

Switzerland and the alcohol question

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mands, et quantité d'autres niaiseries de ce genre. A la suite de quoi, un des plus grands journaux italiens n'a pas craint de parler de germanisation d'un de nos cantons et d'en signaler les dangers pour l'avenir en général et le fascisme en particulier!

On se demande à lire de semblables nouvelles si ce journal n'était pas simplement à court de copie pour aller répandre des choses pareilles; mais—oh! stupeur d'autres cotidiens transalpins se sont mis à faire chorus et toute la presse fut bientôt agitée de ce sujet curieux.

Je vous laisse deviner ce que la Presse suisse a bien pu riposter devant un langage aussi bizarre. Certains journaux suisses-allemands ont même été très sévères dans leurs appréciations et leurs remarques. A notre avis ils ne le seront jamais trop. Il est "inadmissible" que des étrangers, sous prétexte de voisinage, viennent chez nous essayer de l'intimidation, et user de procédés que le peuple suisse ne saurait accepter. Nous sommes maîtres chez nous et nous entendons le rester. Si nos pères n'ont jamais voulu subir la loi d'autrui, bien mal renseigné sur notre Histoire, est celui qui prétendrait nous l'imposer aujourd'hui. Nous entendons nous gouverner et nous répartir comme bon nous semble. Maîtres chez nous, nous le sommes et nous le resterons. Une semblable déclaration devrait clore le débat et forcer le gouvernement voisin, qui possède un contrôle absolu sur sa presse, à modérer le zèle de ses porte-paroles. Tel n'est pourtant pas le cas, et tandis que la polémique se poursuit là-bas, ce n'est qu'officieusement et de façon détournée que nous apprenons que Monsieur Mussolini n'est pas de l'avis de ses journaux. Cette comédie est ridicule et n'est pas faite pour rendre confiance au peuple suisse qui dernièrement signa avec sa voisine un traité d'amitié. Et disons bien haut que ce ne sont pas seulement nos Confédérés d'outre-Sarine qui protestent, mais que toute la Suisse, latine aussi bien qu'allemanique, s'est levée pour remettre les choses au point.

Lorsque nous aurons prié l'étranger de s'occuper de ses propres affaires et de nous laisser les nôtres, voyons ce qu'il en est réellement. Il n'y a rien de très normal. Le nombre des Allemands au Tessin est minime. Il est loin d'atteindre celui des Italiens qui à eux seuls forment les 9/10 du contingent des étrangers. Il y a, il est vrai, une certaine proportion de Confédérés de Suisse-Allemande, mais c'est leur faire une impardonnable injure que de douter de leur patriotisme, et cette injure touche immédiatement tous les Suisses sans distinction, aussi bien que ceux seuls visés par l'étranger. De plus ne savons nous pas que le suisse s'assimile très rapidement dans le canton qu'il a choisi pour domicile et qu'après deux générations ces soi-disant pionniers de la culture germanique seront d'excellent Tessinois, parlant l'Italien comme pas un fasciste!

Vous comprendrez aisément qu'une controverse pareille n'ait pas été du goût de notre population et qu'un fort mouvement de protestation se fasse entendre de tous les côtés. Si le fascisme croit pouvoir aujourd'hui reprendre les méthodes d'intimidation qui lui ont si bien réussi lors de la trop fameuse affaire de Corfou, il pourrait se trouver cette fois en face d'une noie beaucoup trop dure pour être croquée. A bon entendre, salut!

* * *

Hors cette question brûlante qui est allée droit au cœur de tous les Suisses, les événements sont calmes. Chacun, pense à gagner, qui pour quelques jours, qui pour une semaine, qui pour un mois, la campagne fraîche, nos montagnes et nos alpages. C'est l'exode des villes, c'est les belles soirées et les pensées qui s'envolent vers les chers projets, c'est le corps, le cerveau, l'âme, qui se reposent... c'est l'été!... le bel été!...

"UN SUISSE QUELCONQUE."

SWITZERLAND AND THE ALCOHOL QUESTION.

(Communicated by the Secretariat of the N.S.H., London.)

Forty years ago when the pest of spirit drinking threatened to lay hold of the health and strength of the whole Swiss democracy, the people took a big step and erected with one stroke a barrier high enough to reduce the perils of spirit drinking to levels which could no longer be considered a serious danger to our country. In 1886 the production, importation and selling of the most prevalent kinds of schnaps were put under state monopoly. The beneficial result of this measure can clearly be seen in a marked reduction of the consumption of alcohol per head of the population. Within twenty years this consumption fell to about half of what it had been before. In common with Italy, Great Britain, Russia and Norway, Switzerland was at the bottom of the list of alcohol consumption per head of the population.

To-day the situation has changed in the most alarming manner with the result that Switzerland now heads the list of alcohol consumption, being far ahead of any other civilised country whose spirit drinking is recorded in reliable statistics. The Swiss consumption is at the present time nearly double as high as that of France, which is second in the list.

Although Art. 32 bis of the Swiss constitution, which regulates the Swiss alcohol régime, has not been altered and is still in full force, it has become practically ineffective from the point of view of restriction of alcohol consumption, owing to a rapid increase in the drinking of spirits which were left outside the reach of the monopoly. All the interests, organisations and individuals who are most concerned with the duty of maintaining public and individual health, are clamouring more vociferously than ever for an extension of the law to deal with the new situation. Doctors, judges, Benevolent Societies for the care of the poor and sick, child welfare societies, prison authorities, administrators of the lunatic asylums, military leaders and many other responsible voices are all expressing the deepest concern at the new spread of the schnaps pest.

How has this legislation, which previously fully attained the reform aimed at, been turned to nought in our own times? How has this deplorable change for the worse taken place so suddenly that Switzerland is now absolutely the worst State from the point of view of alcohol drinking, while only a generation back it could pride itself on being amongst the most advanced and far-sighted nations from the point of view of alcohol legislation?

The answer to these questions has been summarised in a previous article by the statement that the Federal Alcohol Monopoly, as constituted by Art. 32 bis, covers only potato and cereal spirits, while all other forms of spirits were either expressly or tacitly left free from interference. This peculiarity, which to-day is most surprising to people not acquainted with the history of the whole question in Switzerland, has proved the most disastrous loophole for the ever present temptation of alcoholic consumption. What has happened is simply that the kinds of schnaps, which were not controlled by the State, assumed the place which potato and cereal schnaps held before the legislation of 1886. The following figures illustrate this fact in a most striking manner:

Year	Sales of Federal spirits (lit. of absolute alcohol)	Home production of fruit spirits (lit. of absolute alcohol)
1893—1902 (average) ...	70,600	15,000
1903—1912 " ...	67,848	19,000
1914—1917 " ...	56,950	28,000
1918 " ...	32,297	40,000
1919 " ...	20,273	50,000
1920 " ...	14,578	60,000
1921 " ...	9,332	60,000
1922 " ...	11,998	60,000

The production and consumption of fruit spirits increased as rapidly as the consumption of potato and cereal spirits decreased. In 1920 the consumption of federal alcohol had fallen below the level of the consumption of fruit alcohol in the years preceding and immediately following the revision of the Swiss constitution in 1886. On the other hand fruit spirits are now being consumed at almost the same rate at which potato spirits were being drunk at the time of the first alcohol legislation in Switzerland.

It is very difficult to say who ought to be blamed for this regrettable development. Is it science which made the distilling process much cheaper than in former years? Is it the peasant and the professional distilling trade which took advantage of the loophole left by the legislator, or is it the legislator himself? It serves really no purpose to try to give an answer in this respect, although *prima facie* one feels inclined to say that the legislator might have shown a little more foresight in the drafting of the alcohol article in the year 1886. But it is pointed out that the limitation of the federal monopoly to potato and cereal spirits was much less due to lack of foresight than to the necessity of winning over a certain proportion of the peasants in favour of the alcohol article. And, after all, we have no right to blame our fathers for dealing with the question effectively only for their own time. It is obviously the duty of our generation to mend the defect of the old law in order to deal with the danger which was temporarily averted by the law of 1886.

The way to do this is too plain and the only difficulty in our time is the question of how to win a sufficient majority of the voting populace for an extension of the alcohol monopoly to cover all important kinds of spirits. Unfortunately this difficulty has proved tremendous, so that the first attempt at solving the problem, the revision proposal of the year 1923, was turned down by the electorate. It is a sad discovery to find that vested interests, which run counter to an effective alcohol legislation, are so strong at the present day in our home country that so bold a legislative measure as that taken by our forefathers in the same circumstances seems to-day to be out of the question.

It is quite clear that if the same courage and feeling of responsibility to the community at large prevailed to-day as it did in the year 1886, the revision of the alcohol article would simply consist in the inclusion of all important spirits. But this clean course of logically extending the law

of 1886 to the present day circumstances is being made impossible by opposing interests. A majority vote sufficient for a revision of our constitution can only be attained by considerable compromise. All that the legislator and those who care more for the public welfare than for private gain can hope for is that the new measure against the alcohol pest will not be made ineffective by the various compromises which must be granted to certain sections of the Swiss people.

The new draft for a revision of Art. 32 bis, as submitted to the National Assembly by the Federal Council, is a much weaker thing than the proposal which was turned down in 1923. But still further concessions to the home distilling peasant seem to be necessary in order to ensure the passage of the new article. The negotiations, which have been in progress during the last six months or so, are none too edifying for a people proud of its democratic ideals. What the final result of these negotiations will be cannot be foreseen with certainty, but it is to be hoped for the sake of our reputation as an advanced nation that, though it is difficult to reach an agreement, it will none the less deal in an effective manner with the main problem of alcoholic consumption.

THE CHARM OF MISS BROWNE.

By SOPHIE WYSS, the Swiss Soprano.

Miss Violette Browne is charming. At her Recital in the Wigmore Hall last Friday she made us smile; she made us happy; she all but made us laugh outright. That is to say, she did all she set out to do with consummate ease and facile grace. For she is that rare thing, a singer who has found herself, who has discovered her capabilities and decided her *métier*. She is not like most of us, undecided between this kind of music and the other, leaning at one minute towards Lieder, at the next to the coloratura or the dramatic. No, Miss Browne has already made up her mind as to what she can do best, and has specialised upon it. She realises that her charming platform appearance, the light and *ingénue* timbre of her voice and her quick musical intelligence fit her uniquely for that kind of song which voices the point of view of the "jeune fille," the sort of song that begins: "Maman, dites moi," that begs for "Mummy's" help, or cries: "Oh, you Naughty Boy!" And these songs she sang superlatively well. They may not be music in the sense that we understand the word in Switzerland, but they take some singing. They need lightness of touch, a flexible voice, and above all a suitable personality. All of these things Miss Browne has; therefore we spent a very pleasant evening in her company.

She opened her Recital with two classic Airs from Bach and Mozart. But in these affairs of great music it would be as impossible for Miss Browne, and most other people, to be as certain and as deft as she was in the group of English songs by Frank Bridge, Hubert Parry and Armstrong Gibbs which were to follow. The words of these songs, by Mathew Arnold, Mary Coleridge and Walter de la Mere are probably more successful in their way than the music, which to my fiercer taste seemed misty, vague, uncertain, and perhaps a little weak.

Much more point, to express more or less the same kind of song, was given by Manlio di Veroli, the Italian composer and accompanist, whom we saw last year in London with Piccaver, that fine tenor. Then came the "Chanson du Vent" and "La Cigale" of our own Vaudois, Pierre Maurice. These two were rather unhappily sandwiched between so much "lightsomeness." This was perhaps unfair to Pierre Maurice, for his work is always fine and light, and coming in between a nursery rhyme containing the couplet:

"Three jolly gentlemen in coats of red,
Rode their horses up to bed,"

and a ditty which included a characteristic line:

"J'ai beaucoup de fleurs pour mon amoureux."

I felt that the pearls of my friend were rather lost. It might, however, interest our London Colony to hear that I met Pierre Maurice the other day at the Fête of the Swiss Musicians held this year in that quaint old town, Colombier. He was as charming and gentle and polite as ever, but he took no pains to disguise the fact that he considered some of the music given at the Concerts as being what the English call "a try on." He told me that he thought the Cinema was drawing the multitudes away from music, but I ventured to hazard the idea that the Cinema had only been the first to collar the multitude emerging from the darkness of the 19th century peasantry, which would soon tire of the crudities of Hollywood and perhaps turn to music as a solace. But we digress from the charming subject of Violette Browne.

She next gave us the best music of the evening in "Raconte-Moi, Nounou" of Moussorgsky. Here there was an unexpected subtlety that delighted one's ear. After this there followed an Italian Berceuse by Geni Sadoro, and the programme closed with a couple of nursery rhymes by Herbert Hughes.