

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: - (1970)
Heft: 1586

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

THE ANNUAL DINNER AND BALL OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

As usual, this important and very enjoyable function took place in the familiar setting of the Dorchester and was preceded by a friendly get-together over drinks. I was greeted with the other guests by Mr. and Mrs. A. Jaccard, President of the S.M.S., and then put in the care of Mr. Raymond Chappuis, who offered me a copious Martini. We moved around to salute the many friends present in the room. The other societies were well represented. Many guests, it appeared, were at their first Swiss Mercantile Society Ball. The Society had looked for proselytes outside the ageing circle of its traditional members and attracted many young people from the S.M.S. school of English.

The liveried announcer beckoned us to supper in a stentorian voice and we moved into the pastel glow of the Orchid Suite. Pasteur Nicod said grace and we settled down on our fare. We were offered trout, veal and red cabbages, a menu which I had already tasted at the Dorchester on other similar occasions, but which none the less tasted delicious.

Every table was transported in animated conversation when two gavel knocks on the head table silenced us. The announcer majestically invited us for the royal toast. Mr. Jaccard arose and welcomed us all to the present evening. He specifically welcomed his guests of honour, Monsieur J. A. Iselin, Chargé d'Affaires, and Madame Iselin, Mr. R. M. Suess, Chairman of the Swiss Economic Council, and Mrs. Suess. Monsieur Iselin was representing the Ambassador, Monsieur René Keller, called abroad by his duties. Mr. Jaccard pointed out the important part that Mr. R. M. Suess had played in the creation of the Institute for Swiss Trade Promotion at the Swiss Centre. He welcomed the strong delegation from the Embassy, Monsieur Richard Gaechter, Secretary of Embassy, Monsieur Charles Abegglen and Monsieur Th. Dudli, vice-consuls, and their wives. Among the Mercantile Society's loyal friends, Mr. Jaccard was pleased to welcome Dr. Hans Egli and Mrs. Egli. He mentioned his devoted contribution to the life of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, and expressed his delight at seeing his efforts at creating a Forum of Switzerland at the Swiss Centre gradually materialise.

Mr. Jaccard underlined the tremendous job accomplished by the Swiss clergy in London, musing on the thousands of cups of tea that they must be imbibing each year on their visits to their parishioners.

Following the death of two of the Society's trustees, Mr. Oscar Grob and Mr. Raymond Chappuis (both of them honorary members and past presidents of the S.M.S.) had willingly accepted to serve in a new capacity. Mr. Jaccard took the opportunity of thanking them and greeting them as well as their wives. Another member which Mr. Jaccard would not overlook was Mr. Walter Burren, Secretary of the S.M.S. in London and former Chairman of the Education Committee, and he warmly greeted him and Mrs. Burren.

Mr. Jaccard begged to signal four other guests, Mr. E. W. Slade and Mr. E. W. Wakin, respectively Principal and Vice-Principal of the College, and their wives.

The school has been faring very well in 1969 and was now full to capacity. Costs had soared because of increased expenditure, the guilt being shared by S.E.T. and Graduated Contributions.

Mr. Jaccard ended his address by mentioning the long illness of a friend of long standing of the S.M.S., Mr. Charels Wescott, and proposed to send him a telegram of greetings. He also took the opportunity of thanking the Trustees, the members of the Council and the committees for the support they had given him during the year, making a special mention of Mr. F. O. Hausermann, and concluded his address by inviting us all to drink to the health of our guests and ladies.

Monsieur J. A. Iselin, whose turn had come to address us, began by conveying the greetings of our Ambassador. M. Iselin admitted to the delightful feeling of "being important" which a chargé d'affaires enjoys when his chief is away. He declared himself to be especially grateful to the S.M.S. for giving him the opportunity of savouring this feeling on this evening. Monsieur Iselin said that he had had the opportunity of realising the importance of Swiss businessmen abroad to the country when he was stationed in Berne. He was pleased to note how many of them were active in the Colony. He praised the great job the English school of the S.M.S. was doing among the Swiss youths who streamed towards "swinging London". In fact, the S.M.S. not only taught good English, but was the seeding ground of conjugal happiness: Monsieur Iselin said that good friends of his wife and himself had met at the S.M.S. school in London and married happily.

Monsieur Iselin's first encounter with the S.M.S. was not altogether a friendly one. It happened during a long wait for a free court in an attempt at having a game of tennis. The court was being used by two youths who spoke Schwytzerdütsch and who hap-

pened to be students of the school. Monsieur Iselin ended his address on a viscous note, reminding the ladies that their lipstick was concocted of sheep sweat, a fact that he had learnt listening to an exposé on the wool industry at the last S.M.S. monthly meeting.

Mr. R. M. Suess rose for his address and improved on Monsieur Iselin's revelation by adding that, in his professional capacity he could give some precisions on the slithery components of some perfumes, but that he would naturally refrain from doing so since this would trouble the minds of his female audience.

Mr. Suess knew the S.M.S. very well since he had actually got his professional schooling at this institution. He stressed on the genuine quality of the education given by its schools and on his indebtedness to them. His present position, he said, could not have been achieved without the precious knowledge received on the benches of the S.M.S. in Zurich.

Mr. Suess recalled his early days of apprenticeship, some twenty-nine years ago in Zurich. They were hard days, working hours lasted from 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Apprentices had to come yet half an hour earlier to clean the office, and leave later to do odd chores such as to bring parcels to the post-office. They had a really rough time, but as far as Mr. Suess was concerned, that had been a very useful training in life. He also evoked the austere, creaky high-desk and its tall ink-pot which furnished the accounting room. There had been immeasurable improvements in office equipment and working conditions since those days.

Mr. Suess spoke of the trade in ladies garments and mentioned the implantation of the British "Mothercare" group in Zurich. He believed that Swiss presence in England should not be represented (in the retail field) by just one big shoe company. There was plenty of scope for the establishment of Swiss shops in England. Speaking of women's clothes, Mr. Suess was led to speak on femininity and quoted Mrs. Barbara Castle's definition of the perfect woman: "She looks like a girl, acts like a lady, thinks like a man, and works like a horse."

When Mr. Suess had ended his address, we were beckoned to move to the neighbouring suite while the tables were being cleared and removed for the dancing that was to follow.

That was a very enjoyable dance with plenty of movements on the floor and plenty of beat by the Arthur Salisbury orchestra. The party ended gloriously with a sing-song and "Auld Lang Syne". A good, hearty and gay function.

(PMB)