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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Dinner and Dance

on

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19th, 1955

at

THE DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.I.

In the Chair: W. MEIER, President

I am somehow in a quandry; not so long ago I announced in these columns that the social season of the Colony — under which I understand banquets, balls and dinners — had come to a close, and that I could now look forward to a little respite, and try out some of the recipes for slimming, which a number of my friends have so kindly and understandingly showered upon me. The latest recommendation sent to me by a very old friend of mine, was a "Hay" diet. I have not yet found time to study this proposition, not being used to "grazing", I am not tremendously impressed — still there is no harm in trying. In fact, I am not quite sure whether the Annual Dinner and Dance of the Swiss Mercantile Society is really the last of the Colony's social functions or the first of the 1955/56 season. Hailing from the old fashioned, proud and beautiful city of Berne, I never exactly know where I am with regard to time.

Hardly a week goes by without a "Jubilee" of some kind being mentioned in this paper, and I feel, therefore, quite justified to add one more to the long list. By attending this Dinner and Dance on Saturday, February 19th, I have completed 40 years of membership to the Swiss Mercantile Society in London and thus I am now qualified to be called a "veteran", a distinction which makes me feel awfully old.—

Once again with the advent of spring in sight our thoughts turn with enthusiasm and a great longing to visions of warmth, of sun and flowers. Instead of warmth a sharp easterly wind greeted the arrivals at the Dorchester on that memorable evening, the sun which had made a fleeting appearance in the afternoon had set early, the flowers, however, were there in rich abundance displayed in crystal bowls and flat containers, a lovely and imposing sight only rivalled by the charming ladies in their festive garb.

* * *

As is customary the evening started with a reception by the Swiss Minister and Madame Daeniker, assisted by the President of the Society and Mrs. Meier, both ladies carried lovely bouquets of red tulips and pale yellow and golden fressia which were presented to them on behalf of the members.

A motor-car to fully show its powers needs liberal lubrication, this need also applies to human beings to

get them into a receptive mood, the "lubrication" in this case was done with cocktails, these were served in an ante-room, where the atmosphere became alarmingly warm.

And then came the announcement for dinner, and the company adjourned to the Orchid Room awaiting the entry of the Minister and Madame Daeniker, the President and Mrs. Meier.

On taking their seats at the top table they were greeted with loud-clapping, and after grace was said by Pasteur C. Reverdin, the "battle for food" began. So as not to make the mouths water of those who were not there, I will desist from giving the full *Menu*, but I will not omit saying that it was an excellent dinner which fully came up to the reputation of the *cuisine* of the Dorchester, and its famous Swiss chef.

When coffee was served, the first toast to H.M. the Queen was proposed by the President, immediately followed by the one to Switzerland, given by the Swiss Minister.

With a tremendous bang from a "sledge-hammer" the toast-master woke up those who were taking a little snooze, to announce that the President, Mr. W. Meier was going to address the gathering.

The recent cold spell, had claimed as its victim, no less a person than the President, who, although hampered by a husky voice, gallantly fought to make himself heard.

Mr. Meier started his oration by welcoming the assembly and saying that faithful to the Societies tradition, a number of guests had been invited.

With obvious pleasure he extended a very hearty welcome to the Swiss Minister and Madame Daeniker, who by attending this dinner made their *début* in the London Swiss Colony, they were greeted with loud applause.

He also welcomed the Swiss Minister's collaborators, namely Monsieur E. Bernath, 1st Counsellor of Legation, and Madame Bernath, Monsieur E. M. Bircher, Press Attaché, Monsieur H. Miesch, Secretary of Legation (Madame Miesch was unable to attend and so was Monsieur R. Faessler, Counsellor of Legation), Monsieur and Madame Ansermot, and Consul and Madame Huber.

The President warmly greeted the Trustees of the

Society, Messrs. F. G. Sommer, W. R. Gamper and C. Voegeli, who were accompanied by their Ladies, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer", Lt. Colonel St. Townend and Mrs. Townend, Director of the Anglo-Swiss Society, Rev. C. Reverdin and Madame Reverdin, Pfarrer H. Spoerri and Father A. Laufranchi.

Mr. Meier then congratulated Mr. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer" on having accomplished 40 years of membership of the S.M.S., but denied him the right of claiming to be an "old member", as there were present two members, who beat him by a "full length", namely Mr. Louis Chapuis with 57 years membership and Mr. J. H. Ungricht with 52. All three veterans were applauded.

The President continued by saying, "this gathering is fully representative of our Society and its different branches of work. Mr. Slade, the Principal of our College is here, as well as several masters, and a number of students, also Mr. Hauser, our Secretary, but Mr. Zimmermann, the Manager of the Employment Department had to fall out at the last moment owing to illness. The Council and the various committees are almost here complete, and I gladly take this opportunity of thanking my two Vice-Presidents, Mr. Krucker and Mr. Burren, for their collaboration".

In conclusion the President shortly referred to the activities of the Society, and voiced his pleasure at seeing the Ladies in our midst. (Applause)

The principal toast, "The Swiss Mercantile Society" was entrusted to the Swiss Minister, who on rising from his seat was loudly cheered.

The Minister thanked the President and Committee of the Swiss Mercantile Society for their kind invitation and said that he and Madame Daeniker felt happy to have their first contacts with the Swiss Colony under such good auspices. Ever since he once belonged to the Swiss Community in London, more than 30 years ago, the Minister mentioned that he was deeply impressed by the varied and highly developed activities within our Colony and when he accepted his new post, he was fully conscious of the special responsibilities implied in taking charge of their interests. He gave the assurance that he would always be happy to support any sound initiative, from whatever source it came, to give his personal advice, whenever it was sought and to attend the functions within

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the Colony whether for serious deliberations or for entertainment.

Addressing himself to the Swiss Mercantile Society in particular, he said that although he never had any personal contacts with the "S.K.V.", he was fully aware of the great importance it took in the public life of Switzerland. Our country, being deprived of most natural resources, was to a great extent depending on its trade connections with the wide world. Exports were our lifeline and would be unthinkable without the network of Swiss commercial firms all over the globe, supported by a sound banking and insurance structure. The pioneer work done by those firms and individual representatives of the mercantile profession, based on the high ideals of integrity and proficiency, had earned an excellent reputation to Swiss merchants in all countries and to the Swiss nation in general.

Looking back on his own career, the Minister said that the important achievements of Swiss firms and the mercantile profession in general was brought home to him at many posts where he formerly had served. First in Riga in 1927, where remnants of the old Swiss commercial community from Russia were gathered in the endeavour to build up a new position which was however of short duration; later in such prosperous commercial centres like Shanghai, Tientsin, Kobe and Yokohama which, however, during and after the war, were threatened in their very existence; to a certain extent also in Persia, yet particularly in India where Swiss merchants were absolutely in the

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forefront, next to the British, and in a similar way this was the case also in present-day Siam. Yet everywhere conditions have changed and they do not offer anymore to a young Swiss merchant such an attractive career as in former times. Some of the colonies abroad, of whom he had happy souvenirs, had entirely disappeared, the world had become considerably smaller within the last 25 years.

Yet even under the impression of such adverse circumstances, we should not be discouraged. The Swiss authorities are aware of such difficulties, but at the same time they appreciate highly the private initiative within the mercantile profession itself to unite in order to defend and further efficiently common interests and particularly to assist the younger generation by offering them a thorough professional training and the advantages of an employment service. The efforts deployed by the "S.M.S." during more than 65 years, have not lost of their vigour; they help to maintain the good reputation of the Swiss merchant class in this country. The Minister felt glad to support them and to continue in the future the close and excellent relations which exist between the Legation and the Swiss Mercantile Society.

On resuming his seat Monsieur Daeniker received a warm ovation from the entire company.

It is only right and proper that when one receives an invitation that one says "thank you very much", this pleasant task was left to Lt. Colonel Townend, who said it very nicely. As on a former occasion he expressed the hope that one day the Olympic Games would be held at Lausanne, without being too optimistic I can assure him, that his wish will be fulfilled before long, as in a few months time the International committee will assemble in Paris to choose the place for the next Olympic Games to be held in 1960, and Switzerland has a very good chance of being chosen. (So I am told.)

The official part of the evening then came to a close, and after a short interval dancing began, and what a jolly affair it was. A very good dance band managed to lure even some of the "old ones" on to the dance floor, and oh! how they "hopped" and "wiggled". It was noticed with pleasure, that our Diplomats did not deprive themselves of the pleasure of paying tribute to Terpsichore, the muse of dancing, and a very good thing too, if only diplomats all over the world would dance, instead of wrestle the world would not be in the sorry plight it finds itself today.

At midnight the orchestra intimated that "Auld

Lang Syne" should be sung, and so another Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Mercantile Society came to an end.

There remains only for me to voice the opinion of all those who were fortunate enough to attend this function — an opinion which was unanimously agreed to — that it was a great success in every direction. There reigned throughout the evening a most genial atmosphere, and if one complaint could be made, it would be the one, that time passed all too quickly.

Long after I left the luxurious precincts of the Dorchester, in a blinding snow storm, I could still hear the happy laughter of many of the charming ladies, and could one ask for a better memory to take away from a gathering where good comradeship was so prevalent.

St.

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