

62nd "Fête suisse"

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62nd "FETE SUISSE."

*O Suisse! loin de toi content je ne puis vivre!
J'ai besoin de ton ciel, de tes sommets altiers!
Dans l'œil ton nom seul, ton souvenir m'enivre
Et je te sens plus près, riche d'amitiés!*

In a very festive mood, I wended my way to the Central Hall, Westminster on June 25th, firstly, because I was going to spend an evening amongst my compatriots on the occasion of the 62nd "Fête Suisse," and secondly, it so happened that the day coincided with my birthday anniversary, and I am most anxious to say that this was the jolliest and happiest birthday party I ever spent. I am not quite as old as the "Fête Suisse" but if I am at "her" age still as "young" and jolly, I shall consider myself to be one of the darlings of the Gods.

I had hardly entered the spacious vestibule when a pretty young maiden in a very becoming Swiss costume pounced on me, to decorate me with a silk flag. "Which canton do you come from?" she asked with a silvery voice. I felt rather fluttered, as I am, and always have been against any demonstration which might savour of "Kantönligeist." I therefore gave a short longing glance at that little flag, where a certain animal seems to walk rather slowly, to nowhere in particular, and asked in a husky voice for simply the "Swiss Flag," thus solving a most perplexing problem.

It only dawned on me later, that I could have solved the matter differently by purchasing the 25 cantonal flags, which however, would have given me the appearance of a "prize bull" being taken round the ring. On mounting the large staircase I came across more pretty maidens in the various costumes of our homeland all smiles, and all happy, and I began to feel that I was really and truly amongst my own folk. Equally good looking gentlemen, decorated with "rosettes," tore my complimentary ticket into bits, I don't know whether they did this because I had not paid for it or whether it was out of sheer excitement at seeing a reporter of the "S.O." appearing, be it as it was, their business like ways in attending to all and sundry in such an efficient manner, impressed me most forcibly and awoke in me an ambition that I too might be asked one day to stand at the top of this imposing staircase to watch Helvetia's children arrive, and to tear their tickets into fragments whilst making polite conversation.

Then I was ushered into the Hall itself, and behold what a sight met my eyes, whoever was responsible for the decoration deserves a hearty tap on the back. The platform was one mass of flowers most artistically arranged, huge Swiss Flags intermingled with the 25 cantonal flags, as well as with the Union Jack gave the Hall a most festive appearance, and what a jolly chatter everywhere, "Baslerdütsch" tried to drown "Bärndütsch," whilst a dark eyed sister from beyond the Gotthard tried to convince her fair friend from round the Lac Léman that her lingua sounded equally sweet and enticing. What a feast for one's eyes and ears, friends who had lost sight of each other for years met again, and shook hands and were pleased to exchange a few words, handkerchiefs were waved and happy smiles were passed over rows and rows of densely packed people.

Suddenly the mighty sounds of Bach's "Prélude" filled the Hall, the programme had started in a most appropriate way, huge applause greeted the delicate rendering of this magnificent piece of music by the clever organist of the Central Hall, Mr. Spencer Shaw, who is no stranger to the Swiss colony, having given us on numerous occasions a proof of what an accomplished musician he is. Each item as it appeared on the programme was announced by our esteemed Pastor, M. Hoffmann-de Visme, who accompanied his announcement with a melodious cowlbell and a few happy chosen sentences. After the audience had sung the Swiss Hymn "Sur nos monts, quand le Soleil..." M. Hoffmann-de Visme offered a short prayer.

Amongst great applause, our popular Minister, M. C. R. Paravicini, then literally "climbed" on to the platform in order to give the official blessing to this impressive gathering.

He acquainted the audience with the fact that he had just returned from our homeland, where he was charged with the pleasant duty of bringing greetings from the Federal Authorities in general and from Federal Councillor M. G. Motta, his chief, in particular. He regretted that owing to various circumstances it was impossible to greet Dr. Kipfer, the valiant companion of Prof. Piccard, the heroes of the recent record breaking balloon ascent, amongst us that night, as Dr. Kipfer unfortunately could not prolong his short stay. Another famous compatriote of ours, Mlle. Payot, who is defending our country's honour at the Tennis Tournament at Wimbledon, was unable to be present owing to her engagement at the courts. He finished his most impressive address, by assuring the organizers of this splendid fête how pleased he was to be amongst his coun-

trymen in this great Metropolis, hoping that the spirit in which this gathering was held might be ever present and that it will leave an unforgettable impression on all those who have been privileged to be in attendance.

The applause which greeted the words of our Minister had hardly died down when a group of little girls and boys, dressed as fairies, flowers, butterflies, bees and gardeners made the platform look like a garden in Alice of Wonderland's realm. Accompanied by "La Jardinière" they sang and danced in a most charming manner and the warm tribute paid to their praiseworthy efforts was duly deserved. The music was from Jacques-Dalcroze.

Our well-known compatriot, M. Franz Walter then played three pieces on the cello with the accompaniment by Mme. Weber, and I do not think I exaggerate in stating that the two performers received an enthusiastic reception. M. Walter is no doubt an artist of no mean accomplishment and his fine playing will leave pleasant memories behind.

Mlle. Sophie Wyss who was billed to sing the Aria "Ah! Fors'è Lui" out of Verdi's Traviata received a hearty ovation on her appearance. So attractive is the natural quality of her soprano voice, and so intelligent its owner, that one only regrets at not having more often the pleasure of hearing this gifted singer. The rendering of this famous Aria convinced me, and I feel sure also those present, that we have plenty of cause to be proud of hailing her from the same land. I can not withstand the temptation of relating a little but significant incident:—in the row immediately behind me sat a lady with a little girl, who, after Mlle Sophie Wyss had made innumerable bows in acknowledgement of the unanimous applause given, said to the child: "What a lovely voice!" "Yes Mummy," replied the girl, "and what a fine frock, full of 'wrinkles,'" yes, the frock may have had "wrinkles" but not so the voice, the latter is as exquisite as ever.

Suddenly there appeared a few hefty Committee members on the platform and I was just wondering whether they were going to give us an exhibition of wrestling, when they started to drag out of some corner two enormous "Grand Piano's," an effort which also received due response from the audience. On looking at the programme, in order to find out on whose behalf so much physical effort was expended I saw the names of the Mlles. Carmine, who were going to play the "Polonaise pour deux Pianos" by Chopin. The two charming ladies, who have on so many occasions put their services at the disposal of musical entertainments in the colony, received a most cordial reception. It took a little time, owing to the distance these artistes found themselves separated from each other to make the signal in order to begin their recital, but when they did, they managed to capture all the hearts of the audience by their brilliant playing. On few occasions have I heard Chopin played with the same intelligent understanding. What strength, what sweetness, what variety of conception and what joy they gave to all of us. Truly two fine artistes.

The first part of the programme finished with a song, "Patrie et Liberté" rendered by a "choeur mixte" under the efficient conductorship of Mme. Weber.

An interval of an hour was then announced, in order to allow the artists and their audience to look after their more material requirements. In the "Foyer" a number of stalls were set up containing the most tempting delicacies, such as strawberries and cream, delicious pastries, ices, sandwiches, coffee bar and last but by no means least, a kitchen where most appetizing hot sausages were cooked and handed out, the latter stall seemed to me the principal attraction. The catering was in the capable hands of Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid, from the "Glendower Hotel," and what a happy hit the organizers made in putting the catering into such experienced hands.

The staff went right out of their way to make things as pleasant as possible, no mean achievement considering the haste in which some of the visitors were, to stay their hunger and quench their thirst, and when it comes to the distribution of "bouquets" behind the public platform, I sincerely hope that Mr. and Mrs. Schmid will get the share, they so richly deserve.

During the interval, the Swiss Orchestral Society, under the able conductorship of M. E. P. Dick, regaled the audience with a number of popular Swiss tunes, amongst them was the "Bärner Marsch" which as usual brought the "house down."

The second half of the programme was opened by the Swiss Institute Orchestral Society, with Suppé's popular "Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna" a most appropriate piece of music to put the audience in the right "Stimmung." The long and enthusiastic applause was a striking example of how much everyone appreciated this Society's efforts, they seem to be well on the way to become one of the big assets of the Swiss Colony, as far as the entertainment side of it is concerned.

Apart from the artists already mentioned the Swiss Choral Society and M. Walter Kern appeared in the second half.

The Swiss Choral Society sang three songs, which gave ample proof, to what a high pitch of perfection, their conductor, M. E. A. Seymour, has brought this choir. They seem to have some splendid material at their disposal, and listening to them was indeed a pleasure which few would have liked to miss. I wish especially to mention the last song "Gott schütze die Reben am sonnigen Rhein" by C. Attenhofer, which was most beautifully rendered and which received an enthusiastic reception. The Swiss Choral Society has indeed become an institution of unaccountable value to the Colony, and their performance ranked as equal amongst the many clever performances of the evening.

Mr. Walter Kern gave us a fine and humorous rendering of Alfred Huggenberger's "Wie mes' Lebe cha gnüsse" which recitation was accompanied by peels of laughter from the whole company.

Shortly before 11 o'clock the singing of the National Anthem brought the 62nd "Fête Suisse" to an end. It was a most successful affair, and the organizers of this Fête must be warmly congratulated, it is no easy matter to arrange an entertainment of this dimension, the work entailed must have been considerable. I hear that close on 1100 people were present, which is a splendid record and a sure proof how this "Fête Suisse" has become an institution which is an event looked forward to eagerly every year.

This gathering is so entirely different from all other functions in the Colony, it has a special "cachet" and an atmosphere of homeliness seems to hover over it, indeed it is one great family reunion, where Helvetia's children meet, rich and poor, humble and prominent, to testify to their unswerving attachment to the land of their fathers.—An unforgettable and brilliant evening.
ST.

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