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THE GATHERING AT ZOFINGEN

(The first of three reports by MM)

The little town of Zofingen in the Canton of Aargau prepared a most colourful welcome to nearly 500 visitors, mostly Swiss from abroad, who gathered to meet for their 48th Assembly from 28th to 30th August. The citizens made elaborate preparations, not only the usual flags and flowers everywhere, but they even went to the trouble of painting the old station; for the SBB administration has been talking of a new station building for the last 30 years, and the Zofingers were so ashamed of it that the decorators of the town, assisted by railway staff, decided to take matters in their own hands, and voluntarily redecorated the station at the last minute, so to speak. The paint was donated by a local factory. Thus the honour of the Niklaus Thut town was saved and, incidentally that of the Swiss Federal Railways, too!

Zofingen, an ideal historic setting

Zofingen has some 10,000 inhabitants and is a busy industrialised *Städtchen*. It is in the Wiggertal and very much in the centre of the Swiss midlands. Its origins date back to an old Roman settlement, superseded in the fourth century by an alemannic village. Later, the Counts of Lenzburg became the overlords, and it was not until the second half of the twelfth century that the Counts of Froburg laid the foundation of the town proper by fortifications and a religious foundation. When the Bernese conquered the Aargau in 1415, Zofingen was made a municipal town with its own legal courts. In 1798, it became Helvetic, and when the Canton of Aargau was created in 1803, the town was given the status of a *Bezirkshauptort*.

This then was a perfect background for the *Stedtlifesch*, the special activities laid on by the Zofingen population for the benefit of the visitors. It really looked as if the whole town were participating in one way or another, what with exhibitions and shows, serenades and recitals, brass band concerts, open air dancing on specially constructed wooden dance floors (one was immediately below my hotel window, and as the dancing went on normal nights till midnight and on Saturday till 4 a.m., one can imagine how much sleep I got—a good thing I like dancing!), all kinds of bands in several of the inns; there were tent restaurants, even a field kitchen of the First World War from which real *Spatz* was served—it tasted like 1914, too! On Saturday evening was the main *Festbetrieb*. It began with a procession led by heralds and the municipal band, in which the visitors walked into the old town

through a flower shower. The Jodelklub Edelweiss who entertained the London Swiss community at Wimbledon Town Hall on 1st August, marched with us, and the rear was brought up by a pleasure railway for the old and invalid, and a group of horsemen. The whole atmosphere was a very happy one, and visitors and citizens mixed informally. At midnight there was a huge polonaise through the inner town lit up by colourful Bengal lights. There was much singing, too, and yodelling and even what rain there was could not dampen the high spirits.

Down to work

But lest there should be some suspicion that the whole three days were spent solely in merrymaking, I hasten to say that some extremely hard work was done by a good many participants in various committee meetings, and that the plenary meetings were attended by maximum numbers.

On Thursday already there were two meetings, one of the "administrative committee of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad and one of the committee of the "Foundation for the Swiss Abroad".

On Friday morning at 8.30, the "Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, the Commission (ASK), met at the Town Hall. The Swiss Community in Great Britain was represented by Dr. H. R. Bolliger (North) and Mrs. Mariann Meier (South). Roughly two-thirds of the 92 members and deputies from inside and outside Switzerland were present, and they came from all continents.

The President, Councillor of States Dr. Louis Guisan, reported on the work since spring. Negotiations were going on with the federal authorities with regard to (1) the military exemption tax which might be replaced by a kind of personal tax; (2) whether the Swiss Chambers of Commerce abroad could possibly receive some kind of federal subsidy; (3) a possible chance for the Swiss abroad to join the Swiss AHV (old age insurance) as well as other questions regarding the AHV. The work done by the Secretariat had been much the same since spring as the year before, youth service, information, "Echo" and "Weltschweizer" publication, schools abroad, dealing with the special problems of medically trained Swiss from abroad when wanting to work in Switzerland, etc. He also reported that the government were appointing a delegate for policy on foreigners—a commission studying the problem included the N.H.G.

The next report concerned information and the pilot scheme which was hoped to be carried out in the large Swiss community in France, by which a

news bulletin should be sent to all registered Swiss, with the federal authorities and the Swiss community in France co-operating. This question of information is being studied by a special working group of which Mrs. M. Meier is a member *ad personam*). Criticism was voiced about certain ways the Swiss Press had of reporting happenings in foreign countries, also about the bad quality of transmission of programmes by the Swiss Shortwave Service.

When women step in

The next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad will take place at Brunnen on the Lake of Lucerne at the last weekend in August. The theme will be "Participation of the Swiss Abroad in the Destiny of their Country of Adoption". Finally, new societies were accepted and delegates to the Commission. It is gratifying that the example of the Swiss community in G.B. South to have a woman delegate has been followed by other countries. We are now four women, although I am still the only full delegate from abroad; one is a deputy member from Belgium, one a co-opted member for Western Canada and the fourth is a member from inside Switzerland, President of the Berne Group of the NSH, none other than the Chief of Women's Auxiliary Service, Chef FHD Andrée Weitzel.

The meeting of the Commission ended with a luncheon at which a number of soldiers, young Swiss from abroad at present in military service in Switzerland, were guests.

At the same time as the Commission meeting, a special course of instruction was given for youth group leaders.

In the afternoon, visits to various establishments took place. One group visited the Home for the Swiss Abroad at Duerrenesch, and the work centre for the handicapped at Strengelbach. Four other groups went to the following industrial works: Kammgarnweberei Bleiche, one of the most modern textile factories (woollen and synthetic mixtures); the paint and lacquer factory Dr. A. Landolt AG; the Graphic Institute and Publishing Company Ringier, one of the largest publishers of illustrated periodicals, etc; and the chemical and pharmaceutical works of Siegfried AG. And there were visits with a guide to the beautiful church of St. Mauritius, the Town Hall and other sightseeing spots of interest.

At 6 p.m., the Assembly was officially opened by the Mayor of Zofingen, Dr. Walther Leber, at the Town Hall. It was full to overflowing, and the Zofingen male choir sang in the courtyard. The glasses in which we were

subsequently offered some cooling wine, were presented to us as a souvenir, a rather nice gesture.

There were various meetings and working groups in the evening, the most important, as far as I was concerned, the committee of the *Solidarity Fund*. The general meeting took place the following morning under the chairmanship of former ambassador Dr. Kappeler.

The Plenary Assembly

The first part of the plenary assembly on Saturday began at 9 a.m. at the spacious and airy Municipal Hall. It was devoted to the theme "*Total Revision of the Federal Constitution*". The President, Monsieur Guisan, welcomed various guests of honour, and he was followed by the young and eloquent Genevois President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Monsieur Jean-Claude Nicole. Then followed the highlight of the morning, the address by the former Federal Councillor Prof. Dr. F. T. Wahlen, Chairman of the working group appointed by the Government to prepare a possible total revision. His talk was extremely interesting and will be published separately in a later issue. The Director of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Mr. Marcel Ney, reported on the results of the questionnaires sent out to the Swiss abroad by the Secretariat. His talk was followed by a round table discussion on various points which had come out of the answers to the questionnaire. It was chaired by Mr. Philippe Garraux, member of the ASK and a Bernese lawyer. Those taking part came from France, Germany, Sweden, Australia, Madagascar, Genoa and London (MM, the only woman). Prof. Wahlen summed up the discussion in a brilliant way. In one of the next issues, more will be said about Mr. Ney's report and about the round table discussion, as well as about the results of the special meetings held by the NSH in London and the Swiss Club in Manchester.

At midday, Zofingen families treated visitors to lunch at their homes. This was a novelty. On the other hand, the *ecumenical lunch* and meeting or-

ganised by the Swiss Protestant Church Federation has by now become a firm tradition. This year, it took place at the beautiful Kirchgemeindehaus, and the lunch was offered by the Zofingen parishes, the ministers' wives acting as most efficient waitresses in national costumes. An interesting discussion followed in which the Rev. P. Bossard of the R.C. community in London spoke of the successful ecumenical activities of the Swiss Churches in London.

The second part of the plenary assembly was devoted to the legislation under the *Constitutional Article of the Swiss Abroad*. Monsieur Maurice Jaccard of the Federal Political Department reported on the progress made. He referred to the military exemption tax which would be based on an entirely new conception. With regard to political rights of the AS, one could for the moment imagine an *Aufenthalterstimmrecht*, the right to vote when temporarily resident in Switzerland. A draft Bill, he said, was in preparation. Prof. Dr. H. Roth dealt with questions about Swiss schools abroad.

Two conference participants, a man from France and Prof. J. Inebnit of G.B., took advantage of question time, and the Secretary in charge of the Solidarity Fund, Mr. B. Invernizzi, gave a short survey of the Solidarity Fund. The President of the Federal Assembly, National Councillor Mathias Eggenberger, gave Parliament's greetings.

The main address of the afternoon was delivered by Federal Councillor Pierre Graber as representative of the Government. He talked about the malaise in Switzerland, especially since the *Fremdeninitiative*. He said that the Swiss had to realise that they had thought too much of the economy and not enough of the man. New humanistic ideals were needed; some of the criticism made abroad was justified, not least the lack of women's suffrage on federal level. Switzerland would keep her neutrality; she would not join UNO, but increase her work in international organisations and step up her contributions to development aid. Swiss "presence" abroad was essential and Switzerland's image must be strengthened. An active policy of culture was

necessary—political, humanitarian and economic aspects were not sufficient. Federal Councillor Graber ended his address by appealing to us Swiss abroad to help our country in determining the new aims; we were more aware of the needs, and Switzerland would count on the Swiss abroad to help discover this new humanism. Our patriotism would be an important factor in the unity of Switzerland—necessary more than ever at a time when Switzerland, for the sake of its future, had to reaffirm its international solidarity and at the same time keep its national character.

The Sunday outing

For many years, the traditional *Sunday outing* was favoured with excellent weather. Not so this time. It rained all day. In several coaches, the participants were transported first to an ecumenical and bi-lingual service at the splendid church of St. Urban and then past the lakes of Sempach, Baldegg and Hallwil to Castle Lenzburg. It was a pity that luncheon could not be served out of doors, although even in the large Hall of the Knights, it was comfortable and cheerful. The *apéritif* was offered by the Government of the Canton of Aargau. The *Landammann* of the Canton, Dr. Bruno Hunziker, welcomed the guests who later had an opportunity of visiting the castle, including the Philipp-Albert-Stapferhaus, meeting place of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

The return to Zofingen was made on the fast direct road, and after a last get-together at the "Roessli", this year's assembly came to an end. It may be called a success. The disadvantage was that due to a shortage of hotels, many of the visitors had to be billeted in other towns and villages. Whilst the "Stedtli-fesch" was a very homely affair, it was very difficult to find one another, and there were fewer possibilities of meeting people than at the usual banquet and dance. But the Zofingen authorities and organisers did their best and it was a most handsome and acceptable best. Thank you.

Next year's venue on the Lake of

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Lucerne should attract even more visitors. Perhaps it will be possible at last to muster a reasonably large contingent from Great Britain. The Ambassador was there, Consul and Mrs. Adams, and a few others from various parts—but altogether not even a dozen. When one thinks that from Germany, there were well over 70, and from Africa

there were more than from Great Britain. South America showed up particularly well with nearly a score. So let's make an effort next year—it is well worth it. I have yet to meet a man or woman who, once having been to an assembly, will not come again. Au revoir, then, at Brunnen!

(MM)

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by Eugene V. Epstein

When I first visited Switzerland some years ago, I enjoyed walking. This had less to do with athletic inclination than with my personal financial status at the time. I simply preferred walking to starving, and if I had spent more money on riding around the place, I would have eaten less. This may sound complicated to those who have never led the free, easy life of a student in Switzerland, but to me it was a question of pure economics.

As I slowly began to climb life's ladder rung by rung, I soon obtained my first conveyance: a gleaming Swiss bicycle. It was a fine bicycle, and it served me well, even though I was rather uncertain of myself in traffic. At night, I parked my bicycle in a little alleyway next to the house where I lived. In the morning it was still there, sometimes covered with a light dew, sometimes not. But the point is, it was always there. I occasionally locked my bicycle in the beginning, but after a while I didn't bother anymore. There were two reasons for this: first, I wasn't so convinced that such a simple lock on the back wheel would discourage a genuine bicycle thief; and second, the lock eventually got rusty and ceased to function properly. I was shocked that a Swiss bicycle lock would ever get rusty, but when I examined it, I discovered that it was manufactured in Liverpool.

I was convinced at first that someone would walk—or ride—off with my beloved bicycle, once they discovered it was not locked up for the night. But it was always there in the morning, covered with dew (and sometimes not).

The question of why that bicycle was always there in the morning began to fascinate me. Could it be that the Swiss were just not interested in stealing bicycles, or was there a special Swiss law which was especially hard on bicycle thieves. I began to experiment.

One day I bought a book and left it on the rack on the back of my bicycle. I left it overnight, and it was there in the morning. I left it the next night, and it was still there. I left it a third night. When I looked for it the next morning it was gone. "Happy days!" I exclaimed to myself, "the Swiss are indeed capable of stealing things!"

But then I noticed the book on the pavement behind the bicycle. It had simply grown tired of all this experi-

mentation business and had fallen off its precarious perch on the bicycle rack.

I began to worry about the Swiss, to wonder just what was wrong with them. I studied the newspapers to see what other crimes these perfect people were likewise not perpetrating. My favourite newspaper at the time was the *Neue Basler Bratwurst*—for I was living in Basel—and it had a small daily section dealing with crime. But, in all honesty, there were very few crimes of any importance, with the exception of an occasional murder or two, many of which seemed to occur in intimate family circles.

I continued my experiments. The book on the bicycle soon became a pound of coffee, which was also still there in the morning. I added a small bottle of whisky, and it too was there—untouched—the next day.

"Ha!" I thought. "I'll catch these super-people at their own game. I'll provide something for them to steal that will tempt their perfect little souls!"

I went out and bought some artificial jewelry: a few strings of pearls for two francs and a rather genuine-looking pair of gold earrings (two francs and forty centimes). I placed them carefully in a paper bag, with a small string of pearls hanging out, and put the whole collection on the rack of my bicycle.

I could hardly sleep that night. What scientist can rest in the midst of an important discovery? I had a strange, disquieting feeling. Would the jewelry be there in the morning? Did I really want the jewelry to be there or would I rather have it disappear? In other words, did I want to lose my faith in the Swiss people and demonstrate—once for all—that they were as human as anybody else, despite some theories to the contrary. I tossed and turned and eventually dozed off. I awoke when the dawn's early light entered my room. I dressed as quickly as I could and rushed down to the alley. My heart was pounding and I was out of breath. The bicycle . . . the bicycle, where was it? There . . . there . . . against the wall, where it always was in the morning. It was covered with a light dew—as it so often was. But there was nothing on the rack in the back. My jewelry was missing. Oh joy! My jewelry was missing. Or had it simply fallen off?

I looked underneath my bicycle. I looked all over that alley. It was gone! Filthy criminal, you have absconded with my genuine family jewels. How can one ever forgive thee?

I went upstairs and prepared my usual austere bohemian breakfast of eggs, bacon, cheese, steak, waffles, cake, coffee and ginger ale. As I was musing on this successful conclusion to months of planning and experimenting, the telephone rang.

"Hello", I said into the mouthpiece.

"This is the police department," came the answer. "My name is Dr. Lombardo P. Funderli of the Lost and Found Department, Valuable Stones Division, and we've just received a package containing jewelry which ostensibly belongs to you. Are you missing something or other?"

I told the man I would be right over. When I arrived at the police station, Dr. Funderli explained that one of the good citizens of Basel had seen a package on the back of a bicycle in an alleyway near where I lived. Upon closer examination, Mr. Basel Citizen discovered that some pearls were peeking out of the bag. Our anonymous friend quickly removed the entire package from the bicycle and brought it to the police station.

"That's very thoughtful," I remarked. "But tell me, how did you know the package belonged to me, and that I had forgotten it on the back rack of my bicycle?"

"Elementary, my dear sir," said the policeman. "We sent a squad of detectives down to the scene of the crime to investigate. They examined the bicycle, checked with the manufacturer, took down the serial numbers of all vital parts as well as the number of your bicycle license. The evidence clearly pointed to you as the owner of the said vehicle."

"Are you going to imprison me for my laxity and sloppiness?" I asked.

"Of course not!" said Dr. Funderli. "But we are going to return your

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