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“CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME.”

This saying is, on the whole, a stupid one, either one is charitable or is not. Often it is used simply as an excuse for giving nothing at all; and yet — in some particular cases — it has a certain justification.

Many an appeal is made throughout the year to the pockets of our compatriots living in this country, some are for distinctly deserving cases, others less so, and some are merely frivolous; but let it be said, that generally our countrymen, inspite of almost unbearable taxation, are nobly responding to such appeals. In fact, one can safely say, that the Swiss Colony in Great Britain counts as one of the most generous of the numerous Swiss Colonies abroad.

This reputation, has, unfortunately its draw backs. Of late, a number of Societies and Institutions of all kinds, in our home country, have approached the Colony, if not for charity, at least for financial support in one way or another.

The favourable Swiss currency has suddenly awakened a keen “Wanderlust” amongst our brethren at home. Innumerable Societies have taken it into their heads to arrange shorter or longer trips abroad, such journeys are called in Switzerland, jocularly “Valuta Reisen”. I have nothing against this; if our people at home wish to see the world, that is all to their good, it widens their knowledge and opens their eyes of how people in less prosperous countries, who have experienced two exhausting world wars, are living.

In this respect it might perhaps be said, that in Tourist and Hotel circles at home, frantic efforts are made, to attract foreign visitors, who, owing to the devaluation of their respective currencies, are not exactly rushing to our well-known holiday resorts. Apart from these endeavours, the Federal authorities too, are asking the Swiss people to spend their vacation at home, and thus support our Hotel and Tourist industry, which is having a lean time.

As good patriots, we often proclaim our national motto “Un pour Tous, Tous pour Un”, but as good patriots, All but One, go abroad. It is so cheap and so nice, let the foreigners support our Hotels, Railways, etc.

So far so good, or not so good, but when these Societies, as has happened in the last two years, expect that the Colony here should pay part of their expenses, or supply them with pocket money, then I frankly advocate a stop to this practice.

At least three of the visits of Swiss Societies, during 1948/1949, have cost the Colony, or its members, hundreds of pounds, and whilst their performances were enjoyable and appreciated, I ask myself whether it was really worth all that money.

These joy riders, on one occasion, came over with a good supply of various articles, such as Kirsch, Swiss cigars and sausages, chocolate and nylons, and many an “Auslandschweizer” was looking forward to a little addition to his meagre larder, as a small thank-offering for the generous hospitality extended to them. But lo and behold these coveted articles, were in most cases, not given away. Business is business, they were sold for hard cash to likely customers.

In my interviews with some of the visitors, they admitted, that this was done in order to get some extra pocket money; one charming young Lady informed me, that she and her friends, have done “jolly well” out of this trip, and were even able to take presents home. (It is a pity, that they did not come a little later, they would have been able to return home with new sets of teeth and spectacles.)

Now, we have in our Colony several institutions which have a hard struggle to make both ends meet. The accounts of the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Churches, the official paper of the Colony, etc., etc., show considerable deficits, and a *small* fraction of what was spent on our visitors would have easily wiped out these adverse balances.

I repeat, and wish to make myself quite clear, I have nothing against these Societies coming over here, they are entitled to do so, and we should do everything possible to help them in arranging, *f.i.*, accommodation, show them round and make their stay as pleasant as possible; they are, after all, our own kith and kin, but if they expect, for a few hours entertainment to get, say, “bed and breakfast” thrown in, then the sooner we tell them “nothing doing” the better; it does not mean, that because we are having a “soft” currency, we are also otherwise soft.

I have yet to learn, that our compatriots at home, have ever invited some of our own societies to a partly free trip. Quite the contrary, in many cases, when we return for a holiday, we are expected to play the rôle of the “rich uncle from America.” It should be understood by now, that *we are* the poor relations.

Of late I have been told of letters addressed to various Swiss Societies from all sorts of “Vereine”, who wish to give concerts or displays, and who are asking, at the same time, for some financial “consideration”, these applications, I am of the opinion, should be politely declined, for the reasons stated above.

Here, surely, is a case, when the saying, “Charity begins at home” is justified.

ST.

(We invite our readers to express an opinion about this matter.)

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