

# The Swiss minister at Birmingham

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## THE SWISS MINISTER AT BIRMINGHAM.

On the occasion of his visit to the Swiss Colony in Birmingham, our Minister and Madame de Torrenté were invited to a civic Luncheon given by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham, Alderman and Mrs. J. C. Burman, in the Banqueting Room at the Council House, on Saturday, November 20th, 1948. The Minister's party drove up to the imposing building in the centre of Birmingham which houses the principal administrative offices of this, the second city of Great Britain, and were most heartily received by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress in the Lord Mayor's private Parlour. The procession continued through a magnificently decorated staircase to the official reception rooms where the Lord Mayor and our Minister and their Ladies received together many notables. The party then proceeded to the Banqueting Room which glowed in the colours of great masses of chrysanthemums.

After Lunch, in a simple but warm-hearted speech, the Lord Mayor welcomed the distinguished visitor, and gave a short picture to the assembled guests of our Minister's brilliant career and then referred to the pleasure it was to the City of Birmingham to welcome the representative of Switzerland, that country, which had done so much to mitigate the often crushing burden of the human race. He referred in particular to the activities from which also Birmingham as a city had benefited, such as our compatriot's M. Kunzle's great hearted action of enabling successive groups of 25 children from Birmingham to go to Davos in order to recuperate in the clean mountain air and benefit from the healthy food and he referred also further to the action of the Don Suisse and the furniture which was sent from Switzerland to inhabitants of the City of Birmingham who had, through no fault of their own, suffered great distress.

The Minister thanked the Lord Mayor for his very kind words and said:—

" My Lord Mayor,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have done me a great honour, my Lord Mayor, in extending this very kind invitation to my wife and myself on the occasion of my visit to the Swiss Club of Birmingham and I thank you most sincerely for the very kind words you spoke about my country.

Although this is my first visit to your illustrious town, Birmingham is, of course, not new to me. Who has not seen — or heard of — the famous Hall-mark: " Made in Birmingham." True, these words were not always used in an exactly flattering sense. There is, however, another version, of which you may well be proud. A Swiss engineer recently discussed with me a particularly intricate and difficult piece of work, which, as he had thought, could not be made anywhere in the world. He had, however, just been to Birmingham and ended his explanation with the joyous words: " But they *can* make it in Birmingham." That simple statement " They *can* make it in Birmingham " was a spontaneous tribute to the creative genius of your town and the native skill of your craftsmen.

Creative effort and craftsmanship are concepts which are rated highly in my country too. As you know, Switzerland is small. Four and a half million people of diverse languages and creeds and cultures, situate in the middle of Europe, without raw materials, without colonies, without seaports and with very

limited manpower. Severe handicaps in the modern battle for existence. Imbued with a spirit of independence, which would not let them be submerged in any of their mighty neighbours, they abandoned early in the XVI. century all aspirations to become a dominating military power and started to put their own house in order. It was a slow and painful process, but culminated in the Constitution of 1848 which, in all its essential points, is still in force to-day. This will to be free and vassal to none, which for centuries has filled the minds and hearts of my countrymen, made them realize that if they desired to stand on their own feet, two things were essential: unceasing creative effort and honest-to-goodness craftsmanship. These two, above all, enable us to keep some measure of independence in the economic struggle of the modern world. It is the *quality* of our goods and not their price, which sells them in the markets of the world and so provides us with the necessary funds to buy the food and raw material which we have to import from abroad.

We have no Shakespeare and no Goethe, we have no Michelangelo, no Rembrandt, no Beethoven — outstanding genius is rare in Switzerland. But creative effort and craftsmanship have built our industries as we know them to-day. They have made our watches, our lace, our machine tools, our Diesel engines, our chemical and electrical industry and — let us not forget it — our cheese.

These " twin-stars " of creativeness and craftsmanship reign also here, in your great town. They cannot live for long without each other. They presuppose honest endeavour and pride in achievement. They bring us self-respect and so lead to the respect of

## Switzerland ?

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Me redt au Schwyzerdütsch, " Wäutsch sowieso, Ticines no lieber und Romantsch wen's derno emol Digsionär git."

others. The world has changed beyond all recognition since either the name of Birmingham was first entered in the doomsday book or since Switzerland came into being. This world, this human society, as we know it to-day, will change again and again. But I cannot believe that either creative effort or craftsmanship will ever be "derated" from their high places in the scale of human values.

As long as they are linked to moral values, they will open ever wider fields of new adventures for our youths. As long as they do so exist, we have no right to talk — or even think — about the end of our civilization."

### SWISS CLUB, BIRMINGHAM.

A full report of the Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, which took place at the Midland Hotel in Birmingham, on Saturday, November 20th, 1948, will appear in our next issue.

### OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, December 17th, 1948, (one issue only, owing to Xmas holidays).

We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: Max Kimché, E. Steiner, L. Gempeler, F. Imhoff, G. Schwartz, Th. Erb, E. Ulmann, J. H. Speich, R. Weist, F. Kibiger, G. Ferrari, Mrs. F. L. Guggenheim, P. Bessire, O. Frei, R. Ryf, Miss B. Sandmeyer, E. Winzeler, John Zimmermann, J. A. Donat, O. Gambazzi, A. F. Clemence, J. H. Buchi.



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### SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The Society held its Monthly Meeting on Monday, November 8th, at Swiss House. It is a long established custom in the S.M.S. to meet on the second Wednesday of the month and the change of date was made to enable the delegates from Switzerland, who attended the 60th anniversary celebration to be present. This unfortunately prevented some members from being able to attend but it was, nevertheless, a fairly numerous gathering, including a sprinkling of the fair sex.

Apart from the distinguished visitors from Switzerland, the meeting was attended by Monsieur P. Clottu, Labour Counsellor at the Swiss Legation, and Dr. H. W. Egli, President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. They were all extended a cordial welcome by the Chairman, Mr. W. Meier, who announced that in view of the special nature of the meeting, the usual business agenda would be dispensed with.

A message of greetings and best wishes from the parent association was conveyed to the assembly by the Central President, Mr. K. Strickler. He expressed thanks for the reception accorded to the delegates and underlined the friendly relations between the Central Authorities and the London Section. He said that the activities here were necessarily confined to education, employment service and the social side. This, however, in no way diminished the importance of the S.M.S. as an outpost of Swiss commerce and industry. He reiterated that the association were proud of the Section in London, the largest abroad, and particularly



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