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# CITY SWISS CLUB

## Christmas Dinner & Farewell Party

to

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté,

on

Tuesday, December 14th, 1954,

at the

Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London, W.1



HENRY DE TORRENTE

In the Chair: R. PFENNINGER

President, City Swiss Club.

This year's Christmas Dinner of the City Swiss Club differed somewhat from former years, the reason being, that at the last moment it had to be changed to a "Farewell-Dinner". Thus its usual gaiety and exuberance suffered a little, as bidding farewell to someone who has endeared himself to a large community invariably casts a damper over the proceedings. This does not, of course, mean that the evening was a gloomy and sombre one, far from it, we listened to very interesting speeches, and, as usual, had an excellent dinner — who could remain gloomy and not rejoice in the company of Turkey, Christmas Pudding and Mince Pies?

There was unfortunately no Christmas Tree to kindle a real Xmas feeling, nor was there any mistletoe because this was, what is commonly known as a "Stag Party", and men do not kiss in the ordinary way.

Some disappointment had been voiced, that the Ladies had not been asked to this Farewell Party. Being the Club's "Press Reporter", and therefore *au courant* with the position, I must absolve the Committee of any responsibility for this omission.

In fact, the City Swiss Club wished that on this special occasion, not only the Ladies, but also members of the Colony should be given an opportunity of attending. Owing to the Minister's absence in Switzerland it was found impossible to fix a date, and on his return there were only about ten days left in which to find a Hall accommodating between 200-300 persons.

All endeavours to locate a suitable place proved unsuccessful, which is not surprising considering how close it was to Christmas when all Hotels and Restaurants are fully booked; and as the Orchid Room at the Dorchester had been reserved already twelve months ago for the Christmas Dinner, there was no other way out but to stick to this arrangement, which

unfortunately, owing to lack of accommodation, precluded the attendance of Ladies. I hope this explanation will satisfy the Ladies, some of whom in their wrath blamed the men for an act of wanton discourtesy. I am sure, the sadness reflected on the faces of the 140 members and friends attending the dinner was partly due to the absence of the Ladies.

\* \* \*

Previous to the dinner cocktails were served in one of the ante-rooms, which gave everyone an opportunity of having a friendly chat.

On changing over to the Orchid Room, and when the company was seated, the President, Mr. R. Pfenninger, rising from his seat, announced that our country on this very day was in mourning, the funeral having taken place at Brigue of Federal-Councillor, Dr. Josef Escher.

After having paid a short tribute to the departed one, he asked the Assembly to rise and observe a moment of silence in his memory.

The Rev. A. Lanfranchi then said Grace, and the dinner started. My mouth still waters when I think of all the good things which were provided, and the tribute which was later paid to the Manager of the Dorchester, Mr. G. A. Ronus, who is also a member of the committee of the City Swiss Club, was well deserved.

On the conclusion of the dinner, and before coffee was served, the time for speech-making had arrived, the oratorical "Fare" supplied was very generous, but I am glad to say, that, as all the speakers had something interesting to say, and said it well, nobody seemed to mind the time allotted to it. Unfortunately the space at my disposal does not allow me to reproduce all the speeches *in extenso*.

The first speaker of the evening was the President of the City Swiss Club, Mr. R. Pfenninger. He said that he finds himself somewhat in a dilemma,

because a farewell speech always resembles a funeral oration, at least in so far as only the good points are mentioned, and as in the present case there is such an abundance of good points, that he hardly knew where to begin.

"Like every mortal", Mr. Pfenninger continued, "the Swiss Minister is a very complex being. In his official capacity he is in the first place the representative of our Government. In representing our country it naturally falls to the Minister to defend her immediate interests. Since Switzerland, through the strength of a century-old tradition, as well as her deliberate and very conscious policy, adheres to eternal neutrality, our diplomats are less concerned with the great political issues of the world than with the commercial and financial questions of the day.

"Another aspect of our Minister's life", he said, "is his participation in the activities of the Swiss Colony, and finally I suppose, he is also a human being with human feelings, living or trying to live his private life. If we try to assess the activities of Monsieur de Torrenté in the light of these general categories, we can only be deeply impressed."

The President then mentioned that it was not for him to speak of Monsieur de Torrenté as a diplomat, but that there was nevertheless one aspect of his official work on which he was in the fortunate position of having personal experience.

"As you know", he continued, "it was my privilege for about twelve years to take part in the commercial and financial negotiations between Switzerland and various countries. Usually the resident Minister is quite satisfied with letting the Delegation coming from home do their work without interference or active participation, except that he may help to establish contacts on various levels. The reason is that generally the heads of our Legations do not know much about the problems involved. With Monsieur de Torrenté this was entirely different. He was, and still is an expert in the game itself. It has always impressed me that he had a conception of the problems worked out and thought out by himself. He was equipped to take an active part and his opinions and advice were therefore constructive and helpful in the highest degree. Naturally the Minister himself does not negotiate, he leaves this task to the specialists but if he is the right man, then he constitutes the last defence. He can talk and open the way when the negotiations have ended in deadlock. His ingenuity and sound assessment of the situation will then be a determining factor and it is no empty compliment if I say here that I have never met a Swiss Minister who was more competent and courageous than Monsieur de Torrenté."

The President then referred to the Minister's activities for and within the Swiss Colony saying we are all deeply indebted to him. "The questions with which he has had to deal", he remarked, "must have been wellnigh innumerable, often difficult, tiring and even unpleasant. But he has tackled them all with a youthful exuberance and determination and the energy he radiated impressed us all."

In conclusion, Mr. Pfenninger extended to the Minister and Madame de Torrenté, on behalf of the company, best wishes for his new task in his new sphere of activity.

Loud and prolonged applause greeted the sincere

and excellent words of gratitude and appreciation to our departing Minister.

The next speaker was Mr. F. Streit, President of the Swiss Presidents Assembly, who thanked Monsieur de Torrenté for his farewell message to the Assembly, and for his practical help and wise council which he had given during the past six years.

"It has been the tradition in the past", he said, "to make a presentation to our outgoing Ministers, such presentation being subscribed for by the Swiss Colony. Hailing from that lovely canton of Fendants and Dôles, where modesty still prevails, you made it known through some of your closest friends, that you would not desire such action to be taken on your behalf. We respect your modesty and feelings in this matter. However, in acknowledgement of your excellent services rendered to the Swiss Colony it has been decided to present you with an illuminated address signed by all Presidents of the Assembly."

Mr. Streit then, amidst great applause, presented Monsieur de Torrenté with the above mentioned address, reading as follows:

**The Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in Great Britain to Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, Envoyé Extraordinaire et Ministre Plénipotentiaire de la Confédération Suisse près de la Cour de St. James.**

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain, desire to place on record our grateful acknowledgement of the splendid services



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you have rendered to them during the last six years, in particular in promoting the common interest of the different Societies through the creation of this Assembly.

We cordially congratulate you upon your appointment to the post of Swiss Minister in Washington and our sense of loss in your departure from London is coupled with pleasure in the distinction conferred upon you.

THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN have been ever mindful of the keen interest which you and Madame de Torrenté have always displayed in their welfare, an interest which has won for both of you their lasting friendship and appreciation.

In bidding you Good-bye, we sincerely trust that in the years to come good health and happiness may wait upon you and Madame de Torrenté, and we hope that the time you have spent in this country will have endowed you with many happy memories.

November, 1954.

Signatures :

City Swiss Club : R. Pfenninger, Comité de la Fête Suisse, Confrérie Vaudoise : A. Renou, First of August Committee : R. Dupraz, Eglise Suisse de Londres : C. Reverdin, Schweizerkirche. H. Spörri, Swiss Catholic Church : A. Lanfranchi, London Swiss Philatelic Society : F. Streit, Nouvelle Société Helvétique : H. W. Egli, Société de Secourse Mutuels, Swiss Accordion Club : A. Gandon, Swiss Benevolent Society, Swiss Male Choir : F. G. Sommer, Swiss

Club (Schweizerbund) : F. Delaloye, Swiss Economic Council : H. Oswald, Swiss Mercantile Society : W. Meier, Swiss Observer : A. Stauffer, Swiss Sports Committee, Cercle Genevois : R. de Cintra, Swiss Rifle Association : A. Schmid, Swiss Y.M.C.A. : W. Fischer, Union Helvetia : A. Boog, Unione Ticinese : P. Jacomelli, Swiss Church : Ch. Gysin, Swiss Catholic Community : J. J. Boos, Swiss Club, Balloch : H. Berli, Swiss Club, Birmingham : O. Wüest, Swiss Club, Bradford : C. F. Illi, Swiss Club, Dunfermline : B. Frick, Swiss Club, Leeds : Prof. J. Inebnit, Swiss Club, Liverpool : P. Weber, Swiss Club, Manchester : E. Berner, Swiss Welfare Office : Miss M. Wolfer, Swiss Relief Committee, Liverpool : Mrs. Davidson.

Then the Swiss Minister rose to reply. He was greeted with tremendous applause. He said that he was very touched by the kind thought which inspired the decision of giving him this illuminated address.

"It is to me a precious token", he said, "that you have not only appreciated my efforts, but that I have been lucky enough to reach out beyond my official position and contact your affection. This has been indeed my honest endeavour during my stay in office. Public service is an old tradition in my family, and since a young man I have been brought up to view that one takes one's public duties as a matter of course. It is all the more gratifying when through the kindness of friends you realise that in the execution of duty one has been able to contribute also something to the intangible but priceless asset which can only be described as "goodwill amongst men". I assure you, my friends, that it is never a onesided contribution. Whatever I may have done, I could not have done it without that goodwill, without that friendship and warm collaboration which you yourselves have offered me during my stay in London, and for that I am very grateful." (Applause).

Monsieur de Torrenté then continued in French, passing in review some of the happenings and achievements during his mission in this country.

Concerning the relations between our country and Great Britain, he said :

"Depuis la guerre, nos relations politiques avec la Grande-Bretagne sont sans histoire. Il m'est même arrivé de m'excuser auprès de Mr. Bevin et de Sir Anthony Eden de ne pas les déranger plus souvent. C'est vous dire que ces relations se sont déroulées sous le signe de la compréhension réciproque et de l'amitié

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la plus sincère. Notre attitude traditionnelle est connue et acceptée par nos amis britanniques, qui souhaitent avec nous qu'elle se révèle aussi praticable dans l'avenir que par le passé.

Nos négociations avec Londres se sont donc surtout déroulées sur le plan économique et financier.

Dès la fin de la guerre, la Grande-Bretagne et la Suisse se sont efforcées de normaliser leurs relations dans ce domaine. Les premiers accords conclus ne tinrent compte que partiellement de nos desiderata. Mais l'accession des deux pays à l'Union européenne des paiements mit la plupart de nos produits au bénéfice du "General open licence system". Dès 1951, la libéralisation atteignait pour la Grande-Bretagne 80% des produits. A la fin de la même année, ce coefficient fut ramené — il est vrai — à 44% et l'allocation touristique réduite. Mais depuis lors, la situation s'est notablement améliorée, le coefficient de libéralisation a été relevé en Grande-Bretagne à 83% et, depuis l'automne dernier, l'allocation touristique portée à 100 livres.

Fort malheureusement, le régime d'importation des montres n'est pas encore satisfaisant. Ce sera la tâche de la délégation suisse, qui gagnera Londres en janvier prochain, d'obtenir également des améliorations dans ce secteur.

La valeur des échanges anglo-suisse se développe lentement mais constamment, résultat qui est certainement dû pour une bonne part aux Suisses qui exercent leur activité en Grande-Bretagne.

Ce tableau ne serait pas complet si je ne mentionnais l'accord portant réciprocité en matières d'assurance sociale, signé le 16 janvier, 1953, et l'accord sur la double imposition du 30 septembre, 1954, qui tous deux vous intéressent dans une large mesure.

In conclusion the Minister at some length referred to the inner history of the Swiss Colony during the last few years, such as the foundation of the Anglo-Swiss Society, the Presidents Assembly (of which he was the instigator), the publication of the "Guide to the Swiss Colony", the work of the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Churches, the Welfare Office, and the "Swiss Home" which is now nearing its realisation, not forgetting to mention the help he had received from some of his collaborators at the Legation, such as Monsieur Bernath, 1st Counsellor of Legation, Messieurs Faessler, Bircher, Lepori, Ansermoz, Miesch, Thévenaz, Valloton and Huber.

Before resuming his seat, Monsieur de Torrenté thanked the City Swiss Club for having given him an opportunity of addressing the Colony before his departure.

The Minister's oration was loudly cheered by the entire company.

In the capacity of Doyen of the London Swiss Colony, Mr. Louis Chapuis then addressed the Minister. The speaker, to whom I have had the pleasure of listening to on many occasions, always seems to find the right words, which coming from the heart go straight to the hearts of his hearers.

Striking a personal note he thanked Monsieur de Torrenté for the confidence with which he had constantly honoured him.

"You have always", he said, "in spite of your manifold engagements, found time to attend the principal meetings, you have given us more than we

have given you, and thus have, in the real sense of the word, become one of us."

Referring to the Swiss Home, Mr. Chapuis said, that if this scheme has now materialised it was principally due to the incessant efforts of the Minister, and that the Home will be his monument which he is leaving here.

In conclusion the speaker paid a touching tribute to Madame de Torrenté.

When the applause which these words evoked had subsided, Mr. W. Meier, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, thanked the Minister for the constant interest he had taken in his Society.

Before declaring the procedures as closed, the President mentioned another departure from London, namely that of Monsieur Guido Lepori, Secretary of Legation, who has been transferred to the Foreign Office in Berne. Expressing his regrets to M. Lepori for losing him, he wished him and Madame Lepori the best of success in their new surroundings.

Mr. Pfenninger then wished all members, guests and their families a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

A memorable evening, which will leave behind nothing but pleasant memories, had thus come to a close.

May the reporter, in the capacity of Editor of this paper, add a few words of gratitude to the departing Minister for the interest he has always taken in the work of the Colony's organ, for the many tokens of appreciation shown to him and his wife, and especially for the kind words he has written to him.

ST.



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