

City Swiss Club

Objektyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1944)**

Heft 1029

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

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CITY SWISS CLUB.

Monthly Meeting.

After a three months' interval the City Swiss Club has resumed its activities.

The customary monthly meeting was held at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1, on Tuesday, September 26th. The attendance proved to be nearly a record, as no less than 140 members were present.

This highly satisfactory figure was undoubtedly due to two facts, firstly that most of the members were anxious to get again in close contact with each other, and secondly that our recently appointed Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger had kindly consented to honour the Club by his presence, thus giving the members an opportunity of making his acquaintance.

The relations in the past, between the diplomatic representative of our country, and the City Swiss Club have always been very cordial, and the members, by their large attendance, unmistakably intimated that these relations should remain on the same friendly footing.

Previous to the meeting, M. Bon, President of the City Swiss Club, cordially welcomed the Minister, expressing his, and the members pleasure, at having Monsieur Ruegger as a guest, and wishing him every success in his responsible mission.

He also extended greetings to Colonel de Watteville, Delegate of the International Red Cross in London.

The President informed the members that since they had met the last time, the Club had lost three of its members through illness, namely: M. Paul Hilfiker, M. A. Moser, M. R. E. Strub; he paid a warm tribute (in Schwyzerdütsch) to the memory of the late Paul Hilfiker, former Chancellor of the Swiss Legation, whose high qualities were esteemed by all who knew him. The company paid a silent tribute to those three deceased members.

The President also referred to the departure of Monsieur W. Thurnheer, former Swiss Minister in London, wishing him a speedy and complete recovery from his illness, and thanking him for all he had done for our country during the tenure of his high office.

M. Louis Chapuis, a former President of the City Swiss Club was asked to second the proposal of the Committee to nominate Monsieur Paul Ruegger as "Président Honoraire" of the Club, which proposal received the enthusiastic approval of the members, and the Swiss Minister was elected with acclamation. Monsieur W. Thurnheer was elected Honorary Vice-President.

The Minister then rose amidst the cheers of the company present, he said:

My dear Countrymen,

The President and the Committee, as well as all the members of the City Swiss Club, have not only done me a great honour, they have also afforded me a real and deeply felt pleasure in letting me join them this evening. For those whose lot it is to represent and to defend the interests of our country abroad—in periods which are not particularly apt to lighten our burden—gatherings of our colonies and of their various associations are not only welcome diversions, they are far more than that. They bring with them something of the steady flow of patriotic feeling that streams, with unparalleled force, from our distant mountain heights. And these

meetings offer further a gratefully acknowledged occasion of reviving, again and again, the right spirit which can only spring up, for all of us, from the midst of our Swiss communities at home and abroad; the spirit in which our daily task must be fulfilled. After having had, during a long spell of years, the privilege of living amidst Swiss colonies in countries bordering our own, — colonies many of which have proudly contributed to the standing and reputation of the motherland — I sincerely welcome the opportunity that, for the time being, is offered me; the opportunity of leading the life and sharing the troubles and the hopes of the Swiss in the United Kingdom and in the British Empire. Already the conviction has grown on me that our Swiss colony in London is striving to be second to none, amongst the Swiss colonies abroad, not only in its achievements, but, above all, in its fundamental loyalties to our own country. And in the scheme of things appertaining to our colony, the City Swiss Club has its place too clearly marked for it to be necessary to dwell upon it at length.

May I thank our Chairman for having expressed his eloquent and fervent tribute, first of all, to my predecessor and colleague, Minister Walter Thurnheer, to whom our thoughts rightly go out this evening, whose efforts and strenuous work are unforgotten, and whom we all wish, with all our heart, a speedy and full recovery. I should also like, on the occasion of one of my first meetings with an important part of our Colony, to express, personally as well as for the Swiss Legation in Great-Britain, the most grateful thoughts to my deeply respected friend and former chief, Minister Charles Paravicini, whose wise and excellent activity, on behalf of the good understanding between Switzerland and England has, so fortunately left deep and beneficial traces in every field of the relations between the two countries.

I also thank the Chairman for his tribute to the memory of Vice-Consul Paul Hilfiker, whose great qualities of character and of conscience I had the privilege of appreciating elsewhere many years ago—when the last world war was drawing to a close—and whose premature departure has dealt a severe blow to us all.

I am grateful to our Chairman for having said his touching words of farewell to our Vice-Consul in Paul Hilfiker's language. There are, indeed, occasions on which it is necessary to revert to one of the threefold or fourfold native accents of our country. I venture to express the hope that, in the meetings of our Swiss colony, we may, in the future, perhaps do so even more frequently than this is, apparently, the case.

And now I should like to address a few words to the younger members of our community, to those, who, in part and in some ways, though all may not have realised it, may have suffered more than those of our older generation from the consequences of a long interruption of the formerly regular intercourse with our own country. We all feel, I think, that the ranks of our young Swiss in Great Britain need strengthening and we know that you all will welcome the infusion of new blood, which, we hope, may eventually come to you from Switzerland after the reestablishment of a normal situation. At present and in a near future, it is yet chiefly up to you to

keep up the traditions of your Swiss country—which has not forgotten you. In every walk of life, and whatever the branch of your activity may be, you can, through the quality of your work, through your staunch adherence to the principles which have made our country, be worthy messengers of Switzerland. Never regret to be or to remain what you are. The motto "*civis helveticus sum*" is indeed a title of glory.

Throughout generations and centuries, Swiss citizens abroad have been able to contribute to the moral capital of our country. Many an example can be given to show that this contribution was all the greater, the more the links between a Swiss and his native land remained close and firm. Before the beginning of this war, more than 400,000 Swiss, were living abroad, more than the tenth part of the population of our country. It may be anticipated that, when peace holds again her sway, many new members of our young generation now under arms, in workshops, factories and the farms at home will seek a livelihood abroad. Our motherland can no more afford to lose this essential portion of the country's blood in a generation or two, than an ancient vigorous tree can afford to see some of its vital branches severed. The traditional staunchness of the Swiss Colonies abroad offers however, all guarantees that these communities will never cease to fulfil their essential function in the scheme of our national life.

There is, besides, every reason for the Swiss citizen abroad to be proud of his own country. I need not revert to what you all know about our country's history. Let us simply look at Switzerland's achievements during the present war. The neutrality of our country is not abstentionism. As a political doctrine, Swiss neutrality—the only permanent neutrality which has its firm foundations in the law of Nations—is, as regards its spiritual contents, second to no other political credo in international life. This neutrality alone enabled our country to fulfil to the uttermost its freely chosen duty of helping suffering humanity. Were it not for this active neutrality, shielded and guarded, as it is by our country in arms, all the Red Cross organisations throughout the world would decline and wither, no help could have been brought to countless victims of the war, an infinitely greater number of lives would have been lost. And when once the history of Switzerland during the world war can be written and all is said, it may perhaps be shown that a number of lives, greater perhaps than the population of our country, has directly or indirectly been supported or even saved, from anguish or from starvation, by activities which could only be developed on our soil. This aspect alone is surely enough—though much more remains to be done—to ensure to Switzerland and her citizens the recognition which has never been withheld in this great country which offers us its generous hospitality.

Et maintenant, chers compatriotes, laissez-moi revenir, selon le programme que je me suis tracé au début de ce toast, à l'usage d'une de nos langues nationales. Aux Suisses de Londres, réunis sous les auspices du City Swiss Club, je voudrais dire un seul mot: Merci. Je remercie ceux de ma génération et les plus anciens, ceux auxquels nous sommes redevables de l'organisation des rouages de notre communauté suisse, d'avoir toujours su pour-

suivre leur tâche, d'avoir su subir, avec cette tranquillité et courageuse patience qui caractérise partout la vieille garde—si précieuse et indispensable—, de nos colonies, les rigueurs inattendues de la longue séparation de notre pays, des rigueurs d'autant plus sensibles que le Suisse, plus que les citoyens d'autres pays peut-être, vit, jour par jour, mois par mois, année par année, du contact constant avec la mère-patrie. Je les remercie de n'avoir jamais cessé d'étudier les moyens de faire continuer la vie sociale de notre colonie, d'avoir exploré les avenues de l'avenir, d'avoir réussi à faire vivre les institutions de notre communauté, en un mot, d'avoir *persévéré*.

La récompense de leur labeur long et patient, est proche. Bientôt, nous l'espérons, les portes s'ouvriront qui nous permettront de communiquer plus librement avec notre patrie et de sentir le souffle de l'air natal. C'est un événement d'une portée considérable et que nous saluons comme tel. Au moment où nous nous sentons plus rapprochés du terme de l'épreuve que la destinée a imposée à notre colonie comme à des communautés plus vastes, je suis heureux d'exprimer aux Suisses de Londres la pensée constante de notre pays, en même temps que le salut du Haut Conseil Fédéral.

Avec Vous, je lève mon verre à la santé du Président et des membres du City Swiss Club et au bonheur et à la prospérité de toute la Colonie Suisse de Londres.

The address of the Minister was heartily applauded.

M. W. Deutsch, the Poet Laureate of the Swiss Colony then recited the following Ode to the Minister:

TO OUR NEW MINISTER

You might think our welcome is belated
But, for the recent stress in time and space,
Each of us longed to meet you, face to face,
Wishing that modestly you should be fêted.

We all rejoice to see you nominated
To this great land, to this historic place;
Let your distinguished presence aid and grace
All the good aims, by which we're animated.

For years you held Swiss prestige high in Rome,
Until the Red Cross claimed your gifts at home,
Adding new lustre to an honoured name.

God grant that, when this Armageddon cease,
With faith re-kindled to a sacred flame,
You'll lead us back to sanity and PEACE.

After a short interval the business part of the meeting was declared open. Three new members were elected. It was decided that the next monthly meeting should be held on October 24th, at the Dorchester Hotel and that it should be conducted as a "Bierabig".

Monsieur le Colonel de Watteville, then addressed the Meeting, which came to a close shortly before 9 p.m.

ST.

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