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ANNUAL BANQUET & BALL OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

On Saturday, October 17th 1936, at the Trocadero Restaurant, W.I.

The Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Mercantile Society usually takes place early in the year; this year, however, owing to the lamented death of King George, this function had to be postponed for some months and took place on Saturday last. I am glad to say that the alteration of the date did not effect the attendance, quite the contrary, as nearly 200 members and friends "sat down to a sumptuous dinner." Oh! how I hate this phrase, which appears in almost every report describing a social function; it stands to reason that the participants have to sit down in order to enjoy the *sumptuous* meal. Some people will have it, that the fare was less *sumptuous* than on former occasions, whilst others found it "very tasty," as a chef, who can please every *gourmet*, has not yet been born, I must leave it to every individual participant to decide how "he liked it." I, for one wish to congratulate M. Delaloye, the Manager, of the "Trocadero," and a countryman of ours, for his arrangements.

Previous to the dinner a reception was held by the President, who was ably assisted by Mr. J. Boos, Chairman of the House Committee.

Shortly before 8 o'clock, the Swiss Minister, accompanied by Madame Paravicini and Mr. and Miss Schmid-Rüdin, took the Chair, as Honorary President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, amongst great applause.

The loyal toasts to H. M. the King and Switzerland were proposed by the Minister and duly honoured.

Soon after the dessert was served, M. J. J. Schneider, the vivacious Secretary of the S.M.S. announced that the President of the Society wished to address the company.

Amongst hearty applause, Mr. Steinmann rose and addressed the company, as follows:—

As you are aware, our Annual Banquet usually held in the month of February, was postponed till to-night on account of the death of his late Majesty, King George.

I particularly extend a hearty welcome to our Minister and Madame Paravicini, who once again show by their presence, the keen interest they take in the various activities of our Society.

It is not a mere formality that I most sincerely welcome every one of you here to-night. I am confident that those of you who are "old-timers" at this annual function will declare to-night's the "best ever" and that the "first-timers" will feel delighted with their first experience of an S.M.S. Banquet and Ball.

Among the visitors present I must specially mention Nationalrat Schmid-Rüdin, our esteemed Central Secretary and Honorary Member of the London Section, who is accompanied by his charming daughter. To both of them I extend a hearty welcome.

I am also glad to notice in our midst Mr. de Brunner, one of our Trustees.

As in previous years, I wish to review the progress of our Society during the last twelve months. Knowing that you are here for relaxation, my remarks will be as brief as possible, and much will have to be left unsaid. The financial position of the Society remains satisfactory, mainly as a result of the generous assistance given by the Swiss Authorities. To them we must all be deeply grateful.

I know you will all agree with me that an outstanding event in the past year was the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Mr. Pfändler, as Manager of our Employment Department, which continues to give excellent service.

The high standard of the College has been maintained and examination successes have increased. Although for the greater part of the year there was no marked improvement in the attendance, yet during the last few weeks there has been an upward tendency.

A noticeable improvement was made in the number of Evening Classes. There were 53 classes, that being the highest in the last seven years; and the number of individual students was the highest in the last three years.

There was a successful series of lectures arranged in connection with the Monthly Meetings. These lectures attracted many Members to Swiss House who otherwise would not have been present.

In the realm of sport our Members and Students showed their great prowess and won or lost with a good heart.

The House Committee was very active during the year and that is reflected in the bright appearance of Swiss House. This Committee provided a film projector and an up-to-date wireless equipment.

Without mentioning any particular names, I ask you to join with me once again in expressing our thanks to all those who, quietly and patiently, have continued to work for the well-being of our Society and College.

Last year I expressed hopes for better economic conditions. Only a short time ago our Country took certain momentous steps towards changing its monetary policy in a way which must command the respect of everybody. If our country plays its part judiciously, she will in the long run benefit in the period of renewed prosperity that must eventually return to the World. In the meantime, I am certain our Society will play its part and continue to serve to the best of its ability our Switzerland whom we all have so much at heart.

The applause which the sympathetic President received on concluding his speech was richly deserved. Another gentle tap with the hammer commanded silence for the Honorary President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister. On rising from the *Fauteuil présidentiel*, he received a sincere ovation.

He commenced his oration in "Baslerdytsch," extending a hearty welcome to National Councillor Schmid-Rüdin; continuing in English he said:

For a good many years past I have invariably alluded at your banquet to the hardship of the times in which we live.

I have said again and again that it wants all our courage, our strength, our energy, our patriotism, to face the storms in order to keep our own boat and the boat of our country afloat.

I have spoken of obstacles and restrictions which hamper us on all sides and in all spheres. Restrictions in trade, in markets, in communications. Restrictions affecting our business, our personal enterprise, our liberty of action, our opportunity of seeing the world, of learning and of gathering experience.

I have, of course, always proclaimed not to be a pessimist, and I have regularly encouraged you to look out for some bright spot on the horizon, and to find somewhere an opening in the clouds with a ray of sunshine as a ray of hope. And if you could not find any clear spot with the naked eye, I have recommended to use spectacles with rosy coloured glasses, so as to keep up your spirit and have something pleasant to look at, even if it is not there.

Well, Sir, I am happy to say, that to-night there will be no such gloomy music. At last we really have something pleasant to talk about, without having to use special spectacles.

If I say now that things are looking up, it is not a mere stimulant to keep our spirits up, for it very much looks as if we were well on the way to better times.

Of course, if that is so it is only a beginning. There is no question yet of such a thing as the end of our troubles. But there is good cause for hope, or I should even say there is cause for rejoicing.

You all know what I mean.

For some time past you have observed, with feelings of relief, a decided improvement in these western parts of the globe, in Great Britain and America for instance. This was a comfort, although our old Continent was still unable to keep pace with improving conditions. On the contrary, the stagnation there seemed to persist, and our country, and we here with her, continued to suffer by it in a more and more oppressing degree.

But at any rate, there was an improvement somewhere in the world, for some time past.

Now a good part of the Continent, at least the part most important to us Swiss, has most fortunately joined, or certainly looks like joining, the upward movement.

None of you will wish me to deliver a long conference on the Swiss devaluation, on its reasons and construction, on its advantages and drawbacks. What you might want to hear from me is whether this all important event which touches the very soul of our national existence is, on the basis of the general impression created inside and outside Switzerland, a promising or an alarming event.

The question is: Is the new franc a good thing? In parliamentary style my reply would be thus:— I would inform the Hon. Members of the S.M.S. (and everybody here and elsewhere!), that the answer is in the affirmative!

Well, in Swiss Parliament, in Swiss cities, in all parts of Switzerland, and last but not least in the Swiss Colony in England, the answer is indeed, by an overwhelming majority, in the affirmative.

As for all particulars regarding the question, you will be relieved to hear that instead of indulging in a long stream of comments of my own, I refer you to the remarkable utterances of public opinion at home and abroad, to the great speeches of the President of the Confederation and of men in the Federal Assembly, such as our distinguished friend M. Schmid-Rüdin, to the Swiss and foreign Press voices, and especially, of course, to the articles in the "Kaufmännischen Zentralblatt" and the "Swiss Observer!"

The Federal Council has done once more, in a vital movement, the right thing, and it has done it in a manner which, as I know from direct and best possible sources, has won the admiration of the official and unofficial circles in this country.

Now, Sir, with the new money, we have also new courage, new possibilities, a new time before us.

And if we think that at the same moment, so to say, we read in this morning's papers the result of the "Wehranleihe," which is not a success but a *triumph* of good sense and patriotism, I am tempted to say that for decades the Swiss Mercantile Society's banquet has not been held under so happy circumstances.

And the Swiss Mercantile Society deserves to the full measure to be really happy and cheerful to-night, on their Annual Banquet which so fortunately falls in the great days of October, 1936.

No community has fought more gallantly through the dark days, through gloomy weeks and lean months of past years than the Swiss Mercantile Society. To no one the Swiss Colony owes more gratitude for help, encouragement and endurance than to the S.M.S. Everyone of their leaders, their heads of Departments, their teachers, their members, has done his best and has done it with the utmost devotion, zeal and success.

Mr. President, I single you out, as the guiding spirit and indefatigable head of all the members of the various Committees, in expressing to you, for yourself and for them, congratulations for all you have achieved in these years of trouble, and I want you to believe how deeply we all have at heart the welfare and prosperity of this hard-working, time honoured, prominent institution of our London Community.

This remarkable speech of the Minister was greatly appreciated.

A Swiss Mercantile Banquet without guests is unthinkable, and true to their generous traditions the Society invited a large number of guests to sit down at their table.

The toast to the Guests and the Ladies, was once more entrusted into the hands of Mr. A. C. Stähelin, who accomplished his task with his usual efficiency. He informed the company, that apart from the principal guest, National Councillor Schmid-Rüdin, to whom he paid a well-deserved tribute for the great work he is rendering to the mother Society and also to the London section, the following gentlemen from the Legation were present:

Monsieur Ch. de Jenner, accompanied by Mme. de Jenner.

Monsieur Cl. Rezzonico.

(Monsieur W. de Bourg was unable to be present, owing to his being in mourning for the late Mme. de Bourg, Monsieur P. Hilfiker was prevented to attend owing to illness).

The Swiss Churches were represented by M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme, and M. and Mme. C. Th. Hahn.

That the S.M.S. entertains friendly relations with all their sister Societies was proved by the attendance of the representatives of the following Societies.

City Swiss Club (Mr. and Mrs. Boehringer).

Secours Mutuels (Mr. and Mrs. Campart).

Unione Ticinese (Messrs. Gambazzi and de Maria).

Fonds de Secours (Messrs. Dupraz and F. M. Gamper).

Nouvelle Société Helvétique (Mr. and Mrs. Suter).
Swiss Orchestral Society (Mr. and Mrs. Pellet).
Swiss Club Birmingham (Messrs. Brun and Gattiker).

Mr. Stähelin also welcomed Mr. G. De Brunner, one of the Trustee's of the Society, Mme. Lunghi, member of the House Committee, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Swiss Observer, Dr. Kessler,

accompanied by Mrs. Kessler, London correspondent of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," Dr. Egli, London correspondent of the "Bund," W. G. Keller, London representative of the "Agence Telegraphique Suisse."

The introduction was accompanied by various witty remarks also addressed to the Ladies, which once more proved that Mr. Stähelin is an after dinner speaker *par excellence*.

Mr. Boehringer, President of the City Swiss Club, and a former President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, responded on behalf of the guests.

In a very witty speech he related some of the experiences which were encountered by the Society some 35 years ago; these seemed to have been somewhat of a unsavoury nature, owing to the fact that it was then a not uncommon occurrence that the holder of the "purse" unceremoniously made an exit, without disclosing the whereabouts of the Funds. Thus, according to the speaker, it was often necessary for the members of the committee to go "round with the hat" in order to enable them to pay the teachers fees, a fact which made it very difficult to find members who were willing to serve on the committee, and for some considerable time the affairs of the Society were carried on by a so-called triumvirate, consisting of former Presidents.

The speaker after having referred to the more gloomy side of the Society's past, extended hearty congratulations to the present administration for having been able to direct the destiny of the S.M.S. to such towering heights, and he also extended sincere thanks to the Swiss Mercantile Society, on behalf of all the guests, for their generous invitation.

The short and witty oration of an old and experienced friend of the Society was acknowledged with great applause.

Another gentle knock of the hammer, and it was announced that the guest of the evening, namely National Councillor Schmid-Rüdin, Central Secretary of the S.K.V., was to address the company. On rising from his seat, Mr. Schmid-Rüdin was warmly greeted, speaking in German he expressed his great satisfaction for having been given an opportunity to attend one of the principal functions of the Society.

He informed the gathering that the Headquarters of the S.K.V. in Switzerland were very proud of their London Section, which has, owing to their great efforts and hard work, added to the good name, which our countrymen enjoy wherever they go.

Mr. Schmid-Rüdin then, amongst great enthusiasm, gave a short history of the Swiss Defence Loan Committee, of which he is a member, relating with what splendid success their endeavours had been rewarded thanks to the generous response in Switzerland and from the Swiss living abroad.

In terminating his short and able speech, National Councillor Schmid-Rüdin referred to Schiller's prophetic words: "Schweizer bin ich, und will es bleiben aus ganzem Herzen," hoping that this will be the motto of all the Swiss, living far away from their native land.

Prolonged applause greeted this patriotic address, which was listened to with great interest.

That the members of the S.M.S. Society are very generous was proved on this festive occasion by the remembrance of their more unfortunate brethren who are in straitened circumstances. The Appeal for Charity, was entrusted into the capable hands of Mr. Meier, Vice-President of the Society, who asked without using many words for help, and help he received. The collection amounted to £37 10s. 6d., which greatly honours the S.M.S.

This appeal concluded the official part of the evening, and the company adjourned whilst the Banqueting Hall was made ready for dancing. I need hardly say that the second part of the programme was equally enjoyable, thanks to the special endeavours of the Manager of the Trocadero Restaurant, M. Delaloye, in providing a few cabaret turns, which were greatly appreciated.

M. Ch. Chapuis, a very old and trusted friend of the Society was in charge of the various items during the second part, and he accomplished his task in a very efficient way.

It was altogether a splendid evening, which will leave behind nothing but pleasant memories. ST.

SWISS DEFENCE LOAN.

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Ed.

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Wednesday, November 4th, at 7.30 p.m. — Société
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Friday, November 27th — City Swiss Club —
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7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

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