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CHRISTIAN KUNZLE †

by ST



*“ And all that mighty heart
is lying still ”.*

As briefly reported in our last issue, Christian Kunzle has peacefully passed away, on Sunday, January 10th, at his home, 42, Richmond Hill Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, in his 75th year.

Unrelenting and pitiless death has made lately great gaps amongst the older members of the Colony, and the Swiss Colony in Great Britain has sustained an irreparable loss which is shared by his family, his numerous friends, the City of Birmingham, thousands of children, whom he had befriended and helped, and members of the staff of Messrs. C. Kunzle, Ltd.

It was my privilege to have known this lovable man for more than twenty-five years, and his departure means to me the personal loss of a real and steadfast friend, whom I deeply mourn.

On meeting Christian Kunzle for the first time, he mentioned to me a scheme which was dear to him, namely that of sending weakly and ailing children from this country to his home in Davos. On this philanthropic undertaking he spent nearly £250,000 from its inception.

Well do I remember with what vigour and enthusiasm he expounded this work, which left a deep and everlasting impression on me; here I knew, was a man whose heart was beating warmly for all those who suffered and who were in need of succour. Although he had known bitter tragedy in his own life, it had not turned him bitter, but made him understand better the need of others.

Thousands of children, and grown up members of his staff, suffering from diseases of the lung, owe their regained health, — nay their life — to their benefactor, and for that alone his name will be forever cherished in their hearts.

Some four years ago I visited the “ Chateau ” at Davos, and talking to some of the children I realised what a wonderful undertaking this was, and how deeply grateful these little ones were to the man to whom they owed so much.

On many occasions I was present at Victoria Station when parties of sickly children left for Davos, their faces were pale and some hardly talked; after a few months I witnessed the return of these parties. This time the children looked happy, their rosy cheeks and gay laughter proved that, once again, they had regained health and strength.

When the train left to take them back to their homes in Birmingham and the Black Country, they lustily cheered our departed friend. These are moments in one's life when one feels that gratitude is still a virtue which has, thank goodness, not yet vanished from this earth.

Few will ever know how much this paper is indebted to Christian Kunzle, no request for support, especially at the time when the question of discontinuing this venture, owing to lack of financial support, became acute, has ever been refused, and at one of my many journeys to Five Ways, Birmingham, he assured me that he considered the work of this paper, as being of “ national importance ”.

At this sad moment of taking leave from our friend, I am sending him beyond his last resting place, my heartfelt thanks for his unstinted help and moral support.

Although Christian Kunzle lived for the greater part of his life away from his native land, which he loved so dearly, he has remained a faithful son of our country and especially to his birthplace of Davos, this did not prevent him keeping a warm corner in his heart for the country which had accorded him so generously its hospitality.

Our friend was a self-made man, who, owing to adverse circumstances, did not enjoy the benefit of an advanced education. Success did not turn his head, though whatever achievements, and they were manifold, which came his way, he humbly attributed to the loving kindness of his Master, to Him alone he left the glory.

Mr. Kunzle's wife a compatriote of ours, whom he married in 1903, materially assisted him in the founding of the business. All those who have known her were struck by the sweetness and serenity of her character. She died in March 1951.

Christian Kunzle was a member of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, since 1917. He was also a Contributing Member to the Swiss Mercantile Society, and member of the Swiss Economic Council and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

* * *

Shortly before the turn of the twentieth century, Christian Kunzle, left his native town Davos, to seek his fortune in foreign lands, with the blessings of his parents. As he had related to me, his mother, to whom he remained deeply attached throughout his life until her passing away, presented him with a Bible asking him to follow its teaching and to do what was right. This Bible, the book of books, has remained a constant companion up to the day of his passing away, from it he received guidance and spiritual help in many a critical hour.

His first stay was in Oxford, where he joined his uncle who kept a confectionery shop in the centre of this city, here he learned the secrets of the trade. After a twelve months apprenticeship he left Oxford to obtain a post on the kitchen staff of the House of Commons. One of his special jobs was to make rice puddings for Lord Salisbury, there he cooked for well-known Peers and Members of Parliament at the munificent salary of nine shillings a week! It was a hard struggle to make both ends meet, because he received no help from home.

In order to improve his position he entered into the services of the then Grand Hotel in London, at a slightly higher remuneration. In those days the kitchen staff in Hotels was principally recruited from foreigners, and in order to improve his knowledge of the English language, he entered private service, and later on went to Glasgow where he founded a catering business together with a cousin of his.

After a short stay in his native land, he returned to this country, with the firm determination to start a business of his own. This time he chose Birmingham as the field of his activities. With great enthusiasm and indomitable spirit to succeed he started a little shop together with one apprentice. With a twinkle in his eye he had related to me the joy he had experienced when his books showed for the first time a weekly net profit of thirty-five shillings. Down went the shutters of his shop, and he, and his apprentice went out together, to celebrate this event with a meal at one of the small Birmingham cafés.

Slowly, but surely things improved, the small shop was enlarged and additional premises were acquired. In 1905, he obtained a lease of 156, Broad Street, and as time went on, branches in Birmingham, Solihull, Leicester, Stratford-in-Avon, Leamington and London were opened. The small

business of two men became a large concern which to-day employs over 1,300 employees.

The crowning point of his career was, no doubt, reached when he opened his new factory at Five Ways, which I had the pleasure of visiting on various occasions, the last time about a year ago. And what a factory! Tiled walls and mosaic floors are prominent features of the more modern portion of a works which has been built with an eye on the hygienic side. Everything is spotlessly clean, and reminds one of some of the factories one sees in our own country. Here we find the latest machinery of wrapping boxes of chocolates with transparent paper, and ovens of the most modern design for baking the cakes for which the house of Kunzle's became famous.

Another feature which struck me every time I had visited this factory, was the cheerful enthusiasm with which the large staff works; amongst them Mr. Kunzle was known as "Father", it is undoubtedly due to this spirit, which is so prominent in all the establishments, that the firm has gone from success to success.

Like in a family where children who are in distress, go to their father, to tell him their little troubles, so they went to Mr. Kunzle, seeking advice and help.

* * *

And now this great heart has ceased to beat, those kindly eyes, which shone so brightly are closed for ever, the hands which gripped us so firmly, have lost their friendly touch, but to us who remain behind, and amongst them the members of his family, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy, Christian Kunzle will live on as the great fighter he was, the man who stuck, even in the darkest hour of his life, firmly to the principles of Christian ethics.

We are proud to have called him one of us, he had carried high the banner of Swiss enterprise, tenacity, integrity and patriotism.

You have, great heart, remained

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH!

Edgbaston Old Church, where the funeral service took place, was filled to capacity. Those present included the Lord-Mayor of Birmingham, (Ald. G. H. W. Griffith), Mr. Percy Shurmer (M.P. for Sparkbrook), Mr. O. Wuest, President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, representing the Swiss Minister in London, and many representatives of the confectionery trade in the Midlands.

Among the floral tributes was a bunch of anemones from a small boy representative of the very many ailing children whom Mr. Kunzle sent to his native Davos to recuperate. A large part of the congregation consisted of employees of Messrs. Kunzle from the firm's factory, headed by Mr. W. Salmon, (deputy to Mr. Kunzle) Mr. C. C. Bason, (General Manager) and Mr. E. J. Nield (chief buyer).

Canon Ronald Allen gave an address, in which he paid a high tribute to the late Mr. Kunzle.

The cremation took place at Lodge Hill.