

Correspondence

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Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Club, Birmingham

on Saturday, April 10th 1937, at the Midland Hotel, Birmingham.

P. BRUN,

President of the Swiss Club Birmingham.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Some five years ago, when I received my first invitation to attend the Annual Banquet and Rally of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, I wrote in the Swiss Observer:

"When I mentioned to some of my friends, that I was going to accept the cordial invitation of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, to attend their 'Swiss Rally,' they gravely shook their heads, saying, that I ought to have had enough by now, after having sat and eaten through innumerable Banquets, danced with a score of lovely ladies, shed tears over farewell parties, slept half way through cinema shows, listened to lectures trying to look intellectual, shouted myself hoarse at football, and Ice Hockey matches, felt sentimental at concerts of Swiss music, looked gloomy at funerals, sympathised with old age, feeling as old as they, told the youngsters of the Colony that I felt and drank every day 'Younger(s)' spent a small fortune on Aspirin Tablets and taxi's, etc..."

Being always open to friendly advice, I reasoned with myself that there was some truth in their allegations. I have certainly swallowed a few gallons of *Consommé*, finished off at least half a poultry farm, depleted some of the Scottish Salmon streams, ate more grass or salad than an average sized *vache*, had ice cream enough to freeze a whole consignment of Canterbury lamb, drank cocktails, wines, spirits, and occasionally water (the latter principally early the next morning), and last, but not least, added an extra stone to my already considerable weight, which caused much annoyance and perplexity in certain quarters.

What was there to be done? I was just going to write a very nice letter, making a hundred and one excuses, when the telephone bell rang, and at the other end sounded the "sweet" voice of the President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham; saying: "What about it?" I told him a most pathetic tale, but he ruled it all out, saying he did not believe a word of it, and I was threatened that his radiant countenance would never shine upon me again, should I decline his special invitation. All those who are lucky enough to know this popular President will understand what a dreadful calamity this would be. I simply could not afford to risk it, and to tell the truth, I wanted to go all the time, and so it happened that I boarded the train on Saturday morning with a heavy bag, and a light heart."

I have grown five years older, if not wiser, since I wrote the above, and once again I was faced with the same dilemma and once again I succumbed to the irresistible charms of the President, and although a tired man, I boarded the Birmingham Express to spend a few happy hours amongst my countrymen in this important Midland town.

Having written now for nearly eight years so many reports of Swiss functions, and Banquets being "much of a muchness" — I feel, there is so little fresh to commend upon, yet, this Birmingham festival has a certain fascination for me; first of all it takes place in different surroundings, and it is enveloped in a different atmosphere. One sees different faces — equally good looking as those of our London Swiss — but perhaps a little less *blanc*, than their brethren in the Metropolis, because they are less spoilt with regard to patriotic functions. —

The reception started a little later than was announced on the programme, but we can hardly blame our Birmingham friends for this, considering that we in London are the worst offenders.

Well over a hundred participants sat down to an excellent dinner, and it is only right that I should, before proceeding any further, congratulate our compatriots Mr. Oerli and his charming wife for the efficient arrangements which were made to ensure that everyone would feel at home from the commencement. Mr. Oerli, who is the Banqueting Manager at the Midland Hotel, enjoys the reputation of being a perfect host, and may I say that he has once again enhanced his reputation; the corpulent and jovial *chef* was equally successful in his domain.

The loyal toast having been proposed by the Chairman, M. P. Brun, and duly honoured, M. E. Montag, the Swiss Consul in Liverpool, proposed, in a witty speech, the toast to Switzerland, which was drunk with great enthusiasm.

M. P. Brun, the President, who on rising received a hearty ovation, extended a hearty welcome to the numerous guests and visitors who had flocked to this Rally from far and near, in particular to M. Montag, Swiss Consul at Liverpool, Dr. Schedler, Swiss Consul at Manchester and Mme. Schedler, the representatives of various Swiss Societies in London and M. Stauffer, Editor of the Swiss Observer and Mrs. Stauffer. He mentioned that various fellow countrymen had travelled from places far away.

Thunderous applause greeted the speaker when he announced that some few hours previous to the Banquet he had become a happy grandfather. — and I express also here to Mr. and Mrs. Brun my heartiest congratulations on this event, — although they did not look at all like grandparents.

Mr. J. J. Boos, Vice-President of the Swiss Mercantile Society in London, expressed, in his usual eloquent manner, on behalf of the guests, their thanks for having been asked to spend a few care-free hours amongst such congenial company.

Mr. E. Brunner, Vice-President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, made a touching Appeal for Charity and I am glad to say that his entreaties were not made in vain.

The dining room was then vacated, and a very efficient band invited all and sundry to the dance floor, and I can only repeat what I wrote on a previous occasion, namely that the Birmingham ladies *can* dance, no quarter was given, it was a matter of "to dance or not to dance," and I got so out of breath in the first half hour, that I found hardly words to compliment all those sweet daughters of Eve on their vivacity, endurance and, of course, charming looks.

Halfway through the evening it was announced that Mlle. Aebischer a very youthful dancer would entertain the company with some Burlesque Dances and recitations. This delightful artiste captured everyone with her exquisite performance and the applause which was spontaneously given was well deserved.

Mr. and Mrs. Guller also reaped great applause with their fine singing, and so did Messrs. Gattiker and Beer with their yodding duets.

Shortly before midnight the National Anthem was played, and a happy evening came to an end, but I am afraid not everybody went "straight home."

On Sunday morning soon after 10 o'clock a fleet of cars set off from the Midland Hotel on the way to Stratford-on-Avon, and I am sure this outing proved a tonic for some of those Gentlemen, who, I am informed "came home with the milk."

Back once more at the Midland Hotel, the party sat down to a special luncheon which was much enjoyed.

After Lunch, M. Brun, the President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham, announced that the official part of the "Rally" had now come to an end. He called on Dr. Schedler to say a few words and the latter paid a well-deserved tribute to the popular head of the Swiss Colony in Birmingham. M. Stauffer, Editor of the Swiss Observer, who was called next, took this opportunity to thank the members of the Swiss Club, Birmingham for the splendid response given to his Appeal for the Swiss who had to leave Spain; he mentioned that nearly half of the amount collected (£518. 0. 0) was subscribed for by our compatriots in the Provinces.

After many handshakes and *au revoir's* the happy gathering dissolved; at least officially.

Nearly 30 members of the party adjourned to the private residence of the President on his special invitation, unfortunately I was unable to be present but I have been told that the President's wine cellar is still well stocked. It was a

befitting *finale* to the 1937 Swiss Rally in Birmingham.

Before finishing this narrative, I would like to assure my readers residing in the Metropolis, that our countrymen in Birmingham, know how to entertain, know how to make everyone feel at home; their feelings towards their homeland are as warm as ours, and the hospitality which they extended to all those who came from outside Birmingham, proves that they have their hearts in the right place. We can be proud of the Colony at Birmingham.

ST.

CORRESPONDENCE.

E.W.—In reply to your enquiry we understand that the "Swiss Sports" will not be held this year. We believe an official announcement will be published shortly.

* * *

U.B.—We have enquired about "Swiss Car Flags" but there seems to be no stock in this country. We have written to our correspondent in Switzerland and we expect to have a few of these ensigns over here within a few day's time.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

The Monthly Meeting was held at Swiss House on Wednesday, April 14th. It was followed by a lecture on "Exploring in the Unknown Arctic" by Edward Shackleton, Esq., B.A., F.R.G.S.

There was a large audience present when the Chairman, Mr. J. J. Boos, Vice-President of the Society, introduced the lecturer. All present were eager to hear from the son of the great Antarctic explorer, Sir Ernest Shackleton, the story of those vast deserts of ice and snow which like the unscaled mountain peaks have an inexorable attraction to the doughty explorer. Many have perished in these regions of everlasting darkness and despite all the progress of science the untamed elements of the North still make journeys romantic and hazardous. But thanks to human progress those who return are able to tell the story of their adventures in a more realistic way than those who have blazed the trail before them.

The advent of the cinema has made it possible to see the Polar bear in his own hunting grounds, the overpowering snow blizzards and all the fights against nature in stark reality on the screen.

Mr. Ernest Shackleton is following closely in his father's footsteps and has already made for himself a name as an organizer and a leader of the Oxford University expeditions to the Tropics and the Arctic, as well as an author and a lecturer.

Mr. Shackleton began his lecture by saying that these expeditions were organised by a small club of the Oxford University called the Exploration Club, consisting of undergraduates and graduates and that during the past few years expeditions had been made to many parts of the world. The expedition he was going to talk about was the first party which had been able to go to the Arctic for a whole year and to show no ill feeling to the sister university of Cambridge two Cambridge men were included in the party which left London in July for Greenland and Northern Ellesmere Land. The lecturer then went on to illustrate with lantern slides and films an expedition which no eloquence could have so vividly depicted. This is in no way intended to detract from the lecturer's qualities as a speaker. His rhetoric was masterful and fully up to the high standard set by his university which after all has produced some of the greatest authorities on the English language. Apart from his thrilling stories it was a treat to listen to the lecturer's diction and with his humorous allusions he not only made immediate contact with the audience but kept the interest alive from beginning to end. His witticisms earned him the undivided attention of the audience who were enraptured in the beautiful photography which showed parts of the world very few are privileged to see.

The journey took us via Greenland where we saw Eskimos harpooning the walrus with great agility from their kayaks. "After collecting one hundred tons of meat," the lecturer said, "we would have made a very good tug-of-war team."

On went the journey through dangerous pack-ice and past beautiful specimens of icebergs which are such a menace to shipping. When the ice closed in completely the party went on sledges across three hundred miles of ice, sometimes climbing almost sheer glaciers.

(To be continued).