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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION 1291-1950

at the STOLL THEATRE, KINGSWAY, W.C.2

on SUNDAY, JULY 30th 1950

One thing can be said without contradiction about this year's 1st August celebration, namely that it was an outstanding success. Though the arrangements were on a modest scale — no orchestral music, no films and but a single artiste from Switzerland — the programme was varied, well balanced and most enjoyable. The remarkable thing, however, was the timing and the masterful way in which one item followed another. Not only did the opening take place to the minute — an occurrence almost unheard of in functions of the Swiss Colony in London — but the whole programme was compressed into the short space between 2.30 - 4.45 p.m., without undue haste and with a generous interval half way through.

But let us start at the beginning: As in former years the Organising Committee considered it best to fix the celebration for the nearest Sunday to August 1st. This not only gave most people a chance to attend, but it would have been impossible to hire the Stoll Theatre on a week-day. Although the morning of July 30th was none too bright, the weather improved by the afternoon, when all the faithful flocked to Kingsway to take up their seats at the Stoll, filling it to capacity. There were no festive decorations, no flags or cantonal escutcheons, for reasons fully explained by ST. in his excellent reports on previous, similar occasions, but when the curtain rose, two large flags, the Swiss Cross and the Union Jack (the latter unfortunately upside down) reminded us of the solemnity of the day. It was a happy thought to let Mr. A. Gandon and his accordionists make their bow first, as it provided the large audience at once with the proper "Stimmung", seeing this happy little band in their national costumes and hearing them play the opening march. After this lively introduction the stage was set for our Minister, M. Henry de Torrenté, who was escorted by Father A. Lanfranchi and the Rev. C. Reverdin. Father Lanfranchi read, in his sonorous voice, vibrant with sincerity, the Swiss Pact (Bundesbrief). What a wonderful and precious document this is and what wisdom and statesmanship it enshrines! Even to-day, 659 years later, its sagacity and political precepts fill us with reverence and admiration for our forefathers. If the world of to-day would live up to its ideals, it would not be in the sorry straights in which it finds itself at present. The Rev. Reverdin reminded us of the fact that not only did the Swiss Pact open "In the Name of the Lord", but that our forebears invoked His help and blessing on all their undertakings. The large assembly was then led in solemn prayer, befitting the occasion and the gravity of the times. Now came the moment for our Minister to deliver his Patriotic Address and he was received with warm applause. M. de Torrenté spoke in English, Schwyzerdütsch and Italian, finishing up in his native French and I have the pleasure of quoting this final passage of his oration verbatim, as follows:—

" Mes chers compatriotes,

Vous êtes venus aujourd'hui très nombreux pour commémorer ensemble la date du premier août. Comme toujours dans les heures graves, vous avez éprouvé la nécessité de vous rencontrer, de vous rapprocher, de vous serrer les coudes. Ce sentiment est certes très humain; il n'en souligne pas moins l'esprit de solidarité et fidélité qui vous anime dès que l'ombre d'une menace pour la patrie absente se dessine à l'horizon.

Car la situation est grave; il serait vain de le dissimuler. La guerre froide, la guerre des nerfs, qui dure depuis des années, a pris subitement un tour sanglant en Extrême Orient. Ces événements paraissent sans doute bien lointains. Mais à notre époque il n'y a plus de distance; les intérêts politiques et économiques sont à ce point enchevêtrés que tout conflit constitue une menace pour la paix générale.

En face de cette menace comme en face du danger, nous saurons rester calmes et fermes; nous ne chercherons pas à nous mêler des querelles des autres, tout en nous appliquant à comprendre toutes les revendications sincères et justifiées. Attaqués par qui se soit, nous demeurerons résolus à défendre notre patrie et notre liberté jusqu'au sacrifice suprême. Cette attitude n'est pas toujours comprise; on veut y voir un signe d'égoïsme et de désintéressement. Nous devons nous élever contre une pareille conception.

En effet, si la Suisse peut adopter cette attitude, ce n'est point l'effet du hasard. Sincèrement démocratique, elle n'a jamais cherché, depuis des siècles, à subjuguier qui que ce soit, ni à élargir son territoire. Notre espace vitale c'est d'abord notre pays, ensuite, si l'on veut, dans un certain sens, le monde entier, mais avec un esprit non de domination et de conquête, mais de coopération, de concorde et de charité.

C'est ainsi que la Suisse s'est acquise partout une réputation d'honnêteté et d'impartialité. Vivant à l'étranger vous en avez tous fait l'expérience. Le citoyen romain évoquait la force, la puissance militaire, la suprématie, le citoyen suisse doit évoquer modestement quelque vertu essentielle: l'indépendance de jugement, la modération, l'esprit d'entraide et de solidarité.

Aussi bien dans un monde où règne le désordre des valeurs morales et matérielles, la Suisse apparaît-elle comme un élément de stabilité et de pondération. Certains avaient imaginé qu'avec l'élargissement des problèmes politiques, une neutralité, issue de l'équilibre européen, avait perdu sa raison d'être. Erreur profonde! Notre neutralité a simplement pris un sens nouveau. En effet la situation actuelle n'a nullement diminué l'intérêt des peuples à mesurer leur tendances et leurs ambitions à cet élément de stabilité et d'objectivité que représente la Suisse.

C'est dire que les esprits brouillons qui mettent en doute notre neutralité n'ont pas comme nous vécu longtemps au contact de l'étranger. C'est une erreur de croire que l'on nous demande de reviser ce principe essentiel et constitutionnel de notre politique extérieure, et les objections que l'on nous présente parfois à ce sujet, ne résistent pas à un examen sérieux.

Surtout que cette neutralité ne peut et ne doit pas être un oreiller de paresse. Elle ne garde sa valeur que dans la mesure où nous sommes en tout temps disposés à la défendre. Et là encore les faits parlent en notre faveur. Nous n'appartenons à aucuns des grands groupements politiques qui se sont donnés pour mission de défendre l'Europe; malgré cela, sans exhortation et sans aide matérielle nous sommes armés contre toute éventualité dans la mesure exacte que nous permettent nos ressources matérielles.

Neutralité ne signifie donc pas affaiblissement de la volonté de défense, mais au contraire la ferme résolution de préserver contre toute attaque les idées saines qui font la grandeur de notre pays. Ces idées sont essentiellement contenues dans le Pacte du 1er août qui, avec les siècles, a pris un sens à l'origine insoupçonnée, comme si la Providence invoquée dans le préambule de notre Charte Nationale en avait inspiré chaque terme."

Prolonged applause was the reward for this fine and eloquent address which, I feel sure, left a lasting impression on all his hearers. It was immediately punctuated by the singing of the Canticque Suisse. Although the Swiss Male Choir and some of the accordionists gave a brave lead, the response of the audience did not sound as impressive as might have been expected from so large a gathering. The Swiss Male Choir, remaining on the stage, sang a group of patriotic songs, in Schwyzerdütsch, German and French. It was evident that quite a number of our singers were on holidays, but the twenty odd members present gave a most excellent account of themselves, under the untiring leadership of their conductor, Mr. E. P. Dick. Many rehearsals must have gone towards the perfect rendering of those lovely songs, so dear to our hearts and the

warm applause at the conclusion of this item was well deserved.

We next had the pleasure of hearing the one and only guest artiste from Switzerland, Mrs. Vreni Kneubuhl from Landiswil, dressed in her most becoming Bernese costume. It is rather a far cry from a Bernese village to this Metropolis and it must have been quite an ordeal to adorn the stage alone, facing such a multitude, but did Mrs. Kneubuhl show any trace of nervousness? Not a bit of it. There she sat, happy and serene, with all those many hundreds of people literally at her feet, her lovely, crystal clear voice floating caressingly through the air. Her songs were, of course, in Bernese dialect, each one ending up with a Jodel, giving it a particular and pleasing charm. Her enunciation, too, was perfect, each word could be understood and the perky sense of her humorous songs appreciated. How much the audience enjoyed this *pièce de résistance* was shown by the storm of applause after each item; the Stoll Theatre had certainly found a new star, if only for one Sunday afternoon!

This solo turn was followed by the youthful and colourful group of the Corale Unione Ticinese, under their popular and genial conductor, Mr. P. de Maria. It is always a great pleasure to see and to hear the Corale with its accompanists bringing, as it were, a living souvenir from the Ticino, where the sun shines brighter and the lakes are bluer than anywhere else in Switzerland. They sang their Canzonette freely and easily, without recourse to any printed page and with obvious enjoyment. That this enjoyment was fully shared by the audience and highly appreciated was shown in unmistakable manner when this item came to a close.

Now came the time for a short interval, during which one had an opportunity of meeting and greeting one's friends, many of whom we might not have seen for many a long day. A great number had the honour of being introduced to and greeted by the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, the latter looking very stately and most charming in her beautiful Swiss costume, representing the town dress of a patrician Lady of Sion

THE SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

31, CONWAY STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

As well known to the old friends in the Colony, the object of the Society is to give

**"Assistance to destitute Swiss
irrespective of creed, by casual
help or old age pensions."**

The recently published Report gives an outline of last year's activities and on application the Secretary would be pleased to send a copy to anyone interested in the Society's affairs.

Space donated by The Berkeley Arms Hotel

(Valais). During the interval the ladies in particular would have welcomed a cup of tea, but this alas! was not to be had; on the other hand, there were some ices on sale, in which a brisk trade was being done, especially amongst the younger generation.

When the bell sounded for the second half of the programme, people hurried back to their seats, riveting their attention on the stage in pleasurable anticipation. This second half was again on similar lines, except for the introduction of two young and budding artistes in the persons of Miss Janine Gandon and Master Norman Boehm, both 12 years of age, who proved their versatility on the accordion and were rewarded not only with great applause, but also with a small gift, handed to them by Mr. Sommer. It is also pleasing to record that Mrs. Vreni Kneubuhl, on having completed the second group of her Jodel songs, was presented, by a little girl, with a beautiful and well deserved bouquet of flowers, which she gracefully acknowledged.

At the close of the musical programme, Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the Organising Committee, addressed the audience in a few well chosen words. He expressed the hope that the programme had been well chosen and to every one's satisfaction and enjoyment. He next tendered his warm thanks to all the members of his committee for their great assistance and remarked that he must single out Mr. A. Gandon, the Secretary, who undertook not only the allocation and distribution of over 2,000 tickets, but who was also largely responsible for the arrangement of the programme. Mr. Gandon is well known as the energetic leader and conductor of the Swiss Accordion Club, but he has now revealed himself as a first class and untiring organiser. The generous reference to his services was loudly cheered. Finally, Mr. Sommer reminded his audience that our 1st August celebration at one of London's largest Theatres, without a charge for any of the seats, was made possible solely by the great generosity of some members of the Swiss Colony in London who, as in previous years, had again made this possible, but still wished to remain anonymous. Also this announcement was loudly cheered by the large assembly in token of sincere gratitude. Only Mr. Sommer himself, as President of the function, went without personal thanks, but his great modesty is well known and his work fully appreciated by all those who can gauge what it means to successfully organise a celebration on so large a scale. The proceedings ended with the singing of our National Anthem, which was again led by the Swiss Male Choir, accompanied by the accordionists. This time, however, the large assembly joined in wholeheartedly and fervently. Maybe that many of our English friends sang God Save The King, the tune of the two anthems being identical and why not? We all wish a long life and a happy reign to the monarch, whose land gives us hospitality and which to many of us has become a second home.

And so another 1st August celebration came to its close; a lovely and memorable one. As we left, passing through the lofty Foyer, once more greeting briefly our many friends, we were filled with beautiful impressions and precious reminiscences of our beloved homeland. May God protect it through the coming year, as He has done so graciously in the past and may we ever prove ourselves worthy sons and daughters of HELVETIA.

GALLUS.

JOURNEE DES SUISSES DE L'ETRANGER.

Nous rappelons à nos compatriotes le congrès annuel de la Nouvelle Société Helvétique qui aura lieu au Casino de Montbenon, à Lausanne, du 1er au 3 septembre. Voici les grandes lignes du programme :

Vendredi 1er septembre

- 14h. 30 Séance de la Commission des Suisses à l'étranger.
- 16h. 00 Séance élargie de la Commission des Suisses à l'étranger avec quelques délégués de nos colonies.
- 17h. 00 Séance consacrée aux questions concernant les Suisses rentrés de l'étranger.
- 20h. 00 Discussion sur des questions d'ordre général concernant nos colonies notamment celles de Grande-Bretagne et d'outre-mer.

Samedi 2 septembre

- 09h. 00 Séance plénière :
"La nationalité suisse et l'avant-projet d'une loi fédérale." Exposé introductif. Rapport des colonies sur la question. Libre discussion.
- 12h. 00 Allocution de M. le conseiller fédéral Rodolphe Rubattel, chef du Département fédéral de l'économie publique.
- 13h. 00 Déjeuner en commun des délégués (Casino de Montbenon).
- 15h. 00 Séances destinées aux délibérations séparées des colonies de divers pays.
- 17h. 00 Séance des Suisses d'Italie.
- 20h. 30 Soirée familiale.

Dimanche 3 septembre

- 10h. 30 Départ d'Ouchy, tour sur le lac Léman et visite du Château de Chillon.

REPORTS RE FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATION.

Other reports regarding the above-mentioned celebration in the Provinces, have reached us too late for insertion in this issue, they will be published in our number of August 25th, 1950.

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