

Nouvelle société helvétique

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peninsula. The members of the Congress were met there by Alp horn music. An excellent *al fresco* (or nearly *al fresco*) supper was served, and the whole atmosphere was very informal. A member of the French contingent, who had sampled too many Kirsch's, shouted to me, grabbing me by the shoulder: "Toi, tu est anglais! Je le vois, à cause de ta gabardine." So he shrewdly used the style of my raincoat, . . . in order to place me. Let anyone say that writers are not observant! And yet, he might have been wrong.

On the next morning the scene of the Congress was shifted to Bâle. A special train was prepared for us, and we found, on arrival in Bâle, several tramcars which took us to the new University compound. A magnificent group of buildings, as spacious and well designed as any of the best Universities I have seen in the Old and in the New World. The chair was taken by Ignazio Silone, the President of the new Italian P.E.N. in Rome, an ardent opponent of Mussolini and an exile from Italy during the Duce's period in power. He had some very stern and disturbing things to tell us. He referred to the last war as to an international civil war, transcending all political frontiers, and maintained that it was far from over . . . A more cheerful note was sounded when one of our Bâle hosts, the President of the Bâle Centre, Mr. E. Stichelberger, after addressing us impeccably in six languages, declared that he was not a polyglot. He did not intend the audience to burst into hilarity at this point, but it was spontaneous. To people speaking one, two languages at most, the apology for speaking *only* six, must have appeared strange, although, no doubt, it was perfectly genuine. The speaker apparently

regretted not being able to greet every member of the Congress in his or her particular language.

The session was followed by a very well organised Lunch at the "Casino," where 460 sat down to the meal. From there we went to visit the beautiful Minster, and were impressed by the memorial plaque dedicated to Erasmus of Rotterdam, the illustrious precursor of the Reformation, and the humanist, by the grace of God. We were given a very handsome brochure by E. Stichelberger "Basels Humanisten Zeit," in German, which gave us a vivid picture of the part played by the City of Bâle in the re-birth of learning and of the arts, at the end of the XVth and in the XVIth century.

We were also taken to the Bâle Art Gallery where, after an inspection of the remarkable pictures housed there, we were treated to a sumptuous tea in the Aula of the Museum ("Zwei Mahlzeiten — Coupons, bitte!"). Late in the afternoon we took another special train back to Zürich.

The following day was to witness the conclusion of the official business of the Congress. It was crowned by a gala-dinner and dance in the main Hall of the Congress Building. It was a Lucullian meal, albeit without meat (Friday!) and wines were served "à discretion" and . . . without any coupons! A throng of young and pretty girls from Zürich, all clad in Swiss National Costumes, helped to entertain us and gave us sundry little mementoes of the Congress, discreetly asking for our autographs, as a souvenir for themselves. A similar bevy had greeted us in Bâle the day before. . .

We were addressed by various Swiss personalities, and one of the speakers to respond was Prince Wilhelm of Sweden, himself a littérateur and last year's host in Stockholm. After the dinner the one and only dance of the Congress took place. I wondered how the ripe exponents of literature would deport themselves; but I can assure you that those who risked stepping on the parquet floor did very well indeed. They partnered their ladies in such a way that one would have thought that they always danced after dinner.

The official programme over, several semi-private excursions were undertaken during the week-end.

The French railway strike inconvenienced a number of us, especially the Belgian, French and British members, but we got moving, in some way or other. I had to resort to night-flying, but it was very interesting.

Whilst gliding away from Switzerland, I realised that, in common with all other guests, I was carrying back with me a feeling of warm gratitude for the wonderful reception the proud little country had given to us, visitors from other lands. Seldom has a P.E.N. Congress been held in more attractive surroundings and in an atmosphere of such general goodwill, to which our Swiss hosts have contributed so much.

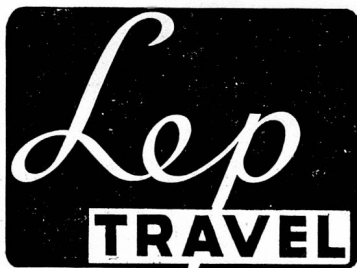
NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE. Childrens' Outing.

Owing to the clashing of dates of this outing with end of term school sports, which most children are attending, we have decided to cancel the outing planned for July 19th.

We hope to resume these activities at some future date.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

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