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THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SWITZERLAND

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique were lucky once again in having a speaker from Switzerland at their Open Meeting at the Swiss Hostel for Girls on Tuesday, 23rd April. Miss L. C. Wenzinger, Editor of "Die Schweizerin" (Basle), gave a talk on "The Woman in Switzerland, her changing position and activities". The speaker started by stressing the fact that women in Switzerland were not a uniform society, but as in other countries their thoughts, work and behaviour varied from Canton to Canton, from town to town, from village to village. The woman in the town may in these times of affluency have a full money bag, but the farmer's wife up in the mountains still has to work hard for her living and has to do the washing in the brook or the village fountain.

In the course of the talk and during the very lively discussion it appeared that whilst training facilities existed for women in every profession and vocation, the number of girl students at university was rather lower than in some other countries. It was pointed out, however, that vocational training was of a very high standard and made great use of. There were women in all professions. Most Swiss universities had women lecturers and in several Cantons women could also be ordained.

The lecturer referred to one of the most outstanding events for Swiss women in recent years, the second exhibition of women's work, the SAFFA in Zurich in 1958. Women of all classes, creeds, backgrounds and interests united in creating this exhibition, which resulted in a net profit of some two million Swiss francs. Sixty per cent of this money was set aside for the SAFFA Co-operative Trust Fund, which was established after the first SAFFA in 1928. The money is used to help women to set up in business or as doctors, lawyers, artists, or to provide older women with scholarships or to enable them to take up training necessitated by divorce or widowhood.

Some of the money went to the Alliance of Swiss Women's Organisations (Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine) who make a special study of women's work and its problems. Another contribution went to the Swiss Institute for Housewifery for testing and proving materials, machines, tools, working methods, similar to the Good Housekeeping Institute in England.

Some of the money went to a Foundation for training women in citizenship, an organisation which also subsidises the publication of instructive books and classes, etc.

Miss Wenzinger then referred to the strong ecumenical movement which has come out of the SAFFA, where a Chapel had been put up for the common use of women of all denominations. Hours of Common Prayer and Week-end courses, Conferences and Services have become a regular feature in women's circles in many places.

The SAFFA has evidently strengthened the self-confidence of Swiss women and increased their sense of responsibility for social, educational and economic questions. Two Consumers' Associations have sprung up and a large number of matters are dealt with successfully.

Miss Wenzinger then referred to the question of women's political rights. The subject was taken up repeatedly in the discussion that followed, and it was evident that whilst a large majority of the audience was in favour of votes for women, members fully realise that in Switzerland the right to vote means much more than electing one's M.P. and local Council every few years. Switzerland is the oldest democracy and therefore a masculine one where the conception of voting goes hand in hand with soldiering. The lecturer reminded the

audience of 1st February 1959 when the male electors of Switzerland refused the women the right to vote. Much progress has been made since then, and whilst there exists even an association against women's suffrage and many women felt that they were not yet ready for the many duties inherent in full political citizenship, there is no doubt that the day will come when the Swiss woman, too, will have the right to vote. In three French Cantons — Geneva, Neuchâtel and Vaud — women have been granted the vote in local and Cantonal matters, and in many Cantons women serve on public commissions on educational matters, social work, hospitals, and on many federal non-parliamentary commissions women are co-opted as experts.

The lecturer then briefly referred to women's part in the Swiss National Exhibition in 1964. She said that naturally women were not as enthusiastic about this as they had been about their own SAFFA, but nevertheless much painstaking work was being done.

After a very lively discussion the President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique duly thanked Miss Wenzinger for her interesting talk, and a stimulating evening came to a close.

Mariann.

JUBILEE

The Swiss Young Men's Christian Association, London, are celebrating their seventy-fifth anniversary. We congratulate them on this achievement and send them our best wishes for the future.

We hope to publish a report of their jubilee celebrations in the next issue.

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

It is with regret that the Committee announce the resignation as from 30th April 1963 of the Welfare Officer, Miss Esther Zimmermann. Miss Zimmermann, assisted by Miss H. Sieber, the Secretary, has been responsible for the Welfare Office since November 1961. Throughout this period Miss Zimmermann achieved excellent results and rendered invaluable service to many girls in need of help or advice. Miss Zimmermann is returning to Switzerland to take up another post and the Committee wish her every success in her future activity.

Miss Dora Schneider of Zurich, a fully qualified and experienced welfare worker, has been appointed to succeed Miss Zimmermann and will take up her duties towards the middle of May.

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OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be published on 24th May. We shall be glad to receive manuscripts and reports not later than Wednesday, 15th May. Short news items can only be included if to hand by Friday, 17th May. All print has to be set one week before publication. We appreciate readers' co-operation.