

The Winston Churchill memorial at Oberhofen

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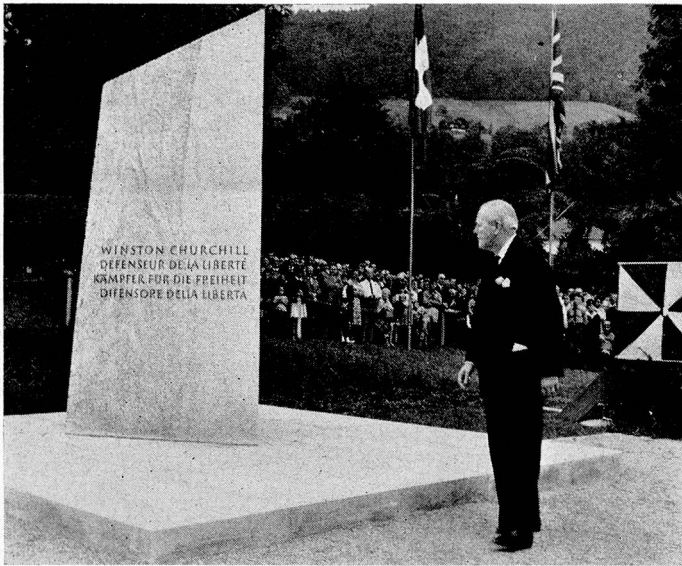
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THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL AT OBERHOFEN



Within less than five months after an appeal had been launched by a special Committee for the erection of a commemorative stone for Sir Winston Churchill, the unveiling ceremony took place on 18th September, exactly nineteen years after the great Statesman had made his historic speech at the University of Zurich. The ceremony was performed in the presence of his son Randolph and the British Ambassador and Mrs. Isaacson. A large community of his admirers who had generously contributed to the successful fruition of this initiative, reached Oberhofen from Thoun by special steamer. A crowd of almost one thousand people from the region had already gathered on the lake shores of this lovely village, around the still unveiled monument. A mild autumn sun gave its blessing to this memorable event.

The memory of Sir Winston and of his impact on history could hardly be honoured in a better way than by this modest but imposing stone, 30 feet high and roughly hewn in granite of the Swiss Alps, suggesting with its elevated protruding top the V-sign and bearing under the name the words "defender of freedom" in our three national languages and the well known four "morals" which every reader of his War Memoirs will remember. As a symbol of Churchill's stern resolution to resist and his unswerving will to continue the fight for freedom to the victorious end, it faces the mountain chain of the Oberland, bulwark of our resistance where our Army found its *Réduit* during the War.

In his inaugural speech Monsieur Petitpierre, Patron of the Committee, said that "it is not customary for a country to dedicate a monument to a foreign statesman whatever his merits, this honour being generally reserved for those of its own sons who have served their country best, but Sir Winston was more than an outstanding Head of Government of a friendly country and therefore holds an exceptional place in the affairs of this century." . . . "The man whom the British Parliament and Nation had appointed as their leader was singled out by fate to assume an even higher task: to lead the defenders of this civilisation against the unleashing of demonic forces which had already engulfed almost the whole of Europe: to stop

them, to make them retreat, to destroy them." . . . "In common with all men for whom freedom is the greatest good we owe a debt of gratitude to Churchill who so decisively helped the countries that had lost their independence to regain it and others to preserve it."

Monsieur Petitpierre also referred to the Note addressed by Churchill to his Foreign Secretary on 3rd December 1944, which we find in his Memoirs and "reveals that he was prepared to support us and to explain our position to those of his allies who did not wish us well." And he concluded with these words: "We have raised this Memorial as a token of the gratitude the Swiss people owe to Churchill. We wanted a simple monument; a stone quarried from our Alps, bearing only a few words — those with which Churchill himself defined the principles inspiring him in defeat and in victory, in war and in peace . . . People's memory is shortlived: Events destroy events. It is to future generations, to our children and grand-children that this monument is dedicated. May this stone remind them that the independence of their country and their personal freedom do not come by themselves; that these freedoms can be mortally threatened and that, at a moment in history when they were threatened most, one man arose to defend them and do more than anyone else to keep them alive!"

Dr. A. Blaser, Vice-President of the Cantonal Government of Berne who very generously had offered the piece of land on which the stone has been erected, alluded to the words which Churchill pronounced from the staircase of the Rathaus, on his visit to Berne in September 1946; he then said that he was not an enemy of any Nation but of tyranny in all its shapes. Because freedom dwells in the mountains and the Swiss people knew how to keep up their independence, he owed them the highest respect.

It was left to the historian of the University of Berne, National Councillor Walter Hofer, to stress the point why Churchill's deed was of such unique importance for the history of Europe. The situation in 1940 was in a way comparable to that in 1802; then, too, England stood alone and made the shortlived Peace Treaty to Amiens with Napoleon. Most probably Britain could have made an agreement with Hitler which would have respected her integrity, but the price for such an arrangement would have had to be paid by the Nations of Europe; they were rescued from being given over to Hitler's totalitarian regime by Churchill's stern resolution to continue the fight. As he had declared in his broadcast speech on 17th June 1940, the British "were the sole champions in arms to defend the world cause" and "we shall do our best to be worthy of this high honour". Professor Hofer added that we can hardly imagine what would have been the fate of Europe if England in that hour had abandoned the fight.

Mr. Randolph Churchill whose physical appearance reminded us so much of his father's and who was greeted with lively ovations by the local population, was visibly moved when he slowly went up to and bowed before the monument. In this speech he mentioned that relations between both countries went back to the days of the coronation of William the Conqueror; he commented on the four guiding principles which are engraved on the stone but which did not meet with approval when his father pronounced them after the First World War; he thanked the promoters of the monument; the initiative taken by a small country compared favourably with the almost hostile attitude of some allied nations after their liberation by the British and American Armies; and he expressed his admiration for the "beauty, grandeur and simplicity" of the monument.

Later on a reception at the Château Oberhofen brought together the members of the sponsoring three Swiss-British Societies of Berne, Basle and Zurich and many of the donors from all parts of Switzerland with the representatives of the local population who showed great joy and real pride that they will in future be entrusted with the care of the Memorial to the great British Statesman.

The Sponsoring Committee will be able to remit a considerable part of the sums collected to a special fund which, if adequately augmented by further actions, shall serve for the creation of a public library of books of and on Winston Churchill which it is planned to be opened next year at Zurich.

From a special Correspondent.

Photograph by courtesy of A.S.L. Lausanne.

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