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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Dinner and Dance

on

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7th 1959

at

THE DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.I.

In the Chair: O. GROB, President

When attending a function of the Swiss Mercantile Society I am always reminded of the French adage, "On revient toujours à ses premières amours". It is now forty-three years since I first became a member of the Society; in fact it was the first Swiss Society I joined after my arrival in London. Although I have since become a member of, and been active in, other Societies, I have always kept a warm corner in my heart for the S.M.S. If I have remained faithful to my "first love", they have reciprocated these feelings in a generous manner.

This year's Annual Dinner and Dance has again awakened many treasured memories — alas! — all too many of the one-time collaborators and friends who, during and since the period when I took an active part in the Society, first as Hon. Secretary and afterwards as President, have gone never to return. It is the way of life that with advancing age there comes the feeling of loneliness; new friendships are no more easily made, and the circle of old friends becomes smaller and smaller.

It is gratifying to see that this Society — which a few months ago celebrated its 70th jubilee — in spite of having attained a venerable age is still hail and hearty and showing no signs of "dilapidation".

* * *

About 150 members, guests and friends met at the Dorchester Hotel. Previous to the dinner, which was served in the attractive Orchid Room, a reception was held in one of the ante-rooms by the Swiss Ambassador, in the capacity of Honorary President, accompanied by Madame Daeniker, and assisted by the President, Mr. O. Grob, and Mrs. Grob.

One hardly realised that we were still in mid-winter with its cold blasts, fogs and snow, when one was greeted with warmth and a beautiful display of flowers — for which The Dorchester enjoys such a reputation — creating an atmosphere of cheerfulness, and greatly adding to the right "Stimmung". The flowers and the colourful and lovely dresses of the ladies reminded one almost of a wedding minus the bride and bridegroom.

Cocktails were served in abundance, and consequently the atmosphere became warmer and warmer. The Toast-Master who presided over the reception announced that dinner was served and the company adjourned to the Orchid Room, and there awaited the entry of the Ambassador, the President, and their

ladies. Their appearing evoked generous hand clapping. Madame Daeniker and Mrs. Grob carried bouquets which had been presented to them on behalf of the members of the Society.

The top table presented a colourful picture. Almost buried under flowers were the silver cups, ornamented with silk ribbons in the Swiss national colours, which were won by the football team of the S.M.S. College. Behind the *Fauteuil Présidentiel* were displayed the Union Jack and the Swiss flag.

Before the assembly sat down to an excellent dinner, prepared by the head chef of The Dorchester, Mr. A. Käufeler (a compatriot of ours), the Rev. J. Scherer said Grace, and towards the end of the repast, the President proposed the Toasts to "H.M. the Queen" and to "La Suisse".

From a far corner of the room — almost too far away to be heard — came the voice of Mr. R. Chappuis, who throughout the evening very efficiently acted as M.C., announcing that the President wished to address the company. On rising, the President was given a cordial reception.

He began by welcoming the members and guests to the Society's Annual Dinner and Dance. He said: "I particularly extend a hearty welcome to our Honorary President, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, and to Madame Daeniker. This is the first occasion that I am able to address your Excellency as our Honorary President, and the Council and the Members of our Society greatly appreciate the honour you have bestowed on us in accepting this office." (*Applause*).

The President voiced his regret at the absence of Dr. René Faessler, Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy, and Madame Faessler, due to an engagement in Berne, but expressed his pleasure at being able to greet Consul E. Ribi and Madame Ribi, and other members of the Embassy.

Mr. Grob continued by saying: "Those who attended our last year's dinner may remember that we displayed for the first time the Lints-Smith Trophy, 'The Times' Football Club's Challenge Cup, which our College team won for the first time on the occasion of the 21st anniversary match. I am delighted to tell you that our team successfully defended the cup on March 29th 1958, by winning 5 — 2. We were not only lucky to win the cup again, but this year we managed to 'capture' the President of 'The Times' Football

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Club, the Hon. Hugh Astor, accompanied by Madame Astor, as guests of honour. On behalf of our Society and the members of our College Football team I welcome you and Madame Astor. We are also very proud to display the London Hospital A.F.C. six-a-side competition cup, which our team won in April of last year."

The President also greeted Mr. C. W. Westcott, Vice-President of "The Times" Football Club, and Mrs. Westcott; the representatives of the churches, Pastor C. Reverdin (who was accompanied by Madame Reverdin), Fräulein Pfarrer Voegelin, Pastor Huber and the Rev. Father C. Scherer; Mr. A. Stauffer, editor of the "Swiss Observer", and Mrs. Stauffer; Mr. Peter Jacomelli, Chairman of the Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in Great Britain; Mr. J. J. Boos, Hon. Member, Trustee, and former President, Chairman of the committee of Swiss Catholics in London; Mr. H. Knoll, President of the City Swiss Club, and Mrs. Knoll; Mr. L. W. Krucker, Hon. Member and Trustee; Mr. F. G. Sommer, Hon. Member and Trustee, and Mrs. Sommer; Mr. C. Voegeli, Hon. Member and Trustee, and Mrs. Voegeli; Mr. W. Burren, Hon. Member and Secretary, and Mrs. Burren; Mr. W. Meier, Hon. Member and former President, and Mrs. Meier; Mrs. Nina Pfaendler, widow of Mr. J. Pfaendler, Hon. Member and Manager of the former Employment Department; Mr. V. Berti, President of the "Schweizerbund"; Mr. C. Slade, Principal of the College, and Mrs. Slade; and the members of the teaching staff.

The President then gave a short résumé of the activities of both the Society and the College, and referred to the very successful 70th anniversary dinner which had been held last year at the Criterion Restaurant, when 28 active members received the gold pin of the S.K.V., and 99 members were awarded the silver veteran pin in appreciation of their long and loyal membership. He extended a specially hearty welcome to Mr. Louis Chapuis, who was accompanied by his wife, for the magnificent record of 60 years of membership. Mr. Grob also mentioned that members of the committee presented with the gold pin for services rendered to the Society were Messrs. A. Jaccard, J. E. Schneider and R. Senn. He thanked the members of the Council and the Committee for the support they had given him during the first year of office, and in conclusion paid a special compliment to the ladies present for the many evenings they had to spend "dry-eyed and weary" whilst their husbands attended the meetings of the Society. His Toast was "The Guests and the Ladies", coupled with the names of "The Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, and the Hon. Hugh Astor".

The address of the President was loudly cheered.

Mr. Chappuis then announced that the Swiss Ambassador wished to address the gathering.

The Ambassador, who received a vociferous ovation, said that he was delighted to preside over such a magnificent Banquet. It was four years ago that his wife and himself made their first appearance in the Swiss colony on the same occasion and, having started so auspiciously, they had spent a very happy time ever since with the colony. Having taken a special interest in the activities of the Swiss Mercantile Society and College and being aware of the valuable work done, he appreciated also fully the

honour of having been made an Honorary President.

Monsieur Daeniker said that although he had hardly had any business experience, he had always been in close contact with the Société Suisse des Commerçants and was a regular reader of their periodical. On reflection, what were the similarities and affinities, but also the differences between a commercial and a diplomatic career? He believed that one could hardly presume that diplomats would be good merchants. It was even said that diplomats were rather slow in understanding the intricacies of business life. On the other hand the very life-line of commercial transactions, the dynamism of business, was rather disturbing to the diplomat. The urge to make profits, to accumulate wealth, was strange to his mind; a diplomat being essentially a civil servant was rather striving for personal security, but often he accepted such short cuts to prosperity as a marriage-bond with a wealthy life-companion.

In recent times the two professions had come nearer to each other and were almost complementary. The work of a diplomatic mission to-day is mainly taken up by financial and economic matters. The times when trade and industry were left to look after themselves are definitely gone; in war and in peace they could no longer dispense with the helping hand of the state authorities in business dealings with foreign countries. The embassy and its members were therefore glad to see their contacts with the business community still further strengthened.

The Ambassador made an allusion to a business building, St. George's House, recently inaugurated in the City of London. When he attended the opening ceremony, in the presence of the Lord Mayor, he felt proud to think that the owners, being one of the largest enterprises in the world in the alimentary branch, are considered an almost entirely Swiss owned company.

The year thus having started rather well, there were further plans for 1959; in October, a comprehensive show of Swiss people's activities in the economic and cultural field was to be held in London and preparations were fully under way. The "Swiss Observer" had already given an account of the plans for the "Swiss Fortnight". The Swiss Economic Council gave most valuable support; but to make this venture a full success, one needed the ready support of all members of the Swiss community and particularly of the societies.

Last but not least the Ambassador paid tribute to the Swiss Mercantile College and its remarkable achievements in instilling a thorough knowledge of the English language into generations of young Swiss who came to this country. Only in recent years were the people at home made aware of the serious drawbacks resulting from the insufficient knowledge of the English language among the Swiss population in comparison with other Western Nations; the Ambassador had had a telling experience of this when, five years ago, he went to Korea with a team of fifty Swiss officers to work there in close collaboration with teams of other Nations. The excellent school training offered by the Swiss Mercantile College was therefore to be highly appreciated as a means to make good such a deficiency. With his thanks to the teaching staff the Ambassador assured the Chairman that he would gladly suggest to the Swiss authorities to grant the school their strong support also in the future.

Long and sincere applause greeted the Ambassador's interesting address.

The task of replying on behalf of the guests was entrusted to the Hon. Hugh Astor, President of "The Times" Football Club, who, although never having visited Switzerland, in very humorous vein referred to the fascination that winter sports there seemed to have for so many of his friends, despite the state of their limbs and faces on their arrival back home, and then he commented on the many encounters of his and the College teams on the football field, congratulating the latter team on their recent success. His witty asides were much enjoyed and applauded.

The last speaker was Mr. A. Jaccard, Chairman of the Education Department, who thanked Mr. and Mrs. Grob for the very efficient way they were conducting this enjoyable evening.

Thus terminated the official part of the evening, and dancing started. At midnight the orchestra struck up "Auld Lang Syne", and so another Annual Dinner and Dance of the Swiss Mercantile Society came to its close. It only remains for me to voice the opinion of all those who were fortunate enough to attend this function — a unanimous opinion that it was a great success in every respect.

ST.

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