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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Dinner and Dance

on

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25th, 1958

at

THE DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

In the Chair: W. MEIER, President

By now I have completely lost count of how many social functions, held by the Swiss Mercantile Society, I have attended for the last 40 years, they must be not far short of a hundred, and there is not one which I did not find enjoyable.

The older one gets the more one looks back into the past; between the first and second war period many of the dinners and dances of the Swiss Mercantile Society took place in somewhat less luxurious places than The Dorchester, and often instead of a "sit-down" dinner, a sandwich buffet was provided for. Those were happy times to which many of the older members still look back with nostalgic feelings.

But "autre temps, autres mœurs"; the scarcity of suitable accommodation, and the wish to go to more up-to-date quarters warranted a change, and for the last few years the Trocadero and the Dorchester Hotel have become the meeting places, and may I add have fully come up to expectations.

The arctic spell of weather, which we have experienced recently came fortunately to an end just before the dinner and dance took place, and whilst the weather conditions were still rather unsteady, conditions were much more favourable than twelve months ago when gusts of wind and rain, not much short of a hurricane, made the journey to Park Lane far from pleasant.

* * *

As is the custom nowadays dinners are preceded by a reception, which was held by the President of the Society and Mrs. Meier, assisted by the principal guests, Monsieur J. J. de Tribolet, 1st Counsellor of Embassy, and Monsieur R. Faessler, Counsellor of Embassy, accompanied by their charming wives. The ladies carried lovely bouquets of flowers which were presented to them by the Society. The lavish flower decorations of the ante-room in which the reception was held, together with the smart dresses of the ladies, reminded one almost of a wedding minus the bride and bridegroom.

The reception being over, the company adjourned to the attractive Orchid Room awaiting the entry of the President and the principal guests. On their appearance they were accorded musical honours, and amidst much hand-clapping took their places at the top table.

The Rev. H. Spoerri said Grace, and the assembly sat down to an excellent dinner for which the head chef of the Dorchester Hotel, Mr. E. Käufeler — a compatriot of ours — deserves great credit. At its conclusion the President gave the Toasts to H.M. the Queen and to "La Suisse".

If at one time or another I have ventured to voice some criticism about the lengths of after dinner speeches, thus often curtailing the more enjoyable part of the evening, this time I have no complaints to make, all the speeches were short, to the point, and amusing.

The first address was given by the President, who at the commencement of his oration dropped a bomb-shell by saying that this would be the last time, that he would take the Chair at the Annual Dinner and Dance, and that he would shortly relinquish the post of President, which he had held for the last eleven years.

Whilst I shall refer to this news-item, which took most of us by complete surprise, later on, I wish already now to make a few remarks.

Eleven years is not a very long space of time in a man's life, considering "how time flies", but those who have had some experience in holding a leading position in a Swiss Society, will undoubtedly agree with me, that it is no mean achievement. There are few Presidents of Swiss Societies who can stand the strain, and if I am correct, Mr. Meier, has almost created a record. It is often said, and not without some justification, that work in a Society is an unthankful undertaking, but I wish to say, that at times it receives its reward, and I feel sure that the applause which we witnessed at the conclusion of Mr. Meier's address must have been a source of satisfaction to him.

The President mentioned that he became a member of the Society in 1928, and that he was elected a member of the Education Committee twenty-seven years ago, "others can", he said, "of course, look further back. Forty years ago, Mr. A. Stauffer was President of the Society, and I am sure Mr. Carlo Chapuis, can confirm that he himself was present at the Annual Dinner 50 years ago."

Mr. Meier then extended a hearty welcome to the following guests: Monsieur J. J. de Tribolet, 1st Counsellor of Embassy and Madame de Tribolet, Monsieur René Faessler, Counsellor of Embassy and

Madame Faessler, Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer" and Mrs. Stauffer, Mr. A. Gandon, Chairman of the Presidents Assembly and Mrs. Gandon, Mr. Chas. Westcott of the "Times" Football Club, and Mrs. Westcott, the Rev. A. Lanfranchi, Pastor H. Spoerri, and Mrs. Spoerri. (The Rev. C. Reverdin and Madame Reverdin were unable to attend). It was also mentioned that two Presidents of Swiss Societies were present, namely Mr. H. Knoll, (City Swiss Club), and Mr. F. Streit (London Swiss Philatelic Society) with their ladies, as well as Consul E. C. Ribl, and Mrs. Ribl.

In front of the President was placed a large silver cup, and many wondered "what it was about", the mystery was cleared up when Mr. Meier disclosed that it was the "Times" football club's Challenge Cup, which after many years of defeat, was at last won by the football team of the College, on the occasion of the 21st anniversary match, and thus for the first time the name of the College football club will appear on the cup.

Mr. Meier, then thanked his colleagues on the Council and the various committees for their loyalty and co-operation that they had given him during so many years, saying "I can now look forward to the domestic scene when my wife will bring me the slippers, will read to me, and I shall sit down in an easy-chair, taking up knitting. (Laughter.)

In conclusion the President paid a tribute to the ladies by saying "We men are glad that you have come. Your presence has a stimulating effect on us. We have done our best to look nice for you. Do you know that some of us have spent hours in the bathroom this afternoon combing our hair and brushing our eyebrows. Yet our colours fade before yours, and now we are looking forward to dancing with you."

The next speaker was Monsieur Faessler, Commercial Counsellor, who gave the Toast "The Swiss Mercantile Society and its College". He said that it was both an honour and a very great pleasure to propose this Toast, voicing his appreciation at seeing again amongst the company the Chairman, "who despite his recent illness looks so completely rejuvenated. He, no doubt, owes his recovery in no small measure to Mrs. Meier, who is with us tonight in the double role of wife and member."

Monsieur Faessler then paid a warm tribute to the Swiss Mercantile Society and the College for their work, especially for the young Swiss coming to this country, saying "Let us hope that this flow of young Swiss coming to learn abroad, will never dry up, for they become the pioneers to whose industry, discipline and devotion, our country owes much for her good name."

The speaker concluded his address with a few words about the economic situation in Switzerland,

saying "The general economy remains extremely prosperous, and most of our industries have had a record activity during 1957, for 1958, too, the signs seem quite favourable. Our heavy industry, for instance, has never had so many orders on its books. We must, however, reckon with an ever sharper competition from other countries, and it is above all the quality of our products and the honesty of our industrialists and business men that will enable us to maintain or even increase our exports."

Monsieur Faessler's speech was much applauded, and when calm was restored, the word was given to Monsieur J. J. de Tribolet, 1st Counsellor of Embassy, who represented, together with his wife, the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker, who wished that the Embassy should this time be represented by some of his collaborators.

His task was to reply for the guests. After thanking the Chairman for the invitation to be the guests of the Society, he associated himself with what his colleague had said about the useful work both the Swiss Mercantile Society and the College are rendering. Referring to Monsieur Faessler's remarks as to the prosperity of our country, he said: "None of us are foolish enough to believe that success in business is the key to all happiness. To be a man, we also need the blessings of humility. I am glad, there-



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for, to see amongst us somebody representing a group of people, who have helped to bring this blessing to the Swiss Mercantile Society, I am referring to Mr. Ch. Westcott, the Vice-President of the "Times" football Club, and his charming wife. As some of my fellow guests may not realise what his presence means, I should perhaps explain. Once upon a time, many years before the war, the members of the S.M.S. wished not only to cultivate their minds, but also to develop their physical fitness. They succeeded in capturing the sympathy and goodwill of the "Times" Sports Club, which offered them the use of their beautiful recreation grounds and pavillion. Kind-heartedly they invited them to play a match and crowned their generosity by donating a Anglo-Swiss football Challenge Cup. The S.M.S. accepted with glee. Well, history relates that the Swiss held their own, once or twice, but otherwise their gains were rather spiritual than physical. Do not wise men teach us that the finest qualities of mankind are forged in adversity? I am sure the Swiss Mercantile Society are very grateful to Mr. Westcott. But I will not pursue this theme of the defeat of flag versus the profit of the spirit, otherwise we'll soon touch the problem of the balance of power — and worse still, where a Swiss diplomat is concerned — the question of neutrality. This evening, at any rate, there is *no* neutrality in our hearts, only for partiality. A partiality which directs our thinking and feeling towards the charming lady guests, whom I already see starting to fret at the length of my speech, and, therefore, in the name of all the guests I thank the S.M.S. once more for its generous hospitality. (Applause.)

Thus the official part came to its close, and after a short interval dancing began, under the efficient guidance of the M.C., Mr. O. Grob. The second part of the evening was no less enjoyable than the first, and the Swiss Mercantile Society deserves to be heartily congratulated for the way in which this Dinner and Dance was arranged and managed, it was a thoroughly successful and enjoyable evening.

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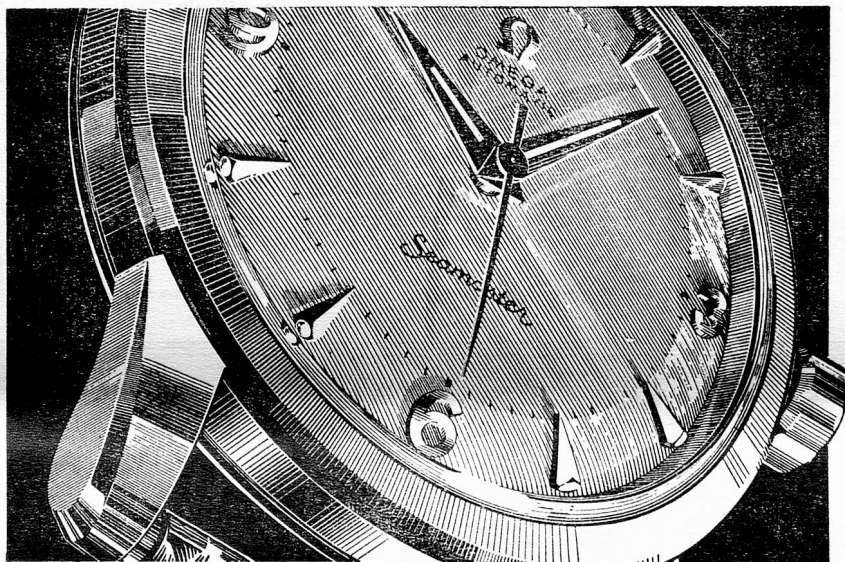
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