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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

We have pleasure in presenting the 109th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society in London. The past year has brought no great changes in our work and we have striven, as before, to bring help and advice to Swiss citizens living in the London consular district.

Just over half of our 335 clients have received financial support of some form, though the trend has continued towards more people needing occasional help and fewer new applicants for regular grants over long periods.

As our accounts show, we have been able to increase very greatly the pensions, thanks to the most generous legacy received the previous year, from the family of the late Miss. Irène Carlin. The number of pensioners has actually dropped by six to 48. There is no doubt, that apart from the decline in the number of Swiss residents in this country, there are more now who have the benefit of pensions or other income. However, it is quite likely that there are still some elderly Swiss whom

we could help, and we would ask our readers to let us know about them if they are in touch with anyone whose life we might be able to make a little easier. As in previous years, we have again administered the Swiss Old Age Pensions for pensioners who find regular payments more convenient than the quarterly cheques normally sent out by the Embassy.

Amongst the compatriots to whom we can give occasional help to meet specific difficulties, there are an increasing number of families, many of them brought to our notice by the Mothers' Group of the Swiss Church. We have established a very pleasant co-operation with these ladies and between us, we try to ensure that the mothers who need support get it from whoever is better able to answer their particular needs. We do wish to express our appreciation to the leaders of the group for all their help and support.

Our offers for holidays were taken up by fewer of our pensioners and many have preferred to receive a contribution towards outings or for a stay with relatives or friends. The

age factor appears to be connected with this, as it is generally only the younger ones who can face the upheaval brought about by staying away from home.

However, there was a marked increase in the number of youngsters going to Switzerland under the Pro Juventute scheme and it was a record number of 28 for whom we paid all or part of the fares. They all seemed to have had a very happy time there whilst their parents, very often lone mothers, had the secure knowledge that the children were well looked after while they were at work.

As in previous years, we have given a grant to the Swiss Welfare Office for young people who has its premises at our house. Once again, the location of the two services in the same building has proved very beneficial not only to our clients for whom we can ensure a permanent presence during office hours, but also for the two social workers who mutually benefit from the contact with each other and the possibility of examining vexed problems jointly. We should like to thank Mrs. Margrit

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Lyster of the Welfare Office for the very pleasant collaboration and support both practical and moral which she gives to Mrs. Sharp.

The clients who came to us with needs other than lack of money have again presented a wide spectrum of problems which we have endeavoured to help them solve either ourselves or in collaboration with whatever agency seemed to be the most suitable. Some of the questions which have cropped up were as varied as loneliness, sorting out of financial problems, marital breakdown, a search of a home or simply for help around the house, returning to Switzerland or any combination of those. We also do act quite frequently as intermediaries between our clients and their families in the home country. Sometimes, it is just an occasional exchange of letters to give them news of people who cannot write themselves any more, and sometimes it involves advice and discussions on how the families can best help their relative.

The welfare of our clients takes up by far the largest slice of our time and energy, but great care is also given to the administrative tasks involved and to the upkeep of our two properties at Conway Street and Belsize Grove. The Swiss Hostel for Girls, as shown by our allowance granted for nights spent there by Swiss girls has again had a larger proportion of our nationals staying there.

At Conway Street, we had a difficult period of nearly five months without the help of caretakers, but we are now extremely lucky with Mr.

and Mrs. Jackson who are a great support in many ways. The central heating system was proving to be more and more unsatisfactory in spite of many efforts to get it to work properly and, therefore in the autumn, we carried out a thorough overhaul. The large expenditure has been rewarded by a much more efficient control of each individual radiator which should provide appreciable savings in fuel. The rooms for young men at Conway Street were occupied at a very satisfactory rate.

As usual, our premises were a hive of activity in early December when, under the leadership of Mmes. Burri and Kaluza, we prepared 158 parcels for 241 people. This action has again given great pleasure to many and we are indebted not only to the two ladies but also to the Swiss firms who gave generously some of their products and beautiful calendars and to Mmes. S. Annette, M. Bruggemann, L. Hall, M. Lyster, G. Senn, W. J. Turner, Mr. and Mrs. R. Glarner, Mr. and Mrs. St. Kaluza, Mr. and Mrs. M. Röthlisberger, Mr. and Mrs. E. Tangemann, Mr. and Mrs. P. Zimmermann and Messrs. E. Huber and L. Smith who assisted with the distribution of the parcels.

The Executive Committee met regularly on the first Monday of each month to discuss applications and other problems arising from the running of the Society and great care was taken to ensure adequate solutions to the varied questions that presented themselves. The Embassy was represented at the

meeting by Consul M. Ch. Glauser. He and Mme. Glauser gave us a memorable evening at their home where the Committee were lavishly entertained to dinner. We do wish to record here our gratitude to Consul and Mme. Glauser.

During Mrs. Sharp's holiday we were fortunate to enlist the assistance of Mrs. Elisabeth Gunn to whom we are greatly indebted. As last year, we were lucky to share with the Welfare Office the secretarial services of Mrs. Marietta Lee whom we thank warmly for her devoted work.

We are very grateful to our Honorary President Ambassador Dr. E. Thalmann for his support and the keen interest he is taking in our activities.

We also wish to express our thanks to all the institutions and individuals who, in the course of the year, have been helping us; the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches, the Swiss Observer, English Social Services and, particularly to our individual friends and supporters on whose interest and financial contributions we depend so much in the accomplishment of our worthwhile task.

Last but not least, our thanks go to our secretary and social worker Mrs. A.-R. Sharp for the skill and enthusiasm she continues to bring to her job.

On behalf of the Executive Committee

M. Schneebeli
President

CITY SWISS CLUB: COMPUTER: Master or Servant?

By an ironic coincidence the strike of civil servants manning amongst others this country's social security computers was just beginning to bite as the anxious question of the real role of this highly sophisticated modern machinery, whether master or servant to humanity's needs, was the subject-matter set for debate at the March meeting of the City Swiss Club after a pleasant dinner held as usual at the Dorchester Hotel. Fittingly it was presided over by a banker, Mr. H. Jauslin, who presumably spoke from practical experience of computers' achievements and risks in his introductory remarks calling on guest-speaker, Mr. A. L. C. Humphreys, C.B.E., F.B.I.M., a Director of the sole British firm in this field, International Computers Ltd, to give us his expert views on the theme.

Without going into the technicalities of the computer Mr. Humphreys characterised its importance for modern society as comparable with what the industrial revolution achieved these last two hundred years. Evidently the computer's phenomenal speed of recording and digesting the facts fed into it and presenting accurate answers to the complicated problems entrusted to its unbiased mechanism represents its chief merit. A multitude of difficult operations that used to bog down the work of scientists, technicians and managements to snail's pace are speeded up to an undreamt of degree by the computer. Man's development over thousands of years have suddenly been advanced by electronics in leaps and bounds scarcely requiring more than a few hours or days.

Having regard to the infinite variety of uses of the computer things can of course go wrong and have gone wrong on occasions, Mr. Humphreys did not hesitate to admit in reply to some anxious questioners fearing breakdowns in entire services and complex industries, possibly amounting to national if not worldwide disasters. But when and where things go wrong depends invariably, the speaker argued, on the human element that cannot be entirely eliminated from the proper use and functioning of the computer. Its usefulness and correct answers depend on the correct choice of problems being fed correctly into the computer. It requires above all a revision of the traditional ways of looking at problems which cannot always be reduced to precise facts and figures needed for the com-