

The speech made by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr. Georges-André Chevellaz, on the occasion of the reception held at the Federal Palace on 29th April 1980 in honour of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, Prince Philip of Edinburgh

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Madam,

The Swiss people - frequently as cold as the snows that mantle their Alps, a people so jealously republican that, throughout Swiss history, at both cantonal and federal levels, a head of government has only exceptionally been permitted to remain in power for more than one year -, this same people bids Your Most Gracious Majesty and Your Royal Highness most cordially welcome. In this way, the Swiss people may compensate, in a moment of genuine enthusiasm, a monarchist affection that has always been denied expression.

This welcome is addressed, in the first line, to Your Majesty personally, in acknowledgement of the charm, elegance, discretion, conscientiousness and quiet conviction you bring to the performance of your royal task.

By extension, however, it is to England that we render homage - to the England of our own history: an England that has, for us, never been alternately close ally and hereditary enemy, as it has been for our neighbours; an England to which a host of bonds, memories and common interests have linked us down the centuries. These relations are multicoloured: they are expedient in a political context, religious for the Irish and English missionaries that came after the 7th century to convey



the Allemani. The legendary Fridolin of Glarus, St. Gall, St. Columban, St. Fintan and other English monks have left their mark in St. Gall, Pfäfers and Basle. There were close contacts between our two countries during the Renaissance and the Reformation, the latter creating a particularly durable bond between our two States. The most various movements of revival and awakening which, throughout the 19th century, came from England to reanimate our somnolent reformed churches with their songs of praise, arousing the missionary spirit and dissidence and schism at one and the same time.

Then there were literary relations. The first British tourists during the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century, from James Thomson to Lord Byron, discovered the natural beauty of Switzerland and the presumed virtues of mountain life within the context of budding Romanticism. Others, in less poetical vein, became lucid observers of the Helvetic microcosm: William Cox, Stanyan, Adam Smith and the historian, Gibbon, who lived in Lausanne for 16 years and knew as much about our country on the eve of the French Revolution as he did about the decadence of the Roman Empire.

English literature, the English love of discovery, travel and outdoor activities laid the foundations of Swiss tourism and many of your people introduced us to our own mountains - men like Whymper, the first to climb the Matterhorn, or those highly individualistic adventurers who introduced winter sports, while your colonels, on retirement from the Indian Army, preferred to take up residence in the big hotels on our lakesides. British capital and technical collaboration played a very considerable rôle in the creation of our



railways and also helped our industry to get under way.

With regard to the political relations between our two countries, these date back a very long way. It was a bishop of Sion in the Valais who, as Papal Legate, crowned William the Conqueror for the second time. In English mediaeval histories one finds the names of members of the House of Savoy and the Grandsons and, later on, those of the Diesbachs and the Scharnachtals. In these political relations it is possible to discern a constant factor - the mutual fear of both English and Swiss that a single power might obtain European hegemony to the detriment of freedom. This is seen particularly towards 1500 when, under the influence of Cardinal Schinner, Bishop of Sion, the Swiss and Henry VIII of England were fighting against penetration of Italy by the French. There was an analogous policy in the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century. The influence of one of England's finest diplomats, Stratford Canning, helped the Swiss to assert themselves in 1815 and under the Restoration.

In the course of the 19th century England, and notably Palmerston, supported the Swiss in their desire for freedom within the context of the authoritarian monarchies.

Finally, during the Second World War, history will never forget that your people once fought alone for the cause of liberty. The Swiss, in particular, pay homage to your sacrifices. Switzerland is also deeply aware of the understanding shown by the British people and their Government to

a little country safeguarding its independence, surrounded on all sides by powerful totalitarian states.

And we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Sir Winston Churchill for speaking in such glowing terms in 1944 of our endeavours to fend off the aggressive intent of one of his own allies, as well as for having chosen Zurich for his proclamation in 1946 of the necessity to unite Europe.

When peace returned Britain showed the world how to transform an empire elegantly and diplomatically into a community of independent countries.

Within the context of this fledgling Europe, our relations have become much closer and it has frequently been seen how many ideas we share. The pragmatic spirit that characterizes our two peoples has manifested itself in the constitution of the European Free Trade Association which, by striking out along original paths, has made a very respectable contribution to the building up of Europe. You have gone even farther than we have along this path of integration, justifying the quip that there are two islands in Europe, Great Britain and Switzerland. Great Britain has realized that it cannot remain one while Switzerland believes she can go on for ever in that splendid isolation borrowed from your country long since.

England has always endeared herself to us by her single-minded devotion to freedom, the respect of the individual and the citizen rights of your subjects, guaranteed for centuries by your charters and your parliamentary traditions. The visit to Switzerland of Your Most Gracious Majesty confirms

and reinforces the identity of views, the great esteem and the wholehearted friendship that exists between the United Kingdom and Switzerland.