

# City Swiss Club

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# CITY SWISS CLUB

## 95th Annual Banquet and Ball

at the

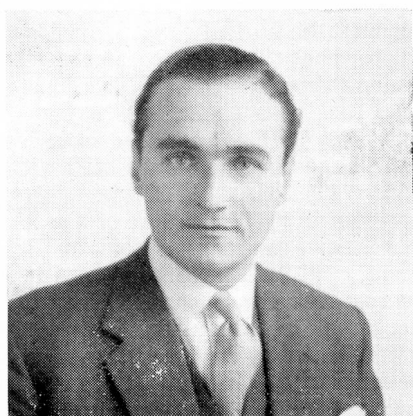
DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, LONDON, W.1

on

FRIDAY, 18th NOVEMBER, 1960

*In the Chair:*

X. M. SPECKERT, PRESIDENT



In a time full of unrest and upheavals in this poor world of ours, the City Swiss Club — which passed its Centenary four years ago — invited its members and friends to attend the 95th Annual Banquet and Ball at the Dorchester Hotel. (No banquets were held during or immediately after either of the World Wars.)

Although some people may hold the view that the time for celebrations is inopportune, the Club nevertheless decided — and rightly so — to hold this time-honoured and traditional festival in spite of adverse circumstances.

For years now, the Banquet of the City Swiss Club has been one of the highlights in the social life of the London Swiss Colony, attracting considerable numbers of members and friends. These annual gatherings, one can safely say — without any intention of appearing snobbish — have a certain *cachet* which is unique and somewhat different from other social events held in the Colony. Not the least reason for its continued success is that on this occasion a number of prominent British friends are invited as guests. It has always been the endeavour of the Club to foster friendly and close relations with leading and prominent personalities of this country, and if the Swiss community enjoys an appreciable reputation in this hospitable island it is due, in no small measure, to the City Swiss Club, because by making personal contact we understand and esteem each other all the better.

At this year's festival, therefore, as will be seen shortly, a number of well-known English guests again honoured the Club with their presence. A gratifying feature of the Club's annual dinner was the presence, amongst over two hundred visitors, of a considerable number of the younger generation of the Colony.

\* \* \*

As is the custom, the evening started with a reception by the President of the Club, and Madame Speckert, after which cocktails were served in one of the attractive anterooms, which was filled to capacity. In due time, a voice emanating from the red-coated toast-master was heard, inviting the company to proceed to their seats, and presently the Chairman and the guests made their entry to take their position at the top table, whilst the orchestra played a lively tune.

The Banqueting Hall was in festive garb, apart from the lovely flower decorations which are a special feature of The Dorchester. There were two large banners, the Swiss Flag and the Union Jack, displayed

behind the Presidential Chair, and large silver candlesticks with lighted red candles were placed on each table. The candlelight augmented by the light of the large crystal candelabra presented an atmosphere of splendour, adequately matched by the fine toilettes of the ladies.

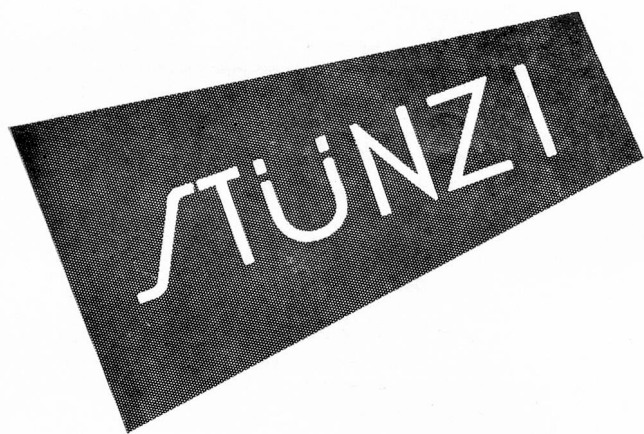
Grace was said by the Rev. Ph. Nicole, and the assembly sat down to a dinner which, as always, came up to expectations, and the famous chef of the Dorchester Hotel, Mr. E. Kaeufeler — a compatriot of ours — had by the gentle art of his cooking added to the success of the evening.

Towards the end of the dinner the Toasts to H.M. the Queen and "La Suisse" were proposed by the Chairman, and the band played the respective National Anthems.

Having a number of guests present who did not belong to our country, speech-making became indispensable, if only to give them the reason why they had been bidden to grace the company with their presence.

The first speech of the evening was given — as it should be — by the President of the Club, Mr. X. M. Speckert, who on rising was cordially received. He expressed his pleasure at having an opportunity of welcoming the company and to introduce the guests at the Club's 95th Banquet and Ball. He explained that the City Swiss Club as such had no longer any direct ties with the City, apart from the fact that many members are trying to make a living there; what, however, we all had in common, he said, was a deep feeling of affection for our homeland. The President said that he would find it difficult to mention something about patriotism, which had not already been said at the many previous banquets, "Patriotism is something one feels, and does not talk about".

Mr. Speckert particularly stressed the friendly and cordial relations which so happily exist between the two countries. After a special welcome from the Chair to the ladies present, he referred to the guests, voicing sincere regret that H.E. the Dutch Ambassador, Baron Adolph Bendinck, a former Ambassador in Berne, and Baroness Bendinck, were at the last moment prevented from being present owing to the illness of the Ambassador. The President also expressed regret at the absence of H.E. the Swiss Ambassador (Honorary President of the Club) and Madame Daeniker, both being at present in Africa.



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The speaker then greeted Dr. E. M. Bircher, Counsellor of Embassy, and representative of the Swiss Ambassador, saying that he had always proved a good and helpful friend to the Club. Referring to his approaching retirement from the Swiss Embassy, he warmly thanked him for his attachment to the Club, and for the many services he had rendered over a long period, expressing the hope that he would still often be seen amongst his many friends of the Club.

Mr. Speckert welcomed the President of the Anglo-Swiss Society, Sir Clifford Norton, a former British Ambassador in Berne, and Lady Norton, saying that Sir Clifford had always proved a staunch friend of our country. Next he greeted Professor Finch (Mrs. Finch was unfortunately unable to join him), President of the Alpine Club, of whom he said that he had at least two qualifications which should entitle him to a "complimentary Swiss passport", namely, that he had acquired the art of yodelling and was able to speak "Schwyzerdütsch". Also introduced to the company were Mr. Richards, President of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, and Mrs. Richards, representing some eight hundred friends of Switzerland. In introducing Air Vice-Marshal Bennett, the President mentioned that he had many qualifications, foremost as the famous Pathfinder of Bomber Command during the last war, remaining ever since a public figure, running his own air lines, building racing cars, occasionally having disagreements with Civil Servants, pleading and defending himself (without Council) in the Law Courts, and kicking generally at "red tape". He said — amidst laughter — "Had the Air Vice-Marshal lived six hundred years ago he would have made an ideal Wilhelm Tell". But the best he had ever done, Mr. Speckert said, "is that he married a Swiss", extending a particularly warm welcome to the only Swiss "Frau Air Vice-Marshal".

The President then continued by saying that he had one more pleasant duty to perform, namely to extend a special welcome to Mr. A. Stauffer, editor of the "Swiss Observer", and Mrs. Stauffer, saying, "You probably know that Mr. Stauffer is retiring from the editorship of the Colony's official organ. We have always appreciated his services rendered to our Club and to the whole Colony. But only now, when we have to try to replace him, is it brought back to us what an enormous debt of gratitude we owe him. His unrelenting efforts, and personal sacrifices, have held the entire Swiss Colony together, and I am sure it is his sincere wish that we all make an effort to see that his work is continued. The City Swiss Club is indeed deeply indebted to him". Turning to Mrs. Stauffer, he said, "I am afraid there is no title for you, but please accept, on behalf of all our members, grateful and sincere thanks, and rest assured that we all appreciated the sacrifices you have made throughout these years, and that without your help Mr. Stauffer would not have been free to give of his best". Mr. Speckert then announced that the committee had decided to nominate Mr. Stauffer as Honorary Vice-President of the City Swiss Club.

In conclusion the Chairman also welcomed the Rev. Ph. Nicole and Madame Nicole, of the Eglise Suisse, and Father J. Scherrer, of St. Ann's Catholic Church. (The Rev. P. Wipf and Mrs. Wipf, of the Schweizerkirche, were prevented from attending.) He then made a sincere Appeal for help for our less fortunate compatriots, saying that most of them had come

to this country full of hope, but that, for one reason or another, they had not been successful, but as they were part of the community it was considered to be our duty to help them in their hour of need. (The collection made amounted to nearly £100).

The President's address was very much applauded, and his Toast to the guests was duly honoured.

The response to the Chairman's address was entrusted to Dr. E. M. Bircher, Counsellor of Embassy. His speech was somewhat different from those one usually hears on such occasions when there are compliments handed out galore, and I have therefore decided — in spite of some warnings from certain quarters to shorten reports about social functions — to reproduce this capable and witty address *in extenso*.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I have to bring you the friendliest greetings from our Ambassador and Madame Daeniker. Those of you who read the "Swiss Observer" are no doubt aware that they are at present on a tour of our Consulates in Africa. That is why I am addressing you tonight in their place. During the last few weeks they have had nothing but sunshine and blue skies. In the circumstances, I don't think we are entitled to assume that they regret their absence — from London.

Tradition demands that our Ambassador, as Honorary President of the City Swiss Club, should give a 'tour d'horizon' of the events of the past year. In his absence I would not dare to break with that tradition — but perhaps you will permit me to bend it a little. For a year is really far too short to allow one to form an objective and unbiased view of events. I would much rather look at the *whole* story of our relationship with this country. It is not nearly as innocent as you might think.

Anglo-Swiss relations started long ago. They really began when these generous islands decided to send us St. Columban and St. Gallus. Nobody has ever found out why they chose Switzerland. Anyhow, they settled in what were obviously then the Swiss 'Bad lands' and are now called Appenzell and St. Gall. — What did we do? A couple of centuries later we helped to consecrate the man who conquered England. We sent Bishop Ermenfroy of Sion to crown William the Conqueror! I don't think that was very nice.

A little later the British made another attempt at establishing friendly relations. This time it was more of a business venture. Because they were not

allowed to do so in their own country, they asked us to print thousands of Bibles in English. This established the reputation of our printers once and for all — and what did we do? In return we gave them Puritanism, with the result that to this day there are in this country regions where you can't get a drink on Sundays. That was not very kind, either — especially when you consider the excellence of the nectar produced in those regions.

The British made a third major attempt at being really friendly. About 150 years ago they sent us their Romanticists, like Shelley, Byron, and their friends, with the result that Switzerland was publicized and became known all over the civilised world. — And what did we do in exchange? Nothing, absolutely nothing at all! To be completely ignored is something the Britishers don't like. So they took their revenge and invented the Alpine Club. This destroyed the peace of our mountains. And then, they invented the Ski Club of Great Britain, and this put an end to the winter sleep of our valleys.

Now we, too, got nasty and built railways, steamers, funiculars, ski-lifts, chairlifts and cable railways galore to relieve them of their money. — More fiendish still, we started to send thousands of young people over here to learn English and so robbed the British of the need to speak other languages.

You have no idea how all this has complicated Anglo-Swiss relations and how adversely it affects the work and life of a Swiss diplomat. Countless associations, scientific bodies, benevolent institutions and government departments, schools, travel agents, business houses — even individuals — want to know something about Switzerland. Their questions get more and more complicated and half the time I do not know the answer.

With nostalgia I think of the remark a well-beloved Swiss Minister made at the end of the first world war. He said, "All a Swiss Ambassador really needs is a beer garden and a Kegelbahn" (a skittle-alley). How easy life would be if our Foreign Office in Berne had heeded his advice! The idea is really worthy of much greater application. It should be used on a world-wide scale. I believe there are already some beer gardens in existence, one in Geneva and one in New York, but neither of them has a skittle-alley. Can't you see what a boon it would be at international conferences, if delegates, after working up their tempers to white heat in the

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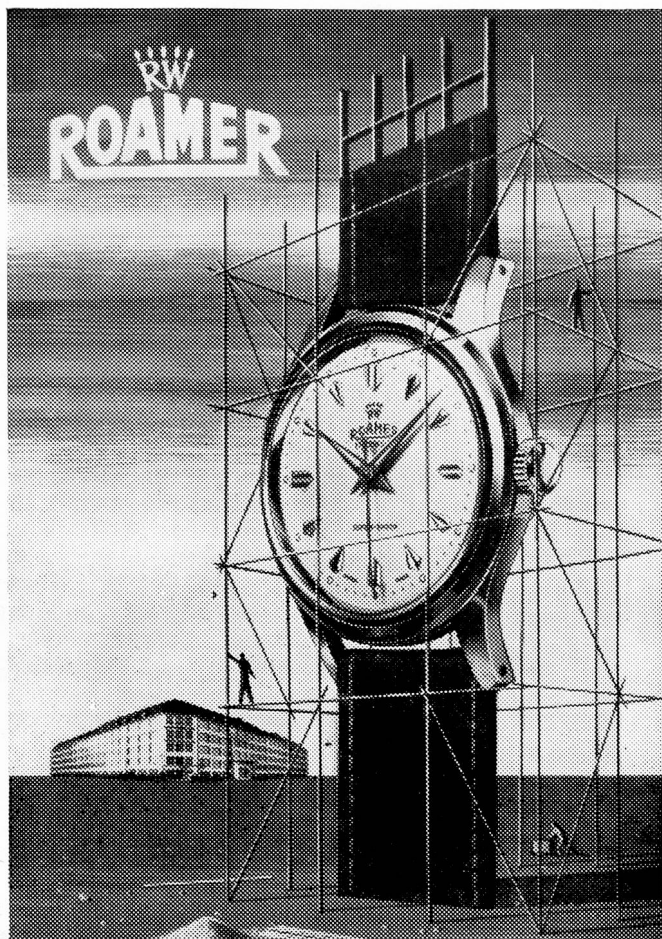
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beer garden, could proceed to the skittle-alley and let off steam. Even the thunder of the heavy balls, as they roll along the boards, has a calming effect — and who would not feel victorious if he succeeded in knocking down the ninepins with a mighty crash!

If I might make a small suggestion myself, I would propose that after the beer garden and the skittle-alley, a third procedure should be declared compulsory for international conferences — a ball like to-night's. What could bring greater harmony, than the presence of beautiful women and the opportunity to dance! In this spirit, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to say to you all: On with the dance; let joy be unconfined!

The words of the Counsellor were loudly and, if I may say so, deservedly, applauded.

The "Réponse pour les Invités" was given by Sir Clifford Norton, in the absence of the Dutch Ambassador, who had been asked to reply. Sir Clifford is no stranger to the City Swiss Club, having been a guest on several occasions, and as recently as in 1956 at the Centenary Banquet. He was, as mentioned, H.M. Envoy in Berne during the period from 1942 to 1946, and knows our country well. In a very witty manner, he expressed thanks on behalf of the guests, for the hospitality extended to them, and his speech was much enjoyed.

\* \* \*

The official part of the evening thus came to a close. It is worth while mentioning that the speeches were "short and sweet", and consequently did not shorten the second part of the programme to any extent. Dancing started right away, and it was a pleasure to see young and old turning around with great exuberance to the tunes of an excellent ten-man dance band. Midnight came and passed, and still the dancers carried on. At 2 a.m. the orchestra played "God Save the Queen", and a brilliant and enjoyable evening came to an end.

It was noted with pleasure that attending the Banquet and Ball were some of the former Presidents of the Club, A. Rueff, L. Jobin, R. de Cintra, and H. Knoll, as well as a fair number of the older members who for many years have regularly attended this annual festival.

The President and his committee are to be congratulated on the efficient arrangements they had made, which ensured that all who took part spent such an enjoyable and happy evening.

ST.

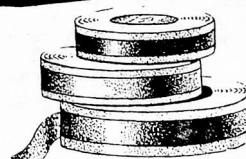


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