

Why the Swiss remain aloof

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WHY THE SWISS REMAIN ALOOF.

By Dr. WILLIAM E. RAPPARD.

Translated from an article in the Journal de Genève

(*"The Christian Science Monitor,"* 23.2.40.)

The attitude of aloofness adopted by the Federal Council in the face of the Soviet-Finnish conflict has not had a good press, either at home or abroad. Disappointment, humiliation, such are the feelings that it has aroused almost everywhere. . . .

When the League of Nations was formed, a splendid sun of international fellowship seemed to have risen on the world. What, in the new order, were to be the position and policy of our country? Would the constitutional and humanitarian neutrality which had brought it security and had in fact been its mission during preceding generations, still be justified?

Optimists, who believed in a radical transformation of international relations, did not think so. Why, they exclaimed, in a European brotherhood, where each is the guaranty of all and all the guaranty of each, should we persist in entrenching ourselves behind a neutrality become by this fact mean and odiously egotistic? . . .

To pessimists, on the other hand, the proposed experiment was far from being worked out. Had it then been demonstrated, as the most enthusiastic of founders proclaimed, that the League of Nations had substituted right for force and brotherly aid for fratricidal strife? . . .

Swayed by most generous hopes, but restrained by its instinctive prudence, the Swiss nation resolved to adhere to the Pact, but not without first of all reserving the benefit of its military neutrality. This regime was loyally followed from 1920 to 1938.

But it was deliberately repudiated when, on May 14th, 1938, the Federal Council received from the Council of the League of Nations renewed acknowledgment of the complete and traditional neutrality of Switzerland. After a whole series of disillusionments and after a decisive setback, the Swiss Nation, and with it the whole of Europe, capitulated to the evidence showing that the sense of international fellowship was still weak and international anarchy persisted. A League of Nations, of which the United States which had founded it, refused obstinately to be a member; which Japan, Germany, and Italy had quit after having flouted it with impunity; which had confessed itself powerless to carry out its disarmament program, peaceful revision of treaties, and collective security — such a League of Nations, no matter how magnificent its ideal, was not, alas! the new actuality proclaimed by the optimists. . . .

The Federal Council of Switzerland, having re-established twenty months ago, to the plaudits of an almost unanimous nation, the complete neutrality of our country, had to proceed consistently in the present crisis. It could not then legitimately make Switzerland a party either to sanctions or to a vote the legal effect of which was to make them obligatory on others.

And that quite simply is why Switzerland remained silent in December, 1939.

That neutrality has been particularly distressing to Switzerland in the present war there is no need to prove. On the one side, an aggressor of unlimited manpower, brutal and lawless, with which Switzerland has refused for more than twenty years to enter into diplomatic relations and whose membership in the

League of Nations Switzerland has publicly opposed in spite of its attachment to the principle of universality; on the other side, a little free State with a population in large measure of the same sort as our own, as observant of international rights and friendly to peace as they are heroic in the defense of their independence — can a case be imagined where the sympathies and antipathies of the Swiss people would be as lively and as unanimous as in the Soviet-Finnish conflict?

But these facts having been thoroughly established and publicly proclaimed; our Government, through its attitude, but kept the promise which it had made before the world, and whose worth is measured by the faithfulness of its observance. . . .

Neutrality is never glorious. It is less so than ever in a conflict where all right and truth are on one side and all wrong and falsehood on the other. But would it have been any nobler for Switzerland to seek easy approval by unfurling from a distance a great streamer of words when its official silence had been absolute in the face of other international outrages which took place in theaters less distant?

If there is a lesson to be drawn from this experience, where our reasons of policy conflict so sadly with our innermost feelings, it is not condemnation of Swiss neutrality in a world of anarchy. It is rather condemnation of that international anarchy which alone can justify the neutrality of a beleaguered little country.

When Europe shall finally emerge, through the triumph of right and genuine organisation for peace, from the jungle into which the brutality of some and the wavering of others have plunged it, no people will rejoice more profoundly than ours.

DIE SCHWEIZ.

Vier Stämme verwachsen in einen Stamm.
Hoch wipfelüberragt.
Der Baum will frei sich vollenden.
Da soll ihn ein Gottloser schänden,
Wenn's einer wagt!

Und ob er auch sechs Jahrhunderte zählt,
Von Jungholz schwillt sein Geäst.
Und ob er, von Stürmen unwittert,
Auch manchmal gebaugt und gezittert:
Der Baum steht fest!

Fridolin Hofer.

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