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Autor: P. H.

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The Swiss Observer

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CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

Mr. V. Berti, the zealous and conscientious president of the Schweizerbund, at the Annual General Meeting of his club the other evening, rightly remarked that the Swiss Colony in Great Britain had been faced with the problem of gradual extinction of its societies for some years now. Indeed, the fact is that many, if not most, Swiss clubs and groups in this country desperately suffer from lack of financial means. At the same time we hear, day after day, that Switzerland, by praiseworthy but shortsighted generosity, is helping some far distant country about which nobody knows much.

It is, of course, always more spectacular to seccour other nations' poor. I have seen this in the United States, where, while the shocking slums in New York are

Fondue is probably the only internationally known Swiss dish. It is one of the specialities featured on the menu of the Schweizerbund.

(Photo: Swiss National Tourist Office.)



a disgrace to the richest city in the world, the government pursues a costly policy of foreign aid, the benefits of which are often debatable. It is nevertheless shocking to know, Switzerland being a most prosperous country, that its societies in Great Britain are faced with such heavy financial difficulties.

* * *

We have already raised the case of the future of the Fête Suisse, that old and precious cultural institution of

our colony. Now comes the turn of the Schweizerbund.

The Schweizerbund is the only Swiss club in London open to all, where on can, any time of any day, meet one's friends around an authentic fondue or a divine bottle of Swiss wine. We have, of course, in England quite a few reputable restaurants under Swiss management, as shown by the list regularly published on the back of this paper, but only the Schweizerbund offers strictly Swiss atmosphere and cooking. Whether you like to play "Yass", hear a Schwyzertutsch or Vaudois accent, or just listen to some Ticinese music, the Schweizerbund is the only place.

It is therefore with sadness that one thinks of the possible disappearance of our beloved Swiss club — with its insuperable problems, unless not only its members but the colony as a whole decide to take the necessary steps to stop the present course of affairs. Indeed, things being as they are, the colony alone is our only hope.

* * *

Briefly summed up, the Schweizerbund's main problem is this: the lease comes to an end this year and has to be renewed. The landlord asks for so high a rent as to endanger the future of the club, but nevertheless negotiations might reduce this amount. Altogether, to renew the lease means finding three new leaseholders, increasing the membership considerably, redecorating the place, completing fire-proofing, and resolving several other problems. The big question-mark remains, however, how to raise the necessary funds to meet all these essentials.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Schweizerbund, Mr. Berti added very justly: "If we are to successfully continue the existence of our Club, then every member must endeavour to increase the membership; furthermore, all possible support must be given to the committee for 1961, which will be faced with this difficult task. Your support on an ever increasing scale in visiting the Club would be necessary, and you should be prepared to make some financial sacrifice to ensure a good start to the new lease".

If the Swiss colony in Great Britain, which everybody hints is getting older and drowsier, wakes up in good time and gives all its support, then the Schweizerbund could be saved and made into a fine Swiss showplace in the heart of London — a showplace every compatriot would be proud of.

P.H.