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# NEWS FROM THE COLONY

## NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE

The last speaker to come to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique was a man of particular distinction and very well qualified to speak about Switzerland. The Earl of Selkirk, who happens to be the President of the Anglo-Swiss Society, was invited to speak at the January monthly meeting on his impression of our country. The heading of his talk was "What Makes Switzerland different?" and all members who were there agreed that Lord Selkirk developed some very original ideas.

The speaker naturally made no mystery of the fact that he came from Scotland, a country with many affinities with Switzerland. Lord Selkirk recalled that both had mountains and a hard environment likely to mould tough characters. Both had produced generations of soldiers fighting for foreign armies. He reminded his listeners that

while the Swiss provided a guard for Louis 16th, the Scots had done the same for Joan of Arc. Moreover, several Scots generals had made distinguished careers abroad. The commander-in-chief to Peter the Great was a Scotsman and Marshal Macdonald was one of Napoleon's most successful generals. The parallel could be extended to the internecine struggles of the two countries. The Scots had the Campbells whom everybody else disliked and Lord Selkirk suggested that the same could be said in the middle ages of Zurich. Although Scotland's great warriors were not as famous as William Tell, their feats had been immortalised by Walter Scott and others.

Turning to the present day, the speaker noted that visitors to Switzerland were generally struck by the cleanliness of houses, railways, banks and other buildings, by the patience with which contumacious visitors were treated, by the sobriety with which daily papers considered world affairs, by the obscurity of Swiss politics "not always understood by us and perhaps not always understood by Swiss citizens", by the simplicity of the farming community as well as the modernity of the urban parts of the country. Lord Selkirk gave a vivid aspect of Swiss life — of which he had his first experience over sixty years ago — by a series of pungent, anecdotes, such as the case of two neighbouring villages in the Valais where one didn't speak French and the other didn't speak German, or the story of the federal councillor who wouldn't take part in the parliamentary ski race because the Swiss public might

think it frivolous.

Lord Selkirk claimed that Switzerland was treated on a different standard than any other country and noted that many harsh things were said about the country. He quoted Conrad who said the Swiss were "comely without grace and hospitable without sympathy" and referred to standard jokes about the cuckoo clock and such like. He explained this by the fact that "Switzerland represents almost too much the gamut of conventional wisdom and does not defend herself."

Expounding on this idea he noted that it was an intensely democratic country "almost entirely composed of what is called middle class". It enjoyed a high standard of living created by the vigour of its people. Lord Selkirk gave a high assessment of Switzerland's neutrality. It should not, he said, be viewed in a negative sense of non-alignment but in the positive sense of "being willing to afford her neutrality to all she holds dear." He noted that this policy dated back to before the 30-year war when the old Confederation was already lending troops to both sides and being involved with neither. He said Switzerland was wise not to join the United Nations as it could not be said that the world body was neutral but rather becoming like a battlefield.

The speaker spoke with admiration of the Red Cross and the work of the entirely Swiss committee of the International Red Cross in Geneva. He said that Switzerland's example could inspire a re-examination of the essential

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philosophy and theory behind democratic government in general. He cited the case of Britain today, saying that the "dictatorship of the majority" into which the country was moving was not really ideal and claimed, like Gilbert a hundred years ago, that the party system was swamping independence of thought.

Dwelling on the problem of government, Lord Selkirk marvelled at the fact that Switzerland was constantly being run by a coalition. He also expressed his admiration at the way political power has in his view been effectively de-centralised in Switzerland. He referred to current concern over the future of the political structure. "I do not know whether the Cantons really have too much power, but I suspect it is untrue to say "den Bunden die Kannonen, die Kultur den Kantonen."

As for the possibility of abandoning neutrality, Lord Selkirk believed there would be sharp divisions if ever the problem came to a head. He said that Switzerland would probably have to abandon its position in the Red Cross organisation and other facets of neutrality. His listeners had the definite impression that he would advise the Swiss against taking such a step. "I believe it is important to us all that the foundation on which Switzerland is built should be continued." The speaker added that the country which André Siegfried called the "heart of central Europe" should follow Shakespeare's motto: "Unto thyself be true then cannot thou be false to no one."

#### DEPARTURE OF THE CULTURAL ATTACHE

Dr. Franz Birrer, who succeeded Dr. Paul Stauffer as Cultural Attaché at the Embassy early in 1970, is to leave London and take on a new assignment in West Germany. Born in 1932, Dr. Birrer is a citizen of Entlebuch where he received his primary education before attending secondary school at Disentis, in the Grisons. He is a graduate in economic and social sciences and obtained a doctorate in law on the problems of patenting from the University of Fribourg. He was later called to the bar of Lucerne but joined the Political Department in 1961. He trained there

and in Geneva for a year before being sent to Paris as a member of the Swiss mission to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) where he remained until September, 1966. He then returned to Berne to work in the Section of Political Studies of the Political Affairs Division. He was posted to London in January, 1970, and worked there not only as Cultural Attaché, but also as a specialist in British political affairs. His cultural responsibilities led him to attend virtually every musical, theatrical and artistic event in London involving Swiss artists. Many budding Swiss musicians have enjoyed his co-operation for their Wigmore Hall première. Mr. Birrer will now serve in the same capacity in Switzerland's Embassy in Cologne.

Dr. Birrer is married with three delightful young daughters. We wish the whole family plenty of happiness and success in Germany.

Dr. Birrer's successor as Cultural Attaché will be Mr. Jean-Jacques Indermuehle. He is expected shortly in London.  
P.M.B.

#### BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

The following readers will celebrate their birthdays during the next few weeks.

Mr. H. Vonwiller will be 81 on 20th March; Mr. Albert Ferber will be 64 on 29th March; Mr. J. Ammann will have his 89th birthday on 30th of the month, the same day as Mr. R. H. Senn, who will be 64. Mrs. K. Michel will have her birthday on 1st April, and Mr. T. Haller will be 60 on 2nd April. On the same day, Mr. Paul Lerch, of 30 Southleigh Drive, Leeds, Yorks, will be 75. On 6th April, Mr. A. Jaccard will be 69 and on 10th of the month, the former Federal Councillor, Prof. Dr. F. T. Wahlen (Berne), will be 76. Mr. L. Portmann will have his 82nd birthday on 13th April and Dr. H. Gysin (Basle), will be 62 on 16th April.

Mr. and Mrs. G. Keller (Kuesnacht), will celebrate their wedding anniversary on 14th March.

Congratulations and best wishes to all these readers and any others who will be celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in the near future, details of which we do not have in our records.

#### HENRY FUSELI EXHIBITION

The Friends of the Tate Gallery arranged a private view party to mark the opening of the Henry Fuseli Exhibition still going on in London. The Anglo-Swiss Society was invited to join in this function and many members turned up.

Henry (or Johann Heinrich) Fuseli was an 18th century artist from Zurich who made his career and his name in London where he died in 1825. Born in Zurich in 1741, he came early under the influence of the leading figures of the age of enlightenment in his home town. But it was in Britain that he achieved fame as a most original artist. The Tate Gallery Exhibition, which runs until the end of March, is the first large-scale show of his works in Britain. The exhibition, which was previously on view in Hamburg and is going to Paris, is remarkable and well laid out.

Fuseli's paintings and sketches are wild and tormented while at the same time respectful of classical discipline. Some are reminiscent of Blake, with whom he was closely befriended. All theatre lovers will appreciate his many illustrations of the works of Shakespeare (particularly Macbeth and Hamlet), Dante and Milton. There are also entire rows of illustrations of the Niebelungen and the works of the Greek classics. Fuseli's self-portraits show him as anguished and dreamy — a feature fairly common among other Swiss artists who, like him, have escaped their small environment to seek inspiration and success abroad. Many of the drawings have a sadistic element and can therefore be said to be of modern inspiration. Fuseli was throughout his life concerned with sexual problems and has produced many erotic works but these are not included in the exhibition.

Certainly, we do not remember any exhibition of this size ever devoted to a Swiss artist in London. The Boecklin exhibition held at the Hayward Gallery three years ago and the Klee exhibition held there recently, cannot be compared to this one for its variety and the number of the works on show. We can therefore only recommend it.

#### RECEPTION AT SWISSAIR

A reception was held on 24th



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