

City Swiss Club

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CITY SWISS CLUB.

(Monthly Meeting)

The usual monthly meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Tuesday, December 12th, at Brown's Hotel.

As on former occasions, this meeting was combined with a Xmas Dinner, and the Management of Brown's Hotel is to be congratulated on serving an excellent and seasonable menu, consisting of such delicacies as roast turkey, Xmas pudding and mince pies.

Well over one hundred members and guests were present, and it is to be regretted that, once again, the accommodation proved to be insufficient to place all those who attended in the same room.

Mr. A. Bon, who was in the Chair, opened the meeting by welcoming Monsieur Ruegger, the Swiss Minister, who has recently returned from a visit to Switzerland, he also greeted, on behalf of the Club, Monsieur Charles Huber, Delegate of the International Red Cross, who is returning to our country, from a prolonged stay in India.

The President expressed his regrets that National Councillors Obrecht and Bringolf, who are at present in London, had to cancel their visit to the Club, owing to other pressing engagements.

Five new members were proposed and duly elected. The Club voted a donation of twenty guineas to the Swiss Benevolent Society which institution is shortly celebrating its 75th birthday anniversary.

Mr. Bon, in the capacity of President of the said institution thanked the members for this generous gift, mentioning that this Society has, since its foundation, distributed an amount exceeding £100,000 for the poor Swiss in this country, the major part of which has been subscribed by Swiss living in Great Britain. He paid a warm tribute to Mr. Theo Ritter, who, for the last forty years, has rendered invaluable services to the Benevolent Society as its Secretary.

Mention was made from the Chair that the question of the foundation of a Swiss Hospital in London, is at present being studied. Owing to the fact that this scheme is still in its initial stages, no concrete proposals could as yet be put before the meeting, but it was the wish of the committee that the members should be acquainted with these *démarches*.

Mr. Ch. Chapuis expressed his satisfaction that, at long last, such a foundation is being studied, and he hoped that, at a later date, the whole colony would be duly informed of the steps taken in this direction. The President, replying to the speaker promised that this would be done.

Mr. Bon further informed the meeting, that Viscount Bennett, a former Prime Minister of Canada, has kindly consented to address the members of the City Swiss Club at one of their future meetings.

The Chairman then announced that Monsieur Ruegger, the Swiss Minister, desired to address the company, this announcement was received with much applause.

The Minister, expressed his regrets that, owing to his absence in Switzerland, he was unable to attend the last two meetings, saying: "I had looked forward intensely to the pleasure to hear the speeches of Professor Gerbrandy, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, of Dr. Masaryk, the distinguished Minister of Foreign

Affairs of Czechoslovakia and, last but not least, of that most brilliant and famous author and political observer, Mr. Harold Nicholson." Monsieur Ruegger congratulated the President and the Club for having been able to entertain such distinguished guests.

The speaker then related the extensive charitable work undertaken by the committee for the "Don Suisse" under the Presidency of the late Federal Councillor M. Wetter, to alleviate hardship of those populations most in need of assistance, mentioning that during its present sitting, the Swiss Parliament has unanimously voted a sum of 100 million francs towards their funds.

Mention was also made about the scheme of the creation of a "Swiss Centre", which question he had an occasion to discuss during his last trip to Switzerland, as well as of the plans for the foundation of a Swiss Hospital in London, a problem which the Minister discussed at length with the Chief of the Federal Department of the Interior, Federal Councillor Etter, who had shown the keenest interest.

The Minister expressed his willingness to support any reasonable and duly examined proposal which the respective committees may seem warrantable to put to the Swiss authorities.

Monsieur Ruegger shortly alluded to some of the political developments in our country, saying that the recent action of the Federal Council in expressing its wish to entertain normal relations with all established powers, was above any reproach and follows the lines of Swiss foreign policy established recently by an unanimous declaration of the Federal Council itself.

Referring to a recent Departmental change in the Government of the Confederation, which caused a certain stir in the Home and Foreign Press, the Minister asked "Is it astonishing that after five long and hard years in war-time, the burden of our heavy portfolio passes from one pair of shoulders to another? The mere fact that discussions arise on this subject, is a further proof of the deeply anchored feeling that our stability of Government is taken as an unshaken axiom of our public life. Such it will remain."

Amidst applause the speaker said "There is no disunion in Switzerland now, as little as there was during recent critical and dangerous years, as to the clear and simple main lines which are the making of many generations and may not be abandoned, of the country's foreign policy."

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In terminating his very lucid and interesting *exposé* (space unfortunately does not allow to insert it *in toto*.) the Minister extended his best wishes to all the members and their families during the coming festive season.

Monsieur Ruegger was heartily cheered on resuming his seat.

Monsieur Charles Huber, Delegate of the International Red Cross expressed his thanks for having been given an opportunity to meet the members of the City Swiss Club. "I felt at once at home in your midst" he said, "and I wish to congratulate you for the patriotic way in which you are conducting your meetings."

Colonel de Watteville, Delegate of the International Red Cross mentioned that he had just received news that the vessel "Henri Dunant" belonging to the Swiss Fleet has been commissioned by the committee of the "Don Suisse" to unload, at a certain Dutch port, supplies amounting to 5,000 tons for the Dutch population. This announcement was greeted with applause.

Before closing the meeting, M. Bon intimated, that owing to future heavy engagements, he might not be able to accept a further term of office as President, but, should this happen, he would willingly put his services at the disposal of his successor.

Mr. de Cintra, on behalf of his colleagues in the committee, and the members, urged Mr. Bon to reconsider his decision promising him the full support of his committee. This was heartily endorsed by the entire meeting.

Wishing the members and their families a Happy Xmas and a prosperous New Year, the President closed the meeting at 9.15 p.m.

ST.

THE SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

Early in the New Year the Society will have reached its seventy-fifth anniversary. Founded on the 1st January, 1870, it has gradually become an organisation which, though unassuming, reflects much credit on our colony, which has born the brunt of a total relief expenditure, during that time, of some £98,000, and a yearly outlay, at present, of £4,700.

Beginning in a modest way, relief was granted up to 1901, on Sundays at the Swiss Church and on week days through a Committee in the City and in the West End. In those early years the assistance given was, more or less, in the shape of "part help" and it is largely due to Mr. E. A. Steiger, one of the Vice-Presidents, that an important change was then brought about in the policy of the Society. From that time it was agreed that sufficient help be given, in all cases, to enable the recipient and his dependants to make ends meet on an economical basis. The result of this step was to put a stop to any calls which might have been made on private charity or on the English Poor Law authorities and from that day the Society could really claim that no countryman of ours needed to have recourse to outside help. This meant a close study of the circumstances of each applicant and keeping a check on the cost of living which, as we all know, has varied considerably in the last thirty years. It

also meant a very substantial increase in the amount of help given, as illustrated by the fact that during the first thirty years of its existence the Society spent in relief £6,093 compared with £88,800 during the last thirty years.

In this connection it may interest readers to learn that in 1920, for instance, the Society allowed a single person 7/6 a week for a room and 7/6 for food, those grants being increased to 10/- and 14/- respectively for a couple. From 1934 a special fuel allowance of 2/6 a week was granted during the winter months. These figures were increased from time to time, as necessity arose, and they stand to-day at 10/- for room and 20/- for food for a single person; 13/- for room and 37/- for food for a couple, plus a winter fuel allowance of 3/- a week.

The allowance for room can be increased if special circumstances warrant it.

As is well known, one of the main activities of the Society is the maintenance of some seventy old pensioners which costs over £2,000 a year. To many of these helpless ones, the Society is the only thing they have to look to and lean upon.

However large the financial assistance may seem, this only represents part of the work done and very often more time and labour is spent in consoling, advising and morally helping compatriots in distress. We need not enlarge upon the numberless pitfalls awaiting our men and women living in this great metropolis. Many a sad story has been unfolded at 31 Conway Street, for which, more often than not, a satisfactory sequel has been arranged there.

Mention should also be made of the huge amount of clothing distributed, especially at Xmas. We are told however, that, owing to rationing, stocks are very low.

Looking back, names stand out particularly from the numerous friends and helpers of those last seventy-five years, such as E. A. Steiger, already mentioned, George Forrer, of the old school, meticulous treasurer and dry old wit, Georges Dimier, big-hearted and open-handed. Among others who were instrumental in collecting the large sums required, we think of our late Minister, Mr. G. Carlin, Gustave Aguet, M. Golay, A. C. Nussbaumer, and our old and staunch supporters The Swiss Church, The City Swiss Club, the Swiss Mercantile Society and the Unione Ticinese.

We did not wish to let this record of seventy-five years pass without reminding our readers of the wonderful work going on unceasingly for the benefit of our unfortunate ones.

True to its tradition, the Society has decided to mark this anniversary by making a specially generous distribution this Xmas to all those in need who, at that time more than ever, are handicapped by the high cost of most things. Their number is large and it will mean an additional expense of some hundreds of pounds. We know that many of our readers will wish to contribute their share to the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Fund, opened for this occasion, and there could be no more fitting appreciation of the efforts made by the Society to keep well up the good name of our country and of the Swiss Colony in particular.

Incidentally, also in the New Year, Mr. Theo. Ritter will have been Secretary for forty years and both his numerous "wards" and friends will wish to congratulate him on this proud record.