

Switzerland at Hemisfair 1968

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SWITZERLAND AT HEMISFAIR 1968 The Confluence of Civilisations in Swiss Life

I

The confluence of civilisations — the main theme of Hemisfair 1968 — is a familiar phenomenon to every Swiss. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Switzerland participates in the Germanic as well as in the Latin languages and cultures. As of the census of 1960, over two-thirds of the Swiss population spoke German-Swiss dialects, nearly one-fifth classic French, one-tenth Italian and one per cent Romansh, an old derivate of Latin. Complete equality has been established between the language groups. Official documents are published in German, French and Italian, our official languages. Romansh, our fourth national language, is taught in the schools of those Alpine valleys in the eastern part of Switzerland where this genuinely Swiss tongue was born.

To be a good Swiss, one has to understand and love the other Swiss languages and cultures. When Swiss gather socially and start singing, they do it in all their languages. No meeting of German-speaking Swiss, for example, would be satisfactory to the participants without a sprinkling of songs in French and Italian, because this enhances it with a special flavour: elegant French and lively Italian poetry and music are added to the more heavy-set Swiss-German, occasionally even a powerful Romansh text may be included, and the whole is enriched by this very Swiss diversity. As a matter of fact, thinking and feeling in various languages makes our life more colourful, enlarges our horizon and develops our capacity to understand each other better. It helps us in achieving two different, but complementary goals, both of which are essential for our national co-existence: to keep our distinct identity within our own language group, and to associate ourselves at the same time with out other language groups. Listening to a Swiss who speaks more than one of our languages well, is to us a source of joy and pride in our multilingual country. This may be somewhat difficult to explain to a citizen of a country in which a single language is the most important common element shared by everybody. But it is closely related to the spirit of Hemisfair 1968 which emphasises, in surroundings profoundly influenced by their Latin heritage, the confluence of the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin civilisations within the Americas.

II

San Antonio, the venue of Hemisfair 1968, with its resonant Spanish name, its carefully restored Indian missions and its charming Latin heritage, is a living example of a happy confluence of civilisations and a place

where the thoughtful visitor sees and feels the great challenge of America: to be a centre of worldwide understanding. Switzerland, therefore, is happy to participate in the Hemisfair and to show, in its pavilion, its own contribution towards this goal.

Switzerland, a small country with few natural resources, has had to work very hard in order to earn its living. Many of its citizens had to emigrate to other countries because of Swiss soil could not nourish all of them. Swiss prosperity as result of untiring efforts in commerce and industry is a relatively new phenomenon. Today, Swiss emigrants are rarely driven by mere necessity; they rather want to enhance their professional skill and knowledge abroad and to develop and exercise their talents in the fulfilment of greater tasks in broader surroundings. Loyal towards their new country, as guests or as citizens, they still keep their Swiss character, in their tradition of craftsmanship, in their philosophy of life as an opportunity to accomplish a work well done, and in their will to evaluate and to understand the different needs and conditions in a new environment. We are happy to maintain close relations with many of them. They help us to understand other countries, and they act, by their behaviour within the new country, as our goodwill ambassadors.

III

Three examples taken from the past may illustrate this point. Albert Gallatin from Geneva (1761 — 1849) took to U.S.A. the civic spirit of an old town proud of its independence, the typically Swiss scrupulosity in financial matters, and the inquisitiveness and intellectual curiosity of an urban community deeply imbued with the thoughts of Calvin and later reformers and philosophers. He unswervingly served his new country as a lively spokesman for his fellow-farmers in the backwoods of Pennsylvania, as a fearless and hard-working U.S. Senator, Congressman, Secretary of the Treasury and diplomat, and, in the last stage of his life, as a wise old man freely giving his honest advice in even the most delicate matters of public concern.

Adolph Francis A. Bandelier from the French-speaking Bernese Jura (1840–1914) continued a tradition already started by Albert Gallatin, who had published one of the first vocabularies of the languages of the American Indians. Bandelier devoted his life to the study of the life and culture of the Pueblos in New Mexico and of other aboriginal tribes throughout Latin America, living with them humbly as one of their own blood-brothers and completely identifying himself with their joys and sorrows.

Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico immortalises his name. As a typical Swiss, he also wanted to share his knowledge with others; his novel, "The Delight Makers", reprinted in 1954, gave a genuine description of early Pueblo life with its spirit of bravery and gallantry. The genuine Swiss admiration for our mountain folk, living their hard life in our high Alpine valleys, enabled Bandelier to overcome the cultural gap between us and the Indian tribes.

Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz from the Swiss Canton of Vaud (1807–1883) Professor of Zoology and Geology at Harvard from 1848 until his death, the discoverer of the Ice Age, an untiring collector of fossils, corals and everything else in the world of zoology, blessed with a unique talent to inspire the enthusiasm of his listeners, is venerated as one of the most successful pioneers in the study of science direct from nature and in that new type of systematic research which is at the core of all our modern achievements. The United States and Switzerland can be both proud of him, because his life work was carried out in equal parts first in Neuchâtel (Switzerland), and then at Harvard. His almost religious belief in natural science as a means of insight into the very essence of life and as a powerful vehicle of human achievement, has served as a guideline for the generations of scientists after him. To be able to achieve such a complete fulfilment in the service of a great cause is a blessing given only to the very few; but our best aspirations in our own age, which is so much conditioned by science, are the same, and his example keeps it valid. Educated and trained in Europe, he owes his full accomplishment to the challenge of a new and, in this time, still largely unexplored world. America made him truly great.

These examples could be multiplied, many of them out of our own time, but they follow a tradition already established in the past. Events such as Hemisfair therefore may remind us of our chance to live up to the great potentialities in our own professional and personal lives.

IV

The picture of Swiss emigration to America and of its contribution to American civilisation would not be complete without also mentioning the ordinary men who form the backbone of a society. Their individual achievements are unknown to the public at large, but they are nevertheless real and, taken as a whole, are a most powerful factor in social life.

The largest early group of Swiss seeking a new home in the eastern part of North America were religious dissidents, mostly Mennonites. Also called Anabaptists because of their belief in adult baptism, they had resisted the centralising power of the Protestant State Churches in the ruling Swiss towns of Zurich and Berne and, in the early eighteenth century, found a haven of religious freedom in William Penn's tolerant Pennsylvania. Known as the Pennsylvania Dutch, they still keep their ancestral heritage of frugality, hard work and sometimes, as in the case of the Amish, even of stubborn resistance against any change of their way of life not in accordance with their tradition. Their spirit of independence has a Swiss flavour; otherwise, they belong to the oldest compact immigrant groups in the United States. Nobody has ever doubted their personal honesty and integrity, and their moral strength is quite admirable.

Aside from some individual cases, such as those of Gallatin and Agassiz, most of the later immigrants from

Switzerland were driven here by economic necessity. The small farmers and unemployed factory workers who founded the Swiss settlements in Wisconsin around the middle of the nineteenth century, just wanted to make a decent living here. The same is true for many of the Swiss immigrants in later periods of economic depression. Through hard work they became solid and prosperous American citizens.

Quite typical for the bulk of the Swiss element here are the skilled craftsmen, starting with President Jefferson's personal watchmaker Leschot, now buried with him at Monticello, and culminating in such master cooks as the Delomonicos in New York, and President Johnson's current White House Chef, Henry Haller. Numerous were and are the successful businessmen of Swiss origin throughout the Americas, a group nowadays enlarged by the qualified representatives of firms on this continent with Swiss connections. The most recent immigrants from Switzerland are largely scientists, in addition to many non-immigrants here under educational exchange programmes. All of them, each in his own way, contribute to the continued amity and mutual enrichment of Swiss-American relations.

(*"Pro Helvetia" Foundation.*)

BAD HAILSTORMS

After a reasonably warm April, May was a rather cold month throughout the country; even the Ticino had more rain than usual, and it was only parts of the Valais where the expected sunshine level was reached. Early in May, there were hailstorms and floods. Twenty villages in the Valais were again in snow, the River Ticino overflowed its banks, and crops were flooded at great damage. Pictures from Basle showed streets covered in small egg-sized hailstones, looking like Easter eggs. By 11th May, already 1,000 hailstorms had been registered. Flowers, fruit, vegetables and cereals — all suffered considerable damage.

Ten days later, snow was still deep in higher Valais regions, whilst the first cherries were gathered in the Rhone Valley.

Towards the end of the month, more hailstorms. The village of Muensingen (Berne) was flooded, and all basements were deep under water in a very short time. In the vineyards near St. Saphorin, three quarters of the harvest was destroyed and over half the Dézaley harvest. At Epesses and Villette, damage was less severe. There have not been such storms for 20 years and more. In other parts of the country, too, there was damage, and the total is expected to amount to several million francs. The hail insurance companies state that 90% of all the wine growers, except in the Valais, are insured against damage by hail.

On 18th June, a strong earth tremor was felt in several parts of the country.

The damage caused by avalanches in January, is only now coming to light completely. But even so far, three million francs has been paid out as compensation for buildings and chattels destroyed — one million alone in Uri. Over four million francs is earmarked for damage not yet assessed. An additional ten million francs has been paid out by public insurance companies. This means that the total damage caused in the "Avalanche Winter" of 1968, reaches the 18 million-mark.

[A.T.S.]