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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

At the Monthly Meeting, held at Swiss House on 14th October, the Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, extended a cordial welcome to Mr. S. Baumgartner, Manager of the Employment Service of the S.K.V., who had come to London on a short business trip.

Having left the Belgian Congo, where he had been engaged in business activities for about six years, Mr. Baumgartner, on his return was entrusted by the S.K.V. with the management of its commercial employment service in Switzerland and abroad.

In his talk "Employment in Switzerland and Overseas" Mr. Baumgartner first dealt with conditions prevailing in Switzerland today. As an indication of the present labour market he stated that whereas in 1950 his department had received 6,500 offers of service, the figure for last year was barely 3,000. He further illustrated the difficulties of staff recruiting by the fact that in a recent issue of the N.Z.Z., two-thirds of the advertisements had been for commercial personnel.

Mr. Baumgartner also dealt at some length with the influx of foreign labour, which the Swiss authorities had found difficulty in curbing and the immense problems of accommodation and education connected therewith.

He also referred to the anomalies in the remuneration of commercial staff, stating that in order to attract applicants it was not uncommon for young and inexperienced employees to receive salaries equal to, and sometimes above, those of much older and trusted servants.

This over-employment was also the cause of many young compatriots refraining from furthering their professional education and being content to remain at home rather than venturing abroad to gain wider experience and first-hand knowledge of foreign trade and markets.

It was regrettable that many foreign concerns who had regularly employed Swiss staff, particularly on the accounting and auditing side, had today to look elsewhere for recruits.

Although he admitted that conditions overseas were often uncertain, he nevertheless maintained that it was in the best interests of the Swiss economy that our young compatriots should show a spirit of adventure and grasp the many attractive and often lucrative opportunities offered to them. This would not only widen their horizons but in many cases also enable them to reach a status which they were not likely to attain at home.

It was to this end that his efforts were largely directed and he hoped that by enlightenment and encouragement better results could be achieved.

To wind up, Mr. Baumgartner showed a colour film depicting the numerous activities in North and South America of W. R. Grace & Co., a vast and well-known organisation with which his department has had very long connections.

By general consensus, this was a most interesting and instructive evening, thanks being expressed to Mr. Baumgartner by the Chairman for having provided it.

At the last Monthly Meeting, held on 11th November, the Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, on behalf of the Council proposed the election of Monsieur Beat de Fischer, Swiss Ambassador, as Honorary President of the Society during his term of office in London. This was unanimously and enthusiastically adopted with acclamation.

The Chairman stated that ever since our Ambassador had come to London, he had taken a great and active interest in the affairs of the Society, particularly the College, to which he had paid an official visit soon after taking up

his position here. The Society was most appreciative of his patronage, which was a source of encouragement to the Committee and the Members.

Following the official business, Mr. J. Leahy, B.A. (Cantab), a teacher at the S.M.S. College, gave a talk on "The British Film Industry".

Being a member of the Film Institute, on behalf of whom he lectures, and having for some time been personally connected with film production, Mr. Leahy was eminently qualified to talk on an industry of which he has made a thorough and enthusiastic study.

After a general outline of the structure of the British film industry, including its financial aspects, the speaker dealt in detail with the production, distribution and exhibition of films. He gave a graphic account of all that goes into the making of a film, from the time it is conceived to the moment it reaches the screen. We learnt much of what goes on behind the scenes and the many difficulties which beset the producer. Little does the uninitiated viewer realise the efforts needed and the costs involved to provide a few hours' entertainment. Those present will certainly have gained a much clearer idea of how the final picture eventually emerges from the apparent chaos and endless retakes in the studio and will probably now enjoy the finished product even more.

To round off an animating and interesting address, Mr. Leahy showed extracts from the following films:—

"French Can Can" — an excellent satirical French film, produced by Jean Renoir, with Jean Gabin as the principal actor, and showing the eccentricities and follies of Parisian night life, or as a wag would have it, a film which makes husbands leave home.

"The Maggie" — a comedy set in Scotland, with the troubles encountered by an American business man having his household effects transported by a decrepit charter boat to his island home, with an amusing aside on game poaching.

Finally a British amateur film "It happened here" — purporting to show what would have happened in England if the Nazis had been able to seize power. This prospect seemed far less remote but much more abhorrent to those who lived in the island fortress in 1940.

W.B.

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