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AN APPRECIATION.



THEOPHILE SIEGFRIED

In a little over two months' time — on July 8th, to be exact — our compatriot Mr. Theophile Siegfried, of "Wingfield", Pinewood Grove, New Haw, Weybridge, Surrey, will be 70 years old. He retired last year, after forty-five years' service with the well-known firm of James Walker & Co. Ltd. of Woking, manufacturers of high class miscellaneous engine packings and jointings — an engineering speciality used on steam engines, hydraulic presses, aircraft, steamships, steelworks and factories — and we find it an appropriate moment to pass in review a life rich in achievements. By his efficient and faithful service for the Company he has upheld the good name which our countrymen enjoy, all over the globe, for efficiency and reliability.

How often one hears nowadays laments by some of our young compatriots, either here or at home, that going abroad "does not pay", and prospects for advancement are poor and difficult to obtain!

In olden times our younger generation were eager and enthusiastic to leave their native land in order to seek their fortune abroad, and to widen their horizon by gaining knowledge and experience which, owing to the smallness of the country, they were unable to acquire at home. These young men were imbued with a spirit of adventure, were willing to work hard, and if need be to "rough it", in order to get on in life.

Through their efforts and trustworthiness Swiss labour was in great demand, and our countrymen gained the reputation of being enterprising and reliable. All over the world they were to be found in leading positions, in Banking, Industry and Commerce, Engineering, etc.

By their achievements our homeland reaped benefit, and if to-day Switzerland occupies an honoured place amongst the leading nations in commerce and trade, as well as in the professional sphere, this is in no small manner due to them.

Somehow or other it seems that the present generation have lost this spirit of adventure, this urge to seek a living beyond the frontiers of their native land. They find conditions and the standard of living

more attractive at home, often forgetting that numbers of foreign countries were heavily involved in two major wars — suffering untold hardships.

Admittedly conditions for getting employment abroad are more difficult to-day, owing to all sorts of restrictions, than, say, forty to fifty years ago, but there are still plenty of possibilities, if one is willing to put up with some inconveniences and less comfort. May the example of our friend act as an encouragement.

* * *

Mr. Theophile Siegfried hails from Landiswil (Canton of Berne), but was born and brought up in Vevey, where he received his schooling at the Primary School and the "Collège Industriel", followed by an apprenticeship in a leading drapery concern at Lausanne, after which he obtained a post in an Insurance Company in Winterthur, in which town he remained for three years.

Being eager to acquaint himself with the English language, he packed his bag and, towards the end of 1911, arrived at Tewkesbury (Glos.), where his sister held a post as teacher of French and German. After a few months' stay he proceeded to London, finding a post as French and German correspondent with the firm of James Walker & Co. Ltd., and becoming in time their Export Manager.

The firm in those days had their factory in the Dock area (Poplar) near the West India Docks, but owing to lack of sufficient accommodation moved later on to Woking.

At the outbreak of the First World-War in 1914 Mr. Siegfried — like so many of his compatriots in this country — returned home to join the army. After nine months' service he was released, and returned to his post at Messrs. James Walker Limited. From this time onwards he gained rapid advancement in this big concern, which at present employs a staff of over 1,800.

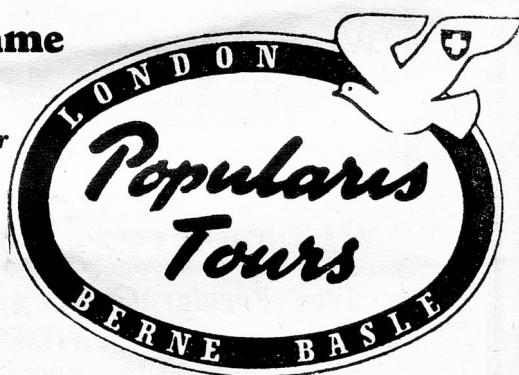
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As early as 1913 he was sent to Leningrad to contact the firm's agent, and in quick succession other visits to various Continental countries followed, during which he negotiated the appointments of agents. On various occasions he was congratulated by the Board for the "highly satisfactory and efficient manner in which these agencies have been arranged".

The Second World War put a temporary stop to his travelling abroad, and in 1945 our friend found that he would virtually have to start from scratch again. Undaunted, he tackled the task afresh with great determination and within two years he had again firmly established the firm on the Continent.

On the occasion of his retirement from the firm a farewell party was arranged during which various presentations were made to him, amongst them an illuminated address bearing the signatures of his former colleagues. A number of speeches by members of the Board and colleagues elucidated his work for the last forty-five years — indeed a befitting ending to a fine and successful career.

Owing to his many travels, necessitating long and short absences from this country, Mr. Siegfried has been unable to take an active part in the life of the Swiss Colony. He joined the City Swiss Club in 1927, where he has often attended meetings and social functions; and for quite a number of years he belonged to the Swiss Institute orchestra, long since dispersed.

Being a keen mountaineer in his younger days, he has climbed many high peaks in our country —amongst them the Matterhorn; for many years he was a member of the Swiss Alpine Club, having been introduced by the late George Dimier. Amongst his hobbies is gardening, and in pursuit of another favourite pastime he can often be seen searching the Surrey woods for edible fungi, on which he is an expert; he confessed to the writer that, although now retired, he has by no means severed his connection with the firm entirely, still doing work in one way or another for them.

We wish our friend, who can indeed look back with pride on a successful life, a happy and carefree eventide in the company of his wife. He well deserves a rest from his ardent labours, and may he remain for many more years amongst us blessed with good health.

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