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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE

Mrs. Meier made a brilliant beginning as newly elected president of the N.S.H. at the last monthly meeting. She presented us to her friend, Dr. Erika Sutter, an ophthalmologist responsible for a 75-bed eye clinic in the bush of the northern reaches of South Africa. The hospital is the second of its kind in the country intended for Africans, there is one other in Johannesburg.

Dr. Sutter related how, starting as a researcher in biology, she found her way as an ophthalmologist working under the auspices of the Swiss Mission in Africa. She produced some beautiful colour slides, a first series showing what the ordinary tourist can see—views of Johannesburg, snapshots of animals in the Kruger National Park. This was followed by a journey out of urban and developed areas towards the less privileged regions where she was called to work. We saw a number of wild and awesome sceneries. Dr. Sutter brought us into African homes, and we finally remained to the end of the exposé in the hospital that had risen out of the wilderness and where Dr. Sutter was devoting her life. The numerous attendance was made to shudder at some ghastly slides of eye diseases; it witnessed the everyday life of an hospital with exclusively African patients and run by a handful of white people. A particularly interesting and original presentation.

(PMB)

THE SWISS OBSERVER 30 YEARS AGO

We have left the life of our colony during the tormented first months of the war quite a few issues ago. We now propose to evoke the main events related in the "Swiss Observer's" of September, October and November 1939.

In the first three issues of September, readers could follow a passionate written debate on Swiss neutrality between Mr. J. Frei and Mr. A. Tosio. Mr. Frei felt very strongly that Switzerland ought to abandon her rigid principles of neutrality (which he respected) in the face of the present conflict. It was a question of honour and also one of practical expediency, Switzerland's involvement in the war being one way to make it shorter. Mr. Tosio on the other hand believed that neutrality was a vital asset which the country could not abandon, even under the circumstances that were reigning in Europe. The Editor, Mr. Stauffer, made the "Swiss Observer's" point of view quiet clear by supporting Mr. Tosio's arguments. The crucial

subject of Swiss neutrality was the theme of a series of talks given by Professor Denis Saurat of the University of London at the French Institute and organised by the City Swiss Club.

On Friday and Saturday 15th and 16th September, two separate contingents of the recruitable males of the Swiss Colony of Great Britain, totalling 450 men, assembled at Swiss House in Fitzroy Square, called under the flag. There was some commotion, the men coming from all parts of the country laden with their trunks and stranded in front of a Swiss House hopelessly inadequate to accommodate them. Wives and sweethearts were present too and there were some heart-rending moments. The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paravicini came to salute these worthy men.

The war upset the life of the colony's institutions.

The Swiss Mercantile Society had to review a sad situation at its September meeting. Many of its members had left to serve the country. They included Mr. W. Meier, Mr. M. Schneider and Mr. R. Senn, all of whom held important positions in the Society's organisation. Many students had equally had to go and the School benches were left empty. The Annual Banquet and Ball which was supposed to take place in October was cancelled. At the October meeting, it was decided to suspend all educational activities until circumstances permitted a normal working of the School. The question of sub-letting Swiss House was debated but no conclusions were reached at this stage. Mr. W. Meier, who, initially mobilised, had come back from Switzerland, related his experiences in a country that had braced itself for a long war.

The City Swiss Club continued its meetings, but they were advanced to 6 p.m. No official dinners were organised but members could gather at Pagni's restaurant after the meetings. 60 people were present at the November meeting to listen to Professor Denis Saurat. Monsieur C. Paravicini and Mr. de Rahm represented the Legation.

In those days, the Editor liked to reproduce excerpts from the British and Swiss press on the development of events in Switzerland. Mr. Stauffer reproduced articles such as "Rationing Preparations" from the "Times" correspondent (2/9/39), such as the "Federal Order on National Defence and Security" by Léon Savary in the "Tribune de Genève", such as "Switzerland and her Neighbours" in the "Economist" of 30th September 1939.

In his editorial of the 14th October issue, the Editor thanks the editorial contributors to the paper and acknowledges the help received in his effort to keep the paper going in spite of a

heavy loss of sales and the cancellation of advertising contracts due to the war.

Concerning advertising, it is interesting to note that the "Swiss Bank Corporation", "Cosmos Freightways" and "World Transport" were already advertising in the "Swiss Observer". The last company modified its advert in October, adding that they were "resuming their regular Groupage Services to and from Switzerland".

It was recalled in a later issue that Swiss readers of the "Swiss Observer" had not been able to get the paper regularly but that the situation had been improved thanks to the obtainment of a special licence from the Postal Censorship.

In view of the difficulties of making the journey to Switzerland, the Legation organised a series of group parties between October 23rd and 28th.

The Minister, Monsieur Paravicini retired at this time and a farewell-dinner with presentation was planned at the Monico Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus, for 15th December.

We may now mention a few items from home that appeared in the "Swiss Observer's" of that period.

Early in October, Switzerland was contemplating in joining the "Oslo Group of Nations" consisting of Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Luxemburg. The Group was considered to be the nucleus of a neutral peace bloc. An unidentified German plane flew over Swiss territory near Schaffhausen and, after being fired at by frontier guards, disappeared across the Rhine. German interests in Great Britain were being taken care of by the Swiss Legation, this special division being the responsibility of Mr. Preiswerk of Basle.

The Germans were in Warsaw and ninety Swiss residents in Poland had taken refuge in the Legation in Warsaw, some others had managed to find a sanctuary with the Swiss Consul in Kaunas. Switzerland was beginning to feel the restrictions the war was putting on her foreign trade. The embroidery and watch industries had particularly suffered from the British decision of halting the importation of these "luxury" articles. The central committee of the Swiss Socialist Party had definitely expelled the Geneva communist Leon Nicole. Peculiar and at the same time intricate conditions were ruling at St. Gingolph, on Lake Geneva. Half of the village being in Switzerland, the other in France, the closing of the frontier had prevented farmers from looking after their cattle when their stables were on the other side of the line. The French Maire and the Swiss Syndic were struggling hard to amend these imperfections.