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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The December Monthly Meeting of the Society was held at Swiss House on Wednesday, the 6th.

There was one admission to membership, Mr. Louis Schmidlin. The President, Mr. W. Meier, then read a letter from British European Airways advising the Society of special "Winter Sports Excursion" fares to Geneva £23:10:0d. return and to Zürich £25:0:0d. return. Mr. Meier welcomed Mr. K. E. Ammann, a former Chairman of the Education Committee now resident in Switzerland, who gave a short talk on the Rhine Port of Basle.

First of all Mr. Ammann mentioned the enormous increase in the volume of traffic handled by the port during the past twenty-five years. In 1926 the imported tonnage amounted to 275,000 tons only. For the first nine months of the current year the total tonnage handled, both up and downstream, was 2,496,631 tons. During 1949, an average of 20 ships arrived each day at the port and to handle their cargoes approximately 510 railway trucks were required per day.

One of the biggest difficulties in dealing with this tremendous volume of traffic was that there was only 4.5 Kilometers of quays. The goods were, however, quickly cleared, the dockers being paid on a piecework basis and three shift worked per day, and, if necessary, night work also.

The distance from Basle to Antwerp is 935 Kilometers, and to Rotterdam only 832 Kilometers. The time taken to navigate the Rhine is nine to ten days upstream, but only three to six days downstream. In order that the position of vessels in the river can be easily ascertained, the Rhine is marked every five hundred meters by a white cross on a black background. Every kilometer the sign shows the number of kilometers which that sign is from Constance. In the case of an accident, therefore, the position of a vessel is indicated by reference to the nearest of such signs.

An interesting point is that no dock dues are levied on the boats using the port, the only charges made being on the cargo carried at a rate varying from 15 to 55 cents per 1,000 Kilos. as "Hafenabgabe" and 45 cents per 1,000 Kilos "Hafenfracht".

Mr. Ammann's short introductory talk was followed by an interesting film showing parts of the river, the type of boats used on it and some of the port installations.

After a vote of thanks to the speaker proposed by Mr. Huber, the President closed the meeting by wishing the members present a merry Christmas and happy New Year.

T.E.S.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE "SCHWEIZERKIRCHE."

Many were the Christmas celebrations and parties in the Swiss Colony, and manifold must have been the impressions which were carried away. Some from amongst our large numbers have adopted the English way of spending Christmas. But many of us still treasure the happy, but quiet atmosphere of the Swiss Christmas of our youth. To all these the celebrations of the German-speaking community of the Swiss Church meant the high lights. The first Christmas Service took place at the Eglise Suisse on Sunday afternoon, 17th December. Between 250-300 friends, young and old, families with children of all ages, assembled in the warm, cosy church, lit by innumerable candles on the tall and shapely Christmas tree.

The programme was long, but varied, and it is difficult to say which part was the most impressive. Some preferred the violin solos, others the hymns sung by the choir of the "Schwyzerchränzli" or the songs by the Male Choir. The community singing must have been enjoyed equally by all — how seldom can we sing with others such beloved carols and hymns as "Herbei, o ihr Gläubigen," "Stille Nacht" and "O, du Fröhliche." The Christmas Message from the Bible and a story for the children had their place in the celebration. The quiet, friendly voice of Pfarrer Blum found its way to every heart.

But what can have moved the congregation as much as the performance of the children? The smallest was barely four, but how lovely it was to hear them recite! Some were confident, others tense, some at ease and some self-conscious, but all gave of their best. Often it was difficult to understand, but one could feel the love and patience which had gone into the studying of their lines. The children, Mrs. Blum (their Sunday School teacher), and the parents, all contributed towards the success. The older children — all girls — gave a well-nigh perfect rendering of "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her" with solo voices, recitation and ensemble singing.

Some children of the Sunday School, about a score in all, repeated their contribution on the following Wednesday afternoon, 20th December, when the girls of the "Schwyzerchränzli" held their own Christmas celebration, followed by a lavish tea. This time some 150 young girls met at the Eglise Suisse. Again the girls' choir sang, and there were violin and recorder solos. The nativity play was well produced and showed quite some talent for singing and acting. How many free afternoons and evenings the girls must have sacrificed for rehearsing! But it was well worth while. To many of the young people this celebration meant the only breath of Swiss Christmas, and they were amongst the most grateful for the happy hours. They sang the old familiar Christmas songs, they prayed, and heard once again the message of hope which in these dark times will lighten our path in the new year: "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

MARIANN.

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