

Swiss national fete day : thoughts and reflections

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SWISS NATIONAL FETE DAY.

Thoughts and Reflections.

Every year, on the first of August, the Swiss people celebrate the birthday of their national Independance.

It was in 1291 when the Republic was founded and therefore has now weathered the storms for 649 years.

Many of us will joyfully remember the happy celebrations in days gone by. Being unable to visit Switzerland this year, let us try to recall the scene and unfold it afresh before our mental vision:— Church-bells ringing melodiously, transmitting fraternal greetings from village to town and from canton to canton — fires burning brightly on every hill and mountain top signalling the precious message of Liberty throughout the land — massed bands playing patriotic airs and choral societies singing old national songs — mountaineers yodelling to their hearts content — and the beautiful Swiss lakes swarming with gondolas, gaily decorated with chinese lanterns, their lights reflected in the silvery water in all the colours of the rainbow. National birthday parties everywhere, gaiety and laughter interspersed by patriotic speeches, paying homage to the ancestors who founded the Swiss Republic and to the heroes who fought, bled, suffered and died for the cause of Freedom, Liberty and Independance.

This year, under the shadow of current events, the 1st of August celebrations will obviously be more sombre and dignified, the usual rejoicings being subdued not only in view of Switzerland's own difficulties and anxieties but with due regard to the sufferings and tribulations of so many nations engulfed in the dangerous whirlpool of War.

Nevertheless, Independance Day is being celebrated so as to prove to the world at large that Swiss unity is a reality and not a sham and that the Swiss of to-day are as determined to preserve and to defend their liberty and cherished democratic institutions as were the Swiss of yore.

Let us hope, however, that Switzerland will remain neutral and inviolate, where the fugitive Goddess of Peace may find sanctuary, with the beautiful Swiss Alps as her throne and the Swiss National Army as her faithful guardian.

* * *

No age has equalled the fantastic nightmare of this. In the kaleidoscopic march of events, Europe's candles are nearly out. History moves in giant strides.

As Byron says:

“A thousand years scarce serve to build a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust.”

Amid the elemental violence of these times we Swiss are bound to be deeply concerned about the destiny of our own dear old country. We do not wish to become imprisoned in a Bastille of Autocracy but desire to remain at liberty in the lofty alps of freedom. The roots of Independance lie deep in the soil of our native land. We are a liberty-loving, peace-pursuing nation, with no axe to grind and no desire to meddle in other peoples affairs, our only wish being to live our own lives in our own way and without interference from outside.

Let us prove to the world that Switzerland is virile and strong and not a decadent worn-out nation; a

country guided by men of strong fibre and unselfish patriotism prepared to defend Swiss independance at all costs rather than to become mere puppets obedient to every pull of string from outside.

Swiss courage, honesty, tenacity and skill — all these qualities we still possess.

Let us proclaim, that the Swiss Federation is not a mere form which has survived its function, but a living, growing, organic entity, whose roots are struck deep in its mother earth, and nourished with the heart blood of its people.

“Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself has said:—
This is my own, my native land?”

* * *

The Press is full of talk and speculation about the kind of world which will emerge after this fearful convulsion is ended. Whilst we all hope for the best there is much that can be done now. Let Switzerland set an example and do some spring-cleaning of her own.

The Swiss motto “One for all and all for one” must become a reality and not a mere catchword. Humanitarian principles must come first. Platitudes must go. All must stand together for the fundamentals of law, liberty and justice. Let us all realize that vested interests and greedy capitalism are as harmful as fascist and communist doctrines. Let all Swiss refuse to bow the knee to Baal and take a loftier view of their personal obligations and duties to their country. The happiness and prosperity of every citizen must be the concern of all.

We must observe the strictest discipline and strive for the satisfaction that comes with hard work, devoted service and successful achievement. We must not allow ourselves to be divided by faction or civil sedition. All “isms” are a curse — national interests must come first. Remember:— “United we stand, divided we fall” and “Eternal vigilance is the price of Liberty.”

* * *

Having put our own house in order we are better qualified to express our opinion on affairs in general and the problems of the future.

It has been stated that no post-war settlement can ignore the role of the United States of America, her inspiration and resources being an essential factor in the moral and economic reconstruction of a stricken and exhausted Europe.

But what of Switzerland? Surely she also has a part to play, not only as a little model of liberty in the centre of Europe but as an example to Europe, as a rallying point for all which put their faith in the old ideals of humanity and liberty. The fact that we are a small neutral nation does not mean that we cannot express our own opinion or that we have no common interest in the maintenance of liberty.

Switzerland has given the world one splendid institution:— the Red Cross. Geneva is the seat of another — the League of Nations. Some people say that the League is defunct and an idle dream. One might as well say that justice is ridiculous since injustice persists or that law is foolish since crime con-

tinues. Unless worse things befall, the League, joined by North and South America, Japan, Russia and all Europe, will be more necessary than ever.

There must be a new social order in Europe, built on foundations which themselves will be well laid and solid; free from greed, avarice, intolerance and brute force. This will require the highest statesmanship and religion, broadminded and tolerant.

But above all, there must be a revival of Christian faith whose strength rests on spiritual truth.

Therein lies the only hope for a better Europe and a nobler world.

There has been too much political opium and not enough Christian spirit, too much argument about dogmas, doctrines, creeds and denominations, and not enough tolerance, charity and brotherly love.

Unless the Church pulls itself together, plays its part and fulfils its mission, Christian civilisation will perish.

This conflict is a life and death struggle between two moral concepts and two cultures, on the outcome of which the future destiny not only of Switzerland, but of all Mankind depend.

Let us hope and pray that the forces battling for progress and all the things worth living for will emerge victorious and that we shall in due course be permitted to witness the dawn of a new era of happiness, prosperity and universal Peace.

Meanwhile, we must be of good cheer and put our trust in God.

Long live Switzerland!

F. ISLER.

A GAME OF GOLF AND THE SEQUEL.

(The following, reprinted from the "*Evening Standard*," 12.7.40, seems to show that in the present trying times even innocent jokes and humour may have unpleasant consequences.)

A Nazi salute given as a joke on the first tee of Muswell Hill golf course caused three men to be arrested.

Hans Koch, a Swiss, Albert Henry Cremer, and August Muller, were charged at Wood Green with being concerned in using insulting behaviour.

Mr. Pease, steward of the golf club, said that he looked out of his bedroom window at 8.30 a.m. on Sunday, June 30th, and saw Cremer come up to Koch and Muller at the first tee and give them the Nazi salute. He heard Koch say that was a risky thing to do in public.

Mr. Pease said he was annoyed; he telephoned the police and the three men were arrested.

It was stated that the prosecution did not impute any sinister motive to the action, nor had they reason to believe that the men were disloyal.

The three men all avowed their loyalty to the country, and said Cremer gave the salute as a joke. Muller said he would die for this country.

Cremer said he might have done it in derision. "I often say when hitting a ball, 'I wish that were Hitler,'" he added.

The case was dismissed, but the chairman said the bench thought it had been very rightly and properly brought.

CORRESPONDENCE.

July 20th, 1940.

The Editor,
The Swiss Observer,
23, Leonard Street,
London, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

A propos Mr. Borel's letter which appeared in your issue No. 974, I can endorse his remarks as I too mentioned the reports which appeared in the "*Swiss Observer*" to the local Police and they obviously appreciated the advice given therein. Your news regarding the ownership of "cameras and telescopes," however, came as quite a shock to me seeing that my Company is responsible for the distribution of cine cameras made by E. Paillard & Co. S.A., of Ste-Croix, and we happen to have some two hundred such cameras of high value in stock. The statement may do a certain amount of harm to the trade — and Swiss trade at that — whereas it is perfectly true that the number of subjects which may be taken is, of course, restricted, it nevertheless is a question of "common-sense" and there is no real reason why this fascinating hobby should be discarded just because one may not, of course, photograph docks, harbours, camps and subjects which no one would ordinarily wish to photograph.

Adverting to your remarks concerning Swiss radio reception, I have experienced no difficulty as regards Beromünster and the reception from Monte Ceneri is quite good; admittedly that from Sottens is very poor, indeed at times quite hopeless, although I manage as a rule every night to hear the news bulletin at 10.20 p.m. even if it means sticking ones' ear to the loudspeaker.

This past week, however, I have found the reception relatively good and free from interference. I have to add, however, that I own one of our best Swiss makes of radio sets with a reputation for selectivity.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES FER.

THE HELVETIA CLUB

1, GERRARD PLACE, W.1. GERRARD 4674.
(Owned by Swiss for the benefit of Swiss.)

Announce

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to be held in the club-house on

THURSDAY, 1st AUGUST, 1940.

COMMENCING 8.0 p.m.

Celebrating

The Swiss National Day.

Admission by Ticket only, price 2s. Od. each.

Excellent cuisine and Refreshments at popular prices.