

A noble work

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A NOBLE WORK

The duties of an Editor of a Swiss paper abroad are manifold; he is expected to be well informed, not only about the official happenings in the respective Colony, but also about the various little intrigues and jealousies in which the Swiss like to indulge at times; which, of course, does not prevent them, whenever a speaker at a banquet mentions our famous motto, "Un pour tous, tous pour un," to cheer vociferously and to tap each other on the back, proclaiming that we are indeed a fine lot of fellows. He is expected to attend every function, be it a lecture, concert, meeting, dance, banquet, wedding, funeral, etc., etc., and woe to him if he does not write glowing reports about these events, handing out bouquets left and right. Should he dare to criticise or voice his own humble opinion, which might not tally with the one of the organisers of the respective function, he is deemed to be no good and the paper not worth reading. He is also supposed to be a hundred per cent. patriot, and to go into ecstasy whenever the Swiss National Anthem is played or the Swiss flag waved; in short, he is supposed to be a *super-man*, which he decidedly is not.

There comes a time to every man who is engaged in journalistic work when he gets, to use a vulgar expression, "fed up"; when, after having listened to innumerable speeches months on end, he begins to feel suspicious of taking the utterances at their face value, and when his heart is aching for a little peace and quietness, far from the limelight. There comes that longing to do some really useful work, something that will last.

In that mood, I decided to visit the headquarters of the "Fonds de Secours," the Swiss Benevolent Society. They were, of course, no strangers to me, as I have heard so many excellent reports about them, and yet, to my everlasting shame, I must confess that I wended my way to the wrong address, where I was told that this institution had moved some five years ago to other quarters. Back to my mind came that inane tune, to which London radio listeners have been treated for the last three months—"And Annie doesn't live here any more."

The only excuse I can think of is the one that I am a Bernese bred and born, and it is a well-known fact that it takes us "Bääärner" some time to keep abreast with current happenings and affairs.

Still, "better late than never." I actually managed to locate their whereabouts, and I received a hearty welcome. It so happened that it was just the day when the members of this famous institution meet, and when those of our compatriots who are in distress and trouble are hastening there to ask for advice and help. I was thus able to listen to many a sad tale, so different from those I am usually accustomed to hear.

I was greatly impressed with the organisation I saw there at work, and I can hardly find words to express my admiration for those ladies and gentlemen who, in such an unselfish way, are giving their time to work for their compatriots, who, often through no fault of their own, have landed in Queer Street. I am sure it will interest my readers to learn that the Committee, which is ably presided over by Mr. A. Dupraz, is meeting once a week (Monday) at their headquarters, 34, Fitzroy Square, W.1, to receive those of our countrymen who require help and advice. To many this pilgrimage must be a sad one, undertaken only when no other way seems to be left open to them. To many it is the last straw they can cling to; but let it be said that they will find there an understanding body of women and men, who are trying to solve problems which have become beyond solution of some of the help seekers. I am convinced that many a heavy heart has departed lighter from Fitzroy Square, and many a tear has been dried when they realised that, although they are living in a foreign country amongst foreign people, they are not forgotten; and that, through the Fonds de Secours, their country and countrymen are trying to help them and make them once more useful citizens of the community.

It is, perhaps, useful to recall that the "Fonds de Secours pour les Suisses pauvres," to give it its full title, was founded on January 1st, 1870, and it was destined to administer casual relief to needy persons of Swiss nationality. For many years the institution was closely connected with the Swiss Church at Endell Street; as a matter of fact, I am told that relief used to be paid out after the morning service.

At the beginning of 1904 it was found that the work had become so involved that it required to be put on a proper basis, aided by an efficient organisation, and through the good services of the

late Mr. E. A. Steiger, a proper working scheme was innovated. Hitherto repatriations, etc., were effected by the various Swiss Consulates. This work was taken on by the institution, and at that time also the Monday Meetings of the members of the Fonds de Secours started. It was there that every case was thoroughly investigated and decided upon on its own merits. On this occasion also the old people entitled to their pension were paid out. At this stage, I might mention that the amount of pensions distributed in 1870 was £47, in 1903 £71, in 1913 £144, and in 1933 £1,948.

The figures for casual relief have gradually increased. In 1870 a sum of £71 was distributed in 1903 it reached the amount of £139, which amount was nearly doubled in 1913 (£264). From then onwards a considerable increase took place year after year. In 1920 the first thousand pounds were reached; five years later (1925) an amount of £1,513 was required to meet the demands; in 1930 it swelled to £1,829, in 1932 to £2,032, and last year it reached the considerable amount of £2,102.

It goes without saying that the work which had to be performed increased in the same measure, and we see at the end of last year over a dozen ladies and gentlemen who regularly meet to cope with the now heavy task.

In fact, the work involved took on such dimensions that it was necessary to appoint a whole time Secretary, and the Committee was lucky enough to find an ideal man for this responsible position in the person of M. Th. Ritter, who for many years had been an ardent worker, giving his time freely and ungrudgingly for this fine cause.

I feel sure that my readers have not the slightest idea of the amount of labour which is entailed at these meetings. Intricate cases with the National Health Insurance Authorities have to be solved, landlords and landladies have to be communicated with; not infrequent are correspondences with the police, in cases where a change of address has not been registered, or when one of those unfortunate ones has given way to sudden temptation. Many are the letters which have to be sent to the various communities in Switzerland and to the Federal Authorities. As an example, I have been shown a *dossier* where in one case alone nearly thirty letters had been written, and I am given to understand that this is not an isolated case. Space allows me only to mention a few of the services which are rendered by the voluntary workers. I should like to name each of these ladies and gentlemen, but I feel sure they would be the last ones to agree to publication. "Charity ever finds in the act reward, and needs no trumpet in the receiver."

Casual Relief.

The figures during the last three years have alarmingly increased, in fact, almost £500 more every year (1930, £1,175; 1932, £1,517; 1933, £1,948), and this apart from the nearly £2,000 which are spent on Pensions. Here again one comes across the common fact that the poorer the parents, the larger the family. Here are two striking cases: A family of ten children are to be supported; the father is out of work. Another family of seven children are thrown on the mercy of charity, the breadwinner having died from cancer. There is food for reflection for those who oppose a reasonable administration of birth control.

Pensions.

The Society has at present 76 Pensioners on their books. The age which entitles them to same is fixed at 65 years, but in some cases a pension has been accorded earlier. They get their rent paid (usually one room), as well as an allowance of 10/- per week for food, etc. It is certainly not a very large sum, but it is to be remembered that most of them also receive the Old Age Pension, so that they can end their days without fear for their daily bread. I have only recently had an opportunity to meet some of these old ladies and gentlemen, and their happy faces have proved to me, that the eventide of their life had been sweetened by the help given to them by their countrymen.

The Georges Dimier Fonds for a home for aged Swiss is also administered by the Fonds de Secours. It would lead too far to go into the details of this Fonds, which dates back to 1925, when the Society mourned the death of their excellent President, Georges Dimier, a fine man and a great Swiss.

One may well ask who is paying for all this. Well, the various communities in Switzerland are certainly giving their support, and the Federal Authorities are not lacking; but the *main* support to this noble work comes from the members, societies and institutions of the Swiss Colony, and here I wish to pay a great tribute to my countrymen for their unlimited generosity. It is true

they have often grumbled, but they never fail when help is most needed, and their efforts made for the happiness of others lifts them above themselves.

It goes without saying that one also encounters criticism. I have been told on one occasion that the Society has repatriated some of the needy ones, thus causing great hardship, especially in cases where the wife was previous to her marriage of English nationality, and the children born and brought up here. On mentioning this I have been assured that this is not the case, and that only single people, or in the case of married people, only those where the wife is also Swiss are sent back. I am glad to state this, as such a procedure would indeed be hard for those concerned.

One feature is also well worth mentioning. Once a month those of our compatriots who have the bad fortune to be confined in a lunatic asylum (there are about twenty) receive a parcel consisting of fruit, sweets and other little delicacies, which have proved to be a real comfort to them. Many amongst these unfortunate ones have not a soul in this wide world.

A department is occupied in collecting old clothes, boots and shoes, etc. Everything is nicely stored, garments which require mending are seen to by some of the lady members. And so I could go on and on, telling my readers what great and useful work is done by these voluntary workers and their institution.

And what a happy little family they are; their work for the common good breeds that kind of friendship which is based on a deeper understanding, a friendship which is lasting and worth while having. It is, indeed, true that we are rich only through what we give, and poor only through what we refuse.

This visit, undertaken on my own initiative, was to me a revelation; it has made me more content with my lot, more grateful for blessings received, which one is so apt to take for granted; but foremost it has filled me with pride to see this small band of faithful workers pursue their noble task, without any noise and advertising, quiet but determined to lighten the burden of their less fortunate brethren. My only regret is the one, that I am quite unable to express through my pen the admiration for this truly great undertaking, and in terminating I remember the words which Pope, the great writer, wrote to a friend of his:—

"When I die, I should be ashamed to leave enough to build me a monument; if there were a wanting friend above ground, I would enjoy the pleasure of what I give by giving it alive, and seeing another enjoy it."

ST.

THE LUCERNE CHRONICLE (Continued).

of pictures, of which 40 are in polychrome, and the remainder in black photogravure, but all in the original size, constitutes an inexhaustible source of information about contemporary life, and gives for the first time a comprehensive insight into the expressive art of the Swiss illustrators of that period. The pictures in this book are the work of two different artists—the first, a keenly observant man well schooled in draughtsmanship; the second, more careless but much more highly gifted, who only attained greater perfection in detail as his work grew under his hand.

While the first illustrator, who still belonged to the older school, shows his predilection for ornamentation in the use of Gothic framework, the second was a trained expert who brightens his pictures with light and air and maps out his picture space. A new artistic feeling is everywhere apparent, the artistic accomplishment is much greater, but this second master also cares little for finished form or refinement of expression in the subject represented. He is more realistic than the first, but does not yet reach the plastic perfection of an Urse Graf or a Niklaus Manuel. The coloration is new, for, instead of the gaudy, brilliant tones used rather indiscriminately, we find a colour scheme based on a uniform and emotional conception of the whole.

It is the first time we have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with this indigenous Swiss art in a comprehensive series of pictures, and that at a period when Gothic decorative illustration was gradually developing towards the plastic perfection attained during the Renaissance. The two modes influence one another to the advantage of each and gradually merge into the art of the realistic painters of the Swiss School, whose new ideas materialised in their most complete form in the work of Niklaus Manuel Deutsch and Hans Holbein the Younger.

This voluminous book opens up to a wide circle of art lovers artistic material known hitherto by only a few examples, with all its wealth of cultural and historical treasures.