

Inaugural service of the Schweizerkirche at St. Mary Woolnoth

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INAUGURAL SERVICE OF THE SCHWEIZERKIRCHE AT ST. MARY WOOLNOTH, E.C.3.

Of the beautiful little church, St. Anne's and St. Agnes, in that quiet backwater of Gresham Street in the City, where the "Schweizerkirche" used to worship for nearly two decades before the war, only the shell remains. The lovely interior was ruthlessly destroyed in the Blitz of December, 1940, and, since then, the German speaking community held its services at the "Oak Room", Kingsway Hall, which had been placed at our disposal by the courtesy of the "West London Mission" and for which we shall ever remain deeply grateful.

Sunday, March 6th, however, was a great day for Pfarrer H. Spoerri and his flock, as the first service was held at 11 a.m. in the beautiful church of St. Mary Woolnoth, close to the Mansion House and the Bank Station. Although in the course of 14 years, during which our services were held at the "Oak Room", that homely venue became dear to the congregation as a place of worship, the longing after a Church could not be stilled and it was with pleasure and satisfaction that the Swiss Colony heard the good news that another City Church had at last been found. Through the indefatigable efforts of the "Church of England Council on Foreign Relations" and by courtesy of the Bishop of London and the Guild Vicar, the Rev. St. Hopkinson, the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth was placed at the disposal of the Schweizerkirche for Sunday morning and evening services.

This church is more ornate than St. Anne's used to be, with impressive pillars, warm panelling, plenty of light through the roof and a very fine organ. Although the snow lay outside, inside the church it looked like spring, with fragrant blooms of Daffodils, Narcissi and Tulips decorating the front pillars and niches. On a table before the altar was a magnificent large basket of Arum Lilies, Carnations and White Lilac, in the artistic arrangement of which, your reporter thinks, the masterhand of one of our old and greatly respected friends of the church could be detected. This new place of worship, in spite of the inclement and wintry weather, was filled to capacity and no less a personage than the President of the Consistoire himself, Mr. Charles Gysin, received the worshippers at the door. Besides M. le Pasteur C. Reverdin, many other prominent members of the Eglise Suisse were present, to share with their Alemanic Brethren the solemnity and happiness of the great event. In his pew sat the Vicar of St. Mary's, the Rev. St. Hopkinson and next to him the Rev. J. R. Satterthwaite, Assistant Secretary of the "Church of England Council on Foreign Relations".

The service opened with an Organ Solo, after which Pfarrer H. Spoerri, who had ascended the pulpit, read out the 84th Psalm in his clear and sonorous voice, as a greeting.

The first Hymn was "Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr" and its strains reverberated mightily in the lofty church as the congregation offered this, its first song of praise. Then followed a prayer of dedication and gratitude for great favours received, after which H.E. The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, rose to address the large assembly. The Minister, who first spoke in English and later in German, said that it gave him very great pleasure that one of his first

public functions should be to address his compatriots in this beautiful City Church and he expressed his grateful thanks to the authorities and personages concerned who had brought it about that from now on we should be allowed to worship there. Monsieur Daeniker also stressed the close links that have always existed between the Legation and the Church, not forgetting the great part which the Eglise Suisse had rendered the Swiss Community for the best part of 200 years. In fact, the Eglise Suisse and her Pastors in earliest days rendered some services which later on were taken over by the Legation, when regular diplomatic relations were established. In those days, now long past, the Swiss Church even furnished the Swiss Citizens with their passports!

The Minister's fine allocution was followed by a moving address from Mr. F. G. Sommer, one of the pillars of the "Schweizerkirche" from its foundation. He based his remarks on the parable of the talents (Math. XXV) which the New Translation by James Moffat calls the parable of the five pound notes (Luke XIX) and he implored his hearers that even those who had received only one talent which, after all, meant the masses, should watch and pray that they might put it to the very best use in God's service.

The Swiss Male Choir, who was present in full strength and occupied the choir stalls, next regaled the congregation with a beautiful and sensitive rendering of Krentzer's "Dies ist der Tag des Herrn" under the admirable conductorship of Mr. P. Dick.

The Vicar, the Rev. St. Hopkinson, next rose to bid a warm welcome to the assembly in terms that

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went straight to the heart. He said that he knew and loved Switzerland and that he and his forbears always had been great mountain lovers and that several of his relations had found eternal rest in the beautiful little churchyard at Arosa. The Vicar stressed that, for these reasons, it gave him particular pleasure that his City Church should now become the home of the "Schweizerkirche" and his welcome was not that of a host to guests, but he was happy to share St. Mary's with his brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

The Vicar was followed by the Rev. J. R. Satterthwaite, who expressed his pleasure that the efforts of the "Church of England Council on Foreign Relations" had at last borne fruit and resulted in having found us this lovely church. He also spoke on the growing unity of the churches, which was so important a matter and uppermost in the minds of all devout Christians. Of this fact your reporter also had vivid proof during the same week-end, when at his local Presbyterian Church a new Minister was inducted and all the local clergy, from the Church of England and every denomination of the Free Churches, were present to extend to him a most hearty welcome, wishing him well in his new ministry. Such a manifestation would have been almost unthinkable, say, 50 years ago, which shows that the unity of the churches is progressing slowly but surely.

After the next Hymn ("Sollt ich meinem Gott nicht singen"), Pfr. H. Spoerri delivered his powerful sermon, basing himself on the text: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Math. XVIII, verse 20). The preacher said how, in his experience, he had often found young people who came to this great Metropolis and, lacking real friends, feeling desperately lonely. It might happen to old people also, who had lost their relations and who had few connections left. The salvation from such loneliness for young and old, lay in the Church and in the community of sincere friends gathering there, not only during Service, but afterwards or at other times, when there were always opportunities for social reunions and for forming friendships. The Church was here to help, advise and uplift and now, when we had been given such a beautiful new House of God, the congregation ought to get larger and the opportunities for social intercourse and friendships multiplied. After the close of the sermon, there was another organ solo, during which M. le Pasteur C. Reverdin had ascended the pulpit,

to say the final prayers in French. He called for God's blessing on everyone: The Queen and the Royal Family, our own Authorities at home, those who guide the destinies of this country and of our homeland, the leaders of Churches everywhere, in particular the Vicar of St. Mary's, as well as our own communities. He said that we had very special reasons this Sunday to feel deeply grateful for so many blessings.

The next Hymn to be sung was: "Ist Gott fuer mich, so trete", after which a number of announcements followed, in particular, that on Sunday, March 20th, at 4 p.m., there would be a Passion play, enacted by the daughters of the "Schwyzerchraenzli", to which everyone was heartily invited.

After the Benediction the congregation sang the final Hymn: "Herr erbarm', erbarne Dich", and then it filed quietly out into the wintry air. The Vicar of St. Mary's had reminded the assembly to sign the visitors' book on leaving, which probably has not borne so many signatures on one and the same day for quite a long time past. Our two Pastors, the Vicar and the Rev. Satterthwaite were at the porch and at the gate respectively, to shake hands. I feel sure that we all were grateful to have this opportunity of thanking by a warm handclasp the two representatives of the Church of England for the genuine welcome they had given us and for the wonderful way in which both had expressed it. So ended a great and memorable occasion which, let us hope, will make the beginning of a new era in the Schweizerkirche, whose enthusiastic Pastor, Pfr. H. Spoerri, is both highly esteemed and well beloved.

W.D.

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