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Editorial

It is your own interest
that is at stake when your
neighbours wall is ablaze!

So wrote the Roman poet 'Horace' sometime in the last century before Christ. And so we can say in our day; there once was a small country in the center of Europe. It had its foundation through the desire to be free of domineering overlords. The people of that country were willing to defend that freedom even when encircled by warring countries in the first half of the 20th Century. Most inhabitants of that country bore a great burden of sacrifice during the war years, but as is the case everywhere some few people gave in to

temptation and took advantage of other people's misfortune. There may well have been some of these people doing what they did under the impression that they could lose family, life and country if they did not comply with the threatening demands of the war-lord from the north! Let's be glad we don't have to apportion blame, not even with hindsight. Let's say "Thank God for God" he is the only judge for such a task. Let's be glad that the Government of that small country which we call our own, Switzerland, has apologized to the world for the moral shortcomings of some few people during those dark days.

Now it is time to update the history books and to boldly mention the accusations, recriminations, exami-

nations and reparations our country of origin has dealt with in the past 2 years.

Some of us patriotic Swiss-Kiwis will not be able to restore our hurt pride fully, but should we feel guilty? I don't think so. The only things most of us can remember of the Nazi-war years are honorable memories and not even the heavily biased BBC-documentary recently shown on TV should be able to make us feel guilty.

As for myself it has been a learning curve: Maybe you and I, we should have known that not knowing our history "warts and all" is understandable when we read the quotation: *History is the crystallisation of popular beliefs.* I just wish the history books would have a warning on page 1, reading: *Reader beware, that despite the noble contents of this book, some hidden and unpleasant shortcomings due to human weakness, may not be mentioned and will possibly come to light in future years.*

For the benefit of the less-well-informed reader let me recount the relevant events of the past two years, culminating in the reparation payment of 1.9 billion S/Francis by the Swiss banks for distribution to the world Jewish congress.

Excerpt from Swiss Radio
International 17.8.98

In 1996 the president of the Union Bank of Switzerland, then one of Switzerland's big 3 banks described any remaining money in dormant accounts belonging to holocaust victims as "peanuts". 2 years on the Union Bank of Switzerland is no more, it has merged with its competitor the Swiss Bank Corporation to become simply UBS. The bank president who made those remarks has since taken early retirement. But the biggest change of all has been the news that the dispute over missing assets is finally to be settled. When the controversy first began the banks insisted the issue of dormant accounts had been dealt with in the 1960's. After pressure from the United States a banking ombudsman was appointed to coordinate applications from potential claimants. This measure had only partial success. The ombudsman's survey uncovered only 39 million dollars, somewhat less than the Jewish organisations claimed existed. By this time the whole issue of Switzerland's role during the second World war was

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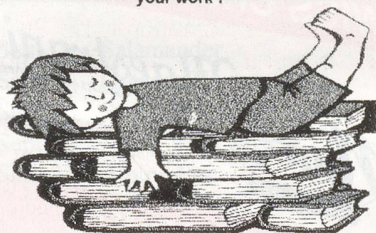
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coming under scrutiny. Allegations that the Swiss bought gold from Nazi Germany knowing that it had been looted from occupied countries or even stolen from individuals in concentration camps began to create a picture of a country that was happy to put profits before ethics. The Swiss Government concerned at the growing damage to the Swiss reputation set up a committee of inquiry. A memorial fund for holocaust victims was established with donations from Swiss business and industry. But still the pressure continued. When a bank security guard rescued war-time documents from the bank's shredder, a once glowing reputation of the Swiss banks reached an all-time low. In July of last year the banks took the unprecedented steps of breaking banking secrecy to publish the names of dormant account-holders. Again it wasn't enough, and American States began to terminate business dealings with Swiss banks. The threat of boycotts galvanised the banks and they agreed to begin negotiating a settlement with Jewish leaders. The discussions were long and difficult. In June this year they broke down only to start again in August. Finally last month an agreement was reached; 1.25 billion Dollars, hardly "peanuts". But still 2 years ago, no one, least of all the Swiss bankers, would have even dreamt of such a deal. Deservedly or un-deservedly, that's the power of blackmail in big business, isn't it? Ed.

It's good to relax after finishing
your work!



President's Message

A few weeks ago, I spent some time checking our membership lists, something I occasionally do, just to make sure that everything is up-to-date and correct.

After going through all the Clubs' records, I carried on to the "Society Only" list - that is, those members not affiliated to one of the Society Clubs (ie. Auckland, Hamilton,

Wellington and Taranaki). The geographical spread of the 106 members on this list covers the length and breadth of New Zealand - from Otautau, near Invercargill in the Far South, to Mangonui, near Kaitia in the Far North, and many places from East to West in between.

Here are some statistics:

Northland 10; Greater Auckland 35; Central North Island 20; Lower North Island 8; Upper South Island 6; Christchurch Region 20; and Lower South Island 7.

Looking back over recent new members, including those from the four Clubs, the majority have come from the Hawkes Bay, Waikato and most predominantly Auckland areas.

Another feature I noticed when looking at these lists was the origin or nationality of surnames - only two seemed to be of Italian descent, but several were of French spelling. As we have only a relatively small number of "French-Swiss" in the Society, and New Zealand, 'finding' each other may not always be easy. A primary objective of our Society is to promote the culture and contact among people of Swiss origin. So, for any members of "Suisse-Romande" origin (or interest) wanting to communicate with others, you are quite welcome to send me a note, and I will assist by passing your message on. I'll report on the outcome in a few months! We also receive a newsletter from the *Alliance Francaise*, which I can pass on to anyone interested.

As you may have noticed, this edition of the *Helvetia* has four more pages than usual, and includes the Society's sports' results and medal winners for 1998. Many have already received their medals at First of August functions, and others should be receiving them at one of their upcoming Club events shortly. This year we have two treble medal winners, and several who had double wins. A total of 86 medals, this year being the beginning of a new series featuring a variety of Swiss farm-houses, were presented overall. My congratulations go to all the winners, and also to the many people from all the Clubs who participated in the sports of Schiessen, Kegeln, "Steinstossen and Jassen. Thank you for your support of these activities. It is great to see some of our younger members also taking

part and I hope to see many more next year.

A month ago now, we once again celebrated Switzerland's birthday so I took this opportunity to send a letter to our Clubs, writing about the different images we have of our place of birth or origin, and all the ways in which we relate to it.

- Many today go frequently to visit, and have been able to keep up with the changes which have occurred.

- For others, a trip to Switzerland is rare, and what once was familiar to them now appears strange and unknown after a long period away.

- As for those of us born here, it becomes a journey to a foreign land, but still we feel a real sense of recognition, due to our involvement with a Swiss Club. I hope that through this participation, we are able to help create this perception of familiarity with Switzerland, and that one day it can be experienced by every one of our younger members when they have the opportunity to travel there some time in the future.

The First of August is an event to commemorate - we can all in some way identify with this special occasion, and share it proudly by coming together and reflecting on and celebrating the common factor which will always bond us - our Swiss heritage, in all of its diverse variations and generations.

Recently, we have gained quite a large number of new members, both through the Clubs and otherwise, so I would like to welcome these people to the Society. To the several new immigrants, welcome also to New Zealand and your new home.

With Spring approaching, and the days slowly becoming longer again, I send my best wishes to everyone.

With kindest regards, Beatrice

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