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A REAL HOME FOR SWISS ABROAD

For some time now quite a number of announcements and advertisements in respect of the "Auslandschweizer" Home in Dürrenesch have appeared in this paper.

The editor has, on many occasions, heard and read glowing reports concerning this *pied-à-terre* for Swiss abroad, in our homeland, which a generous countryman of ours and his wife (who wish to remain anonymous) have put at the disposal of their compatriots living abroad, for use either for a holiday or a prolonged stay.

So often in the past one has heard from Swiss who have left their homeland to seek their fortune in foreign lands, bitter complaints that they have been forgotten.

This might have been true to a certain extent in years gone by, but is hardly justified now, especially since the "Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger" of the "Nouvelle Société Helvétique" has made strenuous efforts to safeguard the interests of the "Cinquième Suisse".

Both the federal and cantonal authorities, too — especially after the last war — have voted considerable sums to aid those of our compatriots who have, either through the war or the economic crisis, lost their homes and their livelihood — many of them having to return home penniless and disheartened.

Amongst the many official and private organisations who have made it their business during the last few years to give practical aid to their brethren in foreign lands, not the least is the "Auslandschweizer" Home at Dürrenesch.

It is the wish of every Swiss living abroad to visit, at one time or another, the land of his birth, which for ever remains in his affectionate thoughts. To see once more the glittering mountains, the lovely lakes, the beautiful valleys and dales, the ancient towns and villages, and the people. To hear again the sounds of the church bells at eventide.

For many, alas, this remains but a dream! Travelling expenses have considerably increased ever since the last war, and hotel charges, even in modest establishments, are often — owing to unfavourable exchange conditions — for many unattainable.

These conditions have, no doubt, prompted the promoters of the Dürrenesch "Home" to make a stay in the "Heimat" a possibility, especially for those of modest means, and we are deeply grateful to them for their generosity.

To gain first-hand information the writer accepted a kind invitation extended to him early this year to pay a visit to this establishment, and it is with real pleasure that he gives herewith an account of his visit made in August of this year, for the benefit of the readers of the "Swiss Observer".

* * * *

It was a lovely summer day when I arrived at Dürrenesch and I was greeted by Mlle. Benoit, the charming principal of the "Home". This typical Aargovian village is situated on the ridge between the Wynen- and the Seetal, 1,854 feet above sea level. It is surrounded by a chain of green hills, meadows and picturesque forests. In the distance one gets a glimpse of the lake of Hallwyl and the Homberg, which is often called the "Aargauische Rigi". On a clear day the snow-clad alpine massive of central Switzerland and the Jura are clearly visible.

Within fifteen minutes' walking distance from the village lies the well-equipped farm, which is part and parcel of the "Home", supplying it with milk, vegetables, fruit, etc., throughout the year, the "Home" being open summer and winter.

It was there that my visit actually started. The large-sized farm is in the charge of Mr. Stalder, a "wärtschafte" Bernese, and his wife. Very generously I was invited then and there to partake of a "Schnapps" whilst my host and hostess explained to me the working of the establishment. Thus fortified I was taken to the actual "Home", and in the company of Mlle. Benoit I was conducted through the main and adjoining buildings, all in perfect repair.

What struck me at once most forcibly — coming from London! — was the cleanliness prevailing. Not a speck of dust could be discerned.

From a large entrance hall the way leads into a comfortable lounge with sofas and easy chairs, radio and TV, large vases of flowers adding colour to the surroundings. On the same level is situated the spacious dining-room with large and small tables furnished in up-to-date style, indeed a most "inviting" room. Here, too, as everywhere else, flowers add to the brightness.

There are single and double bedrooms, both in the principal and adjoining buildings, playrooms for children, card rooms for those who wish to indulge in a "Jass", a library well stocked with books in several languages.

A very large dormitory available for big parties or for over-spills can be found on the top floor of the main building, containing a number of modern wash-basins. The "Home" can accommodate up to one hundred guests.

A visit to the kitchens and store-rooms was a revelation; as far as equipment is concerned they can easily compete with any hotel kitchen I have ever seen.

There I witnessed the preparation of the luncheon of which I presently had the pleasure of partaking; it consisted of soup, a meat dish with two vegetables, and a sweet — a simple menu, well cooked (by a professional chef), appetising, and on the generous side. Those guests who like to supplement their meal with a glass of wine can do so — at their own expense, of course. In fact the cellars of the "Home" can provide some good vintages, and even the "café Kirsch" is obtainable.

During the repast some of the younger guests acted most efficiently as waiters and waitresses. The supervision of meals rests in the capable hands of Fräulein Spahr, a very efficient young lady.

Enquiring as to the terms, I was given the following information: Frs. 10.— per day for a stay of up to one week, Frs. 8.50 for a stay of two weeks, Frs. 7.50 for a stay of up to 3 to 4 weeks, Frs. 6.50 for a stay of up to 4 to 8 weeks, and Frs. 5.— for a stay of up to and over 8 weeks. There is no tipping. Full board rates for children of 1 to 6 years, 50 per cent reduction on full board rate of Frs. 10.—, and from 6 to 14 years 30 per cent reduction on full rate of Frs. 10.—, provided the mother takes full responsibility and looks after the children.

These terms are certainly modest, and most advantageous; it is, however, expected that the visitors should lend a helping hand here and there, either in the house or outside. The choice of what they like to do, and how much of it, is left to their own discretion. According to information derived from some of the guests, I gathered that these services on a "do it yourself" basis in no way interfere with their liberty, in fact as I witnessed for myself they are willingly and cheerfully rendered.

Visitors who prefer to be excused from such services, other than looking after their own rooms, pay the amount of Frs. 12.50 for any length of stay for full board.

I was greatly impressed by the homely atmosphere prevailing at the "Home" — which is not a hotel, because it is not run for profit; cheerfulness and a spirit of comradeship seemed to me prominent factors at the "Home".

Gladly did I sacrifice one day of my vacation to make the journey to Dürrenesch; it was an experience which I should not have liked to miss. From the outset of my visit to my departure I really felt at home, and I sincerely hope to return one day to this haven of rest as a "paying" guest.

I have not the slightest hesitation in warmly recommending to all Swiss from abroad a stay at the "Auslandschweizer" Home, and I am sure they will like it, and on their departure will share with me the feeling of gratitude to the generous benefactors who — owing to the very reasonable terms — have enabled them to pay a visit to their beautiful homeland.

ST.

Kettner's Restaurant has no music and is not luxurious . . . but the Food and Wine are superb.

