

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: - (1969)

Heft: 1580

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

FORMER AMBASSADOR ARMIN DAENIKER SPEAKS AT THE ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY

The Anglo-Swiss Society held its annual dinner in the Park Suite of the Dorchester Hotel on Thursday, 8th October. Lord Selkirk being absent, our hostess was Dame Jane Brian and the guest of honour was Mr. Armin Daeniker, "our Ambassador" between 1954 and 1963.

After we had enjoyed a regal menu quite in keeping with the occasion, when the first cigars were being pulled out and the brandy glasses already half empty, Mr. Daeniker rose to spin the yarn of his stay in London.

He began with a joke which all those who may expect to speak one day on a genteel occasion should profitably know: a speech must be like a lady's skirt: long enough to cover the point but short enough to be interesting. . . .

Mr. Daeniker said that his had been the honour of becoming Switzerland's first ambassador to Great Britain. Our country had kept a legation with a chargé d'affaires since 1853, but it was only in 1954 that it took the resolute step of promoting its London chargés d'affaires (poor chaps who had to meet their expenses out of their meagre salaries and who were always called upon to say grace at official dinners because they were plenipotentiary "ministers" . . .) to the rank of ambassadors. This glamorous promotion, said Mr. Daeniker, involved really little more than the necessity of a change of stamp and more generous tips! In fact, the Queen said to him one day that Swiss "Ministers" were such a good tradition that there was really no need for a change. Mr. Daeniker saw her gracious Majesty for the first time when he presented his ambassadorial credentials to her. In the nine years of his English sojourn, it was the only time he had felt ill. He got out of bed to go to Buckingham Palace, to be comforted and gently sent back to bed by the Queen!

Mr. Daeniker had a number of other amusing reminiscences to relate. He recalled a memorable trip to Wales with Mr. A. Kunz of the Swiss National Tourist Office; he told us how Mrs. Daeniker once had to launch a ship (a midshipman telling her not to let the bottle break so that the champagne could be saved for the crew) and how this ceremony was followed by a tempestuous cruise on the Channel; he also recounted how Mrs. Daeniker was refused entry in the United Kingdom for failure to produce her working permit! One source of relief, said Mr. Daeniker, was that Lord Arran wasn't so eager to have bashes at Switzerland in his days.

He recalled the Anglo-Swiss dinner ten years ago, where a tombola (with

Margot Fonteyn as the prize-giver) gathered some £8,000 for the Pestalozzi village in Britain. £12,000 was eventually collected and this money was used to build a Swiss annex to the Pestalozzi village inaugurated by Mr. Daeniker himself.

He certainly had a well filled term in London. It was during his term and under his patronage that the Swiss Welfare Office, the Swiss Hostel for Girls', the Swiss Centre and the new Residence were launched. Mr. Daeniker expressed the wish that the Swiss Centre, this proud landmark and symbol of Swiss presence, would receive an additional dignity through the creation of a cultural forum. Evoking the recently unearthed bomb on the site of the future Embassy, he said that, to remain sane, it was far better to live in ignorance of all the dangers that were besetting every day of our lives.

Mr. Daeniker did not forget to give a thought to the "Swiss Observer" and the untiring efforts of its former editor. He also mentioned the Federation of Swiss Societies in Great Britain.

Turning to his dealings with Great Britain and Englishmen, Mr. Daeniker recalled the E.F.T.A. discussions, Britain's entry in that organisation and his own part in the negotiations. He recalled his friendship with the late Lord Mason, his membership to the Court of St. James. He told us of the perfect relations he had had with the host country, he mentioned the success of the Swiss Fortnight (which was held during his term of office in London).

Now that he has retired, Mr. Daeniker assured us that he had not succumbed to the temptation of writing his memoirs. In fact, that wasn't such a habit among Swiss elder statesmen.

Living in the home country again after so many years of duty abroad, he was at last able to get to know its own problems, among which regional planning, the invasion of a boulevard press and an increasingly restive youth were mentioned. Mr. Daeniker was keenly interested in Switzerland's relations with the outside world and lost no opportunity in putting the experience of a life's career to the service of a better understanding of other countries. Mr. Daeniker was an active member of the Swiss-British Society. He saluted the creation of a Winston Churchill library in Zurich, as well as the erection of his statue on the shores of the lake of Thun.

Making a final reflection on the diplomatic career, Mr. Daeniker said he could not quite agree with Franklin Roosevelt, who called ambassadors "cookie pushers". His career in our diplomatic service had been quite on the contrary both exciting and immensely rewarding.

Sir Ralf Perring, who was Lord Mayor of London in 1962, rose up to tell us of his immense attachment to our

country, which he visits year after year, and recalled his friendship with Mr. Daeniker. He met him in a City of London banquet given to the diplomatic corps in 1955. At that time, Sir Ralf was just a "junior alderman, working his passage to the mayoralty". Armin Daeniker and he became friends that evening and they concluded a pact according to which they were to meet each other and patron a regal Anglo-Swiss occasion in Switzerland should the one become Mayor, and the other Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Both these things materialised and so did the reunion on an Anglo-Swiss celebration in Switzerland. An English Week was being held in Zurich. Sir Ralf, returning from Canada, found he had 36 hours to spare, so he jumped into another plane and made for Zurich, not forgetting to get the R.A.F. to transport the coach too. Mr. Daeniker was waiting for him in Zurich. There, the initial and all important problems of finding horses to pull the coach had to be solved, but Mr. Daeniker soon thought of our Army, whose stocky horses finally pulled the gilt coach gloriously through the festooned streets of Zurich.

Soon after Sir Ralf had finished his speech, the party began to break-up, and by about quarter past ten, the Park Suite was being abandoned by its last remaining Anglo-Swiss occupants.

(P.M.B.)

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

The highlight of this month's Swiss Mercantile meeting was the celebration of Mr. Raymond Chappuis' 50th anniversary of active membership to the S.M.S. He related briefly his past fifty years, all spent in this country, and the ceremony in Biel during which he had just received the "Wappenscheibe", or painted glass trophy, from the S.M.S.

Three short films were shown: a documentary on Switzerland, one on Liechtenstein and a difficultly qualifiable but very well made film, which was a Swissair production. The film on Liechtenstein showed some marvellous scenery and had gorgeous colours. The Swissair film, called "Snowbeach Switzerland", was turned in St. Moritz in the Winter; its theme could be considered to be "the joy of living".

After the show, we went downstairs to the Mercantile Society's rather dank, but nicely oak-panelled guest room, where we were offered Dutch beer and held a friendly social. There were about eighteen people present at the meeting. Small numbers perhaps, but ideal for a friendly atmosphere.

(P.M.B.)