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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Dinner and Dance

on

FRIDAY, 27th JANUARY, 1950

at

THE TROCADERO RESTAURANT, PICCADILLY, W.I

In the Chair: W. MEIER, President.

One of my old friends, and a prominent member of the Swiss Mercantile Society, wrote, some time ago, in this paper, when mentioning my twenty years connection with the "Swiss Observer", that the S.M.S. was my first love. This is, I am afraid, only partly true. In fact, I have been in love, on and off, at various stages in my life, 'though I will admit, only twice "really seriously", once when I said, on a solemn occasion, — "I will" — and secondly when I was courting the Society.

These two "love matches" I have kept up with constancy, and it was, therefore, a real pleasure to me, to spend an agreeable evening in the company of both my "serious loves".

It is thirty-five years ago, when I entered the Swiss Mercantile Society in London, over which I had the honour to preside in 1917/18, and since then I have had the pleasure of being present at their Golden and Diamond Jubilees; during all these years we have remained the best of friends.

An appreciable number of old members were present amongst the nearly 200 participants, and to name only one, there was my good old friend, Louis Chapuis, who, still hale and hearty, entered the Society 51 years ago.

If some of us have, for a great number of years been affectionately connected with the Swiss Mercantile Society, it is only fair to say, that the Society has returned this affection very generously.

* * *

Previous to a very excellent dinner provided by the Trocadero Restaurant — under the special care of our old friend, Mr. Delaloye, Manager — cocktails were served in one of the ante-rooms of the Restaurant, and where the President and Mrs. Meier received the company. A special Bar, was reserved for the official guests, who did not have to pay for their drinks, and there, strangely enough, I found myself in the company of a large number of distinguished personalities.

Madame de Torrenté, the charming wife of our Minister, on arrival, was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers, and so, I believe, was Mrs. Meier, the equally charming wife of the President. I am not quite sure of this presentation, and I may have made a *faux pas*. If it was not presented, it was a lamentable oversight, and to atone for it, I will, on the next occasion, present her personally, out of my own garden

with a bunch of flowers. (But it must be in the summer, as I only grow Brussels sprouts and cabbages in the winter.)

Suddenly like a thunderbolt from out of the blue, the stentorian voice of Mr. J. Schneider, who, very efficiently acted as Toast Master, announced that dinner was served, and the company adjourned to the sumptuously decorated Banqueting Hall.

The Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, accompanied by the President and Mrs. Meier, received a hearty ovation on taking their seats.

During the dinner, Swiss melodies were played by an excellent orchestra, some of which were rendered at a tremendous speed, no doubt, the band was anxious to get it over as soon as possible.

Towards the end of the dinner, the President of the Society, proposed the Toasts to H.M. The King and the President of the Swiss Confederation and the Federal Council. Then the speeches began and I am glad to say, they were not too long and were interesting.

Mr. W. Meier, President, welcomed the members, guests and the ladies by saying :

"It is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you all to this our 61st Annual Dinner and Dance. Perhaps it is wrong to call it the 61st, because the series was interrupted by the war. Although we have had several most enjoyable Annual Luncheons at the Dorchester Hotel during recent years, our last Annual Dinner and Dance was held in this room in October 1938, when we also celebrated our 50th Anniversary.

There have been many changes since then. I am not thinking of the Menu, which then ran into eight courses — we were apt to eat too much on those occasions and we have every reason to congratulate the Trocadero, under the competent management of our compatriot Mr. Delaloye, for the excellent fare provided.

No, I am thinking of many old and loyal friends of the Swiss Mercantile Society who have since passed away. Our guest of honour was then Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, and there was Mr. P. F. Boehringer, that remarkable personality of the Swiss Colony and founder of the "Swiss Observer," and Paul Hilfiker, Henri Senn, Mrs. Lunghi-Rezzonico and Oscar Gambazzi.

We treasure the memory of those far off days, but it is also nice to see so many old and new friends assembled here to-night, including one who joined the S.M.S. more than 51 years ago and has followed its fortunes very closely ever since — you have already guessed — he is Mr. Louis Chapuis.

As you know, our Dinner has been postponed from October, because in that month the Unione Ticinese had their 75th Jubilee. By doing so we have now the pleasure of the company not only of the Swiss Minister, but also of Madame de Torrenté. I would like to thank them both for accepting our invitation and to assure them that the personal interest they are taking in the Swiss Colony is greatly appreciated by us all.

If I were to follow precedent I would now have to give you a survey of the Society's activities during the last twelve months, but I need hardly do so, because almost all of you, including some of our distinguished guests have played a part in them. — The Swiss Minister himself came to Swiss House when Monsieur de Graffenreid gave us an address on "Swiss Trade Problems". Unfortunately, Monsieur and Madame de Graffenreid are unable to be with us this evening. Dr. Umbrecht, who is our guest with Mrs. Umbrecht, accompanied the members of the Swiss Parliamentary Delegation when they visited our College last May. To Monsieur P. Clottu we owe a special debt, because we caused him a lot of extra work. The members of the Swiss Mercantile Society considered that the terms of the Swiss Old Age and Dependents' Insurance Scheme did not answer our special needs and we asked Monsieur Clottu to forward our resolution and report to Berne where, we hope, they will one day be favourably considered. So we are glad to have him with us and we regret that Madame Clottu is absent in Switzerland.

We are also pleased to see Colonel and Mrs. Rieser. Col. Rieser attended our Monthly Meeting earlier this month when we had a lecture by the Chief of Naval Information of the Royal Navy.

All these events have been reported in the Swiss Observer by our conscientious press reporter and honorary secretary, M. W. Burren, and I should like to thank Mr. Stauffer, who is our guest with Mrs. Stauffer, for allowing us space so liberally and also for reporting on this Dinner — as we all hope he will — in his own congenial and inimitable manner. While speaking about the press, we are pleased to entertain Mr. Theodor Haller, Representative of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, and Mrs. Haller. He gave us a very interesting talk on his special sphere of interest some months ago.

On these occasions we always ask our Trustees to be our guests, as a mark of appreciation for their support, but I regret to say that Mr. G. E. De Brunner, a member of over 52 years, is at present in Switzerland on holiday, while Mr. E. Steiner was prevented from being with us. Nor have we on this occasion any delegates from our parent association in Switzerland. On the other hand, we did not want to miss the opportunity of inviting some members of the Swiss Trade Delegation now in London to come to our Dinner, and I am pleased to welcome Dr. E. Frey, Secretary of the Vorort of the Schweizerischer Handels- und Industrie-Verein, and Dr. Böhi, Director of the Swiss Compensation Office.

As usual, we have asked our friends of the Swiss

Churches, Mr. and Mrs. Blum, Mr. Reverdin (Mrs. Reverdin has been unable to come) and Mr. Lanfranchi. I should like to thank them for what they are doing for many of us and our families, and may I add that they wish to be the friends of all, if only we will go, each in his proper place, to hear the message they have to tell us.

And finally, for we know that our Society can only prosper in a community of friendly neighbourliness, we have invited to join our company, representatives of several Swiss Societies. The Swiss Benevolent Society, which is doing such valuable work in our Colony, is represented here by its President, Colonel Anton Bon; the Unione Ticinese — now 75 years old — by its President, Mr. C. Berti, accompanied by Mrs. Berti. The City Swiss Club is represented by its Honorary Treasurer, Mr. R. Dupraz, and we have Dr. Egli, President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, and the most recently elected President of the "Schweizerbund", Mr. W. Schneeberger, and his wife. Several others were prevented from being here.

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, if I may add just one or two things about the S.M.S. — Our finances are in a sound position, for which our auditor and chartered accountant, Mr. Huxley, who is present, can vouch. — Our College is full to capacity. In fact, we are seriously short of space, and until we can take possession of the buildings adjoining Swiss House, which we held before the war, and which will revert to us in 1953, we shall have to refuse many more applica-



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cants. Most of these then have to go to other schools, where they do not, of course, get the benefit of the subsidy which is paid to us by the Swiss Federal Authorities. I am pleased to say a number of students are present here and so is Mr. C. Slade, accompanied by Mrs. Slade, and Mr. Lockyer, members of the Teaching Staff. Mr. Slade took over the functions of Mr. Marfurt when he was elected English Master at the Kantonsschule Lucerne and returned to Switzerland.

I have to mention with regret that we have just lost the Chairman of our Education Committee in Mr. E. A. Hueni, who has returned to Switzerland on a business appointment. Following so soon upon the loss of two of his predecessors, Mr. O. Roethlisberger and Mr. K. E. Ammann, who returned to Switzerland in identical circumstances and all within three years, you will realize that this means a serious loss of talent for the Society, which it is difficult to replace, so long as there is no influx of new members.

Mr. Pfaundler, who has now been Manager of our Employment Department for forty years, would have no difficulty in placing any new members arriving from Switzerland in suitable business employment.

Fortunately our Society still has many members willing to carry on the work of the Council and the various Committees. I cannot mention them all, but I would single out Mr. J. J. Boos, my predecessor, and Mr. A. C. Stahelin, who was President when I joined the Society 22 years ago, who have often been my advisors, and Mr. L. W. Krucker, our Vice-President, who spends a lot of his time with the management of Swiss House and is responsible for most of the arrangements this evening, and finally, Mr. J. J. Schneider, our Secretary and the valiant keeper of Swiss House, Mr. A. Bossert.

This, Ladies and Gentlemen, brings me to my last task, that is to deal with the ladies, we have, of course, lady members in our Society and we cannot, therefore, exclude ladies from our gatherings . . . but we do not want to exclude the ladies. On the contrary, all our ladies are very dear to us, and without them we men should be sitting here with very long faces.

So I would ask all the male members of the Swiss Mercantile Society to raise their glasses and drink with me to our Guests and our Ladies."

Loud applause greeted the words of the vivacious President of the Society.

He was followed by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur

Henry de Torrenté, who on rising, was accorded a cordial reception, he said :

" It always is a pleasure to spend an evening with the Swiss Mercantile Society of London, that very active group of compatriots who, especially through their school, render inestimable service to our youth in these days of restricted emigration. You, like few others of our national groups abroad, have made it your particular care and job to enable the coming generation to catch at least a glimpse of increased understanding of what is going on outside the borders of our country. We all give thanks to you for this.

As you know full well, the times are difficult. Great attempts are made to our left and right to widen the basis of human intercourse and reduce the barriers, which separate the countries of the world. For Europe, the chief instrument in this respect is the O.E.E.O. and much is to be hoped for from its labours. It is, however, only fair to state that our country too proclaims the policy of " The open door ". We too were forced in self-defence and as a war-time measure, to build some walls around our country. Progressively since 1945 however, we have opened our gates and to-day over 90% of our trade is free from all restrictions. But we have given more than lip-service; we have gone ahead and transformed policy into reality. This policy of " The open door " applies to-day not only to our imports but equally to tourism and all our financial transactions. It is therefore to be hoped that other countries will follow the example set by us and it is equally to be hoped that on the basis of an equitable reciprocity no further sacrifices will be demanded and no further discriminations will be made against us.

In the interest of Europe as a whole, if not the world, countries which manage to stand on their own feet should be given the right to an orderly development of their economic life, in accordance with those principles which the greater part of this world proclaims as worth while and essential.

It is not my intention, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, to turn my words into a discourse or a lecture on the economic life of Switzerland. There is an old Chinese proverb which says : " A man without a smile must not open a shop ". If economics are the business side of our life, it is just as important that we do not forget the smile.

I have been your guest on many occasions when we talked " shop ", but to-night is the time for smiles. Just when the sky is grey and the future indiscernible,

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it is wise to have a gathering of this sort, where friends can meet, where we can dance and laugh — where we can smile.

I wish you all a happy evening and ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to raise your glasses and drink to the Swiss Mercantile Society, its trustees, its council and its members, coupled with the wish that, however dark the sky may be, they may not forget to smile."

The address of the Minister was acknowledged with long and loud applause.

The task to say "THANK YOU!", on behalf of the guests, was entrusted to Colonel Anton Bon, President of the Swiss Benevolent Society. He referred in his address to the conditions regarding the emigration of young Swiss people which prevailed many years ago, when no permit for accepting work was necessary, no passports required or other irksome restrictions in force. He sympathised with our young people at home, who were anxious and yet unable to come to this country not only to learn the language but also to study English culture and customs.

In concluding, Colonel Bon expressed the hope, that these barriers, so detrimental to our youngsters, might in the near future be relaxed or lifted so as to allow a free and unfettered intercourse between friendly nations. (Applause.)

The official part of the evening thus came to an end, and dancing followed almost immediately.

Contrary to former occasions, no Cabaret entertainment was given, and I am sure hardly anybody missed it. We have seen, at some of the functions of Swiss Societies, most harrowing scenes enacted, when young ladies were thrown about "all over the place" and ladies of riper age, gave a generous exhibition of some parts of their anatomy which could have remained better hidden, or a would be Primadonna "who shrieked the house down."

In these days, when none wants to grow old, and one can get pills, tablets and injections for keeping perpetual youth, when even Grandma' wears shorts, instead of a bonnet, everybody, young and old enjoys a "hop", so why waste time? Judging from all the smiling faces everyone indeed enjoyed the many dances, new and ancient ones, which followed each other in rapid succession.

During one of the intervals, it was whispered around, that the following members of the Swiss Trade Delegation, then in this country, had arrived: Mr. H. Schaffner, Head of the Delegation, Mr. H. Bühler, of the Commercial Section of the Swiss Foreign Office, Mr. Pfenninger, Director of the Swiss National Bank and Professor W. Hunziker, Director of the "Schweizer Verkehrs Verband". They were warmly greeted by the members of the Society, and their appearance, on the eve of their departure for Switzerland, was a compliment to the Swiss Mercantile Society, which was much appreciated.

On Big Ben striking midnight, this very successful evening came to a close, an evening during which old friendships were renewed and new one's made, and there remains the pleasant duty for me to congratulate the organisers of this function for the efficient arrangements they had made, and to thank the Swiss Mercantile Society for their generous hospitality and for the very pleasant hours spent amongst congenial friends.

ST.

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