

The main outlines of Swiss history

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THE MAIN OUTLINES OF SWISS HISTORY.

Lecture given by Dr. Jean Inebnit, Professor of Leeds University, at the Open Meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique on 20th January, 1948.

What Switzerland is to-day is the result of an evolution initiated by our ancestors some 700 years ago. Their intention and their resolution to preserve what had always been theirs — their freedom and independence — are still the basic principles of Swiss policy to-day. It was not the spirit of competition which brought the Confederates together. They knew that they should not compete with others. Great men like Niklaus von Flue, repeatedly formulated this principle, and when the Confederates did compete, the results were very often grief and sorrow.

Professor Inebnit then made a survey of the most outstanding events in Swiss history, beginning with the 1st August, 1291, the day on which the three valleys solemnly promised to help each other, and he mentioned the year 1332, the entry of Lucerne, the first link between town and country being thus forged — a union which was endangered in 1481, when the policies of the two groups were about to pursue different objects.

After the defeat of Marignano, and in spite of internal difficulties during the Reformation, the Confederation, though not united, succeeded in changing over to a policy of neutrality which they maintained during the Thirty Years' War, and which they saw recognized in the treaty of Münster in 1648.

The French revolution brought Switzerland the painful experience of being the battlefield of the armies of the Great Powers and the misery of occupation by the French army. But those years appear to us to-day to have been a period of preparation for the new Confederation. The common difficulties and sufferings made the original thirteen cantons ready to receive their former allies, who had had more obligations than rights. This helped to create unity in essential questions and to grant liberty in non-essential matters to all by all.

After a last misfortune — the civil war caused by the Sonderbund — the new constitution was, in 1848, accepted by the majority of the cantons and the people. It has now been in existence for a hundred years, though there has been one important revision, in 1874, and several minor alterations and additions.

It is said that the Swiss democracy would not be workable in a bigger country and therefore would make it impossible for her to become larger. But this is, as Professor Inebnit so clearly and simply pointed out, not Switzerland's ambition. We do not want to ex-

pand. We have not conquered any territory since 1536, and we have never kept anybody in the Confederation against his will.

It is true, we have become accustomed to our institutions so much that we do not always appreciate them as they should be appreciated. We sometimes forget that they are a reason for us to be proud of our nationality. Professor Inebnit went as far as to encourage the audience to display, not to hide, their foreign nationality, for, as he has experienced it so many times, our British friends know and esteem our country and have always been kind hosts to its representatives.

This led Professor Inebnit to, the last, but by no means the least important part of his lecture — the rôle of Switzerland to-day. Switzerland cannot and does not want to play an important part on the stage of world history. But she does want to co-operate with the United Nations Organization — of which she should become a member — in order to attain that one great end: peace. She can help and wishes to help as much as her unique position permits.

We who have the privilege of living abroad should show what we can achieve by directing the Swiss spirit of service into constructive channels, by displaying our spirit of solidarity in times of need and a noble spirit of brotherhood at all times.

We are all grateful to Professor Inebnit for making a practical and practicable suggestion, new to us, though it was not the first time that it had been made. He has submitted it to important men in Switzerland, and it is having their attention and support. The proposals is to form a constructive contingent of people willing to help, socially, materially, and morally, wherever and whenever help is needed, and thus to further the work of the United Nations Organization.

H.M.

1er MARS 1948.

Les Neuchâtelois et les Confédérés nés dans le Canton de Neuchâtel, sont informés qu'un dîner sera organisé le 1er Mars en commémoration du 100ème anniversaire de la République. Les Compatriotes désireux de fêter la Patrie Neuchâteloise seront les bienvenus, et sont priés d'en informer par écrit, jusqu'au 7 février le

COMITE NEUCHATELOIS à 18, Montagu Place, W.1.

Une communication ultérieure sera faite aux participants lorsque le programme définitif, qui dépendra aussi du nombre des inscriptions, aura pu être arrêté.

Comité Neuchâtelois.

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