

La fortification des frontieres

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FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATION OF THE COLLEGE OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

As in former years the College celebrated the National Day in an unpretentious, yet homely manner. Over 200 students forgathered at the Swiss Club, Charlotte Street, on Friday afternoon, July 29th. All present were gaily decorated with First of August badges. The proceeds from this year's sales of these badges will be devoted to various interests connected with the Swiss abroad.

Mr. A. Levy, Principal of the College, presided over the function which was attended by the Members of the Teaching and Office Staffs, Dr. Cl. Rezzonico, Counsellor of Legation, who always takes a keen interest in the welfare of the College, delivered a patriotic address which was vociferously applauded by the audience and the text of which is published below. The Swiss Mercantile Society was represented by Mr. A. C. Stahelin, Honorary Member and a former President of the Society, Mr. H. H. Baumann, Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee and Mr. F. Streit, a member of the Education Committee.

The programme of entertainment was provided entirely by students and consisted of musical items, recitations, etc. The artistes saw to it that there was not one dull moment and their reward was a cordial vote of thanks moved by the Chairman and heartily endorsed by their fellow students. It would be difficult to single out any particular items for special merit but mention must be made of a skit on Schiller's "William Tell" in Swiss dialect which a student rattled off at great length to the general amusement of all present. The afternoon's programme was wound up with a few impromptu dances and a medley of Swiss and English community songs, ably led and accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Schaefer, who received a great ovation from the audience for having spontaneously contributed to the success of the afternoon. The following is the text of Dr. Rezzonico's address:

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want first of all to thank you for kindly allowing me to join this delightful and inspiring "Fête de Famille." My thanks are due — I should have started like this — to you, Sir, and to the Members of the Staff of the College for making it possible to organize such an imposing First of August Celebration in London.

I have, as you know, attended many parties arranged by the Swiss College and I have never made any secret of the sentiments which fill me each time I find myself in your midst. I feel very happy with you all, and I feel quite at home.

To-day, however, in addition to all that, I feel rather moved because we are together in order to celebrate the anniversary of our country, of which every Swiss has just reason to be proud.

Napoleon said: "Switzerland resembles no other country." And this is indeed so. But Switzerland lasts. She has stood fast throughout all the various crises in Europe. Napoleon had before him merely a Switzerland divided by internal quarrels, but for all that he never questioned her existence as a State. He overthrew a whole series of illustrious and ancient thrones, he conquered half of the Continent, he divided the pieces amongst his brothers and his generals, but he never thought of incorporating Switzerland in his Empire. He allowed her to live, the only Republic in Europe.

After the Napoleonic Wars Europe had to be reconstructed. Nations were formed, some of them grew around a dynasty which was united to its people by ancient ties, others had nothing else that they could do but bow to the will of the Conqueror. In Switzerland there was no centre, there was no community of language nor of religion. There was no master imposing his force and his rule. But nevertheless, every Swiss, those belonging to the old Cantons as well as those belonging to the Confederated Cantons, the Aristocrats as well as the Democrats, the Catholics as well as the Protestants, all had only one will and one slogan, the same slogan which a few weeks ago only I heard shouted by thousands of people on the square of Lugano, on the occasion of a religious meeting: "We want to be Swiss."

Swiss patriotism, which has created a strong army, preserved us from invasion in 1870 and in 1914. It won for our Fatherland a long period of peace. The military spirit of the Swiss is always alive, as you know, and it is necessary, not because Switzerland will ever be guilty of aggression, but because she may, at any moment, be dragged into the armed conflicts of her neighbours. This Swiss patriotism, this very breath of our history, is not Democracy in the sense given to this word to-day. It is an old tradition and specifically Helvetic, which Jean de Müller in the Eighteenth Century summed up in these words: "To govern for the people, to inspire the nation in every possible way with a con-

sciousness of its dignity." This care for the public weal is still very much alive and manifests itself by an equality between citizens which is evident in our customs rather than embodied in texts of laws. These customs, which are the very structure of our State, have nothing in common with the principles of the French Revolution. They are far older. In Switzerland equality is not the result of a Revolution but the result of historical evolution.

Another characteristic "trait" of our national life is the association of peoples with various languages. Switzerland can live only through the collaboration of the various races which compose her. These diversities are not a necessary evil with which we are asked to put up; on the contrary, they are the very reason for our existence. As Spitteler put it: "We must feel in common while maintaining our individuality." And this is the real peculiarity of our nation.

Elsewhere we see patriotism based on race instinct, on a dislike of everything foreign. Let us not forget that the hatred and the brutality which manifest themselves in times of war are only the violent expression of the same sentiments which have been allowed to grow up in times of peace. Our national diversities on the contrary inspire us with a higher conception of humanity. Switzerland, in uniting such different elements and in living above the level of such mass hatreds, has given herself a high mission. She participates in the intellectual work of her neighbours and can only live by reason of this reciprocal comprehension of their culture, which is necessary to the civilized world. History has made of us a small State without any possibility of expansion. We shall remain what we are and we only ask to retain our independence. For this we are ready to take any risk without the least hesitation.

On the other hand, we recognize the right to live of all other peoples. This seems to us to be absolutely natural and nobody in Switzerland thinks of boasting about it. As Professor Max Huber, President of the International Red Cross, said: "Through our respect of other countries, we place ourselves on a higher level of public life than that of peoples who, without consideration of good or evil, have a purely egoistical policy. Switzerland must tend to express her ideal in a form ever purer and clearer. In this way she points out to each of us our duty as a citizen."

I am very glad to see that you have all gathered the importance of one of these duties, which is more especially in evidence to-day, as you generously bought the First of August Badges. I am sure you all know that the money thus collected will be devoted to furthering the interests of the Swiss abroad. The idea of looking to the welfare of our compatriots belonging to the Fourth Switzerland is not a recent one and the "Nouvelle Société Helvétique" has in the past done excellent work on this field. Recently, however, the activity of the "Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger" has taken a remarkable impetus and to us, who live abroad most of our lives, it certainly is a real satisfaction and moral help to see that our compatriots at home are trying to help us and in doing so they are fulfilling a very important duty: that of binding the Swiss living abroad more intimately to their brothers who are lucky enough to live at home.

UNIONE TICINESE.

Più fastosa, ma non certo più simpatica, avrebbe potuto riuscire la cenetta di ieri sera organizzata dall'Unione Ticinese, ora Sezione Autonoma della Pro Ticino, per celebrare il Natale della Patria. Infatti la semplicità, sia d'ambiente che di cibo, è stata la nota caratteristica e ad un tempo la fatrice della schietta allegria che regnò tutta la serata.

Già da alcuni anni la colonia ticinese di Londra non festeggiava più il Primo Agosto. L'Unione Ticinese aveva è vero preso parte attiva alla festa campestre che l'intera colonia svizzera della Metropoli in anni passati soleva indire ma che purtroppo cadde vittima della grave crisi economica di recente memoria. Un plauso vadi quindi alla Direzione della Unione Ticinese che bravando ostacoli non indifferenti — quest'anno la nostra Festa Nazionale cadeva proprio l'ultimo giorno della vacanza inglese di ferragosto ("Bank Holiday") — ci ha dato una festa semplice, di gusto tipicamente nostrano, tale e quale l'avremmo potuta sognare.

Oltre cinquanta persone, fra soci, amici ed invitati si trovarono puntualmente al Ristorante Diviani in Newgate Street, e siederono a mensa per gustare un'ottima minestra seguita da due succulenti coteghini adagiati su un piatto di un'appetitoso polenta di color oro cupo. Per i buongustai della colonia la sera resterà memorabile anche per il fatto che forse per la prima volta veniva servito qui del vino nostrano, produzione

Andrea Minoli di Carasso, fornito dal Comitato Centrale della Pro Ticino. Inutile dire che il quantitativo (cinquanta bottiglie) fu appena sufficiente.

Dopo il dolce il Presidente Sig. Giuseppe Eusebio disse alcune parole di circostanza, esaltando la Patria lontana. Lo seguì l'ex-presidente, Sig. Oscar Gambazzi, il quale con una indovinata allocuzione improntata ad un fine spirito patriottico strappò dai suoi ascoltatori uno scroscio d'applausi. Il Vice Segretario, Sig. Cesare Ferrari, ringraziò il gerente Sig. Aurelio Eusebio per l'ottima cena. Fungeva da maestro di tavola, il cassiere, Sig. Carlo Berti.

Durante il pasto udimmo fresche ed armoniose le nostre canzonette popolari cantate dalla Corale Ticinese di Berna, Sottosezione della Pro Ticino. Peccato si trattava soltanto di dischi di gramofono e non della Corale in carne ed ossa! Una volta terminati i discorsi, tutti i presenti meno armoniosamente ma con maggior voga cantarono le note arie, vecchie ma pur sempre belle, al suono di due buone fisarmoniche abilmente maneggiate dai giovani Plinio Morosi e Fredo Baeressi.

La gaia serata terminò dopo gli immancabili quattro salti in famiglia.

Vun da nun.

LA FORTIFICATION DES FRONTIERES: Un entretien avec le chef de l'état — major général, Colonel Labhart.

— Où en sont actuellement les travaux de fortifications sur lesquels devront s'appuyer éventuellement nos troupes?

Chaque fois que s'agit à nouveau le spectre de la guerre, à chaque alerte nouvelle, plus chaude que la précédente et laissant derrière elle plus d'incertitude et d'angoisse, c'est une des questions que l'on se pose chez nous entre celles qui voudraient une réponse rassurante et des renseignements sur les mesures prises par les autorités militaires de notre pays pour notre sécurité.

Nul mieux que le colonel Labhart, chef de l'état-major général, ne pouvait nous donner des indications précises sur ce point et nous l'avons trouvé parfaitement disposé à nous répondre, malgré la discrétion que s'impose à ce sujet:

— Il n'est pas possible, nous a-t-il dit, d'exposer publiquement, en détail, tout notre plan de fortifications et de dire exactement où se trouvent celles qui sont terminées et quels projets nous avons encore. Il est bon toutefois que l'opinion publique soit renseignée et que l'on sache chez nous que ces travaux se poursuivent sur un rythme accéléré. Le peuple suisse a consenti de lourds sacrifices financiers pour assurer sa défense. La réorganisation militaire est en bonne voie d'achèvement.

Nous avons désormais une armée plus mobile, pourvue d'un matériel moderne parfaitement adapté aux circonstances nouvelles. Si, dans une prochaine guerre, nous avions à nous défendre, ce serait probablement d'une attaque brusquée, suivant immédiatement la déclaration de guerre ou même la précédente. Nos troupes de couverture, aussitôt mobilisées, peuvent dès maintenant compter sur des points d'appui fortifiés qui retiendraient l'ennemi pendant que notre mobilisation se poursuivait. Nous avons entrepris ces travaux sur toutes nos frontières, suivant le plan d'ensemble préalablement conçu, et nous avons déjà une ligne fortifiée aussi bien sur les passages du Jura, dans la région de Sainte-Croix-Vallorbe, par exemple, et sur le front nord, entre le lac de Constance et Bâle, qu'au sud, où certains itinéraires ont aussi été barrés par des ouvrages ou le seront prochainement. Les crédits votés récemment permettront de compléter rapidement cet ensemble défensif, tout en créant des occasions de travail dont le pays bénéficiera.

— De quelle nature sont les fortifications achevées ou en cours d'exécution?

— L'ossature du système adopté est formée par de petits forts d'arrêt barrant les voies d'invasion. Leur armement perfectionné est protégé par un cuirassement à l'épreuve de l'artillerie lourde de campagne et des bombes d'avion. Où le terrain est praticable, les intervalles entre les forains sont barrés par des ouvrages de moindre importance. L'ensemble forme une ou plusieurs lignes défensives, en largeur et en profondeur, dont l'effet est augmenté par les obstacles naturels qui se trouvent être ainsi sous le feu continu de nos armes. Sur certains points, des barricades antichars ont été érigées, verrouillant tous les itinéraires de pénétration ainsi que certains secteurs de terrain praticables aux engins blindés. En outre, la destruction massive des voies de communication, préparée de façon à être réalisée dans un bref délai, vient compléter efficacement ces mesures défensives.

— Quelles sont les troupes chargées de la défense de ces ouvrages fortifiés?

— Ils ne pourraient évidemment remplir leur but que s'ils sont occupés par une troupe entraînée sur place et connaissant à fond sa tâche. Il doit y avoir là une garnison prête à toute éventualité, de jour comme de nuit. Des compagnies permanentes ont été créées par le Conseil fédéral pour assurer cette première con-

verture de la frontière. Une organisation d'alarme permet de renforcer rapidement ces détachements permanents par du personnel habitant les environs immédiats de l'ouvrage. Il y a jusqu'ici dix de ces compagnies. Les volontaires qui en font partie, sont engagés pour douze mois, après quoi ils sont licenciés et remplacés immédiatement par d'autres volontaires. De cette manière, nous pouvons disposer d'un nombre d'hommes toujours plus grand, initiés aux méthodes de combat de l'attaque brusquée et instruits dans la défense des ouvrages et dans le maniement de toutes les armes modernes de l'infanterie, mitrailleuses, canons anti-chars, lance-mines. Cependant, ces derniers temps, surtout depuis qu'il y a moins de chômeurs, le recrutement de ces volontaires est devenu plus difficile. Il est possible que le problème de l'occupation permanente des ouvrages se pose à nouveau dans un avenir prochain.

— "Comment a été conçu le plan général des fortifications et qui est chargé de l'exécution des travaux?"

— "C'est la tâche de notre état-major général, en collaboration étroite avec le chef d'arme du génie. Le bureau des fortifications dont l'activité avait été suspendue en 1921, a été reconstitué. Il comprend actuellement 60 ou 70 ingénieurs et techniciens. Le public se rend difficilement compte de l'importance des études et des travaux préliminaires et de toutes les difficultés qu'il faut surmonter avant de pouvoir commencer la construction d'un de ces ouvrages fortifiés. Pour un seul petit fortin, il faut jusqu'à deux cents plans différents ou même davantage. L'étude du terrain doit être extrêmement précise. Les plaques de blindage pour la défense des fortifications et leur résistance au feu, leur armement et leur protection contre les gaz sont autant de problèmes dont la solution a exigé de nombreux essais. Il va sans dire que nous disposons d'un personnel de toute confiance pour ces travaux et que les maisons privées qui sont chargées de les exécuter, sont constamment contrôlées."

— "En regard de ce système défensif moderne, quel rôle jouent aujourd'hui nos anciennes forteresses de Saint-Maurice et du Gothard?"

— "Leur rôle n'a pas diminué le moins du monde par la construction des ouvrages à la frontière. Protégeant les principaux passages des Alpes, elles offriraient des points d'appui solides à l'armée dans des opérations ultérieures à la phase de couverture. Leur construction ingénieuse en terrain de montagne leur confère une grande valeur; elles résisteraient certainement fort bien à des attaques. Ces grandes fortifications ont si bien leur raison d'être que nous pensons en construire d'autres. C'est à cette fin que seront employés, en partie du moins, les nouveaux crédits importants qui nous sont accordés. Il y a encore chez nous des voies de pénétration qui ne sont pas assez défendues. — je pense surtout au défilé de Sargans particulièrement exposé. C'est ce passage que nous allons commencer à fortifier..."

Conclusion de notre entretien, ces mots du colonel Labhart soulignent l'une des préoccupations actuelles de l'état-major général. Nous avions quatre fronts à défendre avant le rattachement de l'Autriche à l'Allemagne. Maintenant nous n'avons plus que trois frontières. Il importe plus qu'auparavant que notre protection soit assurée sur le Haut-Rhin, aux frontières des Grisons et de Saint-Gall, afin que nos positions défensives du nord ne puissent être tournées éventuellement par une armée d'invasion venant de l'est.

Jean-G. MARTIN.
(Tribune de Genève.)

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US. United States of Europe Patterned by the Swiss.

By DEMAREE BESS.
Staff Correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor.

We came back to Geneva after a tour of investigation through German and Italian Switzerland, convinced by our survey that German National Socialism has gained almost no hold upon the German Swiss and that Italian Fascism has achieved few, if any, converts among the Italian Swiss.

But what of French influence? France is Switzerland's third great neighbour, and Switzerland's ties with France have always been particularly close. Has Switzerland shared with France the period of political and social turbulence through which its great neighbour has been passing? Has France transmitted to Switzerland the enthusiasm of so many of its own people for Marxian Socialism and the "Popular Front?"

Geneva is a convenient city in which to study this question. For Geneva is not only Switzerland's "international city," but it is also the largest city in French-speaking Switzerland and is so nearly surrounded by French territory that it might well be more French than Swiss. In fact, we have been assured by Swiss acquaint-

ances that Geneva is not Swiss, and by Frenchmen that it is not Swiss. When we asked: "What is it, then?" the reply was: "It is Genevese."

Reminders of Socialism.

When we arrived in Geneva last December, we observed some apartment buildings of a rather repellent yellow colour. A Geneva resident, pointing out these buildings, exclaimed: "We had a Socialist Government here, and see what happened!" We have discovered since that many Geneva residents are disposed to attribute not only objectionable architecture but other disagreeable manifestations to their late Socialist Government.

As a matter of fact, Geneva never had a real Socialist Government. The Socialist leader, M. Nicole, obtained four years ago a bare majority in the executive branch of the Cantonal Government, but never had a majority in the Legislative branch. As a result of M. Nicole's uncompromising policy, the local regime was deadlocked for three years, with unpleasant consequences. The voters of Geneva Canton, as a reaction, not only swept Socialists out of office but passed by a large majority laws forbidding Communism, the extreme form of Socialism.

The political unrest in France has therefore been reflected to some extent in Switzerland. Swiss Socialists have achieved substantial support not only in French Switzerland but in the cities of German Switzerland as well. The industrial cities of Basel and Zurich have had Socialist majorities.

Socialists for Full Neutrality.

Socialism, however, is the most elastic of all political terms, and Swiss Socialism reflects the tendency of the Swiss people toward mutual tolerance and a spirit of compromise. The tension created by M. Nicole in Geneva Canton has not been repeated elsewhere, because the majority of Swiss Socialists have not shared M. Nicole's uncompromising views. An overwhelming majority at the last Socialist congress, held at Basel in May, passed resolutions approving additional expenditures for national defense and endorsing the fundamental of complete neutrality for Switzerland.

Swiss Socialism is of the same brand as that of the British Labour Party. It repudiates the conception of "class warfare" and holds that Socialist objectives can be achieved without resort to violent revolution.

The more closely one scrutinizes the remarkable Swiss Confederation, the more one becomes convinced that a mode of existence has been worked out here which can absorb and relieve the tensions of Europe's new "holy wars." If only this miniature "United States of Europe" could have been expanded to include the entire continent, as M. Aristide Briand dreamed!

Accustomed to Independence.

Switzerland, at any rate, has come very close to achieving M. Briand's ideal. National Socialism, Fascism, Marxian Socialism, press upon Switzerland from every side, insistently urging their respective claims upon various Swiss groups. But we have seen, as we went about the country talking with the people, that none of these movements can make a permanent impression upon people accustomed, for generations, to local self-rule, sturdy local independence. The principles of the Swiss Confederation have survived a period of severe testing.

When an attempt was made, in 1935, to unite all embryonic Fascist organizations in Switzerland, the resulting organization, the Swiss Union, could marshal only 12,000 votes. At the other extreme, the Swiss Communist Party has polled a maximum of 13,000 votes and has two Deputies in the Federal Assembly.

The founder of Russian Bolshevism, V. I. Lenin, lived in Switzerland for some time as a refugee during the World War. His wife relates in her memoirs that he came home one day in a depressed state, and when she asked him what was wrong, he explained that he had been trying to persuade some Swiss workmen of the necessity for "class warfare," but they refused to take any interest in the idea. Dorothy Thompson, noting that the British Conservative Party has such a large following, observed that the British are conservative because they have something to conserve. That remark surely holds true of the Swiss.

MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS

CAN TAKE One or Two passengers in private motor-car to Switzerland from Manchester or London districts leaving 20th August (single journey only). Write Box No. 76, c/o, Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

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Dimanche 7 août 1938 :

11h. — Culte. M. M. Pradervand.

Les cultes du soir sont suspendus pendant le mois d'août.

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

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Sonntag, den August 7. 1938.

Predgt : Pfarrer Rud. Kägi aus Rothrist.
Während der Monate Juli und August finden keine Abendgottesdienste statt.

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