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CITY SWISS CLUB.

As mentioned in our last issue, the City Swiss Club celebrated Christmas by a special dinner, on Thursday, December 20th, 1945, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

The principal guest of the evening was the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger.

About 130 members and friends were present, and the animated conversation which took place in the cocktail bar, previous to the dinner, was a happy fore-taste of the coming festive season.

The Banqueting Hall was handsomely decorated in true Yule-tide fashion, complete with Xmas Tree, Holly, and even mistletoe. The *Menu* too was a seasonal one, there was onion soup, turkey, Xmas pudding and mince pies, and the Management of the Dorchester Hotel is to be warmly congratulated on their successful efforts to create a truly Xmas "Stimmung."

Mr. A. Bon, President of the City Swiss Club, cordially welcomed Monsieur Ruegger, the Swiss Minister, to the first Xmas dinner of the Club since 1939. In his introductory address he mentioned that an article about the Swiss Colony appeared in one of the Swiss papers, from which one might have gathered, quite wrongly, that the Guest of Honour did not enjoy the esteem of the Colony, to which he was so eminently entitled, owing to his painstaking work, and the great services he had and is rendering at his responsible post. He assured Monsieur Ruegger of the full confidence the Swiss Colony had in him and wished him success in his work. (Loud applause.)

The President also extended a hearty welcome to Professor Keller, Head of the Commercial Mission at present in this country, who by his brilliant work during the last few years, deserves the thanks of his compatriots; to Professor Rappard, who, as special envoy of the Federal Council on numerous occasions, enjoys both the confidence of the British and Swiss Governments; to Colonel of Division Bandi, Head of the Swiss Air Force, who from small beginnings has built up an up-to-date and efficient Force; to Colonel Cottier, Chief of the Swiss Transport Commission, for his great efforts in the sphere of Transport; to Mr. Nussbaumer, General Manager of the Schweiz. Bankverein, who, as his predecessor at the Head of the Swiss Benevolent Society, rendered unforgettable services to the Swiss poor in London; to Pasteur Prader-vand and Father Lanfranchi for their untiring work on behalf of their respective congregations.

Professors Rappard and Keller and Colonel Cottier thanked the President and the members of the City Swiss Club for their hospitality.

The President then called upon the Swiss Minister to address the gathering. The latter received a hearty ovation on rising. He said that his address on the occasion of this Xmas dinner would be a short one, as at Xmas time thoughts quite naturally revert to our own family circle at home and in this country and long abstract statements might be apt to fall on unwilling ears.

The Minister expressed his thanks to the Chairman, Mr. Bon, for his friendly words of welcome, and for the impulse he has given and is giving to the City Swiss Club, and in another field, to the Swiss Benevolent Society. "I am," he said, "likewise exceedingly glad to see around these tables some of the Presidents and other representatives of other Swiss Societies in

London, many of whom I have had the pleasure of meeting in the course of the last month since I returned from Switzerland."

Monsieur Ruegger expressed words of welcome to Professor William Rappard, who, as special representative of the Federal Government, rendered already during the last Peace conference of 1919/20 the most remarkable and decisive services to our country and whose presence again in London in a period when important international organisations are meeting, was most highly valued.

The Minister also paid a special tribute to the Trade Delegation presided over by Professor Keller for the work done by the Delegation, and to the Swiss Transport Committee of the International Labour organisation and to its Head, Colonel Cottier.

Monsieur Ruegger continued as follows:—

"I should like to ask you, at the end of this momentous and eventful year, to cast with me a glance on some of these events and, thereafter, to look ahead towards what we may expect, or at least hope, to see achieved in the future.

The beginning of 1945 like the end of this year bore the signs of important economic negotiations. For the first time after the long period during which our country was absolutely landlocked, an important British Governmental mission came to Switzerland, joining there a similar mission from the United States and a delegation of the French Republic. The result of these negotiations was important, the psychological effect perhaps even more so. In the



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economic field, our problems are urgent and difficult. However, recent and far reaching decisions taken by the Federal Government and the presence here in London of my friend Professor Keller, give us reasonable hopes as to the outcome of impending conversations which will shortly be held in a spirit of amity and mutual understanding.

In the field of transport and communications, our hopes were, at least partially, fulfilled. We have certainly yet a long way to go before we shall see entirely restored all former channels of communications which made regular traffic for all from our country to England so easy and delightful. Our Colony is no longer in the grip of isolation, its insular and landbound feeling is waning, Postal and telephone communications have been most satisfactorily resumed. Air transportation may for the moment yet be a privilege of the 'happy few,' but the Swissair has certainly been accomplishing miracles since last summer. Technically and under the existing arrangements the air lines to Switzerland are as yet working as a courier service for Government purposes in the first place.

A problem which fills our minds unceasingly is that pertaining to Swiss labour in the United Kingdom. We must understand, and do understand, the necessary priorities which have to be secured by the Government in favour of demobilised members of the armed forces. But, a steady flow or at least a trickle of new blood from our country towards our colonies is necessary, lest these should suffer from a pernicious anemia. The prospects following the opening of the Swiss Mercantile School are favourable. In this field also, we may trust that the hopes of our authorities will meet with a friendly understanding on behalf of the Government of this great country and will come nearer to realisation in the course of next year.

About this time twelve months or so ago, I believe I had the occasion of mentioning here our most cordial relations with the Governments of friendly countries, who had sought temporarily a home and haven in Great Britain whilst their own soil had been invaded. For a good part the contacts of Switzerland with these Governments were evidently maintained through the channel of our Legation. Our thoughts of friendship and sympathy have accompanied the Governments of these countries when they have at last been able to return, amid an explosion of joy on behalf of the liberated peoples, to their own native soil.

I may mention also the happy circumstances which made it possible for us to resume in London, owing to happy decisions of the Federal Council and to the understanding of the President and Government of Czechoslovakia, the official and friendly relations with the latter country. You will remember that all these decisions are taken most rapidly and that my friend, M. Girardet, Counsellor of this Legation throughout the years of war, left us in order to assume his post as Minister in Prague.

I should finally like to mention the progress so happily accomplished towards the establishment of Legations in the Dominions. More than once, this subject had been broached in these gatherings and especially, you will remember, when we had the pleasure of welcoming here the former Prime Minister of Canada, Lord Bennett. Now a Legation of

Switzerland has been created in Ottawa. The vast programme of the Federal Government in the field of developing our country's diplomatic representations provides also for the setting up of Legations in the Union of South Africa and in Australia. These are only some of the points which should be recalled whilst casting a summary glance on recent events.

With the Government of His Majesty in the United Kingdom our relations are, of course, as cordial and as trusting as ever.

And now finally a few words on what we may see if we try to look ahead.

Our Federal Government, our Parliament and the people may, in a not remote future, forcibly have to take decisions of the greatest import in the field of our relations to the coming World Organisation. Here again, we must see things as they are, in their true perspective, unbiassed by what may be our hopes and expectations. For the United Nations Organisation, the decisions we may finally reach are certainly of interest, they are not, however, of a predominant importance. These decisions are, on the other hand, of the most vital import to our country, Switzerland. Our traditional policy of neutrality allowed Switzerland throughout the centuries and also under the system set up by the League of Nations, to lead her own life without seeking for any lasting buttress from any single State or from a determinate group of States. Like in 1919/20, we must hope and trust that our will for international co-operation can and will be recognised after due consideration of our special position and without our having to decide, like belligerent States less engaged by humanitarian duties and activities, by a simple aye or no. This 'aye or no' would, of course, in our direct democracy, alone among all States, have to be uttered by the people themselves. The Charter of San Francisco, like the Covenant of the League of Nations, assures economic advantages to the members of the World Organisation only in an indefinite manner. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that political isolation could but make it more difficult to place our foreign intercourse on sure and favourable foundation. In many fields — the field of technical co-operation for instance — our participation can be active from the outset.

These are some of the problems only which confront the Federal Government and which may confront our people. To-day we may say, however, that a representative advisory body called by M. Petitpierre, Federal Councillor in charge of the Political Department — a body on which it has been my privilege to work whilst in Switzerland — have been able to formulate, unanimously, a positive and constructive *doctrine*. This doctrine has been brought to the cognizance of our public opinion.

In the first place, Switzerland doubtless feels it her duty and her call to be present in the field of international co-operation. She has striven for this ideal throughout the centuries and, to-day, less than ever, will she relinquish this ideal.

On the other hand, the Swiss advisory body held unanimously that the international traditional status of Switzerland — which alone enabled our country to fulfill its mission — should be upheld not merely as a safeguard for Switzerland, but as a posi-

tive contribution towards the aims of the international organisation.

The mission of Switzerland, as has been so rightly said, is not only to protect the Alpine passes, but also to keep open paths for good will. The latter we may recall especially on the occasion of this Christmas gathering, for the ideas it suggests are doubtless in the true Christmas spirit."

The Minister closed his *exposé* by his personal best wishes for members of the City Swiss Club and the Colony, and was warmly applauded by the company.

Mr. Bon, on behalf of the members of the City Swiss Club, thanked Monsieur Ruegger for his address and, in joining him in his wishes for the coming year, closed the Meeting.

* * *

The January Meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Monday the 7th at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Mr. Bon, the President, in opening the Meeting, extended a hearty welcome to the various guests, and especially to the Guest of Honour, Commander Stephen King-Hall, the well-known Parliamentarian, writer and sailor.

Commander King-Hall, in his witty address, gave a resumé of his journey to Russia with the Parliamentary Delegation in January, 1945. He pointed out that this was a historic mission, and the first delegation of its kind to proceed on such a visit to the U.S.S.R.

"The theory," he said, "that the Russians only show you what they want you to see was completely exploded so far as we were concerned," and as an example he stated that he wanted to inspect a Russian man-of-war; he also told Mr. Molotov that he would like to go to Central Asia, and furthermore he desired to be left alone with his own interpreter with Russian students. All these requests, he mentioned, were immediately granted.

The Commander said that in order to impress upon many minds a correct picture of Russian society as it exists to-day, it would be first necessary to dispel two opposed but widely held illusions. Many people suppose that Russians are Communists or Bolsheviks, whose zealous desire it is to overthrow capitalist governments and capitalist forms of society. Other people suppose that this classless, ideal society has been achieved, and that Soviet Russia is a paradise on earth.

The speaker said that both these conceptions of Russia are absolutely and entirely wrong, and that the rather uninteresting but significant fact about Russians is, that they are ordinary human beings who, subject to the local influence of Russian historical tradition and Russian racial and national characteristics, react to circumstances in the ordinary human way.

Referring to the political conditions, Commander King-Hall said that the only political party permitted to exist is called the Communist Party, which name is, in his opinion, a complete misnomer, and that the present Communist Party in Russia, of which Marshal Stalin is the Secretary-General, should be called "The Russian National Party," or "The All Russian Patriotic Party."

The lecturer then described some specific aspects of Russian life to-day, saying that persons in superior

classes are at various levels, and that one of the outward and visible signs was the craving for medals, orders and decorations. There were 48 a year ago, and one of the most recent was the "Order of the Mother Heroine of the Soviet Union," for which the qualification is ten or eleven (or more) children. These orders and decorations, which are worn in public, carry with them various privileges in cash or kind.

He mentioned that Education is free in the Universities, but that the stipend depends on the number of marks a student gets in the exams.

As an example, that it is still possible to make money in Russia of to-day, he stated the case of a composer, who told him that he had received 25,000 roubles when he completed an opera, in addition he had been given a high rank in one of the Artistic Orders which carried a cash payment of 50,000 roubles. He then got a percentage each time the opera was performed.

The Commander said that the Commercial Shops are Government owned stores where every kind of commodity can be purchased at prices ten, twenty or more times their price "on the ration." He pointed out that Red Army officers have no expenses, and when on leave they come back to Moscow full of cash and blow it in a gala evening at the huge Government-owned Night Clubs.

He referred to the fearful and desperate housing shortage, but said that in all the devastated cities there are vast plans for new construction, principally for big blocks of flats in garden city style.

With regard to the religious condition, the Commander said that the Orthodox Church in Russia is now a supporter of the régime, and that upon its emaciated body the rays of the Kremlin sun are now beginning to fall.

The Commander then gave a lengthy description of frank and full discussions on a great many subjects with students and professors which he had in various centres, from which he drew the conclusion that the technical educations is good. In Russia, at present, he said, both girls and boys seem to have equal chances of professional careers.

Commander King-Hall finished his highly interesting lecture by saying that he has no doubt that it is the purpose of the Russian régime substantially to raise the standard of life of the Russian peoples, and that the Rulers of Russia are anxious to obtain for their people security from attack. He voiced the conviction that Russia will move on, mentally and materially and that her people will move on along the broad path of political evolution in a manner and style conditioned by their national and racial characteristics.

The lecturer on resuming his seat received a hearty ovation. A lively discussion then ensued in which many questions were asked and dealt with by him.

Before closing the meeting, Mr. Bon thanked Commander King-Hall for his instructive comments, and expressed the hope that relations between the U.S.S.R. and Switzerland will, in the near future, be resumed.

Close of the Meeting 9.30 p.m.

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