

A Londoner's recollections of pastor Hoffmann-de Visme

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A LONDONER'S RECOLLECTIONS OF PASTOR HOFFMANN-DE VISME.

"He was a man, take him for all in all
I shall not look upon his like again"
(Shakespeare, "Hamlet")
I.2.

I have known M. René Hoffmann-de Visme for over 27 years, and memories of this remarkable man are so diversified that one scarcely knows where to begin. From the first one recognized that here was a man of many parts, of great learning and of extraordinary ability. In early life he had read widely in science, and no thinking person could listen to him long without recognizing that his studies in classics and theology were of no common order. An able linguist, he spoke several languages, and could preach eloquently in at least 3 of them, yet he was very modest about his learning. On coming to London he realized that many of Swiss descent understood English best, and he mastered that language in a brief space of time. When on holiday in Cornwall he would sometimes take a service in English, to the delight of the pious Cornish folk, for they felt the great uplift of his ministry. My father would often write to me: "You forgot to tell me what Pastor Hoffmann said last Sunday." I shall never forget how, when he delivered the Annual Lecture (in English) to a great Literary Society, distinguished people from all parts bore testimony to his masterly treatment of the subject. I once heard him give a series of historical lectures, and came away amazed at the profound learning of the man.

Had he occupied an English pulpit, he would have been known as one of London's great preachers. But for endless calls on his time and activity, every sermon would have been a veritable chef d'œuvre. His varied activities brought him into contact with people in every walk of life, and as much at home in the halls of the great as in the homes of the poor, he was everywhere received as an equal: a notable proof of his real social value and remarkable *savoir-vivre*.

He had friends everywhere, and people of different creeds listened to him with pleasure. Professors from France who came with me to hear him were all impressed by his gift of speech. He seemed never to speak without saying something really *worth* saying, and he excelled as an impromptu speaker. Some of his allocutions at various Fêtes de Noël were gems of playful wit and piquant fancy, whilst at the annual Fêtes Suisses he was the life and soul of the evening. Essentially a man of action and of courage, he was a real "live wire." He had great breadth of view, and his sympathies were quite international. Long before the inception of the League of Nations he was a living embodiment of that noble spirit. Hundreds who have passed through trials and deep waters could testify to his wonderful sympathy with those in any trouble or difficulty. He seemed to have a kind word for everyone, and the amount of friendly contact and human kindness he managed to crowd into the brief minutes after the Sunday worship was amazing. In a brief quarter of an hour he would manage more social service than some priests do in a week. How he managed *somehow* to keep touch with thousands in his great parish of London will always remain a marvel. I once "unearthed" in the recesses of Mitcham a Swiss who seemed completely cut off from his compatriots, and I mentioned his name to the pastor, who said quietly: "Yes, I know him." In his flying visits he would never leave any part of London without trying to see every known friend (Swiss or otherwise) in that district, if only for a few minutes. Then he never forgot anyone. A lady who, for family reasons, had been unable to attend church for several years, was electrified to hear herself warmly greeted by name, as though the pastor had seen her only a day or two before. When he could get round to the Foyer Suisse, surely a great work, his cheerful addresses were always a source of inspiring comfort. He had a great heart, of magnificent courage in affliction. After the terrible loss of his beloved wife, he never complained, but manfully tried to carry on his own work and hers too. Yet, somehow, his subsequent preaching took on a new note, and at times it was vibrant with something of the deep pathos of a soul in travail. I went only once to the Hollies; much work and the distance prevented my going again; but I was profoundly touched by the welcome offered to a stranger.

M. Hoffmann-de Visme lived an heroic life in facing an almost superhuman task. His care for the children and the poor at Christmas, and indeed, at all times, was typical of a great soul. His never-ending work was a constant sacrifice, and his total gift of himself was something of willing martyrdom about it. His great worth is only too painfully measured in the deep sense of loss felt by all who knew him. He had great abilities, but, best of all, he was so sincerely good. I somehow feel that "he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. XI 4). His name will live long in London and in the annals of the Colony. A loss to this great metropolis, he is a loss to his beloved country as well.

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In feelings, no tin figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He
most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the
best."

If we count Pastor Hoffmann's all-too-short
life in terms of *deeds, feelings and heart-throbs*,
we can say that he filled his great life to the brim.
Let us try to follow his noble example, and be
ready to add:

"Say not 'Good night,' but in some brighter
clime
Bid me 'Good morning.'"

A FRIEND.

Photograph of the late Pastor René Hoffmann-de Visme.

Melles. Hoffmann and Matthey have received
so many requests for a copy of Pastor Hoffmann-
de Visme's photograph, that arrangements have
been made for this to be on sale.

It is an actual print of post card size, finished
and mounted with folder (7" x 11") by the photo-
grapher who took the original and of which a
smaller reproduction appeared in the "Swiss
Observer" of the 11th September last.

It will be on sale at 15, Upper Bedford Place,
W.C.1, where Mrs. E. Meylan will be pleased to
receive enquiries and orders (Telephone MUSeum
3100).

Price 2/6 each post free.

(Postal Orders accompanying requests, to be
made out to Mrs. Meylan.)

A few copies only of cabinet size are also
available at 3/6 each post free.

Photographs may also be obtained from the
"Swiss Observer," 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2,
against the respective remittance.

Any surplus which might arise out of the sale
of this photograph will be handed over to the
existing small fund of the Sunday School of the
Eglise Suisse.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Sunday, October 17th, at 4 p.m. — Union
Helvetia — Annual Memorial Service — at
Hendon Park Cemetery. (Private bus will
leave 1, Gerard Place, W.1, at 2.45 p.m.).
Service conducted by Pastor C. Th. Hahn.

Tuesday, October 19th — Swiss Mercantile
College — Dance, at the Royal Hotel,
Southampton Row, W.C.1, from 8 p.m. till
midnight.

Tuesday, October 19th, at 8.15 p.m. — "*La
Suisse qui chante*." Special Concert arranged
by the New Helvetic Society and the Swiss
Orchestral Society, at Conway Hall, Red
Lion Square, W.C.1."

Tuesday, October 26th, at 6.30 for 7 o'clock —
Swiss Rifle Team — Farewell Dinner to M.
W. de Bourg, Counsellor of Legation, at
Pagani's Restaurant, Great Portland Street,
W. (See announcement).

Wednesday, November 3rd, at 7.30 p.m. — Société
de Secours Mutuels — Monthly Meeting — at
74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Friday, November 26th — City Swiss Club —
Annual Banquet and Ball — at the
Grosvenor House, Park Lane, W.1.

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Dimanche Octobre 17th, 1937:

11h. — Prédication — M. Lageard.

6h.30 — Prédication — M. Emery.

7h.30 — Chœur.

Le Pasteur Emery reçoit le Mercredi de 11 heures
à midi 30, à l'église, 79, Endell Street, W.C.2.
S'adresser à lui pour tous les actes pastoraux.
(téléphone: Museum 3100, domicile: Foyer
Suisse, 12, Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.)

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. Anne's Church, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.
(near General Post Office.)

Sonntag, den 17. Oktober 1937.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

TRAUUNG.

Am 9. Oktober wurden getraut: Franz Heinrich
Günther von Wädenswil (Zürich) und Else
Ida Krüger von Basel (Stadt).

Anfragen wegen Religions- bzw. Confirmanden-
stunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten
an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde: C. Th. Hahn,
43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W. 4 (Tele-
phon: Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden:
Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche.