

Christmas celebration of the "Schwyzerchraenzli"

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CHRISTMAS AT THE SWISS CHURCH.

Sunday, 26th December, 1943.

A Christmas Celebration was held this afternoon at Endell Street, where the Swiss Church was packed with members of the colony from both the French and German-speaking Swiss congregations. In the centre of the altar stood an immense Christmas tree ablaze with candles, red and white, which had been sent from Switzerland for the occasion.

The celebration opened with Handel's Sonata played by the organ and two violins. The familiar Christmas story, as recorded in the gospel according to Luke, chapter 2, was read by Rev. M. Pradervand. Then a male choir sang: "O nuit calme et sereine."

Rev. Pradervand, in his address, laid special weight on the words in the christmas message: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people." Far from the homeland, speaking in different tongues, we have come together for the same purpose, to see the Christmas tree and to hear God's message: "Fear not"! We have entered the fifth year of the war, and fear in many forms, due to the uncertainty of our time, threatens us from many sides. Fear of illness, of death, of danger to relatives serving in the forces but stronger than fear sounds forth the angel's message: "Fear not"! It is not only a message of great joy to a few who saw Christ in the cradle, but it is meant for all who hear this message to-day. It is a divine message and therefore we are able to conquer fear.

After the address followed a violin duet: Pastorale by Corelli. A message of greetings and good wishes was read from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland, and then the choir from the "Schwyzerchränzli" sang: "Tochter Zion, freue dich, 'Jauchze laut, Jerusalem! Sieh', dein König kommt zu dir, Ja, er kommt, der Friedefürst"!.

Rev. Paul Rad, on behalf of the German-speaking Swiss congregation, spoke on the text: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". Rev. Rad mentioned that this message was originally proclaimed to those who were waiting for their Lord, but we may note that the words "this day" apply for the present time to all who seek the Saviour. They are very significant words and occur again and again in the Scriptures. They often represent a warning not to be hardened through sin, in departing from the living God, but accept His word as long as it is proclaimed. May we to-day receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, so that he can rule our hearts, control our thoughts, and direct our wills. May we be ready also to welcome this Saviour in our homes, so that He may give us His peace which passes all understanding, and the certainty of His abiding presence through time and eternity.

The celebration was concluded by the hymn: "Silent night, holy night," sung by the whole congregation.

A cup of tea was served to all who could stay and this gave an opportunity for many a friend to shake hands and to wish each other a Happy New Year. By and by the candles burnt down, and one worshipper after another left the church, pondering over the message of unspeakable joy: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, — Christ the Lord."

W.F.

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION OF THE "SCHWYZERCHRAENZLI."

A cold wind was sweeping down Holborn as I hurried along to Kingsway Hall on the afternoon of Wednesday, 22nd December. I was going to attend the Christmas Celebration of the "Schwyzerchränzli."

When I got there the Lecture Hall with its dark panelling looked warm and cosy. Long tables were laid for tea, and their simple decorations of fir-branches, pinecones and candles at once put one in a festive mood. While some ladies were busily making last minute preparations the 60 or 70 seats gradually filled up.

The communal singing of "Oh, Du Fröhliche" opened the programme, and by the shining faces one could tell with what pleasure the old carol was sung. Mr. W. Fischer, a member of the *Kirchenrat*, addressed the gathering in English and then in Swiss. It seemed that his homely speech was appreciated by everyone.

When the Christmas tree was lit up the Christmas atmosphere was complete. Many were the candles and happy the faces they illuminated. The choir sang several songs under the direction of Mr. E. P. Dick of Orchestral and Choral Society fame. Every one of the young girls gave her best, and the beautiful old hymns sounded refreshing and harmonious.

Some girls read the story of the birth of Jesus and others recited passages from the Scriptures. The fatherly kindness of Pastor Rad was always in evidence, when he prompted the girls who recited poems, when he led the congregation in prayer, and again in his address. In his usual way he held the audience spellbound when he related some of his personal experiences as a clergyman.

Punctually at 5 o'clock the young girls passed round cups of hot tea and platefuls of cakes. Home-made "Guezi" made by some of the members of the "Chränzli," "Schenkeli" and "Lebkuchen" presented by friends, and other delicious things were much appreciated by the few children present and grown-ups alike.

Some more singing both by the efficient choir and the whole community brought the party to an end. Pastor and Mrs. Rad well deserved the flowers which the girls presented to them. They had worked hard towards the success of the programme. The ready help and the sincerity which they both bring to everything they undertake in the *Schweizerkirche* has endeared them to everyone who knows them. — Many thanks, too, go to Mrs. G. Jenne. Her untiring energy and enthusiastic support are a great asset to the "Schwyzerchränzli."

After many chats and friendly handshakes we finally left the cosy hall for the cold darkness of Kingsway. It had been a happy party and one could have wished for nothing better to start the Christmas holidays with.

It is good to know, too, that at the "Schwyzerchränzli" young Swiss girls have an opportunity, every Wednesday afternoon, to meet others. The friendly atmosphere of these meetings makes it easier for many of them to bear the separation from their families at home.

Mariann.

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE, (London Group).

Annual General Meeting 1944.

The Annual General Meeting of the N.S.H. was held at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, on Saturday, January 15th.

The meeting, which was preceded by a luncheon, was attended by over 100 members and friends.

After the loyal toasts, the President, Mr. A. F. Suter, read out two greetings telegrams received from Prof. Dr. Lätt and the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger.

In welcoming the guests, the President mentioned that the Swiss Minister and Madame Thurnheer were unable to be present as they were still away in Switzerland. He was, however, pleased to announce that the Minister was represented by Monsieur A. Girardet, Chargé d'Affaires, whom he bade a very hearty welcome. He further extended cordial greetings to the Presidents of the sister Societies as well as the Heads of the Swiss Churches.

M. Girardet then rose to address the gathering in the following terms:—

“Monsieur le Président, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege, in the absence of our Minister, to represent the Legation at this gathering. As you certainly know, M. Thurnheer has left a few weeks ago for Switzerland, to report and contact our Government. This deprives M. and Mme Thurnheer of the pleasure of being with you to-day and bringing to you their personal good wishes for yourselves and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. I feel, however, sure that I am acting in accordance with their wishes in conveying to you their heartiest greetings.

Glancing through our files of correspondence with the Bernese Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger, which cover the war years, a fact I had always been aware of, namely that few and slender contacts had been made between the Swiss Colony of this country and the Secrétariat in Berne during this time, suddenly struck me with great force. It came home to me that none of you, none of us, was present at the 650th anniversary of the Foundation of the Confederation in 1940 and ever since, regarding all other manifestations of importance to our national life, you and we have had to content ourselves with watching from this island and waiting for the news and descriptions the papers bring us, at times with very long delays.

This severance of usual links between the Swiss in Great Britain and at home is felt far more acutely now than in the last war and indeed, when compared with the contacts other Swiss colonies abroad — not only on the Continent, but in the U.S.A. and the Republics of South America, in the Near and Middle East — have the good luck to have, I must say that our chances of contact have been very poor indeed.

This handicap cuts both ways. Not only have you — as all of us — not heard overmuch home news and reports on the activities which have been and are increasingly becoming the special sphere of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger, but you yourselves, through your President, M. Suter, have only been able at long intervals to convey to the

Society your thoughts and suggestions on the various questions you have at heart.

Though we here may have been handicapped — to a greater or lesser degree all of us have been — by this illfortune, I know that those people entrusted with the maintenance of the spiritual oneness of the Swiss at home and abroad, have not been idle. This I gather from reports on their activities in those foreign parts to which their workers, lecturers, writers, teachers, film technicians and journalists have been able to penetrate.

This rough enumeration of activities gives you an idea of what you may be called upon to express your views on, when you, your President, and members of your committee will again be able to resume, unhampered by postal censorship and other restrictions, exchange of ideas with your friends at home. I have in mind people like Mlle Briod, whose helpfulness and understanding has never failed you, like Professor Lätt, whose experiences over many years has always been of great value, and like Dr. Imhof, who, having recently joined the Secrétariat, has had fewer opportunities of coming here than of visiting other places, but who is highly esteemed by all who have had the pleasure of meeting him.

I am sure I am speaking on behalf of our Minister when saying that the Legation will not fail to do what is in its power to facilitate this exchange of views. Our own experience with our friends in the Secrétariat — although occasions to enlist their help may not have been numerous — has always been that we have met with understanding and help when we have made certain suggestions. To name one instance: we have been helped from time to time in procuring books and periodicals which the Legation may have needed to place at the disposal of people interested. I feel sure that this service will be developed after the war to enable you all to benefit and derive pleasure from it.

I believe that I am justified in saying this, judging by the happy beginnings which have been made with the library in Swiss House in Rome, and we may look forward to an extension of the work.

This time may not be yet — we may still have to be patient, — but this should not prove so very difficult for us who have lived for these long and trying war years in the midst of a people which has shown and still is showing great fortitude.

It now remains for me to express to you, M. le Président and to the entire company gathered here, my best wishes that the new year of activities of your society may prove a fruitful one.”

M. Girardet's words were warmly applauded by all present.

On behalf of the guests, the Rev. Pradervand then briefly addressed the meeting, paying tribute to the valuable work carried on by the N.S.H. for the benefit of the Swiss abroad.

After a short interval, the official proceedings were opened by the President.

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, compiled in the usual exemplary manner, were read by the Hon. Secretary, Mr. C. Campart.

The President then reported on the activities of the Society during the past year. The following are extracts from his address:—

“As the London Group of the N.S.H. we have