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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY— THE PRESIDENT REPORTS

and language so we cannot overstress our sense of belonging to this family of nations. So the question is only to what extent do we wish to integrate with our neighbours?

“Western Europe, after all, is still divided in many ways — there is the EEC, EFTA and, loosely, the rest. EFTA suited Switzerland because it had no political aims — it is purely a trade association.

“The EEC is totally different insofar as its ultimate aims are more than economic integration. Switzerland’s relationship with the EEC is, therefore, complex. We want and need the closest possible relationship with the Community, BUT, and this is most important, we MUST, we NEED to and we WANT to preserve our neutrality. This is not for dogmatic reasons or even a goal in itself.”

Mr. Thalmann reminds us that the nine have, by signing the Treaty of Rome, and at subsequent meetings of Heads of State and Governments, given up some of their independence and agreed to a common foreign policy and common aims. Perhaps even a Federal Government! But all is still in the melting pot.

Neutrality, stresses Mr. Thalmann, is only justified so long as it preserves Swiss independence. Switzerland, he says, is in a way an anachronism. She became a nation not because of geographical situation or common language but through history, external pressure and, above all, because of the will of her people to form a nation. Now Mr. Thalmann gets down to the nitty-gritty. He is convinced that Switzerland exists only because her people want her to by consensus.

Nevertheless, Mr. Thalmann does remain a European in spirit. “Switzerland”, he says, “has an agreement with the EEC which includes an evolutionary clause. This means we want to develop our relationships in all those fields which do not compromise our neutrality.” Mr. Thalmann lists some of the fields where Switzerland can and will co-operate to the full with her neighbours — science, technology, trade, insurance and legal matters.

When asked for his views about Britain’s current political and economic problems, Mr. Thalmann understandably declined to comment. He feels he has not yet been here long enough to do so but expresses the hope that Britain is on the way to recovery.

To return to a slightly more personal note by way of conclusion, Mr. Thalmann admits ruefully that his duties over the past years have kept him so busy that he has been forced to neglect his leisure activities. Whilst in London he and Mrs. Thalmann hope, in spite of their heavy schedule, to be able to enjoy some of the cultural facilities which the capital has to offer.

In short, this cultured man, whom we are glad to welcome into our midst, hopes to devote some time to leisure activities which he considers part of a normal and balanced life.

WGS

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

It is with pleasure that we present the 106th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. As in the past, it has been our aim during the year under review to offer material and professional help to those Swiss people who choose to apply to us when facing difficulties they could not cope with on their own.

Whilst the number of elderly people has declined slightly, there are a few more families on our books and the overall number of people (58 men, 173 women and 72 children) has stayed virtually unchanged. With some of them, we have had more or less frequent contacts over long periods, sometimes years, others were referred to us by the Embassy, the Churches and English social workers or they got in touch with us directly. In an effort to get our Society’s activities more widely known, an article was inserted into a Special Issue of the *Swiss Observer* which is sent to all Swiss registered with the Consulates.

We were in touch with our clients by 565 receptions at the office, 238 visits to people’s homes or hospitals and, because of the size of our “parish”, to some very considerable extent by correspondence. Whenever possible, at least at the beginning of a contact, the Social Worker aims at seeing the applicant in person as this permits a very much deeper and better appreciation of the real needs. That this involves a good deal of travelling, in and out of London, is obvious. The majority of our clients live in the Greater London Area and the Home Counties, but visits to various towns on the South Coast and up to Northamptonshire have also been necessary.

The number of pensioners has gone down but in view of the present difficult situation, we have been obliged to help those more substantially. The decline in the number of pensioners is partly due to the fact that the Colony is getting smaller and partly to the fact that more elderly people, through job pensions and the

Swiss Old Age Pension are in a materially better position. The Swiss Pension was distributed to some recipients at regular intervals if this was more convenient to them than receiving quarterly payments through the Embassy.

Whilst there are now only 44 persons or family groups who receive regular financial support from us, we have been called upon to make casual grants for unexpected or larger than expected outlays to a substantial number of people.

More than half our clients, however, do not receive any financial help from us at all and approach us with a great variety of problems. In some cases, we are able to provide the advice and support required ourselves, in others, we either direct them to the appropriate source of help such as legal advice for instance, or we act in conjunction with English social services. Sometimes, particularly with elderly compatriots who are not keen to give up their independence, we find that our involvement and the interest we take in them, increases the tolerance of their neighbours towards their own particular difficulties. In being able to get in touch with us when too many problems occur at the same time, they can use us as an outlet for their anxieties and sometimes grievances.

Christmas time was very busy as usual, though we did make one significant change in the composition of our parcels. In view of the extremely large increases in postage, we did not buy much foodstuff ourselves and made a larger use of cash grants and gift tokens. We did send out 146 parcels, made up mainly from gifts of the Frauenverein, the Réunion de Couture and a number of generous Swiss firms and individuals. The whole operation was again in the able hands of Mmes N. Burri and B. Kaluza, helped in many ways by Mmes G. Gyssler, M. Hill, R.-M. Zumofen, Mr. and Mrs. W. Buol, Mr. and Mrs. R. Glarner, Mr. and Mrs. E. Tangemann and Messrs. E. Huber, S. Kaluza, W. Lockyer and L. Smith. Not

only were all the parcels in the Greater London Area distributed by these helpful volunteers, but virtually all those along the South Coast as well, giving their recipients the pleasure of a visit and saving us a very considerable amount on postage.

Fourteen children had their fares again paid for the Pro Juventute holidays in Switzerland and, by all accounts, they did enjoy their stay; though there are now more children who prefer to take advantage of the numerous schemes of foreign travel operated by English schools.

Apart from our own offices, the house at Conway Street also accommodates the Swiss Welfare Office for young people. Previously known as the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls, it changed its name to show that its function also includes counselling the increasing number of young men who come to this country. The fruitful co-operation between the two organisations has again been of great benefit to everybody concerned and we wish to thank Miss R.-M. Zumofen, the Social Worker, for a most pleasant collaboration, not least at the time when, with the precious help of the Rev. U. Stefan and a number of youngsters from the Swiss Church, our office was completely redecorated. It now looks very bright and pleasant. The rooms in the house are let off, some to youngsters, others to older residents and, as can happen in such a community, problems regarding harmonious relations required not infrequent attention.

There is little to report about our property in Belsize Grove except that we are in the process of negotiating a new Lease with the Council of Management of the Swiss Hostel for Girls Ltd.

At the monthly meetings, the Committee dealt with all the applications for help, always striving to give the response most appropriate to the problems presented, and generally attended to any administrative business that accrued. One of the meetings took place at the home of Counsellor and Mrs. B. von Tschärner and was followed by a delightful dinner. We wish to thank them for their very generous hospitality. Whilst we are sorry to report that they have now been posted away from London, our very

best wishes follow them in their new field of activity.

During Mrs. Sharp's holidays, Mrs. M. Lyster, Social Worker, again did valuable relief work and we are grateful to her for the continuous interest she is showing in the Society's activities. For about six months, we were happy to share a secretary with the Welfare Office. Unfortunately, the young lady had to leave and we are still looking for a suitably qualified successor.

We regret to report the death of our former Vice-President, Mr. Jacques Oertli. Although Mr. Oertli, who for many years had served the Society most faithfully and with great devotion, had resigned some time ago, he kept a very keen interest in our activities right to the end and we remember him with gratitude. The former Assistant-Secretary, Mr. Walter Ziereisen died early in the year. Having been retired for some years, he had lost touch with the Society to some extent, but many are the clients who still speak of him and all he had done for them.

Our Honorary President, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. A. Weitnauer gave us his support again during the year. Unfortunately, he was recalled to Switzerland and our thanks and best wishes accompany him in his new activities. The Embassy was represented at our meetings either by Counsellor Dr. B. von Tschärner or Consul M. Ch. Glauser.

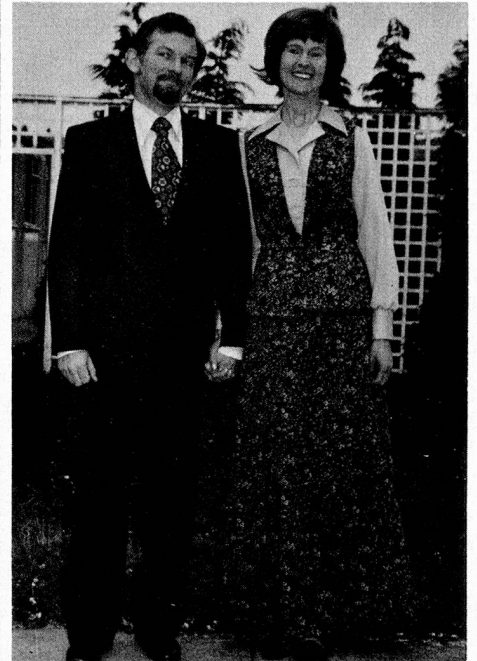
Our grateful thanks go to the many people and institutions on whose support we could again count during the past year: the Swiss Federal Authorities, the Swiss Embassy in London, the *Swiss Observer*, English social services and their representatives and, particularly, the many individual friends and supporters whose interest and donations are so very vital to our work. Our thanks also go to the British Authorities for their hospitality and assistance.

Finally, we should like to express our thanks and appreciation to our Social Worker and Secretary, Mrs. A.-R. Sharp, for all her devoted work which she has so enthusiastically carried out during the past year.

On behalf of the Executive Committee,

M. Schneebeli — President.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY



Congratulations

Sylvia Yvonne STREIT and Michael H. W. JONES were married on Saturday, 24th January at Sheen Register Office. Witnesses were Robert Streit (brother) and Jack Beken (popular member of the London Swiss Philatelic Society, of which Society Fred Streit was co-founder). A short honeymoon spent at Peaslake in the Surrey hills which are known as "little Switzerland". On the 31st of March Sylvia and Michael moved to their new home in Hampton.



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