

# 75 years Swiss Benevolent Society

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## 75 YEARS SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

At the beginning of this year the S.B.S. could look back upon 75 years of charitable work among our poor and necessitous Compatriots in London.

At the same time, Mr. Theodore Ritter had completed 40 years of untiring efforts as its Secretary.

It was only right, therefore, that the Committee should have decided to arrange some little celebration of these remarkable milestones, and therefore had convened the Society's friends to a Dinner at Brown's Hotel on Saturday, the 24th February, following on the Annual General Meeting held at the same place a little earlier in the afternoon.

Shortly before the time fixed for the Dinner friends began to arrive, in addition to those who had attended the earlier proceedings in the afternoon, and when the assembly had sat down, Brown's Hotel well-known Dining Room, where so many Swiss gatherings have taken place during the War, comfortably held some 80 guests who had come to pay their homage to our now Veteran Society, and if it be permitted to say so, also its still very active Veteran Secretary.

After Dinner, which, though simple because of wartime restrictions, was, as of wont, well prepared and enjoyed by everyone, the celebration began by a short review of the past from the Chair, occupied now for five years, as the Swiss Minister pointed out, by Col. Anton Bon, thus adding a third event to make the occasion in fact a triple landmark.

Col. Bon, rising from the Chair, welcomed the presence of M. Paul Ruegger, our Minister, accompanied by Mme. Ruegger, our Guest of Honour Mr. Theodore Ritter and Mrs. Ritter, as well as, amongst others, Messrs. Giradet, Pasteur Pradervand and Mrs. Pradervand, Father Lanfranchi, Signor Mordasini, our new Chancellor at the Legation, and successor to the late deeply regretted Paul Hilfiker, whose work for nearly two decades for the S.B.S. may here be mentioned once again, and Mr. W. Ziereisen, Assistant to the Society's Secretary.

In a short review of the Society's history of continued care and welfare among our Compatriots who in distress or old age never knock at the Society's door in vain, he paid tribute above all to the work of Mr. Ritter for over half the Society's own span of life of nearly three generations, and to the distinguished past Presidents who had done much to enable an ever increasing assistance and relief being made possible.

Over the signature of Col. Bon as President, the Society has issued a small commemorative brochure, carefully and interestingly prepared by that staunchest of friends of those in distress, and himself the Society's President for 14 years, Mr. Robert Dupraz, with two graphs from the hands of Mr. Oertli, a former Treasurer. The two graphs well illustrate, though monetary values are not the same in our time as they were in 1870, the steady increase of the help needed by our less fortunate Compatriots, as well as that always available by the kind generosity of the Swiss Colony in London, our Home Authorities, Federal, Cantonal and communal.

But, besides what has now become history, the immediate future will doubtless call on yet greater efforts. The present emergency has given an opportunity for employment of almost all, except the very old and infirm, but what will happen when the war ends and 25 million people on war work will have to be

accommodated elsewhere again? Without being pessimistic, the President went on to say the advent of the transitory period from war to peace will surely bring some grave problems the Society will have to deal with, but, fortunately, the financial position of the Society is assuring and it is unthinkable that the London Swiss at large will not adequately respond, as they have done in former difficult times. To provide already now for any future calls in that direction, a special Jubilee Fund has been opened and will remain open throughout the year, and already now Swiss Societies and individual friends are making special contributions, and it is hoped others will yet respond to ensure that the means will be equal to the needs.

It fell appropriately to Mr. Gamper, Vice-President and past Treasurer for many years and withal still very actively devoted to the Society's cause to pay tribute to his old friend, Mr. Theo. Ritter, and he did so, not forgetting Mrs. Ritter, in a manner that testified to their long time collaboration and friendship during which Mr. Ritter's untiring work and services as the Society Secretary had earned him the highest degree of appreciation by the Committee and which had made him the trusted friend and adviser of all in their many problems as they arose during those regular Monday evening Meetings and the week between.

He concluded by stating that to mark the occasion his Colleagues and friends had intended to present Mr. Ritter with a Gold Watch and Mrs. Ritter with a Persian Rug. In the case of Mr. Ritter, the right kind could not be found prior to this Meeting and instead Mme. Ruegger had kindly consented to hand him a cheque with which he could ultimately fulfil the wish of his heart. The right Rug for Mrs. Ritter was, however, found, and was suitably displayed in the room.

The assembly, at the invitation of the Speaker, then rose and drank to the health and long life of Mr. and Mrs. Ritter.

When Mr. Ritter, thereupon, rose himself, it was obvious to all how visibly moved he was at the many signs and expressions of appreciation and gratitude, of friendship and good wishes of which he had been the object to-night, and which he said made it almost impossible for him to express his, as well as Mrs. Ritter's thanks. However, we all listened to all he told us in a manner that could be his only, and revealed to us at the same time why he could be sure of the friendship vouchsafed him by those that honoured him to-night, as also not least of all by those he has been able to succour and be their friend during four long decades, and let us all hope for many years yet to come. As could be expected, he had many things to say of ups and downs in all those years now past, and the following passages of his speech convey better than anything else a picture of many a day's happenings not specially retained and record at the same time the understanding mind and kind heart of the man who for now 40 years has been the central figure of them all.

"In those early days distributions were made at the Swiss Church after service. The late Mr. Steiger did not approve of this, saying that one or two shillings were of no real help. He wished all applications to be thoroughly investigated and if found genuine, adequate assistance given, so that the poor could live and need not apply elsewhere. Older Members wished to carry on as hitherto, but one day the reformers had a stroke of luck — One of our diehards, while walking down

Shaftesbury Avenue, was overtaken by a hansom. In the fare he recognised a caller of that morning. The cab turned down Gerrard's Place, he followed, and found the beggar spending the remainder of his 2/- in liquid refreshment. After this the Sunday distribution ceased."

"... 'I often came to our Meetings upset by business trouble or domestic sorrows, but after the evening's work, in comparison with the suffering of some of our poor, my difficulties seemed less. I felt rich and was full of gratitude for all the good things life had given me. I recalled the old Chinese proverb of the man who grumbled because he had no shoes until he met a man who had no feet'..."

"... 'In terminating, may I sum up with a quotation by Barrie, which concerns all of us — 'Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves'..."

A hearty, deeply felt and spontaneous ovation once more must have assured our friend that so much devotion to the poor and friendless amongst our own can never have been in vain and must carry its own reward in all the kindly deeds done.

Our Minister M. Ruegger, then rose to say in so many fitting words, as we are already wont to hear from him, in English and French, how much he had learned and could appreciate the great and generous work the Society had done in its long history, and how much of this was personified in the person of Mr. Ritter, whom we had all gathered to honour. His words were also to the future, however unknown as yet, and that charity and succour to our own in distress and to suffering humanity at large was our heritage from olden times and was to guarantee our Country the respect of the great ones of this World and an honoured place amongst the comity of Nations.

Mr. Dupraz in a lighter vein then thanked the Ladies for their presence, and their very much appreciated part in the works of the Society, when Col. Bon once again rose to say, in Schwyzerdütsch what we all felt to be our duty in the years to come, only to be followed again by Mr. Ritter as well to say once more

thank you to those who had so kindly spoken of him and wishing all a real Vergelt's Gott. Mr. Willy Deutsch then read two poems written by him for the occasion, one to the Society and the other to its Secretary. (See page of this issue). Mr. F. G. Sommer, to conclude, readily responded to a call from the Chair to tell a story or two of the lighter side of life, and Mr. von Bergen accompanied by Mr. Raymond Chappuis at the piano finally delighted those present with a few yodlers from his well-known repertoire.

The President then concluded the evening and the company dispersed. It was an evening that must have delighted and conveyed to all how happy a place this World could be if all were bent to make others happy and content, and that we are all brothers in a world meant to be brothers: "One for all and all for one" as our Swiss motto says.

W.B.B.

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### TO THE SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, LONDON.

(On the 75th Anniversary of its Foundation.)

BENEVOLENCE — melodious, noble name,  
Enshrining virtues of the loftiest kind:  
Love, pity and a charitable mind,  
A heart, nurt'ring compassion's holy flame.

Can there, in truth, be any higher aim,  
Than help poor brethren, so that they may find  
Not to have been forgotten, left behind;  
For all God's creatures have their rightful claim.

't is said that charity begins at home;  
To this the London Swiss have pledged their bond,  
Watchful that, in misfortune, none shall roam.

They've striven seven decades and five years,  
Succ'ring all pressing needs and far beyond  
And, by their work, eas'd pain and banish'd tears.

### TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY, THEO. RITTER, Esq.

(On having completed 40 years of devoted service.)

He, who like your goodself does never cease,  
Through half a lifetime — maybe in excess —  
To help his countrymen when in distress,  
Finds his content in toil, bereft of ease.

Where there is want, depression and disease,  
When folks have griefs or troubles to confess,  
They turn to you — for pity and redress;  
None asks in vain amongst the least of these.

The debt which, as a Colony, we owe  
To you, can never fully be repaid,  
Whilst thanks express but feebly the intent.

May you go on your blessings to bestow;  
The lustre of your task will never fade —  
Its due reward shall be your monument.

LONDON, February 24th, 1945.

"GALLUS."

### ALBERT FERBER (SWISS)



PIANO RECITAL  
at WIGMORE HALL  
TUESDAY, MAY 1st  
at 6.30 p.m.

Works by  
BACH, MOZART, BEETHOVEN,  
CHOPIN, DEBUSSY, RAVEL.

Tickets: 10/6, 7/6, 5/-. 3/-  
From Box Office, Wigmore Hall,  
or from Musical Culture Ltd.,  
53, Welbeck Street, W.1.

★ Mr. Ferber, a Native of Lucerne, well-known in musical circles of this country, has played in most European Capitals. He finished his studies with Gieseking and Rachmaninoff and will also be broadcasting on the B.B.C. Home Service in the Star Programme, Wednesday, April 4th, 1945, at 7.15 p.m.