

Prof. Laett's reminiscences an N.S.H. talk

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PROF. LAETT'S REMINISCENCES. AN N.S.H. TALK.

On July 10th the London Group of the NSH celebrated its 40th anniversary. It had invited for this occasion Prof. Arnold Lätt, the first former Secretary of the London Group, to come over from Zürich and deliver the main address. Prof. Lätt reminded his hearers of the fact that the main reason for the formation of the Group was the need of an organisation to combat the pronounced animosity amongst the British public in the first world war against the Swiss.

It seemed difficult for many Britishers to differentiate between the German enemy and the German Swiss. It became necessary first of all to establish a patriotic society to help all Swiss in England to underline their Swiss identity. Secondly it seemed highly desirable to have someone to defend Switzerland and the Swiss against the many forms of denigration of their good name in the Press and elsewhere.

With the encouragement and support of the then Swiss Minister, Monsieur G. Carlin, the initiators of the London Group secured the willing support of all other Societies, who sent a delegate each to the Group's Council. The membership of the NSH grew quickly to about 600. The work to be performed by the group increased even more rapidly. It became necessary to employ a full time secretary, who quite soon had to engage further help, first one and for a time a second assistant secretary. The procurement of the necessary funds was not altogether easy, but there were many business men in those days, willing to dip deeply into their pockets or their bank balance to help out when it became necessary. Donations of £100 and more, encouraging others to follow suit, were no rarity.

Dr. Arnold Lätt had almost every day occasion to answer some misrepresentation of Switzerland in the press. He lectured at various clubs, universities and institutes. He made a special point to cultivate the friendship of all those in important positions who

were well disposed towards Switzerland. There were also Swiss friends at the various universities: Prof. Shipley and Prof. Oppenheimer in Cambridge, Prof. Paul Studer, a romanist, at Oxford, Sir Gregory Foster at the University College London. Amongst alpinist friends the lecturer mentioned Sir Henry and Arnold Lunn and Coolidge. Amongst writers and journalists he enumerated especially the poet Sir Henry Newbolt, the novelist Arnold Bennett, John Buchan (later Lord Tweedsmuir), A. Spender, Editor of the 'Westminster Gazette,' A. G. Gardiner, of the 'Star and Daily News,' Harold Spender who wrote a book "In praise of Switzerland". Amongst diplomatists and politicians Prof. Lätt singled out as our specially good friends Lord James Bryce, former Ambassador in U.S.A. and author of a book on "Modern Democracies", in which Switzerland was treated with very special respect; C. P. Scott, Editor of the 'Manchester Guardian,' son-in-law of a Swiss chainmaker, Hans Renold from Aarau, Lord Burnham of the 'Daily Telegraph'.

In those difficult years the following members of our Colony rendered particularly important services to the London Group: Jean Baer, the President, César Campart, Honorary Secretary, Theo Ritter, G. Wüthrich, representing the Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon, J. Aguet (Néstlé), Pasteur Hoffmann-de-Visme, A. F. Suter, treasure and later president, Paul Walser etc. Good councillors were also Minister Carlin, Counsellor of Legation Charles Paravicini, later to become our Minister for many years, and Commercial Attaché Henri Martin. From Switzerland the Group enjoyed the active support of the Mother Society, its President Steck of the Aluminium Industrie A.G., Prof. Gonzague de Reynold, Dr. Hermann Schoop, Prof. Pierre Kohler and André de Bavier.

The work of the London Group was supported by other Colonies such as India, Alexandria and Cairo (Alfred Reinhardt and M. Tremblay), Paris, Le Havre, Milan with Ulrico Hoeppli, Buenos Aires with E. Aguet, who formed 15 groups in South America, Banquier Iselin, Consul Schwarzenbach, etc.

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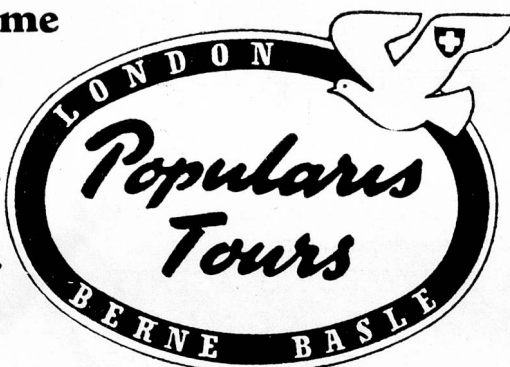
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The London Group was instrumental in getting the Secrétariat pour les Suisses à l'Étranger, the so-called "Auslandschweizerwerk" established. Prof. Lätt has co-operated intimately with the Auslandschweizerwerk after his return to Switzerland. For ten years he presided the Auslandschweizerkommission and conducted several financial campaigns with the support of Dr. H. Daeniker, of the Zürcher Kantonalbank and Prof. Nabholz. Prof. Lätt was the first editor of the "Swiss Observer" in 1919/20, when already the main work was being done by Fred Stauffer, soon to become the sole editor for so many years. On his return to Switzerland Prof. Lätt became the editor of the monthly "Echo" from 1925-44, of the Jahrbuch "Die Schweiz", from 1929-54. Under his direction "Meine Heimat" was produced in all languages of the country, as also in Spanish, but not in English. From 1924-1954 Prof. Lätt broadcast regularly summaries of events for the Swiss abroad. In 1939 Prof. Lätt became a member of the "Stiftung Pro Helvetic" and director of the Group for Cultural Propaganda Abroad.

The economic crisis of 1920 with its inflation, mass unemployment etc. quickly curtailed the means available to the London Group. Prof. Lätt's successors were Dr. Paul Lang and Agéonor Kraft, but the Group had soon after to give up the luxury of maintaining these fully paid officers. The work hitherto carried on in London, was however largely transferred to and expanded by the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Étranger established at Berne, under the Leadership of R. de Traz, Ed. Steuri, Miss Briod, Ed. Zellweger, J. Job and W. Imhof, whom Dr. E. M. Mörgeli, Dr. Christ and Dr. Störi have since succeeded.

In the subsequent discussion our Minister, M. A. Daeniker, our old friend W. Deutsch, as well as the former President A. F. Suter and the present Chairman duly praised the value of the sterling work performed by Prof. Lätt. Having retired from his professorship, he proposes to use his time for completing some further writings about old Swiss colonies and their important personalities.

Dr. Egli invited the meeting later on to express an opinion on his suggestion regarding the use to be made of the 121 million Swiss Francs for the benefit of the Swiss abroad who suffered war damage without receiving compensation. The restriction of such help according to the new proposal of the Federal Government, to cases of need is warmly approved of by the London Group. At the same time the meeting agreed to the suggestion that, if any part of the 121 million Frs. is not needed for such help, it should be kept as a nucleus to aid future Swiss victims of war or of force majeure. This might take the form of an initial capital contribution to the "Fond de Solidarité" for the Swiss abroad, the formation of which is being studied actively by various authorities and organisations in Switzerland. It is proposed that the representatives of the London Group at the forthcoming Journée des Suisses à l'Étranger should, apart from this question, also plead once again for special facilities being granted by the AHV for participation by those unwilling or unable to devote 4% of their income as premiums. It is hoped that other societies will also make an effort to be represented at the Journée, which takes place at Locarno on August 25/26th.

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