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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

FETE SUISSE 1964

One of the most difficult things is to live up to certain standards — particularly when these have been set up by others. The task which the new committee had to tackle in producing this year's Fête Suisse was huge and unenviable. A century of annual rallies lay behind them, and theirs was the problem of upholding all that was good and of discarding all that had been proved antiquated. Eighty-five of these gatherings had become history and, as is natural, only the highlights are remembered and any shortcomings have been forgotten. So it will be with the 86th Fête Suisse which was held at London's Central Hall Westminster on 8th May.

It will be remembered as a great effort made by enthusiastic and hard-working men and women to re-create the Festival after an interval of three years. It will go down in the annals of the Swiss Colony as a jubilee combining the traditional high standard of musical performance with a new note of modern light-hearted entertainment. For those who grew up with the Fête Suisse it will have had its sad moments because for the first time Paul Dick was not playing the organ. For many it was an occasion of nostalgic regret that there was no children's performance, once such a charming feature of the Fête. Outstanding in one's memory will be the gripping words and sound of the Männerchor Zürich singing the Landsgemeindelied: "Alles Leben strömt aus Dir". We shall not easily forget Mr. Albert Ferber's rendering of Villa-Lobos's piano study "Dance of the White Indian". The Cabaret Rüeblihaft poking fun at our national characteristics will make us smile in retrospect, and the memory of the Corale Unione Ticinese's bright and lively "Montanara" will still warm our hearts. We shall recall that the 86th Fête was the first one for many years without queueing for tea because of the introduction of picnic bags.

The Swiss are critical by nature, and I doubt whether a single function in the Colony has ever been accepted without criticism from some quarter or other — and there was plenty about this year's Fête, some of which was justified, some unfounded. The committee have made a point of studying any shortcomings and hitches that occurred in order not to repeat mistakes. But one thing is certain — everybody, however critical, agrees that the Committee have succeeded in making the Festival a success.

It was an impressive sight when the stage gradually filled with 140 of the 210 members of the Männerchor Zürich which has itself an even longer tradition to look back on — for it was founded in 1826 by the Swiss "Father of Singing" Hans Georg Naegeli, with whose "Aufgang des Lebens" they opened their concert. It was fitting that their performance should be devoted to Swiss composers of repute like Othmar Schoeck, Paul Müller, Willy Burkhard, and Hermann Suter, though his "Sonengott" was perhaps a little too ambitious even for such an eminent and well-trained choir under the competent leadership of Mr. Erich Schmid, the director of the Beromünster Radio Orchestra. Later in the evening the choir was to appear at the Festival Hall, and when I heard that they were going to sing the Beresina song there and other patriotic works like "O mein Heimatland". I could not help wishing we could have had a chance of hearing these. How well the more popular songs went down with the

mixed Swiss audience was evidenced by their applause when the choir had sung "Là-haut sur la Montagne" as an encore. No doubt, the Colony appreciated having such an excellent choir over from Switzerland and everybody was prepared to second the warm welcome which the new President of the Fête Suisse, Mr. R. L. Thomas, and later the Swiss Ambassador, extended to the men from Zurich. Monsieur Armin Daeniker said that ever since he had first attended the Fête Suisse in 1955 he had been hoping that one day he would have the pleasure of welcoming his compatriots from Zurich. He referred to the choirs from Berne, Montreux, Fribourg and the Valais, who had come here to sing at our Festival. He greeted the choir's President, Councillor of States Vaterlaus, and the popular Mayor of Zurich, Herr Stadtpräsident Landolt. The Ambassador said he would refrain from singing the praises of his own Canton, but expressed the Zurichers' pride at now being the most populated Canton in the Confederation, with over a million inhabitants.

The Ambassador next paid tribute to the previous President of the Fête Suisse, Mr. Albert Renou, who had done so much to make this annual gathering a success and who had suddenly died without seeing his plans for this jubilee come to fruition. Then Monsieur Daeniker referred to the Centenary Celebrations of the British Red Cross Society which were being held the same evening at the Festival Hall in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen. He mentioned that at first he thought it an obstacle that the two celebrations should coincide. But later he realised that it had a higher significance. "Indeed" the Ambassador concluded, "the Red Cross, which is so deeply rooted in Swiss soil, is one of the most valuable and lasting expressions of what we regard as our mission in the world: to foster solidarity and true understanding among the nations and to mitigate the ravages of armed conflicts. Both events will therefore be celebrated in the same spirit. While our meeting on this side of the river is taking place under the flag with the white cross on the red ground, the gathering on the other side of the river will be held under the flag with the red cross on the white ground. But they will both convey to this great metropolis a message of good will which should act as a challenge to us all."

Councillor of States Vaterlaus next gave greetings of good will in three of our national languages and then pronounced the Ambassador a new Member of Honour of the Männerchor. After the choir had left the stage our famous compatriot, the pianist Mr. Albert Ferber, gave us the pleasure of his art. The choice of music to be performed to such a varied audience must of necessity differ from that of select music lovers who come to hear a piano recital at a concert hall. And it follows with equal inevitability that the response is different. It must be as embarrassing to music lovers as it is galling to the artist to have an undertone of coughing and rustling paper and even talking during his performance. I should have thought it was a matter of courtesy not to eat during the recital and I am not the only one who deplores this lack of discipline. Yet the sad fact is that we have all experienced even worse behaviour, and I suppose by and large it was not too bad for a "rally crowd". The audience, appreciative throughout the evening, showed their approval of Mr. Ferber's playing by according him more ardent and pro-

longed applause than to anyone else. Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith" Variations, the Rhapsody op. 79 No. 2 and the Capriccio op. 116 No. 7 by Brahms, as well as Chopin's C Minor Nocturne (op. 48 No. 1) were included in the programme. Mr. Ferber contributed greatly to the success of the evening and it was a pity time did not allow him an encore.

The interval has always been one of the important aspects of the Fête Suisse, a chance to meet old friends. And with the introduction of picnic bags one was free to roam at random and chat to one's heart's content.

The second part was slow to start but the three members of the "Cabaret Rüebli" and their excellent pianist brought life and a fresh breeze with them at once. They were at their best when making fun of our Swiss institutions and characteristics. There was the naïvely conceited Züricher who showed an American tourist the attractions of Zurich's own night life. The Swiss respect for money came under scrutiny, the Swiss love of insurance and clumsy handling of the German language. Perhaps the best items were the pantomime "Kuhhandel" at the "Landsgemeinde" and the musical skit in which a couple of "Vereinsmeier" remembered their society's outing to Milan. It was appreciated that the Cabaret introduced two numbers in French, but they were obviously not of the same standard as those in "Schwyzerdütsch". The artists, Miss Vera Furrer and Messrs. Alfred Bruggmann and Oskar Hoby, as well as the pianist, Lutz Harteck, gave an excellent performance on the whole, and if they go on improving as they have done since their last appearance in London in 1954 they should soon be second to none.

The Corale of the Unione Ticinese under their popular conductor, Mr. L. Bruni, brought the cheerful songs of the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. In their colourful costumes, accompanied by accordions, violin and piano, they entertained us in their own special way with the attractive tunes. It is gratifying to know that their numbers have recently been increased and we hope that this group of enthusiastic young Swiss will survive for many a year to come and not suffer the same fate as the Swiss Male Choir, who once upon a time also used to contribute to the Fête Suisse.

The 1963 Festival of the Swiss is over. Many are the happy memories we harbour. The Committee has tried hard and the Colony has responded, and there is no doubt that there is a real demand for continuing the Fête. It is the custom to mention the President of an organisation, but Mr. Thomas would be the first to agree that without some extremely hard-working members of his committee no function could be organised, and it is to him and them all that our thanks go. The late President, Mr. Alfred Renou, would, I am sure, have been pleased with the way his ideas for this jubilee have been carried out. Two previous Presidents were amongst the audience, Mr. A. F. Suter and Mr. C. Chapuis, and whilst they may have had some nostalgic regrets that things were no longer the same, they, too, must have applauded whole-heartedly the efforts made and the results achieved.

Mariann.

CITY SWISS CLUB SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL

Reports of their Annual General Meetings will appear in the next issue.

BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY CELEBRATES RED CROSS CENTENARY

On 8th May the British Red Cross Society celebrated the Centenary of the Red Cross in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen. The Royal Festival Hall provided a magnificent background for this event. It was the particular wish of the organisers that the Männerchor Zürich should participate by singing Swiss folk-songs. As a special tribute to Switzerland, where Henri Dunant founded the Red Cross in 1863, the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker were invited to attend the celebration — the only members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Court of St. James's. The choice of date for the celebration, the anniversary of the birth of Henri Dunant, was a special mark of respect to the great Swiss compatriot who, as the Ambassador mentioned in his speech at the Fête Suisse earlier the same evening, "gave us all an example of what a man of great faith and breadth of vision can accomplish in a lifetime".

The celebration at the Royal Festival Hall opened with music by Handel, followed by the Colour Parties from fifty-five branches of the British Red Cross taking their positions on the stage. Henry Purcell's Trumpet Sonata heralded the arrival of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who were received by H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester, Chairman of the Council of the British Red Cross Society. Her Majesty, accompanied by the Duke and T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and H.R.H. the Princess Royal, Commandant-in-Chief of the B.R.C.S., inspected a Guard of Honour of ninety cadets, each of whom was carrying a National flag of one of the countries with a recognised society of the Red Cross, Red Crescent or Red Lion and Sun.

To the sound of a fanfare Her Majesty and the Royal Party then entered the Royal Box, and the National Anthem was played.

The Countess of Limerick, G.B.E., Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee, British Red Cross Society, and of the League of Red Cross Societies, made the introductory speech, followed by Monsieur Martin Bodmer, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who presented the Centenary Medal to the B.R.C.S.

The Colour Parties then withdrew and the Guard of Honour entered with the National Flags, a very moving spectacle indeed.

Next came the showing of the film "Across the Street, Across the World", and the Foreign Secretary, the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Home, P.C., gave the main address. The Celebration finished with the performance by the Männerchor Zürich, who sang the Beresinalied, Karl Attenhofer's "Mein Schweizerland" and Baumgartner's "O Mein Heimatland". They finished with "Reveille" by Rosenmund, and the National Anthem brought the impressive Celebration to a close.

* * *

The next day the Ambassador and Madame Daeniker gave a reception to the Männerchor at the Embassy, at which the Ambassador was handed the deed of his Honorary Membership of the choir. Their Golden Book, which was started by Gottfried Keller and contains famous names like C. F. Meyer, Karl Spitteler, Clémenceau and King Alfonso of Spain, was handed round with great pride, for Her Majesty had graciously agreed to sign it the previous evening.