

Personal

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1934)**

Heft 637

PDF erstellt am: **08.08.2024**

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

THE XXVth SWISS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREE PARTY.

The Rev. R. Hoffmann-de Visme, in its last issue, told the readers of *The Swiss Observer* something about this great coming event in the Swiss Colony, of its modest inception, 25 years ago and how this annual celebration had grown, snowball-fashion, year after year.

Well, it has taken place now, in the very happiest way; the children of our Colony have had their Christmas Party, their "Landsgemeinde," as Pastor Hoffmann called it and duly recorded their votes — of joyful thanks. And surely the spirit of Madame Hoffmann-de Visme, of Henri Jenne and others, who loved our little ones and ensured their happiness in the past, floated over this vast and happy gathering; wish that Melle. Marguerat, too, could have had a peep at this gigantic family, with its festive air and its Christmas tree, the direct result of her inspired suggestion of a quarter of a century ago!

But let me start from the beginning: The invitation cards which were sent out some weeks ago, asked the children of our Colony, without any distinction, to the 25th Christmas Tree Party on Saturday, December 30th, at Victoria Hall, Southampton Row, for 2.45 p.m. sharp. I understand that 460 children announced their intention of being present, of which comparatively few were prevented from attending at the very last. At the named hour the hall was nearly full already, a lovely Christmas Tree, reaching almost from floor to ceiling, invited the children with its glittering rays from countless candles; there was community singing in progress. By 3 o'clock the last stragglers seemed to have arrived and at 3.15 sharp Pastor Hoffmann formally opened the proceedings and addressed his vast audience. In his sonorous voice, which easily reached the back of the hall, he invited all and sundry to stand up and sing two of the most popular Christmas Carols. The response was immediate and the children all sang with joy and fervour — it was wonderful to listen to them. Then M. Hoffmann read the story of the Nativity from the Gospel and recited the Lord's Prayer, the while you could almost have heard a pin drop. The children all were just as devout in their prayers as they had been lusty in their singing. Meanwhile, our guests of honour, M. C. R. Paravicini, Swiss Minister, accompanied by Mme. Paravicini and family, had arrived and were conducted to their seats. M. Hoffmann told the children of the honour conferred upon them, in view of this year's celebration being a semi-Jubilee and asked His Excellency to be good enough and speak to the children himself. — Our Minister, who was received with great applause, acquitted himself of this task in a masterful way. He did not address the "Landsgemeinde" in his capacity as a born Diplomatist, but as a father would speak to his children. He took his audience into his confidence and related how, during his last stay at Berne, the President of the Confederation had enquired of him "whether the children of the Swiss Colony in London were good?" Like an indulgent parent, M. Paravicini seems to have readily replied "yes" and the inference drawn by the President appears to have been that, with such a huge family being really "good," it followed that the parents must be "good," too; likewise our two Pastors and last, but not least, the Swiss Minister himself.

The children were delighted with this speech and were eagerly attentive and waiting for more, but M. Paravicini concluded by wishing them one and all a Very Happy Christmas Fête and all the Best for the coming New Year, inviting them to raise three hearty cheers for Pastors Hoffmann-de Visme and Hahn, the spiritual leaders of this great flock. These cheers were given with real youthful enthusiasm, but broke out afresh, when M. Hoffmann asked the audience to raise them in turn for our Minister and his family who had so kindly consented to give this great event an even greater cachet by their visit and presence. By now, things were in full swing and M. Hoffmann-de Visme announced that a great conjurer was about to arrive "all the way from China" by aeroplane. To afford him time to land and come along with his paraphernalia, resort was being had to some more community singing, interspersed with a lovely solo dance by Louise Ducommun. And here a special word of praise is due to Mr. Steiner, jun., for the practised and ingenious way in which he led the youngsters. Personally, I thought, it was a pity that his voice did not carry like M. Hoffmann's, but the children seemed to hear and understand him all right and followed him in all his antics like a Pied Piper. Suddenly, above the children's voices, there became audible the humming of a huge aeroplane — it must have been a helicopter — and our conjurer had arrived.

The curtain rose and there he was, in all his Eastern glory and he started to surprise his huge family with one trick after another, while a Pianist suitably accompanied with the Chinese Dance from Tschaiakowski's "Casse Noisette."

The conjurer was not Mr. Maskelyne, (though he may have been a near relation) for was he not a Chinese and asked the children whether they spoke his lingo? We had previously ascertained that from the 425 children actually present, comparatively few knew French and fewer even "Schwyzerdütsch," but none, it proved, knew Chinese. So the conjurer, most obligingly, retaliated by speaking English. However, his actions spoke more eloquently to the girls and boys than did his words and he managed to hold them spellbound for quite an hour at a stretch by his really first-class show. But all good things come to an end; in this case, however, to be followed by another, still better one — Tea! After three more rousing cheers, this time for the Chinese Conjurer, all the children filed out, in two orderly columns, one to the left and one to the right into the adjoining hall, which was lavishly decorated and accommodated with 5 long, long tables, temptingly spread. The Mothers with very small children and babies-in-arms, likewise the guests, were requested to remain seated and they had tea served them in the main hall. The arrangements and organisation throughout were perfect, but it must be stated that the children, too, came well up to scratch and followed their leaders like lambs. Their behaviour throughout was simply splendid, although they naturally were in high spirits all the afternoon and evening.

Come and have a look with me at this family of 425 beaming faces! Can you imagine a greater Christmas treat than watching this happy, beaming Mammoth Tea Party; some daintily picking their morsels, others "tucking away" to their heart's delight, but all equally enjoying what Father Christmas had so generously provided. And, thinking of Father Christmas, — why, here he comes in person, in his bright red gown and with his long white beard and his bushy eyebrows, telling the children that he had travelled long and come from far, far away. He first speaks to the children from the Gallery, but then descends amongst them all and makes his round amongst the tables. — And so kindly is his mien and so great his charm that even the tiniest tots have no fear of him.

The lady helpers were indefatigable in looking after the welfare of their numerous little guests and surely none of them went away unsatisfied. To them the last of the many hearty cheers were given and surely they were well deserved. The children eventually marched back into the main hall for the pièce de résistance: the Christmas bag, bulging with presents, to take home with them. These bags were all laid out on the window shelves, arranged in alphabetical order, so that even without the semblance of a scramble each child secured his prize of the evening.

Meanwhile, many of the parents and elders had arrived to claim their little charges after this unforgettable afternoon and in little groups they came out, clutching their treasures and casting back a last look at the scene of their great pleasure and at the stately Christmas tree, now bereft alas! of the glow of a hundred candles which had long since gutted to their sockets.

Then with many a warm word of hearty thanks and sparkling eyes, they all shook hands with Pastor Hoffmann, who had a cheering word for every one and who had been so happy the whole evening because the children's great joy surely found a true echo in his big heart!

And so — to bed, after hours spent that will long linger in each little heart. Could we but have peeped at many a little curly-head holding fast some treasure of that evening under the bed clothes, treasures that helped them to gain those sweet dreams that must surely have followed a time rich in joy and blessing, such as this.

Thus the Swiss Christmas Tree Party has become not only an annual event, but an established custom in the Colony, to which hundreds of children look forward from year to year. It certainly deserves all the interest and support it can get from every quarter for, apart from the necessary funds required, it will be realized that a very great amount of organizing talent and sheer hard work are needed to make such parties the great success they have proved. This would have been charming if one of the very many pretty little girls could have presented Bouquets to every one entitled to our gratitude, but this duty, figuratively speaking, having been left to me, as reporter, I approach it though with pleasure yet with considerable trepidation, as it is hardly possible to mention every one, where so many have given a helping hand. There is first Melle Matthey, who has done such a lot of preparatory work and sent out all the invitations. Mme. Joss, I believe, was in charge of the arrangements on the spot and she managed to be here, there and everywhere, seemingly all at the same time. She was most ably assisted, in diverse ways, by Mesdames Hahn, Jobin, Kummer, Muller, Reber and Wyss, while Melle Sidler was, as before, in charge of the "Tea" arrangements, which left absolutely nothing to be desired.

There were also several "gentlemen helpers" and organisers, led by our tireless old friends Mr. Campart and Mr. Jobin: their modesty for-

bids more than the passing reference that "they also served."

And just on going to press, I learn that the "Chinese" conjurer was Mr. Stanley Cable, son of the well-known Secretary of the S.F.F.D. (Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress) who, in this capacity, is helping so many of our compatriots in London. At the Piano was Mr. Joss, jun.

Once more, Most Hearty Thanks to everyone who helped to make this event such an outstanding success.

GALLUS.

THE FOYER SUISSE.

Mr. C. Bertschinger having tendered his resignation as Honorary Secretary of the Foyer Suisse, as from the 31st December 1933, the Members of the Council of Management wish to place on record their appreciation of his long and valuable services to the Foyer, which have extended over a period of 20 years and which now leave the Trust in a sound financial position. They especially appreciate the untiring efforts and unlimited time which Mr. Bertschinger has devoted to his duties as Honorary Secretary and Member of the House Committee. They trust that they may in future also benefit by his knowledge and experience to further the objects and aims of the Trust.

We hope to publish at an early date particulars of changes which will be made in the present Management of the Foyer Suisse.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

We wish to draw our readers attention to a lecture which will be held at "Swiss House," 34/35, Fitzroy Square, W., on Wednesday, January 10th, at 8.30 p.m., by Henry W. Nevinson, Esq., on "My work as War Correspondent."

The Swiss Mercantile Society Ltd. extends a hearty invitation to members and friends of other Swiss Societies to this lecture, which will undoubtedly be a very interesting one.

Some of our readers may have heard Mr. Nevinson recently broadcast on the above subject.

PERSONAL.

The many friends of M. R. Dupraz, President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, will sympathise with him in his bereavement, his mother having died at the age of 74, after a long illness.

We regret to inform our readers of the passing away of Mrs. Marie Filliez, wife of Mr. C. Filliez, 28, Firth Street, W., after a long and painful illness at the age of 42. The Funeral Service was held on Wednesday at the Church of Notre Dame de France, the interment will take place at Bagnes, (Valais).

We extend our sympathies to M. Filliez, in his bereavement.

We extend hearty congratulations to Mr. F. W. Lichtensteiger, on his promotion to Deputy-Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation, London office, and also to Mr. C. Mayr who has been appointed Sub-Manager of the same institution.

DIVAGAZIONI INVERNALI.

Bianco e nero. Anche la natura segue la moda. Non avete mai osservato quali capricciose, bizzarre forme a volte assume? Simpatiche sempre però. Così, comme riesce simpatica una bizzarra damina.

Bianco e nero. Le colline, i monti intorno più non esultano nei loro atteggiamenti smaglianti, mosaici variopinti, vivaci. Sonnacchiano silenziosi ora, Jotto il soffice manto che li ricopre. Sotterra, la vita più non si sente pulsare; quell'amico ronzo affannoso che si ode distinto durante le tepide stagioni, ora, d'inverno, è muto. Si riposa dolcemente, sotto la neve. E luccicano i monti, come fossero ricoperti da scintillanti gemme preziose. E gli alberi stendono i loro scheletrici rami, che sembrano tante ansiose braccia, adornati di neve. Civettuola la natura! La crudeltà invernale, il vento diaccio, fecero sparire poco a poco le foglie che davano al ramo quella ricchezza parca, graziosa. E spogli così come rimasero per qualche tempo più non avevano attrattiva alcuna. Ossuti, bruni, spargevano mestizia intorno... e allora, generosamente, la natura con dolcezza materna copri quel nudo con tanta neve candida. Ed ora hanno assunto strane forme che attirano lo sguardo, fanno stupire quasi. A volte si direbbe che uno scultore di vaglia si diverti a tramutare in altrettante stupende statue, semplici arbusti, modeste piantine.

Quieto il lago. Non più solcato da tante vele. Non più onde sfavillanti. Non più guizzi improvvisi, mutar dall'azzurro intenso al verde fiavole... Opaco ora. D'ardesia quasi. Lento. Solo le onde che timidamente lambiscono la riva, tremule, riflettono ancora capricciosamente le