

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1951)
Heft: 1161

Artikel: 76th fête suisse
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693084>

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76th FÊTE SUISSE

*“Lasse strahlen Deinen schönsten Stern,
Nieder auf mein irdisch Vaterland.”*

So concluded our national poet, Gottfried Keller, his unforgettable poem “O mein Heimatland”, and this wish was echoed a thousand times on Thursday, June 14th, at the Central Hall, Westminster, where the 76th “Fête Suisse” took place.

This annual event is going from strength to strength, the attendance exceeded again the figure of 2,000. There may be several reasons for this ever mounting attendance, some no doubt go there to meet old friends, and to make new acquaintances, others to have a good time in the “Foyer” amongst the various delicacies, such as “Wienerli’s” Strawberry tartlets, etc., but I believe the majority attend to pay a tribute to our small and beautiful country.

We have every reason to be proud of this land of ours; when one looks around and perceives in how many countries there is turmoil, distress and unrest, one cannot help but feel grateful that we have the privilege to belong to a country where order prevails, and where liberty, both of thought and action, are still the guiding principles.

This gladness and gratitude expressed itself on the faces of all those who were present and thus created, right from the beginning a happy and carefree atmosphere.

Long before the start of the concert the “Foyer” was filled with an exuberant crowd, handsome maidens, some of them in their becoming national costumes, sold little flags of the various cantons and there were tables covered with flags, pictures, postcards and other souvenirs. Once more the Concert Hall wore its festive garb, the national and cantonal flags intermingled with the Union Jack added to the “Stimmung”.

Punctually at 6 o'clock the concert started with the National Anthem played by the “Stadtmusik — Solothurn” followed by the “Solothurner Marsch” and the Overture to “Tannhäuser” by Wagner. I have already mentioned in my report of the Band’s concert on the 12th, what a remarkable band the “Stadtmusik” is; whilst on the previous occasion they had played music of a lighter kind, this time they proved that they are equally at home in classical music. Their fine performance was much applauded.

Mr. A. Renou, President of the “Fête Suisse” Committee then welcomed the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, the Mayor of the town of Solothurn, States-Councillor, Dr. Paul Haefelin, the members of the “Stadtmusik — Solothurn”, the “Chanson de Lausanne” and the entire company. He was followed by Pasteur C. Reverdin, who gave an excellent address concluding it with a prayer.

The Swiss Minister, on ascending the platform received a hearty ovation, in his introduction he voiced his pleasure that amongst the audience were an appreciable number of our English friends. He said: “the bonds of friendship between the people of Switzerland

and Great Britain are so strong that I feel sure they are happy amongst us and will enjoy this evening “at home” with the Swiss Colony.”

He remarked that the “Fête Suisse” has by now become specifically a celebration of the Colony, in this Colony, he said, we have many common tasks and interests, which are closely connected with its future, with regard to the latter he said:

“Je vous en parlais ici même il y a deux ans. J’y reviens aujourd’hui, parce que ce problème est plus que jamais à l’ordre du jour. — Les Présidents des Sociétés suisses en Grande-Bretagne viennent d’en délibérer; la Nouvelle Société Helvétique a ouvert une enquête sur les Suisses de l’Etranger. —

Ensuite parce qu’il m’est apparu que nous n’étions pas sans défense, pourvu que nous fassions appel à cet esprit suisse de solidarité et de coopération qu’illustre en termes lapidaires notre devise nationale.

A première vue il semble suprenant, et même un peu superflu, de parler du rajeunissement de la colonie devant cette assemblée que la jeunesse pare de sa gaieté, de son charme et de son rayonnement. Aussi bien serait-il désirable que l’auditoire de ce jour de fête reflêtât l’image réelle de la Colonie. Hélas! Les jeunes ne sont souvent ici que des oiseaux de passage, alors que nous souhaiterions qu’ils s’attardent sur les rivages de ce pays ami et organisent la relève de cadres vieillissants.

Beaucoup de jeunes gens le désireraient sans doute, d’autres au contraire ne le souhaitent guère. En effet l’étiolement des colonies n’est pas exclusivement la conséquence des mesures restrictives prises par les gouvernements. Plus fréquemment qu’on ne le pense, des occasions s’offriraient à nos compatriotes de s’établir à l’étranger. Mais les recherches et la publicité faites dans notre pays demeurent souvent infructueuses.

Faut-il donc, en comparant les difficultés présentes aux facilités passées, désespérer de l’avenir? Pour ma part je ne le pense pas. Et voici mes raisons:

D’abord parce que les mesures rigides prises par les Gouvernements peuvent parfois dépasser le but qu’elles proposent. Au point que, dans leur application, un assouplissement s’impose dans l’intérêt général. Je crois pouvoir en discerner les effets dans quelques données statistiques.

Bien que le nombre des jeunes gens qui viennent travailler dans des ménages ait diminué d’environ 20%, le nombre des permis de travail délivrés à des Suisses pour d’autres emplois est demeuré à peu près constant; il oscille entre 900 et 1000 annuellement.

Le nombre des stagiaires venus en Grande-Bretagne au cours des années 1948, 1949 et 1950 a été de 1283, alors qu’en France, pays qui vient au second rang, il n’était pour ces mêmes années que de 683.

Sans vouloir tomber dans des illusions faciles, il n’est pas déraisonnable, si vraiment nous avons “touché le fond” d’opposer aux raisons de craindre quelques modestes raisons d’espérer.”

Monsieur de Torrenté then referred to the useful services the Employment Department of the S.K.V. in London had, and is still rendering in connection with the "rajeunissement" of the Colony, and the splendid work done by the secrétariat social, the Swiss Mercantile Society and the Swiss Benevolent Society both for the younger and older generation.

In conclusion the Minister voiced his appreciation and thanks to the Committee of the "Fête Suisse" for having arranged this evening with such efficiency. He extended his greetings both to the "Stadtmusik" and the "Chanson de Lausanne" and to the Mayor of the town of Solothurn.

On leaving the platform the Minister received a hearty ovation.

The Swiss Male Choir, under the conductorship of Mr. E. P. Dick, then sang two songs "Sängerlust" by C. Attenhofer, and Ackermann's "Welke Blumen" with great feeling, followed by the Swiss Accordion Club, who dressed in national costume, and headed by their leader, Mr. A. Gandon, played with great vivacity a selection of marches and "Laendlers" which were greatly enjoyed, the clarinet solo by Mr. Helbling being much appreciated.

The first half of the programme came to an end with the appearance of our visitors from the lovely canton of Vaud; dressed in their becoming vaudois costumes. They filed in from both sides of the stage, followed by two members of the choir carrying their traditional "brentes", amidst thunderous applause. Their conductor, M. F. Guibat, was especially warmly greeted. They sang most beautifully with smiles on their faces during gay songs, with sadness during sorrowful ones. All songs were sung without text books, and from memory, they responded with remarkable alertness to the slightest move of their conductor. The "Chanson de Lausanne" fully lived up to the great reputation which they enjoy in our home country, their precision and harmony is astounding. Especially appreciated was the fine rendering of the "La Jardinière du Roy" with tenor solo by M. Guibat, who is not only a fine conductor but also a gifted singer,

and how beautifully was the song "Vignerons" rendered. All in all a really lovely performance.

An interval was then announced in order to allow the artistes and their audience to look after their more material requirements. The catering, as in former years, was entrusted to the family Schmid from the Glendower Hotel who deserve a hearty vote of thanks for the very efficient catering arrangements.

After the interval the "Stadtmusik — Solothurn" played a Fantasia from the opera "La Traviata" by Verdi, which further enhanced their reputation.

Now came the turn for our compatriots of the sunny south, dressed in their Ticinesi costumes, they sang those popular songs which we so heartily enjoy hearing when visiting this heaven blessed corner of our country. The Corale Unione Ticinese, under the leadership of Mr. P. de Maria, has given us much pleasure.

As an additional item, it was announced that Agi Achermann and E. Berchtold would appear. Both had a great success at Tuesday's concert, and again they captured the audience by their fine singing. Unfortunately it was not possible to allow them any *encores*, owing to time limit, and the disappointment of the audience expressed itself very markedly, although in a way, deplorably.

Again the "Chanson de Lausanne" took possession of the stage with a group of songs. Not only can they sing well, but they are also fine dancers, The "Chanson de Lausanne" and their conductor, M. Guibat, has once again given us an hour of sheer delight.

As a Grand Finale of this year's 76th Fête Suisse, the Cantique Suisse was sung by the entire company.

It was a wonderful and inspiring evening, once again we have felt that we belong together, once again our thoughts have travelled across the sea and over the towering mountains to our homeland which we love, and which is ever in our most affectionate thoughts.

ST.

THE SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

31, CONWAY STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

As well known to the old friends in the Colony, the object of the Society is to give

**"Assistance to destitute Swiss
irrespective of creed, by casual
help or old age Pensions."**

The recently published Report gives an outline of last year's activities and on application the Secretary would be pleased to send a copy to anyone interested in the Society's affairs.

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