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NSH London group hold their annual dinner

MRS Mariann Meier was a remarkable woman who had obviously won the respect and affection of everyone present, said the Swiss Ambassador, M. Claude Caillat, when with Madame Caillat he attended the annual dinner of the London group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

M. Caillat recalled that he had been posted to London many years ago, and had always hoped to return there. He said the embassy would be delighted to continue hosting NSH events and looked forward to continuing good relations with the society.

In welcoming Ambassador and Madame Caillat, who were attending their first NSH function, Mrs Meier, president of the NSH, thanked the embassy for acting as "landlords" to the society's various meetings and expressed her pleasure at M. Caillat's acceptance of the honorary presidency of the society.

She then proceeded with what she called her "roll call", asking every person present to stand up and be presented. This began with the guests seated at the table of honour and continued throughout the room, Mrs Meier unfailingly recalling the name and main activities of the people presented.

One lady who happened to be left out was presented at a later stage, with apologies from the president for the inadvertent omission.

As Mrs Meier explained, the roll call was instituted six years ago in the presence of Ambassador Albert Weitnauer. She said that it offered a fair cross section of the Swiss community in London, and this certainly seemed to be the case. It was an appropriate way of "presenting the colony" to our new ambassador.

She began by greeting the members of the embassy present, including Minister Karl Fritschi. She presented Mr Ernst

Presenting the colony to our new Ambassador

Tangemann in his capacity as vice-president of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK, representing the president, Mr Bernard Simon, who had been unable to attend.

Mrs Meier also mentioned other compatriots with responsibilities in the life of the Swiss societies. In particular Mrs Edith Crack, president of the Consistoire, Mr Jacomelli, president of the Unione Ticinese, and Mr and Mrs Jaccard, representing Mr Hausermann, president of the Swiss Mercantile Society.

Gruelling tour

Among the embassy staff who had sent apologies, press secretary Peter Schweizer had explained that he needed some rest, having just returned from a gruelling tour of Switzerland to show the country to 12 British journalists who were to accompany the Queen during her forthcoming visit.

Mrs Meier also presented Dr Hans Egli, whom she described as the "cultural doyen" of the colony. Turning to Mr Glarner, vice-president of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, she expressed many regrets that he and his family were soon going to return to Switzerland and thus deprive her of a possible successor as president.

When Mrs Meier had finished her roll call she referred to a number of themes of interest to the NSH, particularly the work

of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, at which she has been representing the south of Britain for many years and where, incidentally, she was for a long time the only woman among 80 men.

The commission had done many useful things for the Swiss abroad, such as doing away with the military exemption tax for Swiss men abroad, instituting a permit to buy land and making possible the inclusion, in the Federal Constitution, of a new article which would authorise the Confederation to legislate on the welfare and the political rights of the Swiss abroad.

However, it strongly regretted that a draft under study of a revised constitution contained no provisions for the Swiss abroad. Mrs Meier said that the commission had sent a letter of representation to the Federal Council. She recalled that the total revision of the constitution had been the theme of the last Assembly of the Swiss Abroad at Porrentruy.

In conclusion Mrs Meier spoke of the last yearbook of the NSH. Its outgoing editor, Mr Theo Choppard, had called it "The Swiss between irritation and hope". Mrs Meier said this work was "astounding, revealing and disquieting — but also inspiring".

She quoted a contributor to the yearbook as saying that the Swiss yearning for security, a trait expressed in the smooth functioning of the Swiss economic machine, was due in part to some inner insecurity.

Mr Tangemann spoke of the role of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK. He said that after having for years limited its activities to holding an annual dinner and meeting, the federation had actually begun to act.

It had done this in finding ways of ensuring the continued publication of the Swiss Observer, following the decision of Mr Oscar Boehringer, whose family had founded, published and supported the paper, to now present the publication as a gift to the Swiss community. Although nothing had yet been finalised, it was safe to say that the paper's future was now secure.

The dinner had been preceded by the annual general meeting, when it was agreed to keep the subscription at £2 a year.

Council elections

The following were elected to the council: Messrs Béguin, Berti, Mrs Burri, Dr Egli, Messrs Glarner, Glauser, Indermuehle, Mrs Meier, Miss Oswald, Messrs Renz, Schmid, B. Simon and R. Simon, and Mrs Sharp. Miss Bonzon replaces Miss Duerr as secretary, Messrs Asch and Schedler were lost to the council through death, and Mr Schaerer had resigned.

During the meeting Mrs Meier referred to the difficulty of finding speakers from Switzerland. They were, she said, "always on holiday or in military service".



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