

Swiss relief and reconstruction in France

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PROFESSOR J. INEBNIT'S LECTURE
at the
MIDLAND HOTEL, MANCHESTER,
Saturday, March 9th, 1946.

SWISS RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION IN FRANCE.

Nearly fifty members and friends listened spell-bound to Professor Jean Inebnit unfolding a tale of want, hunger, suffering and privation which the children of France endured during the occupation and since their liberation. Describing many pathetic and moving scenes of utter destruction and misery, particularly in the well-known landing areas and at Le Havre and again as far south as Perpignon and Toulouse, we were told of how the "Youth to Youth" help from a modest beginning in the Yorkshire area with collected articles of haberdashery, combs, soap and pencils blue and red, opened the doors of the doors of the Ministère de la Santé Publique.

The lecturer, though engaged at the Leeds University, felt a tremendous longing to aid this suffering country. Once convinced of his ability, not only to discuss, but actually to render positive assistance, other doors opened and the goodwill and practical help of French officials, from Ministers to the simple village Maire towards a Swiss, backed by the Society of Friends, was greatly in evidence. Many were the journeys, overcoming many difficulties, great the want of his counsel and his goods. However, the boundless energy of the lecturer, blessed by excellent health in spite of hardship, and having been granted greater facilities of transport by American authority, widened his field of activity with ever increasing success. Apart from American and English help the "Don Suisse" again proved in so many ways the deep understanding prevailing in Switzerland throughout the war and since the cessation of hostilities of softening much misery and to mitigate the suffering.

Professor Inebnit spoke of the assistance given in kind, in merchandise, of Swiss volunteers for reconstruction, in money grants and the many other ways alleviating the sad lot of the young and very old people of once so rich and beautiful a land.

Yet another task was added to Professor Inebnit's already heavy but cheerfully shouldered burden. Cases of Swiss citizens imprisoned through denunciation were brought to his notice and where, for obvious reasons, the Swiss administration could not intervene, the lecturer related, to the pleasure of his listeners, of his efforts culminating in the liberation of innocent people.

We were told of a reception given by school children, parents and local dignitaries, of the presentation of the bouquet and an address of grateful thanks of the French youth to the English children which Professor Inebnit was asked to transmit to their Majesties, a task accepted with trepidation but successfully accomplished, suitably acknowledged and duly forwarded to the French head-girl.

Though the wonderful assistance of our little country is beyond question, enormous efforts, perhaps not always appreciated, are made by the French themselves. A people who for their very existence had to resort to underground methods have many habits to undo, and Industrial Schools, for instance, are filled to overflowing. Would not, the lecturer asked wistfully, conditions have been similar had this country been occupied?

Birth or creed are forgotten as all good Frenchmen endeavour to raise the level of decent living and learning and to re-direct much mis-guided effort into more regularised channels.

Our own little troubles and worries pale before those sustained and unselfish individual endeavours, bearing evidence of much fundamental goodness remaining in man. It made us, furthermore, aware of the great need for further unstinted efforts to support these splendid volunteers in their task to mitigate the suffering, not only in France, but also of Europe.

Dr. J. A. Schedler, President, thanked Professor and Mrs. Inebnit for their coming and for the deeply moving account of Swiss Relief and Reconstruction in France. Monsieur Lucien Durieux, representing the French Colony in Manchester, expressed his deep gratitude for this work, for the help from Switzerland and for the address, which none of the present members are likely to forget for many days.

H.E.L.M.

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