

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

A PEOPLE'S VICTORY AGAINST THE CENTRAL POWER

The 3rd December was, once again, voting day in Switzerland. Four laws which had been proposed by the Federal Council and adopted by the two chambers of Parliament had to be voted on by the whole population because the necessary number of signatures against them — 50,000 — had been duly collected.

One of the four laws caused a great deal of controversy: the one about the so-called BUSIPO — or Federal Security Police. The central Government's plan was to create a highly mobile anti-terrorist force of between 200 and 300 men. They were to be recruited from the already existing cantonal police forces, but in case of need to be under federal command.

At the same time another new force, also to be recruited from the cantonal police forces, of between 1,000 and 1,800 men was to be created, whose function would have been to "maintain law and order in case of grave interior unrest", also under Federal Command and instructions. It was this second force which caused the whole new law to be decisively rejected by a substantial majority of the population. This — rejecting — majority was composed of several groups.

One of them was the entire Left. It saw in the proposed new police force a force of interior repression, which it felt was objectionable and un-Swiss. A second group consisted of tens of thousands of people who did not belong to the political Left, but who strongly objected against putting such an instrument into the hands of the central Government in Berne. Their motive was mistrust. And the third group consisted of large majorities of citizens of all the French speaking cantons. They are known to be strongly anti-centralist in their feelings.

Had the Federal Council only proposed the creation of the 200-300-men strong *anti-terrorist* force, it would have got its way without any doubt whatever. Even the Social Democrats would, as their spokesmen explained again and again before the voting day, not only have raised no objections, but would have supported such a proposal. But the fact that the proposed law also foresaw the creation of a second, much stronger, force for — frankly —

more dubious or less clearly defined purposes clearly created considerable ill feeling and mistrust against "Berne".

It was, from the Federal Council's point of view, also a big tactical mistake that the two police forces were linked in one law.

The loser in all this is, of course, the Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, Furgler, who identified himself totally with his proposals. And the winner is the people's will. There is, after all, something to be said for such direct democracy.

WATFORD CELEBRATES GENEVA'S BIG DAY

A small party of Genevese and friends of Geneva gathered on 10th December at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. Allan in Watford to commemorate the Escalade, the famous attempt by the Duke of Savoy to storm Geneva by surprise which was repelled on the night of 12th December, 1602.

The guests included Consul M. Rodé and Mrs. Rodé, who represented the Embassy, Mr. and Mrs. Lea, Mr. G. Buchler and lady friend, Mr. P. M. Béguin, Mr. M. Metford Sewell and Miss. Grunberg. The party was small but the quality of the company, and especially that of the assortment of cakes, patisseries, éclairs, raisin pies prepared for us by Mrs. Allan, amply made up for this fact. This Escalade tea buffet was also graced with champagne and a traditional *marmite* filled with chocolate and marzipan. This marmite had unfortunately suffered some knocks on its journey from Geneva but Mr. Allan had expertly mended it by joining the pieces together with melted chocolate.

The traditional reading of the names of the 18 Genevese victims of the Escalade was performed, before a standing and silent attendance, by Consul Rodé. "*Cé qué Laino*", that most extraordinary song in old French was sung with as much proficiency as could be mustered by the Anglo-Swiss gathering. "*La Belle Escalade*" proved definitely easier to sing, and also presented the advantage of being understandable.

The Guest Book which was passed around showed that in the late 60s, up to a hundred guests attended the Escalade Dinners then held at the Dorchester Hotel. Today, the Cercle Genevois has about thirty members. Few of them are pure Genevese. Anyone who has lived in Geneva or who is related in some way or other to this city is welcomed to join and is warmly invited to send

his name and address to the President, Mrs. A. Allan, 64 Woodland Drive, Watford WD1 3BZ, Herts, so that he can receive an invitation to the next Escalade party.

Having started at about 5 p.m. this latest and most pleasant function ended at 8 p.m., with guests being met by a storm of almost tropical force as they set on their way back to London.

PMB

"BYRON AND THE ROMANTICS IN SWITZERLAND"

This is the title of the recently published book by Elma Dangerfield, author and broadcaster, expert on Byron, and both Hon. Director of The Byron Society and Executive Editor of The Byron Journal.

The book makes delightful reading, and one is immediately fascinated by the easy narrative style which the author uses successfully in her account of the famous "passionate summer of 1816" when Lord Byron and Shelley were living on the shores of Lake Geneva. It gives an excellent idea of Society life at that time, of the scandal that surrounded Byron and Shelley who lived there with their mistresses Claire Clairmont and Mary Woolstonecraft.

The book is based on letters and diaries of Byron, Shelley and others and provides an illuminating slant on the Romantic Movement.

"Byron and the Romantics in Switzerland" is published by Ascent Books Ltd and costs £3.25. It will make an excellent Christmas present to friends of Byron and Shelley, as well as to lovers of Switzerland.

The Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Ernesto Thalmann, gave a Reception at the Swiss Embassy on 25th October to mark the publication of the book. The Countess of Longford introduced the book and its author.

M.M.