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IMPRESSIONS OF THE BRITISH WEEKS IN ZURICH AND THE LORD MAYOR'S VISIT

For any true friend of Britain it is a matter of great satisfaction that the British Weeks in Zurich, from 2nd to 14th September, were as successful as the similar effort which we Swiss undertook in this country in 1959. It is, of course, easier to concentrate an enterprise of this kind in a town the size of Zurich than to hold it in London, where it can hardly avoid being swamped by other events, especially if it happens to coincide, as was the case four years ago, with a General Election. Nevertheless, thanks to the spontaneous support of British firms and of the public, the Swiss flags all over the West End did hold their own, and so did the displays of Swiss goods in the principal shops of the main thoroughfares, and the various cultural events.

The Swiss are somehow more reserved than the British, and the British Isles are more remote to them than Switzerland is to most of our British friends. The organizers of the British Fair and British Weeks therefore made careful preparations to ensure the success of their endeavours, while the town authorities of Zurich lost no opportunity of helping in their own way to underline the importance of the occasion. The town was gaily decorated during this fortnight, and even the blue-and-white tram-cars carried the Union Jack together with the Swiss and Zurich flags. Hardly any shop missed the chance of giving its windows a British angle, if only by exhibiting a tartan, a bottle of gin or whisky, or some boxes of English tobacco. A great number of people were always gathered in front of Türlers, in the Paradeplatz, to admire the replicas of the Crown Jewels, and the big department stores did their best to familiarize Swiss buyers with the products of our principal EFTA partner.

The British Fair, which was the largest of its kind ever held on the continent of Europe and which occupied three halls at the Hallenstadion, was inaugurated on 2nd September by the President of the Board of Trade, Mr. Erroll, and Bundesrat Schaffner. It attracted large crowds every day, although it specialized on the technical side and offered first and foremost a display for prospective buyers of machinery and other capital goods, chemicals, etc. Naturally, the stalls of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, those concerned with Hovercraft, and those of the London goldsmiths aroused the greatest interest. But the London clearing banks, Lloyd's Insurance, BEA and BOAC also provided most valuable information about their activities. According to the organizers, the response by trade circles was most satisfactory. One excellent idea was to reserve one day for the businessmen of each of the countries adjoining Switzerland, who were transported to Zurich by charter planes.

An original feature which did not fail to draw enormous crowds was the huge cake weighing 2½ tons which was sent to Zurich by special plane. Mrs. Erroll cut it in the Münsterhof, after delivering a charming speech, and it was later distributed at the Zurich hospitals.

The performances of Benjamin Britten's "Rape of Lucretia" by a British opera group at the Stadttheater, the showing of the latest Rank comedy film at the Corso, the two concerts at the Tonhalle by the National Youth Orchestra — 100 youngsters from 13 to 17 playing classical music before an enthusiastic audience of young people — and an exhibition of "British paintings of the '60s"

were the main cultural features; but they caused us to regret all the more that the English theatre was not also represented.

It had been a matter of conjecture how the Zurich public would react to having the Lord Mayor's Show in their streets. For many months the popular Lord Mayor, Sir Ralph Perring, had been declaring that he regarded his visit to Switzerland — his second home — as one of the highlights of his term of office, and that he wanted to emphasize its importance by bringing with him not only his Sheriffs, the Sword Bearer and Sergeant-at-Arms, but also prominent representatives of the Common Council, the Pikemen and Musketeers of the Honourable Artillery Company, and a miners' choir.

The solemn entry of the Lord Mayor and his suite into the Stadthaus, with its lovely Italian architecture, was a sight such as is seldom witnessed in that centre of municipal bureaucracy. Clad in his magnificent robes, Sir Ralph delivered a friendly message on illuminated parchment from the Common Council to the town of Zurich, and was greeted with an eloquent speech in English by the equally popular Town Mayor of Zurich, Dr. Emil Landolt.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and the sun, like a happy omen, broke through the clouds after several days of pouring rain just as the Lord Mayor's Show started. More than 100,000 people lined the streets. As at his inauguration last November, the Lord Mayor devoted the Show to the promotion of exports. It was therefore opened by twenty-five motor-cars of the latest British models, tractors and other machinery, followed by two London double-decker buses. The bands of the Cameronians and the Junior Guards were as great a novelty to the people of Zurich as the Welsh miners' choir. A more familiar feature was the delegates of the twenty-six Zurich guilds with their colours, more than half of them mounted, escorting a procession of the City Fathers, members of the Executive Council and their ladies in landaus, who all looked as gay as a wedding party and seemed rather surprised to receive such an ovation from the taxpayers. Meanwhile, the public were becoming impatient to see the Sheriffs and the Lord Mayor, who concluded the procession in their magnificent coaches, brought over specially from London, and who were followed by an escort of loyal Pikemen. The public were unusually unsparing, in fact rather profuse, in their applause for the head of the great metropolis. Nothing however, Sir Ralph declared later, was so moving as the little blind girl who ran up to his coach, eager to feel his warm handshake, since she was not able to see the gorgeous show.

The after-dinner speeches exchanged at the various functions, as for instance at the banquet given by the Stadtrat at the Muraltengut, or during the Knabenschiessen at the Albisgütli, provided occasions for celebrating the bonds of friendship between the two nations and their common ideals. Particular emphasis was laid on the similar character of the two cities as centres of trade and finance, on the fact that both have a still surviving guild tradition, and on the many contacts which have linked them together in the course of history. The beautiful silver loving-cup presented by the Lord Mayor to the Stadtrat of Zurich will be a lasting souvenir of this memorable visit; it will be as greatly treasured as the one which was presented by Queen Elizabeth I to the Protestant City Fathers more than 300 years ago, and which can still be admired at the Landesmuseum.

From a Special Correspondent.