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NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

**Annual General Meeting at the Dorchester Hotel,
on Saturday, January 25th, 1947.**

When is a funeral not a funeral?, this question might have been asked by those who expected to assist at the burial of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

For some weeks rumours of all kinds were rampant in the Colony, of meetings behind closed doors, and in various camps; of conspiracy, plots and what not's, the situation became so dense that I intended, imitating one of the Dailies, to put the following Headlines in the "*Swiss Observer*":

**BIG SWISS SOCIETY ON BRINK OF COLLAPSE
PRESIDENT AND COMMITTEE THREATEN TO
COMMIT HARI-KARI.**

On second thoughts, I decided to "wait and see," and I am glad that I did not follow my erst-while "intuition" which ran away with me in a weak moment.

Those who attended the Luncheon, Meeting, Tea and Lecture, with the idea of attending a burial feast, and those, who came along, because they thought there might be a chance of witnessing a capital row, must have been sadly disappointed. There were no tears, no sobbing and no wreaths, and instead of sad faces there was laughter and good spirit (apart from that served at the cock-tail bar) everywhere.

A very good Luncheon was served by the Management of the Dorchester Hotel, and at its conclusion the President, Mr. A. F. Suter, proposed the customary Toasts to H. M. the King and to Switzerland, followed by a few words of welcome to the official guests, amongst whom were: The Swiss Minister accompanied by Madame Ruegger, Professor and Madame Bertrand of Geneva, Monsieur and Madame Aubaret, Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Boos, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, Mr. R. de Cintra, representing Mr. Bon, President of the City Swiss Club, who owing to indisposition was unable to attend, Mr. and Mrs. C. Campart, President of the Secours Mutuels, Mr. Th. Ritter, Fonds de Secours, Mr. Sommer, President of the Swiss Male Choir, Madame Bolla, President of the Rutli's Ladies Club, Mr. C. Ferrari, President of the Unione Ticinese, Mr. A. Stauffer, *Swiss Observer*, Messrs. Pellet and P. Dick of the Swiss Orchestral Society, Mr. Stoeri, President of the Swiss Club (Schweizerbund), Pasteur Pradervand, Father Lanfranchi and Pfarrer Blum, Mr. and Miss Unden and Mr. Bossert.

Some of the above guests, were not mentioned by the President, or were announced in bits and pieces, later in the afternoon, no doubt, owing to the intense strain under which the President was labouring. These omissions are herewith corrected, and everybody should be happy again.

Monsieur Paul Ruegger, the Swiss Minister, who received a hearty reception, then addressed the company, stressing the point, that the Society must, under all circumstances carry on, expressing thanks to the outgoing President and his collaborators, and extending best wishes for the new "Management." It

was perhaps, under the existing circumstances, not very easy to deliver this address, but as a born diplomat, the Minister accomplished his task in a brilliant manner; it is a pity that the microphone behaved in such a naughty way, I could have thrown a brick at it.

The President then declared the 32nd Annual General Meeting as opened, and Mr. Campart, a former Secretary of the Society, read out the minutes of the last General Annual Meeting. After these minutes were unanimously accepted, the President, Mr. A. F. Suter, read out his Presidential address as follows:—

I have the honour to lay before you the 32nd Annual Presidential Address which will give you a short account of the activity and welfare of the London Group during the year 1946.

After the last Annual General Meeting on February 2nd, 1946, the Council held six separate meetings, at which the representatives of the Swiss Mercantile Society, the Secours Mutuels and the Unione Ticinese usually participated. On December the 17th the Council convened an Extraordinary General Meeting in order to discuss the future of the Group, to which I shall refer in greater detail at a later stage.

For the members of the Group six monthly meetings were arranged during the period at Conway Hall, where we enjoyed the benefit of lectures by Dr. Cottier of the Office Suisse des Transports, by Mr. Robert Prew, late editor of the *Daily Mail*, by our old friend Prof. Arnold Latt, by Mr. A. Escher,

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of the Legation, by Mrs. Corbett-Ashby, a very famous British feminist, and by Prof. de Beer of University College London.

The Group has started the period with a membership of 232, of which 181 were active, paying members, and we register to-day a membership of 224 with 196 active paying members. I will not attempt to speculate upon the reasons why the attendances at the monthly meetings throughout the year have been very poor, probably of an average not exceeding 40, despite the excellent lecturers provided and the fact that we have had the encouragement of the presence of our Minister whenever his duties allowed him to attend. Quite naturally, these circumstances prevented the Council from arranging a large number of meetings or from approaching other important personalities for lectures and addresses.

On the other hand we were able to make all the arrangements for a lecture tour to the Swiss colonies in Birmingham, Manchester and Dunfermline by Prof. Arnold Latt, who, together with Prof. Faesi and Prof. Bovet, had been sent across by PRO HELVETIA to renew and keep contact with the Swiss in Great Britain. A number of our members also attended the official Pro Helvetia lecture of Prof. Arnold Latt at the Royal Society of Arts in April.

As in former years, our Group took their part in the Fête Suisse and the First of August Celebration. Per contra we have been unable to obtain new and attractive films from Berne and therefore could

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not offer the colony those shows which at one time were so much enjoyed by so many London Swiss.

I have purposely kept this report very short, giving you merely the facts which have led up to the change in the constitution of the Group which shall be effected to-day. In last year's Presidential address at this table I had stated:— "After eighteen years of chairmanship of the Group I have now decided to resign this office, and you will have to find the third President within the next six months." Failing to do so within the eleven months of the year, the Council decided in the twelfth month, that is on December the 19th, to put the issue to the test.

At heart we were all convinced that the Group should and could not die, but we were equally certain that it was absolutely necessary to find fresh support from outside the Group. The manner of securing that outside support — however questionable that manner might have appeared to some people — I am happy to say has been successful. In this knowledge I wish to express here the sincerest thanks to the Minister, both of the Council and myself personally, for putting his finger on the magic button, or better said, his magic finger on the button.

A list of candidates for the new Council is in the hands of all the members; in the large majority of them we greet the new members who represent this outside support so badly needed by the Group. The old Council, with the exception of the three gentlemen standing for election, in relinquishing their posts and gladly reverting to ordinary membership, offer their successors a very hearty welcome and wish them God speed and success in their new labours.

This being the President's "swan song" everybody gave him an extra cheer.

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Schedler, acquainted the Meeting with the financial position, which he termed as satisfactory, and consequently the accounts were accepted with thanks to the treasurer.

This concluded the first part of the Agenda, and Mr. Suter proposed that Mr. J. J. Boos, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, should take the Chair

pro temp. This met with approval, and Mr. Boos was duly installed in his temporary office.

He expressed his thanks for having been asked to preside during the elections, and before proceeding, extended to the retiring President the appreciation of the members for the work he had rendered during the nineteen years of his Presidency, including some of his colleagues and co-workers, namely Mr. G. Keller, Mr. C. Campart (former Secretary for 30 years), Messrs. Renz, Steiner and Schedler.

Mr. Boos referred to the recent loss which the Society has suffered through the death of Mr. G. Wüthrich, who in the early days of the Society had rendered valuable services to the London Group, and asked the company to rise from their seats to honour the memory of the deceased.

After acquainting the Meeting with the names of those Gentlemen, who had accepted the nomination for the new Council, the election was proceeded with. Pending the announcement of the result, Mr. Boos gave the word to Pasteur Pradervand, who associated himself with the President pro temp. in thanking the former President and Council for their services rendered.

Mr. Manzoni, a former President of the Swiss Male Choir, made a fervent appeal for a closer collaboration amongst the Swiss Societies. Dr. Egli supported this appeal, and suggested that Swiss who became naturalised should be admitted as members, also Swiss born ladies who married Englishmen should have an opportunity to join. As this involves alteration of the rules, this suggestion, which met with general approval, was put ad acta for future consideration. Mr. C. Kunzle (Birmingham) gave a short resumé of his efforts to build a bridge between our two countries, saying that he will not rest until this has been achieved.

The result of the elections was then announced and the following were elected as members of the new Council:—

Messrs. P. H. Aubaret, Dr. H. W. Egli, F. E. L. Ferraris, C. Ferrari, W. Kilchenmann, Dr. A. R. Lindt, Dr. G. Kullmann, Dr. E. Spuhler, A. J. Staehelin, H. Wasmer, A. Tall, A. Renou, C. Weilenmann, R. Weist. Auditors: Weber and Roethlisberger.

Mr. Boos then invited Dr. Egli (who will act as President with Mr. A. Tall as Secretary) to take the

Chair expressing to him and the Gentlemen elected heartiest congratulations and best wishes for their future efforts.

One compliment deserves another, and Dr. Egli promptly thanked Mr. Boos for the very efficient way he had acted as temporary chairman.

Now never let it be said again, that Society work is an unthankful job, as there now followed a real orgy of appreciation and congratulations.

As is only proper, the new President, in the first instance thanked the members for showing their confidence in him by calling him to the helm, and he then extended compliments to the late President, proposing that the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, should be elected Honorary President, and Mr. A. F. Suter, Honorary Vice-President of the Society. This suggestion was accepted unanimously and with acclamation.

Dr. Egli gave a short account of his efforts to secure a new body of men to carry on, saying that, through all his preliminary talks he had the full support of the Swiss Minister, and the result of his conversations with some of the prominent members of the Swiss Colony were almost staggering.

He said, that the new Council is particularly anxious to attract the participation of the ladies of the Colony in the projected discussions and active work. The tentative program in view (see below) comprises much of particular interest to the ladies and to which they could make particularly valuable contributions.

PROGRAM.

A free discussion, open to all members of the Swiss Colony, will be held on February 6th, at 7—8.30 p.m., at the VIENNA CAFE, Berkeley Arcade, Baker Street, W.1 (opposite Baker Street Station), (put at our disposal by our member Mr. J. Dubs, the proprietor), to inaugurate our program on the basic problem:—

How to maintain and strengthen allegiance to Switzerland

- among: (a) the emigrated Swiss
(b) their foreign-born wives
(c) their children.

It is hoped that from this discussion a variety of suggestions for practical work in this field, to be undertaken by the N.S.H. and its members will emerge, while also pointing to special questions which need fuller examination in further open discussions or closed meetings. One of them is undoubtedly the question of

A Swiss Centre.

Is the establishment of a Swiss Centre desirable? What are its functions and requirements? What practical and continuing support can the Swiss Colony ensure?

An open discussion of this problem, to which all members of the Swiss Colony are invited, will be held on March 6th (Thursday) at the same time and place.

* * *

A third open discussion on the special problem of *How to stimulate the love of Switzerland among our Children* will probably emerge from our first discussion. Should

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a Swiss School be established here, or facilitated courses organized in Switzerland? Are holidays in Switzerland enough or are longer periods in Switzerland necessary, and at what age? Under what facilitated conditions?

* * *

Other questions to be usefully discussed are:

The Swiss Observer, how to support and improve it, how to ensure as wide a distribution as possible?

Ways and means to influence the Home-land.

How to formulate and assert our views on important Swiss questions?

Should a special parliamentary representation of the Swiss abroad be demanded? Joint action with other Swiss Colonies?

* * *

How to cultivate and stimulate Anglo-Swiss Friendship?

Swiss help for England? English facilities for Swiss immigration?

Lectures to English audiences? Letters to newspapers, to authors writing on Switzerland, to thank them or to correct them?

* * *

On the first Thursday of every month open meetings will be arranged to discuss these and other questions.

But our purpose is not only to talk, indispensable though this is to keep our minds keyed up to continuous thought concerned with our country. It is fully intended to organize *positive action wherever the discussions have shown this to be desirable*. There will be more than enough to do for every Swiss desirous to contribute in a practical way to the furtherance of the widest interests of our country. One such very personal task urged on everyone is to *establish close contact with any countryman* tending to stray from the fold or isolate himself. The names and addresses of all such "finds" should be communicated to our Hon. Secretary for official efforts of contact on the part of the N.S.H.

* * *

For the foreign-born wives in the Swiss Colony and for Swiss children grown up here, also for the emigrated whose knowledge of Switzerland may have

grown a little vague or dim, special

Lecture Courses with documentary film-shows are projected on:

- (a) Swiss History.
- (b) Swiss Constitution, political and social life.
- (c) Switzerland to-day and to-morrow.
- (d) Swiss costumes, songs, art, dialects.
- (e) Swiss enterprise abroad.
- (f) What others say about Switzerland, etc.

The interest in these courses will be enlivened by organizing *Essay-competitions, costume-shows* with prizes etc.

The *Library* of the N.S.H. will be brought up-to-date and enriched by new books on Switzerland, newspaper-cuttings, etc.

Dialect Readings at informal group-meetings might be organized.

The social pleasurable possibilities of our gatherings will not be neglected. A la carte meals will be available before all meetings.

Informal Dances might follow some meetings if sufficiently supported.

Sing-Songs might be held with the assistance of hidden talents, instruments, etc., refreshing our memories with beloved old tunes from home.

Thus can be seen that the new Council, under new leadership is anxious to start a new era of intense activity, and it is sincerely hoped that they will find the support in their creditable endeavours.

The Meeting was then closed, and the company adjourned to partake of tea, during which Miss Unden gave a short piano recital which was much enjoyed.

Monsieur Aubaret, from the Swiss Legation introduced to the gathering, Dr. Bertrand, Professor of Literature and History at the University of Geneva, who addressed the members. His excellent lecture was greatly appreciated and it was a befitting ending to a memorable day.

May the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London Group, prosper and become a valuable addition to the existing different Societies in the Swiss Colony in London.

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