

Editor's letter box

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SOUTHERN CROSS TO POLE STAR.

Mr. A. F. Tschiffely, our famous compatriot, lectured to the members, students and friends of the Swiss Mercantile Society on Friday, January 26th, at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. The attendance of about four hundred evinced the keen interest which was shown in this lecture.

Mr. A. Steinmann, President of the Society, welcomed the audience and introduced the lecturer, who gave a graphic account of his journey on horseback from Buenos Ayres to New York, a distance of fifteen thousand miles. R. B. Cunningham-Graham, in "Tschiffely's Ride," describes the ride as the greatest feat that man and horses have performed in all the history of the world.

The lecturer first described the itinerary of his long, long ride, for which he set out from Buenos Ayres in April, 1925, and which took him across the plains of the Pampas, then over the ranges of the Andes and along the coast of Chile, through Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua and Mexico to Washington and New York, where he arrived with all the glories of a hero. The endurance and hardships suffered on the journey, no pen can describe. The changes of climate, from tropical heat to icy cold in the dizzy heights of the Andes; swamp-ridden country; shark-infested rivers; impenetrable jungles and malaria-stricken areas; through revolutionary Mexico, and along the no less dangerous motoring roads of the United States. The purpose of the lecture was to give the audience an idea of the exciting experiences the lecturer had on his ride, the countries he traversed, and the strange people he met on his trail.

The lecturer acquired his two horses, the now famous Mancha and Gato, from an Indian chief. They were sturdy native breeds of Patagonia, and, according to the lecturer, were second to none for endurance, deprivation and tenacity. He chose two of strange colour, as they are more difficult to steal.

The lecturer now set out on his long trail, illustrating his experiences with a collection of exquisite coloured slides which were specially made for him from his own photographs by the American Geographical Society, to whom he lectured on his arrival in New York.

It would be futile for me to attempt giving a description of these wonderful views, but having witnessed scores of illustrated lectures which are regularly held by the Society, at Swiss House and elsewhere, I may say that these slides easily surpassed anything I had previously seen. A sunset in the Andes; life in an Indian village; hanging bridges across canyons, the mere sight of which makes you shudder; picturesque plains; rivers of which the lecturer swam at least two hundred on his journey; Inka ruins which afforded the lecturer great scope for archaeological study, but nearly cost him his life, when, digging in one of the graves, he got blood poisoning, no doctor near, but he got finally cured by an old Indian herbs doctor; deserts, etc., etc. He said his two horses had personality. They were very wild and nasty at first, and difficult to break in. They still had their little tricks when he did not ride them for two or three days. They never let him ride bare back. However, they slowly tamed down. Through Mexico the lecturer even had an escort of a troop of cavalry to protect him from the bandits and revolutionaries, terms which in Mexico are, however, identical. A story told by the lecturer at this juncture is worth relating. A governor of a certain state of Mexico issued a proclamation to police and people which read: "I must request you not to hang bandits by the way-side, this being an insanitary practice, and furthermore frightens away tourists." Nothing deterred Mr. Tschiffely from reaching his goal, and we cannot but admire his undaunted spirit of adventure, his unflinching determination to succeed, from which no setback, no malaria, no perils of the jungle made him waver.

But Mr. Tschiffely is not only an accomplished horseman of iron resolution; he is also a man equally agile with the pen; hence his leap to fame through his book, "Southern Cross to Pole Star," which was a last year's best-seller in the non-fiction class of books. I do not doubt that all those who were present have a fervent wish to read this book at an early opportunity, as giving a far better idea of the epic ride through the two American Continents than the finest lecture could give, and through it become even more closely acquainted with its famous author. But, on top of all, Mr. Tschiffely is a first-rate lecturer. Bearing in mind that he was not speaking in his mother tongue, one could not help admiring his wonderful flow of language, his enormous vocabulary and the masterly way in which he related his experiences. He went on for nearly two hours, covering a vast journey and omitting little that was outstanding, surely an accomplishment in itself! And how the time flew by — like a whirlwind across the long trail. What must the actual journey have been, at jog-trot and on the buck-jumper Mancha? One

could have gone on listening, for the lecture was never tiring, and the two hours passed away with the audience rapt in attention. The prolonged acclamation which was given to the lecturer was an unmistakable proof of the enjoyment which the audience had derived from this lecture, which must be considered as one of the most successful functions of the Society.

Mr. Steinmann, on behalf of the Swiss Mercantile Society, expressed thanks to Mr. Tschiffely for his most interesting and instructive address.

W. B.

SWISS OBSERVER TEN YEARS AGO.

The 28th January was the decennary of the death of Georges Charles Dimier; he was buried in the family grave at Wandsworth Cemetery on February 1st, almost on the 70th anniversary of his birth at Fleurier. It may be safely asserted that he was the greatest man that the Swiss Colony in London had produced for a good many generations. Though Georges Dimier had spent over half a century in this country, it was only during the last twenty years of his life that he actively interested himself in the affairs of our Colony. He made his debut with numerous lectures on the Swiss Alps — whose giants had all surrendered to his inexhaustible energy and tenacity — unfolding a singular faculty of imparting to his listeners the love of the mountains and of his country, which was an outstanding feature of his life.

There are few institutions in our Colony that have not benefited by his disinterested influence, and there are two or three where his activities have been such as will leave an indelible mark for all time. First must be mentioned the Fonds de Secours. It was due to his initiative that this institution, which until then had been directed by the Eglise Suisse, was placed on a broader basis, and thus secured the whole-hearted support of the Colony. He was helped in this work by his life-long friend, Edouard Roehrich, who went to his last home a few years earlier. Georges Dimier had been the president of the Fonds de Secours for fifteen years; he spared neither time nor money to make its funds available to an ever-increasing number of compatriots and purposes. I shall always remember his eloquent appeals at the annual banquets of the City Swiss Club, when he usually ended his peroration with tears in his eyes. A more sprightly, though no less strenuous, opportunity for the manifestation of his unflinching vigour was provided by the "Swiss Sports." If my memory serves me right, these sports originated at the annual outings held by the Swiss Club Schweizerbund somewhere in Epping Forest.

This event would naturally appeal to Dimier's mind, and when his help was enlisted, it was not long before the Swiss Sports Committee was constituted, which embraced, thanks to his commanding personality, all the Swiss clubs and societies in our Colony. The subsequent annual gathering at Herne Hill has now become a popular fixture for "rich and poor," and many will remember the day when Dimier emerged victor in the Veterans' Walking Race from a large field. Unfortunately, these sports have, during the last few years, exhibited a tendency to give more prominence to the athletic side, which has impaired their popularity and affected the attendance. I have already referred to the City Swiss Club, whose members unstintingly supported Dimier whenever he tapped their patriotism and their pockets; he had been president and treasurer, and was one of the promoters and founders of the Club-House fund, which to-day is no more securing the support of the members.

I cannot do better than reprint the concluding sentences of the obituary written at the time by the late Jean Baer, viz.: "Il importe maintenant que tous les membres de la Colonie s'efforcent de suivre l'exemple que cet homme de cœur nous a laissé. Il le faut pour que vivent les œuvres auxquelles il a consacré pendant si longtemps le meilleur de sa vie."

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EDITOR'S LETTER BOX.

To The Editor,
"The Swiss Observer."

Jan. 30, 1934.

Many will appreciate the article on the Swiss Cross in your columns of last week, and it is to be hoped that in future Swiss societies will show less indifference for the design of our national arms. The printers are not entirely to blame, for they merely use the *cliché* which is lent them, printing eventually a Red Cross in lieu of the correct emblem should it be unavailable. To anyone who has his national colours at heart, it is vexing to see so many variations, not only of the cross, but in the proportions of the field surrounding it. Furthermore, the shape of the shield should be modest and not subjected, as is often the case, to atrocious and grotesque contortions. And if we are powerless in preventing commercial firms adopting our emblem as trade-mark, let us at least strike a difference with a correct design.

The five equal square cross is erroneous. The cross in heraldry is represented with four equal arms considered to occupy one-fifth of the field if not charged, like the Cross of St. George. The Swiss coat-of-arms, *gules, cross couped argent*, unlike the St. George's Cross, does not extend to the margin of the shield, but its width, one-fifth of the field, is identical. According to the rules of heraldry, the length of each arm of a *cross couped* should project the centre square by one and one-fifth its width. Such a design has been adopted by Rudolf Mürger, the Bernese artist responsible for the admirable armorial series of Pro Juventute stamps of 1921-1926, and the official publication of the Chancellerie Fédérale. Likewise is the cross of the timbre-tax designed by Charles L'Eplattenier in 1910, on the postage stamps of 1924, on the old five franc silver coins, and on the seal of the Confédération.

The Swiss cross is one of the most honourable of all heraldic distinctions, perhaps not very pretensions, but it is in this noble and sincere simplicity that lies all its beauty, a great emblem indeed.

P. S.

To The Editor,
"Swiss Observer."

30th January, 1934.

With reference to your notice, "Language Census in Switzerland," in the last issue of your paper, I beg to inform you that a very slight mistake occurred. In giving the number of the Romansch population you omitted just a little nought. The figure should read 43,000 and not 4,300 as stated.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A. TALL.

London, den 30. Januar 1934.

The Editor,
"Swiss Observer."

Was mag der Gedankengang bei einem Auslandschweizer gewesen sein, als er sich wie in Mailand bei den Faschisten, oder wie in Berlin bei den Nationalsozialisten anwerben liess, und darüber hinaus noch eine schweizerische Sektion dieser italienischen resp. deutschen politischen Verbände gegründet hat?

Wenn man nicht selbst dabei gewesen ist, so kann man sich die Gründe nicht leicht zurechtlegen. Vielleicht ist das ganze Gebahren den Umständen zuzuschreiben, dass viele Auslandschweizer an in der Schweiz vorgefallenen Dingen auf politischem Gebiet ein Missfallen haben und an einem erspürlichen Wirken und Gedeihen der demokratischen schweizerischen Politik verzweifeln. Un nur wenige zu nennen: Die Genfer Unruhen und die gelinde Bestrafung der Rädelsführer, das negative Ergebnis des eidgenössischen Referendums über die Lohnschmälerungen der eidgenössischen Beamten. Vorfälle in Zürich bei Anlass des schweiz. Offizier-Vereins-Jubiläums et hoc genus omne.

Man sagt sich, und hier ist auch der Schreiber dieser Zeilen dabei, dass es an Kraft und Mut gebreicht, und dass Hopfen und Malz verloren sind, wenn nicht ein anderer Wind zu wehen beginnt. Möglich ist, dass die Führer in Mailand resp. Berlin im Trüben fischen wollen ohne sich Skrupeln über die Nachwirkungen zu machen.

Inwieweit diese Missgeburten im Auslande auf die Politik in der Schweiz einen Einfluss haben sollen, ist eine andere Frage — wenn es hochkommt, können sie als Warnung angesehen werden an die Regierung in der Schweiz: Seht zu, dass nicht auch bei Euch ein Diktator Eure demokratischen Errungenschaften auf Nimmerwiedersehen demoliert!

J. J. EBERLI.

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