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THE N.S.H. AT WORK AND AT PLAY

Over the last few years, the Annual Dinner of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique has become one of the important events in the diary of the London Swiss community. It took place on 8th February at the Regent Centre Hotel off Great Portland Street. Previous to the reception some 40 members met for the Annual General Meeting at Swiss House in Fitzroy Square, barely two minutes from the Hotel. The usual business was transacted, the President's and Council's report were accepted, as were the accounts. The Council was elected by secret ballot, and the annual subscription was left at £2 — easily the best value for any Swiss, considering that the N.S.H. organises a great variety of lectures, meetings and discussions and all, bar the concerts, free of charge.

After the Reception, nearly 80 members and friends sat down to an excellent dinner. The Society's President, Mrs. Mariann Meier, then welcomed the guests of honour, the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Thalmann. She regretted that it was the last time Monsieur and Madame Thalmann would be at the Annual Dinner, since they were retiring in November. She said that every time an Ambassador left there was regret, for every Ambassador and

his wife make a contribution to the life of the Swiss community. But the Swiss were inveterate grumblers and easily criticized. If there had been grumbles about Monsieur and Madame Thalmann, she had not heard them, and rarely had regret been expressed so vividly when the news of their departure was made public. She expressed thanks for all their interest and ever-ready help and wished them a well-deserved happy retirement.

It has become a tradition in the N.S.H. that the President gives a kind of "tour d'horizon" at the Annual Dinner, and this Mrs. Meier did with lively humour. She had something to say about the Society's guests as well as others present who in one way or another had contributed towards the activities of the Society. She welcomed the Swiss Minister and Madame Fritschi and several members of the Embassy. She mentioned the Hon. Vice-President Dr. H. W. Egli who had played such an important part in the Swiss community in general and the N.S.H. in particular. She had something nice to say about the Honorary Members present, Mr. Paul Bessire, the former President Mr. Willy Renz and the latest, elected that very evening, Mr. Roland Asch. Hon. Treasurer for

21 years, all present with their wives. She did not forget the Hon. Auditors, Messrs Bonnet and Rothlisberger, nor the friends from the Swiss Church, The Rev. and Mrs. Orna-Ornstein and Father Bossard. She expressed pleasure that so many Presidents of other Swiss societies had come, and she thanked her officers without whom, she said, her efforts would be a poor show. Mrs. Meier ably referred to some of the important subjects the N.S.H. was dealing with, such as the citizenship question and the total revision of the Federal Constitution. She recommended the Solidarity Fund and finished her speech with a letter that the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Carlin, had written to the Secretary of the N.S.H. exactly 60 years ago and in which he praised the activities of the Society and appealed to its members to give support to the Swiss representatives, whether official or otherwise.

The same theme, quite by chance, was taken up by the Swiss Ambassador, Hon. President of the Society, when he addressed the party. He expressed gratitude for everything the President and members had given him and his wife during their stay in London. "Apart from human kindness and warmth, you have given us the support every



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Ambassador needs if he is to do his job properly. It is true that an Ambassador's first duty is to foster relations between his home country and his country of residence in all important fields of international life. But he also assumes a certain responsibility for the well-being of the Colony and its relations with the home country as well as with the host country. In this respect, the N.S.H. plays a key role. In spite of the fact that I am privileged to be surrounded at the Embassy by an excellent staff, I should simply not have been able to do the work the N.S.H. is doing in cultivating Swiss traditions and informing our compatriots in Britain about political, social, economic and cultural developments in Switzerland".

Monsieur Thalmann said that one had to be realistic, the outlook was rather gloomy, internationally as well as on the domestic front. And therefore, an Ambassador would need the Society's help even more in the future. And he concluded by saying: "Close ranks behind your outstanding President, help one another by sticking together and try to recruit more and more members who are willing to follow the wise advice of John F. Kennedy: 'Don't ask what the country can do for you but what you can do for your country'. By doing so you will carry on the real spirit of the N.S.H., which

is the greatest asset Switzerland has abroad".

After the traditional presents to the ladies from an anonymous donor had been distributed, Mr. Bernard Simon, who had earlier been welcomed by the Chairman as President of the Federation of Swiss

Societies in the UK, addressed the gathering on behalf of the guests, ably and with true Basle wit.

This brought a most enjoyable evening to a close, and we should like to say thank you and the best of luck!

M.G.

THE WINTER WONDERLAND

This was the theme of a gala reception held at the Hotel Inter-Continental in London on 15th January. Over 1,000 guests attended the reception, and they included several Ambassadors, many celebrities, many personalities in the Swiss Community, hotel guests and clients. The Swiss Ambassador and Madame Ernesto Thalmann were guests of honour, and they were received by Mr. Graham Jeffrey, General Manager of the Hotel Inter-Continental.

The Grand Ballroom presented an astonishing sight: On a platform in the centre was a traditional Swiss sleigh, and two Swiss musicians played Ticinesi tunes. Swiss songs, marches and folk music as well as pictures were produced with the help of audio-visual apparatus. Against that background, models displayed furs loaned for the occasion by Bradleys at Harvey Nichols and over a million pounds worth of

jewellery from the Queen's jewellers, Collingwood of Conduit Street. The placid St. Bernard dog took it all in its stride!

All around the ballroom were buffets, some in Swiss chalets, others on tables and stalls, and the variety of hot and cold food was such as has hardly ever been seen in this country: *raclette*, *fondue*, *Buendnerfleisch*, a suckling pig stuffed with chestnuts, roast beef, *pâtés*, apple fritters, cold meats and a very large selection of Swiss cheeses and bread and *Zoepfe* of every description, and, most important, excellent Swiss wines to match (after the initial serving of champagne).

The Swiss National Tourist Office, Swissair and the Swiss Cheese Union had co-operated with the hotel in organising the event. The Hotel Inter-Continental in Genève had played a major part in the planning of the party. M.M.

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The Swiss Ambassador (centre) and Madame Ernesto Thalmann being received by Mr. Graham Jeffrey, General Manager of the Hotel Inter-Continental. More pictures on page 32.

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