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SWISS MALE CHOIR.

Three outstanding events topped the programme when the Swiss Choral Society met for the Annual General Meeting at the "Schweizerbund" on the 2nd of November last: Firstly to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Society; secondly to change the name into "Swiss Male Choir"; and thirdly to rehearse in future at the "Schweizerbund."

The Meeting was preceded by a supper at 7 o'clock, kindly offered to the active members by two generous donors. The tables were nicely decorated with flowers, which gave the whole setting a festive appearance. Shortly after 7 o'clock the President invited Father Lanfranchi to say Grace, after which we sat down to an excellent supper delicately served by the steward of the "Bund" and his efficient staff. Before coffee was served President Sommer pronounced the toast to H.M. The King, followed by the toast to our beloved Switzerland. Mr. Sommer then opened the meeting, addressing a hearty welcome to 45 members present. Our Hon. Vice-President, Mr. J. Manzoni, then rose to deliver the anniversary address. He told us at length how the Swiss Choral Society came into being 25 years ago almost to the day, when he was elected President; how they celebrated the event with a free concert at the "Schweizerbund," how they went ahead by leaps and bounds and how to-day he feels very proud to be the "Father" of the Society. Mr. Manzoni also spoke of the hard years which befell the Choir, especially the last six, during which the Society existed as best it could. He emphasised, however, that the war is now over and great things lie ahead for our Choir and he desired to have, therefore, a solemn promise from all active members that they will do their utmost to attend all rehearsals and further the interests of the Choir in every respect. This promise was forthcoming spontaneously. Mr. Manzoni's speech was applauded with enthusiasm, after which the Choir assembled to sing "Mein Schweizerland" (Attenhofer). This song was rendered with much feeling, the last verse rising to a beautiful crescendo which made me believe that Mr. Manzoni's words must have fallen on fertile ground!

The Meeting then listened to the reading of the Minutes of the previous Meeting, and also to the financial report. Our Treasurer presented a most satisfactory balance sheet, thanks to two friends becoming Life-Members in the course of the year, as also a steady increase in passive memberships and the regular subscription payments of the active members. Both reports were accepted with prolonged acclamation and a vote of thanks to both the Secretary and the Treasurer.

President Sommer then rose to present the annual review in the following terms:

"It is my pleasant duty to extend to you all a cordial welcome to this Annual General Meeting of our Society. I am particularly pleased to welcome so many of our passive members, a proof that our activities are gaining interest, and I need hardly say how much we feel encouraged by your continued support.

It is customary at Meetings of this nature to give a short account of work done in the past, and to consider future activities and prospects.

When we met for our Annual Meeting last year, the war was still in full swing. The invasion of

France had only taken place three months before, and even the most optimistic of us could hardly foresee that the war in Europe, let alone that in the Far East, would be a thing of the past by May and August, 1945, respectively.

The 'doodle-bugs' and rockets were falling fast on London when at the last Meeting we looked into the immediate future. Whilst we then decided to take up regular fortnightly rehearsals almost at once, the continued enemy air activity kept us from making a start until February last. From then onward, until the end of July, the Society met regularly every other Friday for rehearsals. After a month's rest during August, these rehearsals were again continued from September to this day. Actually 14 rehearsals have taken place this year, as against 20 last year. The average attendance was 23 out of 32 active members; on one occasion, namely, 1st June, the whole of the active members, viz., 32 were present. This, I am sure, must be considered a very satisfactory effort. Whilst the average attendance of 23 on the other hand, can hardly be termed satisfactory, it must be remembered that the earlier part of these rehearsals still took place under difficult war conditions. I must also point out that the average attendance figure has been detrimentally affected by the fact that, unfortunately, two of our active members have failed to put in an appearance throughout the year, except on one occasion.

I would take this opportunity of stressing the importance that active members should make it a point to attend rehearsals as regularly as possible. Disinterested, or indifferent, members are not only no asset to the Society but they are even a hindrance, as they discourage others. I know full well that no member can hope to attend all rehearsals, but at the same time there can be no valuable excuse for missing almost all of them. Nothing is more discouraging to the conductor than finding his strenuous efforts wrecked at the decisive moment by a minority of irregularly attending members.

During the year under review, we have, unfortunately, lost six active members on account of ill health and other reasons. We are most anxious that this 'fall out' should be made good, and I sincerely trust that all here present to-night will make genuine efforts to introduce prospective new members, thus adding new blood to our active circle. The number of passive members has increased during the past year to 46, thus registering a very satisfactory increase.

Most of you will recollect, as has already been confirmed by the Minutes, that in 1943 we elected as Hon. President, the then Swiss Minister, Dr. Walter Thurnheer. Unfortunately, owing to a serious illness which overtook him towards the end of last year, he had to leave this country for Switzerland, and I am sorry to record that Dr. Thurnheer died there on 7th August last. The late Minister served his country and the Swiss Colony in London with great devotion, and it will ever be remembered with gratitude that his moral and practical support during the most trying time of the war was a great encouragement to many. As a tribute to his memory, may I ask you, gentlemen, to be upstanding and observe a minute's silence.

The Swiss Choral Society performed at two functions during the past year, both of which are of recent date and, therefore, still well remembered. On 29th July, we met at Stoll Theatre on the occasion of our National Day Celebrations, followed on 1st August, by a function at Seymour Hall, as guests of the 'Rutli' Club. I am glad to record that on both occasions the choir performed with distinction.

The Committee met as and when occasion necessitated; the Music Commission, on the other hand, has not met during the past year, due to sufficient old music being available for present needs. The time is rapidly approaching, however, when this Commission will be required to serve the Choir in the choice of new material. In this connection, I may mention that negotiations are under way to obtain selections of old and modern songs from Switzerland in our National Languages.

As to the future, now that the war is over, the Choir will no doubt have to answer many calls of the Swiss Colony in London. For the immediate future, three functions are envisaged. We have been asked to assist at the bi-lingual Christmas celebration of the Eglise Suisse at the end of December, further, we anticipate being asked once again to add to the success of the Annual General Meeting of the N.S.H. in January 1946. Towards the end of the year, or at the latest early next year, a new Church minister will be appointed for the German-speaking community and it will be greatly welcomed if the Choir can render one or two songs at the respective induction service.

These functions will make it imperative that rehearsals should take place regularly from now to the end of the year, and as a result, I repeat my earnest appeal to all active members.

In view of the more normal conditions now prevailing, the Choir will no doubt wish to extend its activities to the fullest possible extent in the coming year, and I express the hope that in 1946 it may once again become possible to hold an annual dinner and concert or dance, to which our ladies can be invited.

With your active help, gentlemen, this and other functions should in no small measure popularize our efforts and bring happiness to a large number of compatriots and friends in London.

I am confident that, given your continued support, the Choir will go from strength to strength and prosper for the good of all concerned."

Rousing cheers greeted the President's speech. The elections followed under the Chairmanship of Mr. Manzoni, who thanked the outgoing Committee for their excellent services, calling for three cheers which were spontaneously forthcoming. He intimated that the outgoing Committee was prepared to stand for re-election if the members wished it. After a short discussion this was agreed to, especially as Mr. Manzoni remarked that the five gentlemen on the Committee had done all the work during hard times and that they might be given a chance to have at least one easier year. He welcomed Mr. Sommer, our Jubilee President, back to the presidential chair. The foregoing procedure was interlaced with songs from the Choir, who seemed to be well in form.

Our Jubilee President then continued with the Agenda. The Auditors were re-elected. Resignations

there were none, but five applications for active membership received unanimous support and were accepted. Mr. Sommer also wished the meeting to confirm 26 admissions for passive membership and thanked Mr. Manzoni for his untiring efforts in finding and introducing new passive members; there was also a further application for Life-Membership and the Secretary was instructed to communicate with the gentleman in question. It was further decided to approach the new Swiss Minister, Monsieur Ruegger, to accept the Honorary Presidency of the Society. This was followed by a discussion whether or not to change the name of the Society; it was argued that after all we were the equivalent of a "Schweizer Maennerchor" whereas a Choral Society is usually understood to be a "Gemischter Chor." The name Swiss Male Choir would be a much better translation of "Maennerchor" and when the proposition for the change was put to the vote the new name was adopted unanimously. Henceforth the Swiss Choral Society will be known as the SWISS MALE CHOIR. A further discussion ensued when the proposal was made to rehearse in future at the Schweizerbund instead of at Swiss House. Mr. Sommer said that this had been discussed in Committee and that he and his staff had kept an open mind on the question. Many speeches were made, some for, some against; the President of the Schweizerbund invited us to try it out, assuring us that he and his Committee would do their best to make us very happy. It was also mentioned that, after all, for at least fifteen years we had been rehearsing at the Schweizerbund under very happy conditions. When at last Mr. Sommer had heard enough and actually two proposals had been made and duly seconded, he brought the presidential hammer down with a loud bang — and put the matter to the vote. The result was that only three members voted against a change. The Swiss Male Choir will, therefore, rehearse at the Schweizerbund, 74, Charlotte Street, W.1. At the same time it was decided to rehearse every Friday evening as in pre-war days and at 7 p.m. *prontissimo*.

Mr. Ritzmann rose to propose a most hearty vote of thanks to the two gentlemen who so kindly offered supper and drinks; everybody cheered, everybody was happy! I may not mention names as the two gentlemen wish to remain anonymous; incidentally, those two gentlemen cheered as well so as to hide their identity. Our Jubilee President then thanked all for having patiently and good-humouredly listened to a very long debate on the Choir's affairs. He also thanked the Swiss Mercantile Society for their hospitality, as also Mr. Bossert for his kindly help, and the Schweizerbund and its steward, Mr. F. Wyss, for making us welcome and providing an excellent supper. The Meeting closed at 10.50 p.m. — Well, dear reader, if the above account of a most successful Meeting appeals to you and if you are interested in Singing, why not join our ranks? We shall make you very welcome!

E.P.D.

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