

City Swiss Club

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1953)**

Heft 1214

PDF erstellt am: **27.04.2024**

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CITY SWISS CLUB.

"Soirée Familiale" on Tuesday, September 29th, 1953, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

I never exactly know when the social season of the London Colony begins or when it ends, there seems to me "always something going on."

The "Soirée Familiale" of the City Swiss Club, was, however, the first larger function of this Society held for some time, and I must congratulate the committee for having, on this occasion, asked the Ladies to be present.

When some time ago, the participation of Ladies at the Club's functions was discussed, it met with some opposition, I can not remember now for what reason, but I am glad to see, that none-the-less this time the Ladies have been asked, and why not?; if they are good enough to cook our dinner, and darn our socks, they are also good enough to share our pleasures. (This statement ought to fetch a few new Lady subscribers to the "Swiss Observer").

The appeal made by the committee to the members to attend this function met with a ready response, nearly 150 persons of both sexes being present. The guest of honour this time was Lady Mary N. Kelly, wife of Sir David Kelly, G.C.M.G., M.C., at one time H.M. British Minister in Berne, and from 1949/51, British Ambassador in Moscow.

Going back some thirty-six years of membership of the Club, I can not recall that a Lady has ever lectured to the City Swiss Club; I may be wrong, and I am open to correction. We are getting on nicely, and perhaps one day, Swiss women at home may get the vote, although I have been repeatedly told, only lately by a number of them, that they do not want it. (This statement will brood trouble for me, but it is based on facts).

* * *

After a dinner, which once more came fully up to expectation, and is by now almost taken as a matter of course, though nevertheless greatly appreciated, and the customary toasts having been proposed to H.M. the Queen, and Switzerland, the President Mr. R. Pfenninger, introduced the guests, extending, in particular, a hearty welcome to Lady Kelly, who, he said, is not only known as the wife of a famous Diplomat, but also as an author of no mean repute.

The President voiced his pleasure at having the company of the Swiss Chargé d'Affaires, and Madame Bernath, Monsieur and Madame Umbricht, to whom he wished, on behalf of the members, God speed on their approaching departure, Monsieur et Madame Ansermot, and Monsieur and Madame Huber of the Swiss Legation.

Lady Kelly, on rising to address the company, received a hearty ovation; in her introduction she mentioned, that during her stay in the Federal Capital, previous to the last war, she managed to learn a little "Bärendütsch", which, knowing, that this is more than some of our compatriots can boast of or care to learn, pleased me mightily.

The speaker had chosen as her subject "My Impressions of Russia", which nowadays can always claim to be of interest, in view of the fact, that news from behind the iron curtain filters through very sparingly.

For obvious reasons her *exposé* dealt principally with general observations, which were perhaps already known to many from her books or from articles which have appeared from time to time in the daily Press, and leaving out any references to personalities, who are at present in the lime light in the Soviet Union.

Lady Kelly mentioned, that she was no expert on the doctrines of Karl Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and that her knowledge of Russia was principally confined to European Russia, owing to the fact that the movements of foreign Diplomats were somewhat restricted.

Space unfortunately does not allow me to give a running commentary on this very interesting address so charmingly presented. Lady Kelly stressed the point, however, how difficult it was, not only for foreigners, but also for Russians themselves to move freely from place to place, even the shortest journey required a permit from the authorities. Visitors, allowed by the Russian Government, are always accompanied by officials.

She painted a dismal picture of the terrible shortage of dwelling accommodation especially in the large industrial cities, saying that it was not uncommon to find as much as fifteen people housed in one room. Accommodation was allotted according to the work applicants were performing. On the other hand privileged persons might have a five roomed flat for themselves only. Absentism was rigorously penalised either by heavy fines, imprisonment or deportation to

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labour camps, the latter providing cheap labour for the State.

"The aim of the present rulers of Soviet Russia is to build up an industrial State to compete with the United States of America", the speaker said, "private enterprise does not exist, and the heavy industries enjoy predominance over all other industries."

Amusements of all kinds are strictly under control, and used in the main for propaganda purposes, especially cinemas. Dealing with the religious question, the speaker said, that although about forty Greek Orthodox churches alone were open for public worship in Moscow, the priests were not allowed to teach dogma or explain the rites, and were mostly frequented by elderly people.

Lady Kelly dealt at some length with the cost of living in Russia, mentioning, that although, strictly speaking, there was no rationing, the latter existed owing to the exorbitant prices charged for the barest necessities. All shops are State owned, thus cutting out any kind of competition.

Referring to the Russian ballet, the speaker said, that this was on a scale unknown to the West. Performances last for four hours and more. Admission to these performances can only be gained by official permits, and preference is given to people who, in one way or another, are doing useful work for the State. Loudspeakers everywhere, by day and by night, are broadcasting, apart from news, propaganda items.

Hotel accommodation throughout the cities which she was able to visit was difficult to obtain, and the washing accommodation was of a very primitive nature. Barring two long distance trains, for which reservation has to be made at least a fortnight in advance, no dining cars are provided, and food for a journey must be taken, though a plentiful supply of tea is always obtainable.

Lady Kelly concluded her address by voicing her love for the Russian people.

After a short discussion, and before closing the Meeting, the President warmly thanked the speaker for her address, and the loud applause which followed was proof, how much her interesting *exposé* had been appreciated.

ST.

LONDON SWISS PHILATELIC SOCIETY.

The Society resumed its monthly meetings, after the summer recess, on September 25th, with an auction of members Duplicates. Whether it was the return of M. Micheal Waloff to the rostrum, or the wish to renew old friendships after a three month vacation, it is hard to say, but there was a bumper attendance. Judging by the sounds of merriment which came from the meeting room, there were more laughter to the minute than are to be heard in any London theatre at the present time; however the 100 lots which came under the hammer were disposed of in record time. The meeting on October 30th is the annual Ladies Night, when Mrs. Doris Green F.R.P.S.L. is to be the guest of the evening.

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