

Theodor Haller at the Schwyzerchraenzli

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THEODOR HALLER AT THE SCHWYZERCHRÄNZLI.

We all know that thousands of Swiss girls have come to this country since the war. Most of us are aware of the difficulties and problems many of these girls have to face. We also know and appreciate the hard work the Swiss Welfare Officer, the clergymen of the Colony and many individuals put into helping the less fortunate of our young compatriots. To-day, however, I am not going to discuss their problems but to tell you of some of the activities arranged for the young girls of the German speaking community of the Swiss Church.

Every first, third and fifth Sunday in the month the girls meet for an afternoon's exploring of less known parts of London, and afterwards they spend the evening together. On the second and fourth Sunday when there is an evening service in German at the Eglise Suisse the girls have another opportunity to meet from 4 o'clock onward. But their great day is Wednesday. Then the Schwyzerchränzli meets at the Eglise Suisse in Endell Street, and some 50 girls spend a happy afternoon and evening. The programme for these meetings based on their own suggestions, is most varied. Before they gather at the church they may visit factories (like Ford Motor Company, His Master's Voice, Kodak etc.), places of interest (like Royal Mews, G.P.O., telephone exchanges, Law Courts, Royal Mint). They have outings to Kew Gardens, Virginia Waters, Epping Forest, quite apart from whole-day excursions on Bank Holidays and to the seaside in the summer. In addition interesting lectures, film shows and discussion evenings are arranged. Music always plays an important part, possibly in the form of recitals but always the young people sing, and extremely well, too.

I think the most valuable aspect of these gatherings lies in the fact that the girls do not go there and simply accept any arrangements made for them, but that they themselves make them and carry them out. The Schwyzerchränzli is not a welfare institution which gives assistance to those in need. It is a group shaped and kept alive by the girls. Herr und Frau Pfarrer Spörri, themselves still young and their regular helpers, understand youth's urge to create and they encourage the girls to express themselves. The Chränzli should become the girls own creation for which they can consider themselves responsible. With such an outlet many of their personal problems find a natural solution, though the clergyman and his wife are nevertheless ever ready to give help and advice when they are needed. The same principle of self-help governs the religious discussions which are based on the reading of the Bible. The girls no longer just sit and listen but the Gospel becomes of vital importance to them and an essential factor in their life.

Another facet of the Schwyzerchränzli is that lectures, outings and discussions make it easier for them to understand England and the English way of life.

Such an opportunity came their way on Wednesday, 31st March, when Mr. Th. Haller, London representative of the Swiss Broadcasting Company and the Nationalzeitung gave a talk on

England. He called it "England zwischen Mittelalter und Düsenjäger". It was based on the material used on a most successful lecture tour which Mr. Haller made in Switzerland. He began by explaining the different attitude to time, especially to the past which the English have. The Swiss are proud of their new and modern buildings and progressive towns, whereas the English are proudest of their most ancient edifices and sights. Architecture as well as landscape are part of the English way of life. Industry is accepted only to further aims and objects and is not used for its own sake. The memory of history is ever present in every day life. Mr. Haller had a special word to say about the Monarchy. To the masses of the people it represents a symbol of the past on one hand and on the other it reflects their own individual self. The aristocracy had, through a wise and far-sighted policy, become part of the whole pattern, and thus the principle of the select and the masses presents no problem. On the contrary it is at the root of England's successful world politics. For such bold statesmanship is only possible where an élite is governing.

Mr. Haller went on to explain the English character. This, too, has its roots in a great tradition, the sum total of experiences which generations have passed on. He has a sense of fairness and tolerance growing out of an invincible knowledge of his security. Thus he feels safe in his own self and that again shows itself in his respect of the other fellow's private life and liberties. Already a small child is accorded a certain freedom along the lines of "live and let live". At home, at school and later in life the Englishman is part of a team, of a community and hence again this fundamental feeling of safety as members of a nation that is England.

Mr. Haller illustrated his interesting talk with three films on England and English pageantry, which even to those of us who have been resident in this country for many years were most instructive. A lively discussion followed the lecture. A beautiful eveningsong and the reading of the 23rd Psalm brought a very successful meeting to a close.

Mariann.

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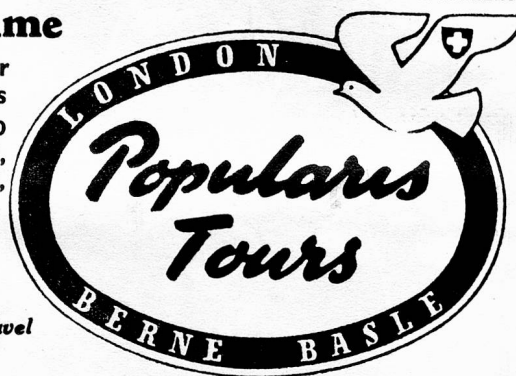
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