

67th fête suisse

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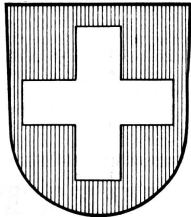
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67th

FÊTE SUISSSE



*“ Als ich fern dir war, o Helvetia
Fasste manchmal mich ein tiefes Leid.”*

Who amongst my compatriots in foreign lands, has not, at one time or another, felt deep down in his heart that longing and yearning, after the lovely little country which we call our own; a feeling which our National poet, Gottfried Keller, has so vividly expressed in that unforgettable poem “O mein Heimatland.” —

Fate, or may we call it destiny, plays some remarkable pranks with us at times, and therefore many who would like to spend their holidays in the “old country” are, for some reason or other prevented from doing so. As a small recompense the Committee of the “Fête Suisse” annually offers to our compatriots an evening, where, at least in thoughts we can for a few golden hours dwell amongst the beauties of that land which means so much to us Swiss. —

We are living in an age, where no sooner one record is established another will take its place, and I am glad to report, that any previous records of attendance at the “Fête Suisse” during the last 66 years, have been “smashed.” The official figure supplied to me, shows that 1,200 of our countrymen, assembled last Thursday, at the Central Hall, in order to testify their allegiance to their mother country, this is a splendid result of which the organisers can well be proud.

It was in the real sense of the word a large family party, happiness was written on all the faces, — happiness hovered over the beautifully decorated Hall; it was as if a golden breeze swept over from our beloved country, lighting up the faces and gladdening the hearts of Helvetia's children across the sea. —

On entering the spacious vestibule, sweet maidens in National costumes, greeted the arrivals with a sunny smile, “can I sell you a flag?” a pretty *vaudoise* enquired, and when she pinned it on to my coat, I could almost hear my heart beat, I felt that I was once again amongst my own folk, familiar sounds of our native dialects reached my ears, and forgotten were all troubles, I felt myself back home again, days of a happy childhood were remembered, days amongst the beauties of my native land came back to me, and I imagined I could hear the bells ring once more, those bells which awaken in so many of us sweet, unforgettable memories.

These little flags with which everybody was decorated, created a real homely atmosphere, and for once one could indulge, in what at home is called contemptuously “Kantönligkeit.”

I was much amused, for instance, to see that the popular Headmaster of the Swiss Mercantile College, Mr. Levy, wore in his button-hole, the “Thurgauer” emblem. I made it a point to have a good look at the “size” of his fingers, and much to my astonishment I found them of “normal length,” which goes to prove that we have for centuries cast an unjust slur on our brethren of the canton of Thurgau. — (But, of course, I must mention that my friend hails from “another” canton.)

The concert hall itself was wonderfully decorated, the large platform was one mass of flowers, and Mr. Scheuermeier, who was responsible for this artistic display, deserves the thanks of everyone present. In addition, huge Swiss Flags intermingled with the different cantonal flags, and the Union Jack, gave the Hall a most festive appearance, and here again, Messrs. Godfrey (E. Hungerbühler) must be heartily congratulated, both our countrymen can claim a big share in the success of the evening, they added greatly in creating the real “Stimmung.”

Amongst the many flags displayed, I noticed the Italian flag, and as barely a couple of hours previously it was decided in the “neighbourhood” of the Central Hall, that sanctions should come to an end, I consider that this was a bit of “smart work.” —

One does not usually connect a cow bell with an entertainment, anyhow not in this country, but, as on former occasions, this was the signal that the programme was about to start.

At 7 o'clock punctually the sounds of the mighty organ filled the big Hall with Gounod's

“Marche Militaire” (alas, a most appropriate tune) played by Mr. E. A. Seymour, in his usual efficient way.

Before I go any further in describing the various items on the programme, I would like to voice a disappointment; that amongst the 15 numbers billed, not one single Swiss composer was included. (The pot-pourri of Swiss Folk songs played by the Swiss Institute Orchestra was not mentioned). Yet we have at least a score of famous composers such as Jaques Dalcroze, Volkmar Andrae, Suter, Attenhofer, etc. Considering that the “Fête Suisse” is a purely Swiss affair I should have thought that some of our foremost composers would have been included in the programme.

Furthermore I missed sadly one or two items of “yoddlings,” so popular with Swiss audiences; and why has the Committee never given an opportunity to the youth of our Colony, that is, the children, to put in an appearance, this used to be one of the “star” turns on previous occasions. —

After the audience had sung the Swiss Hymn, “Sur nos monts, quand le soleil,” Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme offered a short prayer.

Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, then literally, “climbed” on to the platform in order to give the official blessing to this impressive gathering; it is to be regretted, that the Minister, owing to his official duties and pressure of work, was unable to give us one of his inspiring speeches, which are, on so many Swiss functions a very appreciated item.

M. Hoffmann-de Visme then addressed the audience, and his sincere and patriotic oration created a deep impression, he explained just why the “Fête Suisse” has become such a splendid institution. He mentioned that we have not only assembled on that day to amuse ourselves, but also to render thanks to our Lord, who has given us His spiritual guidance, and has extended His protection over the destiny of our people.

The applause which greeted the words of our Pastor had hardly died down, when Mr. and Mrs. Easdale-Niklaus appeared on the platform to play “Deux Valses Romantiques” for two pianos by E. Chabrier and later on Chopin's Polonaise in A. It took a little time, owing to the distance these artistes found themselves separated from each other to make the signal in order to begin their recital, but when they did, they managed to capture all the hearts of the audience by their brilliant playing. What strength, what sweetness, what variety of tone and conception and what joy they gave to all of us. Truly two fine artistes.

The next item took us right into the realm of *bel canto*, Mlle. Violette Browne sang the aria “Pace” from “La Forza del Destino” by Verdi. Those who heard Mlle. Browne for the first time — and the writer is ashamed to confess to being amongst them, although I am told Mlle. Browne has in recent years given quite a number of concerts in London, — had the great pleasure of discovering a fine singer, not only of great talent and of fine technical training, but with an easily flowing charming voice. She was just as admirable in her “Lieders.” Nothing could have been better than the firm, continuous line she drew through Joseph Marx “Hat dich die Liebe berührt.” The volume of tone, remarkable no less for its beauty than its power made it a real pleasure to listen to her.

Before the next item on the programme, M. A. F. Suter, the vivacious President of the “Nouvelle Société Helvétique” addressed the gathering saying:

We Swiss abroad have an organisation in Berne of which we may be proud, the *Secrétariat of the Swiss Abroad*. This is the daughter institution of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, which counts well over 200 Groups abroad with an ever increasing membership of thousands of good Swiss. Let us support these two useful and patriotic institutions.

As in former years, the *Secrétariat* again sends the greetings of Switzerland to our Fête; and again in the shape of Alpine flowers. But this year they had a late spring in Switzerland

with heavy snow on Whit-monday at Meiringen, so that the few Alpenrosen which could be obtained came from the sunnier slopes of the Tessin, Meiringen, however, was not going to be beaten, so the pupils of the Sec. school gathered lots of deep-blue Gentians and I hope that there may be enough “strüssli” to go round.

On this occasion it may be just as well to remind ourselves of the fact that we Swiss abroad are something like 500,000, or perhaps 11 per cent. of the total population. The reason for this immense and constant emigration from so small and so beautiful a country as Switzerland is naturally of an economic character and therefore forced upon us.

In the earlier centuries, our forefathers abroad were mainly mercenary soldiers serving in the famous Swiss Regiments. To-day, we have a share in every profession, every trade and industry, and in every class of work carried on in town or country all over the world. It is to our credit that the world has still a good opinion of us, and this opinion may be expressed as: — “Generally, the Swiss fills his position;” a great compliment.

On the 31st of March this year, a Swiss died in London (at least his father was Swiss, the mother an Englishwoman, and the boy was brought up in Lausanne and Geneva). This Swiss had risen to the highest honours in scientific achievement, and the King had conferred a knighthood upon him for his services to the Empire. He had developed and directed a scientific institution in this country which is to-day a model of its kind and the envy of the world.

This man was SIR JOSEPH PETAVEL, the late Director of the *National Physical Laboratories* at Teddington.

Single-minded — unafraid — loyally did he do his life's work, and became a great servant and a great Master. In our hearts, let us honour his memory, let us pay tribute to his great mind, and let his life's achievement be an example to us all.

This speech which finished with a joke, which however, does not lend itself for translation, was highly appreciated.

The musical part of the programme was then continued, and on the platform appeared a youthful artiste, Mr. Teddy Weil, who, after mastering a certain nervousness, which may be called “stage fright,” gave a masterful rendering of Brahms's fifth and sixth “Dances Hongroises” and Heykens “Sérénade,” Mr. Weil is a capital little Artiste, who has great talents, which should be allowed to be fully cultivated. Mr. E. P. Dick proved to be an efficient accompanist.

For some quite unaccountable reason I have in the past always been prejudiced against mixed choir singing, and I had fully intended to disappear to some “other regions,” whilst the “Choeur mixte” was singing, I am glad I did not follow my first impulse, because I would thus have missed one of the finest items on the programme, the rendering, especially of Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's “Herr, durch die ganze Welt” was most impressive, and amongst the solists I would like to give the palm to Mlle. Nellie Pallisser, her agreeable voice blended finely with the ensemble; it was, however, a pity that the male voices were not more numerous. The accompaniment of Mr. Seymour at the organ bore witness of his fine musicianship.

Pastor Hahn who conducted is to be congratulated on having been so successful in tackling a work which is by no means easy to perform, I am sure my readers will agree with me that the singing of the choir was remarkable, and they fully deserved the spontaneous applause which they received. —

An interval of an hour was then announced, in order to allow the artists and their audience to look after their more material requirements. In the “Foyer” a number of stalls were set up containing the most tempting delicacies, such as strawberries and cream, delicious pastries, ices, sandwiches, coffee bar and last, but by no means

least, a kitchen where most appetizing hot sausages were cooked and handed out, the latter stall seemed to me the principal attraction. The catering was in the capable hands of Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid, from the "Glendower Hotel," and what a happy hit the organizers made in putting the catering into such experienced hands. The staff went right out of their way to make things as pleasant as possible, no mean achievement considering the haste in which some of the visitors were, to stay their hunger and quench their thirst, and when it comes to the distribution of "bouquets" behind the public platform, I sincerely hope that Mr. and Mrs. Schmid will get the share, they so richly deserve.

During the interval, the Swiss Orchestral Society, under the able conductorship of M. E. P. Dick, regaled the audience with a number of popular Swiss tunes, amongst them was the "Bärner Marsch" which as usual brought the "house down."

After the interval, the Swiss Institute Orchestral Society, under the conductorship of M. E. P. Dick, gave a very creditable rendering of the "Prélude" from Wagner's "Meistersinger," which is by no means an easy work to perform by an Orchestra of "amateurs" perhaps the "brass dept.," once or twice played a tune of their own, but this not infrequently happens even in professional orchestras.

I was looking forward with great pleasure to hear this orchestra, which has, on so many occasions, given their services to the Swiss Colony, but, as far as I am concerned, this pleasure was greatly impaired by the noise in the Hall, during the performance, it reminded me more of a "Biergarten" than of a Concert Hall.

Last year a famous London conductor, rebuked the audience at a performance at the Covent Garden Opera House, in a rather unparliamentary manner, when they failed to keep silent, Mr. Dick would have been quite justified to imitate his colleague. It was a great pity, and all those who could not control their wagging tongues for a few minutes, will have the satisfaction of knowing that they spoil the pleasure of many who were eager to give the orchestra a fair hearing.

Apart from the artists already mentioned, M. Berni "et ses Accordéonistes" appeared in the first and second part of the programme. The almost riotous applause which greeted every number he sang was a proof that the audience thoroughly enjoyed not only the singing of Maestro Berni, but also the clever accompaniment of his colleagues.

Pasteur Hahn then played on the organ a Prélude, and shortly before 10.30 the singing of the National Anthem, brought the 67th "Fête Suisse" to a close.

I noticed that many of the performing artists were presented with beautiful bouquets, which they certainly richly deserved, but thanks are especially due to the gentlemen who have organised this "Fête," and if they have perhaps not received appreciation in a more tangible way, they can rest assured, that the gratitude is inscribed in the hearts of the many, to whom they have given a few hours of never-to-be-forgotten joy. The waves of patriotism ran high; — it has often been mentioned to me, that patriotism does not pay, — it might be so, but then, really, do we want to drag these most sacred feelings down to a "business proposition?" Let us, and God grant us this, still cherish and treasure the feelings of love and gratitude of our country which has given us so much, in fact, given us all that is worth living for. But it must not remain a patriotism which is conveniently displayed on some festive occasion, it must be a patriotism which is based on a deep conviction to help all those, who are now, through no fault of theirs, in dire distress.

If we live up truly and faithfully to our motto, *Un pour tous, tous pour un*, then we have proved to be worthy sons of our beloved homeland.

This 67th Fête Suisse has once again reminded us of our duties towards our brethren, and I hope it will bear golden fruits, this is my most fervent wish.

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Owing to the fact, that the time of the team is taken up with practice, it is difficult to make arrangements for meeting the team during their stay, but we hope to publish in next week's Swiss Observer, further details regarding an eventual meeting of the crew.

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Wednesday, July 1st, at 7.30 p.m. — Société de Secours Mutuels — Monthly Meeting, at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Tuesday, July 7th — City Swiss Club — No Meeting.

Friday, July 17th — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Supper at 6.30 p.m. (3/-), to be followed by a causerie by Monsieur M. Veillard, Docteur en droit, Lausanne, on "Coup d'oeil sur la Suisse de 1936," at the "Foyer Suisse," 12, Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.

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Dimanche 5 Juillet — Service de Clôture de l'Ecole du Dimanche. Sainté Cène matin et soir.

BAPTEME.

Hazel Annette Pratt, née le 25/2/36, fille de Leslie et de Nelly née Soutter — de Genève. — le 21/6/36.

MARIAGE.

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11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst und Sonntagsschule.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

Die Abendgottesdienste fallen während der Monate Juli und August aus.

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