

71st Fête suisse

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71st FETE SUISSE.

The mere mention of the Fête Suisse immediately brings to my mind those Thursday afternoons in June before the war when we gathered at Central Hall. It used to be Gold Cup day at Ascot, and the evening papers were full of pictures of the King and Queen and Society attending the big event. As far back as I can remember it was invariably a fine afternoon, and the gathering of the Swiss in London was somehow connected with sunshine in Westminster, bright summer clothes and, towards the end of the evening, the last rays of the June sun stealing into the Hall through the skylight.

And then the war came and put an end to the annual Swiss reunion. Now, after these long and awful war years, the organising committee under its president, Mr. Charles Chapuis, decided that the moment had come to hold the Fête Suisse once again. The colony welcomed this decision and turned up in large numbers at the Central Hall Westminster, last Saturday 15th June. Although no records of attendance were broken it was as good a gathering as at any time before the war. This year's reunion will always live in my memory with the sight of a gaily decorated London. All down Regent Street and Haymarket the victory flags were out and Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square was strikingly beflagged. Even the drab and grey Government offices in Whitehall wore a face of happy celebration. Someone had the splendid idea to place flower boxes in front of the windows. And it was indeed a very pleasant sight to see the fresh bright colours all the way down to Parliament Square. Westminster, too, was gay with colour and full of holiday crowds, and all this took away the dreariness of the rainy afternoon.

Inside Central Hall the scenes were very nearly the same as years ago. Even before the official opening of the doors visitors had arrived and were soon filing up those handsome wide stairs to the promenade outside the concert hall. There, too, the picture was familiar. Everyone wanted to buy his own cantonal flag from one of the young ladies who had trays full of them. In the centre was a large stall where Mrs. Ch. Chapuis and her helpers were again working untiringly selling attractive "Sennechäppli" and lovely flower post-cards from Adelboden. Mr. Schmid of Glendower fame again had the catering in hand, and he seemed to have achieved the impossible by providing food and drink for the whole assembly, a feat which he, his family and staff accomplished with their well-known efficiency. All the same I could not help recalling the once so popular "Cervelats" and "Wienerli."

The hall itself showed a friendly face with the cantonal flags displayed all the way round and the

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federal cross on its red ground side by side with the red white and blue of the Union Jack above the platform. Soon the hall filled up. I saw many familiar faces amongst the crowd. Quite an astonishing number of small children were present, though it struck me that there were only few youngsters over ten. Many amongst the children and several ladies looked especially attractive in some kind of national dress. Even a "Sennechäppli" or a "Chüjerchütteli" was good to look at. I am one of the lucky ones who possess a genuine "Tracht," and whenever I put it on I do so with pleasure and am very proud to wear it on an occasion like this. I hope that many of our Swiss friends will bring a costume over from Switzerland next time they have an opportunity.

A few minutes after 5.30 the programme started. The majestic sounds of the "Schweizerpsalm" sung by the community and accompanied on the organ filled the building. In the absence of Pasteur Pradervand and Father Lanfranchi who were both in Switzerland, Pasteur E. Jomini said a short and sincere prayer in French.

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, under whose presidency the Fête was held, then formally opened the meeting and addressed the gathering. His skill in speaking fluently our four national languages as well as English is generally known and was again greatly admired. He stressed the fact that through all these troublesome years the colony had stuck together and could now once again hold its traditional June reunion. He had a few special words for everybody: for our "Compatriotes Romands," for us "Dütschschwyzer," for our southern compatriots the "Ticinesi," and he particularly pleased our Romansh confederates with a few sentences in their melodious idiom. It was regrettable, though, that his address could not be as fully appreciated by everybody as it deserved, for, as is inevitable at a gathering of this kind, the children grew rather restless as the address went on for some time.

Next came the Accordion Group. It was smaller than usual this year, but I hope that this is only a passing phase. With its first bars it created that particular atmosphere so essentially belonging to our "Ländlermusik." It always gives me a kick to hear this kind of music. Perhaps this is because I have so often heard it in the "Innerschwyz" when I was a child. The solo number was played by a very small girl, Janine Gandon. She showed not the slightest sign of stage fright and performed with the same air of nonchalance as her father. She well deserved the warm applause by the audience and the bunch of sweet peas which a little fellow in a red "Sennechütteli" handed to her. She is eight and he just half her age!

The characteristic "Stimmung" created by the accordionists vanished as the party left the stage and the audience visibly settled down to a more serious part of the programme.

It has been the tradition to have artists of repute at the Fête Suisse, and this year the committee were able to get two very well-known Swiss artists, Sophie Wyss and Albert Ferber. Madame Wyss is an experienced soprano and her singing obviously delighted the assembly. She had chosen songs of a light character eminently suitable for such an occasion. The delicious freshness of Mahler's "Hans und Grete" was clearly enjoyed by everyone and all gaily joined in the chorus of "Auprès de ma blonde."

The other artist was the young pianist, Albert Ferber, who recently returned from Switzerland. His brilliant performance deeply impressed the gathering. Every artist has his own way of interpreting the music of the great masters, and Mr. Ferber put all the passion and sentimentality, and all the energy and vigour of his youth into his rendering of three of Chopin's immortal studies. The audience would not let him go without an encore.

No programme of a patriotic nature would be complete without a "Männerchor." It is one of the characteristic features of Swiss communal life, and it is only natural that the London colony should have produced a choir of this kind. One of the reasons why the Swiss Male Choir is so popular is no doubt the fact that so many families have an interest in its appearance, if only because they have a husband or a father performing in it. Mr. E. P. Dick, resplendent and unique in white tie and tails, conducted the fair-sized choir with his customary proficiency. The applause which the gathering gave the "Ranz des Vaches" unmistakably showed that they would not readily accept a programme without the "Männerchor."

One of the chief attractions of the Fête Suisse is the opportunity it offers to meet old friends. The interval seems to have been specially created for this purpose. There was a happy crowd chatting and laughing up and down the promenade. It was once again proved how ideally suited the Central Hall is for a function of this kind. Indeed there are few, if any, buildings in London which are so satisfactory from every point of view. It was a pity that the interval had to be cut in order to bring the programme up to schedule.

The second part was opened by the President of the Committee, the hardworking and debonair Mr. Ch. Chapuis. He greatly regretted to announce that Miss Rosemarie Pfaendler, who was to have given a violoncello solo could not appear owing to illhealth. He further informed us that he had received a telegram from the "Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger" in Berne saying that the children of Meiringen, who, as in years gone by, were going to gather "Alpenrosen" for us, could not do so owing to a heavy fall of snow

(25cm.). This was very unfortunate because it would not only deprive us of a greeting from our mountains but would substantially affect the financial results of the Fête, the proceeds of which were to go to the Swiss Benevolent Society.

Mr. Ferber then followed with a second performance playing Liszt's "Sospiro." He finished with Chopin's Ballad No. 2. But the audience again insisted on an encore and although he had another engagement immediately afterwards he readily obliged with some Debussy.

Madame Wyss, accompanied on the piano as before by Miss Southey-John, sang another group of songs. It was a very happy selection, and she, too, had to come back to give an encore.

Both artists certainly deserved the enthusiastic applause they received. But I cannot help wondering whether the excellence of their performance was as fully appreciated towards the end as it should have been. I am a great admirer of good music and fine artists such as it was our privilege to hear on Saturday. But during their second appearance I was unable to give them the undivided attention I would have liked to give and as I did earlier in the evening. Where there is such a varied audience including children it is inevitable that one gets tired after a few hours. I wonder whether it would not perhaps be wiser to shorten the two parts by having each individual artist appear once only, so that their art could be fully enjoyed to the end. This would at the same time relieve parents from the quandary whether it is right to take young children to a gathering with a long programme during which they might cause a disturbance. It would take away nothing from the character of the Fête. On the contrary, it would enhance its spirit, especially if the interval could be kept to at least the scheduled 45 minutes. I have heard nothing but praise except with regard to the length of the programme. I can only guess at the tremendous amount of work the President and his Executive Committee have done to make this Fête a success, and it is far from me to belittle their efforts. On the contrary, I have the Fête Suisse very much at heart and I hope that my suggestion will not be taken amiss.

After this departure from the actual report I must

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get back to the programme. When the applause for the two artists had died down Pfarrer H. Blum followed with a short address. His simple but warm words in homely "Züridütsch" expressed very aptly the gratitude we all feel that Switzerland was spared the horrors of war.

The Accordion players came next with another group of popular tunes. Once more one could feel the pulse beat faster and many a "Juchzer" went up from sheer enjoyment. The "Männerchor" then assembled for the final part of the programme. After opening with a rarely heard song about how little we want in life they followed with the "Jolly Roger." This rousing tune delighted old and young folk alike. It was, if I am not mistaken, the first time that the Male Choir have ventured on the platform with an English song. I have little doubt that they will get the same warm-hearted reception if they try this again.

The programme was to finish with "Oh mein Heimatland." The beautiful melody was sung with real fervour by the whole assembly and formed a perfect ending to a pleasant evening, even though the tempo was a little on the slow side. Audiences always incline to drag, particularly when accompanied on the organ. Nevertheless, it could not damp the patriotic feeling which Gottfried Keller's superb poem invariably evokes in our hearts. After the National Anthem the Fête was over, but the memory of a happy day will linger on with all of us.

MARIANN.

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION.

The First of August Committee of the Swiss Colony in London have much pleasure in extending to all Swiss and their families in Great Britain a cordial invitation to join in this year's celebration of our Swiss National Day.

The date, time and place will be found on front page.

Admission will be by ticket only, which will be free of charge and must be applied for in advance. Application should be made to The First of August Committee, Swiss House, 35, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1, where tickets will be available as from the 8th July and can be obtained either by a personal call Mondays to Fridays between 6 and 7 p.m. or by post on condition that a 2½d. stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. The full names of all persons for whom tickets are required must be stated.

The Theatre holds about 2,200 people and tickets will be issued in strict rotation. Early application is therefore advisable to save disappointment.

It will greatly help the Committee if ticket holders who find themselves prevented from attending the celebration will be kind enough to return their unwanted tickets at once to the above address for the benefit of other fellow countrymen.

And last but not least, it is hoped again that as many visitors as possible will wear national costume.

THE COMMITTEE.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

The last monthly meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Monday, 17th June, 1946, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1, and was preceded, as usual, by the customary dinner.

The principal guest of the evening was Sir Charles Petrie, well-known historian and author, who chose for discussion the subject "The Traditional Friendship of Switzerland and England."

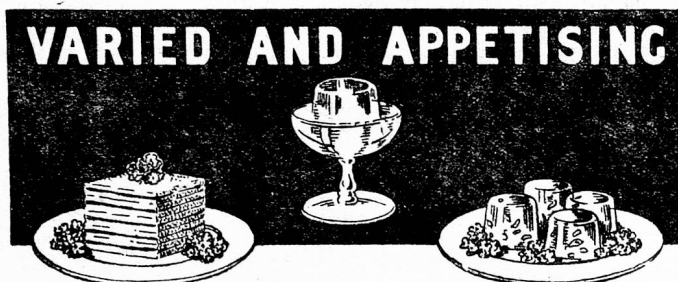
The President, Mr. A. Bon, in opening the meeting, extended a hearty welcome to the various guests, and especially to the guest of honour, and expressed the gratitude of the members for his acceptance to address them.

Sir Charles Petrie's *exposé* commanded deep attention from all present, and one had to admit, regardless of political inclination, that here at last, in this topsy-turvy world of changing policies and sentiments, was someone who, with that characteristic eloquence of the well bred Englishman, simply and completely expressed his ideals of democracy in two well chosen phrases — "Unity with diversity" and "Unity without uniformity." He compared the basic build up of the Swiss Confederation with its three different languages and numerous cantons, to Great Britain with her England, Wales, Scotland and not too distant Ireland, but he admitted that in respect of the latter the British, so far, had not been completely successful. He expressed the wish that all Swiss who had been in this country for some time should not hesitate to make known to their British colleagues their views on this all important question of Government.

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, in thanking Sir Charles Petrie, added further interesting data about our homeland. Before closing the meeting, Mr. Bon expressed the gratitude of the members for a most interesting conference.

Close of meeting 9.15 p.m.

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