

82nd fête suisse

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**A. RENOU.**

President: "Fête Suisse" Committee.

*O Suisse! loin de toi content je ne puis vivre,
J'ai besoin de ton ciel, de tes sommets altiers,
Dans l'exil ton nom seul, ton souvenir m'enivre
Et je te sens plus près, riche d'amitiés!*

Who amongst my compatriots sojourning in foreign lands has not, at one time or another, felt deep down in his heart that longing and yearning after the lovely little country which we call so proudly our own?

Fate (or may we call it destiny?) plays some remarkable pranks with us at times, and therefore many who would like to spend their holidays in the "old country" are, for some reason or other, prevented from doing so. As a small recompense the committee of the "Fête Suisse" annually offers us an evening where at least in thought we can for a few golden hours dwell amongst our own people and the beauties of that land which means so much to us Swiss.

The pious wish expressed in the last, as well as in former, issues of this paper, that I would like to see the Central Hall, Westminster, filled to capacity as it was when General Henri Guisan, commander-in-chief of the Swiss army during the last war, was present (May 31st, 1948) remains still unfulfilled. Whilst the attendance in the neighbourhood of 2,000 can be considered satisfactory, there were, however, still a good many empty seats.

Full or not full this year's "Fête Suisse" has, again, been a great success; throughout the evening a happy atmosphere prevailed — a sure sign that the varied programme which was presented was appreciated.

In the past, I have often described the Central Hall as being "drab" and "uninspiring". In all fairness I must retract this statement now, because, since we met there last year, the large hall has been redecorated in a colour scheme of pale blue and white, thus looking much more presentable.

Two large Swiss flags could be seen, one was placed in front of the organ whilst the other was in front of the middle gallery. The flower decorations of deep red carnations and rhododendrons were the work of Miss E. Finger, the Swiss florist, who deserves to be complimented for the attractive display.

Long before the programme was timed to start the hall and the galleries began to fill up. To make the

82nd FÊTE SUISSE

at

CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER

on

THURSDAY, 4th APRIL, 1957

Under the Presidency of

MONSIEUR ARMIN DAENIKER

Ministre de Suisse

waiting less dreary and more agreeable, Mr. E. P. Dick played a medley of Swiss tunes on the organ.

On the approach of 6 o'clock, H.E. the Swiss Minister, accompanied by his collaborators at the Legation and their ladies, Monsieur M. Glasson, States Councillor, and Madame Glasson, and the Mayor of the town of Bulle, Dr. Joseph Pasquier, made their entry and were received by Mr. A. Renou, President of the "Fête Suisse" committee, and by Mr. Ch. L. Chapuis and Madame Chapuis; the last named presented Mme. Glasson with a bouquet of red roses.

When the clock struck six the programme started with an organ prelude followed by the Swiss Hymn — which was sung upstanding — and a prayer given by Pasteur Claude Reverdin of the Eglise Suisse.

Then appeared on the stage three young gentlemen wearing white silk shirts and black trousers, these were billed as the "Trio Domino". I do not think that ever before the mouth organ was heard on any "Fête Suisse" programme. Two of the artists carried instruments somewhat different from those we used to know as "Mulorgele". They played three items, "Valse de Luterbach", "Montferrine", and a Polka, quite competently, but whether they could be heard at the far end of the hall is another question. Judging from the applause these mouth organ wizards received, their performance seemed to be appreciated.

When calm was restored, Mr. A. Renou, President of the "Fête Suisse" committee, appeared on the platform and very briefly extended a hearty welcome to the large audience, to the Swiss Minister, to the distinguished visitors and especially to the "Chanson de Gruyère". He wished everyone a pleasant evening, and, as he did so without losing much time, everybody was grateful to him.

It has always been the custom that the youngsters of the Colony should be seen and heard, and rightly so; they are the new generation who will have to carry on one day.

With piano accompaniment about 40 young people, some of very tender age and others more "advanced", all belonging to the "Schweizerkirche", made their entry on the stage. Some seemed to be very shy and somewhat bewildered (it is no joke to face a large audience perhaps for the first time in one's life), yet others were quite undeterred and self-confident.

They enacted very charmingly the well-known dialect song "Es Burebuebli mani nid", singing and acting well. Some of the faces of the young actors were delightful to watch. A number of the children then executed a "Reigen" whilst others supplied the vocal accompaniment. Mrs. M. Meier, who trained the children, is to be congratulated on a performance which fully deserved the applause which was so spontaneously given.

The next item on the programme was mentioned as a piano recital by Madame Marie-Louise Boy de la Tour, but unfortunately this had to be omitted owing to the indisposition of the artiste, which was much regretted.

H.E. the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, then appeared on the stage and amidst much handclapping he said:

"For the third time since my arrival in London I have the honour to preside over the Fête Suisse and to greet you all on behalf of the Swiss Legation. I feel glad indeed to see that so many hundreds of our compatriots and friends have responded to the appeal of your Committee, which is, I think, a well deserved reward for their unceasing endeavours to make the Fête Suisse a new and resounding success every year. To those of you who are perhaps not familiar with the significance of this Spring Festival, let me mention from the chronicles of our colony that from 1863 onwards the Swiss of London have been gathering under the Swiss flag one evening every year. At first it was no more than a family gathering round a cup of tea in order to renew common bonds of friendship

and to evoke cherished memories of our home country. Very soon the attendance increased and reached into the hundreds. But now as then, the Fête Suisse has kept its true character as a family gathering and although we may not all know each other, we are conscious that we are of one and the same kin.

"Thus the Fête Suisse is also an occasion for those who perhaps have arrived only a short while ago and still feel strangers in this great metropolis, to meet the older generation, those who truly represent the great traditions of this colony; it is an occasion for them to see some of the many activities, patriotic, cultural, social and philanthropic, which are going on within the ranks of the Swiss community, in our Churches and in the many societies; an occasion for the elders to make contact with the many thousands of young Swiss who come to this country each year in order to learn its language and to acquaint themselves with its way of life. It is an occasion also for all of us to get a whiff of the refreshing air of our cherished home country which our visitors bring to us from Switzerland.

"I wish to extend a hearty welcome to the distinguished artists who will entertain us to-night with Swiss music, classical and popular, and particularly to the Chanson de Gruyère. Is it not a happy coincidence that this year the City of Fribourg will be celebrating the 800th anniversary of its foundation and that we shall thus have an opportunity to rejoice in this happy occasion with a select group from this canton, headed by the distinguished State Councillor M. Glasson? Indeed, there is hardly a Swiss who will not keep at heart the vivid and deep



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STATES COUNCILLOR MONSIEUR P. GLASSON PRESENTS A SOUVENIR TO THE SWISS MINISTER AND MADAME DAENIKER.



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MR. L. CHAPUIS RECEIVES HOMAGE FROM THE YOUNGER GENERATION.

impression of the City of Fribourg embedded under the shadow of its ancient cathedral, with those graceful bridges spanning the Sarine and its ramparts which, in the words of Ruskin, are 'mounting the abrupt hill slopes like running cats'. Gruyère does not need an introduction. The name itself sounds to me like an evocation to visit this ancient burgh again, to admire the splendid architecture of its main street and the magnificent castle of the Counts of Gruyère, on its promontory overlooking the lovely undulating valley and lush green pastures, and to meet once more a people which still holds fast to its ancient traditions and its love of music.

"To all of you I wish to convey a message of goodwill from the Swiss authorities to whose minds, I assure you, the wellbeing as well as the needs of our Swiss abroad are ever present and who want me to thank you for your faithful attachment to our common cause. At the same time I wish to express our gratitude to the authorities of this great Nation for the hospitality which they extend so liberally to our compatriots in this country. Indeed, the sympathetic understanding which we get in this country will always be the basis of a firm friendship between our two Nations, an infinite source of comfort and confidence which brightens our outlook for the future.

"Je ne voudrais pas terminer sans adresser quelques paroles de bienvenue à nos visiteurs de la Suisse romande, aux éminents musiciens, aux membres de la Chanson de Gruyère et à leur chef, le distingué compositeur M. P. A. Gaillard, M. le Syndic de Bulle et surtout aussi à M. le Conseiller d'Etat Glasson et sa charmante épouse. C'est un attrait particulier de notre Fête Suisse que nous devons aux

heureuses initiatives de son Président, M. Renou, de recevoir chaque année un groupe de compatriotes de l'un ou l'autre canton, accompagnés de hauts magistrats. Il y a quelques années, ce fut, du du Valais, la Chanson du Rhône de Sierre; en 1955, un chœur mixte de Berne et l'année passée la Chanson de Montreux. Nous nous devons donc que cette année ce soit les Fribourgeois; c'est un événement dans les annales de la colonie de vous recevoir à Londres et nous sommes heureux que vous soyez venus aussi nombreux.

"Le canton de Fribourg ne se trouve guère sur l'itinéraire du touriste ordinaire que les bureaux de voyage lui ont tracé; et encore il l'aurait vite parcouru. Il faut être connaisseur subtil pour découvrir le cachet et la variété de ses paysages préalpins, y trouver la synthèse heureuse entre le réel et le surnaturel, ses paysages empreints d'une forte spiritualité mais adoucis par un sourire discret; paysages qui visent partout vers des horizons lointains, universels et même vers le mystique.

"La cité de Fribourg qui fêtera bientôt l'anniversaire de sa fondation en 1157 fut le premier état romand dans l'ancienne Ligue des treize cantons. Nous sommes conscients de l'importance de l'apport fribourgeois dans les guerres qui ont assuré notre indépendance et formé l'ancienne Confédération suisse. Mais ce que nous voulons retenir aujourd'hui, c'est la mission de Fribourg de réunir en harmonie l'élément latin et l'élément germanique, harmonie qui s'exprime si heureusement dans son architecture. Les ponts majestueux que nous admirons du temps de notre jeunesse, reliant si gracieusement les hautes rives de la Sarine, ne sont-ils pas un symbole de cette

vocation, qui est devenue d'ailleurs celle de la grande patrie, la Suisse multilingue.

"Situé autour d'une tête de pont, la transition entre deux cultures — ailleurs source de conflits interminables — a inspiré Fribourg vers une synthèse viable, elle y a trouvé sa propre âme et forgé une unité, ancrée dans une foi solide et empreinte de sérénité et de confiance dans sa destinée. Cette destinée fut celle de porter, par le rayonnement de son enseignement, le renom de Fribourg bien au delà des confins de la patrie.

"Ce rôle, Fribourg ne l'aurait pas rempli sans son fervent humanisme, son esprit de tolérance; c'est ainsi que les régions si diverses du canton ont gardé leur caractère propre. Nous savons bien que ce ne fut pas sans âpres luttes politiques et nous avons même eu ici l'écho du rôle qu'une certaine chèvre avait joué récemment encore dans ces luttes. Nulle vallée, je pense, n'a gardé un caractère aussi prononcé que la Gruyère. Les Gruyériens, toujours prêts à défendre leur liberté et leur autonomie, ont sauvé un patrimoine de traditions anciennes, de charmants costumes ainsi qu'un riche trésor de chansons si mélodieuses. Nous sommes heureux que vous soyez venus enrichir notre fête par votre présence.

"Je souhaite à tous les membres de la colonie et visiteurs de la Suisse une heureuse fête et je tiens surtout à remercier M. Renou et ses collaborateurs d'avoir de nouveau assuré par leur initiative et leur dévouement le succès de cette soirée qui fait honneur à une glorieuse tradition."

The Swiss Minister's oration was warmly cheered.

The lights then became dimmed, but spotlights picked up the members of the "Chanson de Gruyère" descending from both ends of the gallery on to the

stage amidst the ringing of cowbells, the sounds of the "Ranze de vache" and tremendous cheering from the audience.

This colourful procession was headed by a sturdy *montagnard* carrying — almost on his head — a full-sized Gruyère cheese of considerable weight. His body-guard consisted of four men carrying large cowbells.

The bells were placed in front of the platform and behind it the choir lined up awaiting the arrival of their conductor. The charming ladies and handsome gentlemen dressed in their becoming Gruyère costumes presented an attractive sight.

Then a solitary figure descended in measured steps from the gallery amidst much cheering, Mr. Paul-André Gaillard, the conductor of the choir. He is no stranger to the Colony, having conducted the "Chanson de Montreux" at last year's "Fête Suisse"; he enjoys — and rightly so — a fine reputation not only as a conductor but also as a composer; in him we recognise the real artist, whose aim is to make his country — his rivers, his lakes, his people and his wine — live in the songs and dances, some of which he has himself composed. Mr. Gaillard has trained his choir, which he conducts with rare sensitiveness, to perfection, and they responded to the slightest movement of his hands or head with amazing promptness.

The choir started with three songs, "Nostalgie", by Carlo Boller, "Le chagrin de Madeleine", by Boyet, and Boller's delightful "Sigismond le jardinier", all rendered with much warmth and purity of tone. The next item was a solo by Mr. Claude Gafner, who sang Gustave Doret's "Chanson d'Aliénor". He is the owner of a very sympathetic



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THE CHANSON DE GRUYERE AT THE SWISS LEGATION.

voice which he keeps under perfect control, and his singing was much enjoyed. Two more songs by the choir were preceded by folk dances competently and lively executed by a few couples.

Waves and waves of applause greeted the performance of the "Chanson de Gruyère"; to say that their performance was perfect, an artistic enjoyment, is but to state the obvious, for these singers had the audience completely at their mercy from the moment they came on to the platform.

Then the first part of the programme ended and an interval of about an hour was announced.

This year for the first time adequate catering arrangements were made, a large hall on the ground floor being made available. Thus the often dangerous overcrowding on former occasions found a happy solution. Year after year I have in this paper advocated different catering arrangements, and I am glad that at long last I have succeeded.

The family Schmid of the Glendower Hotel were again entrusted with the catering; as usual they accomplished their task with efficiency. They, and their co-helpers, are to be congratulated on their efforts; it is not an easy business to fill over 2,000 hungry mouths in barely an hour! Within a short time almost all the good things such as "Würschtli" (from Bartholdi), cakes, patisserie, sandwiches, etc., had vanished.

The second part of the programme started with community singing, and many amongst the audience joined in very heartily, encouraged by Mr. E. P. Dick's excellent organ accompaniment.

Then our old friends the "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese made their bow. Amidst general applause this brave group of "signorine e giovani ticinesi" appeared on the stage. It was noticed at once that they were not only more numerous than usual, but also — like the hall — "renovated", some of the "signorine" appearing in new colourful costumes.

They sang in accomplished style a number of the nostalgic "Canzonette" of their lovely little canton, where the sun shines so brightly, and the rain (at times) comes down so persistently! There were old numbers and new ones, all beautifully rendered. On leaving the platform they sang their, by now well-known, signature tune "Ciau".

The clapping which rewarded their performance seemed to be never-ending, but owing to the injunction at the foot of the programme that there would be no *encores* the hunger for more could not be satisfied.

Once again the "Trio Domino" played popular and classical music.

Scarcely had the applause died down than on to the stage walked the members of the Swiss Male Choir. While the years have made heavy gaps in their ranks and put more than a sprinkling of grey on many a noble brow, the quality of their harmony and their spirit never falters. They sang Mendelssohn's "Des Jägers Abschied", "Le flot et le vent", by Bovet, and in conclusion, Stauffacher's "Mein Herz ist fröhlich alle Zeit". The scarcity of tenors in this choir was evident, but nevertheless their singing was throughout melodious and enjoyable. Mr. E. P. Dick, their conductor, deserves compliments for his noteworthy achievements in spite of many difficulties. They were rewarded with deserved applause.

Glancing at my programme I noticed that another

"Young Generation", this time the one from the "Eglise Suisse", was to appear. The title of their performance read "L'opération", followed by the remark "Silence please!" This was most mysterious, but it soon became evident why silence was requested as the gruesome story developed.

Two gentlemen dressed in spotless white overalls wheeled on to the stage an operating table, on which lay stretched out a patient who was, as it appeared to be, "interfered" with by the surgeon and his assistant.

After a few preliminaries, such as washing hands, sharpening knives, feeling the pulse of the patient and listening to his heart beat, the operation began. Not being a medical man I am somewhat ignorant of the contents of the abdomen, but judging from what "came out" of this tortured body, which on occasions "rose" in protest, they must be pretty substantial.

This innocent little performance was very well acted, and everyone was much relieved when the "victim" apparently none the worse for his experience, joined his torturers in order to acknowledge the applause which was given them.

This memorable evening concluded with the re-appearance of the "Chanson", and again we were spellbound by their excellent singing and dancing. I will only mention "C'était le bon temps", by P. A. Gaillard, "Joli Printemps", and J. Bovet's "Là-haut sur la montagne", that lovely song which took us high up in our mountains.

Mr. Claude Gafner sang the "Chanson du Berger" with vivacity and beauty of tone proving that he is a very gifted singer.

As there was a little time in hand, the choir as *encores* sang two items, one in Italian and the other in "Schwyzerdütsch", and the clear diction showed that they are not only fine singers but equally good linguists.

Thunderous applause was a sure sign how much the performances of this excellent choir were enjoyed and esteemed.

Then the Grand Finale approached which was preceded by a few words by Mr. A. Renou, who, in the

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capacity of President of the "Fête Suisse", thanked all the artistes, especially the "Chanson" and its sympathetic conductor, as well as all those who had helped in one way or another to make this 82nd "Fête Suisse" such a remarkable one. He also mentioned that the huge "Gruyère" cheese which was given by the visitors would be cut up and given to hospitals and the poor.

The lights were then lowered and above the platform, where most of the performers were assembled, the Swiss flag was lit up, and with patriotic fervour the whole assembly sang with organ accompaniment our National Anthem.

In concluding my report I would like to render homage and sincere thanks on behalf of all those who attended this year's festival, first and foremost to Mr. A. Renou, who has tackled a difficult and exacting job with his proverbial organising talents — only those who are acquainted with the work such an undertaking entails know what a tremendous amount of time and thought are required; it was not easy, but the President's optimism and his spirit of "never say die" has conquered all obstacles.

There are many, too, who have worked hard giving their services freely; I cannot mention all, but some at least deserve to be singled out; they are: Messrs. W. Wyler, C. Nater, X. Speckert, J. Zimmermann, not forgetting Mr. Raymond Kohler, a member of the

Swissair staff who was put at the disposal of the committee by the management, and who did a magnificent job in looking after the visitors right from the beginning to the end.

This fine and inspiring evening again has brought us nearer to each other; once again we have felt that we belong together, and in that spirit we shall carry on, whatever difficulties we may encounter, for the glory of our country:

LA SUISSE!

ST.



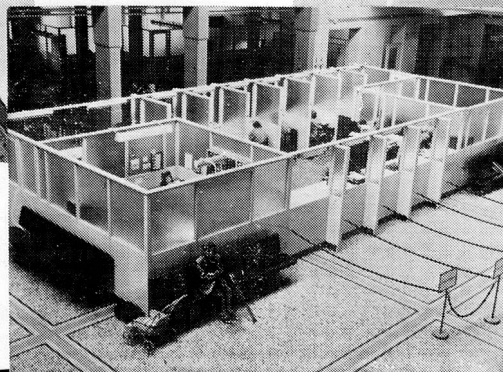
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