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200 YEARS SWISS CHURCH IN LONDON

Measured in terms of history two centuries are but a bagatelle; seen from our own earthly existence they appear considerable. We are apt to congratulate ourselves on the achievement of such a jubilee, almost believing it to be our own merit that we have reached it. No doubt, many of those who are still alive today have helped to bring the second century of the Swiss Church in London to a successful end and they deserve praise and encouragement, as do those who are willing to carry on into the third century. We should, however, not be complacent. On an occasion like this it is befitting that we should go back into the past, remember the men and women of courage and vision and above all the grace of God which has brought their efforts to fruition.

It is precisely this respectful remembrance which characterised the Bicentenary Celebrations of the Swiss Church, a dignified looking back in humble gratitude and a hopeful looking forward to things to come.

The whole week preceding the jubilee was full of preparatory meetings and re-unions. Of the former pastors of the two parishes four were able to accept the invitation to come to London and two prominent visitors representing the Church authorities in Switzerland attended the jubilee. On Sunday, Pasteur C. Reverdin (now in Geneva) took the two services at the Eglise Suisse, on Monday and Thursday evenings he and Professor H. d'Espine held services of preparation combined with gatherings for parishioners old and new. Dr. A. Doebeli gave a lecture to the "Schwyzerchränzli" on the Ecumenical Conference in New Delhi, which was followed by the showing of lantern slides. One of the most impressive meetings was the re-union with the former clergymen of the "Schweizerkirche", the German-speaking community of the Swiss Church. Luckily all three who had each held office in London for several years were able to attend: Pfarrer C. Th. Hahn, who had been here from 1924 to 1938 and is now at Sierre; Pfarrer H. Blum, now at Thalwil; and Pfarrer H. Spoerri, now at Rüschlikon — the latter two with their wives. To the many friends who came to the get-together, the three pastors were able to bring alive the past forty years with their reminiscences.

And then came the big day of the Celebration, Sunday, 27th May, dull, cold and rainy. But the Swiss Church in Endell Street, resplendent outside in a new coat of paint and decorated inside with gorgeous flowers in our national colours, was packed to capacity, ante-room and gallery included — a rough guess of 400 present may be wide of the mark.

The sound of the organ reverberated jubilantly from the plain walls of the church which has witnessed divine worship of generations of compatriots. In the traditional way on all special occasions this thanksgiving service was bilingual. Pfarrer P. K. Wipf, of the "Schweizerkirche", based his sermon in German on a text from Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth, for the first Heaven and the first Earth had vanished and there was no longer any Sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming out of Heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: now at last God has His dwelling among men. He will dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself will be with them." The text speaks for itself, as did that chosen by Pasteur

Ph. Nicole, of the "Eglise Suisse", for his sermon in French: "For here we have no permanent home, but we are seekers after the City which is to come" (Hebrew 13).

In two languages, too, the congregation sang and prayed, and the impressive service was followed by Holy Communion administered by Professor d'Espine and Pfarrer Hahn, assisted by the two resident ministers and some members of the Church Council, the "Consistoire". Few were those who left before Communion, and this emphasised the special *cachet* which this whole service of commemoration bore, that of gratitude for God's grace in the past and of hope for His blessing in the future.

On foot and by car a large number of parishioners and friends moved over to the Victoria Hall in Bloomsbury Square, where an informal luncheon was served. Many an old friendship was renewed and many a new relationship was formed. A feeling of excited anticipation grew as time moved towards 3 o'clock, the start of the official celebration. Again the large hall was filled to capacity, and during the next two-and-a-half hours the 200 years of existence of a Helvetic Church, its meaning for the life of the Colony and its importance for Switzerland, passed in front of the audience as if seen through a splendidly coloured kaleidoscope.

The Chairman, Mr. O. Béguin, President of the Consistoire, opened the proceedings from the midst of the prominent speakers on the platform — brilliantly lit for the purpose of televising. A hymn sung by the whole assembly, a lesson and prayer spoken by Pfarrer Wipf preceded the Chairman's welcoming address to visitors and friends. Mr. Béguin said he would refrain from looking back, as a commemorative booklet in French and German was available giving an historic outline of the foundation and development. He introduced the speakers, the first of whom was Professeur H. d'Espine, President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and Chairman of the Council. He spoke in eloquent French on the Churches in Switzerland today and painted a vivid picture of how Protestant and Catholic Churches lived side by side. He stressed the efforts both sides were making trying to bring about more unity. Switzerland, a land with a mission, was aware of its obligations, but it had no illusions about its task of reviving the interest of the indifferent masses.

Monsieur A Daeniker, the Swiss Ambassador, who was accompanied by Madame Daeniker and a number of his colleagues from the Embassy, was the next speaker. He brought greetings from the Federal Authorities in Switzerland and from the Embassy. He then delved into the past, much further back than 1762, for already forty years previously a "Church of the 'Switzers'" had been brought into existence. At that time there were no fewer than 700 of our compatriots in London, and they were able to offer King George I a battalion of 500 young men. In spring 1762 the Helvetic Church was founded, but not until 1775 was it to have its own building of worship which was exchanged in 1885 for the Church in Endell Street. The Ambassador reminded the audience of the conditions which existed at that time. The Swiss Church played an important political part at a time when it was difficult to keep in touch with the homeland and at a time when there was no diplomatic emissary in London. The Swiss Pastor and members of the Consistoire had free access at Court. Only in 1817 was a consular agent appointed, and not until 1891

was a permanent diplomatic mission established in London. Many are the institutions in the Colony of today which can be traced back to the Church. It also looked after the needy until the Swiss Benevolent Society took over in 1870. But its co-operation with the S.B.S. and other organisations in the Colony which are concerned with the welfare of our compatriots continues. The structure of the Colony has changed, so have the obligations of the Church, though these have by no means become lighter. A problem of a more recent date is that of looking after the floating population of some 5,000 young people temporarily part of our Colony. There, too, the Church communities do a great deal of valuable work, an almost indispensable supplement to what the Embassy can do. The Ambassador finished his interesting speech by expressing the hope that the appeal for funds launched in Switzerland on behalf of the Swiss Church in London would be successful so as to enable its members to face the future with confidence.

After the Ambassador's speech the formal part of the programme was interrupted for a musical interlude. Two arias were sung by Mrs. L. Bucherer, accompanied on the piano by Pfarrer Wipf. It was sheer delight to listen to her soprano voice rendering Beethoven's "Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre" and Bach's "Mein gläubiges Herz frohlocke".

The next speaker should have been Pfarrer H. Tanner, Chairman of the Council of Swiss Churches Abroad. He had been unable to come and his place was taken by Dr. A. Doebeli, Hon. Treasurer of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches. His talk in German on Swiss Churches at home and abroad gave a well documented picture of the position of the Swiss Churches in other countries. A dozen of them are affiliated to the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, of which seven are in Europe (London belonging since 1933), four in South America and one in South Africa. He referred to the curious fact that abroad many Swiss work actively in the Church who would not dream of participating in church life at home. His organisation was well aware that the communities abroad made many sacrifices, but they also realised that they should be supported by the homeland. The Swiss Church in England was not an isolated community, but was alive and fulfilling its twofold obligation of building bridges with other churches here and at the same time fostering contacts with Switzerland.

Another hymn followed Dr. Doebeli's address, and the Chairman introduced the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt. Rev. R. N. Coote, Bishop of Fulham. His address was entitled "The Significance of the Foreign Churches on British Soil." Whilst he made light of his function, which is to visit the English Churches abroad, and spoke with warmth and humour of his connections with Switzerland and the forty Anglican Churches there, he emphasised the importance of being able to attend services in one's own tongue and manner, so that one could worship with one's intellect and not only with one's emotions. On the other hand, His Grace warned against the temptation of foreigners to bury themselves in their own Church, thus missing the opportunity of becoming familiar with each other's Church and of "launching out into the sea around us".

Next on the programme (which was running remarkably to time) followed a series of short addresses of greetings and congratulations. His Worship the Mayor of Holborn, in his capacity as representative of the Civic Authorities, expressed pleasure that the Swiss Church was within the boundaries of the Metropolitan Borough of

Holborn and hoped that it would remain there also in its third century.

Pasteur C. Reverdin, as the last of the former ministers in London, spoke on their behalf. He described the consideration and kindness the Swiss clergy experienced from Anglicans and Free Churchmen alike, and the many friendships they were privileged to enjoy. He recalled some of the valuable things he and his colleagues had learned to appreciate, the sense of tradition in the Church, the human approach and the courage and idealism of many of the clergy.

The next speaker was the Rev. F. P. Copland Simmons, former Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. He pointed out how much the Free Churches had in common with our Protestant Church. Expressing his good wishes for the continued thriving of the Swiss Church he cited Shakespeare's "What's past is prologue", an encouraging thought for the future.

Pasteur F. Dubois, of the French Church in Soho Square, which is already 412 years old, brought up the rear of the speakers. He was the spokesman for the foreign Churches in London, many of whose representatives were present at the Celebration. He praised the good relations the Swiss Church had with his and other Churches of foreign nationality.

The Chairman next read congratulatory messages received from many quarters, amongst them one from the Bishop of London and from Pasteur M. Pradervand, a former minister who had been prevented through illness from attending. On the other hand, four of the children of the late Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme were present. Several of the former assistant ministers of both communities had also sent greetings, as had a number of Swiss Societies in Great Britain. Mr. Béguin then spoke of the special appeal which had been successfully launched in Switzerland under the auspices of the two Federal Councillors, Chaudet and Wahlen, and he greeted those members of the Appeal Committee in London who were present. He concluded his speech reiterating the duties and responsibilities of the Swiss Church, both in spreading the Gospel and in giving succour to the lonely and the poor. The difficulties and problems may differ from those facing our predecessors in the last two centuries, but the task is the same as ever.

The official part of this auspicious day closed with a hymn. Pasteur Nicole spoke the prayer and invoked the Lord's Blessing. The audience then adjourned for tea and a very happy and memorable occasion came to an end.

Mariann.

OPEN MEETING

Tuesday, 26th June 1962, at 7 p.m.

at

Swiss Hostel for Girls,
9 Belsize Grove, London, N.W.3

Oberts-Divisionär Dr. KARL BRUNNER
will speak (in German) on:

"Friedenswille, Wehrkraft und Ideologische
Selbstbehauptung"