

Fête suisse

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FÊTE SUISSE.

There is to be no Fête Suisse in 1942. This news, though probably not unexpected, will be received with very real regret by the many hundreds of compatriots, who used to swell the ranks of our gatherings at the Central Hall, Westminster.

The Fête Suisse is one of the old and cherished institutions of the Colony in London, having been in existence since 1864 and being due, therefore, to celebrate its 80th anniversary in two years' time. No doubt, its beginnings were modest enough and, originally, the function was called "Thé Suisse," which appellation, about 20 years ago, was changed to "Fête Suisse."

At the time the reporter first came to London, it was held at the Portman Rooms, Baker Street, W., and since then has repeatedly changed its venue. Of late years the attendances increased to such an extent that the gathering had to be accommodated in the beautiful and spacious Central Hall, Westminster, which it easily managed to fill to capacity. But, whilst the growth of this function has gone on apace, with many incidental innovations and improvements, as well as vastly superior catering arrangements, the essential purposes and feature of the Fête Suisse remained unchanged; namely, that it should be an annual rendezvous for all the Swiss in London: young and old, rich and poor, able to foregather on this one occasion. Under one roof, under one flag, the sons and daughters of Helvetia loved to unite, in order to exchange home- and family news, to listen to the speeches of their leaders and to sing the loved old songs. By its very simplicity and time-honoured tradition the Fête Suisse was and remains dear to every one. Last year it did not take place, as it was decided that the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the Swiss Confederation should be duly celebrated instead.

However, as our readers will probably ask themselves, why it had been decided not to hold the Fête Suisse this year, it will be most expedient to report on the meeting of the "Comité de la Fête Suisse," which took place on Friday, March 6th, at "Swiss House," under the experienced chairmanship of Mr. A. Fred Suter. After the minutes of the previous meeting had been read by the Hon. Secretary, and duly

passed, Mr. Charles Chapuis, as Treasurer, presented his report on the financial position, showing a very satisfactory balance at Bank. Mr. Chapuis next presented to the meeting a detailed Memorandum on the advisability, or otherwise, of holding the Fête this year. It was a very detailed and quite unbiassed statement on the many and varied aspects, which presented themselves to the Committee for consideration, under the circumstances prevailing and was drawn up with that knowledge and care, associated with anything Mr. Charles Chapuis undertakes.

This the chairman duly acknowledged and, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mr. Chapuis for his thoughtful and valuable contribution, which would form the basis of any further deliberations on the subject.

The chairman next informed the Committee that, before convening the meeting, he had called on the Swiss Minister, M. Walter Thurnheer, in order to ascertain his views. Mr. Suter reported that the Minister, whilst gravely questioning the wisdom or advisability of holding the Fête under to-day's conditions, made it perfectly clear, that the last thing he desired was to interfere with, or veto, any of the old established traditions of the Colony and he intimated that, in his (the Swiss Minister's) view, the onus of a decision would rest on the Committee itself.

The chairman said that he felt sure the members would appreciate the generous attitude of our esteemed Minister and that, before going any further, we now had arrived at that moment, where each member present should state his, or her, view on the principal question, whether or not the Fête should be held this year, giving a clear vote for or against.

Twenty Committee members, including the chairman, were in attendance, two members having excused themselves for their absence. The voting resulted in seven for and thirteen against holding the Fête this year. Those who had voted in favour, stressed the need for cohesion in the Colony at such a time as the present and the great moral and up-lifting value which such a gathering gave to all the participants. The others, far from denying the force of the previous argument, pointed out the inadvisability of holding such a function in what appeared to prove the most critical year of the war. Apart from catering and other, what might be called minor, difficulties, it was stated that arrangements, entailing much work and considerable expense, might, in certain circumstances, have to be cancelled at the eleventh hour. Above everything, however, it was considered that nothing should be undertaken by the Swiss Colony in London, which could be misinterpreted in any quarter, might give rise to even the slightest offence towards the hospitable country of our adoption or render the position of the Swiss Minister and the Legation in the least uncomfortable.

Of course, it is admitted that our Fête Suisse is not a "Fête" in the sense the British understand the term. Yet, it would be equally inconceivable to hold such a function, pitched throughout in a minor key. This would belie both its object and the true Swiss character. On the other hand, to proceed on familiar lines, would mean that, as the program unfolded itself, the "Stimmung" of the assembly would rise in proportion, as is the custom in most large gatherings and certainly in any composed mainly of patriotic Swiss. And herein exactly lies that danger which has already been touched upon.

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As one of our most respected and sagacious members of the Committee reminded us, if it was found wise and necessary to suspend the Fête Suisse during the last war, how much more so is it incumbent on us in the present one, so infinitely more serious and grave, from every point of view.

The chairman, in summing up, told the Committee that, although he had three sons with the British Forces, he spoke without any consideration of his personal feelings, but that he was convinced the members had arrived, with a majority of two to one, at a right and proper decision. The minority, as good Swiss, were, of course, perfectly willing to fall into line.

Mr. Ch. Chapuis, when he presented his report as Treasurer, observed that, after having held that position for twenty years, he considered he was entitled to retire, but the Committee were fortunate in getting him to accept re-election for at least another year. Pasteur Pradervand proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the Treasurer for his long, arduous and untiring services; this was duly seconded and carried by acclamation. The Treasurer, in returning thanks, told his colleagues that his work could not have been carried on so successfully and with such beneficial results, to the general fund as well as to the Swiss Benevolent Society, without the constant and whole-hearted support of Mme. Chapuis.

At the close of the proceedings Mr. Suter announced that, in the circumstances, the Committee would remain in being as at present constituted, so as to be able to resume the work at the earliest possible date. He expressed the view of all those present in declaring that so old and honoured an institution as the Fête Suisse must and would survive and that the abandonment of the function was merely temporary.

No one present on March 6th at "Swiss House" will forget the weighty words of the chairman, when he impressed upon the meeting that the present is a time for introspection and for prayer, far more than for merry-making. The religious leaders were glad to take up this lead of a layman and hoped that all would take this very truth to heart. They also reminded us that the Churches would offer official celebrations of our great National Day on Sunday, August 2nd.

A hearty vote of thanks to the Chairman, as well as to the S.M.S., for kindly having placed their members' room at the Committee's disposal, brought the proceedings to an end.

GALLUS.

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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

The annual general meeting was held on Saturday afternoon, 28th February, at Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, London, W.1.

Mr. Anton Bon, the President of the Society, was in the chair and the meeting was attended by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Thurnheer, who is Honorary President of the Society, by Madame Thurnheer, who is Patron of the Home for Aged Swiss, by Mr. F. M. Gamper, Chairman of the Committee of the Home for Aged Swiss, by Mr. Louis Chapuis, Chairman of the Swiss Relief Centre, and by some thirty members of the various committees.

In his opening address, after reviewing the general activity of the Society during 1941, when fortunately no unexpected strain of any consequence was placed upon its resources, Mr. Bon drew attention to the heavier calls which are bound to be made upon the Society's funds in the post war period, quite apart from any sudden emergency which might spring up at any moment and against which some provision was necessary. And so he stressed the need already now for special efforts if we, as a colony, are to maintain our reputation for looking after our poor throughout the war and in the difficult years to follow.

One hard fact may be mentioned in this brief survey, in anticipation of the detailed report and accounts to be published and distributed in due course, i.e., that notwithstanding the decrease in unemployment brought about by the war, the Society's total disbursements are again on the increase, as the following figures will show :

1940	£5,150
1941	£5,886

Therefore, provision against an uncertain future fraught with great and unavoidable difficulties cannot be expected to be built up from, nor even assisted by, any easing of the ordinary burden on the Society's finances.

It is comforting to note that the Committee of the Swiss Benevolent Society is taking the long view, in the confident belief that it may rely on the sympathy and help of all who have the welfare of our poor at heart. Here then is an opportunity for all subscribers, in the colony and outside, to continue and, if possible, increase their generous support — so gratefully acknowledged by the President and by the Hon. Treasurer in the course of their speeches — and to try and induce others, not yet enrolled, to join in the common effort in the noble cause of charity, in the true spirit of our national motto: "One for all, all for one" and remembering always the everlasting truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Satisfactory reports were given by the various sections of the Society and, like the yearly accounts, were duly approved with the customary thanks to the executive officers and their helpers. Whether you listen to the Hon. Treasurer's minute analysis of monies received and spent, or to the more directly human side of events emerging from the Secretary's report, or again to the story of happiness, contentment and well-being of our old people in their country retreat at Hatfield, where other members of the Colony, hit by the war, have found a temporary haven of peace and quiet under the roof of the Swiss Relief Centre, or to the care with which the Society's funds are managed by