

Association of British members of the Swiss Alpine Club

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ASSOCIATION of BRITISH MEMBERS of THE SWISS ALPINE CLUB.

The Annual Dinner of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club was held at the Royal Adelaide Galleries, Strand, on Wednesday, November 22nd, about 100 members sitting down to an excellent dinner. Mr. A. E. W. Mason, the retiring president, presided and proposed the loyal toasts, which were heartily received.

Mr. EDGAR FOA proposed "The Swiss Confederation." He said:—

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—The toast which has been committed to my charge is one which will not, I think, require many words in its support from me. It is a toast which is always honoured at these gatherings of ours, and for a very good reason. We are all indebted very greatly to Switzerland for all the things that she has done for civilisation, but we, members of this Association, have a still deeper debt to her. Of course, Switzerland herself is under a deep obligation to nature. Nature has poured into her lap the gifts which she has vouchsafed to no other country in Europe. (Hear, hear.) And for us mountaineers—I speak rather as a back number myself, but still I may say I have been a mountaineer—for us mountaineers her climate is almost as the breath of our nostrils, and her mountains and valleys are the very poetry of such things. These glories of Switzerland she has always been ready to share. She has thrown open her gates and welcomed the stranger, to whatever nationality he belonged, with open arms. Not only that, she has known that it is impossible to make the great mountains yield their secrets unless they are approached in the proper spirit. Accordingly she has built huts and scattered them profusely over her mountains, so that we may be able to approach them at the proper time and in a proper spirit. Now these glories, as I have said, are open to all. I am not here to say that the huts accompany them. A man tells you he sleeps well in a hut and you generally laugh. Still, look at the glories which these huts enable us to enjoy. For my own part, and I daresay I will be representing the feelings of many of you, when I say I do not think there is an hour of more crowded and more glorious life than the hour when you come out after an uncomfortable night in the hut under the stars and taste or feel the intensity of the stillness which reigns around. I think it is an impression you receive which is almost awful in its intensity, and for my part I know nothing that can compare with this instilling feelings of awe and reverence in your heart, than the intense stillness which reigns around. You hear nothing save perhaps the sound of the mighty torrent thousands of feet below which ascends like the faint and haunting murmur of a dream, and you know then—I think you know under circumstances which you cannot equal anywhere else—what the poet meant when he talked about the silence which is in the starry sky, and the sleep which is amongst the mountains.

The hospitality which Switzerland extends to us is not confined to huts. It is well known that she has always attracted great and illustrious men to her shores, and to them she has yielded a hospitality which has made her famous in the annals of mankind. The names of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Gibbon leap to the lips when one names such a thing as this, and the mention of Gibbon's name reminds me that this is not the first time I have had occasion to address an assemblage like this with a similar toast committed to my charge, and it was under rather curious circumstances. When the Britannia Club hut was opened some ten years ago, the proceedings wound up, as proceedings of that kind do, with a banquet, and at the last moment I was told off to propose this toast in French, which is a thing that I was not at all accustomed to do. But fortified with a little "buvier" and having screwed up my courage to the sticking place, I managed to get through the ordeal, although I daresay the speech was not understood by those who heard it. I was put in as a sort of complement because the gentleman, whose name wild horses would not induce me to retail, who was told off for the purpose, was silent at the last moment. I mention this because I told a story on that occasion. I remember, which is the only part of the speech I do remember, about Gibbon. (Laughter.) I cannot for the life of me now think how I brought it in. It was not a bad story—(laughter)—and if you like, I will tell it to you again, although one small portion of it may be in the foreign language which I was asked to employ on that occasion. The story is this, although it is a very bad way of beginning a story by telling you it is a good one.—There was a lady living at Vevey. She was of English birth, but had lived for a long time in Switzerland, and there was a doctor who was very sensible to her charms, the Swiss doctor. And she was also under the influence of those charms, and when he was present, although personally or physically he had not perhaps very much to recommend him, with the charm of his conversation he made the doctor, what is colloquially termed, take a back seat. On one occasion, when Gibbon was pouring sweet nothings into the lady's ear, the medical gentleman was hurt and interposed, and said to Gibbon, "Quand Madame sera malade de vos fadeuses, je la guérirai." Gibbon replied, "Monseigneur, quand madame sera morte de vos recettes je l'immortaliserai." I see now how I brought it in, because I see that is the explanation. It was a tribute not only to the charms of the Swiss ladies, but a tribute to the skill of their medical men and also a tribute to their hospitality.

Passing from that, I would like, before I sit down, to say a word in praise of this toast, which is "The Swiss Confederation." I am not going to give you a lecture on the Swiss Constitution. I believe I am not capable of doing so; but I can say this, it must be a model of a constitution, and for this reason. In these days a great deal is talked about nationality as the only principle upon which a nation can be founded and can exist. In Switzerland you have and you had for centuries a nation consisting of men of different races, professing different religions, speaking three or four different languages, all welded into one harmonious whole and living, as I have said, for centuries with peace and contentment with their constitution. It is a remarkable thing which you perhaps hardly find paralleled in the rest of Europe.

One word more before I sit down. One of our greatest mountaineers, I mean Sir Leslie Stephen, wrote a book which we all cherish and read with delight, "The Playground of Europe." Gentlemen, that was Switzerland. With equal fitness I suggest to you that Switzerland might be called the Council Chamber of Europe. You have all heard of the League of

Nations. All our hopes for the future are concentrated on the League of Nations, and for this reason. When the resources of chemical science are brought in as they are to-day in support of the engines of destruction there is no doubt that wars of the future will result in whole nations being swept away. Not only hope is in the success of the League of Nations, and accordingly the League of Nations has been started. Gentlemen, where has the League of Nations been started? Why, of course, at Geneva. Geneva is a place which we all know and love so well, where the seed has been sown which, we hope, will ripen by and by into the rare and refreshing fruit which we all hope to be allowed to taste of. We all hear of the concert of Europe. The concert of Europe is likely to emit some times discordant notes, and there is a very discordant note being sounded now. There is one instrument—shall I call it a tin whistle?—which hails from the Near East, which has a very bad crack in it. Where do we send that crack to be mended? To Lausanne. Why? Because all the most eminent tinkers in Europe are assembled at Lausanne. They are all endeavouring to mend that crack which has caused the discordant note in the concert of Europe which we all hope will last long. I think I have said enough to make you understand and to feel as I feel that Switzerland is a country which has deserved well of mankind—(hear, hear)—and it has deserved particularly well of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, and that being so I am sure I am only interpreting your own feelings when I ask you to drink this toast with me. I shall couple with it the no more fitting name than that of His Excellency the Minister, who represents that Republic within our shores.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE SWISS MINISTER said:—

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen.—The speech we have just listened to is the kind of after-dinner speech I like to hear. It is not often given to me to listen to such a speech; but it is always given to me to listen to such a speech when I come to the British Association of the Swiss Alpine Club. That is the reason why of all the banquets I am, owing to the great hospitality of the British nation, invited to in the course of the year, there is none I look forward to with more joy than your annual banquet. (Hear, hear.) I can give you a proof that what I say is not a mere phrase I have to-night a feeling of giddiness and silliness—(laughter)—the consequence of the injection of vaccine against smallpox which has been administered to me a few days ago, and which besides an inflammation on my arm has also, as you will notice in the course of my speech, a stupefying effect upon my brain. (Laughter.) Nothing would have induced me to present myself in such a state of physical and mental deficiency to such a distinguished assembly as yours but the desire, the irresistible desire, not to miss the annual banquet of the Swiss Alpine Club of 1922. Now, gentlemen, Mr. Foa has been so good as to say very nice things about Switzerland. It is, of course, a great treat to me to listen to that sort of speech, as I have said already, and even if he had not said all the nice things about my country and my people which he has just expressed, I should have known that he, as well as your Chairman and you all, are the best of friends we could find anywhere. And besides, there are hundreds, I may say thousands of people in this country who give myself and all my compatriots who reside in Great Britain day by day proofs of their kind and generous feelings towards my country. But, gentlemen, there are exceptions. There are very few exceptions. They are fortunately very rare indeed, but there are. I may perhaps, if you will allow me, give you an example of an exception like that. Not that I attach any importance to the fact at all, but the case is not, I think, without a touch of humour, and I think it will amuse you to hear it. One of our most distinguished historians wrote before his death a history of Switzerland. I think it is from 1500 up to modern times, and this history has been translated into English by a learned countryman of yours, and I am glad to say, duly appreciated by the British press. However, one of the London leading papers* has published in its columns a criticism of that book of which perhaps I may read to you a few sentences. I suppose it will amuse you to hear it. As you know, the Swiss are rather proud of their history, and I think that some of them are sometimes too proud. It is certainly a bad thing to be too proud. Some one who is too proud generally gets, sooner or later, smothered. I listened to this those who are too proud have got their snub all right. (Laughter.) Here is what this gentleman said:—

"One would have said at the first blush that the artist who sets out to draw scenes from Swiss history is apt to draw a blank. That country, so attractive to the eye, is curiously baffling to the historian. Apart from the distinction of contributing Zwingli to the last page of every encyclopaedia it wears singularly few honours in European history, and the historical imagination falls back on the scenes in which nearly all the most prominent parts are played by foreigners. The national Valhalla must contain little beyond the heroic figures of chocolate merchants. (Laughter.) The bold gesture of William Tell is associated with a simple article of diet. Switzerland to the uninformed observer must always seem to be one of those fortunate countries which have a great deal of geography and very little of history. Delightful to the map maker and railway engineer, these favoured regions are equally delightful to the schoolboy, because there are no dates to remember. If there was a declaration of Swiss independence, no one is expected to know when it took place. Swiss history is the one subject which one may safely confess to ignore. There is no gleam of the old light, no faintest echo of the heavy step of the Swiss infantry. We have instead the mild tap at the door, the cautious tread, the bright deposited tray of our kind familiar Swiss with their 9,600 pairs of sheets and blankets and their 2,400 eiderdown quilts. (Laughter.) One has an uneasy feeling that if an invading army passed the Swiss frontier, its luggage would be taken upstairs—(laughter)—while a courteous management arranged to accommodate all officers above the rank of major in rooms with a view of the glaciers. (Laughter.) Even the Republican milk of mountain pastures is sold in tins at grocers' shops, whilst the citizens of the Confederation perform kindly but unimpressive duties in the grill room." (Laughter.)

Now, gentlemen, there is one thing in this against which I most earnestly protest, and that is the assertion that the history lesson is a treat for the Swiss schoolboy. I know it by my own experience. There are dates in Swiss history, and there are dates outside

of Swiss history, and these dates I had to learn for I don't know how many years—not only Swiss dates, but French dates and German dates and Italian dates and English dates, and I remember that I have been locked up for lunch because I could not say on what date Henry VIII married his sixth wife. (Laughter.) I am absolutely certain the man who wrote this article has been more fortunate than I, for nobody ever asked him in what year the Swiss warriors smashed to bits in 1476 the most powerful ring of the Continent which then existed. But there is one redeeming point in this article, and that is the one when he says one never knows what happens when an invading army comes to Switzerland. I will tell you. When an invading army of the British mountaineers comes to Switzerland, then, I own, they will have the mild tap on the door, and the cautious tread and the bright deposited tray of our kind familiar Swiss servant, and they will have 9,600 pairs of sheets and blankets and 2,400 eiderdown quilts, and even those of you who are below the rank of a major will get a room with a view to the Alps. Now, gentlemen, before I sit down, and talking of the glaciers, I should like to mention how sorry I am that we are not to-day, as in former years, hurried to greet amongst ourselves that greatest of all mountaineers, General Bruce. (Cheers.) In some ways I must say that his absence has rather a relieving influence upon me. The presence of that giant of mountaineers has always rather terrified me. If he were here to-day, I think I should have a feeling as if a man would stand in front of me twenty thousand feet high, in whose eyes, if I could see them, I would find a sort of expression of pity and astonishment—looking down on me on my field of activity three yards above sea level from twenty thousand feet high, looking at me and thinking, "There he is, the fellow who has never been on the top of a mountain. I should not have believed that any human being could look so small." (Laughter.)

Mr. GERALD STEEL, C.B., proposing "The Alpine Club and Kindred Societies," said:—

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—Good wine needs no bush, and so I am sure a good toast requires no beating about the bush, and so I can be more readily hurried to greet amongst ourselves to a company of this kind on the achievements and objects of climbing clubs is simply to preach to the converted. In these days it is very rare to find any one topic on which there is complete unanimity. We are always reading we should get out of Mesopotamia or leave Palestine or get out of Chanak, but I have never heard a Britisher suggest it is time we left the Alps. (Laughter.) The Alpine Club and Kindred Societies which are probably less ambitious seem to me to be either denominations or sects or orders of a true religion which is devoted to the worship of the mountains. It seems to me the clubs have one great advantage over all religious denominations. No one individual can with any decency belong to more than one denomination, but in the case of the climbing clubs, without straining your conscience (although, of course, it may strain when Christmas time comes round and the demand for subscriptions, it may strain an already over-strained overdraft). One cannot approach a toast like this without making a distinction which I hope, won't be regarded as invidious, when one places the Alpine Club first, both on account of its pre-eminence and on account of its seniority, and particularly on this occasion, because it is represented to-night by its very distinguished President. I was passing through Oxford Circus the other night on the way home, and I saw a very brightly illuminated notice, the Amazing A.C. World Record. (Laughter.) Not being a motorist—I have not a car or even a Ford—I naturally thought this referred to a great publicity campaign on the part of the Alpine Club. (Laughter.) The other climbing club which is associated with this toast particularly is called the Midland Association of Mountaineers. I confess I am rather surprised at the title, because, although a mountaineer myself, I have never heard of the Association. In fact, it seems rather incongruous there should be Midland mountaineers. It seems like a Swiss Navy League. (Laughter.) I have always regarded the Midlands as being rather more associated with molehills than with mountains. There are a few hills, because some of us, who "did" Rugby, know there is one particularly painful one which we used to have to run up. It is called Barby Hill. It is about one hundred and fifty feet high. After one has forced its north face and arrived at the top and enjoyed its "buvier" one gets rather a remarkable view. Looking to the westward there are the Malvern mountains, eighty miles away. Looking eastward there is no other bump on the earth's surface of equal size until you come to the Ural Mountains. (Laughter.) There are members, I am sure, of the Geographical Society here, and they will find that that is absolutely correct. It is said to be a British characteristic that we take our pleasures very sadly. I am sure it is equally a British characteristic, after we have taken those pleasures there is nothing we enjoy more than to forget them and go over them again with kindred spirits. There is nothing that is really comparable in any other form of real sport to these gatherings of climbing and walking or scientific clubs. I am sure it is the aftermath of mountaineering and expeditions, this chewing of the cud, that is really the root of the great popularity and the affection in which we hold our mountaineering and touring clubs. Imagine what it would be if we were deprived of this. Can you imagine what would be the privations of a dumb golfer or fisherman and worst of all a tongue-tied mountaineer? (Laughter.) It would certainly destroy half the merit and all the pleasure of our achievement. I am afraid it is not possible to mention the names of all the clubs. There are some fifty well recognised among climbers, and so I merely confine myself to mentioning the two particularly associated with this toast, and I do ask you to drink the toast to those, which, though less active in a physical sense, are yet equally active in the geographical and scientific sense, which have contributed so extraordinarily to the success of the mountaineering expedition of the last century and particularly the last two years. (Hear, hear.) So I would ask you to drink the health of all Mountaineering Clubs and Kindred Societies, coupled with the names of Professor Collie and Mr. Bill—Professor Collie of the Alpine Club, and Mr. Bill of the Midland Association of Mountaineers.

Professor J. NORMAN COLLIE said:—

Your Excellency, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen.—In answering to the toast of the Alpine Club I need hardly say that the Alpine Club is progressing very favourably at present, and I have no doubt that that is wholly due to the enthusiastic way in which its health is very often drunk at these meetings of mountaineers. (Laughter.) I have had to respond to so many of

* The quotation refers to a criticism in "The Daily News," which was commented upon in "The Swiss Observer" of November 18th.

these that I am quite sure that the Alpine Club's health could not be anything else but most satisfactory. During the last year or so the Alpine Club has burst out again into a more active life, sending out under the aegis of the Geographical Society the expedition to Mount Everest. This expedition, as you all know, has yielded results even better than we could possibly have expected. We all know now what horrible things the poor people whom we sent out there had to suffer. They are frozen, they are nearly blown inside out, they are burnt with the sun, and if it had not been, I think, for the enormous liberality and, I may say, lavish expenditure of money on the part of Captain Farrar, they might even have stopped in the places they went to. Perhaps one of the greatest indignities they had to undergo there from human beings, not from the weather, was the imposition of this oxygen which was sent out. (Laughter.) I have been told by many people that oxygen is probably a most poisonous substance, and that you were trying to dope the Alpine Club to try to get to the top of Mount Everest, that oxygen was certainly a thing that could not be used by any self-respecting mountaineer, and that they would rather see Mount Everest, unclimbed than to see it climbed by the help of oxygen. It is no good pointing out to these people that oxygen is the air you breathe and that oxygen in a bottle is no different from the oxygen in the air. The only difference is that it is slightly condensed. I do not know if those people who object to oxygen would have objected to our using condensed milk on the mountain and condensed anything else. And if it is a departure to use oxygen, so it is an innovation to use boots, because our ancestors never climbed mountains in boots. Still, I do not think, after all is said and done, it will do any harm to use oxygen. Personally I believe that people will get to the top of Everest without oxygen as well as with it. The only thing is they can get on very much more easily with the oxygen, just the same way as they could get up more easily with a good breakfast and good food on the way up if they can digest it.

Mr. Foa has said that when people go to the Alpine Huts, and say they sleep there, they are liars. (Laughter.) It struck me rather, now that I am getting older and wiser, that possibly most of the people who came up to those huts early in the morning in starlight and indulged in such an amount of pleasure and excitement, were seeing stars. I think if these people said they had enjoyed that so much, they possibly might be also guilty of what one might call a terminological inexactitude. (Cheers and laughter.) I must say whenever I have got up early in the morning with the stars, I have felt cold and miserable, and I have not enjoyed those magnificent feelings Mr. Foa talks of. And also, as I am getting older and wiser, I am beginning to wonder almost why people ever go and climb mountains at all. You do not get on the tops of the mountains beautiful dinners, such as we have had to-night. Certainly you do not get any beds where you can go and sleep comfortably. You do not have fires to keep you warm. You feel extremely tired very often and sometimes suffer from mountain sickness, and on the whole I am beginning to wonder why people do go and climb mountains. There are so many objections to it, and I have come to the conclusion it is possibly perhaps because it is thought good form. The objectionable things as a rule that one has to do are extremely good form, and the things that are nice and very easy are naughty, and therefore, the climbing of mountains can be looked at from two different points of view, and if it is really naughty to climb mountains, then it might be nice, but if it is very objectionable in many respects, I have no doubt it is extremely good form. I have heard a remark which perhaps I ought not to have heard from your Chairman when he said all the remaining speeches are going to be short. I thank you for having drunk the health of the Alpine Club, and sit down.

Mr. A. L. BILL said:—

Your Excellency, Mr. President, and Gentlemen.—I can assure you I rise with very mingled feelings. First of all, naturally, it is a great pleasure and privilege to be called upon to respond, for I suppose the youngest body of mountaineers in this country, the Midland Association of Mountaineers, which is an absolute infant barely a year old, and I take it a little brutal to expect so young a child to be able to speak at all, much less make a speech. Of that you will have ample opportunity of judging. I do thank you very much on their behalf, and I can assure Mr. Steel that his estimation of the opportunities of that club for climbing are very well justified. I know, as an old Rugbyan myself, the terrors of the Barby Hill. I also can assure you neither on the Wrekin nor at Malvern is there very much opportunity for rock climbing. We are speculative rather than operative. (Laughter.) On the other hand, I can assure you that much pleasure, as it is, to have this opportunity. I do rise with considerable trepidation in the field in which it is absolutely impossible for me to follow the high level of oratory which we have heard from previous speakers, and especially to come immediately after the President of the Alpine Club, of which by the help of good friends and much use of the rope, I have become a very bumble member. I am rather reminded of a remark of one of the guests at the recent Alpine Club Dinner. We cannot all be climbers, and I am one of those, I am one of the "also rans," or possibly you might say "also crawls." I feel that, to plagiarise again the speech which was made at an Alpine Club dinner, that I might be expected with others to sing the grand old hymn:—

They climb the steep ascent to Heaven,
Mid peril, toil and pain,
O Lord, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train.

(Laughter.) That, I may say, is not original, but as no doubt many of those present know, it was part of a speech made deploring the increase of those means of communication into the sanctity of the high hills. Well, I have been told to be brief. At any rate, if I had not been told to be I should be. I thank you very much on behalf of the Midland Association in that in the first year of our existence you have honoured us with an invitation and especially you have honoured us with an opportunity of acknowledging that invitation, and I thank you very much for your honour and hospitality. I will not test your forbearance longer, but will sit down, again thanking you, and may I also add the thanks, as the Secretary has allowed me to do, on behalf both of the Midland Association and the French Alpine Club.

Mr. T. H. SOMERVELL said:—

Your Excellency, Mr. President, and Gentlemen.—My fellow Rugbyan has already told me that I am a member of a denomination, but I do not know which it is, because I am a member of very nearly all the societies which come under the ruling of the Act,

except the Midland Association. I think, having been at Rugby, I ought to join that too. (Laughter.) I am a member of the oldest of the Societies, the Alpine Club, and of the best of them, the Fell and Rock Club. I shall be brief and certainly not exceed five minutes. I have been in England a week, having come back from Everest. During that week I have made two speeches, one of them lasting an hour. Professor Collie has already challenged me to make a statement about oxygen. At any rate the tone of his remarks, if not by the remarks themselves, it seems to be rather a vexed question. I had forgotten all about it in India, but having come home I find everybody is talking about oxygen, and I feel something is expected upon the subject from me. Personally, when making the small attempt on Everest which I did make, I did not use it, but I have nothing against it, in the same way that I have nothing against the use of howitzers with which to shoot pheasants. (Laughter.) If you cannot shoot pheasants without using a howitzer by all means use it. If you cannot climb Everest without oxygen by all means use it. If I could not climb Everest without oxygen, I should certainly be a protagonist of that substance. As I am perfectly sure I could climb without, I feel it is better to try to do it without, but I have no theory on the subject whatever, so I cannot contribute to the discussion. I therefore in those words refuse to allow my leg to be pulled. (Laughter.)

Professor Collie also mentioned something about privations that we people on Everest underwent. As a matter of fact, the arrangements were so admirable one really had no privations to complain of, and most of the ones you have read about were the inventions, like so much of the elections here, of the Press. The only real hardship I personally underwent during that expedition was that six weeks before we got to Darjeeling my "baccy" ran out. That never got into the papers. It was much worse than all the umpteens below zero that was written about.

As this is a gathering especially of the Swiss Alpine Club, of which I am proud to be a member, and therefore especially connected with the Alps, I feel in the rest of my five minutes I ought to just say a few words—if you will excuse a split infinitive—about the difference one has found between the Himalayas and the Alps. When I was trying to climb up Mount Everest I found myself envying those of my fellow men here on the real mountains, the Alps. I am only too pleased to find when I got here that they had a pretty bad year of it. (Laughter.) I would not have missed last year for anything, but I feel this year one really had almost as good a time on the Himalayas as they had on the Alps. But there is no comparison between the Everest group of mountains and the familiar groups in the Alps. The Alps have it every time. The Everest group, though they are so colossal in size, rise from a tremendous altitude, as you know. One goes up to a height of 21 or 22 thousand feet to reach the base of Everest, so that the actual mountain itself, considered from the mountaineer's point of view, is very little bigger than the average Alpine peak. I saw nothing on Everest to compare with the view of Monte Rosa nor the view of Mont Blanc and several other peaks and views in Switzerland which one could mention, and one must say that one was really disappointed in many ways with the Himalayas. Of course, we had with us Dr. Longstaff, the Himalayan climber of great experience, and he assured me that all the Himalayas except Everest were much more interesting. (Laughter.) Of course, Dr. Longstaff was one of those that went home early and was perhaps not afflicted with undue optimism at the time. Coming home I passed through Sikkim. The mountains of Sikkim surpassed altogether in beauty those of the Everest group. It would be invidious to compare them with the Alps, but one must own the extraordinary beauty of such mountains. These mountains are really, I think, unsurpassed even by the Alps. On the whole I have come to the conclusion that the Alps are so much finer than the Himalayas, and I think a gathering of the Swiss Alpine Club a very fitting occasion on which to compare the two. I congratulate your Excellency on being the Minister for the country which really has "the" mountains. May I also on behalf of all the miscellaneous societies, to some of which I belong and to some of which I don't, thank you very much for drinking our healths.

THE PRESIDENT, proposing "The Guests," said:

Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—It now falls upon me to propose the toast of "The Guests." You might almost think it had been done, but it has not. We should have had here to-night the Lord Chief Justice, who, unfortunately, has been sniggering with cold at the last moment, and sent us a note to say that he could not come. Well, gentlemen, we are so used to having at all events one judge at these annual dinners that all this evening I have been feeling as if I have been coming to dinner without my braces on. (Laughter.) It is reasonable that this Club should have a judge at its dinner, because after all I think almost the greatest originator of Alpine exploration was a judge, Mr. Justice Wills. It was he and those of his day who broke through that tradition of the 18th and the early part of the 19th century which looked upon mountains as stupendous and terrible things, to be inspected by poets from the flat, but not to be assumed as they have assumed now, the less dignified, but more pleasant position of the playground of Europe, as Mr. Foa said. Well, we have here, in spite of his absence, a number of distinguished guests; some of whom have already replied to speeches, and I have a sort of regret that I did not propose to toast of the Alpine Club and Kindred Societies, because one of the gentlemen who replied to it, Mr. Bill, had at one time, I think, worked politically against me when I was a member for Coventry, and I might have had a chance of getting a little of my own back. (Laughter.) Amongst the guests we have here, apart from the Swiss Minister, M. Martin, Councillor to the Swiss Legation, and M. De Cintra, President of the City Swiss Club. You see, gentlemen, that lets me in to do again what has really been done, making remarks about the League of Nations, Lausanne, and all the rest of it, but I am not going to do it. I am just going to say I agree very much with the President of the Alpine Club and his remarks about the huts. It is extraordinary how the same thing will strike differently upon different minds, because it has always seemed to me that intense moment of relief that Mr. Foa experienced when he got out of the uncomfortable Alpine huts at the moment when I felt most intensely that the discomfort of huts had been greatly exaggerated. (Laughter.) We have had Mr. Somervell speaking. I got the most pessimistic opinions from his speech, because if ascending Mount Everest with the help of oxygen is comparable to shooting a pheasant with a howitzer it will never be ascended at all. I cannot imagine anything more difficult in the world than to go after pheasants with a howitzer. I have to couple with the toast the name

of Mr. Noel, who is the Secretary of Queen's Club, an expert of racquets and tennis and an authority on all ball games, and every kind of sport except mountaineering. So it is very good to have a reply to the toast of the guests at a club of this kind, because he is just preparing everybody to go up on a mountain. It is like the headmaster of a preparatory school, if I may say so. He is just preparing people for Eton. I therefore have the greatest pleasure in calling upon Mr. Noel to reply to the toast of the Guests.

Mr. NOEL said:—

Your Excellency, Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen.—As several men of the Everest expedition will understand perfectly well, I am speaking as proxy. It has been an enormous pleasure to myself and I am sure everyone of the guests to be here to-night. I do know a little about climbing, not climbing the Alps. I always considered myself a grand expert in red brick climbing at Trinity College, Cambridge. (Laughter.) I have seen a lot of ball games, and whatever sport there is it is good as long as it is good amateur sport. May I thank you very much on behalf of the guests for this most delightful evening.

Mr. C. T. LEHMANN, proposing "The Chairmen," said:—

Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—One of the minor amusements attendant upon public dinners is a live gamble with your nearest diner as to the opening that will be taken by various speakers. There is the deprecating style, "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking," etc., there is the man who says, "The Secretary calls upon me at the last moment," there is the opening of the practised speaker, such as you have here to-night, knowing he is going to give you a good speech and does not mind it said at the beginning. I am, of course, an old member of the Club. I have the difficult task of proposing "The President," who is not only past but present. This diffidence is increased when I realise I have to make personal allusions which will necessarily be aversive to a naturally shy and sensitive nature. I am only the librarian, a simple compiler of catalogues. He is a writer of books. I ought to be the gentleman with the duster. Unfortunately, I am only a man with a brush. With that brush I must endeavour to paint a portrait to those of you who do not know him as well as we do. You have seen him standing up just now. You have noted the tall, elegant, athletic figure, the dark Napoleonic lock, the symmetrically chiselled features typical of a beau of a Regency period, and attired with a red coat, white buck-skin breeches and Wellingtons. I am sure you will agree with the suspicion that I have long entertained that he is the model that has been selected by a very well-known firm of whiskies to advertise their mountain dew. (Laughter.) They describe him as born in 1820 and still going strong. In that they do him less than justice, because I am perfectly sure he was not born in 1820. However, from my personal knowledge, it is not going strong, it is going weaker than it used to be, while he is stronger and better than he ever was. I think he undoubtedly deserves compensation for that libel on his character. I hope he gets it continually and in kind. (Laughter.)

and as the contract must have been entered into many years ago, I hope it is carried out by them in pre-war spirit. (Laughter.) But this, gentlemen, is simply the outward characteristic. What about the man himself? To hundreds of thousands, nay, to millions throughout the world he is a wizard, but not with the old magician's carpet. He takes us clean away from the murky atmosphere of this country to all corners of the world, he takes us away from our dull, drab lives into others crowded with incident, with adventure, where we always get what it deserves, where vice meets with retribution, which it does not always meet here. To many he is the well-known sportsman whose affections are equally divided between the mountain and the sea, and in that he shows himself a clear-minded lover of nature, not a mere wooer of artificial games, not a selfish hunter or pursuer of those delights attendant on the fickle goddess. I have tried to paint a portrait. Time has not enabled me to do more than a mere thumbnail sketch, but those who know him and have known him for these many years realise and can fill in the details and know that there is much more. He has been our President since 1913. A short glance at our annual reports shows that the first two years he was described as A. E. W. Mason, Esq. Then it came to be Captain Mason, and then Major Mason. Now he is A. E. W. Mason, Esq. These few words give a history of these ten years. He was early taken away from the duties of the Club to the duties of the nation, which he fulfilled with ability. Mr. President, you have been to us more than an office. You have been a personality, a personality which has made an instant appeal. You will live with us always as a personality with a peculiar and particular charm. To many has been given the gift of words, but few have the power of thought and few have the ability as you have had to clothe with felicitous phrase thoughts both poetical and true. We all know your particularly delightful way of bringing in a joke, when the duties expect it. I thank you on behalf of all our members for your ten years of Presidency—(cheers)—years which I think will be the happiest this Association has ever had. I do not mean to belittle the future by comparison with the past, but I am simply speaking from my own conviction. May you for many years yet to come delight us all with the memories we have of your Presidency, and may you bestow those gifts not only on us, but on that much larger and certainly not warmer circle of friends, your many, many gentlemen. I give you the health of the retiring President, A. E. W. Mason.

THE PRESIDENT said:—

Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—I am a very shy man, and in replying to this toast for the last time I wish to thank you all very heartily for the consideration you have shown to your President during these ten years. It has been a time of great vicissitudes in the history of this country, and our activities as a Club, of course, did cease for four years. I am followed by Dr. Dent, who has done so much and worked so hard for the British Association of the Swiss Alpine Club, and you know and I know that all that can be done to extend and strengthen and promote this Association will certainly be done by him. He will also have the privilege of replying at the end of all the annual dinners to the toast of the Chairman. He may find it is not so humorous as it is to the rest of the audience. (Ltr.) But he will get used to that. He has jolly well got to. Anyway, I thank you very much indeed for the kindly way in which you have received this toast, and in wishing you farewell as your President, I do not say farewell as a member. I am now Vice-President in perpetuity of this Club and shall hope to attend its dinners and its meetings as I have done in the past. (Cheers.)