

Swiss National Day celebrations

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS

LONDON

On the afternoon of the First of August somebody rang me up to find out if I knew of a nice place where a National Day Celebration would be held. When I referred the caller to Wimbledon he objected because it was too "rough" and not really "nice" and too far out of town as well. I gave the young man a piece of my mind and told him that he was, of course, at liberty to stay at home and celebrate our National Day any way he chose, but that the official celebration was being held at Wimbledon Town Hall; with the support of the Colony, including the Embassy; and anybody staying away because some people had been noisy and ill-mannered last year was not being helpful — when all is said and done it is the people who go there who *make* the celebration and determine the character of the atmosphere.

And never have I been more right. Apart from the efforts the Committee had made to eradicate a few of the shortcomings of last year's celebration, much good will was shown from many quarters, and more members of the permanent Colony came this year than for many a year past. It can be said that the 1963 celebration was a success from every point of view.

The programme started on time, went smoothly and with a swing, and the *Stimmung* throughout was happy, as it should be when celebrating a birthday. Nor was a solemn accent lacking, for an impressive prayer spoken in German, French and Italian by the Rev. Father J. Scherer, the patriotic address by the Swiss Ambassador, and the reading of the Swiss Pact in French by the Rev. Ph. H. Nicole reminded us that we had gathered not only to sing and dance but also humbly to remember the blessings that God has bestowed on our homeland and to ask Him for guidance and protection in yet another year.

The welcome accorded to the Ambassador was more than formal acknowledgement. It was a spontaneous expression of some of the affection with which Monsieur Daeniker was regarded and it was tinged with regret at his impending departure at the end of the year.

He welcomed the Worshipful Mayor and Mayoress of Wimbledon, Mr. and Mrs. Waller, as well as the Deputy Mayor, and thanked them "for honouring our celebration with their presence and for once more allowing the Swiss Community the privilege of enjoying the hospitality of the Borough". The Ambassador referred to the message to the Swiss abroad in which the President of the Swiss Confederation calls on all of us "to meditate on the foundations of the Confederation and its place in the world, and to contribute, in a common effort, to the preservation of our national patrimony and its adaptation to the needs and demands of modern times. He expects that the Swiss abroad will face the difficulties which they may encounter with courage and determination, showing by their behaviour that they are worthy of the passport which they carry with them. There is no better recommendation for a Swiss when he leaves his home to try his luck in foreign countries.

"Courage and determination are the outstanding virtues which we remember each year when we meet here to commemorate the birthday of the Confederation. With these virtues our forebears fought for the preservation of

what they considered their guaranteed rights, in times which for them were no less menacing and unstable than those in which we live. They were hardly conscious that the Pact which they concluded in 1291 would lead to the foundation of a new state. They did not reach for the stars to bring down a new social order. But when their fierce resolution was put to the test, they were ready to defend their rights and their common bond with their life-blood. In an unbroken development, marked as much by their sense of purpose and consistency as by sane moderation, the Confederation grew through the ages to its present shape. Such differences as under other circumstances proved dangerous to internal cohesion were overcome by a keen sense of tolerance and solidarity. And it was only complacency with an outworn social order that proved to be a fatal danger to the integrity of the federal bond.

"Our President reminds us also that ours is a small state whose existence has at all times to be vindicated by the defence of its rights and liberties. As a small state we do not have to carry the burden of so many of the problems which confront the great nations of this world. We never had colonial possessions, and we never claimed the right to maintain peace and order in whole regions of the world and ultimately to defend them, or to participate in the development of great collective forces. As a small state we not only tend — as Jacob Burckhardt says — to allow our people to be citizens in the fullest sense of the word, to foster our democratic institutions, and to bring to fruition the great variety among the cantons which is a characteristic of our national culture. But we also tend to evolve and support such ideas of liberalism and of an international legal order as are essential to the Lebensraum and the very existence of a small state. It also allows us to speak to the young, uncommitted developing countries in a language untainted by memories of the past."

Monsieur Daeniker then referred to the badges which we Swiss all over the world were wearing and said that the proceeds from the sale would be devoted to the nursing of the sick. This reminded us of the Centenary Celebration of the Red Cross. He called to our mind the events of 1863 and the courage and determination of the five men who worked undauntedly for a great cause which had become the International Red Cross. The Ambassador said that to our nation it meant a new mission. He next mentioned the Swiss National Exhibition, and that he had been asked to convey a hearty welcome to all present. It, too, stood for courage and determination. The organisers hoped they could count on a very large number of Swiss from abroad. "It will be more than a display of what has been achieved during a long period of prosperity. If we go, it should not be in a spirit of pride and complacency induced by the standard reached in so many fields of economic and cultural activity; it should be to face the challenge to the future destiny of our nation.

"In conclusion, I have to convey to you the gratitude for your loyalty expressed by our President in his message. During 8½ years as Swiss Minister and later Ambassador I have been encouraged and fortified by your support, by the solidarity which finds such outstanding expression in so many voluntary institutions of our Swiss community in the United Kingdom, and by the good will shown by the

authorities of this great and hospitable nation. New and important tasks lie before us. They must be confronted in the same spirit of solidarity and responsibility towards, in particular, the young and old amongst us. But above all, let us unfurl and gather round the flag of our dear fatherland, which shall lead us to new horizons, and rejoice on this day of common patriotic elation."

When the applause had died down, Mr. Jacomelli, Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee, announced the Choir of the Swiss Mercantile Society's College. Under the direction of Miss Harrison and Mr. D. Bonsall, a strong mixed choir sang songs in English as well as in "Schwyzerdütsch" and French. Their performance was excellent, and both students and masters can be congratulated on a handsome contribution towards the evening's success.

The colour film which followed was rather too corny for my liking; Switzerland was being "sold" in grand American style; nevertheless it had its good points and the audience appreciated them. The first-class yodelling and "Ländlermusik" which it contained were particularly apt for the occasion.

The true Anglo-Swiss friendship was demonstrated not only by the Swiss choir singing English songs, but also by an English accordionist, Miss Phyllis Gillingham, who played Swiss songs and "Ländler", a most creditable effort by a great artist on her instrument — Miss Gillingham is Winner of the All British Virtuoso Accordion Championship, and her playing added special lustre to the programme.

The last item on the programme was the never disappointing Corale dell'Unione Ticinese. As usual their Conductor, Mr. Luigi Bruni, led the thirty singers in a series of attractive songs from the Ticino, he himself as well as two other players accompanying the choir on the accordion. The violinist was absent, but the pianist was in her usual place, and it was with particular pleasure that we noted two small boys in the choir for the first time.

In the past it may occasionally have surprised our British friends when they heard "Rufst Du mein Vaterland" to the same tune as their own National Anthem, but it was certainly better than the "Schweizerpsalm" which has been decreed our new National Hymn on a trial basis. I doubt if it will survive; it is difficult to sing well, and the words are not only hard to memorise because all verses are too much alike, but also far too pretentious. The organisers were aware that only a few people knew the words and they wisely had them printed on the programme. Together with the two choirs and full organ accompaniment, the audience managed the best rendering of the "Schweizerpsalm" that I have heard for a long time. It rounded off a very successful programme. The Chairman, Mr. F. Streit, introduced His Worship the Mayor, who was happy to welcome us on behalf of the Borough of Wimbledon and expressed appreciation of the bonds of friendship between Great Britain and Switzerland.

The second part of the evening was given over to dancing to Harry Vardon's Band, and it was a lively and pleasant dance, with hundreds of young and quite a fair number of not so young compatriots and friends obviously enjoying themselves.

Mariann.

SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER

The Swiss Club Manchester met under beautiful sunshine in order to celebrate the 772nd anniversary of the birth of our Confederation. Joyful faces everywhere were the proof that all were happy to be reunited again for this

solemn yet heartwarming event. Almost 120 persons partook of the tasty supper and ate with relish the "Schüblig" and delicious strawberry tarts decorated with the Swiss Cross and kindly offered by Mr. Schoms, whose absence was regretted by all.

After supper the Club gathered round the lusty blaze of the traditional bonfire. Mr. Simon, President of the Club, read the message of the President of the Confederation, and then invited Mr. Rosset, Consul-General at Manchester, to address the assembly. Mr. Rosset spoke of the unity of the Swiss nation, a unity that existed and thrived despite the linguistic barriers. He then spoke of the Swiss National Exhibition which will be held at Lausanne next year and which will mirror Swiss achievements and hopes. Speaking then in English, Mr. Rosset commented on certain passages of the President of the Confederation's message, namely the ones dealing with two crucial problems facing Switzerland: neutrality and the European Economic Community.

Illuminated by the blaze of the bonfire the assembly sang patriotic songs, ending with our national Hymn. Then began a display of fireworks, which unfortunately could not be brought to its climax because of the danger of fire spreading.

The company started to separate, and compatriots and friends took leave with a last look at the bonfire, a living symbol of our homeland and all it means to the Swiss living abroad.

B.B.

THE YORKSHIRE SWISS CLUB

As last year, The Yorkshire Swiss Club celebrated the First of August at the fringe of Ilkley Moor high above the green valley of the Wharfe.

About seventy members and friends gathered at Overdale, the home of Mr. and Mrs. R. Müller. The evening was warm and beautifully clear.

Mr. Müller, who is the President of the Club, greeted the guests. He then read a telegram from the Consul, Mr. C. E. Rosset, who sent his best wishes and patriotic greetings. He also read a message from the Ambassador, Mr. Daeniker.

Mr. Müller then reminded the gathering that there was a constant close contact between the Consulate at Manchester and the Club, and that on the occasion of the first of August, when relatively many Swiss are assembled who might not always be easily reached, there were a number of points which Mr. Rosset wished him to make known.

One of these points concerned the advantages granted to Swiss from abroad visiting the forthcoming National Exhibition at Lausanne.

Dr. A. U. Obrist then gave a short address, starting by reminding his compatriots of the historical origin of Switzerland in 1291, and of its long and arduous development to become the Swiss Confederation which we know today. The Swiss democracy is in many ways unique. The institution of Initiative and Referendum gives the citizen of Switzerland more power of expressing his wish than anywhere else, but this also demands a greater awareness of his duties towards the State.

The Swiss abroad — Dr. Obrist went on to say — although prevented from exercising their political rights are not exempt from their duties towards their native country.

They fulfil an important task in maintaining the connection and in forging a link between Switzerland and the world that surrounds it; they help to build an image in the eyes of the world of the Swiss and Switzerland.