing.

That this excellent choir has, in spite of the mentioned disadvantages, rehearsed their performance carefully was proved by the fine rendering of "Noch ruh'n im weichen Morgenglanz," which was in perfect harmony, and that unassuming song "Lueget vo Bärge und Tal" was sung with feeling and restraint. Altogether a creditable achievement for which both choir and conductor are to be congratulated.

This year's celebration ended with the singing by the audience of "s'Blüemli" and the Swiss National Anthem.

In terminating my report, I wish to thank the

Organising Committee for their hard work in presenting us with an enjoyable afternoon, and I hope nobody will disagree with me, if I give first and foremost credit to Mr. Charles Chapuis and Mr. Jules Zimmermann, who deserve high praise for their efforts. Mr. Theo Ritter, who was in charge of the distribution of tickets, has accomplished his difficult task efficiently.

Thanks should go to Mrs. Bolla and to the many young and charming ladies, mostly dressed in Swiss national costume, who sold programmes and emblems, and thus did a tiresome job with ever smiling faces. Thanks are due also to all those generous and anonymous donors, who, by their splendid gifts, made it possible to secure the Stoll Theatre.

* * *

And now, dear compatriots, let the Swiss Colony as a whole, be a reflection of unity, which has been on our National Day the catch-word of countless orators, from one end of our country to the other.

There is room for improvement in various directions, let us make up our minds to be always just and forbearing in our relations with each other; let us beware of bickering and petty jealousies. "True patriotism," a great thinker once said, "consists only in this — that everyone sweeps before his own door, minds his own business, and learns his own lesson, that it may be well with him in his own house"; let us remember, that to err is human, to forgive, divine.

Let us also beware of the pride which would make us believe that there is no other country like our own, and let us beware of disparaging it by saying there is no good thing in it.

Wherever Swiss do dwell, their thoughts had gone on that memorable day back to their native land, many amongst us, will go, or have gone, after a long spell, home to their dear ones, many a heart will ache and many an eye will be moist, to many amongst us, that longing to see again those mountains in all their majesty and glory, to hear once again those bells ringing, will manifest itself; let the clouds which pass above us, be the messengers of our fraternal greetings, let them deliver the message of our unswerving attachment to the land of our birth and tell them of the love which still lives in thousands of hearts away from our native soil.

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