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DINNER AND BALL — SWISS CLUB, BIRMINGHAM

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20th, 1948

What we in London call an Annual Banquet and Ball is called in Birmingham, quite modestly, a "Dinner and Dance"; in the end it comes to the same thing, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Now, I am not going to pretend that things are done differently, or even better in the Provinces than in London. A Banquet or Dinner and Dance is a Banquet or Dinner and Dance wherever it takes place and therefore I have, alas, to report it in almost the same wording, which has been published under my *nom de plume* for more years than I care to remember. Events in the Swiss Colony have in recent months been rather prolific and wearily I go on repeating, what I have written in "hundreds" of previous reports.

My decision to accept the kind invitation of the Swiss Club Birmingham caused some of my friends to remark that I ought to have "enough" by now. After having sat and eaten through innumerable Banquets and Luncheons, danced with a score of lovely Ladies, shed tears over farewell parties, slept half way through cinema shows, listened to lectures trying to look intellectual, shouted myself hoarse at football and ice-hockey matches, looked gloomy at funerals and cheerful at weddings, sympathised with old age, feeling as old as they, told the youngsters of the Colony that I drank and felt every day "Younger(s)" and spent a small fortune on aspirin tablets and taxis, etc. I have certainly swallowed, during the last twenty years, a few gallons of *consommé*, finished off at least half a full sized poultry farm, depleted some of the Scottish salmon streams, ate more grass and salad than an average sized "vache", had ice-cream enough to freeze a whole consignment of Canterbury lamb, drank cocktails, wines spirits, and occasionally water (the latter principally early the next morning).

Why then did I decide to travel to the Midlands? I will tell you, because I had such happy memories of former visits. Our Birmingham compatriots are a happy and hospitable body, deeply imbued with a sincere attachment to our country, and amongst them I count many of my best friends, whom I was anxious to see again after nearly ten years.

After this prologue, I will now commence to give my readers an account of this happy gathering at the Midland Hotel.

It started with a reception by the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, who had at their side, the President of the Swiss Club, Mr. O. Wuest and Madame Wuest, Monsieur and Madame E. W. Bircher of the Swiss Legation, and Monsieur and Madame Schaerer, Swiss Consul at Liverpool.

Whilst the reception was being held the company fortified itself with cocktails and this afforded me an opportunity to shake hands with many of my old friends such as Mr. C. Kunzle, who was accompanied by his charming daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. G. Ellison, Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Brunner, Mr. and Mrs. P. A. Duvoisin, Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Kloetzli, Mr. and Mrs. Oehrli, the efficient Manager of the Midland Hotel, Mr. and Mrs. Gattiker, from Bristol, Mr. and Mrs. Bouverat, and many others.

The gathering was also honoured by the presence of the Lord Mayor of the City of Birmingham, Alderman J. C. Burman and Mrs. Burman. I understand that this is the first time that a Lord Mayor of the town has honoured the Club with his company, whilst in office.

At the close of the reception, the company adjourned to the Banqueting Hall which was lavishly decorated with beautiful flowers and Swiss and English flags giving the Hall a pleasant and festive appearance. During the dinner, which consisted of "Filets de Sole Bonne Femme," Dinde rotie Farcie aux Marrons, Celery Braisé, Pomme Parisienne, Bombe Tutti-Frutti, Petit Fours, Café, a small orchestra, under the able and untiring leadership of Mr. Bird, played a pot-pourri of Swiss Folk tunes; amongst them "Von ferne sei herzlich gegrüßet," "O Bluemli mi," "Als ich fern dir war, o Helvetia"; perhaps the "Schweizerpsalm" could have been left out, it somehow did not go, with "Bombe Tutti-Frutti", as strictly speaking the diners ought to have risen from their seats.

At the conclusion of the excellent Fare for which the Management of the Midland Hotel is to be congratulated, the customary toasts were given, by the President, Mr. O. Wuest. After the toast to H.M. The King, the toast to the "New Prince" was given amongst much cheering, followed by the toast "Switzerland."

The first address of the evening was given by the Chairman, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, the Swiss

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Minister, who on rising from his "Fauteuil Presidenciel" received a hearty ovation.

He said:

"The invitation, which you, Mr. Chairman, and the Swiss Club of Birmingham have extended to my wife and myself was welcome indeed. We both accepted it with particular pleasure, because it has given us the chance to meet you all and especially those amongst you who have been established and settled for so many years in this great centre of creative British effort.

When a new Minister takes over from his predecessor, it is one of his duties to make contact with his compatriots who live in the foreign land and to bring them greetings from home. This is a pleasurable task. And although I cannot be a Santa Claus and bring you all a tangible token of the fact that the Government and the people at home are thinking of you, I can assure you that your invitation and my visit were discussed in Berne and that I have accepted not only for personal reasons, but with the full consent and approval of our Government.

It is gratifying to see, on this, the 56th anniversary of your Club, such a numerous gathering of compatriots and friends. I feel it appropriate to the occasion to express to you all our thanks for your good stewardship. All of us, who live abroad are to some extent ambassadors of our country. On our work, our integrity and our helpfulness depends to a considerable extent the reputation which Switzerland enjoys in other lands. It is easy to think, when one is far away from home, that it does not matter what we do and how we behave. But you all know, as well as I do, that it is just the small items of daily life, the friendships we make, the services we render, which in the end build, piece by piece, the general character, which is ascribed to the people as a whole.

Swiss people have always had a good reputation for industry, for honesty and for straight dealing and this reputation is mainly due to our behaviour as individuals. The personal contacts, the mass of small, daily, often trivial experiences are as weighty a factor in international relations as conferences and treaties and agreements. The human factor is and always will be of great importance, because it can forge bonds which overcome all obstacles and transcend all frontiers.

In this sense, my dear compatriots, you have done your share in building up the good name of Switzerland and I thank you all for your faithful stewardship.

Your Chairman has rightly asked me to be brief, so as not to deprive any of you of the joys of things to come. Let me, however, add one more word in support of such gatherings as this. Few of us who are abroad can, in these times, have all the contact we desire with our homeland. Even the richest are subject to a limited allowance of Swiss francs. It is, therefore, all the more necessary that opportunities be found where we can recreate to some extent the atmosphere from which we came, where we can meet our

fellow countrymen and — women and talk and dream of home. This is your Club's aim. Your officers, your president and secretary, and all the members who support them, deserve our warmest thanks for arranging this, and I hope many other equally enjoyable evenings.

It is the sincere wish of all of us that the Swiss Club of Birmingham may flourish and so continue, to do its share towards the maintenance, not only of this bond of friendship amongst ourselves, but also of the good relationship which has always existed between Great Britain and our country.

Before I close, I feel a special mention is due to two members of your Colony, who, not only in words but through their action, have added to the good repute of our country. I refer first to Mr. Christian Künzle, who, in a truly christian spirit, has put his property at Davos at the disposal of the children of Birmingham, and second to your President and his good lady, who hold open house and with unfailing courtesy and cheer welcome the young compatriots who are new arrivals in this country. The Swiss Colony of Birmingham may well be proud to count such men amongst its members."

The excellent oration of the Minister was much applauded.

The President of the Swiss Club then very briefly replied, in fact he was so short, that no sooner I was ready to make copious notes, he had finished, and I wish that some of his colleagues in London would copy him, it would save me a lot of work, and they would earn undying thanks from the Ladies.

Mr. Wuest expressed his pleasure, that after a lapse of ten fateful years the Society had been able to



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resume their annual function. He thanked the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, and the Lord Mayor of Birmingham for having honoured this function by their presence which was greatly appreciated by the members.

The address of the congenial President of the Swiss Club Birmingham was greatly enjoyed.

He was followed by Mr. F. E. Brunner, who paid a warm tribute to the City of Birmingham, which he said has become to many of our countrymen a second home, and enabled them to make many friends; he continued by saying "we really feel at home in this great city."

Mr. Brunner mentioned that the Club highly appreciated the presence of its Lord and Lady Mayoress and handed over to Alderman Burman a cheque to be used for some charity in commemoration of this conspicuous event. (*Applause.*)

Amongst enthusiastic cheering the Lord Mayor replied by thanking the last speaker for the nice things he said about the City of Birmingham, offering thanks for the donation made.

He expressed his pleasure for having been given an opportunity to spend an evening together with the Swiss Colony in Birmingham, which he said (*amongst laughter*) is a well-behaved community; hoping that some of his countrymen would behave as well as the Swiss do when in foreign countries. "The Swiss", he said, "have many things in common, amongst them the same tune of their National Anthems. When you leave your lovely country for a rather "hard" country you bring with you your culture, skill and brain. We are proud to have you in Birmingham and the last

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thing I would wish you to do is to drop your nationality."

In conclusion the Lord Mayor expressed his pleasure at having had an opportunity to welcome the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté at the Council House that same morning, and offered his help to the Swiss community whenever same should be required.

Long applause greeted the address of the Lord Mayor.

The toast to the guests was entrusted to the President, who expressed his pleasure in welcoming the following guests:— The Swiss Minister and Madame Henry de Torrenté, the Lord Mayor and Lord Mayoress, Alderman and Mrs. J. C. Burman, Monsieur and Madame E. W. Bircher, Mr. and Mrs. Schaerer, Swiss Consul in Liverpool, Mr. R. de Cintra, President of the City Swiss Club, London, and Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer."

Mr. Wuest also greeted many of the older members of the Colony, amongst them Mr. Kunzle, Mr. and Mrs. Ellison, Mr. and Mrs. Fincher, Mr. and Mrs. Amphlet and others.

The task to say "Thank You" for the hospitable generosity extended to the guests, was put into the hands of Mr. R. de Cintra, President of the City Swiss Club, London, who very wittily accomplished his mission.

The last speaker was Mr. Schaerer, Swiss Consul in Liverpool, who spoke in French, English and Schwyzerdütsch. He extended a hearty welcome to the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté in the name of the Consulate and the Swiss living in the Consular District, and voiced his pleasure at seeing the Lord

Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham present, which he termed as a great honour, and thanked them for all they and the City of Birmingham are doing for the well-being of the Swiss Colony.

Before the official part of the evening came to a close, the President thanked the members of the Committee for their painstaking work in organising this function, and Mr. Oerli, Manager of the Midland Hotel, for his efficient collaboration.

The company then adjourned to the Ball Room, where Mr. Bird's band enticingly summoned the revellers on to the dance floor. Our compatriots from the Midlands dance as enthusiastically as those from the Metropolis, and what endurance they have, old and modern dances followed each other in bewildering pace, and if I sank into my bed almost in a state of exhaustion I have to blame the bewitching Ladies of the Swiss Club Birmingham.

To make it a real Swiss affair there was some yodelling too, and as far as I could see the performers enjoyed it.

Sharply at midnight the most enjoyable function came to an end.

The next day a party of about thirty people were taken in private cars to Stratford-on-Avon, where a very good Luncheon was served at the Shakespeare Hotel, during which informal speeches were given by the Swiss Minister, Mr. O. Wuest, President of the Swiss Club Birmingham, and Mr. C. Kunzle.

And so once again came to a close a very happy and carefree gathering which has left an unforgettable memory in all those who were privileged to attend.

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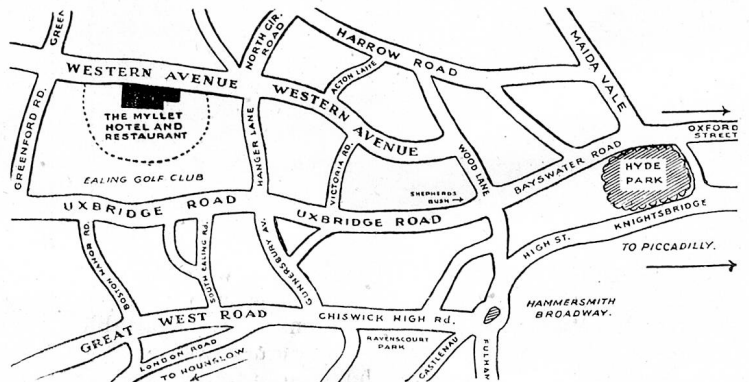
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