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NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE

Notes on a Swiss Archæologist

At the meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique which took place on 15th November last, Miss Sophie Wyss surprised those present in the role of a vivacious lecturer. Her enthusiasm in the subject of her lecture was visibly shared by her audience. The fact that the subject was the "person and work" of her grandfather, Dr. Victor Gross, added zest to her discourse.

The lecturer spoke with great veneration of her grandfather, whom she had known in Neuveville, during her childhood. The Huguenot family Gross, like many others, had settled in Neuveville in the year 1687, two years after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Victor Gross was born in Neuveville in 1845. He chose medicine as his profession, and after obtaining his degree decided to live and work among the compatriots of his native town. There he married in 1869, and there he followed his calling, with great success, to the day of his death. He well deserves to be remembered on the 40th anniversary of his death.

Filled with enthusiasm and a versatile spirit, Dr. Gross managed to find time and energy for the study of the arts, particularly music and painting, as well as archæology, in addition to attending to his patients. He was the friend of numerous personalities of his time — a period of awakening of naturalism — such as scientists, poets, writers and artists. Notable amongst them were the Bernese geologist, Edmund von Fellenberg, the German anthropologist, Schliemann, whose name as the discoverer of the ruins of Troy is well known, the Swiss writer, Carl Spitteler, the Neuchâtel naturalist, Desor, and many others.

Dr. Gross, however, is specially known for his researches on Swiss "Pfahlbauer" village remains (villages lacustres) — villages built on wooden piles near the fringes of lakes — near Biel and Neuchâtel. He accumulated a rich private collection of arms, implements and ornaments of this period, which, after being shown at exhibitions in Paris and Vienna, was deposited in the Swiss National Museum in Zurich. To him goes the honour of having excavated in Vingreis the most beautiful specimen of a Celtic canoe of the stone age, which can still be seen in the Museum of Neuveville. He wrote many books on prehistoric, historic, scientific and archæological subjects — published from 1872 to 1917. He also conducted a vast correspondence with archæologists of world fame.

One of his classics is the beautiful volume entitled "Les Protohelvètes", published by the Anthropological Society of Berlin. It is interesting to learn that the lake dwellings ("palafittes" in French, "Pfahlbauten" in German) had long been considered to have been built in deep water. Recent observations, however, have shown that the European continent suffered a great drought, especially at the beginning of the neolithic period, i.e. the bronze age. It has been established that these villages were built on the shores of the lakes during this period, thus confirming the theory of Dr. Gross.

Dr. Gross also proved that the bronze objects which had been found were made locally and were not "imported" (period about 1300 to 90 B.C.). It also might be interesting to note that the Swiss painter, Albert Anker, when working on his picture, "The Women Lake Dwellers", was helped by his friend Gross, concluded the lecturer.

Miss Sophie Wyss, having shown herself to be an excellent lecturer, then rounded off her contribution by singing a number of Swiss songs. Well deserved applause, added to by words of thanks of the President, Mr. W. Renz, was evidence of the appreciation by those present.

J.H.B.

EXTENSION OF SWISS BANK CORPORATION BUILDING

The Swiss Bank Corporation are pleased to confirm preliminary reports which have appeared in the Press to the effect that they are extending their present building at 99, Gresham Street, London, E.C.2.

The new office building, entirely modern in concept, is being erected on the site of the old church of St. Stephen, Coleman Street (destroyed during the war) to form an extension to the bank's existing City office which is itself to be extensively reconstructed. The new building will add some 30,000 square feet or approximately 60% to the floor space at present available and the whole project should be completed by early 1964.

The architects are Messrs. David du R. Aberdeen & Partners, 19, Southampton Place, London, W.C.1.

The Swiss Bank Corporation, the largest commercial bank in Switzerland, first opened an office in London (Threadneedle Street) as long ago as 1898.

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