

In Memoriam

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IN MEMORIAM

On Thursday, 18th June 1959, the Union Helvetia Club — which was founded in 1894 with headquarters in Nassau Street, and six years later (1900) moved to their own premises at 1 Gerrard Street, W.1 — had ceased to exist.

It is — alas! — one more Swiss Society which, owing to unfortunate circumstances, has had to close down, and I am afraid it will not be the last one. The "writing is on the wall"; an ageing Colony without the infusion of young blood cannot go on for ever. It is a sad occurrence, because the Union Helvetia Club, consisting of hotel employees, was at one time — especially before the first world war, and until the beginning of the second war — a very active Society in the Colony.

This event, sad as it was, warranted no celebration, but the committee found it opportune to convene a Meeting in order to acquaint the members of the winding-up arrangements. This Meeting was held at the "Schweizerbund" (Swiss Club), 74 Charlotte Street, W.1; Mr. P. Lehrian was in the Chair, and there were about sixty members present.

The Chairman, in opening the Meeting, welcomed the members, amongst them being a fair number with over fifty years' membership, and also expressed his pleasure at being able to greet Dr. Portmann, Central Secretary of the Union Helvetia in Switzerland, "a pleasure, however mixed with sadness," he said, "for these are to be the last rites in the history of the Society".

The Central Secretary gave a concise and able résumé of the facts which led to the decision to close down. "It is a well-known fact," he said, "that the young Swiss are not leaving their country any more in such numbers as they did before the two wars." He explained that the present-day salaries abroad compete unfavourably with those prevalent in Switzerland. Dr. Portmann said that with the expansion of the hotel industry in Switzerland, the latter was in need of every trained man and woman. Switzerland suffered at present from an acute shortage of labour, so much so that Swiss hoteliers were forced to recruit this summer no less than 60,000 foreigners for their hotels. The Central Secretary's address was listened to with much interest, and acknowledged with applause.

President Lehrian then gave particulars as to the disposal of the assets; he mentioned that the Society was able to transfer the capital of the "Rutishauser Fund" from Switzerland to this country, and it was decided to put this fund, which will be known

in future as the "Helvetia Rutishauser Fund", under the jurisdiction of the Swiss Benevolent Society, together with a cash amount. In return, the Swiss Benevolent Society undertakes to look after the "invalides", making them a weekly grant, and in general will assist past-members in accordance with the Society's rules, subject always to any restrictions which may apply under National Assistance rules.

Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, assured the Meeting that his Society would carry out any arrangements which had been made.

Before closing the Meeting, Mr. Wittwer, Secretary, thanked Mr. Lehrian for the part he had played in the successful conclusion of the affairs of the Society. A proposal from the Chair to offer a reward to Mr. Wittwer, who has held the post of Secretary for the last ten years, was unanimously accepted, the recipient expressing thanks to the members for this *beau geste*.

With the closing of the Meeting the Union Helvetia Club has passed into oblivion. It was, no doubt, for many of the members a sad moment when they adjourned to the Banqueting Hall to partake of the "Begräbnissen", which was offered by the late Society to its faithful members, and to a few guests.

Before the company sat down to dinner, cocktails were served in the "Bündnerstube", and H.E. the Swiss Ambassador having in the meantime arrived, he and the official guests were invited to cocktails on the first floor.

Then the "mourners" adjourned to the dining hall, where the tables were appropriately adorned with flowers arranged with much taste by Miss E. Finger, and I am glad to say, that after an excellent dinner, arranged by Mr. A. Finger (the former Assistant Secretary), the "Stimmung" — kindled with various vintage wines — soon changed, and for a short spell the "body" was almost forgotten.

It is usual that speeches are made not only at banquets, birthdays and weddings, but also at "funerals".

The principal speakers on this occasion were, amongst others, H.E. the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. Portmann and Mr. Lehrian, each of whom paid a touching tribute to the "departed", recalling the history, the successes, the joys and troubles of a life which had lasted sixty-five years.

The loss of one institution of the Colony affects all, and I am sure the disappearance of the Union Helvetia Club will be generally deplored.

"GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN!"

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