

# A visit to the "Foyer Suisse"

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - (1935)

Heft 702

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689826>

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# A visit to the "Foyer Suisse"

at

12 — 15, Upper Bedford Place, London, W.C. 1.

By ST.

Within the short span of three months I have had the pleasure of visiting at least three times the newly renovated premises of the "Foyer Suisse." The first occasion being, when the Committee of Management invited some 50 of our old Swiss to a very enjoyable Luncheon, at which an excellent meal was served. Barely five weeks after, I had an opportunity of attending the reception given in honour of Mlle. Briod, the charming Secretary of the "Secretariat des Suisses à l'Étranger" in Berne, when again the company sat down to a unpretentious but excellent dinner. As all good things come in threes, I was asked to take part in a small supper party which was held at the "Foyer" after the General Meeting of the "Fonds de Secours," and there again the gathering, which included the Swiss Minister, and various Presidents of the different Swiss Societies in London, was full of praise for the excellent arrangements which had been made.

Then and there, I made up my mind to acquaint my readers and compatriots with the fact that the Colony possesses in the "Foyer Suisse" a really splendid institution, appealing to all in the artistic and comfortable arrangement of the rooms, as well as the excellence of the service and the *cuisine*. —

In my capacity as Editor of the Swiss Observer, whose work not only consists in criticizing, but also in finding out facts which are beneficiary to the community, I approached the authorities of the "Foyer Suisse," with a view of obtaining first hand information.

For some reason or other, the Press is not always welcome, there are still a good many people who hold the profession responsible for a great deal of mischief, caused in this world, but I am glad to say, that my application, to look over the premises met with a ready response, and a most cordial invitation was extended to me to inspect the "Foyer Suisse" from "top to bottom." This visit, which was a pleasant revelation to me, I am going to describe for the benefit of my readers, but before I do so, I wish to give a short account of the history of this Institution for those who are not quite "au courant" as to why the "Foyer" really exists. —

The "Foyer Suisse" was founded to be a memorial of the 150th anniversary of the Swiss Church in London; and its aim to be a centre of Union and a Home for young men and women, mainly of Swiss nationality, and particularly to serve the Parish purposes of the Swiss Church in London.

These aims have been pursued with a laudable tenacity since the inception of the work in 1910, as far as the drastically changed conditions, caused through the world war, have permitted. These were, as can be guessed, primarily responsible for some of the initial plans being altered to bring them into line with the newly created circumstances.

An upheaval of such magnitude which the world has witnessed through the four war years, has changed to a certain degree the aspect of life, but in spite of a necessary new orientation the "Foyer" has been able to realise many of its original aims. —

Incessant work both here and at home by an appointed committee, enabled them to collect sufficient Funds to launch out on a larger scheme, and on the 23rd of June, 1923, the inauguration of the "Foyer Suisse" took place at Upper Bedford Place, W.C.2. It was a most conspicuous occasion, apart from the Swiss Minister, all the Presidents of the Swiss Societies in London, the members of the Consistoire and the Committee of the "Foyer Suisse" as well as those of the "Bazaar" committee 1913, were present.

I cannot do better than to quote a few sentences from the inauguration address given by the Swiss Minister, on that memorable day, he said:

"Le nouveau centre de la colonie suisse que nous inaugurons aujourd'hui est le résultat très beau des efforts assidus d'un groupe de compatriotes qui ne se lassent point de songer au bien être de tous ceux qui, loin de la vie paisible et des sites aimés de notre Suisse, se trouvent isolés dans la grande métropole, où tout fourmille, où se croise le trafic mondial, où l'activité et la vie frémissent dans un tour-

billon que notre petite patrie ne connaît point. C'est donc à tous nos compatriotes, à tous nos jeunes amis venus ici et certes peu accoutumés encore à la vie londonienne que le "Foyer Suisse" ouvre ses portes avec autant de cordialité que de bon escient pour qu'ils se retrouvent un peu dans l'atmosphère du pays et surtout pour leur donner un point de départ solide vers une activité nouvelle et dans un entourage différent, pour leur offrir de cordiales directives, d'aimable conseils et des avis salutaires. C'est donc dès à présent que nous pouvons exprimer notre gratitude à ceux qui ont travaillé avec ardeur et désintéressement à la réussite du "Foyer Suisse," et c'est dès aujourd'hui que nous pouvons être certains de l'influence bienfaisante et saine que cette institution répandra dans les cercles de notre jeunesse. Je vous offre en mon nom et celui de la Patrie les félicitations les plus cordiales et les vœux les plus sincères."

This then is a short history of the "Foyer Suisse," pages could be written about the struggles, disappointments and hard work with which the various committees had to contend since the inception of this scheme, which has had such beneficiary results for scores of young men and women; but space prevents me to go further into details, or to mention the names of those who have given their time and money freely, so that this splendid idea could be carried out.

And now to my inspection visit. Having known the "Foyer" previously, I was forcibly struck by the very great changes which have taken place during the last twelve months. As my readers will no doubt remember, the Council of Management had, over a year ago re-organised the Hotel side of the "Foyer Suisse," handing over the management of that part of the "Schweizer Verband Volksdienst," an organisation which undertakes the management of canteens and other welfare organisations in Switzerland; as a matter of interest I might mention that they were invited to reorganise a large canteen of the Post Office in Warsaw.

The moving spirit of the "Schweizer Verband Volksdienst" is Madame Elise Züblin-Spiller, the instigator of the "Soldaten-Stuben." She was and is known to thousands of our soldiers, who during the Frontier-Occupation enjoyed the hospitality of these "Stuben;" well do I remember with what joy and pleasure I visited these cheery places, as a soldier during the long months of our stay in the Jura mountains. Since then, encouraged by the great success the "Verband" met with, and which has been more than once officially recognised, this organisation has enlarged its activities and improved its services, and by now they are freely consulted by a number of important institutions in Switzerland.

Having taken over the Management of the Hotel side of the "Foyer," a new spirit seems to have entered the place. It was realised at once

by the new management that very useful services could be rendered, in particular to visitors from Switzerland coming either on business or pleasure to this vast Metropolis. That they have already succeeded in attracting many of our countrymen in spite of the short time at their disposal was proved to me on hearing various of our Swiss dialects as well as French, as I walked through the various general rooms. I was informed by my excellent guide, Mr. Paul Bessire, who I know to be responsible for the planning and supervising of the entire renovations and decorations, that one of the first tasks the "Schweizer Verband Volksdienst" undertook when taking over, was a complete reorganisation of the service. They were able to bring over a few members of their well-trained staff from Switzerland, amongst them a highly experienced hotel-manageress, whose energies within a very short time worked a complete transformation.

In order, however, to offer our Swiss visitors the comfort which they expect, and to which they are accustomed, I was told, that the Council of Management came to the conclusion that more than mere changes in the staff appointments were necessary, and it was decided to start with a general renovation of the "Foyer" buildings.

This undertaking must have been a very complicated one, as a good many structural alterations were necessary, but I understand that in spite of the fact that these took nearly a year the visitors were in no way inconvenienced.

The planning of such far reaching renovations was not an easy matter, when one considers that the property concerned is fairly old, but I have no hesitation in saying that this problem has been solved in an amazing and masterly fashion; I should have thought it hardly possible, that the up-to-date decorations could be adopted to fit in with the old surroundings.

Through the courtesy of the Management, I have been able to secure a few photos, with which I am able to illustrate my article, and although they almost speak for themselves I will endeavour to supply my readers with some details about the main features of the renovations, and alterations which have taken place.

Those who remember the somewhat narrow entrance hall of old will hardly recognise the "Foyer" if they visit it again. For one thing the position of the Dining room and the Lounge Hall have been reversed, and one enters now directly from the front door into a very large entrance and lounge hall. A double set of doors at the entrance prevents any draught, and the first glimpse one gets is a most pleasing one, giving the impression that the comfort of the visitors has been studied to minute details.

One is at once struck by the clever and artistic electric light installations, and the way in which the wall-paper, paint and ceiling decorations



A corner of Lounge Hall.

blend together in one harmonious background; the one who has been responsible for the said decorations has exhibited a marvellous knowledge as to how a room can be made to look attractive without being gaudy. I noticed particularly, that apart from the pleasing ceiling lighting effects, wall brackets had been conveniently fixed so as to enable each individual guest to read comfortably in any position in the room. As I looked around suddenly some sound of a favourite opera of mine burst on my ears, these tunes emanated from a discreetly placed loud-speaker, and I was told that the visitors greatly enjoy these musical interludes.

Leaving the Lounge Hall, I found myself in the Dining Room, which I understand can accommodate about 60 guests. In order to "fortify" myself for an extensive excursion through the various other rooms, I sat down with my enthusiastic guide to a very enjoyable meal. During the courses I was able to have a good look round, and here again I was very much struck by the cheerful atmosphere of the room. In common with the general scheme of decoration which has been adopted throughout, this room has been decorated in a gold, cream and brown pattern; the electrical installation consisting of old-style wall brackets with modern lamp shades, provide an excellent illumination. The effect of the light is bright and yet restful to the eye; it throws into strong relief the various tables, which were all laid according to the fashion of a first class hotel.

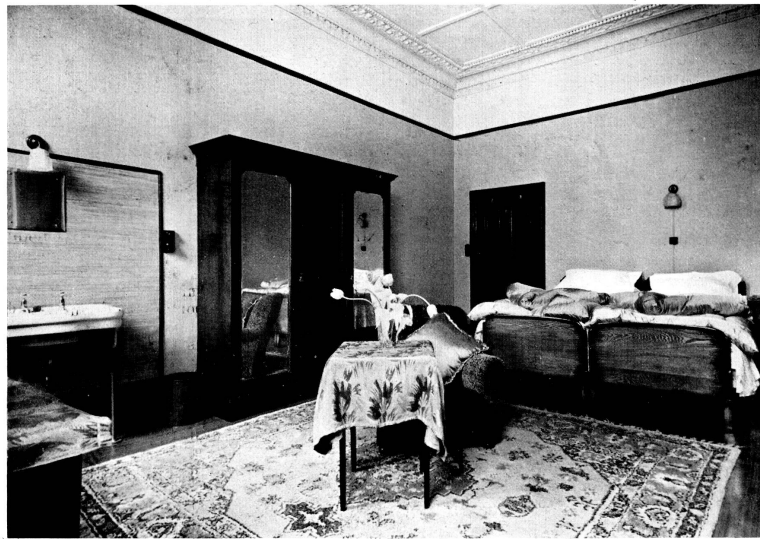
Having finished a meal which was excellent both as to quality and quantity, I was told that the originator of this repast, was a Swiss chef, who, for obvious reasons enjoys a great reputation at the "Foyer."

Coffee is generally served in the Lounge Hall, but it appears that some of the guests prefer to have it served in the writing room. I well remember this room of old, it used to give me the "pip," one part was partitioned off, which made the room look gloomy and depressing, in fact I once referred to this room to a friend of mine as the "suicidal chamber."

What a change now! The ugly partition has been removed, and the two parts have been thrown into one, a modern wall-paper of light but warm colouring has been chosen which is set off perfectly by panels. What an inspiration this room no doubt must provide for anyone who wishes to set his thoughts on paper. I was told that during the work of renovation, when the walls were stripped bare an original Adam panelling was revealed, which unfortunately could not be embodied in the new scheme, however the room has not lost any of its attraction through this omission.

Beyond this room, lies that part of the building which accommodates all the social and welfare side of the "Foyer Suisse." This part is perhaps best known to the casual visitor because in its various rooms takes place a great deal of the social activities in connection with the Swiss churches in London. There are, i.e., the two meeting rooms of the French speaking Y.M.C.A. and the Swiss Y.M.C.A. These institutions meet regularly once a week either for meetings or lectures.

Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday afternoons and evenings are the days set aside more



A Double Bed-Room.

particularly for the Swiss girls: the "Réunion des Jeunes Filles" and the "Schwyzerkränzli." They meet in the roomy and pleasant hall which can accommodate up to one hundred visitors. Whoever enters there on set days will be impressed by the intense activity displayed.

What pleasant and cheerful animation reigns there when 30-50 girls flock in as if it were their home. There they get their tea and supper; in addition English lessons and sometimes tuition in leather work or other handwork are given. Classes, lectures on Biblical subjects or on mission work are held by the two pastors, and on Sundays lecturers come and speak to the girls; lantern slides are shown or a musical afternoon is arranged, thus offering our young compatriots an opportunity of spending a few pleasant hours in congenial company.

The same rooms are also used for the Ladies monthly sewing meetings, both French and German speaking, who work together for the poor of our colony; there too are held the monthly meeting of the Sunday School Club, and social evenings of various characters. Besides these regular activities, different organisations, which are closely allied with the work of the Church hold either occasional or regular meetings at No. 15. The Council of the "Foyer" as such, has organised on its own, afternoon receptions and a yearly dinner for the old Folks of our colony, which meetings are usually presided over by the Swiss Minister.

And now, I must also mention the appointment by the "Foyer" of a permanent lady social secretary, for the benefit of the young girls of the Colony. It has been the ever open door for them for the last three or four years and has proved to be a great boon for an untold number of girls. They come there to get advice or help on matters of difficulties which cross their paths in their daily life. Others again are told of the resources

London can offer, or they are helped legally if in trouble by being put in touch with the proper sources. All this welfare work will, I was told, be extended when conditions permit, and already plans for further developments are well in hand.

Returning again to the Hotel proper, I noticed, when passing through the ground floor rooms, various staircases obviously leading to the bedrooms. They looked so inviting and tempting, that I simply had to prolong my visit in order to find out what "treasures" were hidden there.

On the first floor I found the larger bedrooms, and entering one at random with a critical eye and mind, — full well knowing what some hotel rooms can look like, — I was agreeably surprised to see repeated the restful atmosphere which had impressed me so much when visiting the living rooms. Here again one can see at once that the comfort of the guests has been thoroughly studied. I found that all the beds throughout the Hotel were fitted with box spring mattresses, (a very important factor for tired travellers), and looked most inviting in their general appearance. Being fond of comfort myself, I was intrigued to find an electric light over the bed-head, and what forethought! A switch was conveniently placed within easy reach from the bed. This ingenious switch arrangement struck me, and I was able to ascertain, that it is part of the standard equipment adopted in all the bedrooms, in fact in some of the rooms a two-way switch was fixed to ensure still greater comfort.

To resume my description of the first bedroom which I inspected, (there are nearly 60 of them all centrally heated) I directed my attention to the hot and cold water installation. To avoid the usual unsightly splash marks round the hand basin, a nicely framed splash-back of generous proportions, matching the wall-paper had been fixed. Above each wash basin a decent sized mirror has been fixed, and what is more important, an electric light with a switch close at hand. Those amongst my readers, who, like the writer, have wandered from one mirror to another, in some of the hotel bedrooms, to get some light on their faces for shaving operations, will appreciate what a boon such an arrangement is, and it is a further proof how very thoroughly everything has been thought out.

Having duly inspected the 1st floor, I was anxious to know what the second and third floors had to offer. One thing which caught my eye at once was, that all the staircases and passages had been renovated in the same decorative scheme. The style adopted throughout gives the same sense of warmth and yet airiness, and this is specially important in such old buildings, where the renovation of small stair-cases and landings offer decided difficulties.

My visit to the higher stories took me through many bedrooms, large and small, and I am delighted to say that the scheme of decoration and standard equipment was the same throughout and embodied also the special features which I remarked in the 1st floor bedroom.

Walking down the thickly carpeted staircase, I could not help feeling again that sense of warmth and cheerfulness which permeated the general rooms on the ground floor.

My visit was not quite complete; walking along a passage, a neatly uniformed chambermaid opened the door of a bathroom for my inspection. I have already pointed out that these



Section view of the Dining Room.



A Single Bed-Room.

houses are old, but I had to marvel at the improvement brought about by the use of modern fittings. The cream scheme of decoration and the bath with polished black slate panels give these bathrooms almost a luxurious appearance.

Having noticed how the work had been lightened for the upstairs staff wherever possible, I was anxious to see for myself what had been done "below stairs." —

I was taken there without a moments hesitation, and found in these quarters the same appearance of cleanliness, every corner looked spick and span. Some of the structural alterations pointed out to me, were undertaken for the special purpose of adding to the comfort of the staff, which goes to prove that every care has been taken in this respect.

My description would not be complete if I did not say a few words about the Office. We get a glimpse of it from the entrance, and a very pleasant room it is, just the room where a prospective guest would make a reservation straight away; it has that "inviting" atmosphere.

This ended my very pleasant visit to the

"Foyer Suisse," and before I close I would like once more to mention two points which very much impressed me. There is first of all a cleanliness apparent which extends over all parts of the buildings, and hand in hand with it goes an atmosphere of cheerfulness caused by a really artistic decoration scheme.

I have not the slightest doubt that the comfort of the guests has been studied in every detail, the service is extremely efficient and unobtrusive, and every reasonable improvement has been made to simplify the work of the staff, to whom every consideration is shown.

A very welcome fact, especially for Swiss visitors is, that they can converse in "Schwizerdütsch" and French both with the waitresses and chambermaids.

Casting a glance back over the Lounge on parting from my amiable guide I noticed a general look of contentment on the faces of the guests who were taking their coffee, and this is undoubtedly a proof that they are happy and comfortable at the "Foyer Suisse," I would be happy too, where I to stay there if still a bachelor.



A corner of the Reading and Writing Room.

#### A FINE FRENCH AND AN AUSTRIAN FILM AT THE ACADEMY CINEMA.

After an exceptionally long run of the magnificent Austrian film "Maskerade," the Academy Cinema follows this success of the Continental film art with two fine new productions from the Continent. One of them is a French film interpretation of Vicki Baums novel "Hell in Fransee," published in England as "Martin's Summer" and rechristened in France "Lac Aux Dames." The film has an exquisite setting, all the acting taking place in the Tirolean Alps. Erich Hell, the hero of the novel, who is poor as a church mouse, but fascinates all the ladies in his position as a swimming teacher, is beautifully interpreted by Jean Pierre Aumont. The lovable character of Puck, the wilful daughter of the eccentric baron, half child half woman somewhat after the manner of Elisabeth Bergner, is most

delightfully acted by Simone Simon. The whole film is inspired by a romantic conception which is sure to appeal to the heart of any audience, even of those who do not understand French. If the romanticism is on occasions overdone, such as in connection with the, for our time, absurd reticence of the youth about his being too poor to marry a rich man's daughter, this is the fault of the author rather than of the production.

Apart from this full length French film the Academy Cinema is showing the same programme an excellent 30 minutes "short," interpreting in an original manner Heinrich von Kleists classical comedy "Der zerbrochene Krug." It is done in German by a Viennese company directed by Ernst Angel and it has been awarded a prize of high distinction at the International Sound-Film Competition in Vienna of 1934.

Dr. E.

#### ENGLAND — A MODEL?

By DR. D. SCHINDLER.

##### 1. Grey is all theory.

For some time, accounts of economic improvement have been coming from England and this news news has been eagerly seized by the inflationists in other countries. In their opinion, the favourable effects of the English currency depreciation have at last materialised. This view has apparently been spread designedly by England. The English press is always asserting that the Sterling Bloc is in the ascendancy, while the countries of the Gold Bloc, according to English views, are languishing economically. Thus, the gold countries are encouraged by England to go off the gold standard and to join the Sterling Bloc. It seems to be mainly the English banking world that is anxious for this to happen, as the English industry could have no interest in recommending the abandonment of the gold standard abroad, seeing that this would increase international competition and render export more difficult. The English banking world would, on the other hand, have an interest in the gold countries following the English example, for if the gold countries maintain the gold standard, the almost illimited confidence the English banking world has been enjoying up to now will be greatly lessened and probably a large part of the international credit and insurance business will go to countries which have proved reliable for creditors.

Nothing must, of course, transpire in the English press; the course followed by England must on the contrary be commended to other countries as the road to recovery. Thus the "Economist" has recently published a special Supplement written by Sir Henry Strakosch and entitled the "Road to Recovery" and this road to recovery is, of course, the depreciation of the pound which has given a new upward impulse to the countries of the Sterling Bloc. The gold countries on the other hand are depicted as having got themselves into such a position, by adopting a so-called "deflationary policy," that prices and wages have driven each other lower and lower, without ever reaching a state of equilibrium. It is the sage story that has been told to us at home by those who initiated the demand for a referendum regarding measures to deal with the depression. The lowering of prices must lead to a reduction in wages, and a lowering of wages must in turn lead to a fall in prices, so that finally things get into a vicious circle. With this method of reasoning wages and prices should eventually drop to zero when everything would be obtained for nothing, which would not be such a bad condition of affairs. If, however, this state of things is not attainable, equilibrium between prices and wages must be reached somewhere, in spite of all predictions to the contrary, and will be reached. Of course, it is not possible to say beforehand what will be the point where equilibrium will be attained; if it had been known, there would have been no crisis. During the period of boom it was also not known beforehand up to what point prices and wages would rise, but they rose until the purchasing power flagged, and during the depression, they have to drop until actual purchasing power, not created by Government action, arrests the dropping prices. In the case of most raw materials it is plain that this point has already been attained and in the case of many manufactured goods too; this point would probably have been reached more or less everywhere if currency depreciations, increase in tariffs, hindrances of all kinds to trade had not rendered the sale of so many goods on the World market more and more difficult.

The fact that the gold countries have not yet reached a state of equilibrium between production and consumption, gives the English the pretext of pointing out the apparent lack of success of the so-called deflation policy; they, however, wisely keep quiet the fact that their inflation policy has failed still more completely in attaining its object, seeing that the latter was, as attested sufficiently often by the leading Statesmen of England to bring about a general rise in prices and to get rid of unemployment. As a result of the drop in prices, the English industry had ceased to be able to work on a profitable basis and it was desired to eliminate artificially through the depreciation of the pound the drop in prices. It had plainly been reckoned that a depreciation of the currency by 20 to 25% would lead to a general increase in prices to the extent of the same percentage, in the depreciated currency, so that work would be restored to a profitable basis. This has, however, proved to be an entire miscalculation both in England and America. The prices have not improved by a long way, to the extent that had been hoped; they have, in great part, remained stationary and have even in a few industries dropped still further. On the basis of pure calculation, a depreciation of the currency by 40% should lead to a rise in prices of about 70% so as to reach once more the former gold value. When compared with Switzerland, wholesale prices have up to now only risen by about 15% in England and by about 30% in the United