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AGM AND DINNER OF NSH

The London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the oldest branch abroad of the mother society in Switzerland, held its AGM at the Prince of Wales Hotel in Kensington on Thursday, 24th March, 1977. The President, Mrs. Mariann Meier, was in the chair. The usual items were dealt with expeditiously, amongst them the annual report and the accounts. From the former, it was evident that the Society was one of the most active in the Swiss community and could look back on yet another successful year with a handsome increase in membership: two deaths, six resignations mainly due to leaving London, but 26 new admissions. The accounts, to London, but 26 new admissions. The accounts, too, were approved unanimously. Annual membership subscription was still only £2 and was considered most modest in view of the great variety of talks, lectures, concerts, etc. members were offered. Thanks were expressed to generous donors and hosts who often carried the cost of entertaining guest speakers.

The usual elections of Council and Hon. Auditors took place (officers are elected by the Council at its first meeting after the AGM). One of the pleasant duties the Chairman had to perform was to announce that the Council proposed conferring honorary membership on the four so-called Free Members, viz. Mr. P. Bessire, Prof. J. Inebnit, Mr. G. Keller and the former President Mr. W. Renz. The longest-serving President Dr. H. W. Egli

was already the Hon. Vice-President of the Society. The meeting approved the proposal with warm applause.

Under any other business, Prof. Inebnit brought up the matter under consideration in Berne of the nationality of children born to a Swiss mother married to a foreign father. It was agreed that the Society should discuss this important aspect of Swiss citizenship at a later date.

As in previous years, the Dinner was the highlight of the evening. It was attended by 80 members and friends. After the meal, the President welcomed the Swiss Ambassador, Hon. President of the Society, and Madame Thalmann. She said that last year the Society's dinner had been their first public engagement in the Swiss Colony, and now she was able to welcome them as friends. She expressed gratitude for all the interest the Ambassador and Madame Thalmann took in the activities of the Society, not least by putting the Embassy Lecture Hall at its disposal.

In a very lively and witty speech, Mrs. Meier combined the welcome of a number of guests with asides regarding various happenings within the Society and concerning individuals. Amongst the guests she mentioned the Society's Hon. Vice-President, Dr. H. W. Egli, the cultural doyen of the Colony; the Vice-President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK and Mrs. Tangemann; all three Ministers of the Church, whose

ecumenical work, especially amongst young Swiss compatriots, was exemplary; and the pianist Lennart Rabes and his mother, who contributed considerably towards the musical life of the Colony.

Mrs. Meier had a special word of welcome and appreciation for Mrs. Elsie Stauffer, wife of the late Fred Stauffer, for 33 years Editor of the *Swiss Observer*. The Council, she said, wanted to pay tribute to her husband and to herself on the occasion of her forthcoming 80th birthday. The President welcomed Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Thomson of the *Swiss Observer*; she expressed appreciation and gratitude for all Mr. Thomson did in order to get the Colony paper out on time and to satisfy readers and advertisers alike by being mainly in charge of *Swiss Observer* administrative work.

The Chairman welcomed the Hon. Auditors Messrs. Bonnet and Rothlisberger and their ladies, and Mr. and Mrs. Roland Asch. She called him not only the "Colony Treasurer" but "Treasure" without whose devoted work for over 20 years the Society would have been much the poorer in more senses than one. She regretted the departure of the Hon. Secretary, Miss Helga Lustenberger, who was promoted Chancellor at the Consulate in Bregenz. In recognition of her excellent work she was presented with two books.

Mrs. Meier then thanked her officers and Council and welcomed a number of Embassy members whose continued interest was much appreciated. She also singled out a number of presidents and other officers of other

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Swiss organisations, the NSH being the only Society whose membership included the presidents of all London societies bar one.

The President then referred to her visit to Switzerland, her presence at the meetings of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and the first plebiscite at which Swiss resident abroad would vote.

The *Swiss Observer* Editor, she said, had put as a heading to last year's 60th anniversary celebration "Diamonds are for ever - NSH glitters at 60". She said her endeavour as that of her predecessors had been that the NSH should continue not to glitter but to shine on the sound foundations on which it was built. She said she had been at the helm for a good seven years and wanted soon to relinquish the job.

"My biggest worry is to find a successor before I grow stale. Exactly 20 years ago, the Common Market was founded. An international commentator said that it would not survive the next 20 years without the support of every man and woman in the street.

"It is the same with us. Our membership has shown an increase every year, and it is you, the members, who make the Society what it is. I thank you for your support and beg of you to help me find the right man or woman to take over.

"Carl Spitteler, the Liestal author, poet and Nobel Prize winner, compared us Swiss abroad to a balloon climbing to unknown heights, but which is tied by seven golden wires to the homeland. We don't know where the London Group of the NSH is going. But it is this attachment to our homeland which will give us courage and strength to face future tasks."

After the warm applause had died down, the President called on the Ambassador who referred to his first official function in the Colony a year ago, the NSH Diamond Jubilee, second only to presenting his credentials to Her Majesty the Queen. He then touched upon an important subject, that of CULTURE. He said: "In the short time I have been in London we have had many interesting events like lectures on art, concerts and theatrical productions. I should like to express my warmest appreciation to Mrs. Meier for her untiring efforts on behalf of Swiss culture. In her and in the London Group of the NSH we know we have a precious ally on whom we can always count.

"People outside Switzerland are generally unaware that our country has its own cultural life. They tend to believe that we are a purely egoistic and materialistic nation. They have in mind the hard-worn clichés about a land of tourism, chocolate, cheese, watches and banks. I have met so many people abroad who honestly think that Swiss culture is limited to folklore, alphorns and yodelling, which, on top of everything else, have to be performed in lederhosen (men only, of course!)."

The Ambassador asked whether there was a genuine Swiss culture? Many

people believed that Swiss culture was merely a reflection of the Germanic, the French and the Italian culture. He referred to a remarkable speech, which he made some two years ago at the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Basle, Dr. Marcel Ney, the Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad. He showed very impressively and convincingly that there was a Swiss culture.

"In a nutshell, his main points were that culture is not only made up of human knowledge; it has a much wider meaning and it encompasses creative activities of all sorts, artistic, scientific and popular. It has to do with the quality of life, with the environment, with the climate. It is influenced by the historical and political development of the peoples of a region, by the nature of the relations between its inhabitants. If we look at Switzerland in the light of these considerations, we come to the conclusion that *there is one Swiss culture*. Whatever their origins, the German-, French-, Italian- and Romansh-speaking Swiss have all shared the same political destiny, the same economic development and the same social evolution. They all live surrounded by the same mountains, in the same valleys and on the shores of the same lakes. They have all been nurtured by the same soil, which, because it is so poor and arid, led many to seek their fortunes in far-away places. Switzerland's political history and her natural surroundings have to a large extent fashioned her culture.

"Swiss culture has never achieved any summits comparable to the cultures of Venice with her schools of painting, France with her architecture and Austria

with her music. Switzerland has never had wealthy princes and monarchs to promote and subsidize the arts as in the rest of Europe. On the contrary, each individual made a contribution to culture in seeking to better his lot and that of the community. There have been and still are a great diversity and wealth of creative activity in Switzerland. We have every reason to be proud of our cultural heritage, for we have something to offer in that field. The effort to do so is what we call the 'rayonnement culturel'.

"I should like to close on an optimistic note. Although there is a chronic lack of money in the cultural field, Switzerland's cultural image is becoming better known abroad. We can hardly say the same thing about her political image when we read some of the articles that have appeared in various newspapers in recent times. It would be wrong to pause in our efforts to present our country's cultural image. We must pursue them. In this we also need the active interest and participation of the Swiss living abroad, and that means the Nouvelle Société Helvétique above all. I am confident that we shall always be able to count upon your enthusiastic and whole-hearted support in our cultural activities."

Monsieur Thalmann's speech was warmly applauded.

The last speaker was Mr. Tangemann who brought greetings from the President of the Federation and expressed appreciation of the Society's work.

That brought an excellent evening to a close.

M.G.

SWITZERLAND IN BRITAIN'S CULTURAL LIFE

To 8th June - Bath Academy of Art (for the Bath Festival) - *Award-Winning Books and Posters from Switzerland*.

Wednesday, 1st June; Friday, 3rd June; Sunday, 5th June; Thursday, 9th June; Saturday, 11th June; Monday, 13th June; Thursday, 16th June; Sunday, 19th June; Thursday, 23rd June - Glyndebourne Festival Opera, 5.30 p.m. (13th June only: 6 p.m.) - The tenor *Hughes Cuénod* sings a leading role in Janacek's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Nureyev Festival at the London Coliseum: *Manola Asensio* dances leading roles in *Romeo and Juliet* (2nd to 25th June) and *Giselle* (27th June to 2nd July).

Sunday 5th June - Royal Festival Hall, 3.15 p.m. - *Martha Argerich* plays Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No 1 with the New Philharmonia Orchestra, under Riccardo Muti (also in the programme; two works by Tchaikovsky).

Sunday, 19th June - Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.15 p.m. - *Heinz Holliger* plays Vaughan William's Oboe Concerto and Vivaldi's Concerto in B for oboe and violin (Georg Egger) with the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra, under

Jörg Faerber (also in the programme: works by Pergolesi, Stravinsky, Bach and Respighi).

DO YOU KNOW THAT . . .

. . . on 5th May it was 40 years since the Swiss aviation pioneer, Walter Mittelholzer died in an accident, and that it was 60 years on 15th May that Niklaus von der Flueh was canonized, having died in 1487.

. . . it was 170 years since the Swiss natural scientist Louis Agassiz was born. . . on 2nd June 1957, the first TEE train became operational.

. . . on 20th June 1907, the Swiss National Bank opened its counter service. . . that between 1960 and 1974, the cost of hospital treatment in Switzerland rose by 892 per cent, expenditure for medicines by 331 per cent and for medical treatment by 317 per cent.

. . . that Switzerland spent 2.3 per cent of her gross national product on research and development, the highest rate immediately behind the USA, and that the portion financed by the Government was the lowest of the eight countries in question, only 22 per cent as opposed to Great Britain at the top with an estimated 58 per cent.