

City Swiss Club

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1959)**

Heft 1353

PDF erstellt am: **01.05.2024**

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CITY SWISS CLUB

94th Annual Banquet and Ball

at the

DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, LONDON, W.1

on

FRIDAY, 20th NOVEMBER, 1959



In the Chair:

X. M. SPECKERT, PRESIDENT

The "Swiss Fortnight" with its innumerable functions such as receptions, exhibitions, plays, film shows, cocktail parties, dinners and concerts, is still in everyone's mind, and quite a few who took an active part in this big — and most successful — undertaking, are still feeling the after-effects of their strenuous work.

It was therefore with some trepidation that the committee of the City Swiss Club decided to hold the Annual Banquet and Ball in spite of the many fairly recent social events, amongst them the Anglo-Swiss Charity Ball and the "Soirée Romande" which had taken place at the Dorchester Hotel.

The deciding reason — approved of by the members of the Club at a specially convened meeting — was that these banquets (numbering now ninety-four) have only been interrupted during and immediately after the two wars, and nothing short of such a calamity should interfere.

Furthermore this annual function has always been looked upon as one of the high-lights in the social life of the Swiss community. Many famous personalities, amongst them diplomats, peers of the realm, politicians, statesmen, soldiers, writers, journalists, musicians, industrialists, scientists and explorers have, at one time or another, graced the top table by their presence.

This year, however, it was decided to carry on this festival in a less ambitious style than usual, because of the recent overdose of activities. Whilst a reduced attendance was to be expected, it was nevertheless gratifying that nearly 200 members and friends were present.

The Swiss Ambassador, Honorary President of the Club, and Madame Daeniker wished to be excused from attending, owing to the strenuous time which they had experienced during the "Swiss Fortnight", and the Chair was taken by the President, Mr. X. M. Speckert.

It was also resolved that on this occasion the list of official guests should be drastically reduced, and the invitation confined to only a few, and — would you believe it? — the same axe was applied to speech-making. In the past, as Press Reporter of the Club, I have described and reported about thirty-five annual banquets; never before have I had an easier task than this time, because the two Toasts, and the short

address of the President took all together just over ten minutes, whilst in bygone days speech-making often lasted anything from one to one-and-a-half hours.

Now let us see what this "austerity banquet", or may we call it more adequately a dinner-dance, really was.

Shortly after 7 o'clock the President and Madame Speckert received the members and guests in one of the anterooms. In previous reports, referring to the reception, I used to write "the ladies carried lovely bouquets which were presented to them on behalf of the members of the Club". It was noticed that the President's wife did not carry a bouquet; this was, however, not due to any meanness on the part of the members, nor has it anything to do with the austerity aspect. Madame Speckert simply wished "no flowers by request", and, by the way, does she really need any flowers to enhance her charms?

Whilst the reception was still in progress, and the red-coated toast-master was calling out the names of many well-known personalities in the Colony, cocktails were served in an adjoining room, mainly so that a congenial mood should prevail. Owing to the smaller attendance, this room, which on former occasions could be compared with a Turkish bath, became not unduly overheated, nor did the "traffic" become too irksome. Before long, the atmosphere having become lively and very convivial, it was broken by the stentorian voice of the toast-master announcing "Dinner is served". Here again one noticed a change; whilst on former occasions this announcement was preceded with the words "Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen", this time — the Excellencies and Lords being absent — the wording of the announcement was simply, "Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen," etc.

Yet another change was noticeable — it was indeed an evening of surprises — hitherto it had been customary that after all the members and their friends had taken their allotted seats, the orchestra would strike up a martial tune and, amidst handclapping, the Chairman, accompanied by the principal guests, would make a solemn entry. This ceremony was dispensed with; unobtrusively and with the rest of the company the President and the guests took their places at the small top-table.

The banquet hall, one of the finest in the West

End, presented a magnificent spectacle; apart from the charming flower decorations, the huge Swiss National Emblem and the Union Jack, large silver candlesticks with lighted red candles were placed on each table, whereas on former occasions only the occupants at the top table had been favoured with this special "illumination". The candlelight augmented by the light of the large crystal candelabra, presented an atmosphere of splendour, only matched by the lovely toilettes of the ladies.

Grace was said by the Rev. C. Reverdin, and the company sat down to an excellent dinner consisting of *Le Potage Germiny aux Croûtons*, *La Timbale de Sole Dorchester*, *Le Riz Pilaff*, *Le Faisan à la Châtelaine*, *Les Petits Pois Étuvés aux Laitues*, *L'Omelette Surprise Montreuil*, *Les Petits Fours*, *Le Café*. This Menu was prepared under the supervision of the head chef of The Dorchester, M. E. Kaufeler, a compatriot of ours, and much enjoyed. It goes without saying that a good dinner deserves an equally good wine, so there were to be had, amongst others, fine vintage wines grown on the sunny slopes of the cantons Geneva, Vaud, Valais and Neuchâtel. Les Brown and his orchestra provided the "Tafelmusik". When coffee was served the Toasts — "H.M. the Queen" and "La Suisse" were proposed by the President of the City Swiss Club, with the playing of the respective national anthems.

Scanning my Menu card I perceived that only the two Toasts were mentioned, but I had been previously informed that the President would say "a few words". (Here I must apologise to him for having written in my report in the "Swiss Observer", about the flight over London arranged by Swissair for members of the Club, that he made a speech during the flight; this is not "according to facts", he spoke afterwards at the cocktail party.)

At many of the former banquets not a few dreaded the speeches, although in fairness it must be said that many of the orations were interesting and a pleasure to listen to, but, alas, quite a few were far too long! It was always a bone of contention, especially with the ladies, who said that they came along to dance and enjoy themselves, and not to hear over and over again, and at some length, what splendid specimens of the human race we Swiss really are. (Of course they know it, but why rub it in.)

Mr. Speckert on rising received a cordial ovation; he extended a warm welcome to the entire gathering, expressing his pleasure that in spite of the recent glut of festivities so many of the members and friends had turned up. He voiced his regret that the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker were unable to honour the Club by their presence. The President

explained that it was the wish of the members that this year's Banquet and Ball should be held in a more simple manner. "We have" he said, "very much shortened the official part because we have tonight very few guests". It was a welcome gesture after the many speeches one had had to endure at the "Swiss Fortnight" to be let off for once.

The President then introduced the following official guests: Mr. Geo. Starkey, President of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, and Mrs. Starkey, Mr. Max Wiesendanger, President of the Swiss Presidents' Assembly, and Mrs. Wiesendanger, Dr. Knuchel, President of the Swiss Club Manchester, and Mrs. Knuchel, Pasteur C. Reverdin and Madame Reverdin, Mr. A. Stauffer, editor of the "Swiss Observer" and Press Reporter, and Mrs. Stauffer. He also greeted Mr. H. Knoll, late President of the Club, and Mrs. Knoll, and the members of the Swiss Embassy present. He referred to the recent loss the City Swiss Club had sustained in the passing away of Mr. Louis Chapuis, a former President and Hon. Vice-President, and after paying a gallant tribute to the ladies he concluded by making a warm Appeal to support the collection (amongst Swiss only), to be made for our brethren in straitened circumstances. (This collection brought in some £70.)

The official part of the evening thus came to its conclusion at an early hour (it was not yet 9 o'clock); it was all over in a "jiffy". The toast-master was politely told that he "could go home", and really and truly the Press Reporter too was not wanted any longer, but "he would not go home".

After a short interval dancing began, and soon the floor presented a mass of animated people. It was really a field-day for the younger generation, they had their fling, but even some of the older couples held their own. Five hours of continued dancing is not bad — no — this is not correct; although on the invitation and ticket the words "carriages at 2 a.m." were printed, it was suddenly decided "to call it a day" an hour earlier, at 1 a.m. — instead of 2 a.m., and funnily enough nobody seemed to be upset at losing an hour of fun, least of all the dance band. It goes to prove that five hours of continuous dancing is too much of a good thing, and some break of one kind or another should be made.

The band played "God save the Queen" with the stroke of 1 o'clock, and a very pleasant and successful evening came to its close. To the singing of "Auld Lang Syne" the President and his charming lady were led into the centre of the ring and three cheers were given them, and the entire company sang lustily "For they are jolly good fellows!", and SO SAY ALL OF US!

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