

73rd fête suisse

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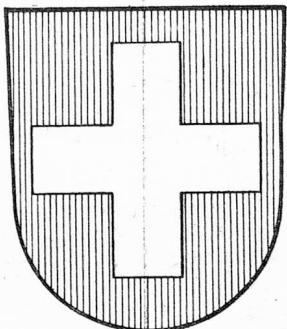
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73rd

FÊTE SUISSE



*“Salut glaciers sublimes, vous qui touchez aux cieux,
Nous gravissons vos cimes avec un cœur joyeux,
La neige se colore, l'air est pur, l'air est frais,
Allons cherchez l'aurore sur les plus hauts sommets . . .”*

With an enthusiasm hitherto unsurpassed, the 73rd Fête Suisse was celebrated on Monday, May 31st, 1948, at Central Hall, Westminster.

The attendance, numbering nearly 3,000 has easily beaten all previous records, there was not a single seat vacant, and it is much to be regretted, that so many of our compatriots could not be accommodated. For their benefit, I will try to give a description of what took place on that memorable evening, it is a poor substitute, I agree, but I will endeavour to make it as presentable as possible.

The principal attraction at this year's Fête Suisse was, undoubtedly, the appearance of the members of the Swiss Folklore Federation numbering over 160 of both sexes.

Long before the programme was timed to start, both the Foyer and the Hall were thronged with people.

Fair Ladies, mostly dressed in picturesque national costume sold small cantonal and Swiss flags, programmes and pictures, their engaging smiles encouraged many of the buyers to give a little more than was asked for, especially as it was for the benefit of the Swiss Benevolent Society, which is doing such splendid work for the less fortunate of our colony.

Entering the large Hall, which was decorated with a huge Swiss flag, the Union Jack and the cantonal escutcheons, a magnificent picture presented itself.

On the platform, reaching right up to the organ enclosure, were the members of the “Elite of the Drums and Fifes of Basle” in their ancient uniforms, carrying their glittering and famous drums and Fifes, the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Folklore Groups from Buochs, Vitznau and Basle in their colourful national costume, the “Laendler Musik,” of Vitznau, complete with accordions, contra bass and clarinet, the “Stanzer Buebe” Yodler Choir, carrying their “Znüni Säckli,” the three “Alphorn Bläser,” Christen Father and Son, and Bieri of Hergiswil am See, holding their huge “Alphorns” and the three “Fahnenschwinger” of Hergiswil am See with their Swiss flags.

It was an unforgettable sight, overpowering in its aspect of colour, awakening in many of us treasured memories of our beloved country, many a heart began to beat quicker, and many a lump came into our throats.

Punctually at 6.30 p.m. Mr. Charles Chapuis, the untiring President of the Fête Suisse, declared the Fête as opened, Mr. E. P. Dick, played an organ Prelude, consisting of a Potpourri of Swiss Melodies in which the audience heartily joined.

Then with great emotion the entire company sang our National Anthem, followed by a prayer by Pasteur C. Reverdin, in which he evoked the blessing of Almighty God.

The opening address was given by our new Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, who, on ascending the platform received a hearty ovation.

He said:

Mon Général,
Chers Compatriotes,

Je me félicite de l'occasion qui m'est ainsi offerte d'entrer en contact avec la colonie suisse de Londres trois jours après mon arrivée au moment même — je serai tenté de dire avant même — d'entrer en charge.

C'est pour moi un grand honneur et un grand privilège, dans une période aussi mouvementée, d'assumer la représentation de la Suisse en Grande Bretagne. Surtout que ce rôle a été rempli jusqu'à présent par notre plus brillant diplomate, mon collègue et ami M. Paul Ruegger. M. Ruegger s'est acquitté de sa tâche avec une intelligence, et un succès auxquels tout le monde s'est plu à rendre hommage.

Je n'ai pas la prétention d'égaler ce qui est inégalable. Toutefois je compte bien maintenir et même développer, sous le signe d'une confiance réciproque, les relations étroites et amicales que mon prédécesseur a entretenues avec la Colonie. Vous pouvez compter sur moi.

Ma mission s'annonce du reste sous d'heureux auspices. Je ne pouvais souhaiter en effet d'introduction plus flatteuse auprès de la Colonie suisse de Londres et même de Grande Bretagne, qu'en apparaissant aux côtés de Monsieur le Général Guisan, dont la présence donne à la manifestation de ce jour une ampleur et un éclat certainement inaccoutumés.

Je salue également le représentant du Gouvernement de Bâle, ainsi que tous les artistes suisses — citadins et montagnards — qui vont nous rappeler par leurs jeux et par leurs chants la patrie absente.

La manifestation de ce soir me remplit de fierté. Elle me permet de mesurer l'attachement de la Colonie suisse de Londres à la mère patrie. L'éloge du patriotisme de votre Colonie n'est plus à faire. J'ai eu moi-même à m'occuper durant ma mission à Paris de l'acheminement vers la Suisse de vos mobilisés de 1939. C'est avec enthousiasme qu'ils ont répondu à l'appel du pays.

Or l'aide des Suisses de l'étranger est plus indispensable que jamais. "L'ère des dangers est passée," disait à l'issue d'une guerre un homme d'Etat du siècle dernier, "L'ère des difficultés commence."

Quoi qu'il en soit, dans la période d'instabilité et de dérèglements issue de la deuxième guerre mondiale, une tâche constante nous incombe — en plus du maintien de notre neutralité, — tâche qui nécessite une vigilance de tous les instants: conserver jalousement les deux forces spirituelles, "qui," ainsi que le disait une fois le Président de la Confédération, "sont le bien commun des confédérés": le respect qu'ils professent pour la liberté et le respect qu'ils professent pour la dignité et la liberté de la personne humaine."

Ce double souci a déjà trouvé son expression dans la première constitution fédérale dont la Suisse toute entière, dans un mouvement unanime de confraternité, sans distinction de langues ou de religions, s'apprête à fêter le centenaire.

Cette constitution, fondée sur le fédéralisme, qui conditionne l'existence même de notre pays, confirme l'existence des états et l'autonomie cantonale. Elle nous apparaît avec le recul que donne le temps comme un heureux compromis entre les tendances de l'époque. L'élaboration en fut grandement facilitée par le premier en date de notre lignée de généraux, le Général Dufour, qui se révéla non seulement un chef par la rapidité et la clarté de ses décisions, mais un homme d'Etat par sa modération et son souci d'apaisement.

La Constitution de 1848 révèle en son principe un heureux partage de la puissance publique entre les Cantons et la Confédération, un juste équilibre entre les droits et les devoirs des citoyens. Ainsi que l'a dit M. Edgar Bonjour: "Die schweizerische Verfassung ist nicht das Werk einheitlich aufbauender Logik . . . , sondern das Ergebnis einer Verständigung der Gegensätze, herbeigeführt durch den gesunden Menschenverstand. Es spricht aus ihr der Wille zum gerechten Ausgleich zwischenstaatlicher Autorität und persönlicher Freiheit."

Elle ouvre largement la voie aux révisions et aux amendements. Ce qui a permis dans le passé et permettra dans l'avenir de la rajuster aux nécessités des temps.

Les Suisses se sont eux-mêmes en toute indépendance dotés de cette constitution.

Toutefois, il me plaît de rappeler ici que si la querelle qui divisait alors le peuple suisse a failli provoquer une intervention étrangère, c'est à Lord Palmerston que nous devons en partie de l'avoir évitée. Fidèle à son rôle historique, le Royaume-Uni, servi par une diplomatie aussi subtile qu'efficace, sut empêcher l'intervention de certaines grandes puissances. Ainsi l'Angleterre se révéla une fois de plus l'amie fidèle de la Suisse.

Comme nous, l'Angleterre a procédé par évolution, par intuition plutôt que par révolution, comme nous elle possédait une liberté politique enracinée profondément dans le sol national. Nous partageons avec elle la vertu de la tenacité et surtout la soif de la liberté.

Ces institutions que nous nous sommes librement données, il s'agit de les conserver comme le plus précieux des patrimoines. Prenons donc comme devise ces paroles du Président Motta: Confiance et vigilance.

The applause which this patriotic address evoked had hardly died down, when the Drums and Fifes of Basle, marched in front of the platform, headed by the drum-major, who, with his impressive baton greeted the audience, they played with great efficiency and remarkable technique Basle Festival Marches.

This band needs hardly any introduction, they are



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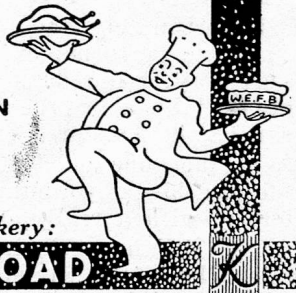
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famous all over Switzerland; to really appreciate their playing in all its finesse, one should have been bred and born in Basle. To those "uneducated" ones in the audience, who are not familiar with this kind of music it might have sounded rather overpowering, it needs, as I say, an acquired taste, and some of my very good friends, who hail from the canton of Basle, were just a little bit disappointed about some of the remarks made as to the "noise," they need not be unnecessarily alarmed, the same happens to us Bernese, who expect, that whenever the "Bärnermarsch" is played, that all our brethren from the other cantons should become flushed with pent up emotion and patriotism.

The tumultuous sound had hardly subsided when the Yodler Choir from Stans came forward, dressed in their embroidered "Chuttli." They sang two songs with Yodle soli in fine style and the applause which their performance earned was richly deserved.

They were succeeded by the Rigi Boys Peasant Band of Vitznau, comprising three accordionists, contrabass and clarinet, playing joyfully a few "Ländler," the star turn of this band, was undoubtedly the clarinet player who not only is a master of his instrument, but, an unconscious humourist.

And now the famous "Alphorn" trio, the Christen's, father and son and Bieri appeared, who have the reputation of being the best solo players in Switzerland.

They played two pieces "Bärgblume" with echo sounding from somewhere behind the stage and "In de Schwizerbärge," their fine playing brought back many memories of times when we heard these homely sounds in our lovely mountains. They too earned well deserved applause.

Again the Drums and Fifes took the stage playing this time historical Marches of the Swiss Regiments of the 16th to the 19th century; here again the ensemble and the skill of the players was easily detected.

Amidst "Yuchzers" coming both from the stage and from the Hall, the Folklore Group assembled to give us some traditional dances, accompanied by a "Ländlerkapelle."

Pretty maidens and sturdy men danced and whirled round to their heart's content, making everybody else eager to join them. Some of the dancers, especially on the female side, were pretty hefty, but they danced never-the-less with much grace and above all with enthusiasm and great fervour.

They earned universal applause for their colourful display.

The lights were then lowered, and there appeared the Beckenried Flag Swingers, who swung their huge Swiss flags with astounding efficiency to the tune of the Peasant band.

Unfortunately they were unable to repeat the remarkable performance which they had given at the Albert Hall, a few days previously, owing to the fact that the lights above the stage caused obstruction when throwing the flags at a great height.

In fact one good Lady in the audience nearly received a black eye, but this little slip did not unduly interfere with a really clever and fine performance.

The "Fahnenschwinger" were followed by the Yodler Choir from Stans, with two songs which again brought the "house down."

In concluding the first part of the programme the

Drums and Fifes of Basle played the "Retreat" from a Swiss Torchlight Procession of 1799.

An interval of an hour was then announced, which enabled the audience to partake of refreshments, which were invitingly displayed in the Foyer.

The scene which followed reminded one of the storming of the Bastille, the onslaught was terrific, and remarkable skill was needed to balance plates and cups whilst treading ones way through the crowd.

The catering, as in former years, was entrusted to Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid, from the Glendower Hotel, and I defy anyone to find a better host and hostess.

It is no easy undertaking under present conditions to feed nearly 3,000 hungry mouths in the restricted time of an hour; but in spite of the congestion, unavoidable owing to the restricted accommodation, caused by some anxious people, who were frightened that they might be too late to get their tummies filled, everything went off without a hitch.

The staff worked like heroes, and like their "boss" kept on smiling. A hearty vote of thanks is due to Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid for their efficient catering arrangements and their staff, who simply refused to get ruffled, even under trying circumstances.

The second part of the Programme started with a great and pleasant surprise; it was announced through the microphone, that General Guisan, Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army during the last war, would address the company. This announcement was greeted with hearty and prolonged applause and when the General appeared on the platform a tremendous burst of cheering and clapping greeted him, seldom have I witnessed such a hearty and spontaneous reception.

Gang lueg d'Heimat a !

Va revoir ton beau Pays !

Va a vedere il tuo Paese !

Va a vera teis Pajais !.....

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Surrounded by all the flags and a number of girls in Swiss costume, the General expressed his pleasure at having been enabled to attend this year's Fête Suisse and thus make contact with the Swiss Colony in England. He thanked the members of the Swiss Folklore Association for having taken part in this patriotic demonstration. He paid a generous tribute to the Swiss in England for their unswerving attachment to their native country, and expressed his admiration at the efforts the British Empire had made to safeguard Democracy and Liberty. The General referred to our Army and its work during the Frontier occupation, saying that the times through which we are passing require constant watching. In a humorous vein he referred to his "passing out" of the Army.

The short address, which was given partly in French and partly in "Schwyzerdütsch" was loudly cheered.

And whilst the applause was still resounding from the four corners of the Hall, the Drums and Fifes assembled again, and the drummers, this time in full strength played the "Windschi" march, composed by Dr. F. R. Berger, in honour of the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, when he visited Switzerland in 1946.

I noticed that they had discarded their uniforms, and now appeared in a less ceremonious attire, I am not quite certain for what reason, whether it was too hot for them, or whether they hoped to be able to put more force in their playing by being more lightly clad.

The "Windschi" March certainly sounded forceful, and if Mr. Churchill was at the House "over the road" his ears must have tingled, whilst mine ached. Two more numbers were played, "Z' Basel am mym Rhi" and "Arabi," the latter being an arrangement of the "British Grenadiers" first played in Basle in 1883 and introduced from London through the Swiss Legation.

Once again the skill and the fine technique of these players could be admired.

The Rigi Boys Peasant Band of Vitznau, the Yodler Choir from Stans, the Alphorn Trio from Hergiswil, the Querpffyer, the Folklore Group and the Flag Swingers turned up in their turn, and presented the audience with a second edition of their fine repertoire.

Then came the grand Finale, the entire company sang, upstanding, the Swiss Psalm and never before have I heard this beautiful Hymn sung with such deep feeling and enthusiasm, it was a befitting ending to a really fine evening, an evening which will be treasured for a long time by all those who were privileged to be present.

Before concluding this report hearty thanks should be expressed to the Organising Committee, they have tackled a tremendous job with remarkable efficiency. Appreciation should be paid especially to Mr. Ch. Chapuis, President of the "Fête Suisse," Mr. J. Zimmermann, Hon. Secretary, and Mr. A. Renou, who have borne the chief burden of the work. A hearty "Vergähts Gott" is due to the members of the Swiss Folklore Federation for having presented a really fine and enjoyable programme. A "merci mille fois" to all the charming programme and flag sellers.

I have nothing to criticise, yes, I have, will the Gentleman who put up the Bernese escutcheon see, in future, that it is not put the wrong way round, the bear and we Bernese do not like it.

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