

Letters to the editor

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HOW BATH SWISS CELEBRATED THE FIRST OF AUGUST

A few Swiss gathered for the First of August in an English friend's orchard.

A young Swiss girl brought some lovely red and white carnations to adorn our picnic table.

Our white cross on the red field was hoisted and we started at 8 p.m. sharp with the National Anthem. Then I read the President's message in German, French and English.

After this we enjoyed several Swiss Jodel records and our picnic.

Unfortunately the weather was not too kind for our outdoor activities, so we had to leave sooner than expected, and we finished at my home.

We are sorry not to see more Swiss in Bath and Bristol taking an interest in meeting each other on such occasions.

Frieda Maddox-Müller.

FIRST OF AUGUST SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER

The Swiss Club Manchester convened on the evening of the First of August at Cotton's Hotel near Knutsford for the traditional bonfire preceded by a "Wurst und Kartoffelsalat" supper.

The evening was successful in every way. Around the faithful "old guard" we were all happy to see the numerous young people who are the life-blood of the club. After the excellent and joyful supper the dynamic president, Mr. Simon, invited us to gather round the immense bonfire, much of whose wood had been contributed by members of the club.

As the flames rose, our thoughts turned to our beloved homeland with its long and perilous history. The vice-president, Mr. E. Berner, read extracts from the Bundesbrief, which even after more than 650 years makes us marvel at the level-headed way in which the founders of the confederation were able to reconcile down to earth practicalities with sacred ideals. Mr. Simon then read the annual message of the President of the Swiss Confederation to all Swiss living abroad and added a few words for the occasion. In the absence of our consul, Mr. Rosset, who was at the Leeds Club First of August festivity, Mr. Sollberger, vice-consul, spoke to us of the problems, mainly of an economic and social nature, facing Switzerland.

After this reminder of our nation's problems we returned our attention to the bonfire, which was gradually losing its initial force and sending fewer sparks into the balmy evening air. Before parting company we all enjoyed a splendid firework display which was arranged by Mr. Sohm and which was a fitting ending to a very enjoyable and harmonious evening.

W.B.

Wer nur Vergangnem lebt,
Verfällt der Schwermut leicht;
Wer nur an Heutgem klebt,
Wird naseweis und seicht;
Wer Künftigem allein
Sich weiht, wird irr gelenkt;
Der nur wird glücklich sein,
Der alle drei bedenkt.

(O. Sutermeister)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A number of most encouraging letters have reached the editor, particularly regarding her thoughts on our National Day. One reader felt that "this inspired message is the best thing we as a small nation can give to Britain and the world at this point". Another reader says he trusts and prays that the front page message "will have a deep influence on all that read it". The editor humbly accepts such heartening praise — her words came out of her deep love for her homeland, as well as out of sincere respect for the country we live in.

But then patriotism does not mean the same thing to everybody.

A letter full of complaint arrived from Paddington. It contains bitter disapproval of the First of August Celebration at Wimbledon. The writer asserts that it was such a great disappointment to many because "Chopin was no Swiss", and why was half the programme devoted to him? "Are we Swiss abroad or are we Poles abroad?" The writer expected folk music. (What, if not that, were the songs sung by the Unione Ticinese? Ed.), yodelling, "2 Schwitzeroergeli, Bassgigge, Clarinet und etwa noch ein Alhorn! Und einen anständigen Huddjgaeggeler!"

He asks why there was no money for a "really good Celebration". He and others would be prepared to pay double for "a decent National Day Celebration in order to have the feeling at least one day a year that we have a country which is not only interested in military taxes!"

The writer will let the New Helvetic Society in Switzerland have a report of the celebration and threatens with some boycott (of *what* is not clear) if that does not help.

"Why can't we have any Swiss music on our National Day? If we cannot, what is the point of a gathering in the first place? Does the fault lie with the organisers or with the Swiss Embassy?" Even the film, he asserts, was poor according to expert opinion. The writer maintains that in previous years the "programme came up nearer to established standards".

The editor considers the criticism unjustified, at least in most parts. There are quite a number of Swiss to whom patriotism is not equivalent to the strains of a "Ländlermusik". She wonders what reaction the writer would have if some music by Frank Martin, Arthur Honegger or other Swiss composers were performed. In fact, from the tone of the letter she cannot help suspecting that the writer could well have been amongst those who marred Miss Huggenberg's recital by lack of discipline.

The First of August Committee is only too glad to receive constructive suggestions for next year's celebration. But, obviously, it is of no use suggesting a group of artists from Switzerland which would cost a vast sum of money. It becomes more and more difficult to support the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Churches and other institutions within the Colony. The hundreds of young Swiss who attend the National Day Celebration are, generally speaking, not those who give financial support year after year to the many good causes in the Colony — which benefits them, too, in quite a large measure. Yet often it is they who complain first and criticise most. Incidentally, the writer of that letter is not amongst the subscribers and supporters of the "Swiss Observer".