

Swiss National Day Celebration

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1954

on SUNDAY, 1st of AUGUST, 1954
at the BATTERSEA PLEASURE GARDENS

*O mon cher pays, sois mon seul amour,
Sur ton sol il fait bon revenir,
Dans ton sein qu'il est doux de finir
O patrie, où j'ai reçu le jour!*

Three factors largely contributed to make this year's 1st of August celebration not only a memorable, but also a successful one.

In the first instance it happily fell on the same day that our countrymen at home were commemorating the 663rd birth of our country. (On some former occasions this anniversary was celebrated by the London Swiss Colony one or two days ahead so as to give as many as possible a chance to attend). No doubt, many of those who were present at the Battersea Pleasure Gardens, let their thoughts wander for a few fleeting moments back home where at the same time our brethren across the sea, with no less patriotic fervour, were paying homage to our ancestors, who in times of similar upheaval and evil forebodings as the world is witnessing today, took the solemn oath to stand together steadfast and united, in storm and danger, in peace and war to defend our country's independence.

Secondly the organisers took this year the bold step of changing the meeting place. As long as I can remember the celebration has, with one exception, always been held indoors, and for the last few years at Central Hall, Westminster, which although perhaps convenient, is not a very inspiring and rather dull assembly place.

Thirdly the weather was kind in spite of a rather alarming forecast, at least until the very end of the actual performance, which was a blessing. I shudder to think what would have happened, if at the last minute a change over to the "Vauxhall Beer Gardens Pavillion" (also not a very inspiring place) would have had to be made.

It is true the sun sulked behind heavy and threatening clouds, and a strong and rather coldish wind made things at times none too pleasant, but as the rain kept away there was no reason to grumble. It certainly did not affect in any way the happy and gay spirit of the audience. The "gamble" of the Organising Committee has this time "come off", which, I am sure must have been a great relief to them, but will it always be so, I wonder?

The concert pavillion which can accommodate about 1,500 persons sitting down, was occupied to its full capacity, and many late comers had to stand either at the back or the sides of the auditorium. At a rough

guess there must have been between 1,600 to 1,700 persons present, which is a highly satisfactory number, and a splendid testimony that, although far from home the Swiss have not forgotten to remember the birthday of their beloved country to which they owe so much.

The stage, as well as the auditorium were gaily decorated with bunting, the cantonal escutcheons, two large and two smaller Swiss flags, as well as the Union Jack. It certainly gave colour and enhanced the "Stimmung".

Our English friends when they return from a visit to our country, invariably pay high praise to the tidiness and the cleanliness they encounter there. The large and smaller Swiss flags which were exhibited in front and at the back of the stage unfortunately belied this. They looked not only shabby but almost dirty, and a friend of mine suggested, that there and then a collection should be made for a few packets of "Tide" to give them a good spring clean, or may I ask some of my compatriots who are the owners of a washing machine to volunteer, as an exception to "take in washing" and give them a "good boil", and also, at the same time add the same process to the "Union Jack", it would look so much better.

It was a pleasure to see, that apart from some of the performers, a good number in the audience wore national costume or covered their "golden locks" with "Mälcherchäpplis". The 1st of August badge was also worn by almost everybody.

The programme of this year's 1st of August celebration showed little change from those presented in the post war period.

I may here repeat what I have written on previous occasions, namely: "In more affluent days we were lucky enough to possess an orchestra, which was a great asset to the Colony, and which brought a welcome diversion to a performance which has become a little drab and monotonous. This is, of course, not the fault of the organisers. Professional Swiss artistes who have in the past generously given their support, have either left us, or can not afford anymore to give their services free of charge. More and more we are getting dependent on "imported" help, which, although appreciated means additional expense. Considering that no entrance fee is charged, and that all the cost are to be met by voluntary contributions, I cannot see how a more varied, and perhaps more interesting programme could be presented under these circumstances.

And does it really matter so much? The main object of the 1st of August celebration is not to make a big "show", but to present to the audience a bill of fare which enables them to feel at home, and to awaken in them memories of a time when they too were living in that country which we so proudly call "Our Homeland".

I venture to say, that the 1st of August Committee has been successful in creating such an atmosphere, and the applause with which every programme item was acknowledged proves it"—.

Shortly before the start of the performance, the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté arrived, accompanied by members of the Legation and their wives. Colonel Gygli and Major Weber the Military and Air Attachés wore uniform. A little girl and boy dressed in Swiss costume presented to Madame de Torrenté, and Madame Dupraz, wife of the President of the 1st of August Committee, bouquets of red and white carnations.

Punctually at 3 o'clock the programme started with community singing, and I am delighted to say that everyone, young and old alike joined in most heartily. Such old favourites like "O mein Heimatland, O mein Vaterland", "O Bluemli my", and "Ich bin ein Schweizerknabe" were sung with much feeling, whilst "Roulez, tambours", "Là-haut sur la montagne" and "Addio la caserma" were rendered with great vivacity.

The Swiss Minister, in company with Rev. C. Reverdin of the "Eglise Suisse", Pfarrer H. Spoerri of the "Schweizerkirche" and Father A. Lanfranchi of the St. Ann's Catholic Church, then took their seats in front of the curtain, and amidst a great hush, Father Lanfranchi offered a prayer in Italian thanking God Almighty for having so kindly guided the destiny of our little country.

Monsieur Henry de Torrenté then gave the customary patriotic address, saying:

My dear compatriots and friends,

I welcome you all on behalf of our authorities to this annual gathering in commemoration of our National Day. Thanks to the present workings of the calendar, the First of August this year falls on a Sunday and this makes it possible for us to meet out of doors, as we do at home. I am delighted with this innovation and congratulate the First of August Committee. The weather seems to smile and will, I hope, remain kind to us.

As is customary on the First of August, the

President of the Confederation, M. Rubattel, sent a message to all Swiss abroad with the request that it be transmitted to you. It is my honour to do so.

"La tradition exige du Président de la Confédération qu'il adresse aux Suisses à l'étranger un bref message du 1er août. Une exigence qu'il accepte sans discussion parce qu'elle lui est douce et qu'elle peut vous être bienfaisante.

Certes, vu du dehors, pour vous et pour nous, le pays change; les villes s'étendent, les usines se multiplient, l'industrialisation avance d'un pas trop rapide, réduisant chaque année la part de terre que travaillent les paysans. Nous serons dans peu de temps cinq millions; il faut bien que tout le monde vive.

Mais si la figure de la Suisse se transforme si les préoccupations générales diffèrent de celles que vous avez connues il y a dix ou vingt ans, ou davantage encore, nous restons fidèles à nos patries cantonales.

Alors que partout ailleurs les nuances se perdent, le miracle se perpétue d'un Etat qui voue ses soins les plus attentifs au renforcement des originalités où il puise sa confiance et sa force. Quelque part dans le monde vit et prospère un petit peuple auquel vous appartenez, qui garde le sens de ses origines et s'efforce de ne s'en point éloigner.

Les Landsgemeinden survivantes, celles des deux Appenzell, de Nidwald, d'Obwald et de Glaris sont le témoignage émouvant de cette fidélité des hommes à leur vallée, à la terre qu'ils connaissent

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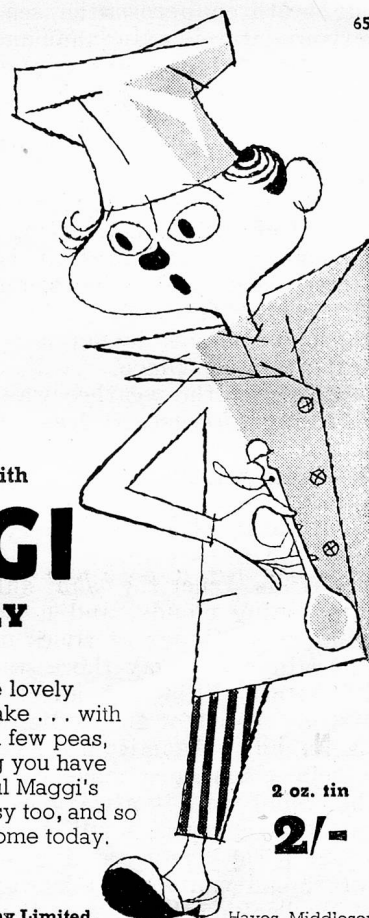
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de près. J'ai participé à quatre d'entre elles. On y parle un langage qui ne varie pas : celui du peuple souverain, responsable, appliqué aux affaires communes comme il l'est à ses affaires privées; un langage de dignité simple, de respect des magistrats élus, direct et solide.

Les relations internationales peuvent se multiplier, Berne étendre son emprise, peu importe; le sens de l'autonomie cantonale reste vivant, omniprésent et profond, quelles que soient les formes qu'il revête. Le peuple de chacun des vingt-deux Cantons n'oublie pas que le socle c'est lui, et que sans socle il n'y a pas d'oeuvre d'art.

Ainsi, mes chers compatriotes, en est-il de notre pays : soumis sans doute, comme les autres, aux impératifs de la vie moderne, mais soucieux de ne pas leur consentir d'autres sacrifices que les inévitables. C'est là notre privilège et notre sauvegarde.

Heureuse fête du 1er août à toutes et à tous, au près et au loin; nous ne vous oublions pas."

Le temps limité dont je dispose ne me permet pas de récapituler comme à l'accoutumée les événements de l'année. Je me bornerai donc à ajouter quelques mots au message du Président de la Confédération.

Il était opportun, à mon avis, qu'à l'occasion de cette Fête du 1er Août, le Président de la Confédération insistât sur l'importance de nos "patries cantonales", à une époque où les tendances centralisatrices pourraient induire un observateur super-

ficiel à croire que nos particularismes sont en voie de disparition.

En dépit des avantages matériels qu'une certaine unification peut comporter dans l'un ou l'autre domaine, la Suisse doit garder son caractère propre qui est de constituer à elle seule une société des peuples.

Situé au point d'impact de trois des grandes civilisations européennes, notre pays veut rester divers en son unité et, à cette fin, respecter l'existence des communautés dont il est la synthèse. Les unes prolongent l'Allemagne, d'autres la France, d'autres l'Italie jusqu'au coeur des Alpes. L'essence de notre entité n'est donc ni le mythe ethnique, ni l'affinité linguistique, ni la similitude des croyances religieuses.

Cette entité est fondée sur l'alliance de communautés d'hommes "parallèlement épris de liberté et qui se sont créées identiquement une religion de la dignité humaine". Ces communautés ne doivent pas se résorber dans le creuset d'une unité nationale. Chacune doit garder son individualité propre, tout en s'efforçant de rapprocher les unes des autres des cultures qui s'opposent et d'en tirer ce qu'elles ont de meilleur.

L'un de nos amis anglo-saxons a judicieusement relevé qu'en Suisse l'entité vivante était la communauté et non l'Etat; que l'Etat y était contenu dans certaines limites, ce qui faisait de la Suisse un pays véritablement libre.

A la Confédération d'abord, à l'Etat fédératif ensuite ces communautés ont demandé la sécurité contre l'ennemi du dehors; une protection contre les grandes nations dont elles sont le prolongement, afin de pouvoir, à l'abri de cette protection, poursuivre leur évolution dans l'ordre et la paix. A cette fin s'ajoute le désir d'une coopération mutuelle pour assurer la prospérité de tous par la prospérité de chacun. Cette conception de l'indépendance à l'égard de l'étranger et de la collaboration à l'intérieur a trouvé son expression dans le fédéralisme.

C'est le fédéralisme qui, à son tour, a permis et favorisé l'épanouissement de la démocratie. En effet, la décentralisation de la puissance publique, l'indépendance de la commune à l'égard du canton, l'autonomie du canton à l'égard du pouvoir central éveillent et stimulent l'intérêt de l'individu pour la chose publique. L'intérêt que



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chaque citoyen porte à sa commune est à la base de l'éducation civique.

Enfin, c'est de l'ensemble de ces conditions de la structure ethnique et de la situation géographique de la Suisse qu'est née la neutralité. En effet, le pays eut été menacé dans son existence même s'il avait dû prendre part dans les querelles des grandes pays qui nous entourent.

Mais je m'empresse d'ajouter que la neutralité n'est pas une attitude passive. Elle exige une vigilance continue et le maintien d'une forte armée pour la défense de notre territoire; elle impose au citoyen le devoir impérieux de la mesure et de la réflexion. Elle attend de nous des sacrifices.

Aussi n'est-ce pas sans surprise que l'on a accueilli récemment une initiative émanant de la Suisse romande et tendant à la réduction immédiate de 50% de notre budget militaire. Cette initiative a été stigmatisée dans les termes qui conviennent par M. le Conseiller fédéral Pepitpierre, Chef du Département politique fédéral: "La neutralité", a dit M. Petitpierre, "nous interdit de participer à des alliances militaires, de mettre notre armée au service d'un belligérant, mais elle nous fait un devoir de la défendre s'il y est porté atteinte et d'avoir pour cela une armée aussi forte que nos moyens nous le permettent".

Nul ne songe évidemment à contester aux citoyens le droit d'examiner la possibilité de compresser les dépenses militaires. Mais c'est là une question de bon sens et de mesure, alors que l'initiative propose une réduction brutale et immédiate sans justification raisonnée ou constructive.

Le peuple suisse lui fera sans doute le sort qu'elle mérite, reconnaissant une fois de plus que notre neutralité n'est pas un oreiller de paresse.

Au surplus, il convient de juger l'arbre à ses fruits. Or, il est évident pour tout observateur impartial que la neutralité n'a nullement empêché la Suisse de rendre à l'Europe, sur le plan humanitaire, économique et financier, des services sans commune mesure avec son importance territoriale et le chiffre de sa population.

C'est à la Suisse neutre que s'adressèrent, il y

a plus d'une année, les puissances engagées en Corée, en l'invitant à participer aux deux commissions internationales prévues par l'armistice.

C'est Genève qui a été choisi une fois de plus comme siège de la Conférence asiatique que l'avenir classera certainement parmi les plus importantes de l'histoire contemporaine. Cette conférence, si elle n'a pas résolu définitivement le conflit indo-chinois, n'en a pas moins arrêté les hostilités et créé les conditions nécessaires et indispensables à la poursuite d'une solution pacifique. Il n'est pas présomptueux d'imaginer que ce résultat est dû dans une large mesure à l'atmosphère de détente que seul peut offrir un pays qui, à l'abri des passions politiques trop violentes, s'efforce de comprendre les aspirations de chacun. C'est ainsi que l'on a vu les représentants des deux blocs qui s'opposaient à Genève venir à Berne saluer le Gouvernement fédéral et le remercier d'avoir accueilli la conférence.

Aussi, la Suisse, société des peuples en miniature, fidèle à sa tradition démocratique, n'a qu'un suprême désir: servir l'humanité en favorisant de tous ses moyens toutes les initiatives propres à assurer la paix.

One of the features on former National Day celebrations was the reading of the "Swiss Pact", which was usually done by one of our clergymen, but this year the committee following a precedent, entrusted

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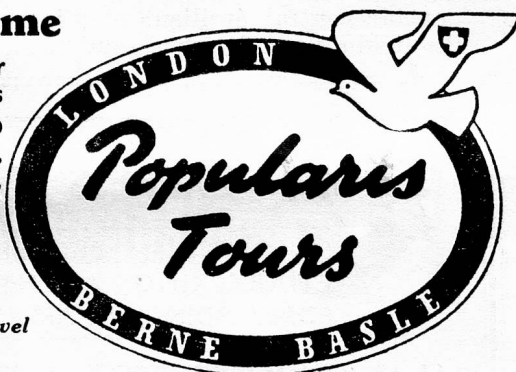
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the reading of this historical document to another member of the Colony.

Their choice fell on our friend Mr. William B. Sigerist, and no better choice could have been made. Those who remember him officiating as "Father Christmas" on many occasions, knew that in his new role he would be equally impressive.

Dressed in the service uniform of a corporal of the Papal Swiss Guard, which I believe was lent to him by Mr. A. F. Suter, — who appeared in the same capacity some years ago — he made his entry on the stage. With measured steps and a grave expression, as befitted the occasion, he read with a sonorous and well timed voice this Pact which, where and whenever it is read is creating a deep impression on its hearers.

After this we came to the lighter part of the programme. The "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese, who, on so many former entertainments of the Colony, under the baton of the late P. de Maria has given us so much pleasure, appeared once again before a Swiss audience, rendering various "Canzonette" under the leadership of their new conductor, Mr. L. Bruni.

Dressed in their becoming Ticinese costume they sang songs which many of us have heard in that heaven blessed corner of our country. Although less numerous than in the past, they sang well, but I for one missed the happy expression and the bewitching smiles of the ladies which used to make their singing so enjoyable to watch and to listen to. If their conductor, who by the way seemed to be the only jolly

one in this performance, can induce his choir to smile, when smiles are called for, he will greatly enhance the performance of the "Corale".

The Swiss Accordion Club, who appeared next, has also somewhat "shrunk", but what was missing in "quantity" was gained in "quality". They really played delightfully under their leader Mr. A. Gandon, and what a saucy little hat his daughter wore! the items on their programme were a march "Regiment 13", and "Schweizergruss". The almost hysterical outburst from members in the audience showed that their playing was appreciated.

I can hardly imagine a Swiss event without the appearance of our old friends the Swiss Male Choir. Befitting the occasion they wore in their button-holes red and white carnations which made them look more handsome than ever. Although less numerous too, than usual, owing to the absence on holiday of some of their members, they did not fail by their rendering of two songs "s'Heimwehland" and "Heimweh" to strike a note of nostalgia in the hearts of their hearers. Mr. E. P. Dick, who so ably conducts this choir was evidently pleased with the applause, which was well deserved.

This ended the first part of the programme. During the interval everyone adjourned to the "Beer Garden Pavillion" where instead of beer — tea, soft drinks, sausages and sandwiches were to be had. Most frequented was the "sausage corner", where delicious "Wienerli's", supplied by our old friend Bartholdi were on sale.

On former occasions I had reason to complain of the behaviour of some of the purchasers of these delicacies, who literally used to storm the counter as if it was a matter of life and death. This time everything was done in an orderly manner, which goes to prove that "constructive criticism" is helpful at times.

In the last issue of this paper, the committee had announced, that apart from tea and soft drinks, beer and wine would be available, but I am afraid this was a mis-statement, or was it meant as a catch? Apparently the catering authorities failed in their endeavours to procure a license, and so it was "soft drinks" and tea, much to the disappointment of those

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who had visions of enjoying a bottle of Neuchâtel or Fendant, or a pint of good old ale.

When everyone had eaten their fill, they returned to the Concert pavillion to listen to the 2nd part of the programme, which started again with community singing, which lacking alcoholic encouragement, was nevertheless just as lively as at the beginning of the performance.

After the last sounds of the song "C'est si simple d'aimer" had disappeared, Mr. Albert Ferber made his entry on the stage and received a vociferous reception, and rightly so, by his fine playing he has made an honoured name for himself in the musical world of this country.

How delightful was the rendering of Debussy's "Serenade for the Doll" and "Claire de Lune". No less enjoyable to listen to was "Nocturne C sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1 by Chopin and "Allegro de Concert" by Granados, which proved what a fine musician Albert Ferber is. Thunderous applause greeted each item, and even the starlings in the loft of the stage, who had previously been very noisy, kept quiet during his performance. Could a better compliment be paid to an artiste?

Again the Swiss Male Choir made its appearance, singing this time two songs in French, "Nos montagnes" by H. Suter, and F. O. Wolf's "Notre Valais", followed by the Swiss Accordion Club with "Ländler" and Polkas.

A very welcome diversion in the programme was the reading from English authors on Switzerland, by Selma Vaz Dias. I am sure, I am not giving any secret away, if I mention that she is the wife of our compatriot, Dr. H. W. Egli. Those who have seen and heard her on the stage, on radio or television knew of the great pleasure that was in store for them.

With her fine voice and with perfect diction she read excerpts from Oliver Goldsmith, Robert Louis Stevenson, ending up with passages from Schiller's William Tell (in English). A most exquisite performance which was greatly enjoyed and suitably acknowledged. The lovely bouquet of flowers which was presented to her was a token of appreciation for the joy she had given us.

Once again the "Corale" appeared with a number of songs. Then came a little hitch, the only one which occurred during the afternoon, and not a very serious one at that. The programme mentioned a "short address" by the President, this was overlooked by the announcer, who invited the audience to sing the National Anthem, but after a hurried conversation, Mr. R. Dupraz, was urged on to the platform, and in a few words addressed the company, thanking in the first instance the Swiss Minister, and Madame de Torrenté for having honoured this year's 1st of August celebration with their presence as well as all the artistes who collaborated. He hoped that this patriotic gathering, which was attended by many young members of the Colony for the first time, would leave a lasting impression on their memory and prove to them that the Swiss in London always remember this anniversary which is so dear to them.

My dancing years being "almost" over, I excused myself from adjourning to the "Beer Gardens" Pavilion, but I hear that it was a most enjoyable affair.

In summing up, I can say without hesitation, that this year's celebration was a great success, and the committee who worked so hard deserves grateful thanks, especially Mlle. S. Morosi, Messrs. Dupraz Egli, Streit, Gandon and Dick, and all those who took part in the programme, not forgetting those members of the Colony and Swiss firms, who by their generous contributions enabled us to celebrate this day in a dignified manner.

May a kind Providence protect our beloved country in the years to come. Switzerland today is a nucleus of what Europe tomorrow, and the whole world later on might be, and we are ready to sacrifice everything rather than that this oasis of sanity in the heart of Europe should be destroyed.

And in this spirit we will remember the "Rütli" oath, and that motto from which springs our whole achievements, political, economical and cultural and of which we have a right to be proud today:

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