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FAREWELL DINNER

to

MONSIEUR L. A. GIRARDET

Swiss Minister to Czechoslovakia

on THURSDAY, MAY, 3rd, 1945

at the DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

In the Chair: A. BON, President of the City Swiss Club.

*"Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been.
A sound which makes us linger; yet farewell!"*

Here today, gone tomorrow,—such is the life of a diplomat. No sooner does one learn to know and grow genuinely fond of one another, than one has to part company.

Members of the Swiss Colony in London assembled in large numbers on Thursday, May 3rd, at the Dorchester Hotel, to bid farewell and God speed to Monsieur L. A. Girardet, late Counsellor at the Swiss Legation in London, and recently appointed Minister to Czechoslovakia.

The departure of Monsieur Girardet, will leave a deep gap behind, we have been the richer for his dwelling amongst us and we shall be the poorer for his leaving us.

For the last five and a half years of war he has shared with us danger and anxiety; calm and collected in many a crisis, steadfast in the darkest hour, helpful to all who needed help, such were his qualities, which endeared him to all those who were in constant and personal touch with him.

It is therefore not surprising, that many of the leading personalities in the Swiss Colony honoured Monsieur Girardet by their presence.

A fact, well worth mentioning is, that no less than three Swiss Ministers were present at this gathering, namely Monsieur Paul Ruegger, Swiss Minister in London, Monsieur de Pury, Swiss Minister accredited to the Dutch Government, and the guest of honour. I do not think that this has ever happened before in the history of our colony.

Amongst his former colleagues of the Legation who attended were: Messieurs de Rham, Kessler, de Graffenried, Hunziker, Perret, Rappard, Barbey and Mordasini. The Special Division of the Legation was represented by Messieurs Moretti, Huber, Poulin, de Dardel, Caillat, Burckhardt, Staufer, Zobrist, Tissot and Spagnapani.

The following Swiss Societies were represented either by their respective Presidents or members of their committee: City Swiss Club, Secours Mutuels, Swiss Mercantile Society, Fonds de Secours, Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Unione Ticinese, Swiss Choral Society, Union Helvetia and Swiss Club.

Those present also included: Mr. E. Steiner, Chairman of the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems, Dr. de Wolff, Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation, Professor Geigy, from the Tropical Institute, Dr. Lindt, Chief of the Swiss Home Front, Mr. Gottfried Keller, Dr. Kullmann, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, League of Nations, Colonel de Watteville, Delegate of the International Red Cross and Captain Chapuis, son of M. Louis Chapuis, a

former President of the City Swiss Club, who was recently liberated from a prisoner of war camp in Germany.

Duly fortified by various cocktails, the company adjourned from the reception room to the Banqueting Hall. The next hour was then spent in the enjoyment of an excellent dinner, consisting of Soupe à l'Oignon, Faisan à la mode Bernoise, Pommes Persillées, Rocher de Glacé Hélène, Brioche Grillée and Café.

Towards the end of the dinner, the customary toasts to H.M. the King and Switzerland were proposed by the Chairman, Mr. A. Bon, and honoured by the company.

One of the principal features at a Farewell party are undoubtedly the speeches. On this occasion they were all very short and sweet, so as not to prolong the agony of the recipient; being given extempore, no notes were forthcoming and in giving a short resumé they will, I am afraid lose some of the personal "cachet," for which I tender my humble apologies to the respective orators.

Mr. A. Bon, Chairman of this gathering, and President of the City Swiss Club opened the oratorical proceedings. He announced that his address would be given in "Schwyzerdütsch," which, judging from the applause following this announcement, met with the approval of the audience.

The speaker began by offering a hearty welcome to the many distinguished visitors present and, referring to the guest of honour, Monsieur Girardet, enumerated the services he had rendered during the last seven years of his stay in London, to our country in particular and to the Swiss colony in general, first as Commercial Attaché and then as Counsellor of Legation and Chargé d'Affaires.

Mr. Bon related particularly the spadework which had been done by our Guest of Honour, in relation to the various commercial and economic missions which were sent from Switzerland during the war, under the Chairmanship and collaboration of Minister Sulzer, Professor Rappard and Dr. Keller. "If they have met with success," he said "it was due in no small measure to the preparatory work of Monsieur Girardet, and for this alone we owe him our deep gratitude."

He also referred to the responsible position which Monsieur Girardet held as Chargé d'Affaires during the illness and absence of our former Minister, Monsieur Walter Thurnheer.

Mr. Bon, terminated his address by wishing Monsieur Girardet success in his new and important post in Prague, using the parting words: "Vergelts Gott, Viel Glück und Viel Erfolg."

The next speaker was Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, who expressed, on behalf of his Society, his regrets on the departure of Monsieur Girardet, thanking him for the many services rendered, wishing him "Happy journey, happy stay and happy return!"

Mr. Suter was followed by Mr. J. J. Boos, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, who, in his turn thanked Monsieur Girardet, on behalf of the S.M.S. for the support which he and his Society had received during the last seven years of close collaboration.

He also mentioned the fruitful work carried out by Monsieur Girardet on behalf and for the benefit of Swiss Business men in this country, not forgetting the

work he has done for the "Basler Mustermesse" and the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems.

Mr. Boos paid a compliment to Monsieur Girardet for having successfully represented, on many occasions, the Minister at some of the numerous functions of the seventeen different Swiss Societies and Institutions in London, a duty, which he must have at times found rather irksome, but which he never shirked, even during the most fateful days of the war. Mr. Boos finished his speech by invoking God's blessing on his new mission and labour.

Colonel de Watteville, Delegate of the International Red Cross in Geneva thanked Monsieur Girardet for the always willing help he had given to the International Red Cross on many occasions, a help which, at times greatly facilitated their task. He expressed the hope that this great humanitarian organisation might count in future on his support.

Dr. Kullmann, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, League of Nations, associated himself with the previous speaker in thanking Monsieur Girardet for the assistance and support he had, at all times, received from Monsieur Girardet. He enumerated shortly the great services our country had rendered in the humanitarian sphere during the last five years, services which no other country could have given. No less than 29,000 people had found a permanent or temporary refuge in Switzerland. He ended his excellent and moving address by saying that he hoped to meet Monsieur Girardet one of these days in his new field of activity.

Dr. Kullmann was followed by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, who, to begin with, gave a *resumé* of the career of Monsieur Girardet, saying that he joined the Federal Political Department in 1917. At one time he occupied the post of private secretary to the late Federal Councillor Gustave Ador. A year later (1918) Monsieur Girardet was promoted Secretary of Legation, and later for some time was attached to the International Red Cross in Geneva.

In 1924 he acted as *Chargé d'Affaires* in Warsaw. From 1925-1927 Monsieur Girardet held the post of First Secretary at the Swiss Legation in Washington, after which he spent two years in Berne, where he was attached to the commercial division of the "Département fédéral de l'économie public." In 1929 he joined the well-known Engineering works of Adolphe Saurer in Arbon in the capacity of general secretary, and later on was appointed Sub-Manager of this concern, which he left in 1938 to re-enter the diplomatic service.

In that year he was transferred to the Swiss Legation in London, where he was put in charge of the commercial division. In 1943 Monsieur Girardet was promoted Counsellor of Legation and from November 1943 to August 1944 acted as *Chargé d'Affaires* at the Legation in London.

The Minister said that Monsieur Girardet had rendered faithful services to three Swiss Ministers in London. He mentioned that during some of the blackest days of the war he had guided with exceptional ability the affairs of the Legation.

Monsieur Ruegger then sprang a surprise on the gathering, stating that Monsieur Girardet was one of the chief collaborators in wording the Geneva Convention of July 1929, a great and responsible task for

which he was eminently fitted owing to his legal training.

In conclusion, the Minister wished him great success in his new post, which he termed an observation post and "une poste de patrouille avancée."

And now came the turn of the guest of honour, who on rising received a hearty ovation from the entire gathering.

Greatly moved, he thanked the various speakers for the many eulogizing remarks they had made about him, which were somehow bewildering. He said that he would rather not say "adieu" at all.

"The Swiss Colony, and especially the City Swiss Club," he said, "have shown me what collaboration and 'esprit Fédéral' can achieve; I shall always remember those years I have spent amongst you, memories which I shall treasure and take with me to my new post."

He terminated his address with the words: "Adieu, Merci et au revoir!"

On resuming his seat he was once more heartily cheered.

Thus ended one of our memorable functions. We who are bidding Monsieur Girardet farewell will miss his "bewitching" smile and his charming personality. He has truly been one of us, never ruffled, always the "diplomat par excellence." The task before him is not an easy one, but we are glad that he has been chosen to a post where we are sure he will render further valuable services to our country. We in our turn say: "Merci, bonne chance et au revoir!"

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