

La Fête des vigneronns

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LA FÊTE DES VIGNERONS

This manifestation must obviously be an outstanding one since, seventeen years after it was held last time, in 1955, many queries have been made at the Tourist Office in Vevey as to the date of the next one, the fourth to take place in this century. Whoever witnessed this spectacular show remembers it with much emotion, and such enthusiasm is catching. Those who merely watched all the preparations being made for the festival with a sceptical smile on their lips were soon to become true fanatics of it all. Reminiscences of music, dancing, singing and enchanting costumes figuring in the magnificence of such a skilfully rendered setting, were to remain engraved in their memory.

There is no need to describe the Winegrowers' Festival to any of the 170,000 spectators at one of the day- or night-time shows in August, 1955, or to those who remember the 1927 festival. Let us however try and go into the details of this celebration for the sake of the young and for those who, for one reason or another, never get the chance of attending this open-air spectacle glorifying the labours of the soil.

Glorification of the Vine

The Canton of Vaud stretching from the frontier of Geneva as far as that of the Valais is, above all, a wine region. Endless rows of vines cover the slopes running down to the Lake of Geneva. Since a long time back in history, Vevey has been the centre of viticulture. It was the monks of Haut Crêt, a monastery depending on the Chapter of Lausanne, who planted the first vines of Lavaux at Le Dézaley. The abbey of Saint-Urbain, whose aim was to encourage viticulture and help labourers dedicated to it, was founded in Vevey before 1647 when its existence could be officially established. This abbey was later conferred the name of "Confrérie des Vignerons" (or brotherhood of winegrowers) and followed the same goal and traditions including that of the procession later known as *parade* or *bravade* when winegrowers of this esteemed society also participated in a day of gaiety.

At the beginning, the winegrowers met every two or three years but then spaced out their festivities over longer

intervals of time. The procession grew in size and later, singing, dancing, floats and mythological figures were added, the protagonist being Bacchus, of course. The young god, hoisted up on a barrel or a stretcher supported on men's shoulders, was soon joined by his companion, Ceres, played in 1747 by a brawny butcher's lad whose appearance being far from seductive was turned into an object of laughter. This was soon to change and the roles of the goddesses Ceres and Pales were to be interpreted by blond and brunette beauties of the weaker sex. These processions then gave way to a true fête with stands for spectators.

In 1797, the Winegrowers' Festival took place in one of the finest squares in this country — the "Grande Place" or "Place du Marché" where, on 13th May, 1800, General Bonaparte inspected a corps of 6,000 men before leaving for Italy.

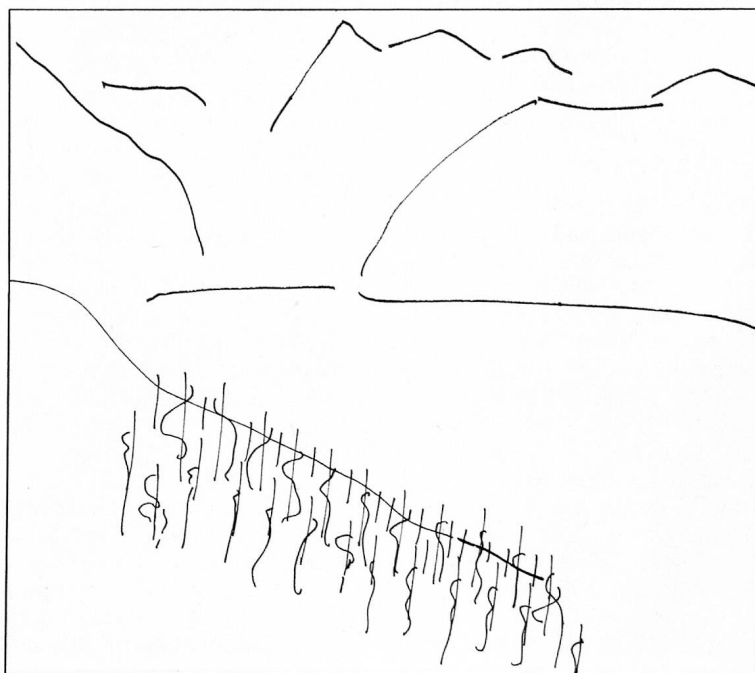
This square, of over 20,000 square yards cleared of all obstacles, lies in a charming situation facing the grandiose panorama of the Savoy Alps and is, without a doubt, an ideal spot for the organisation of popular fêtes. In such ideal conditions, these spectacles, dedicated to the growth of the vine and to the labours of the earth according to the changing of the seasons, could only

grow in importance. Five Winegrowers' Festivals were held in the 19th century and there were 12,000 spectators at that of 1889. Finances too, had risen since the festival of 1797 which had cost 3,227 francs — that of 1889 was to cost more than 34,000 francs.

The next Winegrowers' Festival, the fourth this century, will take place in August, 1977, as has been decided by the Council of the "Confrérie"

It is not easy to choose the number of pageants to be held or the artists who are to compose the booklet and music and design staging and costumes of this gigantic show. The persons responsible, aided by excellent advisors in the artistic field, have to find the "right man for the right job". All in all, it is a difficult task; the last three festivals (those of 1905, 1927 and 1955) developed more and more towards perfection that one begins to wonder how the organisers of the 1977 show can still do better. But one can rely on them — the show will doubtlessly be different from the preceding ones but certainly just as beautiful.

Looking retrospectively at this century, one can reckon the immensity of these shows offered by the "Confrérie des Vignerons" of Vevey. In 1905, there were stands for 12,500 spectators and a total sum of around 625,000 francs was spent on this immense spectacle when Gustave Doret was responsible for the music,



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René Morax for the verse and Jean Morax for the costumes. Greek-style décor around the top of the square tended to hide the attractive buildings.

There was a gap of 22 years before the public returned to Vevey for another Winegrowers' Festival. The 1st World War was to perturb not only Europe but also the life and ways of this small town on the lake of Geneva. However, nine years after these hostilities, in August, 1927, the "Grande Place" was seen again to swarm with singers, dancers, musicians and extras. These performed in the centre of a huge stage with room for 14,000 spectators facing a *décor* imitating the ramparts of a city of days gone by with its towers, huge gates and other details. The composer, Gustave Doret, who had so excelled in the musical score in 1905, was once again in charge of the same task. Now, fifty years later, people still sing his tunes which are far from dull or commonplace and this is, without a doubt, a proof of the popular quality of his choir music. The enchanting poet from Geneva, Pierre Girard, wrote the text about the changing of the seasons in an unusually fresh style. The painter, Ernest Biéler, designed sumptuous and authentic costumes in warm and discreet colours. For the first time, solo singers came from abroad: René Lapelletrie and Hector Dufranne of the Paris Comic Opera. The striking role of the priestess Ceres was acted by the talented singer from Soleure, Berthe de Vigier.

Fireworks to celebrate the first half of the century

The festival of 1955 was announced with much movement and colour. The huge enclosure was encircled by a monumental staircase which made one compare the whole to a flying saucer suddenly landed on Vevey territory. This open-air theatre could seat 17,000 spectators and more than 3,500 actors, 950 children, 300 horses, oxen and sheep appeared on stage. Specialised producers directed these mass movements: Oscar Eberlé from Zurich and Maurice Lehmann from Paris. A choir of 450 male and female singers, 120 musicians from the Paris Republican Guard and excellent singing and dancing soloists interpreted Carlo Hemmerling's music. One cannot find words to describe this spectacle

lasting for more than three hours without interruption. One must have seen and experienced it oneself to imagine its splendour, incomparable size and authenticity. This enormous crowd of people in its coloured garb designed by the Parisian H.-R. Frost was gathered together from town and country to praise the labours of the vine and the earth. 4,700 million francs were spent in the preparation of the festival but this does not entail all the work which went into it — the long months of toil, rehearsals and sacrifices. However, everyone did his share enthusiastically and to experience such a festival, be it as actor or spectator is a magnificent adventure. With three years to go, all concerned eagerly await the next one.

S.N.T.O.

Comment

A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

As reported in the British papers, the Swiss electorate has firmly rejected an Initiative to expel half the country's foreign population. The final voting figures on the 20th October Referendum were 1,689,870 against the proposal and 878,739 for, or roughly 66 per cent against to 34 per cent in favour. All the Cantons voted against the Initiative. In comparison, seven German-Swiss Cantons had voted for the similar Schwarzenbach Initiative on 7th June, 1970. This Initiative had been defeated by a much smaller margin (54 per cent) but the turnout had been larger (74 per cent against 69.6 per cent on October 20th).

The Canton to vote most firmly against the Initiative, which called for a reduction of the foreign population to 500,000 people by January, 1978, was Geneva, with 73 per cent of "no" votes. The National Action which sponsored the Initiative found the greatest support in Uri (44 per cent), in Schwytz, Berne and Basle-Town (41 per cent).

The outcome of the vote was hailed by President Ernst Brugger, who praised the common sense of his compatriots and said that the Federal Government would pursue its policy of stabilising the foreign resident population to one million and fifty thousand.

National Councillor Valentin Oehen, member of the National Action and chief promoter of the anti-foreign campaign, described the outcome as "disastrous", and said that his movement had been victim of an unfair and "inhuman propaganda" by the media. He claimed that the National Action would have won 65 per cent of the votes if the campaign had been "conducted correctly." It now remains to be seen whether Republican National Councillor James Schwarzenbach will go ahead with his new Initiative, launched last March, which sets virtually the same aim as the one that has just been defeated, but allows a ten-year period for the repatriations and naturalisations which would bring the number of resident foreigners down to 12.5 per cent of the indigenous population.

Among the innumerable and well researched articles that were written before the vote by journalists and politicians to defeat the National Action, some firms published hard figures on the way they would have been affected. Although the vote is over, and as Mr. Brugger said on the night of the poll, the country is freed from a "paralysing uncertainty" and able to make a fresh start, it is interesting to realise the consequences which an acceptance of the Initiative would have had for a typical firm, Bobst & Sons of Lausanne.

This company, specialising in packaging machinery and exporting 97 per cent of its production, has 1,803 workers and employees, 637 of whom are foreign. These employees are distributed as follows: machining division, 795 persons, 55.2 per cent of whom are foreign; assembly division, 321 persons, 30.5 per cent of whom are foreign; administration, 687 persons, 14.6 of whom are foreign.

Should the Initiative have been accepted, 100 per cent of yearly permit-holders and 59 per cent of resident permit-holders would have had to leave the country. The machining division would have lost 40.5 per cent of its work force, the assembly division 21.8 per cent, and the administration 10.2 per cent. The plant would have lost 462 persons or 25.6 per cent of the total.

Bobst & Sons may have attempted to adapt itself to the situation by running down its production. But it would have had to dismiss *more* staff because the necessary balance between the various departments would have been upset, the machining division being harder hit than the other parts of the factory. Moreover, all the firm's previous efforts at rationalisation would have been in vain since such efforts would only have paid by maintaining a high level of production.

This simple example showing that many Swiss in the company's management would have lost their jobs (or be compelled to carry out machining and assembly jobs!) illustrates one of the many drastic consequences of an acceptance of Mr. Oehen's proposals.

P.M.B.