

XXVth annual Xmas tree party to the children of the Swiss colony in London

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Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1935)**

Heft 689

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686315>

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**XXVth ANNUAL XMAS TREE PARTY
to the Children of the Swiss Colony in London,
at Victoria Hall, W.C.1.**

New Year's Day, 1935.

My Dear Auntie,

Your lovely Xmas surprise, in the form of a fountain pen and a wonderful box of stationery, gave me ever so much pleasure. I have already told you so, when writing you just a post card, with all my best wishes, for the New Year. But to-day I have a real opportunity to make the best of your useful gift, by attempting to send you an account of the Mammoth Xmas Tree Party I was allowed to attend last Saturday afternoon, December 29th.

It was such a big affair — big is the word, in its widest sense — that I hardly know how and where to start; for, can you imagine a party, attended by well over 400 children, at which everything went off "according to plan" and without a hitch? I think it is simply marvellous, the way everything was organised.

Well, dear Auntie, when I arrived, lots of other girls and boys and tiny tots, accompanied by their parents, made their way towards that lovely great building, near Holborn Tube Station. We had to present our invitation cards and then descended into the cloakroom, where we received a numbered ticket in exchange for the belongings we left behind. I soon spotted that all the boys wore their best suits and the girls their nice party frocks and when I entered the huge hall (I have never seen a larger one) it was already three quarters full. By the time we were due to start, every seat was taken and I noticed many grown-ups standing along the gangways at either side. However, the object on which most eyes were focussed, was a magnificent Xmas Tree standing to the right of the stage, reaching up to the ceiling in height and glimmering with a hundred lighted candles. The fun started with community singing, lead by a bright young student, with a nice smile, who had a taking way with the children and whom I remembered from last year, as Mr. Walter Steiner, while Mr. Ernest Joss again accompanied at the piano. Some of the tunes had to be sung with "actions" and it was lovely to watch how even the tiniest tots joined in the singing and tried to imitate the "actions." The Hall resounded to "Tipperary," "Pack up your troubles" and other marching tunes, sung in many devious ways, according to the instructions of our energetic Conductor. At 3 o'clock Pastor Hoffmann-de Visme rang his famous old bell (not an Xmas one, though one with an honoured tradition in the Swiss Colony, as Daddy tells me) to bid us all welcome and to remind us that, though a few days belated, our purpose for having gathered was to celebrate Xmas. It was easy for the speaker to persuade us that we should therefore change over to Xmas Hymns and "The First Noel" and "Good King Wencelas" sounded even more grandly from the enthusiastic assembly than the marching tunes had done. After the singing, Pastor Hoffmann read to us the ever-beautiful story of the Nativity from the Gospel and his clear and resonant voice carried right to the back of the vast Hall. The reading was concluded by the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, during both of which this enormous and youthful congregation kept wonderfully attentive and silent.

Then Mr. Hoffmann told us that this year's party was the 26th of its kind and that, snowball-fashion, it had grown year by year to its present gigantic proportion. The children were sorry to learn that they could no longer send a wire to the dear old Lady who had initiated these Parties, over a quarter of a Century ago, as she had passed away at Lausanne, early this year; but, surely, she is now in a better land.

We were reminded, however, that the good work was being carried on and M. Hoffmann invited us to raise three cheers for everyone who contributed towards making them the great success they are; above all, for the tireless helpers, likewise the generous donors. These cheers were joyously and lustily given and then followed by three more "for dear Switzerland and for England, the hospitable, where most of you children were born." Again the cheers rang out to the echo. After this Pastor Hoffmann informed his eager listeners that an important gentleman from the Legation, its Counsellor, who was "next to the Minister," had honoured us by kindly attending with his family. He introduced to us M. de Jenner and asked him to say just a few words. This he very kindly did and I must tell you, dear Auntie, that I liked his speech very much, because it was, how shall I describe it?, so — unorthodox. I hope this does not sound disrespectful and that I have chosen the right word; Daddy always tells me to be extra careful when employing such a long word (you can make such a mess of things by using it in the wrong place!). Well, M. de Jenner, after saying very nicely "How do you do" and wishing us all the best for the New Year, asked whether we should be able to tell Father Xmas that we had been GOOD boys and girls throughout 1934? And then he proceeded to explain that, personally, he could not help having

a sneaking regard for "the naughty ones," as they were responsible for creating so much extra fun and laughter. Being a Diplomatist of some standing, however, M. de Jenner must suddenly have realised that he was treading on somewhat dangerous ground, for he wound up, amongst much laughter, by imploring the children not to give him away to their parents, on reaching home. The applause after this speech had hardly died down, when M. Hoffmann announced that the next item would be a long and interesting one, in the form of conjuring tricks. — We were keyed up to keen expectation, the curtains of the stage were moving and bulging when, suddenly, there was a loud crash, as if the "magic" had already begun. — I fear something must have gone slightly amiss with the conjuror's "works," for the curtain remained drawn, while up on to the platform stepped young Mr. Steiner, once more to beguile the audience with a few general sing-songs. Magicians, however, are truly wonderful people and, whatever went wrong behind the scenes, it was soon put to rights, the curtains parted and we beheld all the impedimenta necessary to the glorious hour before us! — Now, dear Auntie, you may remember that I told you last year we had a Conjuror who came, by aeroplane, "all the way from China." I suppose that, after the many sad flying accidents of late, the organisers did not wish to imperil his life, so they had a look round the London Swiss Colony and, would you believe it?, they were successful in finding a Conjuror, every bit as good as the one "from China" and who entertained us right royally, with one clever trick after another.

Some of us children were actually asked to mount upon the stage and assist him, just to convince everyone that all was "true magic" and not mere trickery.

I cannot possibly find time or, for that matter, words, to describe to you all the wonders that were performed before our eyes, but I did hold my breath when the conjuror poured the ingredients of an omelette into Mr. Sigerist's best Sunday hat — only to extract therefrom, a minute later, a beautifully baked cake, after which the hat was returned to the brave gentleman just as spick and span as it had been received. The exit the conjuror made, at the end of his performance, was very clever and ingenious, and the loud and long applause must have somewhat rewarded him for all his pains. I must not forget to mention that he had also taken us into his confidence by explaining the little hitch before his show began. It appears that some little wicked fairies pulled at one of the legs of the many little tables, all laden with "Tricks" — hence the crash! For this, of course, the poor conjuror could not be blamed and, anyhow, I should like him to know how we all — girls and boys — loved his wonderful show and how grateful we feel towards him. Daddy told me afterwards, in confidence, that this clever gentleman's name was Mr. Edward Maeder.

The bell rang once more — this time for Tea, which was spread on long, long tables in the next room, into which we marched, quietly and orderly, row by row. — Soon the huge and happy family was seated round this festive board, surmounted by heaps of cakes and lovely crackers and the noise of the latter resounded for quite some time. We were helped to tea and cakes by a large number of nice kind ladies, who seemed to find a cheery word for everyone and who greatly enjoyed giving us what none of us was shy in taking. It was really a lovely sight, all the beaming faces at all the many tables and most of the several hundred little guests "tucking in" with gusto and great delight. But yet another surprise and treat was in store for us, a visit from Father Xmas, in long red robes and white flowing beard, all complete. He appeared on the gallery above and spoke down to us children in a loud, deep, but very kindly voice.

There were great shouts of delight and, later on, he came down amongst us and talked to many of the children, while they finished their tea.

Daddy afterwards told me that Father Xmas also went into the big Hall, where the Daddies and Mothers, with very small children, had remained, to have their tea. All the tiny tots were anxious to shake hands with Father Xmas, none seemed nervous or at all afraid, so kindly was his manner and so benign. My last impression of him is, as he stood on the balcony again, where he first appeared, saying good-bye to us and announcing that he was just about to return to the eternal snow of Switzerland. We were asked to give him a rousing hip, hip, hurrah! on his long journey and this, I think, must have been the longest and most deafening cheer of the evening.

Tea being over at last, we prepared for the last stage of this splendid afternoon, namely, to file back into the big Hall and line up, in front of all the hundreds of carrier bags, containing our presents and which had been alphabetically arranged. There was no delay, therefore, in our taking proud possession of same, after which we cast a last wistful glance at the tall and lovely Xmas tree, whose candles had long since gutted down to their sockets.

We shook hands with Pastors Hoffmann and Hahn, on leaving, thanking them for the most lovely time they had given us. Then down into the bowels of the earth, to retrieve our coats and hats and happily out into the murky December night and home, to tell everyone how much we had enjoyed ourselves.

I asked Daddy who all the good Ladies were, who had made all the preparations and arrangements for tea and he gave me a string of names, a good many of which would be familiar to you, dear Auntie, for it seems that more or less the same kind ladies are ever ready for this and other work, whenever their services are needed. I remember, however, two names, to whom Daddy said, our thanks were most especially due, that of Miss Siedler and Miss Simmen. If you should happen to meet them, would you please say how grateful all the boys and girls feel towards them and their kind helpers for all their work in providing us with such a ripping tea? Daddy also mentioned, when we were out of earshot of the little ones, that Father Xmas' real name was Mr. Charles de Castella.

Well, dear Auntie, this brings me to the end of my letter — the longest I have ever written to you, or anybody else. I hope I have been able to give you a modest word picture of the grand time I had, in the company of hundreds of other Swiss children. But I am sorry to confess that I came away with one grievance: nobody called for three cheers to Pastor Hoffmann and Mr. C. Campart, although I know from Daddy that these two gentlemen are the very pillars on which this Xmas Tree Party rests and has rested as long as he can remember. I asked Daddy why HE did not call for those well-deserved cheers, but he said that I was rather late in reminding him and that, anyhow, they were too modest to ask for such acclamation, as with them this party had long become a child of their hearts and a real labour of love. So be it and it is, alas, too late now to do anything about it until another year. They have, at least, the satisfaction to know that, as four hundred little heads were laid on their pillows, that night, expressions of deep gratitude have surely mingled with prayers for the night.

Now, dear Auntie, I really must come to a close, as it is getting very late. I hope these lines will find you well and happy and I am thankful to report they leave us all "in the pink."

I am looking forward to visiting you, as early as possible, during the year which has just started, but, should you come up to town first, be sure to call and see me some time. Until then, please, rest assured of my old love and devotion.

Ever your affectionate niece,

DORIS MARGUERITE.

L'ESCALADE.

Malgré le temps et la distance, si quelques personnes se plaisent à dire que les vieilles traditions se perdent, je puis dire que ce ne fut pas mon avis, ni je crois celui des Genevois qui assistèrent au petit banquet commémoratif de la date du 11 Décembre.

Pour la 21-ème fois la Colonie Genevoise de Londres, ayant à sa tête Mr. le Pasteur René Hoffmann-de Visme ainsi que Mr. Raoul de Cintra, évoqua les noms des héros morts pour la patrie, puis debout l'assemblée entonna le Cé que l'aino.

Après quelques paroles sur l'Escalade, nous éumes communication d'une missive provenant de la Cie de 1602, qui envoyait ses vœux aux Genevois de la Tamise, c'est en pensées avec eux que notre président brisa la marmite.

"Ainsi périssent les ennemis de la République" Puis chacun évoqua des souvenirs, tout ce termina à une heure avancée, mais trop tôt encore, au grès des assistants, cette soirée patriotique.

J. R. TREMBLEY.

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