

Switzerland an the English-Speaking World

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SWITZERLAND AND THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

By ERIC METTLER

Everyone knows that many bonds of common language, race and culture unite the Swiss with their French, German and Italian neighbours. It is, however, less known that in the field of political and partly also religious tradition, of civic and cosmopolitan life, the Swiss have more in common with Britons and Americans — as well as with the Scandinavians and the Dutch than with their next-door Continental cousins. Our most intensive economic exchanges are with the countries which have joined in the EEC. But apart from that we have for a long time been engaged in a very extensive as well as intensive world trade which makes us feel not as inland Europeans but — although neutral according to international law — as members of the Atlantic sphere formed by the seafaring nations. In addition, Swiss businessmen and technicians feel at home in Asia and Africa where English is the most important *lingua franca*. Our emigrants have settled in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We have not only Germanic and Romanic, but also Celtic blood, like the Scots and Welsh who have contributed so much to building up the Commonwealth, and like the Irish, one of whom has risen to head the Government of the United States.

We love the charm and gentleness of France, the practical wisdom and the elegance of Paris. The classical beauty of Italy is for us a necessity; the industriousness of her people of whom so many are working in our country is one of the pillars on which Swiss prosperity rests. We know the Germans well, not only as poets and musicians but also as near and powerful relations. But in critical periods, when our existence is threatened as it was at the time of Napoleon, during the creation of our federal state, throughout the two World Wars and now in the presence of the Communist powers, we look to the more distant Anglo-Saxons. They have given us understanding and support again and again during the difficult passages of our history. Our relations with Great Britain and the United States are as old as they are amicable. A Swiss, Bishop Ermenfried of Sion, as pontifical legate placed the crown on William the Conqueror's head in 1070. Another Valaisan, Cardinal Schiner, a friend of Cardinal Wolsey, in 1513 tried to bring England into the struggle against France on the side of the Pope. Since the time of Queen Elizabeth I, British envoys have represented their country in the Swiss Confederation and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they tried sometimes — without success — in the controversy over Versailles' claims to hegemony to induce the Swiss to abandon their neutrality. Cromwell was well-disposed towards us and preserved us from external interventions in the Peasant War of 1653.

When we think of what Britons have done in Switzerland, we perhaps recall that while our mountains were first praised by a Swiss poet, they were first climbed by British alpinists, and that Conan Doyle, the inventor of Sherlock Holmes, together with some native pioneers, was the first skier in Davos. We may also remember that the first English translation of the Bible was done by refugees and published in Geneva in 1560. A powerful stream of religious and political ideas runs from Calvin, and partly from Zwingli, through John Knox. The first colonists who went from England to North America nourished their vision of the future from two sources — the communal freedoms of Germanic origin which had survived in the British Isles as in the Swiss mountains, whereas in the nascent nation-states on the Continent the late Roman-absolutist concept prevailed; and the democratic practice of the new presbyterian and congregationalist religious communities. The Pilgrim Fathers who crossed the Atlantic on the "Mayflower" to reach a new world, in their Covenant mixed inherited individual and corporative rights with a renewed faith based on individual responsibility.

The political freedom of the Anglo-Saxons as well as the Swiss does not rest on logically deduced "inalienable human rights", but on long-established institutions, customs and convictions. Burke referred to it in his "Reflections on the Revolution in France", and Toqueville said: "L'administration proprement dite fait peu de chose en Angleterre, et les particuliers font beaucoup. . . ." Not that beautifully written constitutions have a long life, but those which have grown organically, such as the British, American, Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss. The catalogue of human rights which Lafayette brought back from Virginia was not able to prevent the Jacobin and Bonapartist chapters in French history, and from the "Contrat Social" some threads run to the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". The communal law in the Grison valleys, however, is common law to this day. Swiss took an active part in the settlement of North America from the first moment. As early as 1562 an adventurous Diebold of Erlach appeared in Florida. In 1607 more Bernese participated in the foundation of Jamestown. In 1668 citizens of Fribourg settled in the region of Quebec. In 1770 General Haldimann was a local commander in New York. In 1811 Sir Georges Prévost, of Genevese origin, was Governor General of Canada. Later, Swiss colonists founded villages and towns in Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota, to which they gave Swiss names. Many Swiss fought in the American Civil War on the side of the North; from the South, the deeds of a solitary General Felix

Zollikofer of Altenklingen have been reported. The tragic story of General Sutter from Baselland, who played a role in the opening up of California, is common knowledge. At Harvard University Louis and Alexandre Agassiz from Môtier were brilliant scientists in the nineteenth century. A modern oceanographer calls himself Iselin; Buchser, Barth, Brunner and Jung may be mentioned as technical, artistic and spiritual bridgebuilders.

In the Middle West of the United States a Swiss has a feeling of being at home. He meets people of a similar kind, peasants and *petits bourgeois* somehow familiar to him although the dimensions are so much larger. He travels as if in an extension of Europe and is grateful that North America was not conquered from Alaska or Japan. He feels quite different when travelling behind the Iron Curtain. In Russia "Swiss" (*Schweitzer*) means "door-keeper" to this day; the visitor from the Helvetic mountains breathes with difficulty in the depressing air of despotism and hardly meets anyone congenial to him. The Rocky Mountains are much nearer to him than the Urals.

When Napoleon endeavoured to dominate Europe it was said that Geneva was a town where people spoke French and thought in English. At that time English officers organized a fleet on Lake Constance and called in the Russian General Suvorov; but temporarily the French General Masséna won the battle for Zurich. During the restoration of Swiss traditional neutrality, which had collapsed under the force of the Revolution, Stratford Canning, Ambassador in Berne from 1814 to 1818, proved a great friend at the Congress of Vienna. Sir Robert Peel, another British envoy to the Confederation, showed much understanding for the democratic forces. When in 1848, after a short civil war, the new liberal Confederation was founded against the will of neighbouring reactionary Europe, Palmerston held his protecting hand over us and prevented any intervention by Austria and France. In the conflict between Neuchâtel and Prussia, Britain was the only power on our side. In the winter of 1872-73 Jacob Burckhardt delivered an address to some young Basle businessmen on English as the future world language. Our great historian who is now being studied with lively interest in the United States, after two visits to London had this to say on British diplomacy on the Continent: "Its most important achievement is: to periodically have put France in her place. This is a genuinely European concern. All the nations rise against the unilateral supremacy of any single power. Europe wants to remain diversified". The old Confederation was a loose association of states. At the time of Napoleon a unitary form was forced upon our country. In 1848, finally learning from the example of the United States, we found a harmonious middle-way solution, which has remained viable to this day and will remain so in the future. It respects equally the overall interest of the nation and the autonomy of the Cantons. We have taken over our bicameral system from the United States; the decentralizing element is represented here by the Council of States, as there by the Senate. In reverse, between 1898 and 1918 nearly half of the American States following the Swiss example introduced the institutions of direct democracy, referendum and initiative into their constitutions.

Well do the Swiss remember that both in the first and the second world wars the victory of our kind of world began to take shape only when American troops appeared in Western Europe. In World War I the Americans secured our supply of wheat. What Churchill

and Roosevelt did for the freedom both of belligerent and neutral nations will never be forgotten. The gratitude generated in that period will last for a long time to come. We criticized Roosevelt in his late years only for not being suspicious enough of Stalin and for underestimating the positive aspects of the European colonial empires. As for the British, we are severely critical of them only when it looks occasionally as if Sir Winston's cigar might be replaced again by Chamberlain's umbrella.

My home town is St. Gall, a commercial centre in the eastern part of Switzerland, from where high-quality textiles have been exported to all parts of the world for centuries past. As children we grew up with an Anglo-Saxon horizon without being conscious of it. All educated adults not only spoke German and French but also made jokes in English, read Galsworthy, and in addition to the creations of French *haute couture* appreciated the advantages of British tweed and smoking pipes. At the same time one was a member of the Spanish Club — less because of Spain than because of Latin America. Father had worked both in Paris and in New York; it was nothing extraordinary for uncle to return from business trips to Manila and Hong Kong. Only later one realized that there were lawyers and professors who new Greek and Italian rather than English and who, familiar with Ranke's Germanic-Romanic world, did not discover the Anglo-Saxon sphere, the strongest pillar of democracy, until the second half of their lives, although they had long been enjoying the blessings of Pax Britannica, gradually replaced by Pax Americana. Today the knowledge of English and the Anglo-Saxon way of life is widespread in our country. Thousands of young Swiss girls go to Britain every year to spend twelve months there as "mother's help", and as many young men manage to get acquainted with the American scene from personal experience.

Under the shelter of the British Empire Swiss businessmen and engineers have built up a network of trade whose history awaits being written. In Japan and India, in Egypt and South Africa they were and partly still are active on a scale. Experts around the globe know the meaning of Sulzer Diesel engines, Brown Boveri turbines, Schindler railway cars and Schmidheiny cement plants. The investment of our chemical industry in both Americas is considerable. Some Swiss watch factories export one hundred per cent of their production. We mention these facts not to boast, but to show how closely the Swiss economy is linked with world trade, whose principal partners are the Americans and the British. In 1962 the United States was our second most important customer (after Germany and before Italy and France) and our fourth most important supplier (after Germany, France and Italy). The Swiss welcome the integration efforts of the still free part of the old Continent in whose centre they live. But they do not want to be locked up in an inward-looking small Europe governed by a centralistic bureaucracy with traditions unfamiliar to them. We consider the reconciliation between France and Germany as historical progress of the first order. To our thinking, however, not only Metz, Sedan, Verdun and the destruction of Heidelberg Castle should be forgotten, but also the burning of Joan of Arc and the deposition of a Cologne mayor by the British, the passing of the Mississippi Valley and of Canada to the Anglo-Saxons, Fashoda, and other events of historic rivalry. Incomparably more important problems are confronting the free world today.

According to Swiss opinion liberalization of trade would best have been carried out within the framework of the OEEC. When the EEC was founded with a tariff wall around Little Europe, we joined the EFTA with the other European neutrals, the Scandinavians and the British, hoping thus to save enough breathing space for our world trade. When the British decided to apply for full membership in the EEC we nourished the hope — now unfortunately disappointed — that together with other liberal-minded governments Great Britain would be able to give the EEC an outward-looking character and to create understanding for the neutrals' special needs of association. We consider the United States' Trade Expansion Act as an important move in the right direction.

No other European country perhaps has shown so little susceptibility to anti-American stirrings after the war as Switzerland. We are aware of the supreme importance of the American engagement this side of the Atlantic. As we did not need any Marshall Plan or armaments aid, we feel no resentment against the rich, powerful friend. If Americans are aggressive, tough businessmen, we are too. There were, to be sure, some moments of doubt — which were overcome. At the time of the Washington Agreement on German property in Switzerland we felt unduly forced to apply illiberal principles. Also, in the course of the past few years it sometimes seemed to us that some elements in Washington had too little understanding for the international value and the special needs of our neutral status. As we see it, the old national diversities of Europe cannot grow together in quite the way those of the United States did. Only when enough allowance is made for the specific character of her individual nations, as developed through centuries, can Europe rise to new importance.

Our neutrality does not give us a bad conscience. We can look straight into the eyes of the Americans, Canadians and the British whose troops are stationed at the Central European front. Our army of twelve well trained and well-equipped conventional divisions which can be mobilized in forty-eight hours has cost a great many Swiss francs, but not a single dollar. It does not belong to NATO; but, as far as is within our power, it protects our narrow Alpine sector of free Europe against any aggressor. *And what's wrong with that?*

(Reprinted from "A small country re-examines itself" by courtesy of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.)

THE STONE OF UNSPUNNEN

On the occasion of the Federal Alpine Meet (Eidgenössisches Schwing- und Aelplerfest) which will take place in Aarau on 15th/16th August, the strongest men will also compete in throwing the "Unspunnen stone". This block of gneiss weighing 183.7 lbs. was, according to tradition, thrown for the first time during the Unspunnen Feast, at the foot of the Unspunnen ruin near Interlaken, on 17th August 1805. It was Niklaus Friedrich von Müllinen, "Schultheiss" of Berne, who brought about that meeting. This custom is kept up at the Alpine Meets. While only a very strong man can even lift the stone of Unspunnen to the height of his head, it certainly takes a good deal to throw it over a distance of a few metres. The cowherds from Central Switzerland, from the Muota Valley in particular, have proven special ability in this weighty sport, direct descendants as they are of the victors at Morgarten who launched boulders and trees down on the Habsburg army in 1315.

[S.N.T.O.]

FEDERAL NEWS

The **revenue of the Confederation** for the first six months of the year has increased by 391.8 to 2,236.4 million francs compared with the same period in 1963. The highest amount was produced by the turnover tax (561.1 million francs).

Revenue from customs duties for the first six months amounted to 670 million francs, 79.2 million francs more than in the first half of 1963.

The Federal Council decided to answer the appeal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for a further grant towards the **U.N. Campaign in Cyprus**, by allocating 80,000 dollars for the next three months.

The **oil refinery** at Collombey-Muraz in the Valais has run into difficulties and has appealed to the Confederation for help. This has been refused by the Federal Council. Already in 1959, the undertaking had been warned that no financial help would be forthcoming if difficulties arose.

The "**Peace Treaty**" in the Swiss Machine and metal industry has been renewed for a further five years, the agreement providing for even better pay and holiday conditions.

A **new agreement with Poland** concerning compensation in nationalisation schemes was signed in Warsaw on 26th June and accepted by the Federal Council at its last meeting before the summer interval.

[A.T.S.]

IMPORTANT VISITORS

The Austrian Federal Chancellor Dr. Josef Klaus and his retinue paid an official visit to the Confederation in July. The Chancellor and the Austrian Foreign Minister engaged in friendly discussions with the federal authorities in Berne. The visitors also went to Fribourg and to the EXPO, accompanied by Federal Councillor Bonvin.

The premiers of Dahomey and of Trinidad and Tobago visited Switzerland in July. Another illustrious visitor to Berne was the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Peter Smithers.

[A.T.S.]

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