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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER: Saturday, 14th December, Christmas Party at Ciba Geigy (UK) Ltd. Heald Green. Thursday, 30th January, 1975, Raclette Party at the Cottons Hotel, near Knutsford.

SCHWEIZERBUND (SWISS CLUB) 31st December, 20.30 for 21.00. Dinner at Bertorelli's Restaurant, 19 Charlotte Street (1st floor) London W.1.

SWISS CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY: Saturday, 4th January, 1975. 2 p.m. at St. Mary Hall. YMCA Central Club. 16-22 Gt. Russell Street, London WC1. All children in the Colony welcome. Parents who are not on the mailing list please contact the organiser, Miss Elizabeth Hoffmann de Visme. Tel: 01-348 1156.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY: Dinner and Dance, Dorchester Hotel, Saturday, 1st February, 1975.

Thursday, 23rd January, 7 p.m. Swiss Embassy, 18 Montagu Place, W.1, Nouvelle Société Helvétique, OPEN MEETING. The Earl of Selkirk will give a Talk on his connection with Switzerland, which has lasted over 60 years. All Swiss and their friends welcome.

The Swiss Bank Corporation, London, is pleased to announce that Mr. H. Grüninger has been appointed Deputy Manager, with effect from the 1st January, 1975.

CHURCHES CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME

French-speaking Parish

Sunday, 15th Dec. Service at 11.15 a.m.
Wednesday, 25th Dec. Service at 11.15 a.m. (no meal).
Wednesday, 25th Dec. Family Christmas Celebration.
Sunday, 29th Dec. Service 11.15 a.m.

German-speaking Protestant and Catholic Parishes

Sunday, 22nd Dec. 4 p.m. Ecumenical Christmas gathering at the Eglise Suisse.
Tuesday, 24th Dec. 6.30 p.m. Ecumenical Christmas celebration at the John Southworth Centre.
Tuesday, 24th Dec. Midnight Mass with English local residents. Possibility to stay on premises overnight.
Sunday, 29th Dec. No Service.
Tuesday, 31st Dec. at 6.30 p.m. Ecumenical Service at the John Southworth Centre. New Year's Eve Vigil.

CITY SWISS CLUB

109th Annual Banquet and Ball

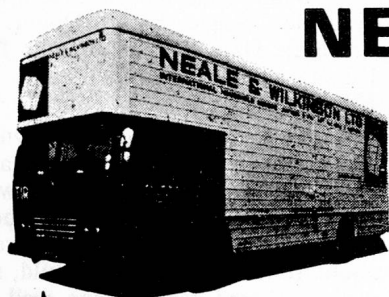
The French writer Maximilian, Duc de Sully, claimed in the 17th century that *"People in England take their pleasures sadly after the fashion of their country."* Nobody present at the City Swiss Club's Annual Dinner and Dance at the Dorchester on 15th November would agree with this quotation cited by the Swiss *Chargé d'Affaires* Monsieur le Ministre J. Iselin. Neither did he, of course, which was obvious from his whole speech which he gave in the absence on official duties of the Swiss Ambassador. He spoke about his and his wife's sadness at having to leave Britain shortly, after almost six years, and how they would miss their friends. This was the other side of the diplomat's interesting life in many different countries. He said they would be sorry to leave this hospitable country described by the American philosopher George de Santayana as *"... the paradise of individuality, eccentricity, heresy, anomalies, hobbies and humour."* As a citizen of Basle, the latter was not the least that Monsieur Iselin appreciated. He also paid tribute to his friend and guest of

honour, Sir Frank Figgures, and he praised the splendour of the occasion, the *"professional calibre"* of the men and the *"beauty and elegance of their ladies"*.

Whatever may have changed in the course of the decades, the brilliance of the event certainly has not, though the absence of the men's full evening dress may be missed by some of the ladies. The numbers have gone down somewhat, but it is still the best-attended function of the resident Swiss community in London. There were two members and their ladies present whose membership goes back to over 50 years — Mr. P. Bessire and Dr. H. Rast — and they will no doubt agree that the many-course dinners of pre-war times (plus a cold buffet *à discretion* later in the evening) and the half-dozen extensive, often tedious, speeches are not regretted at all. This year there were only three speeches, not too long and to the point. The function has, for the past few years, been organised in conjunction with the Swiss Economic Council, whose President and Mrs. R. Suess were present.

Mr. E. Tangemann, the Club's President, welcomed the guests in a few well-chosen words. He regretted the forthcoming departures of Monsieur and Madame Iselin, the Cultural Counsellor and Madame Birrer and of Consul-General and Mrs. Adams. It used to be the custom to invite the presidents and their ladies of *all* Swiss societies as a matter of course. Since the Assembly of Presidents, predecessor of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K., was founded in the 'fifties, its President is now invited to represent them all, as it were. Mr. B. Simon was unable to attend, but its Vice-President was there — none other than the Club's own President! He mentioned with pleasure that the President of the Swiss Club Manchester, Mr. P. A. Senn, had taken the trouble to come all the way from Cheshire to attend the Banquet.

The last speaker of the evening was Sir Frank Figgures, prominent Civil Servant and devoted friend of Switzerland's. He recalled the deep impression the *Landsgemeinde* in Appenzell had made on him, and he described in detail the open-air Parliament as an expression of deep-rooted democracy. Sir Frank's



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speech ended the official part of the evening.

For as long as I remember (and my first presence at this particular function was 42 years ago), the Club always spared a thought for the less fortunate compatriots. A collection used to be taken, but for the past few years, a tombola in aid of Swiss charitable institutions in London has been organised. Most handsome prizes, from a *pendule Neuchâtelaise* to spirits and wines were to be won, and the girls in Swiss national costumes had no difficulty in selling all the tickets.

Dancing went on until 2 o'clock to the music of Phil Revens. I heard only one criticism, that they made too much noise, and only two regrets, that the lack of a "Paul Jones" deprived one of meeting and dancing with lots of friends in the course of the evening, and that there was no "Auld Lang Syne" which used to give those present a chance of thanking the President and his wife with the time-honoured "For they are jolly good fellows! And so say all of us."

Yes, Monsieur Iselin was right — the Duc de Sully was proved wrong, and another happy and memorable occasion went down in the annals of the Club's 118 years of history.

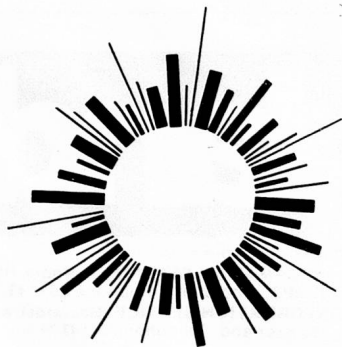
M.M.

BIRTHDAYS

The following readers will be celebrating their birthdays in the near future: Mr. C. A. Fuchs will be 82 on 26th December, and Mr. E. C. Schmid of 35 Shirley Drive, Hove 4, Sussex BN3 6UA, will be 80 on the last day of the year.

Mr. W. Renz will have his 76th birthday on 2nd January, and Mr. C. Nater (St. Moritz) will be 66 on the same day. Mr. J. Christen (Oberwil, Zug) will have his 86th birthday on 3rd January and Mr. E. P. Locher his 81st on 4th of the month. Mrs. L. Moehr will have her birthday on 12th January.

To all these readers and any others who will be celebrating birthdays and anniversaries shortly, we send congratulations and best wishes.



Obituaries

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Mrs. K. Seitz, of 30 Fairlawns, Maldon Road, Wallington, Surrey. We express our sympathy to her family and friends.

RACCONTO PER NATALE

(Nota del redattore. — *Attingiamo quest'anno pel nostro racconto alla opera della compianta maestra Alina Borioli d'Ambri. Il suo primo libro di prosa: "La vecchia Leventina", apparso nel 1926, rivelò al pubblico della Svizzera italiana una narratrice dal tono casalingo, dalla semplicità del discorso al focolare, facente anche un uso assennato e coraggioso del dialetto valterano. Poco prima della morte, avvenuta nel 1965, vide la luce la sua raccolta di poesie nel dialetto leventinese: "Vos det la Faura" (La voce del bosco) in cui è compreso il suo capolavoro: "Ava Giuana d'Altenchia" (La zia Giovanna d'Altanca) nelle "Edizioni del Cantonetto di Lugano" (1964). Una progrediente cecità l'aveva assai presto costretta a lasciare l'insegnamento e s'era data allora a raccogliere con intelligente amore, leggende, aneddoti, usanze della sua valle.)*

ANTICHE USANZE (LEVENTINESI) PER SPONSALI.

Conoscenza e fidanzamento.

"Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi"; il vecchio proverbio era generalmente seguito dai leventinesi, i quali, ben di rado, si sceglievano la sposa, non dico fuori della valle, ma fuori del loro stesso comune. Quando ciò avveniva, e cioè, quando la sposa era d'altro comune, la conoscenza veniva fatta il più delle volte alle sagre: San Nazzaro ad Airolo, San Pietro a Quinto, Sant'Andrea a Faido, San Maurizio a Chironico hanno compiuto miracoli di senseria matrimoniale, riendo benignamente molta paglia vicino al fuoco. Nei tempi antichi, quando un giovanotto, adocchiata una donzella, la chiedeva in isposa, questa, prima di dargli risposta, si recava, accompagnata da sua madre, in casa del pretendente, a vedere la "biava" (biada). Se lo scrigno era colmo, voleva dire che il pane era assicurato abbondantemente, se no, c'era da temere carestia. Raccontasi che un giovanotto di Faido si presentò un giorno a chiedere la mano di certa Zina di Calonica. — "Fammi vedere la biava", disse lei. — "Zina", rispose il giovane, "faccio il falegname e non ho terre". — E lei: "A tu iè gnènca na spiga e tu vo pratend da spusè Zina? Mi a ca me e ti a ca tò." C'erano però dei maliziosi che calcavano gli "scrigni" mettendo un po' di paglia sotto il grano, così si traevano pronostici d'abbondanza anche quando era probabile la carestia. Dal canto suo lo sposo, prima di fissare il giorno delle nozze, conduceva la propria madre in casa della sposa ad ammirarne il corredo. Era di prammatica che la sposina tagliasse e cucisse di propria mano la camicia dello sposo, ed essa non dimenticava mai di ricamare un fiorellino sullo sparato. Ci

furono però dei contratti matrimoniali assai più semplici. Tipico è il caso di un ambriese chiamato Carlotto. Stava un giorno pipando, seduto su un tronco di pino, quando vide una certa Luzia di Quinto entrare nel magazzino di faccia. Mentre lei fa le sue provviste, egli pensa che è tempo di metter su case e che la Luzia potrebbe convenirgli. Eccola uscire colla sua gerla in ispalla. "Luzia, le grida Carlotto attraverso la strada, i t'imbrochi". Lei: "I aceti la to imbrocadura". Lui: "Alora nem a fè chela tal scrittura". Ed andarono a farsi le carte. A Chiggiogna una vivace "popòla" zappettava in un verziere. Passò di lì un ardito lavorghese che lei stessa aveva soprannominato "ul Leon". "Tencia, le disse, stu colp i t meni via pa lau pel". Lei: "I vegni, Leon". Lui: "Varda che mi fei dabon". Lei: "I fei dabon enchia mi". E poco dopo la Tencia ed il Leon erano moglie e marito. Dar la baia e tribolare gli sposi era per i leventinesi come l'undicesimo comandamento di Dio. I fidanzati erano presi di mira per sorprese e burlette d'ogni genere. Se pure s'aveva un po' di misericordia per la sposina, per lo sposo non ce n'era mai, non gli si permetteva che "tal vivanda fosse gustata senza alcuno scotto". Al ritorno dai dolci convegni egli trovava la via sparsa di ostacoli e di tranelli. Un tale trovò persino levata la scala di legno che doveva rimetterlo sulla strada e dovette saltar giù dalla "stua" (stanza dei convegni) della sposa, sotto gli occhi di lei timorosi ed ardenti. Qualche tempo prima delle nozze, accompagnati da un parente, si recavano al borgo per la compera dell'oro e della stoffa per il vestito della sposa, seta per lo più di color viola o cannellino. Il vestito vestito veniva poi confezionato in valle nella foggia paesana: ampia sottana con corpo attaccato, e camicetta sciolta con frangia. Il fazzoletto di seta a fiorami aveva la stessa frangia del vestito. A Chironico, invece del fazzoletto a colori, si metteva in testa un quadrato di tela bianca, ricamato o con pizzo, chiamato "continence".

All'antivigilia delle nozze, gli sposi giravano in tutte le case del villaggio a distribuire i confetti. Non si faceva risparmio di "binis". Mio zio mi raccontava d'averne condotto due quintali a due fratelli bedrettesi che si sposarono l'uno un giorno e l'altro l'indomani. "Quella volta, mi diceva, ho condotto dentro un carro di focacce e paste frolle".

Del resto, in tali occasioni, non si faceva economia di nulla. C'erano il prosciutto e la carne secca della mazza casalinga, il formaggio degli alpi, il burro, la crema, le uova e le galline, si uccideva un bel vitello, la selva forniva le lepri e il Ticino le trote. Così i pranzi riuscivano veramente luculliani.

(Da "La vecchia Leventina" di Alina Borioli, ristampa uscita dalle "Edizioni del Cantonetto" di Lugano a Natale 1973, prezzo Fr. 10).

A tutti i suoi fedeli ed assidui lettori augura Buon Natale,

Poncione di Vespero.