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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

The Swiss Mercantile Society held its Monthly Meeting on Wednesday, December 9th. As announced in the columns of this journal the Society was fortunate in securing the services of no less an authority than Professor E. Allison Peers of Liverpool University who addressed the Society on "Spain To-day and The Civil War."

Until very recently the subject formed the burning question of European politics and only receded into the background when the swift moving current events in this country focussed all attention on a problem nearer home. Despite this fact and the vagaries of the weather a large number of members and friends of the Society were present when Mr. A. Steinhmann, President, introduced the lecturer to the audience, among whom was Dr. Cl. Rezzonico, First Secretary of Legation.

The lecturer immediately gained the undivided attention by some witty remarks which made one almost forget that he was going to speak on a subject embracing all the horrors which defy all those known to history.

The lecturer said that during something like twenty years he had visited Spain, each annual stay being three to four months, when it was a Monarchy and later as a Republic, touching different parts of the country. He expressed the view that by going to a country time after time one got to know more of it than the people living there, the same as one noticed the changes of a friend whom one met only occasionally and the ravages time had wrought upon him. He said that what he was going to relate was not an expert view on the political situation but merely his personal opinion of a country by a man who loved Spain and the Spanish people very much indeed. He mentioned he did not wish to harrow the feelings of the audience by the most dreadful things which were happening in the Civil War.

He went on to trace the causes which led up to that unparalleled strife in modern history. He said the Spaniard was as brave as a lion and as obstinate as a mule when fighting in defence of an ideal. He never wanted to fight to any extent for material gain but if he believed a thing to be right there was no stopping him, there was no intermediate colour to black and white. He continued that not everybody was fighting because he wanted to fight but the majority believed their side was right and peace, happiness and prosperity could not be restored unless their side won. It was this awful tenacity which made them fight for nothing less than the extermination of the other party. They were unable to see a middle point of view, to find formulae or a compromise. Another idiosyncrasy of the Spanish character was that he was a great individualist, neither willing to combine nor to collaborate. These were the underlying reasons for the Civil War in a country which despite its modern institutions only had a twentieth century veneer on an antiquated past, for the possession of a modern system of technical inventions did not make a country civilised. For a very long time, for at least one hundred years, Spain was ruled by see-saw governments, one coming in and the other going out, one spending most of the time in undoing what the other had done. In Spain not only did the Cabinet Ministers change but also all the permanent officials and the whole of the Civil Service, the pendulum swinging from left to right.

In 1923 General Primo de Rivera believed he could stop the swinging of the pendulum. It stopped on the right and remained there for seven and a half years until the moment he resigned. There were no elections for about seven years and then the Government went out of office and the King also left. The Spanish Republic came into being in 1931 and there was a strong swing of the pendulum to the left. In 1933 the Right Government came in to undo what the Left Government had done. In 1936 the Left came in again and took in not only the Communists but also the Anarchists and the Syndicalists and swept the board to carry out a reform much more drastic than anything Spain had seen. It started with such a state of chaos that after four months the leader of the Conservative Party pointed out that during that time 210 churches were burnt down, 353 strikes took place, of which 110 were general strikes and 250 political murders were perpetrated with no one brought to justice. That was a golden opportunity for all parties to come together and to admit that they all realised the truth but did not agree as to the reasons. But Spain was not a country where the leaders got together and first and foremost restored order. The Prime Minister admitted then completely and tranquilly the figures quoted but put the blame on the opposition who had started the trouble. From that moment onwards there was no hope left, for Spain, said the lecturer, had to go on to fight it out to the bitter end. Precisely one month later the Civil War began to rage in that country. Those then were the immediate causes of the Spanish conflict which demanded close reasoning

if one wanted to understand what was going to happen next.

Professor Peers then went on to show a series of most exquisite slides, many from his personal collection, depicting more vividly the subject than words could describe. He began with a number of picturesque scenes and landscapes, showing the countryside with its natural beauty, the glorious architecture and monuments of the past. He continued by giving short biographies of the ex-King Alfonso, the great sportsman with the perfect line, the Republican President Alcalá Zamora with the "plebeian" salary of £40,000 a year and a yearly grant of £50,000 for entertainment. He "lasted" 44 years and (fortunately for him) was away when the Civil War started and no doubt would end his days in Paris, like many other great Spaniards.

The lecturer then proceeded to give pictures of the War with descriptions of the atrocities of the "civilising mission," the siege of the historical Alcazar with its unequalled cellars.

Next were slides of the warfare in towns and plains alike, fertile with palm trees and olive groves or flat and barren country, devoid even of trees, where warfare became hazardous. We saw Granada, Toledo, Madrid, Barcelona, Irun (better "Ruin"), Majorca, San Sebastian, the University City of Madrid, which was larger than that of Paris, the destruction of that recent effort of a country which wished to rise to the level of European civilisation was particularly sad. There were pictures of devastated cities showing the havoc of aerial bombardments. He showed women militia as well as Moorish soldiers of whose ancestry the Spaniards were so proud.

The lecturer did not think that any good could come from a victory of either side, that there would be no compromise and that the pendulum would continue to swing in one direction more than another and peace and prosperity would not return to Spain until there was a sufficient number of reasonable people. There would have to be something like a Fifty Years Plan, lasting a complete generation, until both sides and all parties were willing to adopt a programme of moderate reform and the abolition of risings and counterrevolutions. Then they could again follow their vocation in the vineyards, the olive groves and tend their oxen and be ordinarily sociable.

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He said by virtue of their great vitality the Spaniards managed in former times to extract themselves from similar situations and in a not too distant future Spain would start building up for herself a new prosperity; that the sun had not set on Spain but that it was the beginning of a new and glorious sunrise.

Vociferous cheers concluded the lecture. Several questions were asked which the lecturer answered in a masterly manner. The President expressed the Society's cordial thanks to Professor Peers and this concluded an evening "par excellence."

W.B.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE EIGER.

By C. F. MEADE.
The Field.

One of the most deplorable of Alpine accidents which have occurred this year was the disaster which befell the climbers who attempted to ascend the north face of the Eiger. It ranked as such if only on account of the infatuated rashness of the young men who laid down their lives so needlessly in carrying out this desperate enterprise. The story of the persistent attempts at rescue made by heroic guides deserves telling.

The four assailants of the Eiger left the Kleine Scheidegg on Saturday, July 18th. Two were Austrian and two Bavarian. One of the latter had already had a fall of 120ft. during a preliminary reconnaissance in which he owed his immunity merely to chance and to the excellence of his rope. (The party were competing for the Olympic medal awarded for the most important feat of climbing during the year.)

On the first day, a Saturday, they made rapid progress in spite of the bad weather, which caused streams of snow and water to flow down the face. They succeeded in circumventing the formidable cliff named the Rote Fluh, which was overhanging, glazed with ice and swept with falling stones. They passed the night at a height of about 10,500 ft.

Next day, Sunday, during a momentary break in the bad weather, they were observed through telescopes from Grindelwald ascending an ice-slope and securing themselves to a *piton* (a ringed metal peg hammered into the rock). On Monday, also, they were observed, at first advancing and subsequently descending. They had reached a height of nearly 11,000ft. before turning back. It was almost identically the point reached by the two Germans who perished in the attempt of 1935. Again, on Tuesday, the fourth day of the fatal journey, they were seen halted, one of them apparently with a head wound. They were attempting unsuccessfully to return by reascending the rocks which they had descended with the help of *pitons* when circumventing the Rote Fluh.

Meanwhile a railway ganger had heard their cries for help and seen them through an opening in the wall of the tunnel of the Jungfrau Railway that ascends inside the Eiger. He gave the alarm, and four guides arrived by special train — Adolf and Christian Rubi, Hans Schlunegger and Arnold Glatthard — all men in the very front rank of their profession. The four of them at once climbed out through the opening in the wall of the tunnel, and began the desperate task of traversing the face of the precipice to get to the four climbers.

As the latter found it impossible to climb up the rocks that they had descended at the Rote Fluh on their way up, the only alternative was to fix a rope and swarm straight down it over the overhanging precipice. The first man attempted to do this, but found that there was not enough rope for the purpose, so the second man, above him, had to take off the rope in order to pay out more of it. In doing this he slipped and fell into the terrible depths of the precipice overlooking Grindelwald.

Some loose coils of the rope, dislodged by his fall, lashed themselves like a whip round the second man and instantly strangled him, at the same time hurling the third man against the rock and mortally injuring him. A youth called Kurz was the sole survivor, and shouted down to the guides that he was now alone, linked to two dead companions, and with one arm useless from frost-bite. Volleys of stones and masses of snow raked the precipice repeatedly. Glatthard narrowly escaped destruction, and the guides crept on towards the precipice to which Kurz was clinging, but now night came on, and they were obliged to retreat, Kurz declaring that he could not hold out for another day.

On Wednesday, the fifth day, the guides recommenced the struggle, but it had become evident that Kurz was too far up for them to reach, so he was asked to try to use his axe to free himself from the rope linking him to the dead body nearest to him. With incredible fortitude and perseverance he eventually succeeded, and the body narrowly missed sweeping the guides down with it in its flight into the abyss. Then three terrible hours passed while the crippled Kurz heroically contrived to knot the ends of the rope

and lower it to the guides so that he could draw up pitons and implements which he could fix so as to enable the guides to lower him from below on a sort of pulley.

Kurz's will power and courage seemed inexhaustible. At one moment a snow avalanche swept over the whole party, and later a huge stone narrowly missed striking Schlunegger. Yet now success seemed almost within reach, for Glatthard, standing on Rubi's head and held against the precipice by Rubi's arms, could almost touch Kurz's feet with the tip of an axe. It was at this moment that the culminating disaster supervened: the knots tied by Kurz in the rope jammed in the ring that he had fixed higher up the mountain so that the unfortunate man was caught in a trap and was unable to lower himself any further. His indomitable courage and that of the guides could no longer avail, but his sufferings were at length at an end, for in making the final effort his strength gave out, and he breathed his last at half-past eleven in the morning of the fifth day.

(To be continued).

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