

1st August in London

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1st AUGUST IN LONDON

The Swiss in the London area celebrated the National Day at the Wimbledon Town Hall on Wednesday, 1st August. Despite the torrential rains that had poured over London one hour before the beginning of this annual event, an encouraging number of compatriots turned up. Storms had held up traffic in South London and caused several hundred Londoners to temporarily abandon their flooded homes. Huge pools had accumulated in the streets of the city as the sewers couldn't absorb any more water.

Despite the weather's unfavourable portent, the National Day Evening started off with hardly any delay with two films on Switzerland, both of which had been screened at some previous occasion among the Swiss societies of London. As a great many young people and English-speaking Swiss had come to the Evening, this didn't matter too much. What probably caused more inconvenience was the din coming from the back of the hall, where dozens of loudly-laughing youths were enjoying a drink at the bar.

Fortunately the bar was closed after the two films. The doors were closed at the same time so that a minimum volume of conversation and clatter of feet would disturb the patriotic part of the Evening, which began by a prayer *Lobe den Herren* sung by the youth club of the Swiss churches led by Father Bossard and Pastor Denis Muller. This was followed by a sprightly song *Lord of the Dance* which the choir sang with a guitarist and swinging flags. The words had been distributed among the attendance. Despite Father Bossard's gestures of encouragement, singing didn't latch on inside the hall.

The third item on the programme was a patriotic address by the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer. He delivered a short speech that was well tailored to the occasion. He began by saying that he would not burden the gay atmosphere by lengthy discussions:

"Anniversaries are usually considered happy occasions, and one is not

given on such days to deep reflection on fundamental problems. Let me assure you right from the start that it is not my intention to detract from the gay atmosphere which is meant to prevail at a First of August celebration. Obviously, I am thinking in particular of our young people, who are undoubtedly determined to stay in this pleasant hall for many hours on end, dancing and having a good time.

Dr. Weitnauer nevertheless asked leave to say a few words on the situation of the Motherland on its 682nd anniversary. He said that Switzerland was one of the oldest countries of Europe, which meant mainly two things: "vast experience and deep-rooted traditions, or, in other words, a very particular way of life and a very typical way of solving problems".

The Speaker stressed that by being "old", a country was by no means shorn of characteristics of drive and initiative. He said that he felt the "winds of change" in both Britain and Switzerland, both of which were beset by important problems. Regarding Switzerland, he said that "on the face of it, everything seems stable and orderly; the country's economy goes on booming, people are earning more and more and can afford more, although they work less". But this overwhelming prosperity "is really our main problem", he added, mentioning the problem of the presence of so many foreign workers in the country and run-away inflation. These and other factors conveyed "in drastic fashion the impression that things cannot stay very much longer exactly as they are now".

"To the great majority of our British friends, Switzerland still looks, if I am not altogether mistaken, like a rock in a rough sea" he continued. But the growth of human exchanges between the two countries, particularly among the young, will foster the awareness of a common destiny with the other countries of Europe.

Dr. Weitnauer stressed that "we shall need all the helping hands we can muster to further develop our relationship with the

United Kingdom". He mentioned the importance of the Swiss Colony in Britain in this respect. "I have not met a single Swiss during my more than two years' mission as a Swiss Ambassador in London who is not very fond of this country. I could not think of a better foundation than these feelings".

The Ambassador ended his address by bidding the numerous attendance to have a pleasant evening.

After an absence of some years from National Day meetings, the *Corale dell'Unione Ticinese* appeared on stage and immediately began with a well known and lively song from back home which many people hummed to themselves. They sang several more songs and tended at times to be dwarfed by those at the back of the hall by the bustle of conversation. The atmosphere had loosened up as the bar had been re-opened at the end of the Ambassador's speech. There was a rather loud bustle when, the *Corale* having ended its last song, Father Bossard, Swiss Chaplain in London, appeared and read a greatly shortened version of the Ruetli Pact, copies of which had been distributed. This was followed by reappearance of the Swiss Church Choir which gave the lead in singing the first verse of the National Anthem in its own language. Thus ended the official part.

A great rush towards the sausage and roll counter marked the Interval. Some people complained that there were no *cervelas* and thus no specifically Swiss food. Chairs were moved to the sides of the hall as the hundreds of youths present prepared for an evening of fun and dancing. The residents of the colony had kept a low profile in the gallery upstairs and most of them left for home during the Intermission. Other middle-aged people with their families remained for some time to listen to Harry Vardon's Band and look at the hundreds of dancing youth. But the latter part of the 1st August evening was primarily a young people's affair, as it usually is.



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