

The origin of the "1st of August"

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FIRST AUGUST IN LIVERPOOL.

The First of August, a chance to meet, but where? The weather had not, so far, been promising this summer and a possibly rainy day by the sea had no special attraction. Also the Railway Company has raised the fare to Prestatyn to 9/9, a serious matter. So Prestatyn was ruled out and a meeting arranged by Mrs. Davidson and Mrs. Macquarie near the Old Windmill, Bidston, a picnic tea where people could bring their own rations. Bidston Hill is on a long ridge of sandstone running North and South through the northern half of the Wirral Peninsula. To the West a fine view opens over the Dee Basin to the Welsh Hills, to the East is the busy Mersey with its docks and Liverpool with its fine Cathedral, and many handsome buildings, not all laid low by the war. Not far away is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Davidson, a place of refuge if storm clouds should gather. These usually come in from the wide expanse of the sea in Liverpool Bay where the steamers find an exit to the four corners of the world. Altogether a well chosen meeting place.

The weather forecast was for rain during the afternoon. It did not come, so we could have our picnic in the open. Mrs. Macquarie fixed a Swiss flag on a gorse bush and started the gathering with a patriotic song to be followed by others. We compared notes on our trips to Switzerland and we all agreed that we were charmed by the beauty everywhere of our country when it was fine. For some of us had struck a very rainy period. We do not share the almost universal belief of our English friends that Switzerland *must* have

done well out of the war. We found a sharp increase in the cost of living, housing shortage, high taxation, in fact all the evils we suffer from here, only to a lesser extent and the quality of the food is much better. The hotels are reasonable in price, once you have paid your fare, your costs as regards hotels, will be no more than here.

When tea time arrived Mrs. Macquarie opened a box which contained a large cake with our national colours from Mr. Troxler of the Swiss Café, Bold Street, Liverpool, with other good things, a very acceptable present from an old friend, which we highly appreciated.

The Prestatyn party had come by car and Mrs. Cheetham brought along with her Frl. von Erlach, an exchange student of the University of Bern, spending her vacation in North Wales.

We also greatly appreciated the presence of Mr. Davidson and of Dr. Macquarie.

The Consulate was represented by Miss Türler and the former Consul.

Time passed quickly, but the party seemed loath to break up and I doubt if they would have left the ling and the heather when they did if a rain cloud was not rolling up to reinforce the earlier warning "rain come to-day," but it did not, except to a small extent. *Au revoir!* When shall we meet again? was the key note of our parting.

E.M.

THE ORIGIN OF THE "1st OF AUGUST."

The first of August celebrations took an official character for the first time in 1891 when on the 600th anniversary a general chiming of bells was heard throughout Switzerland at eight in the evening. Seven years later a petition was presented to the Municipal Council of Berne by the late Mr. Rudolf Mürger, to the effect that the chiming of bells should be repeated every year on the 1st of August. The request was passed on by the council to the cantonal authorities and by the latter to the Federal Council. The cantons were finally consulted and eighteen of them were in favour from the beginning.

On the 22nd July, 1899, the cantons were invited by the Federal Council to bring about a general chiming of bells from 8.30 to 8.45 p.m., and five years later this time was fixed half an hour earlier. At the same time it was suggested that flags and pennants should be flown from public buildings. In 1911 the offices of the Federal Administration were for the first time closed at 5 p.m.; since then early closing on the 1st of August has become general.

A petition presented to the Federal Council in 1916, with a view of turning the first of August into a public holiday did not find favour with the two Houses of Parliament. It was held that solemn chimes calling for a few moments of meditation after a day's toilsome work was more dignified than a whole day of festivities and jollifications.

Bonfires never formed part of the official commemoration; they are remnant of ancient folklore. Since 1910 collections (by the sale of badges, etc.) for the benefit of some Swiss institutions of general utility have formed a popular feature of the 1st of August.

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