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'Our Dr Rast' dies, aged 90

LAST year, Dr Hugo Rast celebrated his 90th birthday in Kaufdorf, Berne (see Swiss Observer, August 1981). Though he still enjoyed excellent health, he did feel that the light of his life had begun to flicker.

When his wife, Ruth, had to attend to some urgent business in London towards the end of March, she did not feel happy to leave his side. She told him that she would prefer him to go with her. He loved the idea, and they hired an ambulance plane from Belp and together they flew back to their real home in London.

The weather was fine and the flight in the small aeroplane was a delight, like a going home. Together they visited old friends and old places and enjoyed past memories of a life filled to the brim with creative work, joys and sorrows.

But he knew, and even wrote it down, that he was like a candle, collecting with an effort the rest of the remaining wax, radiating light and warmth for the last time before going out. On March 28 he suffered a stroke and died in the Middlesex Hospital on April 6 with a last look of grateful farewell to his wife and the personnel of the ward who had cared for him so well for the last 10 days.

It was holy week. Easter was approaching, and the symbolic meaning of that liturgical event summed up his whole life: He lived and worked with Christ for the well being of the people; he died with Him, and rose with Him to eternal life.

Dr Rast was quiet, but a great character of the Swiss colony in London, and his name spelt healing. He was from Hochdorf (LU), being born in Berne on August 6, 1891, and was a lover of life, of music, of art, of mountain sports, but above all of people.

In spite of his strict upbringing in Catholic discipline, God let him see the humour, the love, the kindness and the beauty in his religion and in life. That is why he studied to become a medical doctor.

His main interest was surgery, but he felt that there was more in a suffering patient than a defective organ, and he tried to understand all possible aspects of his profession, including the new science of psychotherapy. He graduated as an MD in Berne in 1915 but his studies brought him to Lausanne, Paris and finally to

London in 1919.

In the First World War he was medical officer supervising the trains which carried prisoners of war to be repatriated under the Geneva Convention. It was as if he had prepared himself for his much greater responsibility during the Second World War.

In London he began work at the German Hospital. He took postgraduate courses to bring his qualifications up to English standards, and qualified in 1922 as FRCS (Engl) and LRCP (Lon). Then London took hold of him. He became a surgeon in 1925, senior surgeon in 1938 and medical superintendent of the German Hospital in 1939.

His high qualities as a medical doctor, his command of languages and his deep concern for the patients won him the respect and confidence of the Home Office, of the War Office and finally of the United States War Department. He was appointed chairman of the Mixed Medical Commission for civilian internees, for prisoners of war and then for the European theatre of war.

He became the medical adviser for 14 embassies and legations in London: Belgium, Brazil, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Several publications in scientific research not only helped to combat

disease but also won him the respect of his colleagues.

A secret of his great capacity for work was the love of mountains. As a member of the British Alpine Club he was a frequent guest, and was well known in Zermatt. He knew the Matterhorn, which he climbed for the last time when he was 70.

Hugo Rast remained an active member of the Swiss colony, and several societies enjoyed his regular presence and co-operation in office. He was simply "our Doctor Rast" who could listen, go to the heart of a problem and give advice until, a few years ago, he built his second home in Kirchdorf (Berne).

To the delight of his friends he married Ruth Berthe Aeberhardt in May 1970. She became his devoted wife, friend and companion. With her we all share not only the sadness that he is no longer among us but also the joy of having known him and the deep confidence that his spirit will remain an inspiration to us and that we shall meet again once we have reached the cross of the mountain peak and, like him, gone beyond.

Fr. Paul Bossard.

WE regret to announce the death of Mrs Theresa-Maria Furrer, of 29 Grandison Road, London SW11. She died on April 16 at the age of 91. We extend our sympathy to her family.

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There are five establishments in German-speaking Switzerland and five in the French-speaking part of the country, though Fribourg University is bi-lingual. There are, however, no university level institutions in the Italian-speaking areas.

Although the universities all have a similar structure, each establishment has its own character and its own reputation. Like universities in other European countries, Swiss universities provide a specialised education which builds on the more general secondary education.

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