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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1952

at the CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.
on SATURDAY, JULY 26th, 1952

The actual date of the 661st anniversary of our country's independence is the 1st of August; the Swiss Colony in London celebrated this important historic event on Saturday, July 26th, 1952, in order to give as many people as possible an opportunity of attending.

Although the attendance was somewhat smaller than last year, none-the-less about 1,600 of our compatriots entered the portals of Central Hall Westminster.

It is to be regretted, that a good many who could, no doubt, have made it convenient to attend, did not turn up to pay a tribute to our country on its birthday anniversary; by their absence they missed a most enjoyable afternoon's entertainment.

In my last year's report I referred to the precarious international situation. Unfortunately no improvement has taken place during the last twelve months, the position is much about the same, and I can do no better than repeat what I wrote on that occasion.

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 evel 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.

* * *

Despite this sombre outlook, a happy and genial atmosphere prevailed, and everybody was anxious to forget for a few hours, at least, this depressing state of affairs and to pay homage to those men, who 661

years ago, on the sacred soil of the Rütli vowed to stand steadfast together in distress and danger, in joy and sorrow.

Yes, happiness was the key-note of this year's celebration. This was largely brought about by the numerous attendance of the younger generation of the colony. The smiling faces of our pretty young Swiss maidens would have cheered up even the biggest pessimist.

To add to the gaiety of the occasion the Hall wore its most festive garb. Swiss flags as well as the Union Jack were prominently displayed. I, however missed the cantonal excutcheons which, on former occasions were a welcome addition to the decorations. Whoever was responsible for the effective display of flowers in front of the platform deserves a tap on the back.

An appeal had been made by the committee, that whenever possible, national costume should be worn, and I am glad to say, that quite a number of the Ladies answered this appeal. The programme and badges sellers were especially charming, and I am sure, this galaxy of youth and beauty encouraged many a purchaser to put a little extra in their collecting box. (The proceeds from the sale of the badges will be used for historical research and Swiss culture.)

Previous to the start of the programme, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté arrived, accompanied by his collaborators at the Legation, (Madame de Torrenté, having gone to Switzerland to attend the funeral of her mother, was unable to be present) and Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Sommer, President of the 1st of August committee. On taking their seats in front of the platform, Mrs. Sommer was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

On the stage all participants in the programme (about 70) were seated, and as most were dressed in national costume, they presented a colourful picture.

The programme started with a march played with great vivacity by the members of the Swiss Accordeon Club under the excellent leadership of Mr. A. Gandon, all were dressed in national costume.

After this appropriate introduction, Father A. Lanfranchi, rendered prayer. This was followed by the reading of the Swiss Pact, first in French by Pasteur C. Reverdin, then in German by Pasteur H. Spörri and finally in Italian by Father A. Lanfranchi.

The reading of this historical document, full of sagacity and political precepts always creates a deep impression. If the world to-day would live up to its ideals, it would not be in the sorry strait in which it finds itself at present.

Then followed the patriotic address of our

Minister. Monsieur de Torrenté spoke in English, German, and Italian terminating in his native French, and I have much pleasure in quoting the final passage of his oration as follows:

Mes chers compatriotes,

La Fête du Premier août nous donne chaque année l'occasion de faire le point et, sans vouloir prophétiser ni pénétrer l'avenir, de chercher à percevoir le destin de notre chère patrie.

Dans un monde confus et chaotique, tragiquement déchiré par deux conceptions idéologiques, polarisées par des Etats puissants notre petit pays est resté immuable et prospère. Cette situation enviable est due tout d'abord à la protection de la Providence, à qui il plut d'arrêter à nos frontières le fléau de la guerre et des destructions. Il n'en est pas moins certain que notre volonté de défense et les qualités de labeur et de persévérance de notre peuple ont été les éléments actifs de notre prospérité.

Le rôle de l'armée saute aux yeux, celui du travail, pour être moins spectaculaire, ne lui cède guère en importance.

Au milieu du désordre des marchés et des insuffisances de la distribution des matières premières, le travail est pour la Suisse le seul élément permanent et sûr. Une main d'œuvres qualifiée, le goût de la bienfaisance dans un cadre bien ordonné, une volonté farouche d'assurer notre existence, nous permettent d'espérer que tant que nos produits trouveront preneurs, notre situation matérielle sera sauvegardée. Le travail est notre richesse. "C'est l'homme", a écrit une fois l'un de nos meilleurs économistes, "qui, depuis des siècles, supplée par son travail aux insuffisances de notre sol et de notre sous-sol. La richesse d'un pays c'est sa production, c'est-à-dire l'adaptation par le travail humain des biens naturels aux besoins de la consommation. Or, s'il est relativement peu important pour la prospérité d'un pays que son sol et son sous-sol soient riches, il est indispensable que sa population soit laborieuse".

Mais il ne suffit pas de produire, il faut encore écouler cette production. Or, l'économie de nombre de pays — nos clients proches ou lointains — a été gravement affaiblie par deux guerres mondiales. Leur pouvoir d'achat a fléchi dans une notable mesure; leur standard de vie s'effrite; ils craignent, en important les produits perfectionnés de notre industrie, d'aggraver le déséquilibre de leur bilan. Si favorable qu'elle paraisse, notre situation est

donc beaucoup moins stable qu'on ne le pense généralement. Le Conseil fédéral a attiré maintes fois l'attention de nos industriels sur le danger de s'adapter trop complaisamment à une conjoncture que l'on doit tenir pour exceptionnelle et passagère et par certains côtés malsaine. En effet, force est bien de reconnaître que, dans une large mesure, le pouvoir d'achat de nos partenaires a été maintenu ou accru par des artifices, artifices certes indispensables et généreux, mais artifices tout de même.

Ainsi, en dépit d'avantages exceptionnels, et de notre prospérité évidente, notre situation reste incertaine. Car, si la Suisse a eu l'incroyable privilège "de regarder", suivant le mot de Lucrèce, les grandes batailles rangées parmi la plaine, sans prendre sa part du danger, elle n'a pas moins "de ces hauts lieux fortifiés par la sagesse" et par l'expérience observé que, si le tribut du sang lui avait été épargné, son sort était indissolublement lié à celui de l'Europe.

C'est pourquoi notre neutralité ne saurait être une attitude passive. Elle exige non seulement une vigilance constante et le maintien d'une armée forte, mais nous impose d'autres devoirs encore.

"La plus ancienne des Républiques existantes serait heureuse", disait déjà le Conseil fédéral dans son message du 8 février 1919, relatif à la neutralité de la Suisse, "d'apporter à la Ligue des Nations le concours d'une expérience acquise au cours du développement progressif et laborieux de son régime fédératif".

En effet, les conditions particulières, dans lesquelles la Suisse a été fondée et s'est développée, sa situation géographique, sa composition ethnique, lui ont permis de contribuer à enrichir dans une mesure remarquable le trésor des expériences humaines. Ce privilège a pour corollaire l'obligation de mettre à la disposition de tous les valeurs ainsi accumulées et sauvegardées. Ce qui implique une collaboration avec tous les peuples. Cette activité se manifeste aussi bien dans le domaine purement humanitaire que dans le domaine des relations extérieures où la Suisse s'est engagée résolument dans la voie de la coopération internationale sur le plan culturel, social et économique.

Société des peuples en miniature, la Suisse, conformément à sa tradition démocratique, n'a qu'un désir: servir l'humanité en encourageant dans la mesure de son influence toutes les tendances propres à assurer la paix.

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The Minister's oration was acknowledged with hearty acclamation, and was followed by the singing of the 'Schweizerpsalm'. The rendering of this beautiful hymn was unfortunately spoiled by the admittedly difficult closing bars. I have witnessed this on previous occasions and to omit a re-occurrence, I should suggest that the audience should get a lead from the platform, or that the singing should be done with organ accompaniment.

Now came the turn of the Swiss Male Choir, conducted once again by its popular and painstaking conductor, Mr. E. P. Dick, who after a lapse of several weeks owing to illness, resumed the leadership. This Choir reminds me of Brandy, it improves with age, and although somewhat weakened through the absence on holiday of several of its members, they sang two songs most beautifully. The rendering of both songs, especially the one "Ihr Berge lebt wohl" deserves the highest praise; both in tone and diction it was faultless and created a deep impression on the audience. The applause which greeted their performance was richly deserved.

As in the programme of the "Fête Suisse" an item was reserved for the youngest of the young, who performed a number of National Dances. This is always a risky undertaking as children are apt to suffer from stage-fright, but I am glad to say everything went without the slightest hitch, and Miss Sylvia Morosi, who so devotedly arranged this little display, is to be heartily congratulated on the result. The boys and girls danced and acted with great charm, and seemed to enjoy their performance as much as the audience who were watching them. Especially attractive was the dancing of one very young couple, the little girl, I am sure, being well on the way to becoming a famous ballerina.

Never was any applause better deserved than for the performance of these children of the colony.

Could one imagine a Swiss patriotic gathering without some yodelling? In the past the Colony had its own Yodelling fraternity. Unfortunately, either through death or departure they have disappeared, and the committee was obliged to "import" an exponent of this particular kind of singing. Their choice fell on Frau Vreni Kneubühl, a "Wärschafti Emmentalerin", who will be remembered by her fine performance at the 1st of August celebration two years ago.

They chose well and wisely, and in her becoming Emmental costume she sang a number of songs in Bernese dialect, each ending up with a Yodel. Her crystal clear yet forceful voice flooded caressingly through the air, and the wittiness of her humorous songs, of which each word could be clearly understood, literally brought the house down. How much the audience enjoyed her singing was proved by the storm of applause after each item. Indeed a fine artiste in this special sphere of music, and a modest one at that.

This solo turn was followed by the appearance of the, by now, famous "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese, who dressed in Ticinese costumes brought a splash of colour into the proceedings.

Their lusty singing of Ticinesi folklore has, I am sure brought back to many in the audience unforgettable and happy memories. Looking around I perceived that many an eye became moist and many a tear trickled down on the handsome faces of our Ticinesi

sisters; could a better compliment be paid to the performers?

Mr. P. De Maria, their popular, and may I add prosperous looking conductor is to be greatly complimented on the fine achievements of his choir.

Then came a short interval during which one had an opportunity of meeting old friends whom one had not seen for many a long day.

When the bell sounded for the second half of the programme, people hurried back to their seats in pleasurable anticipation.

To start with, the Swiss Accordeon Club played with their usual efficiency a medley of popular Swiss songs and their conductor deserves a hearty vote of thanks. Well may we sing that well-known ditty "For he is a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us."

The Swiss Catholic Choir, under the baton of Father A. Lanfranchi rendered popular songs, which earned them well deserved applause. This mixed choir has made great progress since we heard them last, for which their conductor is to be commended.

The *pièce de résistance* in the second half of the programme was, undoubtedly, the appearance of Mr. Robert Streit, a young artiste who, I am sure, will one day make a name for himself should he decide to take up the profession as a pianist.

I understand, that it was his first appearance before a large audience, which in itself is no small ordeal, but I am delighted to say that he came through it with flying colours.

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His rendering of Schubert's Impromptu in A. flat was beautifully played, and was most impressive, a sure proof that he is a fine and talented musician. No less enjoyable were the renderings of Cançò I Dansa (No. 1) by F. Mompon and Le petit âne blanc by Ibert, the latter played with great delicacy.

This fine performance by the youthful artiste was loudly cheered, and as a *beau geste* Mr. Streit gave an encore. All in all a remarkable *début* by a remarkable and gifted artiste.

Frau Vreni Kneubühl, the Swiss Male Choir and Swiss Accordeon Club again appeared and earned great applause. Frau Kneubühl was presented with a lovely bouquet of flowers at the end of her performance.

The musical programme then came to a close with the singing of the National Anthem, and Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the 1st of August Committee, in a little speech thanked his colleagues on the committee for their collaboration not forgetting the artistes who took part in the programme, nor the generous donors, who by their support had made it possible to hold again this traditional 1st of August celebration.

Thus another memorable patriotic demonstration came to an end, and on behalf of all those who were present, I wish to extend hearty and sincere thanks to the committee for this most enjoyable afternoon, singling out the President, Mr. F. G. Sommer and the Secretary, Mr. A. Gandon who had so untiringly worked to make this celebration a success.

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In our issues No. 1163 (July 27th, 1951) and No. 1172 (Dec. 21st, 1951) we commented on the diaries of Johann Conrad Fischer. The actual MSS. were on exhibition last year at the South Kensington Museum. These diaries, written (probably with quill) in German, are, as will be remembered, the personal records of Fischer's repeated travels through France, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and England. They reveal an interesting personality, cultured, shrewd, purposeful and endowed with an immense capacity for constructive effort. He was an outstanding type of the industrial pioneer of the early 19th century to whose ability and spirit of enterprise the economic development of Switzerland is so largely due.

A hundred-and-fifty years ago this remarkable man founded in Schaffhausen the iron steel works which to this day flourish under the name of GEORG FISCHER WERKE. From small beginnings the undertaking gradually became one of the most important of its kind, not only in Switzerland but in Europe. It enjoys a world-wide reputation and its products are known everywhere.

The original works in Schaffhausen have, in the course of the years, been considerably enlarged. Branches and affiliated Companies in Switzerland, Germany and England added to the importance of the Firm, which, moreover, established its own sales-organisations in Paris and Milan. The English branch is situated in Bedford and bears the name of BRITANNIA IRON AND STEEL WORKS LTD.

In these establishments altogether 9,000 people are employed, half of them in the Schaffhausen works. Large sums of money have been spent on social welfare, on housing, the care of the children and apprentices, pension schemes, medical service and so forth.

Financially the Company possesses considerable strength. At the end of 1950 the total assets (Gesamt-Vermögen) are shown to be 96½ million Swiss francs and the average dividends since the formation of the Company 7.53% of the share capital. These are remarkable figures considering the difficulties connected with the supply of fuel and raw materials in times of war and the fact that Swiss industry did not escape the effects of the recurring periods of trade-slumps.

Much of the Company's success may be attributed to the continuity of the management. It had the rare fortune of being directed for more than fifty years by the founder himself, and to have at its head a man, Mr. E. Homberger, who has been in charge uninterruptedly since 1902.

The foregoing data is taken from a commemorative publication issued by the Company under the title "HUNDERTFÜNFZIG JAHRE GEORG FISCHER WERKE 1802/1952", a handsome volume, beautifully illustrated, in which the story of the Company from its inception to the present day is told. The non-technical section of the book has been written by Dr. F. Aschinger, the commercial editor of the "Neue Zuercher Zeitung", the technical and commercial material has been contributed by the staff.

All those who are connected with the Georg Fischer Company can take a justifiable pride in its traditions and achievements and we, the readers of the Swiss Observer, wish them continued success and prosperity.

J.J.F.S.