

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1944)
Heft: 1020

Rubrik: Nouvelle société helvétique

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NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE, (London Group).

Annual General Meeting 1944.

The Annual General Meeting of the N.S.H. was held at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, on Saturday, January 15th.

The meeting, which was preceded by a luncheon, was attended by over 100 members and friends.

After the loyal toasts, the President, Mr. A. F. Suter, read out two greetings telegrams received from Prof. Dr. Lätt and the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger.

In welcoming the guests, the President mentioned that the Swiss Minister and Madame Thurnheer were unable to be present as they were still away in Switzerland. He was, however, pleased to announce that the Minister was represented by Monsieur A. Girardet, Chargé d'Affaires, whom he bade a very hearty welcome. He further extended cordial greetings to the Presidents of the sister Societies as well as the Heads of the Swiss Churches.

M. Girardet then rose to address the gathering in the following terms:—

“Monsieur le Président, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege, in the absence of our Minister, to represent the Legation at this gathering. As you certainly know, M. Thurnheer has left a few weeks ago for Switzerland, to report and contact our Government. This deprives M. and Mme Thurnheer of the pleasure of being with you to-day and bringing to you their personal good wishes for yourselves and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. I feel, however, sure that I am acting in accordance with their wishes in conveying to you their heartiest greetings.

Glancing through our files of correspondence with the Bernese Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger, which cover the war years, a fact I had always been aware of, namely that few and slender contacts had been made between the Swiss Colony of this country and the Secrétariat in Berne during this time, suddenly struck me with great force. It came home to me that none of you, none of us, was present at the 650th anniversary of the Foundation of the Confederation in 1940 and ever since, regarding all other manifestations of importance to our national life, you and we have had to content ourselves with watching from this island and waiting for the news and descriptions the papers bring us, at times with very long delays.

This severance of usual links between the Swiss in Great Britain and at home is felt far more acutely now than in the last war and indeed, when compared with the contacts other Swiss colonies abroad — not only on the Continent, but in the U.S.A. and the Republics of South America, in the Near and Middle East — have the good luck to have, I must say that our chances of contact have been very poor indeed.

This handicap cuts both ways. Not only have you — as all of us — not heard overmuch home news and reports on the activities which have been and are increasingly becoming the special sphere of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger, but you yourselves, through your President, M. Suter, have only been able at long intervals to convey to the

Society your thoughts and suggestions on the various questions you have at heart.

Though we here may have been handicapped — to a greater or lesser degree all of us have been — by this illfortune, I know that those people entrusted with the maintenance of the spiritual oneness of the Swiss at home and abroad, have not been idle. This I gather from reports on their activities in those foreign parts to which their workers, lecturers, writers, teachers, film technicians and journalists have been able to penetrate.

This rough enumeration of activities gives you an idea of what you may be called upon to express your views on, when you, your President, and members of your committee will again be able to resume, unhampered by postal censorship and other restrictions, exchange of ideas with your friends at home. I have in mind people like Mlle Briod, whose helpfulness and understanding has never failed you, like Professor Lätt, whose experiences over many years has always been of great value, and like Dr. Imhof, who, having recently joined the Secrétariat, has had fewer opportunities of coming here than of visiting other places, but who is highly esteemed by all who have had the pleasure of meeting him.

I am sure I am speaking on behalf of our Minister when saying that the Legation will not fail to do what is in its power to facilitate this exchange of views. Our own experience with our friends in the Secrétariat — although occasions to enlist their help may not have been numerous — has always been that we have met with understanding and help when we have made certain suggestions. To name one instance: we have been helped from time to time in procuring books and periodicals which the Legation may have needed to place at the disposal of people interested. I feel sure that this service will be developed after the war to enable you all to benefit and derive pleasure from it.

I believe that I am justified in saying this, judging by the happy beginnings which have been made with the library in Swiss House in Rome, and we may look forward to an extension of the work.

This time may not be yet — we may still have to be patient, — but this should not prove so very difficult for us who have lived for these long and trying war years in the midst of a people which has shown and still is showing great fortitude.

It now remains for me to express to you, M. le Président and to the entire company gathered here, my best wishes that the new year of activities of your society may prove a fruitful one.”

M. Girardet's words were warmly applauded by all present.

On behalf of the guests, the Rev. Pradervand then briefly addressed the meeting, paying tribute to the valuable work carried on by the N.S.H. for the benefit of the Swiss abroad.

After a short interval, the official proceedings were opened by the President.

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, compiled in the usual exemplary manner, were read by the Hon. Secretary, Mr. C. Campart.

The President then reported on the activities of the Society during the past year. The following are extracts from his address:—

“As the London Group of the N.S.H. we have

achieved the 28th year of our existence. Our society was born during one world war because of the needs of that period, and now passes through a second one. Our country again occupies a position among the nations very similar to that of the last world war. Her traditional neutrality is proving itself again an asset, not only to her, but every other nation; many are the tasks of an international character laid upon Switzerland — some voluntarily self-imposed — others by consent with many individual Foreign nations, and these tasks are fulfilled conscientiously as a duty and benevolently as a contribution to humanity in general. But Switzerland is also standing to arms; she has never relaxed her armed vigilance to keep her frontiers inviolate from any Foreign intruder. Her people are stoically carrying the heavy burden of self-defence and the privations which her geographical position and complete encirclement by Foreign powers at war force upon her.

We, her citizens living abroad, cut off almost completely from contact with our homeland, have to share the fortunes and hardships of war with the countries in which we are settled. As a consequence there must be many tens of thousands of our countrymen in dire straights and want in those countries overrun by the armies of the invaders. Our hearts go out in pity and compassion to these unfortunate compatriots of ours, and we are deeply grateful to know that our Authorities at home as well as our mother society and other bodies are continuing to do everything they can to assist them in their distress. Our own duty in this respect is clear.

We in this hospitable country of Great Britain are still in the position to enjoy the comparative immunity from loss of life and wealth as an effect of the war, and in these fortunate circumstances our society has been able to carry on its work during 1943 in an undisturbed sequence of meetings.

If, in the course of these meetings, we have been successful in keeping our members and friends informed of the position in Switzerland, as well as of the progress of the war and world affairs in general, this has been done by the deliberate policy of the council. We hold it to be of great importance that we should all have a clear insight into world conditions of to-day; and we therefore gladly accepted Mr. Gottfried Keller's kind offer to continue his lectures at the monthly meetings during 1943; the constantly mounting figure of attendances during the year is a clear proof that the members share our conviction and appreciate equally the advantages offered to them by our distinguished lecturer.

Our connection and intercourse with the S.S.E. has been confined, more even than in previous war years, to a few cables and letters, apart from the printed reports of our proceedings transmitted by the S.O. From the Secretariat we received, months after the events, the reports of the council meetings, of the *Journée des Suisses à l'Etranger*, etc., but it has of course not been possible to obtain from Switzerland any books, calendars or other material, for which payment is required, except in small numbers through the kind offices of the Legation.

I mention here with regrets the attempted visit of the German-speaking secretary of the S.S.E., Dr. W. Imhoof, who intended to give a series of lectures in England, but whose journey terminated in Lisbon after a long wait for a passport visa which never ar-

rived. Before his return Dr. Imhoof sent me the Red Cross Film through the Legation in London, and this has been in my keeping since.

This film, *The Flag of Mercy*, I hope is by now known to all of you, although the first showing at Conway Hall on September 11th produced an uncommonly small audience, for what reason it is difficult to say. Since then it has been shown at various places: — to the Swiss colonies and to Red Cross audiences in Manchester and Dunfermline (Scotland); by Mr. Binggely to an English audience in Huntingdon; and the S.M.S. have shown it to their members in London. You will have another chance of seeing it in London at Conway Hall on February the 5th next, when members of the British and the Allied Red Cross Societies in London (probably some 300 persons) have arranged to accept our invitation. I am given to understand that they would prefer to mix in with our people rather than have a special show reserved for themselves.

There are further arrangements in hand: — for the film to return to Manchester and to be shown also at the Technical College at Leicester, where an old member of ours, Mr. Louis Duffey, will present it, while there are sure to be more applications as we go along and it becomes known. The film is earning a good deal of money in collections for the Red Cross Funds, and we may be thankful that the Secretariat has placed in our hands a medium of — I will not call it propaganda — visual demonstration of the earnest spirit and conscientious work of the Swiss people in this, their especial, sphere of war activity."

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Mr. Suter then expressed the sincere thanks of the council and the members to all those who had, in the course of the year, assisted the work of the group by their support and goodwill:— to the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Thurnheer, the Legation staff, the London sister societies, the Churches, and finally for particular services rendered by some of the members.

“ You know, Ladies and Gentlemen, we Swiss have every reason to be proud of the civic organising spirit and capacity in our colony which does not really leave any urgent need uncovered; all we have to deplore is that this same colony is constantly diminishing in numbers by force majeure:— on the one hand, there is no immigration of new young blood, on the other, we cannot expect our sons, born in this country and, having come through a world war fighting with the British forces, to regard themselves as Swiss citizens, however benevolently the Government may look upon such a procedure. They, our sons, recognise that Switzerland is the land of their fathers, not their own, but the finest land next to their own.

In conclusion we have to ask ourselves:— Have we done our duty to the colony? Have we been able to fill a demand, a need? Have we been able to give either instruction, comfort or entertainment, and furthermore, if so, have we done so on a sound basis? Have we found the people who require these advantages?

The answers to these questions form our balance sheet, our spiritual profit and loss account. Perhaps we cannot, nor ought we to, give the answers ourselves, but we must feel them, even if they remain unspoken.

I think the only sure guide is our own satisfaction in the work:— to lose our own personality in the doing of it, to appeal to the highest demand in ourselves and take it for granted that this demand exists in all others. To take the matter seriously as if it were part of our profit-making career. To feel convinced of the correctness of a certain direction or a certain system and then follow it wholeheartedly.

We are cut off from home; we are thrown back upon ourselves. Therefore we must study ourselves more than we used to do; we must refine our tendencies and perceptions — refined thoughts and actions will follow. Also we depend upon each other more than we used to do; therefore we must be more friendly, more charitable, more forgiving, more faithful, less cynical.

The war will not last for ever, but the brave new world will not be born except in our hearts. We are not likely to forget our sweet homeland, our oneness with the Swiss soil; meanwhile, if we follow these simple specifics, it seems to me, we shall live up to the dictates of our civic virtue, to the high standard of our Swiss citizenship.”

The Presidential address was received with prolonged acclamation by all present.

The accounts for the period under review were presented by Mr. W. Renz, Hon. Treasurer. The figures submitted showed that the Society could look back on a year of satisfactory working. Of particular interest was the increase in membership from 200 to 235, of which increase no less than 30% are ladies. The active interest of these members is evinced by the average attendance of about 80 members at the Monthly Meetings.

The Meeting thereupon duly adopted the accounts, thanks being expressed to the Hon. Treasurer for his arduous work during his first term of office.

There now followed the election of the Council for the year 1944, Mr. J. J. Boos, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society acting as Chairman pro tem. He thanked the outgoing Council members for services rendered during their tenure of office, singling out for special mention the President, Mr. A. F. Suter, the Hon. Secretary, Mr. C. Campart, and the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. W. Renz, who as the chief officers had borne the brunt of the work. He also mentioned the outstanding lectures of Mr. Gottfried Keller, which continued to attract an ever larger attendance at the Monthly Meetings, the best proof of their popularity. He said the Society owed a special debt of gratitude to Mr. Keller for coming along month after month to enlighten the members on the trend of world affairs and also to give news of the latest happenings in our homeland.

As a result of the election, the Council for the financial year 1944 was constituted as follows:—

Messrs. E. J. Bachofen, Wm. Beckmann, W. Burren, C. Campart, W. Gamper, Gottfried J. Keller, Wm. Renz, Dr. H. Revilliod, Theo. Ritter, M. Rothlisberger, Wm. B. Sigerist, A. Fred Suter, J. Weber, Miss Germaine Zingg.

This concluded the official part of the meeting, after which the members adjourned to a welcome tea.

The afternoon was fittingly wound up with an excellent musical programme. Mr. Revilliod delighted the audience with some finely rendered violin solos, very ably accompanied on the piano by Mr. John Suter. These two young artistes were cordially applauded by an appreciative audience.

They were followed by Miss Unden, whose piano recitals were a feature of the afternoon's entertainment. Her début was an unqualified success, as was shown by the tremendous applause from her audience. We hope to hear her again on some future occasions.

The musical programme would, however, not have been complete without the items contributed by the Swiss Choral Society. Under the genial leadership of Mr. E. P. Dick, they sang “ Adieu, petit rose ” by J. Dalcroze, “ Waldesrauschen ” by F. Ullrich, “ S'Mälche ” Jodelled by Krenger and “ Le Ranz des Vaches ” (trad.)

The Choral Society seems to go from strength to strength and must be congratulated on a very fine performance. They received a tremendous ovation from an enthusiastic audience, who were most appreciative of the homely tunes which created a real Swiss atmosphere.

In conclusion, the President thanked all the artistes for having contributed to a most enjoyable afternoon, which all present endorsed with prolonged acclamation.

WB.

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