

Nouvelle société helvétique

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SWISS RELIEF CENTRE.

The following communication has been received by the Committee:—

19/8/40.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

Maintenant que l'heure du départ approche, nous sentons que nous avons contracté une lourde dette envers vous. Elle ne pèse pas au point de vue matériel, mais d'autant plus au point de vue moral et sentimental.

Nous sommes venus de différentes directions, avec des peines et soucis plus graves pour les uns, plus légers pour les autres, mais, nous tous, avons été reçus de la même manière si accueillante. Quelques-uns entre nous ont encore été secourus d'une manière spéciale, à la fois généreuse et discrète, et ce secours nous a enlevé bien des soucis. Comment aurions nous pu procurer tout cela nous-mêmes?

Nous retournons en Suisse, un voyage peu agréable à l'heure actuelle, mais quand même enviable. Nous ne manquerons pas de dire à la Suisse ce que nous avons eu et éprouvé chez vous. Nous lui dirons que les Suissesses et Suisses de Londres sont bonnes et bons, qu'ils sont généreux et qu'ils savent accueillir et offrir. Nous lui dirons aussi que vous n'avez pas peur de sacrifices et d'efforts et que vos cœurs, malgré que vous êtes ici depuis des années, même des décades, sont restés des cœurs suisses, c'est-à-dire bons et pleins de philanthropie.

Nous lui dirons que, malgré les longues années que vous l'avez quittée, malgré la grande distance qui vous sépare d'elle, vous êtes restés en contact avec elle et que les fils les plus tendres vous attachent encore à notre patrie, petite mais belle, démocratique et libre.

Nous lui parlerons de vos institutions de bienfaisance, et de votre esprit de compréhension pour les compatriotes en détresse. Nous lui dirons que vous savez donner avec un sourire, et que chez vous la main droite ignore ce que donne la main gauche. La Suisse écouterait avec plaisir que vous avez créé à Londres un flot vers lequel peuvent se diriger tous ceux que la tempête actuelle a mis en danger, privés d'emploi, ménage et famille. Nous lui dirons que vous savez consoler ceux pleins de tristesse, et reconforter les accablés, et elle sera fière de vous.

Nous qui avons bénéficié de vos sacrifices et de vos travaux désirons vous montrer que nous apprécions tant d'efforts.

Nous essayons de vous le faire comprendre par cette lettre, modeste en sa forme, mais pleine de profonds sentiments. Et quand nous serons de nouveau loin de vous, les uns en Suisse, les autres en pays étrangers, nous penserons avec une reconnaissance sincère aux jours que nous avons passés dans votre grande famille suisse.

Où, nous sommes venus chez vous moralement attaqués, tristes et déçus, mais nous repartons reconfortés, plus gais et surtout plus confiants.

Nous vous disons merci de tout cœur et vous prions de croire que nous renfermons dans ce merci un sentiment ineffaçable qui nous attachera à vous pour toujours.

Nous vous souhaitons, à vous qui resterez ici, bonne chance, que la bonne fortune vous sourie et que les vicissitudes de la guerre vous soient épargnées.

Les Hospitalisés du SWISS RELIEF CENTRE.

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

The great interest created by the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's monthly meetings was shown last Friday, the 16th inst., when 56 members and friends gathered at Swiss House, in spite of the afternoon's air-raid warning, which somewhat disturbed transit through London.

After the election of a new member, our Swiss journalist friend Mr. Keller gave us a resumé of the past events. With regard to Switzerland, several little-known facts were mentioned, namely, the Swiss unemployment figures showing a total of 11,500 unemployed at the end of July, unfortunately likely to grow rapidly through the loss of export markets, and kept down by the authorisation to allow demobilised soldiers to remain in the army if their civilian employment is terminated; then the conclusion of a trade agreement with Germany to arrange larger coal exports against Swiss goods, and a compensation system in business with Poland, also a clearing agreement with Roumania. The Swiss economic situation is at present unfortunately very badly hit by the French Armistice, and innumerable problems have cropped up which are still very far from settlement.

This well documented causerie was very much applauded by the audience, who had listened eagerly to the speech of our friend.

Mr. Girardet, conseiller de Légation, followed Mr. Keller with an exposé of the present economic relationship between England and Switzerland. He painted a very clear picture of the unfortunate situation in which our country is finding itself now; and it is particularly unlucky that the agreements concluded in April, 1940, as the result of long negotiations, are already out of date, owing to the changes brought about by the French collapse. On the one hand, Switzerland must obtain raw materials and foodstuffs from overseas, and the transport of these necessities has to undergo the control of the British blockade, ever suspicious of leakages; on the other hand, the exports of Swiss goods which are essential to provide payments for the imports, are no longer free, and are at the mercy of the Anti-British group. Swiss economic experts are striving to find a solution satisfactory to all sides, but it must be obvious to all that the problem is very complicated. With regard to the recent trade agreement with Germany, it is known that this is mainly a financial agreement, but it is also possible that some other propositions exist which have not yet been published, as they would have to be approved first by the British authorities.

The transit of goods between Switzerland and overseas (including England) via Lisbon is still obscure; theoretically it should be possible since agreements with France and Spain, so far not repudiated, would allow such transit, and the matter would therefore only seem a matter of means; but Britain has recently decided that the non-occupied part of France is now considered by them as enemy territory, and the reaction of the Vichy Government to this is not yet known. It may be that the reply will be — under German pressure — a prohibition of trade with England and Colonies, and therefore seizure of goods in transit to England, which would be most serious for Switzerland. Until this is completely cleared up,

obviously no reliance can be placed on the Lisbon route, which, at any rate, is still extremely uncertain.

Apparently, the transit of mails via Lisbon air-mail is now improving, and some members were in the position to state that letters sent from England reached Switzerland within 12-20 days; but the reverse journey still takes much longer.

A discussion followed this interesting talk; and let it be mentioned here, incidentally, that Mr. Girardet would welcome information from interested parties as to their own experiences regarding transit of goods via Lisbon (either way) and experiences in mail delays. He can be reached at the Swiss Legation. Some members thought that an official Swiss convoy system Switzerland-Portugal should be instituted, with the full official weight of the Government, but obviously, until the position of the Vichy Government is cleared up, this is premature. Another member pointed out the situation of Swiss goods in transit seized by the belligerents; there must be a considerable quantity of these and large amounts of money involved. The Swiss Government is trying to take stock of them, but it is extremely difficult, since mail and telegraphic communications are often practically impossible. There are huge amounts of goods in transit through France and blocked in out-of-the-way places, also of Swiss goods on Dutch, French and Italian steamers, seized by the British blockade, etc., and although every effort is made to try to help the Swiss owners, progress is very slow.

The conclusion of this very black picture is that we must have confidence in the Swiss Government, which is doing its best under most trying circumstances; and to trust them in their efforts.

The Council's thanks are due to the two speakers whose authentic information is greatly appreciated by all members present at the meeting.

A.B.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The Monthly Meeting of the Society was held at Swiss House on Wednesday, August 14th. Mr. J. J. Boos, President, was in the Chair and over thirty members were present. The business part of the meeting was soon dealt with and the members were not at all reluctant to forego their game of cards when the Chairman announced that he had been able to arrange for three Swiss, at present in London, to relate their war experiences. First we heard a moving account of a compatriot who had been residing in Belgium where, until the invasion, he held an executive commercial position. He had to leave home helter-skelter on a bicycle, his wife and child having obtained a lift on a relative's motor car. From place to place they chased each other right into France and the pathetic story of what he witnessed on the way included some gruesome tales of heart-rending experiences. When finally he arrived at a French port, where all bridges had been blown sky-high, he had lost all trace of his family. He managed to get on a Polish steamer, which finally landed him in his country. He is now waiting to return to Switzerland with the special party arranged by the Swiss Legation. We

hope that sooner or later he will be able to trace his family, of whose whereabouts he is at present still unaware. After having heard the story of the civilian evacuee, we heard the soldier's side of the picture. The other two, who some years ago joined the French Foreign Legion, gave us a first hand account of this well-known unit. What we had often heard and read was more than borne out by what these two experienced in North Africa and both were agreed that every young man, however cruel fate might have been to him, should be warned from joining this motley army. When war came to the shores of Norway, the Foreign Legion played an important part in the taking of Narvik and our two Legionaries were right in the thick of it. Parts of their narratives defy the pen and confirmed a lot we had read in the Press. The fighting qualities of the Legion are legendary and both these soldiers did not lack in valour, for one of them was awarded the military cross and promoted to the rank of corporal for bravery on the battlefield. The collapse of the campaign brought them to this country, where with others they still hope to be of service to the Allied cause. On the conclusion of their most interesting narratives, the three compatriots were accorded a very hearty ovation and they related many more experiences in formal chats with members who stayed on after the meeting.

W.B.

LETTER BOX.

Miss L. D. — We thank you for your cheque of 14/- being one year's subscription for your friend. We wish other subscribers would follow your good example in adding the extra postage.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Tuesday, September 3rd, at 6.15 p.m. Dinner 6.30 sharp — City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting, at Pagani's Restaurant.

Wednesday, September 11th, at 7.30 p.m. — Swiss Mercantile Society — Monthly Meeting, at Swiss House, 34/35, Fitzroy Square, W.1.

Friday, September 20th, 1940, at 6.30 p.m. — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Monthly Meeting to be followed by a talk by Mr. G. J. Keller on: "Three days' Tour in the Southern Defence Areas," at "Swiss House," 34/35, Fitzroy Square, W.1.

Divine Services.

Dimanche 25 août 1940: à l'Eglise Suisse, 79, Endell Street, W.C.2.
11h. Culte M. M. Pradervand.

Pour tout ce qui concerne le ministère pastoral, prière de s'adresser à Monsieur le pasteur Marcel Pradervand, 65, Mount View Road, N.4. (Téléphone Mountview 5003). Heure de réception à l'église le mercredi de 11-12h.30.

Sonntag, den 25. August 1940: in der Schweizerkirche, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.

11 Uhr. Gottesdienst Mr. B. Segal.

Für alle Amtshandlungen wende man sich z.Z. an Pfr. M. Pradervand, 65, Mount View Road, N.4. (MOU 5003)

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