

Christmas Celebrations in the "Schweizerkirche"

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CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS IN THE "SCHWEIZERKIRCHE."

Every year before Christmas there is a certain moment which makes one realize that the great days of festivities have started. This time it happened to me on Wednesday, 21st December at the Christmas celebration of the "Schwyzerchränzli." For weeks I had been shopping and preparing presents, and I had started baking "Guezli." The red candles on our breakfast table and those at church every Sunday in Advent had lit a light in our hearts, and the children had grown more and more excited every evening as they had opened another little door on their Advent calendar. But when I entered the Swiss Church at 5 o'clock that Wednesday evening the moment had arrived for me when the thought of Christmas overwhelmed me. The warm, welcoming atmosphere gripped me immediately. There must have been nearly two hundred young girls ready for their own celebration. An air of expectancy filled the crowded church lit only by dozens of white candles on the huge Christmas tree hung with shiny red apples and glittering silver threads.

The homely chatter of the young people stopped when the Rev. H. Blum started the service with a few simple but touching words of welcome. Apart from these and Mr. Blum's short address later on it was the girls themselves who produced the programme. The clear young voices of some of them recited the story of the birth of Christ, and some played the piano and recorders, whilst their choir sang beautiful old Christmas hymns. Once, however, it was the children's turn, when the boys and girls of the Sunday School recited and sung under Mrs. Blum's guidance. And if their voices were at times not very audible or their words very distinct their eager and happy faces more than made up for it.

During the tea interval the young girls met in the Church hall where some of the untiring helpers in the "Schwyzerchränzli" such as Mrs. Jenne and Miss Waldvogel, had prepared a lovely tea. The long table was decorated with candles and fir branches and every variety of Swiss Christmas "Guezli", cakes and sandwiches were to be found.

When the whole congregation had sung "Nun danket alle Gott" the celebration came to an end. I am sure every one present must have left the church filled with happiness and the true Christmas spirit.

For many of these young girls this was the only Swiss Christmas atmosphere they were to enjoy, for they were not all able to attend the Christmas Service on the 25th, nor were they fortunate enough to go to the FAMILY CHRISTMAS SERVICE in the afternoon of Boxing Day. This time it was the members of the German-speaking Schweizerkirche who assembled at the Eglise Suisse in Endell Street. From babies in arms to old men and women they were there, about three hundred of them, united in the joy of Christmas. Again the church was lit by candle light. The children of the Sunday School sang and recited once more, and a slightly smaller choir of the "Schwyzerchränzli" rendered their songs. A violin solo and a hymn sung by members of the Swiss Male Choir were part of the programme. The children listened very attentively to the Christmas story by Mr. Blum, later they trooped up to the tree where they eagerly received their small presents. After Mr. Blum had read a Christmas message from the Schweiz. Kirchenbund the congregation sang the last of the familiar Christmas songs and with the Lord's Blessing the service came to an end.

I could not help feeling that there was more to these Christmas services than just songs and prayers. Where two hundred young girls could meet in a strange city like London and celebrate Christmas in a serious Swiss way there must be a strong bond of friendship and a happy Christian spirit. It shows also how fortunate must be Pfr. Blum's leadership to create such a friendly and happy circle. And if the first of these celebrations to me meant the beginning of Christmas the family service came to a befitting climax. From this service where, in spite of difficulties of transport and travelling, a large congregation of Swiss families could meet to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and where the old and the young and the very young co-operated towards the success of the celebration there must have emerged a blessing which cannot but make itself felt throughout the New Year.

MARIANN.

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