

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1960)
Heft: 1357

Artikel: Association of british members of the Swiss Alpine Club
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687428>

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ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH MEMBERS OF THE SWISS ALPINE CLUB

On November 25th, the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club held their fiftieth Anniversary Dinner at the Connaught Rooms, under the Presidency of Mr. Geo. Starkey.

Amongst the many guests were H.E. the Swiss Ambassador, and Dr. E. M. Bircher, Counsellor of Embassy. To the latter was entrusted the Toast "The Association", which we have much pleasure to reproduce.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you will have seen from the programme, my job tonight is a serious one:

Toasting a new-born infant or a newly married couple is easy. Neither of them know what they are in for — so you drink to the future and hope for the best.

To toast somebody who has reached the respectable age of 50 is a different matter. You cannot simply neglect the past. You are bound to ask yourself: Does that creature merit a toast? Does it merit our good wishes for the future?

Well, I had a look at your past, Gentlemen. From the first annual report it would appear that the idea to form the Association was conceived several years before the event took place. In other words the baby had a fairly lengthy period of gestation. The report says literally: "The Association came into existence through the energy, and not only through the energy, but through the tact of the honorary secretaries".— Without labouring the analogy too far, may I just record relief, that tact was used at such a critical moment. Gentlemanly behaviour is always worth remembering.

The infant was born at a general meeting on December 8th 1909, and weighed into this world 120 strong. Strange to say, subsequent reports speak also of June 1909 and state that the membership then was 26. That is rather puzzling, for one cannot be born twice. 26 members in June must therefore be regarded as a pre-natal count, if such a thing were possible.

The poor child was given the name of A.B.M.S.A.C., which stands for "Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club" — what a terrible mouthful! Still, this is rather the fault of the parents; cannot be held against the child.

The objects of the Association were, and still are, threefold:

- First: To promote amongst the British members the sociability which is so typical of the Swiss Alpine Club.
- Second: To support the Swiss Alpine Club by encouraging British alpinists to join and by collecting funds for a club hut, etc.
- Third: To create a platform from which to present the British viewpoint to the Swiss Alpine Club.

Let us see how this infant has behaved itself and how it fulfilled the purposes of its existence.

Firstly the promotion of that typical S.A.C. sociability.

Gentlemen, I fear you have failed! In any Swiss social gathering sooner or later we play a "jass", our national Swiss card game. It is of the essence of that game to thump the table, and the better your

trumps, the harder you thump. I have attended many meetings of the Association and never seen or heard any table thumping. But worse is to come: In any Swiss gathering — especially when Fendant or Dôle has mellowed the mood — sooner or later you begin to sing, and if the mood gets mellow still, someone will even try to yodel. Gentlemen, I have never heard of this mellow melodiousness amongst you! This is a grave and serious shortcoming. I fell in duty bound to suggest, that your Chairman and President remedy this dereliction by giving us a song later this evening.

The second object or *raison d'être* of the Association is to support the Swiss Alpine Club.

In spite of two world wars, in spite of financial catastrophes, like going off the gold standard and exorbitant taxation, the Association has grown from a pre-natal 26 to 685 to date. To provide over 600 fee-paying members — I disregard such good-for-nothings as veterans and honorary members — is a most valuable support.

More astonishing still: Within three years of its birth this infant collected sufficient funds to build a whole club hut in the Alps and donate it to the S.A.C. Mind you, this happened in the halcyon days when the pound was worth a sovereign and a hut could assembled and erected for about £800. Still — a remarkable deed for a youngster. The Britannia Hut was inaugurated in August 1912. It stands to-day, with its extensions and adornments also paid for by the Association, as a permanent token of that friendship and love which the British feel towards my country.

More touching and less well-known are such facts as that during the first world war you, who lost millions of lives, gave a thought and financial help to our guides who lost their livelihood; or, when this country went off the gold standard, you expressed sympathy with our hotels and hoteliers who had to do without your patronage. There are other similar actions and gestures on record which show what a generous and faithful partner the Association has been to Switzerland and the S.A.C. You have certainly earned full marks for that.

The third reason for your existence was to create a platform from which to present the British viewpoint to the Swiss Alpine Club.

Well, Mr. Chairman, this seems to me a bit fishy. Putting it more bluntly: Does this not mean that you want to tell the S.A.C. "what's what"? Oh, I know this can be done politely and gently, tactfully (and tact came in at the beginning of my story) — it can be done so, that the bigger, stronger and older partner does not even realise he is being told "what's what".— Gentlemen, haven't we all experienced this at one time or another? — and isn't this rather feminine strategy?

Applying the feminine gender to the Association would of course explain the absence of table thumping and melodious mellowness.

If we are applying the feminine gender and call the Association the kinder, gentler or even the better half, we come inevitably to the conclusion that to-day we are not only celebrating a fiftieth birthday, but actually a golden wedding.

You all have heard of that happy, gentle lady who was asked on her golden wedding day: "Madam, during those 50 years of married life have you ever

thought of divorce?" Her reply was: "Divorce, no never — but murder often."

The records of the Association show no trace that divorce was ever contemplated. Hidden thoughts, of course, are not officially recorded. I found only one slight hint, that tension might not always have been absent in that relationship. The report about the Britannia Hut is remarkably short and dry. It mentions nothing about the plans, the building or the handing-over. It merely states, that the hut was to have accommodation for 16 gentlemen and 8 ladies, have a stove and four wash-basins. But then, surprisingly, it says that, on the suggestion of your President, pipes were to be installed "for obtaining fresh air in the sleeping room and drawing off the bad"! — I cannot help feeling that a mention of this trivial detail in an otherwise terse report was the outcome of years of agony which British climbers suffered in the fug of continental huts. — "For obtaining fresh air in the sleeping room" — doesn't that sound like the outcry of a tortured soul?

Well, even that agony has not led to divorce. The Association has proved itself beyond all reasonable doubt a staunch and truly faithful partner. On that ground alone, Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel fully justified in asking you to raise your glass and drink with me the toast to the Association. — May it long continue!

UNIONE TICINESE

"Grand Dance" in aid of the Swiss Benevolent Society

In March of last year the Unione Ticinese held a "Grand Dance" in aid of the Swiss Benevolent Society at the "Schweizerbund" (Swiss Club), 74, Charlotte Street, W.1. This was a most enjoyable affair, which was attended by the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker; whilst the members of the Unione Ticinese attended in full force, the Colony as such was scantily represented.

Not disheartened by this lack of general interest, our friends from the "Sunny South" are arranging another social evening, on Thursday, March 10th at the "Schweizerbund" again for the benefit of the Swiss Benevolent Society (see advertisement).

The purpose is to support our brethren who are in straitened circumstances, and we sincerely hope that many members of the Colony will attend this informal dance, not only to support the Swiss Benevolent Society, but also to spend a few happy hours with our Ticinese brethren.

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