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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1951

at the CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.
on SATURDAY, JULY 28th, 1951

Although the actual date of the 660th anniversary of our country's independence is the 1st of August, the Swiss Colony in London celebrated this historic event on Saturday, July 28th, so as to give as many as possible an opportunity of attending.

Brilliant sunshine and a cloudless sky heralded in this memorable day, when well over 2,000 of our compatriots, young and old, assembled in the large Hall of the Central Hall, Westminster.

One could but wish that an equally clear and cloudless sky would extend over the political horizon of the world, so that we could all enjoy the short span of life which is allotted to us, without constant fear and worries as to what the future may have in store for us.

This poor world of ours is still in a state of turmoil, and Peace which we so ardently desire seems to be further away than ever. Instead of finding a common ground where all countries, large and small, could work together to give us "Peace in our time", petty jealousies, mistrust, cunning and craftiness are filling our hearts with uneasiness and even forebodings.

In many parts of the world to-day war is still waged either by actual fighting or what is known as a "cold war"; still the guns are roaring and the shrill sounds of the sirens are bidding men, women and children to seek shelter from air attacks.

How long will this madness prevail? Common sense, one would have thought, would have taught us a lesson, that war, with its miseries, sacrifices and utter destruction is no solution to our troubles, and that Peace alone can bring to a weary world its salvation. That Peace in which mankind can work in perfect harmony, to better the economic conditions and deliver us from constant fear has, unfortunately, so far remained an utopian dream.

Humbly to-day we cast our eyes heavenwards to seek guidance and enlightenment, and like our forefathers centuries ago, we will bend our knees and fold our hands to ask God Almighty to inspire us with that love towards each other which passes all understanding. He alone, can give us that Peace which millions of our fellowmen all over the globe so ardently desire.

* * *

In order to forget for a few fleeting moments this depressing state of affairs and to pay homage to those men, who 660 years ago, on the sacred spot of the Rütli vowed to stand together in distress and danger, in joy and sorrow, the Swiss community assembled this year at the Central Hall.

One feature of this year's celebration was to see so many of our young compatriots present, due, un-

doubtedly, to the fact, that our Swiss Youth is allowed once again to come over here, if only for a restricted period. Let us hope, that the immigration restrictions will be eased up still further, so that the rejuvenation, so very necessary to our Colony will not be retarded.

Whilst our younger generation should be encouraged to take an active part in the social life of our Colony, I would, however, advocate that in future "babes in arms" should, whenever possible, be left at home; it is hardly fair to them to be dragged along to a performance which they are unable to understand or to appreciate, and it is equally unfair to the audience to have to listen to the less melodious addition to the programme, which a number of these little ones thought necessary to make.

As on former occasions the Hall was gaily decorated with large Swiss flags, the cantonal escutcheons and the Union Jack. The display of flowers in front of the stage was very effective and much admired.

Before I start to describe this function, I should like to mention, that it was an undeniable success; from the beginning a festive atmosphere could be detected. Most of the young and pretty programme sellers wore Swiss national costume which added greatly to the "Stimmung", and although the 1st of August badges had, as everything else, gone up in price, good business was done, greatly due to the charming and appealing smiles of the vendors. The badge depicts a mother carrying a young baby in her arms and was designed by the painter Ferruzzi. The proceeds of the collection are destined to help mothers in distress.

Shortly before the start of the performance, the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté arrived, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Sommer, President of the 1st of August Committee. The President's granddaughter and Mr. Gandon's little son, both dressed in Swiss national costumes presented the Ladies with two beautiful bouquets of flowers.

The programme opened with a March played with much exuberance by the members of the Swiss Accordion Club under the excellent leadership of Mr. A. Gandon, all were dressed in national costume.

After this lively introduction, Father A. Lanfranchi read, with a sonorous voice and great sincerity the Swiss Pact (Bundesbrief) in Italian. I can do no better, than to repeat what my friend "Gallus" so aptly wrote in his last year's report, he remarked: "What a wonderful and precious document this is and what wisdom and statesmanship it enshrines! Even to-day 659 years later, its sagacity and political precepts

fill us with reverence and admiration for our forefathers. If the world to-day would live up to its ideals, it would not be in the sorry straits in which it finds itself at present."

Then a hush came over the Assembly when the Rev. H. Blum delivered a solemn prayer, befitting the occasion; with great earnestness he invoked the Lord's blessing on our country and gave thanks to Him for having guided so kindly the destiny of our land.

Now came the moment for our Minister to deliver his Patriotic address, he was received with great applause. Monsieur de Torrenté spoke in English, Schwyzerdütsch and Italian, terminating in his native French. It gives me great pleasure to quote the final passage of his oration verbatim, as follows:—

Mes chers compatriotes,

Le Pacte de 1291 présente un édifice aux lignes sobres, à la charpente robuste. C'est à l'abri de cet édifice que devait éclore, puis se développer, à travers bien des luttes et des vicissitudes, pour s'épanouir enfin au cours du siècle dernier cet idéal de la démocratie qui a doté la Suisse "d'un crédit moral et politique de premier ordre dans le monde d'aujourd'hui".

Vous vous êtes parfois demandés pourquoi la Suisse était l'un des seuls pays à vivre la démocratie dans toute sa plénitude et dans tous les domaines de la vie publique.

La réponse la voici: Dans le Pacte de 1291, les hommes de la Vallée d'Uri, la commune de la vallée de Schwyz et la commune de ceux de la vallée inférieure d'Unterwald ont fait dans l'intérêt collectif le sacrifice d'une part de leur liberté, mais dans la mesure seulement où cela était nécessaire pour affirmer la solidité de l'alliance, assurer l'ordre et la protection des personnes et des biens. Les communautés ne se fondent pas les unes dans les autres; elles conservent leur individualité, leur vie propre, leur autonomie locale.

L'autonomie locale, cantonale et communale! Au cours de plus de cinq siècles, un nombre croissant de communautés distinctes et diverses par la race, la langue, la religion, devaient venir se grouper sous l'égide de l'état fédératif "dont les trois pays avaient en 1291, posé d'une main ferme et sage les premières pierres". Mais, jalouses de leur particularisme, elles surent maintenir leur physionomie propre au point qu'un observateur impartial a pu écrire récemment: "Le principe de la "démocratie suisse, c'est d'être communal,, c'est d'être cantonal

avant d'être fédéral." C'est l'exemple de la Suisse qui a inspiré ce jugement célèbre: "Il est de la nature d'une république qu'elle n'ait qu'un petit territoire; sans quoi elle ne peut guère subsister".

Le décentralisation de la puissance politique, l'indépendance de la commune à l'égard du Canton, du canton à l'égard du pouvoir central, éveille et stimule l'intérêt du citoyen pour la chose publique. C'est dans la commune, cellule de notre vie politique, que le citoyen fait son éducation civique et se prépare au rôle et aux charges qu'il devra peut-être assumer une fois sur la scène cantonale ou fédérale. C'est là "qu'il participe à toutes les décisions intéressant la collectivité, désigne personnellement ses représentants et peut voir l'homme au fond du problème et la vie derrière la loi".

Le citoyen suisse, disait un jour M. Motta, n'est pas un citoyen de façade, il s'occupe personnellement des affaires publiques et s'habitue à envisager les conséquences directes de ses décisions.

Les expériences le mettent à même d'exercer une surveillance constante sur ses gouvernements et de contribuer judicieusement par le référendum et le droit d'initiative à l'œuvre législative dans une démocratie "de tendance populaire et non parlementaire".

Ainsi, grâce à la sagesse des initiateurs du Pacte de 1291, la Suisse, pour reprendre un autre mot de M. le President Motta, "est devenue le témoin et le champion de la démocratie dans le monde".

The Minister's address was acknowledged with hearty acclamation, and was followed by the singing of the "Schweizerpsalm" by the entire audience.

Then came the turn for the "nightingales" of the Colony, the Swiss Male Choir, headed by its popular conductor, Mr. E. P. Dick, to appear on the stage;

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they sang two songs, namely "Mein Dörfllein" by H. Ackermann and Jos. Bovet's "Le vieux Chalet".

The first song, so appropriate to the occasion was beautifully rendered and sung with deep feeling, the baritone solo was especially impressive and the prolonged applause was well deserved.

No less enjoyable was the song "Le vieux Chalet" both in diction and harmony a fine performance, considering that this choir was far from complete, owing to the holiday season, their excellent singing deserves great praise and their conductor is heartily to be congratulated on the result. Well done Swiss Male Choir!

We next had the pleasure of hearing that fine and well-known Swiss pianist, Albert Ferber, who has, during the last few years made a name for himself in the musical world of this country. Those amongst the audience who regularly attend his recitals at Wigmore Hall knew with certainty the pleasure his performance would give them.

Albert Ferber played the Fantasy in D minor, by Mozart with great mastery and revealed himself as a sensitive and always interesting interpreter of a composition that has often been heard, and could so easily lead the young pianist to be content with merely imitating his brilliant masters.

This was followed by "Reflets dans l'eau" and "Mouvement" from Images by Debussy. His excellent execution and brilliant technique was greatly admired, and the audience gave vent to their enthusiasm by prolonged and hearty cheers, indeed a most enjoyable performance.

A Swiss patriotic gathering without yodelling can hardly be imagined, unfortunately the Yodler fraternity in the Swiss Colony has gone into oblivion and so the Committee had to ask for help from the motherland. Their choice fell on Ernst Sommer and Heidi Ammann from Berne; the former is by no means a stranger to the Colony, having sung on various occasions at Swiss functions in London. They sang together "Heiwehlied" and "Der Landmann" by Ummel, and Ernst Sommer rendered a solo "Wildheuerjutz"; both have very pleasing voices and their performance was acknowledged by a storm of applause. Heidi Ammann was dressed in her most becoming Bernese costume whilst her partner wore the traditional "Mälcherchuttli".

A splash of colour came into the proceedings when the Corale of the Unione Ticinese appeared on the platform, followed by their genial conductor, M. P. De Maria.

Lustily and melodiously they sang such homely airs as "Addio Bella", "Mazzolin di Fiori", "Occhi Neri", etc., etc. Most of us have, at one time or the other heard these songs when on holiday in their lovely little canton, and how we loved them. The Corale, by their fine singing brought back to us treasured memories for which we are grateful to them.

Then came the time for a short interval, which also afforded an opportunity to meet and greet old friends whom we might not have seen for many a long day.

When the bell sounded for the second part of the programme, people hurried back to their seats in pleasant anticipation. The various items were on similar lines; again the Swiss Accordion Club played Marches and "Ländlers". Albert Ferber played Nocturne op. 48 No. 1. by Chopin and Ravel's Alborado

del Grazioso and by his fine performance literally "brought the house down". The Swiss Male Choir sang "Welke Blumen" by Hs. Ackermann, and Jos. Bovet's "La montée à l'alpage"; again one was impressed by their fine singing. Ernst Sommer and Heidi Ammann earned again much applause with their Yodels.

For the first time at a 1st of August celebration the Swiss Catholic Choir, which is conducted by Father A. Lanfranchi, introduced themselves. This small mixed choir has some good material at their disposal and the rendering of J. Baur's "Festgruss: Sei Willkommen" and "Filastroca del Grillo" by Vacari, was impressive. It was perhaps a little *risqué* to sing "La Jardinière du Roy" by G. Doret, so soon after the exquisite rendering of this song by the "Chanson de Lausanne" at the last Fête Suisse, and I will leave it at that.

The musical programme thus came to a close and Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the Organising Committee, briefly addressed the audience expressing the hope that all those present had enjoyed themselves. He very warmly thanked his colleagues on the Committee for their collaboration, the artists, who appeared on the programme, for their much appreciated performance, and especially all the donors, who by their generosity had made it possible to hold again this 1st of August celebration.

May I, on my part be allowed to express, on behalf of all those who spent such an enjoyable afternoon at the Central Hall sincere thanks, especially to Mr. Sommer, Mr. Gandon and Mr. Dick who had untir-

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ingly worked to make this celebration a success; it will leave nothing but pleasant memories behind.

In concluding this narrative I venture again to repeat the few words which I wrote on the occasion of another 1st of August celebration in this paper.

"And now, dear compatriots, we are living at a time when great changes, affecting the thoughts and actions, the habits based on tradition and experience, and even our ideals, are making themselves felt and are taking place, whether we like it or not.

It is a period, during which we see the old order which has served us in the past and has achieved what we are wont to call our modern civilisation, slowly but inevitably make room for a new era which is, as yet, hidden from our eyes, but for which we all, each according to his ideas, strive and yearn..

We Swiss, on this 1st of August, 1951, feel that we too, are subjected to all those tormenting, conflicting, perplexing and anxious currents of thoughts and actions arising from them. We see our, on the whole smoothly and peacefully working democratic way of doing things assailed by happenings beyond our frontiers.

Switzerland to-day is a nucleus of what Europe to-morrow, and the whole world later on might be and we are ready to sacrifice everything rather than that this oasis of sanity in the heart of Europe should be destroyed."

And in this spirit we will remember the "Rütli Schwur" and that motto from which springs our whole achievements, political, economical and cultural and of which we have a right to be proud to-day :

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