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## SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

## 57th Anniversary Celebration.

After a lapse of some six years, the Society resumed its social functions with a Luncheon and Dance at the Dorchester Hotel on Saturday, October 20th.

About 180 members and friends were present to celebrate the Society's 57th Anniversary. It was a real peace reunion which brought together many whom the war had driven asunder.

Following an excellent luncheon and the customary loyal toasts, the President, Mr. J. J. Boos, extended a cordial welcome to the guests. He regretted the absence of the Swiss Minister but was pleased that Dr. Escher, Chargé d'Affaires, was able to attend in his stead. There were also present M. de Graffenreid, Commercial Attaché, M. Mordasini, Vice-Consul, M. Staehelin, of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade (O.S.E.C.), the representatives of the Churches, the sister Societies and the Press.

The President then addressed the gathering in the following terms :—

" It is usual for the President on this occasion to give a résumé of the past year's activities, to announce successes at the College, Sports, etc. Alas, I cannot give such a report, but I feel sure you would want me to say a few words on the past and our plans for the future.

Much has happened since our last peace time banquet, our Golden Jubilee in 1938, and little did I foresee that 1945 would still see me as your President, having gone through the greatest war in history. Let us thank God that He has spared us and kept Switzerland safe, and let us resolve to do our share in whatever station of life we are, to help in the reconstruction of a better world.

With the closing of the College in November 1939, our activities had to be centred in our resident members. We held regular meetings, had excellent lectures by eminent Swiss and British personalities and discussed amongst ourselves many up to date questions and problems.

The heavy air activities in 1940/1 and again in 1944 curtailed our activities slightly, but when the lull set in again brought members together in interesting talks and friendly meetings. In 1944 we were able to arrange Evening Classes in Russian, French and Italian, the lectures and classes being continued this year.

During the war, the various Civil Defence duties called many of our members out, but only a few became leaders, such as Mr. Staehelin and Mr. Grob; from the Home Guard we were barred, possibly because the only Swiss Home Guard over here was such a good shot that he carried away all prizes and honours of his company.

Most of us, however, were busy fire watching. Many stories could and are being told about adventures and incidents. Even Mr. Pfaendler had to keep watch at Swiss House and it was to his regret that members of the Council and Committee did not have to share it with him, because of his wish to make a foursome for a game of cards.

Swiss House, indeed, had many narrow escapes from total destruction and we owe much to our vigilant Bossert, who was always there.

In spite of these six years of war and difficulties, the position of the S.M.S. to-day is sound. Our standing in the Colony is as high as ever, our financial status (so our Bankers and Trustees say) is good and our membership has been steady. The dangerous times have welded us more closely together and the creation of the Ladies Group has also helped to bring the fairer members of our Society into the picture.

Swiss House is less than half its pre-war size. It has served during these war years as a centre of useful Swiss activities, as the many affiliated Societies and Committees in the Colony will testify. The heavy expense in keeping and maintaining Swiss House has not been in vain and we are grateful for the support received from the Authorities at home and our friends in Switzerland and here.

## THE FUTURE.

Our first task will be to renew our contact with the S.K.V. at home. Censorship, lack of postal and travelling facilities cut us off for almost six years, but we have not been forgotten at home and they are as anxious as we are to work with and for us again.

The S.K.V. has now over 50,000 members and about 5,000 juniors, its standing in the economic and general life of the country is assured and together with the affiliated societies of employees (Banking, Insurance, Travellers and Union Helvetia) in the V.S.A., approximately 120,000 employees in some form of commerce are united, not for political ends but for the furtherance of the status of their

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members, always taking a middle, lawful way, to attain the goal worked for.

Our special position here in London has not enabled us in the past to help much in those directions, but let us hope that when in a few years hence we shall (and we all hope will) see a free flow of trade, there will also be a freer flow of employees and workmen from country to country. I know the S.K.V. and the Authorities are pressing and working hard to this end, although conditions today are far from encouraging; we shall have to be patient a little longer.

The second, and perhaps equally important task of the S.K.V., is the education of its junior members. Nearly 4,000 young Swiss boys and girls are yearly attending the S.K.V. schools; nearly four million Frs. are spent annually on these classes. The desire to learn and perfect their English is as strong as ever in our young *commerçants*, and rightly so, because English more than ever will be the world language.

As long ago as early May, the British Authorities were approached through the Swiss Minister to grant us permission to re-open our College and to grant entry permits to our students. I am glad to say, about two weeks ago, this permit was received and your Council is taking every step to start, if on a reduced scale, as early as possible.

We are aware of the great difficulties which have to be overcome, repairs and alterations at Swiss House, Teachers, Administration, Boarding Houses, etc., but the educational matters are in the hands of Mr. W. Meier, who in pre-war years was our efficient and energetic Chairman of the Education Committee, and I know his keenness is as great as ever. He will be assisted by a willing band of helpers.

The new lease of Swiss House is in the capable hands of our Trustee, Mr. De Brunner, who, with Mr. Krucker's help, will also endeavour to get the repairs at Swiss House done as quickly as possible.

We shall certainly also need the help of all our friends and donors, also the Swiss Legation and our own members to assist whenever and wherever they can.

The Council has asked me to go to Switzerland so that our plans and efforts can be co-ordinated with those of the Authorities at home, and when we have our plans ready we shall inform you. It will probably be March or later before we can make a start, but I do hope when we meet again next year for our anniversary, your then President will be able to announce not only full working of the College but also great successes by our students and a healthy, prosperous state of the S.M.S."

The Chairman's speech was warmly applauded and Dr. Escher then briefly addressed the assembly. He mentioned that it was not his first contact with the S.M.S., having himself been a student at the College many years ago. He said all present were aware of the importance of the College to young Swiss who wanted to come over to learn English. The Legation were inundated nowadays with enquiries from hundreds who had not been able to leave their country during the war years. The possibility of finding employment for them here was remote, at least for some years to come. It was, therefore, all the more appreciated that the College could be reopened. Another problem, he

stated, was the lack of new blood in our Colonies abroad. This applied here probably more than in many other countries. Of the countries he had passed through, there was hardly one where the second generation so easily assimilated itself and whilst this was no doubt a compliment to the country we were living in, because it showed that their ideals and way of living corresponded very much to our own, it engendered a certain danger to our Swiss community. Through young dual nationals becoming English, the Colony was apt to dwindle unless, of course, there was a steady influx of new arrivals from the home country. He was pleased in looking round to find many of the younger generation present who would be able to keep the flag flying for many years to come and there was therefore no need to take too gloomy a view, particularly as many of the older ones were also still very good average.

Dr. Escher's words were very cordially applauded. He was followed by M. de Cintra, Hon. Treasurer of the City Swiss Club, who replied on behalf of the guests. He regretted the unavoidable absence of Colonel Bon, who had very much looked forward to being present.

Mr. de Cintra, stressed the excellent relations existing between the S.M.S., the City Swiss Club and the various other Swiss Societies, all of whom were working with the same goal in view, namely a closer understanding between this country and Switzerland and to further Swiss trade here. He then paid a personal tribute to the President, who had guided the S.M.S. through many dark years and who had never failed to do his utmost in difficult circumstances.

It was Mr. A. C. Stahelin's pleasant task to honour three veteran members, who, he said, were outstanding examples of steadfastness and fidelity, men who had supported our Society through fair days and foul. They were Mr. J. F. Maeder, member since September 1891, and Messrs. H. Buser and W. E. Gattiker, both of whom joined in May 1895. Unfortunately, Mr. Buser, for reasons of health, was unable to attend. Mr. Stahelin expressed to them the Society's heartfelt thanks for their loyal support, in recognition of which the golden badge of the S.K.V. had been presented by the Central Committee of the association. Amidst tremendous applause, the President then pinned the golden insignia on the lapels of the two veterans present.

Mr. Gattiker, on behalf of the veterans, expressed appreciation for the honour bestowed upon them.

After a short interval, the couples took the floor to the strains of the Dorchester Dance Band. Mr. L. W. Krucker, who acted as M.C., saw to it that there was no lack of variety and both young and old thoroughly enjoyed themselves, despite the fact that for many it must have been the first dance in years.

Whilst a welcome tea was being served, Miss M. Unden delighted the gathering with some piano recitals. She was followed by Mr. F. von Bergen, who, accompanied by his daughter on the piano, created a homely atmosphere with yodelling songs. This interlude was very much appreciated by all present and the artistes were given a great ovation.

The dancing was then resumed, with Mr. A. Gandon providing popular waltz tunes on his accordion. All too soon the happy afternoon passed away and brought to an end one of the most enjoyable functions held for many a long day. May it be the augury of a brighter era.

W.B.