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NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE.

How to maintain allegiance to Switzerland among our children?

N.S.H. — discussion leads to new initiatives.

Too many of our children grow up without sufficient knowledge of and contact with their home country. A recent open discussion organised by the New Helvetic Society, London Group, showed that the concern about the estrangement between the British born generation and the country of their fathers, is a widespread one, and that new steps must and will be taken in order to strengthen the ties between the young generation and the home country.

Dr. Egli, President of the London Group, opened the discussion with a comprehensive report covering all aspects of the problem. Only one method has hitherto been tried and proved quite inadequate, he said. The N.S.H. organised short holidays in Switzerland; but the children, whilst appreciating the beauties of the country, didn't learn the Swiss language, stuck together and rather fought off intruders. The idea of a Swiss school in London has to be turned down at once. The parents wouldn't like to deprive their children of the opportunities offered by a good English school nor would the children themselves. But there are schooling possibilities of a less comprehensive kind. It would be desirable for our children to be brought together more frequently. Opportunities might be explored for Saturday morning re-unions combined with lectures and games. Then the visits to Switzerland should be organised on a more ambitious basis. In order to acclimatize, longer periods than a few weeks are required. This means that school facilities have to be provided for. If the children attend a Swiss school, they might loose in England a whole year; it would be preferable therefore to open a special school in Switzerland for children coming from foreign colonies, with English teachers and an English curriculum but enriched with lessons about Switzerland and language courses. The proposition, while expensive, seems not unduly impossible. Parents should, of course, bear the normal costs, the extra expenses being met by special funds, if necessary.

Mr. A. F. Suter agrees on the whole with these proposals. He thinks that in co-operation with the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger and Pro Juventute holidays could be arranged in the "Ferienheim Alpina" where up to sixty children can be cared for. The difficulty lies rather in the travel arrangements which have to be prepared well in advance.

Mr. Tall advises to send the children preferably to families, than to homes or to camps. Otherwise they will come back as stubborn British as they were before. The travelling difficulties being to-day what they are, the holidays have already to be organised now for next year.

Mr. Pradervand recalls that the Sunday school did much to keep the young generation together and to teach them the Swiss language. It is also easier to

collect the children on Sundays when the parents go to church. Meetings on Saturday wouldn't be likely to be popular with parents or children.

Mr. Bleiker favours the suggestion of Mr. Tall. If the children are not scattered in families, they will form a united block and be quite unable to get accustomed to the Swiss way of life. In the meantime we should be able to give our children a good text-book on Swiss history, otherwise words like "Grütli" just mean nothing to them.

Miss Unden suggests that the children be sent to Switzerland not too early, preferably after the age of 14. Having finished their schooling in England, much of the difficulties mentioned in the discussion would disappear.

Mr. de Cintra tackles the problem from the practical point of view. We ought to consider the entirely different categories of Swiss parents: on the one hand families with prospects of going back to Switzerland, on the other, families who stay here permanently. For the former category, some Swiss schooling is clearly desirable in the child's own interest, for the latter, on the contrary, too much Swiss training would prove detrimental to his fitting into English life. But even for the children whose schooling for practical purposes should be entirely English, some Swiss courses and text-books would be highly desirable.

Mr. Weilenmann would like to see the children sent on holiday to Switzerland to be accommodated in the same town or even in the same district. In that way, they could easily be collected for lectures and outings.

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Mr. Blum suggests to organise in England camps in the countryside for a week or ten days. This would provide also an opportunity to give lectures and to mix the useful with the agreeable.

Dr. Egli summarizing the discussion is glad of the large consensus of opinion which emerged from the debate. Everybody being aware that the children adore going outside London, two practical propositions were made: first, to organise trips immediately after the Sunday school, every Sunday or every second Sunday. If a coach could be hired, that would make the outing all the more attractive for the children; secondly, to organise camps on holidays in pleasant surroundings. The N.S.H.-Council will take the necessary steps in order to carry out the suggestions as quickly as possible. There is also a wide agreement as to the necessity for arranging more holidays in Switzerland, but differences arise as to the special provisions for the schooling. The Council will contact the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger and Pro Juventute and see what could be done in the near future.

The discussion closes in a very happy mood. Mr. Dubs, of the Vienna Café, Mr. A. F. Suter, Hon. Vice-President of the N.S.H., and Mr. Aubaret, of the Swiss Legation, in a spontaneous movement offer their respective homes in the countryside for children-outings!

After the official closing of the debate, Mr. Gandon and Mr. Delaloye, two concertina players of repute, entertained the gathering and prolonged the genuine Swiss atmosphere of this third and very successful open meeting.

E.S.

Mr. Peter Dürrenmatt on "The political and economic trend in Switzerland."

The London Group of the New Helvetic Society was very lucky indeed to get Mr. Peter Dürrenmatt, home-editor of the "Basler Nachrichten," giving, on 28th April, at the Vienna Café, an improvised *causerie* on the economic and political trends prevailing in the home country. Mr. Dürrenmatt spent a few weeks over here lecturing in various P.o.W.-camps. Introduced by Dr. Egli, President of the London Group N.S.H., the distinguished journalist speaking in the homely "Bärndütsch" impressed a large gathering by his lucid exposition of the conditions at home: the economic boom causing more anxiety than satisfaction, the social maladjustments leaving the peasantry short of man-power and draining all the economic life to the booming industries, the political conservatism of the electorate and the uneasiness of the international outlook. Dr. E. v. Schenck, Editor of the "Schweizer Annalen" and fellow-traveller in the P.o.W.-camps, added some valuable remarks about the privileged and precarious position of Switzerland in the after-war period, a position of which too many Swiss are not yet fully aware.

The *causerie* was followed by a film-show called "Hidden Beauties." The film, which was taken by Mr. Bedret, of St. Moritz, created great enthusiasm amongst the audience by its sheer beauty, and Mr. Tall deserves thanks for having made this fine film available to the London Swiss.

E.S.

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