

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

By
Gottfried Keller

In one of my recently printed letters from Switzerland, which contained reminiscences about happenings during world war two in Britain, it was mentioned that the Swiss Colony was, at that time, a fairly closely knit community. One of the contributing factors to this state of affairs was the fact that the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique kept up its regular monthly meetings.

They were usually held in the SMS building in Fitzroy Square and always presided over by one of the Colony's striking personalities who provided a great deal of inofficial leadership: *Mr. Fred Suter*. A self-made man in the best sense of the word, Fred Suter had come over to England as a youngster and had created a shellac factory, which became a great success and is in existence to this day. Suter — Fred to his many friends — built a beautiful mansion as his residence, high up in the Surrey Hills, overlooking Reigate, which he called "Lueg-is-Land" and which he hospitably opened to a good many of his compatriots.

During the so-called "Blitzkrieg", Suter was to lose both his first wife and his lovely home by a direct bomb-hit, but with characteristic tenacity he rebuilt a new home on the same spot, married again and went on — his sons and daughter having created families of their own — to adopt a blind baby. The second

Mrs. Suter and her adopted daughter — the latter has since become a highly talented and respected organist and music teacher — later sold "Lueg-is-Land" and moved to Lausanne.

Some 70 or so wartime meetings of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique were held under Fred Suter's able and congenial chairmanship. One of their features was a regular exposé about the international situation, both political and military, given by one of the Swiss newspaper correspondents in London. As the NSH meetings were open, these talks were usually listened to — as I said by some 70 or so — with rapt attention by members of many other Swiss societies and the lecturer (modesty prevents me from mentioning his name) was nearly always introduced by Fred Suter as "Our Minister of Information".

As a neutral correspondent the said lecturer had free access to a good deal of information and to all prohibited and protected areas, ample petrol rations and often he was driven about by a very charming lady-driver of the Government car pool who is today the wife of the Bishop of Leicester, *Mrs. Cicely Williams*. In passing it should be mentioned that she is one of the most faithful friends of our country in England, that he has written several fascinating books, especially about the region of Zermatt, that she belongs to the readers of the

Swiss Observer and that she and the Bishop belong to the most loyal friends one can have.

One day, when space permits, I hope to write about the immense services the London Bureau of the Swiss War Food Office have rendered to our home country. This bureau was housed in Grosvenor Square and was run extremely efficiently by *Dr. Nicholas Kamm*. Dr. Kamm passed away several years ago.

This reminiscence would be incomplete to a degree if I did not mention the stately figure of *Colonel Anton Bon*. During the war and up to some years afterwards he ran the Dorchester Hotel in Park Lane, and he ran it in the truly grand manner. Although Cabinet Ministers, Statesmen, Foreign Potentates and other famous personalities of many nations lived under Colonel Bon's roof, he always welcomed compatriots and many a Swiss society and enabled them to meet in the Dorchester Hotel by quoting as low prices as he could possibly justify.

Colonel Bon — his bearing was such that he could not have any other military rank but Colonel! — later moved to the Browns Hotel, and still later went back to Switzerland, where both his wife and he passed away. The Bon-tradition of hospitality was later continued by George Ronus.



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