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NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE LONDON GROUP.

26th Annual General Meeting.

On Saturday, 17th January, 1942, the 26th Annual General Meeting of the London Group of the N.S.H. took place at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London, W.1. As was to be expected, owing to Col. A. Bon's kind hospitality and attention everything possible was done to make all attending members and their guests (86 altogether) feel perfectly happy and at home.

Before luncheon a pleasant half-hour was spent in chatting, renewing old friendships and making new acquaintances. Luncheon was served at about half-past one and it was a special pleasure to all to see as Guests of Honour the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Walter Thurnheer and Madame Thurnheer, whose interest in the life and well being of the Swiss Colony in general and of the London Group of the N.S.H. in particular, is so much appreciated. As for the luncheon itself no praise can be too high for those responsible for it, having regard to the difficulties under which caterers must labour these days! Two toasts were drunk, one to the King and the other to our beloved Switzerland. Mr. A. F. Suter, the untiring and vigorous President of the London Group cordially welcomed the guests, in particular the Minister and Mme Thurnheer, the Presidents of the other Swiss Societies in London and Pasteur Pradervand of the Eglise Suisse and Father Lanfranchi of the Roman Catholic Church; Mr. Suter expressed his regrets that a number of members were unable to attend. Mr. and Mrs. G. Keller were specially missed. With great interest everyone listened to the address which the Minister was good enough to give (the full text of his speech will appear separately). Monsieur Thurnheer was able to give an *exposé* of all those topics of Swiss news which interest every Swiss living outside Switzerland. Some of the news was first hand information gathered by our Minister during his recent stay in our country. Our Minister was given a sincere and well-earned applause at the end of his address.

The luncheon over, the formal part of the meeting was proceeded with. Mr. Suter's Presidential Annual Report was listened to with close attention, and it was received with the acclamation which it deserved. Mr. Suter's Report is printed in full below, but be it mentioned here that Mr. Suter's statement that the membership of the London Group had increased during the last year was an announcement that cheered everyone present. During the customary Resignation of the Councillors and Auditors and during the election of the Council and Auditors for 1942, Mr. Henry C. Balser acted as Interim-President. When the composition of the new Council was announced the fact that a lady, Miss Germaine Zingg, had been elected a member of the Council, caused some hearty cheering and hand-clapping. Needless to say, Mr. Suter was among great applause unanimously re-elected President and Monsieur Campart, Hon. Secretary of the London Group. Both Mr. Suter and Mr. Balser thanked Mrs. A. C. Muller for her unselfish devotion to the cause of the N.S.H., while Mr. Boos, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, expressed the gratitude of the Presidents of the sister societies for the hospitality extended to them. After a witty address by Mr. W.

B. Sigerist, the meeting was wound up by the President who was very appreciative of the confidence placed in him by the Group.

After the meeting all foregathered for tea and "community singing" arranged by the Swiss Colony's "Musical Director," Mr. Dick. When at last, at nearly six o'clock, the gathering broke up, the general feeling was of having spent "a perfect day." There was no rushing home like last year in anticipation of "Leaflets" of a certain weight falling from Heaven!

H. C. B.

* * *

The Swiss Minister addressed the Meeting as follows:

Mr. President,

It is a great pleasure to my wife and myself to be here with you again. These gatherings of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique are always an enjoyable event. Mr. Suter is such a good organizer and such an amiable host; as far as I am concerned I can only find one small fault with him, he always asks me to address the meeting.

Some of you might know that I have recently been in Switzerland. The thought of a trip to Switzerland no doubt creates in you a pleasant sensation, as would the thought of a good juicy orange. But oranges are difficult to get and it is difficult to get to Switzerland too.

Switzerland presents at this moment a picture of snow-covered mountains, of blue sky and sunshine, of skating and tobogganing and giddy skiing down lovely snow slopes. These pleasures exist, but I cannot tell you anything about them from personal experience as my time was entirely taken up by working in the numerous offices of the Bundeshaus in Berne.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have just begun the New Year and I think it therefore appropriate to mention shortly the most important events of 1941, as they apply to that small, but to us so dear space on this globe, to Switzerland. During the past year I have been home twice, in March and in November. By comparing the two periods, I found that the effects of the war on our neutral country are now beginning to show more and more, especially on economic lines. Those few Swiss who were of the opinion that Switzerland, as a neutral country, should be spared any privations, realise now that they were mistaken.

Coffee, tea, chocolate, cocoa, butter, cheese, are all rationed. Meals in hotels and restaurants are only served after giving up your meal coupon; of coal one gets a very small amount, enough to heat one or two rooms in a house. Electricity for household use is strictly limited, also the use of liquid fuel and gas. Our forests are a great help to us, but nobody can burn as much wood as he would like to. Meat is only allowed on four days a week and the rule is strictly enforced in restaurants, hotels, as well as in all private houses. Eggs are almost as rare as here. The use of wool and cotton in the textile industry is restricted and replaced partly by artificial silk. Cloth and shoes are rationed.

This is a short enumeration of some of the numerous restrictions which are imposed upon our compatriots at home. One might think that such restrictions would have as a natural consequence a reduction of expenses and of the cost of

living. Unfortunately this is not so. The living costs have gradually increased, at the end of October they were already 32% higher than at the beginning of the war. The Confederation has made great efforts to keep them down and spends about 100 million francs a year alone on stabilising the bread prices. We know that when goods become rare, it is very difficult to stop the rise in prices. The wages and salaries had therefore to be increased; the State has added 12% to the salaries. Provisions had to be made for all those who depend on pensions and similar incomes.

The rise of expenses of the individual, however, is relatively modest in comparison to the expenses of the State. They swell up immensely and include naturally all the vast military expenditure necessary for any neutral country wishing to be ready to defend itself against any attack. Our budget is accordingly big, 1820 million francs expenditure and 700 million francs revenue only. To meet this deficit, taxes are imposed in numerous forms. It is our policy to leave as little as possible of the State debts, which naturally develop during such times, for future generations to pay. The earnings which a nation makes in prosperous, peaceful times, under the protection of a well organised State, have partly to be given over to the State in times of necessity. Since the last war, which to neutral Switzerland was less costly, we have now the advantage of two financial saving measures: the electrification of our railways, under the able leadership of Colonel Huber and which made our railways independent of imported coal. The second measure is the movement for the extension of the area under cultivation, a movement which makes enormous progress under the leadership of Dr. Wahlen. Both men are old friends of mine and I look up to them with thankfulness for what they have done for our country.

The industries in Switzerland with the exception of those producing luxuries are, due mostly to the needs of our army, well occupied. The revenues of the railways, the post and the telegraph are satisfactory. Those hotels which depend mostly on foreign tourists are in a difficult position as the foreign tourist represent this year only $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the total number of hotel guests. Because of the war the Swiss have to spend their holidays in Switzerland and they represent $\frac{5}{6}$ th of the hotel guests, consequently the hotels enjoying the favour of the Swiss people are doing quite well, specially those situated in the milder climate of the lake of Geneva and the Tessin.

Our industries and trade are naturally dependent on the markets abroad and at home. The home consumption is very considerable, but instead of the private enterprise, the State has by and by become the greatest buyer of goods. Of the annual expenses of Switzerland, private and public combined, the State spends one third, which, as a natural consequence, has very considerably changed our economical structure. It is for the time being a good thing, as our exports and imports have suffered extensively through the war in Europe and beyond. During the past year, the Balkans, the Russians, Japan, and most important of all for us, the United States of America, have entered the war. They all represent for us valuable markets for buying as well as for selling, and their entry into the war will

no doubt bring us more difficulties. Under these circumstances we must be very appreciative that our shipping possibilities have remained more or less the same. We have our Greek ships on time charter and besides we have a small fleet of our own, which is a real Swiss fleet, sailing under our own flag and right, with its home port in Basel. This was instituted during the past year.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have tried to give you, in a few words, an idea of some of the economic events in Switzerland during 1941.

However necessary for a country its economic functions are, there are others of great importance as, for instance, legislation.

The Federal Penal law took, on the 1st of January 1942, the place of the former 22 cantonal laws. One of its consequences is the abolition of the death penalty. Its main idea is not so much to punish as to reform and in cases of permanent criminal tendencies, to isolate the individual for the protection of the public.

The initiative for the election of the Federal Council by the people instead of by the united legislative assembly, and the extension of the number of Federal Councillors from seven to nine, is of great interest. This initiative which has been decided during the past year, will come to the Federal vote this month. If it is accepted, it might bring changes in the political field.

This vote is the first Federal vote since the last census of the Swiss population which took place on the last day of November. The final results are not yet known but they seem to point to an increase of our population. It was on the day before our departure from Switzerland that this census took place, so even if you Swiss citizens living in England, are not counted in this census, my wife and I did our best to represent you on this occasion.

Since the beginning of the war Switzerland represented the interests of other countries, but this year the list has greatly increased. Amongst others we have now the honour to take care of the British interests in Germany, Italy, Occupied China; furthermore we represent the German and the Italian interests in the United States, the Japanese interests in Great Britain and in certain other parts of the British Empire, as well as in the Philippines and last but by no means least the United States interests in Germany, in Italy and in Japan.

Finally I wish to mention an institution which I class amongst those near to the heart of the Swiss people; it is our Swiss Red Cross and, on a higher international level, the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva, under whose guidance several thousand Swiss are working, most of them without remuneration, for the international welfare. Just think of the relief and consolation felt by millions of people all over the world when they get letters with news from or for prisoners of war. Geneva has already forwarded seventeen million letters and communications.

The Swiss are not a people who like to show their emotions or deeper feelings, but by a work like this, we show what our hearts feel for those who suffer. Let our Swiss hearts remain open, strong and stout.

The President's Report for the Year 1941.

M. le Ministre, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the President's privilege to lay before you an account of the transactions and the general activity of the London Group during the past year; he is also expected to attempt some sort of an analysis of these activities, to draw conclusions and to indicate ways and means for necessary improvements and for the greater usefulness of the Group's work.

The year 1941, being the second full war year, brought about some profound changes in our position. The great bombing onslaught on the City of London on May tenth proved to be the last of the large scale aerial attacks on our Isles, while during the summer the main centres of combat moved East and relieved us of the imminent probability of direct invasion.

The Membership of the Group has risen by 13, from 169 in December 1940 to 182 to-day. As might be expected, the turn-over has again been considerable with a total loss by death or for other reasons of 14, while the admissions amount to 27. Nine of our members live abroad, either in Switzerland or the U.S.A. and expect to return at some future date.

During 1941 the Group has held twelve regular meetings:— The Annual General Meeting in January at the Dorchester, ten monthly members' meetings and one special council meeting in October at the Swiss House, all on Saturday afternoons. With the growth of the Group and the consequent increase in administrative obligations, but particularly for the reason that our regular Speaker, Mr. J. G. Keller should be given all the available time at the monthly meetings for his interesting talks, it was decided for the council to meet in separate sessions preceding the monthly meetings. As far as the special events of the year are concerned, the June meeting was set aside for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the London Group, coupled with that of the honorary secretaryship of Mr. Cesar Campart; at this function our Minister unfortunately was prevented from being present, but sent us a charming letter of congratulations. Your President was greatly honoured by being assigned the chairmanship of the organising committee and the leadership of the Swiss National Day Celebration of the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the Swiss Confederation. I must mention here also the Group's visit on August the 16th to the Sunshine Home for Blind Babies at East Grinstead, where our member (and I am happy to see a candidate for the council) Mlle Germaine Zingg is now the temporary directrice and is doing wonderful work. M. and Mme Thurnheer graciously joined us at the Home, and we were all deeply impressed by the success of the treatment of the children. In October we were given the opportunity by our member Mr. Bon to visit and inspect his famous Hotel, where we were shown the mysteries below ground and the beautiful period appartements above.

Returning to the cultural and social purposes and activities of the members' meetings, I may state that, with the exception of the February meeting,

when Dr. H. W. Egli gave us an excellent talk on "*Switzerland and the War*," we have been treated to a steady monthly succession of highly instructive addresses by our own 'Minister of Information,' Mr. G. J. Keller, council member, Foreign Correspondent of the Basler Nachrichten and President of the Foreign Press Association. The high appreciation of his services to the Group is reflected in the steadily growing attendances at the members' meetings, an average of fifty over the whole year.

The absence of Film shows from our 1941 programme is a matter of sincere regret to everyone, and it is hoped that in the course of the present year ways and means may be found to re-institute them, if not in their original volume, at least in one or more smaller shows. The good attendances and success of the S.M.S. shows are proof of the cultural value of this medium.

Our Group has maintained excellent relations with the Legation, the Churches, our sister societies and the Swiss institutions, but our relations with the mother society in Berne have been interrupted very considerably during the year. Correspondence has been uncertain in transit for long periods, and we have sent and received few letters, resorting to greetings by cable after certain monthly meetings and on other occasions. We are consequently not so well informed of their present activities and pre-occupations as previously, but we are certain that for the central secretariat and council, as for ourselves, the many and varied problems arising out of war consequences must tax their strength considerably. I have just received the December issue of the "*Echo*," from which we may gather much about the interior position of Switzerland, a wealth of information about Swiss colonies all over the world, and instances of Swiss charity in connection with the youth of the surrounding countries at war. Incidentally, there is a piece of information in this issue which concerns us in particular:— Mr. Ernst Speiser, a member of the London Group for a number of years, and since his return to Switzerland a director of Brown, Boveri & Co., in Baden, has been chosen by the Federal Council as "*Der neue Direktor des Eidgen. Kriegs-Industrie- und Arbeitsamtes*." I shall not fail to congratulate my old friend Speiser both on your behalf and personally on his accession to such a lofty position.

With your concurrence I intend to have the following ELT transmitted to Berne immediately after the session:—

ELT SECRETARIAT SUISSES ETRANGER, 36, BUNDESGASSE,
BERNE.

THE LONDON GROUP AT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
DORCHESTER TO-DAY, WITH MINISTER AND MADAME
THURNHEER, GUESTS OF HONOUR, SEND LOYAL PATRIOTIC GREETINGS.

SUTER, PRESIDENT.

And now for our good resolutions for the new year — let me couple them with a repetition of sincere New Year's Greetings to all members and friends. We Swiss are Neutrals, and as such occupy a position altogether apart from the many nations in the world war, a position of great favour and great danger. When we try to discover the reasons for the continued neutrality of our little Homeland, a good many become apparent to us, but we find it

difficult to apportion to each reason its relative importance and its interrelation with the others. At the end of our thinking we stand in all humility and wonder at the mighty wisdom of our forefathers.

For us Swiss in Great Britain, it is difficult indeed to be neutral as a Swiss should be:— We believe in the righteousness of defending freedom and democracy; our convictions of right and wrong cover precisely those of the British people; so many of our sons are fighting in the British ranks, and we cannot ourselves always keep cool the martial blood of our forbears in our veins. Even if our heads are, can our hearts be neutral? There is fortunately direction in what our poet Spitteler said during the last war: —“Wohlan, füllen wir angesichts dieser Unsumme von internationalem Leid unsere Herzen mit schweigender Ergriffenheit und unsere Seelen mit Andacht, und vor allem, nehmen wir den Hut ab; dann stehen wir auf dem richtigen neutralen, dem Schweizerpunkt.” This advice, at first sight, seems curiously negative, but it does in reality lead us directly to the one great service which we as a nation can do for humanity to-day, and for the practice of which we possess the ideal instrument of our own making in the shape of the Internat. Red Cross Organisation in Geneva.

Our Federal President Wetter, in a public speech in Zurich on November the 21st, reminded his hearers that Swiss neutrality imposed upon them the duties of caution in critique, charity to humanity through the work of the Red Cross Organisation, and the example of fraternity between nations as exemplified in our own confederation. And he admits that even at home, the practice of absolute neutrality is very difficult indeed.

So let our good resolutions be few and restricted and for that reason, no doubt they will stand a better chance of being performed. Let us be loyal above all things and to all things we owe loyalty. Let us preserve our broad, sane patriotism of the Swiss, not of the Thurgauer, or the Vaudois, or the St. Galler or the Valaisan. Let us keep bright the flame of that yearning in our hearts which hurts so much, to be back in our mountains, on the pastures, on our shimmering lakes, in our green forests, and in our beautiful old world villages and towns.

In closing this report, I am happy to extend the thanks of our Group to all those who have, with their assistance or their sympathy, enriched our work during 1941. In the first place, these thanks are due to our Minister, whose presence here is such an encouragement to us, and who has given us so many proofs of his approval and sympathy; to the Swiss Mercantile Society, our good friends and landlords; to our lecturer in chief, Mr. G. J. Keller, for his invaluable gift of accurate knowledge. I am exceedingly sorry that he has been prevented from being with us to-day. Our thanks also go to our honorary secretary Mr. Cesar Campart for his most excellent minutes of the proceedings which will afford later generations of Swiss in London most useful information of the happenings of the present time; and to that other honoured secretary of ours who does her work so assiduously behind the curtain and renders such great services to the Group, Mrs. Clara Muller.

A. Fred. SUTER.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The Monthly Meeting of the Society was held at Swiss House, on Saturday, January 24th. Mr. J. J. Boos presided.

There were three applications for membership, one resignation and five members, now permanently resident in Switzerland, had their membership transferred to Swiss Sections.

The Chairman informed the Meeting that the English course held at Frohurg had proved a success and a second course had already been started. These courses are held under the auspices of the S.K.V. and subsidised by the Swiss Government. They are run on the lines of the S.M.S. College and must be considered a war-time measure designed to replace the courses held in London, as far as this is possible.

It was decided to hold the Annual General Meeting at Swiss House on Saturday, February 14th, at 2 p.m. The Chairman expressed the hope that members would be present in large numbers.

The meeting was followed by a film show. Unfortunately, the attendance was not as good as usual, no doubt due to the severe weather. Those who did brave the elements did not regret it for a single moment, for they were treated to a most instructive and entertaining afternoon by Mr. A. Kern, Export Manager of the well-known American firm of Standard Brands Ltd., a compatriot who was introduced to the audience by Mr. J. J. Pfaendler as a traveller whose business had taken him to many countries. Mr. Kern on his journeys recorded his impressions in a number of films. He took the audience on a tour round the Mediterranean, to countries which are now often in the limelight. One reads and hears a great deal of the remotest places these days, but it is not always easy to imagine what they look like. Mr. Kern filled many gaps in our knowledge, both with pictures and words, for he gave a running commentary on all the films he showed. The journey started with Spain, approaching the Pyrenees from the north and thence to Barcelona, with its majestic harbour and to Madrid, famous for its bull-fights. We had all heard of Matadors, Pica-dors and Toreadors, but few of us had seen a bull fight on the screen. Mr. Kern had very ably filmed a bull fight and we were able to see the whole process from beginning to end. It is rather a bloodthirsty sport, but nevertheless very thrilling. When viewing the many fine buildings of Barcelona and Madrid, we could not help wondering what these looked like after the Civil War. The first film ended with scenes on the world famous beach of San Sebastian, where holiday makers were surf-riding in canoes. The next film took us on a trip from Italy to Egypt. In turn we saw the ports of Genoa and Naples, passing Vesuvius and the isle of Capri. After crossing the Mediterranean, Alexandria was reached, where the English fleet was in port. The film was taken in 1936, during the time of the Abyssinian crisis. Of particular interest was a visit to a Swiss cement factory at Tourah on the Nile. The third film depicted a journey from Port Said to Rhodes, the Italian island in the Dodecanese, thence through the Dardanelles to Istanbul, Gallipoli and on to Athens. Most interesting was a trip through the Corinth Canal. Finally this journey concluded at Brindisi and Venice, town of the gondolas. Next we saw a film on Palestine and Syria, with many famous sites in the Holy Land portrayed in vivid colour.