

Swiss furniture sets for Great Britain : a munificent gift

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SWISS FURNITURE SETS FOR GREAT BRITAIN.

A Munificent Gift.

To show the appreciation of our countrymen, both here in England and at home, for the sacrifices this great country has made during the last war for the greatest of all causes, namely Freedom and Liberty, it was decided, soon after the termination of hostilities, to testify our admiration in a practical way.

As far back as May, 1946, 100 sets of furniture consisting of: two beds, a wardrobe, a kitchen table, four stools, and a set of kitchenware, were handed over to the British authorities as a present from the Swiss Colony in Great Britain, followed by another 50 sets from the Zurich section of the Swiss Red Cross.

Hardly had this presentation been made, and acknowledged with warm tokens of gratitude, when the "Don Suisse" announced, that they would allocate to Great Britain a further 950 sets, and these were duly delivered and distributed to bombed out families in the British Isles.

Hundreds of letters were received by the recipients expressing sincere appreciation of the services those simple sets were rendering, and the wish was expressed that more furniture of this kind would prove a great help. The "Don Suisse," however, having tried to relieve the misery in other war-stricken countries, had no more funds available.

With the fullest support of Monsieur P. Ruegger, Swiss Minister, the "Conseil pour l'Etude des Problèmes Suisses" (Swiss Council) offered to make a direct appeal to the friends of British people in Switzerland. As tact is required concerning any offer of help to the British people, no publicity was made.

Early this year an appeal was launched in the form of a personal letter, signed by the Chairman of the Council, Mr. E. Steiner and its Hon. Secretary, Mr. A. Renou. During a stay in Switzerland of the latter, the Swiss Committee of the "Swiss Furniture for England Fund" was formed.

National-Councillor Heinrich Schnyder assumed its Presidency, while M. Charles Veillon of Lausanne became President of the committee Romand. At the very beginning it was made clear, that the gifts should come from the Swiss people, and not from selected individuals. For that reason, the various workers associations were also invited; they responded with great enthusiasm and substantial help.

To-day, the magnificent sum of Frs.s.350,000.— has been collected. To this sum must be added all contributions such as printing, transport (a very heavy item, borne entirely by the Association of Transport firms) enabling every centime of the collection to be spent on the furniture. Not one penny has been spent on administration, travelling, etc. All these expenses have been borne by those interested in the work as their contribution. This made it possible to buy 600 complete Aermo sets to which has been added a pair of bed sheets per bed.

Under the supervision and in full agreement with the Ministry of Health the W.V.S., who have rendered such splendid service in selecting the families who received the "Don Suisse" Aermo sets, have once more undertaken the distribution of the furniture. The W.V.S. works in close collaboration with the local authorities and inspects every family who is deemed

eligible to receive furniture sets, so that not one of them is going but to the most deserving cases.

Apart from the 200 sets now going to the London Region, about 340 sets will go to the provinces, Scotland and Wales and the remaining 60 to London.

To mark this occasion it was decided that a little ceremony should be held, which took place on Monday, October 27th, 1947, at the L.C.C.'s County Hall.

Amongst the numerous audience were the Minister of Health, Mr. Aneurin Bevan, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, Lady Nathan, Chairman of the L.C.C., Lady Hillingdon, Vice-Chairman of the W. V.S., Dame Beryl Oliver, British Red Cross, and a number of Mayors of the various London Boroughs.

From the Swiss Legation and the Swiss Colony were present: Monsieur A. Escher, Monsieur et Madame P. H. Aubaret, Monsieur M. Heimo, Monsieur A. Rappard, Monsieur A. R. Lindt, Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Bernheim, Mrs. P. Bessire, Mr. and Mrs. L. Chapuis, Mr. and Mrs. C. Campart, Mr., Mrs. and Miss R. de Cintra, Mr. and Mrs. W. Deutsch, Mr. J. A. Donat, Dr. H. W. Egli, Mr. Ch. Fer, Mr. W. Gamper, Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Grau, Mr. and Mrs. Ch. Gysin, Mr. Th. Haller, Rev. Lanfranchi, Mr. E. Nater, Dr. A. Kunzle, Mr. H. Oswald, Mr. and Mrs. A. Renoud, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Suter, Mr. G. E. Suter, Mr. and Mrs. Ch. Seinet, Mr. H. Steiner, Mr. F. G. Sommer, Mr. R. Weist, etc.

Lady Nathan, Chairman of the L.C.C., took the Chair soon after 3 o'clock, and in her opening address expressed her pleasure to Mr. Aneurin Bevan and the



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Swiss Minister for their presence at this very happy gathering. She expressed her deep gratitude to the Swiss Minister for the sympathy Switzerland has once again shown to her country in presenting them with these gifts of furniture, she also paid a warm tribute to our country for having welcomed hundreds of British children for a holiday and thus brought them back to health and strength.

Mr. Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, said that it was a particular pleasure for him to attend this gathering, where such useful gifts as these were presented, especially as this country was so terribly short of timber. He continued, "We are indeed grateful for your generosity which is a further proof of the happy relationship between the two countries."

The Minister of Health then mentioned the many schemes whereby British war invalids and children were enabled to spend a holiday in the pure air of our country, enjoying good and healthy food. "We do not forget and cannot forget, and the British people and the British Government greatly appreciate this remarkable show of understanding" the Minister said amidst applause. Referring to the extra gifts of linen sheets, Mr. Bevan struck a humorous note by saying that, although this country actually manufactures these articles, they are being sent away to help the export drive. The Minister of Health closed his address by asking the Swiss Minister to convey to the Swiss people the hearty thanks of the people of Great Britain. (*Loud Applause.*)

Monsieur Paul Ruegger, the Swiss Minister, then

addressed the company. He thanked both the Chairman and Mr. Bevan for the friendly feelings towards our country which their words had conveyed. "I am sure that all my compatriots present at this gathering will remember gratefully all that has been said with such true and most kindly understanding of Switzerland's endeavours."

The Minister then gave a short *exposé* of how this scheme came into life, paying a tribute to Mr. H. Steiner, Chairman of the Council, Mr. A. Renoud, the untiring Secretary of this institution and National-Councillor, Heinrich Schnyder, for their work and untiring efforts, and to all the donors to this Fund.

He paid a no less warm tribute to that admirable organisation, the Women's Voluntary Services, its great and able President and to her experienced assistant, Lady Hillingdon, saying that it was thanks to this organisation, ever closely in touch with the needs of the moment, that immediately and without delay, the method of distribution of these sets of furniture had been so efficiently worked out.

The Minister said that we full well realise that these efforts are yet on a small scale, and that we Swiss shall never forget that the efforts of the English people to help others everywhere are proportionally so much greater. He concluded his oration by saying that Switzerland will not forget what the world owes to England. (*Loud Applause.*)

Lady Hillingdon, Vice-Chairman, W.V.S., expressed, on behalf of the bombed out people, not only in London but also in the Provinces, the deepest gratitude for the help and cheer given to them, saying that this gesture of friendship was a valuable asset in the relationship between the two countries.

Mr. Haywood, leader of the L.C.C., then proposed a vote of thanks both to the Swiss Minister and to the Swiss people, which was carried amidst acclamation.

Before this simple and yet impressive ceremony came to a close, Mme A. Renou drew the names from a box, of those who were lucky enough to receive the furniture.

In terminating this account of a function which left a deep impression on all those who were privileged to attend, I wish to congratulate, in the first instance, the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems and its President, Mr. H. Steiner, for having brought this really remarkable scheme to such a successful conclusion, I feel sure, that I cause no heartburning amongst the members of the Council, if I pay a special tribute to the Hon Secretary of the Council, Mr. A. Renou, who has rendered such great services to this fine cause.

He has carried out a tremendous scheme with great ability and foresight, and his share in the success of this undertaking is a remarkable one. Both the Council and Mr. Renou were very ably assisted by the collaboration of National Councillor H. Schnyder and M. Veillon, in Switzerland, who also deserve to be mentioned.

A work based on charitable love and fellowship has thus found its happy conclusion, a work which will bring our two countries still nearer to each other, a deeper understanding will lead, let us hope, to the appreciation of each others difficulties in whatever sphere this may be.

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