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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

The Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Benevolent Society, which took place on Monday, 29th March, was extremely well attended. There was an air of expectancy at Swiss House when the Hon. President Monsieur le Ministre Henry de Torrenté opened the proceedings. Many rumours of a fabulous legacy had circulated in the Colony and that evening the facts were to be announced. The meeting started with a speech of welcome by the Minister, who was accompanied by Monsieur H. Miesch and Consul J. Huber. He expressed his personal gratitude to the former President, Colonel A. Bon, for the outstanding contribution he had made during many years not only to the work of the Society but also to the life of the Colony. He proposed to the meeting to nominate Colonel Bon an Hon. Vice-President of the Swiss Benevolent Society. This was warmly agreed to.

Mr. R. Dupraz, Hon. Vice-President, then took the chair for the business part of the meeting which he opened with the sad news of the death of one of the oldest members of the S.B.S., Mr. F. H. Rohr. For 44 years he had been a loyal and regular worker at the Society's Monday evening meetings. The members paid a silent tribute to his memory.

A new President was elected in the person of Mr. F. G. Sommer who is well known for his unselfish work in the Colony. The Committees were re-appointed with the addition of Messrs. A. Gautier and O. Togni.

Mr. M. Rothlisberger reported on the work of the special committee which had been in charge of the Sandoz Legacy. Monsieur Aurèle Sandoz of Lausanne died in 1952, and in his will he left South African Mining shares to the Swiss Benevolent Society in London. The value of this bequest was in danger of being completely absorbed by South African and British death duties. Thanks to the energetic intervention of the Swiss Legation it was possible to reduce these duties, and after satisfying the Inland Revenue authorities concerned the sum of roughly £100,000 would now revert to the Society. Grateful thoughts were expressed to the memory of Monsieur

Sandoz for his legacy. According to a wish expressed by his heirs £1,000 will be donated to the Cancer Research Section of the Middlesex Hospital. The special committee whose duties had finished was discharged and the meeting delegated the task of looking after the legacy to the Society's Finance Committee (Messrs. R. Phenninger, M. Rothlisberger, A. Rueff and O. Togni).

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. M. Rothlisberger, then presented the accounts for 1953. During the last ten years pensions and relief paid out by the Society had more than trebled, but the income had only just doubled. In 1953 the £2,000 spent on casual relief and the nearly £3,000 paid to the 60-odd old pensioners were again a record figure. On the other hand contributions and subscriptions continued to drop. The deficit of £2,284 was more than double that of the previous year and was only partly made good by a generous legacy by a Mrs. M. S. Luckhurst. This was a regrettable state of affairs. Whilst the Sandoz funds would more than wipe out any deficiency it was the diminishing support from the Colony which was to be deplored. The strength of the S.B.S. had always rested on the good will of the Colony and this should be preserved also in the future.

Monsieur de Torrenté voiced this feeling very aptly when he pointed out that no amount of income from the Sandoz Legacy would be able to make up for the loss of moral and financial support from the Colony. The slackening in the payment of contribu-

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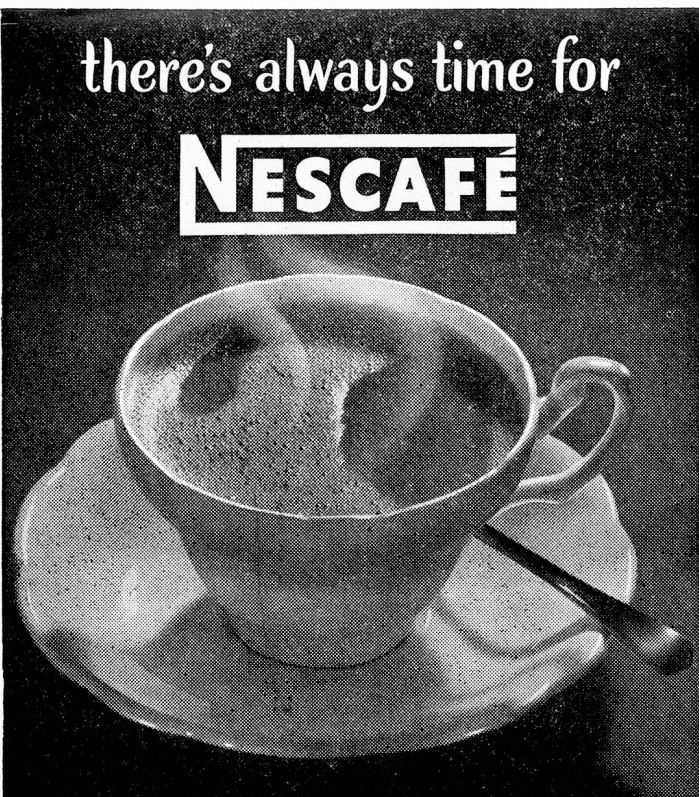
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tions might have grave repercussions on the spirit of solidarity which has always been one of the characteristics of the Swiss Colony in London. The best way to avoid this was to have the Society use this opportunity to undertake new and larger social tasks. The Minister proceeded to suggest that a part of the legacy be invested in the purchase of a house to be used as a residential home for Swiss girls, which, as the clergymen and the Welfare Officer could testify, was badly needed. Such an undertaking is well within the aims and objects of the S.B.S., and in fact is covered by the Society's constitution.

On the proposal of the Minister the meeting then set up a special commission who would go into the details of such a project. It consists of the President of the Society, of Messrs. W. Meier, R. Pfenninger, M. Rothlisberger and a representative from the Legation, who have power to co-opt such experts as the clergymen, the Welfare Officer and members of the two interested societies in Switzerland "Verein Freundinnen Junger Maedchen" and "Katholischer Maedchenschutzverein". The proposal of such a home must not be confused with the project of a Swiss Youth Centre and Hostel which the committee set up by the Presidents' Assembly is studying and of which the Colony is already aware.

Before closing the members expressed their grateful thanks to Monsieur le Ministre for his help and keen interest in the activities and problems of the Society.

Mariann.

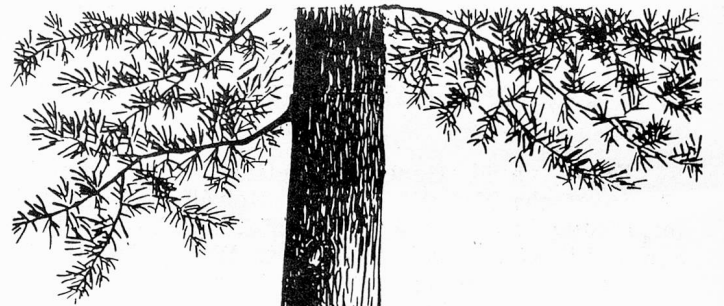


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