

# The jewish emancipation in Switzerland

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## THE JEWISH EMANCIPATION IN SWITZERLAND

The 14th of January this year marked the centenary of the equality of rights for Jewish settlers in Switzerland. Yet it was not until 1874 that total freedom in all religious beliefs became a fundamental Swiss law. The Jewish settlers were centred in the main around the two villages of Lengnau and Oberendingen in the Aargau. According to an Aargau law of 15th May 1805, the Jews were not entitled to the same rights enjoyed by the rest of the Canton's citizens, but were held to the same obligations.

Many rules were instigated, whereby the Jews were restricted in their trade and employment. The two Cantons of Basle added to the hardship of the Israelites by strenuously opposing their entry into Switzerland from Alsace as well as exerting the customary restrictions on Jewish trade.

Three great industrial nations of the nineteenth century, France, U.S.A. and Great Britain made repeated protests concerning these restrictions imposed by Swiss laws. The second Cabinet of the Netherlands States-General met on 8th May 1863, and after a lively debate found it impossible to ratify the existing trade agreement between their country and Switzerland on account of the Swiss attitude towards Jewish settlers.

In the same year, the French drew up conditions which were to be the basis of any future agreement for trade and immigration between France and Switzerland. In fact, what the French wanted was the abolition of the "Reynevalsche Klausel". Because of the obvious economic implications of the trade barrier between the two countries, the Swiss agreed. These two confrontations produced the pressure necessary for true Jewish emancipation.

During the centenary celebrations organised by the Swiss-Israelite Corporate Federation in Zurich, — there are 20,000 Jews in Switzerland — Prof. Dr. von Salis looked back in retrospect and recalled the phase of the nineteenth century Jewish emancipation in Switzerland. He stated that the demolition of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (10 a.d.) and the following dispersal of the Jewish nation, together with the approval of the first French Constitution (1791) which had as its principle the freedom of all peoples and their equality in law and justice, were the most significant dates in history affecting the Jews.

Federal Councillor Rudolf Gnaegi brought greetings from the Swiss Government and made a special appeal for the prevention of prejudice and for practising real humanity. Zurich's new Municipal President, Dr. S. Widmer, recalled 1862, the year the Jewish settlers first gained the right to live in Zurich and the year 1861 when the first Jew became a Swiss citizen with all the civic rights of Zurich.

Dr. Widmer thought the sentiments which eventually brought the Jewish emancipation "truly Swiss". He then mentioned the special achievements of the Israelites in order of their importance, such as patronage of all fields of art and culture, finance and science.

The main speech of the celebration day was given by Dr. Georges Brunschvig who again honoured the people who had made emancipation possible. He then mentioned the situation of the present day, stating that during the last thirty-four years, Judaism in Switzerland had been in real danger and that there was still not, as yet, a Swiss law which offered effective protection against antisemitism. The President of the Swiss-Israelite Corporate Federation took a short look at the rehabilitation work in Israel with the help of Switzerland. He ended his speech with the warning against totalitarian tendencies, especially from the

groups of the extreme right. Dr. Brunschvig also said that "Hitler's executors" had started up once again and that antisemitism was after all a real danger to any democratic way of life.

The culmination of a hundred years of Jewish emancipation can be found in the new Jewish Museum in Basle, which was opened on 17th June by Dr. Christoph Bernoulli. There can be traced centuries of ancient culture ranging from the old text of the Tora and Talmud to the colourful wall carpets depicting religious symbols and beliefs. The Museum is not only the most important one of its kind in the German-speaking lands, but it helps to break down the cloud of secrecy which has always surrounded the Israelites and their culture and religion.

E.B.

(Based on news and information received by courtesy of A.T.S. and "Basler Nachrichten.")

Israel-Switzerland relations have recently been testified to by the following events. In April, the Swiss Federation of Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Zurich announced that the organisation had 739 members. They had donated Fr.700,000.— for the creation of a subsoil water research institute and would contribute a further sum of Fr.75,000.— for the next two years. The Swiss-Israeli Society awarded the Anne Frank Medal which carries the inscription "I believe in the good in man" to the former President of the Geneva Council of State Jean Treina, in recognition of his efforts in furthering cultural relations between the two countries.

As every year, oranges were sold in Zurich and other towns in Switzerland for the benefit of the Swiss agricultural college "Nachlat Jehuda" in Israel. In 1966, 190 children from twenty countries are studying at the college, one of the best in Israel. Its new dining hall was opened earlier in the year in the presence of the Swiss Ambassador Monsieur Jean de Stoutz. He was also present at the inauguration of the Swiss Children's Home at Jehuda. There is also a Swiss Children's Village at Kirjath Jearim, which was founded early in the 'fifties and where the former Federal Councillor Petitpierre laid the foundation stone for a new building in May 1965. This should bring the capacity of the home to 150.

On 29th June, an official Swiss day was held at the International Industries Fair in Tel Aviv. Fifty Swiss firms were amongst the exhibitors. Swiss exports to Israel increased from 72.7m. francs in 1964 to 88m. last year, whilst imports from Israel rose from 47m. to 48.1m. francs in the same period. A delegation of ten men from Swiss industry visited Israel for a week at the end of June. They also attended the Swiss Day at the Fair in Tel Aviv.

[A.T.S.]

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