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Opening of the Home for Aged Swiss.

(GEORGE DIMIER FUND.)

at 31, Southampton Street, Fitzroy Square, W.1 on Saturday, February 22nd, 1936

There are many functions taking place in the Swiss Colony, in the course of a year, which might focus greater attention upon individual members, than the one which took place last Saturday, when the new Home for aged Swiss, was officially opened by M. C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister.

It was a simple ceremony, but in its simplicity it was one of the most impressive functions which I have had the pleasure to attend for many years. —

On this occasions it might perhaps not be out of place to mention a few facts, as to how this Home came into being. —

The origin of this fund dates back to 1924, when the Swiss Benevolent Society mourned the death of their much lamented President, Mr. George Dimier. With his intimate knowledge of the distressing circumstances in which many of our aged compatriots had found themselves, he bequeathed the sum of £500 as a nucleus for a fund for the ultimate founding of a home for them.

At the suggestion of a number of members of the Swiss Colony, who have subscribed for a considerable time to the Funds of the Swiss Benevolent Society, a general appeal to the Colony was made, and I am glad to say, that this appeal received a generous response. This gave the Fund a very good start; but the realization of its aim was still a long way off, until the President of the *Unione Ticinese*, at their annual dinner in 1930, caused a real sensation in announcing, that his Society was prepared to give £1,000 to the Swiss Benevolent Society for the George Dimier Fund, provided the other Swiss Societies gave £1,000 between themselves, and that the Swiss Benevolent Society collected a further £1,000 from other sources.

This splendid offer by our compatriots beyond the Gothard, was a hard nut to crack; but a specially appointed committee set to work at once, and thanks to their untiring efforts, well over £3,000 was collected within a short while, an amount well above the figure stipulated by the *Unione Ticinese*. From that date, the Home advanced from a remote possibility to a fairly early probability.

In 1934 the Funds available amounted already to about £9,000, a splendid testimony to the generosity of the Swiss living in this country, when one considers that the economic "blizzard" has sorely tried the pockets of many who have hitherto liberally contributed to the Funds of the Society. This result is all the more gratifying, when one considers, that apart from this specially ear-marked Fund, about £4,000 had lately to be found annually for the support of needy Swiss.

In fact, the figures for casual relief have attained alarming dimensions, as the following amounts will show :

In 1870 a sum of £71 was distributed, in 1903 it reached the amount of £139, which amount was nearly doubled in 1913 (£264). From then onwards, a considerable increase took place year after year. In 1920 the first thousand pounds was reached; five years later (1925) an amount of £1,513 was required to meet the demands; in 1930 it had swelled to £1,829, in 1932 to £2,032, and last year it reached the astounding amount of over £4,000.

One may well ask who is paying for all this. Well, the various communities in Switzerland are certainly giving their support, and the Federal Authorities are not lacking; but the *main* support for this noble work comes from the members, societies and institutions of the Swiss Colony, and here I wish to pay a sincere tribute to my countrymen for their unlimited generosity. It is true they have often grumbled, but they have never yet failed when help was most needed.

The work accomplished by a happy band of voluntary workers, during the last few years, is beyond praise, and is to me a revelation; it has made me more content with my lot, more grateful for blessings received, which one is so apt to take for granted. My only regret is the one, that I am quite incapable to express through my pen the admiration for this truly great undertaking. —

And now twelve years after the George Dimier Fund was initiated, the Home for aged Swiss has become a reality, and the only regret I can voice on this memorable occasion is the one, that the founder of this Home was not able to be present to see the realisation of a scheme which was so near to his heart. —

About 60 of our compatriots assembled last Saturday at 31, Southampton Street, Fitzroy

Square, W.1, to witness the official opening of the "Home." Miss T. Müller, one of the most active members of the House Committee, welcomed the visitors in her usual charming manner.

Amongst the guests were the members of the House Committee, and members of the Committee of the Swiss Benevolent Society. (*Fonds-de-Secours*), the Presidents of the Swiss Societies in London and the Provinces, there were also present Mr. A. Nussbaumer, Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation, M. Léon Rueff, Mme. Dimier, the widow of the Founder, accompanied by her son and her daughter (Mme. de Cintra), M. R. de Cintra, Pasteurs Hoffmann-de Visme, Hahn and Santy, M. Hafner, Westcliff, M. F. G. Sommer, M. Hilfiker, M. and Mme. Ch. Chapuis, Rev. Holmyre (Swedish Church), M. Saager, M. Stauffer, Swiss Observer, etc., etc.

The opening ceremony took place in the "Common room" on the ground floor.

Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme started the proceedings with a short invocation, asking that the Lord's blessing might rest on this Home.

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, then addressed the gathering as follows :—

This day will be a memorable one in the history of the Swiss Colony. It will be a still more memorable one in its history of charity and mutual assistance, an activity which has at all times been carried out with honour by the London community of our countrymen.

I must confess that rarely has a function of this kind given me personally so great a satisfaction as does the one I have been honoured to perform this afternoon.

The acquisition of a Home where our aged and lonely friends may spend the autumn of their lives in comfort and peace, has for years been the one great ambition of that charitable activity which I have just mentioned.

That this lofty ambition has now been realised must be acknowledged by all of us as the remarkable but well-deserved success of those to whose energy the achievement is chiefly due.

Twelve years ago, in 1924, Georges Dimier passed away. Although his memory is, and will remain, green as long as there is a Swiss Colony in this city, there is surely no time at which we can pay homage to that memory more fittingly or in a more grateful spirit than we do to-day.

We all know that he is the father of the idea, the activity and the result, and it is owing to him that we are here at this moment to open the doors of what will prove to be an abode of quiet content.

I will not mention all those who have helped Dimier and the cause. They all know in what a high degree they deserve the tributes of their compatriots. They have worked hard for years, some of them for a generation or more, and to-day they see the fruits of their labour.

Some are standing here in this very room; they need no praise from my lips — it is their work itself that praises them.

But I would like to remind you that there are still a few of Dimier's contemporaries left, who, at this moment, though far from here, rejoice with us over the accomplishment of what has been one of their dearest wishes, ever since the time when they themselves worked unsparringly for the weal of the Colony.

Let me mention just two names, whose bearers are striking examples of patriotic devotion. Both worked with Georges Dimier in their time as you, who are here, are working now. I mean Georges Forrer and Arthur Baume.

May I make use of these few minutes which have been given to me to open this Home to recall their merits and to express to them our grateful feelings.

And now I have the privilege of officially declaring this Home open, so that it may be given to the laudable use for which it is intended.

We pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon it.

M. P. H. Conrad, President of the House Committee, then expressed the thanks of his Committee to the Minister and the company present, for the continuous interest and support which they have shown and which has proved a great help in the realisation of this institution. He

made a strong appeal that their interest should suffer no relaxation, assuring the company that the Committee would always use all their efforts to derive from the means at their disposal all possible advantages for the welfare of the pensioners.

M. R. Dupraz, President of the *Fonds-de-Secours* associated himself with the previous speaker in thanking the Minister for having graciously consented to open the Home. He also expressed his great pleasure to be able to greet Mme. Dimier, her son and daughter, and after having paid a sincere tribute to the memory of the late George Dimier, he extended his sincere thanks to all those who had helped in bringing this home into being. "I am unable," he continued, "to mention all those who have so unselfishly worked for this great cause, but allow me to mention only two names, namely Mrs. Saager and Mr. Ritter, who have untiringly devoted themselves to make this place a real "Haven of rest." He impressed on his hearers, that although the aim of creating a home for aged Swiss has materialised, there was still much to do in order to maintain and improve and possibly enlarge this institution, and he asked the company to help the committee by placing the necessary Funds at their disposal. —

The visitors were then shown over the premises. The time at my disposal was unfortunately too short to give an exhaustive description of the very nicely furnished rooms, but perhaps I shall be able to publish at a later date some photographs, and a more complete description of the Home in the "Swiss Observer."

There are altogether 11 rooms of which 3 are double rooms and one a common room; all the rooms are very tastefully furnished, and the colour scheme is throughout in green and beige, which gives them a light and bright appearance. Various lovely pictures, depicting wonderful views from our homeland adorn the walls, and will no doubt awaken happy memories of long ago to the occupants. The photograph of the Founder, which is placed in a prominent position in the Common room, will for ever keep the memory green of one, who through his kindness of heart and generosity, has provided for our old compatriots a shelter at the eventide of their earthly pilgrimage. In the entrance Hall a plate has been placed with the following inscription :

In remembrance of Georges Dimier,

Founder of this Home.

opened 22nd February, 1936.

There is at present accommodation for about 15 Pensioners of both sexes, and they will be in charge of a nurse house-keeper. —

The Home will be open for any visitors, who might be interested, on Saturday next (February 29th) from 2-6 o'clock, which might be also convenient to those who will be in town on the occasion of Saturday's Film Show of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*. —

Saturday, February 22nd, 1936, will remain one of the most outstanding days in the history of the Swiss Colony, this day has proved once again, that those of our countrymen who have attained old age, and who have been unable, often through no fault of their own, to make provisions for a rainy day, are not forgotten and will be cared for, and their gratefulness is surely enough reward for those who have so generously contributed to this Home.

On visiting one of the upper rooms I came across an illuminated inscription, which I would like to make the Motto for the Home, it read :

Wo Glaube, da Liebe
Wo Liebe, da Friede
Wo Friede, da Segen
Wo Segen, da Gott
Wo Gott, keine Not!

ST.

KARL DOLMETSCH.

It may interest our musical readers to know that Mr. Carl Dolmetsch is now in America, making a tour of the States from coast to coast, for the purposes of giving Concerts, Demonstrations, etc.

He is playing three times for the National Broadcasting Co. of America, and is giving Bach Concerts in New York in collaboration with Madame Susanne Bloch (Lute and Recorder), Madame Gabriella Pessl Sobotka, (Harpichord), and Madame Jean Buchanan (Clavichord).

Mr. Carl Dolmetsch is himself playing Violin, Viol and Recorder.