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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Dinner and Dance

on

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20th, 1954

at

THE DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.I.

In the Chair : W. MEIER, President

To write year in year out reports of the various social functions held in the Colony, becomes a very difficult job, because they are all more or less run on similar lines.

If, therefore, such reports become at times rather tedious, no blame should be attached to the reporter, who would gladly strike a new note. For more than twenty years I have described hundreds of functions in these columns, and I must confess to report continuously the same thing, has become almost a nightmare to me, and yet, having as a guest accepted an always generous hospitality, I feel in honour bound to write something about it. After all, I have not been invited for the sake of my "beautiful eyes", but to keep an up-to-date record of what takes place in the Swiss Colony, for the benefit of a future chronicler.

All Banquets usually start with cocktails, which I believe are a profitable business for the respective Hotels or Restaurants, but it is also supposed to get the company in the right frame of mind, which, of course, is most important.

Then there are the speeches, which often vary little, some are long and not very exciting, others are "short and sweet". For years I have led a campaign in this paper to put the axe on speech-making, which in former years often took the best part of the evening, thus preventing the younger generation from enjoying the dancing, and I flatter myself, that I have to a great extent succeeded in my endeavours.

If I look back on the evening of the 20th of February, I can say that the Dinner and Dance of the Swiss Mercantile Society was an undeniable success, and the 160 members and guests who attended this festival will agree with me, that throughout the evening a happy atmosphere prevailed coupled with a lively spirit of congeniality which created a delightful relief from the present time which is so full of disappointments and evil forebodings.

This function started also with cocktails, and a reception by the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté and the President and Mrs. Meier, after which the company adjourned to the Banqueting Hall (Orchid Room) which was richly decorated with lovely flowers, and behind the Presidential Chair the Swiss banner and the Union Jack were displayed.

The entrance of the Swiss Minister and the President with their Ladies, the latter carrying beautiful bouquets of flowers which had previously been presented to them, gave rise to warm applause.

The dinner, comprising La Crème St. Germain aux croûtons, Le Filet de Sole Mornay, Le Poulet Nouveau Jardinière, Les Pommes Anna, La Pêche Orientale, Les Friandises, Le Café, was as usual, excellent.

After the customary toasts to H.M. the Queen, and Switzerland, the President, Mr. W. Meier, extended a hearty welcome to the following official guests: The Swiss Minister and Madame H. de Torrenté, Dr. A. Weitnauer, Counsellor of Legation, M. & Mme F. Ansermoz, Attaché Social, M. & Mme. Miesch, Secretary of Legation, M. and Mme. J. Huber, Consul, Lt.-Colonel and Mrs. Stuart Townend, Chairman Anglo-Swiss Society, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor, "Swiss Observer", Mr. and Mrs. Chas. W. Westcott, of the "Times" Football Club, Mr. and Mrs. F. Streit, Chairman of the Presidents Assembly, Rev. A. Lanfranchi, Pasteur and Mme. C. Reverdin, Pfarrer and Mrs. H. Spoerri. (Dr. E. M. Bircher, 1st Secretary of Legation, was unable to accept the invitation being in Switzerland.)

The President then gave a short *resumé* of the activities of the Society and the College, and voiced his pleasure at seeing so many old and young members present. "If the Swiss Mercantile Society has today achieved success", he said, "it is principally due to those men, who years ago were at the helm of the Society, and who in times of stress faithfully carried out their duties."

Mr. Meier also warmly greeted the Trustees with their Ladies, Messrs. W. R. Gamper, F. G. Sommer and G. Jenne, and thanked his immediate colleagues of the Council and the Committee for their most helpful collaboration. He terminated his address with a tribute to the Ladies which I consider was well deserved. If the evening was a success, it was in no small measure due to them. They looked, as always, beautiful and charming, and their happy, and I may say enticing smiles put everybody at ease. Various interpretations have been put on the initials S.M.S., and one of them is "Swiss Matrimonial Society",

not a bad one, and I am afraid, that if I had not already been "suited" and have been a young man, I might have fallen to their charms.

When the applause which greeted the President's address had subsided, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, gave the toast to the Swiss Mercantile Society, he said:

"It is always a pleasure for my wife and me to spend an evening amongst our friends. Naturally, the pleasure is considerably enhanced if at the same time one can congratulate them, give them a pat on the back and tell them what good boys and girls they have been.

You have just heard from your Chairman, that in this year you have not only enlarged your College building, but have also considerably increased the number of pupils and the number of teachers. It really looks as if, for some years at least, you will be free from worries.

I congratulate you, your Chairman, your Committee, your Head Master and your staff on this success. Nothing is more heartening than the knowledge that the Swiss Mercantile College is a growing, flourishing concern. This is no doubt due to the fact that your Committee and your teaching staff have great psychological understanding for the special requirements of Swiss youth. We at the Legation get many enquiries from pupils as well as parents about the best way to learn English; and very often we get also their comments on the various methods employed by the different schools. No need to stress that the marks which the Swiss Mercantile College obtains are exceedingly high. If you analyse the reasons you get rather an amusing, interesting picture. It shows that the success of the Swiss Mercantile College is chiefly due to the fact that the Head Master's stick is of exactly the right length. It must not be as long as the schoolmaster's stick in Switzerland, and yet it must be longer than the rather short ones usually employed by the English teachers. Mr. Slade is obviously an artist in discerning the right length for the Swiss. To keep the balance between the wishes for freedom from the pupils and the call for discipline and home work from the parents who still provide the money, is not easy. I think a great deal of the school's success is due to judicious solving of this problem.

May I, on this occasion, express one wish. More than half of the enquirers at the Legation state that they want to learn "commercial English". They are rather shocked when we tell them: "Forget it, and try to learn *good* English!" The newcomer to this country can not of course evaluate the horror and shivers which creep up one's back when you read a letter starting with: "Yours of even date received", nor do they appreciate how much the English classify a person by the style and language he uses. I know that your College share my view that there is only *one* English worth learning and that is *good* English. I wonder however whether through your good offices and your organisation it might not be possible to propagate the idea amongst the schools in Switzerland that "commercialese" is not a thing of beauty and that a business letter written in perfect style will in the long run draw bigger orders and build more lasting connections, because it is a token of that greater understanding of the Anglo-Saxon ways,

which alone can be the sound foundation of a frictionless relationship.

Before I sit down, there is one more point I have to mention. I want to say a special word of thanks to your Committee and especially to your Chairman and his good lady for the great willingness which all of you have shown over many years in furthering the cause of our Colony as a whole. Generously you have always put your services at the disposal of the London Swiss, have given shelter to innumerable Committee meetings and associations. Individually many of you have given much time and money to any efforts concerning our Colony. I do not know whether you have ever been thanked before for these innumerable services. You certainly have never asked for thanks. I would however be failing in my duty as the father of the Colony if I did not express on behalf of all of us a warm and sincere: "Thank you for all you have done".

And now, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, all that remains to me is to wish you a happy, cheerful and enjoyable evening."

After the conclusion of this short speech we witnessed a repetition of the enthusiasm which had marked the start of his address.

It is a usual thing to say "thank you" when you receive an invitation. This task to say *merci bien* on behalf of the guests was entrusted to Lt.-Colonel Townend, and I am sure no better choice could have been made. Not only is he an excellent speaker, but he is also "handsome" to look at. Having listened to a good many speeches at Swiss dinners, by our English friends, I was not surprised



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that he started off by saying what marvellous fellows we really are. This always goes down well, because it is flattering, and who does not, at times, appreciate a "tap on the back".

Amongst the many virtues which he credited the Swiss with, was the one, that we are a "sporty" nation, this indeed is a compliment coming from an Englishman, as after all, most sports started in this country; he said that almost everyone in Switzerland practices some sport of one kind or another, whilst here most people are doing the "watching".

Colonel Townend expressed the hope that once again the Olympic Games would be held in our country. He concluded his oration by asking us to let him know what was the secret of the prosperity which Switzerland enjoys. This is a tricky question to answer, it might easily be considered to be presumptuous, but I venture to give an answer by saying "hard work", and I hope he will not take it amiss or bear me any grudge for saying so, after all, "he asked for it."

This concluded the official part of the evening, and after a short interval dancing began, and it is only fair to pay a compliment to the orchestra, which not only played well, but with great tenacity.

At midnight this happy evening, full of gay laughter and good comradeship came to a close, and I feel sure that all those who took part left the Dorchester with the feeling of having passed a few enjoyable hours in congenial company.

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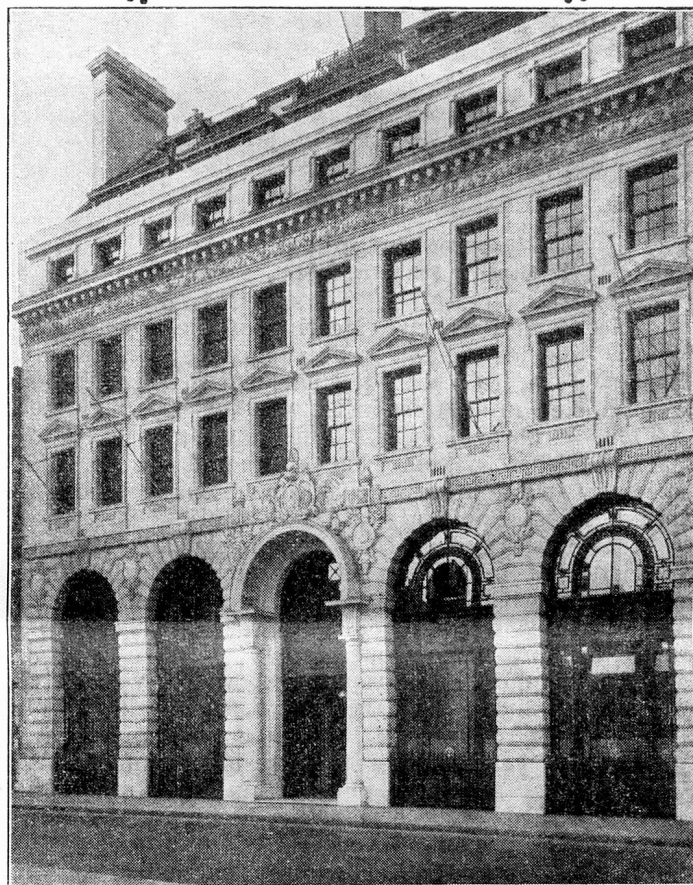


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