

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Rudolf Minger and French-speaking Switzerland".

To all the marks of esteem which have been paid to the memory of Rudolf Minger, former Federal Councillor, who has recently died, we would like to add the testimony of the French-speaking Swiss, who is convinced that he is now speaking in a perfect communion of thought with his French-speaking fellow-countrymen.

It is true that it would be impossible to be more authentically German-Swiss, more thoroughly Bernese, than was the former Head of the Military Department. He was a man of the soil, a man of his people. When he was appointed to the highest of our Federal offices, he did not know our language well, and even at the end of his career he could not speak it with ease. It seemed as if his entire education separated him from us, as if he would not be able to understand us and that we, also, would not understand him. But, this was a false appearance.

In reality, if Rudolf Minger was — and this is undubitable — the most popular of the members of our highest authority in these our modern times, he was popular in all the political parties of the country. In our part of the country, as elsewhere, what we loved was his simplicity. We loved this man because he was a real person, who never dreamt of trying to pass himself off as being anything other than his real self. What we liked was the fact that he knew his own limitations, but did not suffer from this, that he simply did his duty, placed all his forces at the service of his country and accomplished his task honestly.

The Swiss, in the French as well as in the German-speaking part of the country, like to recognise themselves in their authorities. They do not like them to differ, in their bearing or in their manners, from what is the best to be found in the average citizen. Rudolf Minger corresponded exactly to this definition.

Moreover, Rudolf Minger was a man without prejudices and, above all, he detested small parochial quarrels. He accepted reality for what it was. He knew that the Swiss nation is composed of a number of very different people. He treated them all on an equal footing. He would have been the very last to allow himself to be seduced by the temptation of applying any kind of ostracism to that which did not resemble him completely.

This was easily discernible in the attitude which he adopted quite naturally and quite spontaneously in regard to the French-speaking Swiss. He appreciated their qualities. He knew how to draw the best out of them for service to their country. He asked for and he obtained their co-operation. In particular, we will never forget that he was immediately, right at the beginning of the Second World War, a warm partisan of the nomination of Colonel Guisan to the supreme functions of a General. Nor will we forget, either, that right up to his retirement, that is to say during sixteen months, he collaborated

with our General, in a spirit of perfect friendship. Nor will it be forgotten that this friendship was mutual and that it was loyal and faithful on both sides.

Another thing which was appreciated about Rudolf Minger was the fact that, never for an instant, did he think of substituting himself for the specialists on military questions. Although he himself had the rank of a Colonel, and could have commanded a Regiment, he always, so long as he was at the head of our National Defence, considered himself to be the representative of the civil power, charged with the task of administering the military domain. In this way he performed a work of conciliation, seeking tirelessly to achieve a proper balance between the technical requirements of our National Defence and its political possibilities. He possessed the sense of authority. He would never have allowed his own to be encroached upon. But he also knew, through a sure instinct that true authority is only possessed by a man who knows how to share it, to delegate it and to respect that of another man's, even if he be a subordinate.

Thus, Rudolf Minger was a man who possessed an admirable equilibrium. His life was successful. He was neither proud, nor falsely modest. He was as Nature had made him. And we loved this genuineness of his, accompanied by such magnificent simplicity.

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