

Letter from Geneva

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LETTER FROM GENEVA.

My dear Friends,

Do you know which planet governs the year 1959? The almanac will tell you it is Jupiter. In Geneva it is nothing of the kind. Not that we have no respect for Jupiter in any form whatsoever — just fancy! — but simply because the city is celebrating a four hundredth anniversary and that is a red letter day in the history of our Republic and Canton. On the subject of republics, too, do not ask me whether it is our third or seventh; there is only one — and it was the outcome of the 1535-1536 events. With the overwhelming support of the citizens from the very outset — those citizens among whom Jean-Jacques Rousseau was proud to count himself one — towards the end of the seventeenth century it gradually became an oligarchy, later to succumb to the combined blows of the Revolution and the Directoire troops.

After fifteen years of occupation she once again reverted to her true character and in the latter years of last century became democratic. But, at least in spirit if not in letter, she has conserved that aristocratic determination so deeply ingrained in the hearts of the community to call on no one but the best to conduct affairs of state.

That which gave the Republic its personality — to an even greater degree than did the Reformation, which left so deep a mark on other cities — was the setting up of the Academy (to-day the University), thus immediately confirming the city in its vocation. Georges Goyau has said that Geneva is a church-city. It may be. But it has succeeded so long as it has remained a university city, that is to say, a city where learning is dispensed, or rather, by merely being the place where such learning could be obtained, for there was no point in taking up the chorus again "y'en a point comme nous". So, in the next century or so this Academy, the conservatoire of Reformed Thinking came to be known as the "colline sur l'Europe" sung by her poet René-Louis Piachaud.

Geneva, then, is celebrating the fourth centenary of the foundation of her university. All the faculties are open to visitors; there are evening lectures by eminent personalities; old students from all over the world are to be asked to subscribe towards the building of a University City — *Alma Mater Genevensis* — a long-felt need. Big festivals are to take place in June to raise funds also for the purpose. I do not propose to say more about this just now, but knowing your attachment to our city and the interest you have always shown for everything connected with it — you have many dear friends here — let me tell you about something else which created quite a stir. It was His Holiness Pope John XXIII's announcement that there should be held an Oecumenical Council. The mere mention of oecumenism in Geneva strikes an ultra-sensitive nerve since to live in communion with the Churches of all denominations is a tradition of long standing here, as close and friendly contacts have for many years existed between what has been called "Protestant Rome" and the English Church — that of the United Provinces, including the young communities set up in New England later to become powerful in the United States, with the Hungarian Church.

There are a hundred and one reasons why Geneva was chosen by the World Council of Churches as headquarters, grouping in their organization many millions of non-Roman Christians, such as the English, Calvinists, Lutherans, Orthodox, Presbyterians and other denominations. This alone will give you some idea of the sensation caused here by Pope John's words when mentioning the possibility of calling an Oecumenical Council to consider the problems which would be raised by a rapprochement with other confessions; and reviving our hope too that, in view of the grave dissension in the Christian world Christians are at last becoming conscious of the value, in the eyes of men of all races and religions, of their determination to get together and seek a way to unite.

Now, do not accuse me of being flippant if I say that much can happen before we get to that point. The main thing is that people really want to get there.

On the social, artistic and intellectual side, there seems no relaxation. A very real treat which we look forward to again and again is the lectures on the Château de la Lore given by the Baronne de Belleruche. These lectures, and the grace and charm of the young lecturer with a deeper sun-tan at each lecture, who illustrates her subject with slides, are greeted with prolonged applause. Finally, in the realm of Art, at the Musée de l'Athénée there was an exhibition of the French artist, Charles Dufresne's work in retrospect, before the posthumous works of Jean Ducommun were hung on the line. The Musée Rath was showing some contemporary paintings from Canada which aroused lively interest, as did the Polish engravings and prints at the Cabinet des Estampes.

Just one more point: I am hoping you are basking in such wonderful sunshine as we are here in Geneva, with fresh nights and mild days, so that you may enjoy your *dolce far niente* on a sunny terrace when you tire of reading my prose.

Yours affectionately,

Jean Jacques.

NESTLE'S NEW OFFICES OPENED.

St. George's House, Wood Street, Cheapside, the new main offices of the Nestlé organization in Britain, was officially opened on 3rd February by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Harold Gillett. Designed by T. B. Bennett & Son Ltd., it has seven storeys above ground with an additional tower block rising to 124 feet above the pavement, and provides 98,000 square feet of space for a staff of 670.

It was announced at the opening ceremony that the Nestlé company are to endow scholarships to the Management Development Institute in Switzerland, founded by the Nestlé Alimentana Company in 1957, to be awarded to outstanding young men in British industry. The scholarships will be worth £1,000 each, and one will be granted for each of the next three years.