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58th ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON of the SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY at the DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

Birthday parties are always jolly affairs and the anniversary celebration of the Swiss Mercantile Society on Saturday, November 2nd, 1946, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1, was no exception to this rule.

Two hundred and sixty-five members and friends attended the party, a sure proof of the popularity of the Society. There was no birthday cake, owing to the scarcity of candles, but the flower decorations at the top table made up for it and stimulated a festive *cachet*.

As the Swiss Minister remarked in his opening speech, the Swiss Mercantile Society is now "middle-aged," and has therefore reached the "middle-age spread," a good thing for a Society, but less appreciated by human beings.

There is still plenty of life and vigour in this institution; I had the privilege to attend the 25th as well as the 50th anniversary of the S.M.S., and I hope that a kind Providence will allow me to take part in the 75th anniversary; now on their 58th birthday I find the Society still as lively as ever.

The Dorchester Hotel provided a good luncheon; the wine list contained several fine vintages, at prices which nearly came up to the age of the Society; this might have been meant as a compliment to the birthday child, but it was less so to the purse of the participants.

Shortly after the coffee was served, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, proposed the toasts to H.M. the King and to Switzerland; both were honoured with acclamation.

Then, to the delight of the company, Mlle. Brun, a noted artiste in our country, and at present on a visit over here, sang a song or two, accompanied by Mr. R. Chappuis; her fine voice and lively interpretation was a pleasure to listen to.

The applause, which she deservedly received, had hardly died away, when the Toast-master announced that the Swiss Minister wished to address the gathering.

Monsieur Ruegger, who had only returned the day previous to the party from Switzerland, received a hearty ovation on rising from the "Fauteuil Presidentiel."

The Minister mentioned that he had made a special effort to attend the annual anniversary luncheon of the Swiss Mercantile Society, which he considers to be one of the outstanding events in the Colony.

He said, "I deem it a privilege to meet, under the auspices of your Society, so many friends and, if I may say so, pillars of the London Colony. I have also to convey to you the greetings and best wishes of my wife who had very much hoped to join me and you all to-day, but who has been retained abroad.

"My first words will be to express, upon this happy anniversary, my sincerest congratulations to the Swiss Mercantile Society of London, to its Council and General Purposes Committee, the Education and House Committee and to the Advisory Board of the Employment Department. We all know full well and realise the excellent and steadfast work which is being done, in such various fields of thought, of preparation and of action by all the members concerned. And I am sure you will all join me if, above all, I give expression to our very deep and sincere feelings of thanks towards M. Boos, the so very deserving and excellent Chairman of your Council and Association. The Swiss Legation are keenly aware, as are our competent Government Departments in Berne, of the persevering, earnest and successful efforts of your Chairman to maintain, in war-time, against all difficulties, the programme of the Swiss Mercantile Society and to sow the seeds of a fruitful activity of your Association and all its departments in the crucial period following the war.

"The Swiss Mercantile Societies," he continued, "in the large European capitals have a task to perform which is a most necessary corollary to the action of the Central Association in our country. The commercial activity of Switzerland depends to a great extent upon her initiative abroad. It is not the exchange of goods only which is vital for our economic existence, but the development also of the human *substratum* which, after all, carries and supports all foreign trade. One of the aims of the Mercantile Societies is to develop constantly the professional efficiency of those who are active in commercial life. From this follows the great, the very great importance of the Educational Departments, especially in the capitals which are great economic as well as linguistic centres. And, above all, in London. The present prosperity and economic activity of our country must not lull us into self-deception. The moment will come — and perhaps in a not far off future — when much will depend on the *quality* not only of Swiss goods, but of the training and preparation of our commercial employees at home and abroad.

"With the proof of excellent quality only can we hope to pierce the barriers, which, as the heritage — or the mortgage — following two wars, render employment abroad often so difficult.

"We can perhaps hardly hope that, in this great country — as well as in others which, in former times, absorbed so many of our commercial employees — the gates will be largely opened, in a near future, for economic activities our younger generation was formerly accustomed to find also in England. Present circumstances make this difficult, in spite of the understanding shown by the British authorities and, on the highest level, by that great and eminent statesman, Mr. Ernest Bevin who, already as Labour Minister, gave proofs of his sympathy for Switzerland. On the basis of an exchange system, for instance, and in other ways some progress may, however, be realised in future. Above all, one valuable prospect remains and may, in a near future, even take larger proportions: the prospect that young Swiss, who temporarily come to England to develop their knowledge, not only of the English language, but of English ways of thought and of commercial customs, may lay here the foundations

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of a useful activity in other parts of the great Commonwealth and of the world."

The Swiss Minister's oration was loudly cheered by the entire gathering.

Then the microphone was placed in front of the President, Mr. J. J. Boos, a proceeding loudly cheered by his audience.

He extended a hearty welcome to the Swiss Minister and to the company. Mr. Boos expressed regrets that Nat. Councillor Schmid-Ruedin and Mr. Strickler, who had intended to attend the party, were detained in Switzerland on urgent business, and were therefore unable to attend.

The President said that during the last few months, he, as well as several members of the Council, had had the pleasure to make contact with the Head Office in Zurich, thus renewing the old ties of friendship which have always existed. He also mentioned that the Society was duly represented at the Delegates' Meeting of the S.K.V. in Davos.

Referring to the opening of the College on May 1st, 1946, he said that for the first course 54 students were enlisted, and for the second course, now in full swing, 90 students at one time attended, making a total of 126 students. He said that it was hoped to enrol lady students for the first and second courses in 1947, who hitherto could not be taken owing to lack of accommodation; in addition, Mr. Boos pointed out, evening classes were held throughout the year in English, French and Russian. With regard to "Swiss House" the President remarked that in the middle of October, after lengthy negotiations with the landlord, the architect and the builders, in which negotiations the Trustee of the Society, Mr. G. E. DeBrunner, played a major part, a contract was placed to put "Swiss House" in proper repair. Nearly £3,000 will be spent, of which £2,500 will be the landlord's and war damage share, whilst the Society will be called upon to provide avout £500, in addition to the £300 already spent on repairs and new equipment.

Mr. Boos continued by saying, "The re-organisation and re-start of our full activities is costing much money and the S.M.S. is grateful to the many donors and contributing members. Some have already sent in their share for 1946 but to the others I appeal to be generous in their donations and I cann assure them that the money will be well spent."

The President also voiced his gratitude for the support received from the Swiss authorities and the Swiss Legation, and in conclusion expressed his pleasure at seeing so many old members present, amongst them Messrs. DeBrunner, L. Chapuis, Ungricht, Pfaendler, Stahelin, Stauffer, Weist and others.

The address of the popular President was enthusiastically cheered by all present.

After a further solo by Mlle. Brun, Mr. Meier, Vice-President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, extended, on behalf of the Society, greetings to the official guests; he said:

"It has become a tradition at these annual dinners of the Swiss Mercantile Society to entertain a small number of distinguished guests and good friends. It is my privilege to say, on behalf of the members of the Society, a few words of welcome to these guests.

"We are greatly honoured by the presence of several members of the Legation. First and foremost the Swiss Minister. M. Ruegger, as one of the leading diplomats of our country, has many engagements in the international sphere. This makes it necessary for him to be away from London on numerous occasions and, as a consequence, his very able Chargé d'Affaires, Dr. Escher, has often taken the Minister's place at important functions in the life of the Colony, such as the opening of our College to which the President has referred. Dr. Escher is one of our honoured guests and so are M. and Mme. de Graffenried.

"The Commercial Counsellor of the Legation has addressed the members of the Swiss Mercantile Society on several occasions during recent years. A fact which we much appreciate. Nor is Mme. de Graffenried a stranger at Swiss House.

"We have also invited our Trustees. Mr. Eichenberger was unable to come, but Mr. DeBrunner and Mr. Steiner are here. Although Mr. DeBrunner has lived in the country for some years, he never fails to make the journey specially to London when his advice and guidance are wanted at one of our Council Meetings. Mr. Steiner has now retired from a very active and prominent position in the City of London and I would like to express to him, on behalf of all of us, our

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best wishes for a pleasant and prolonged rest in the country.

" We have again extended an invitation to the Presidents of some of the Swiss Societies. Mr. Bon is here as President of the City Swiss Club. Many of us are also members of the City Swiss Club and we know the outstanding services he has rendered to the understanding of Switzerland's position during the war. We also know of his work in our own local affairs as President of the Swiss Benevolent Society. The Nouvelle Société Helvétique is represented by its captain for many years, Mr. Suter, accompanied by Mrs. Suter. They, too, live in the country now, but they have specially made the journey to be with us.

" We also have a distinguished guest from Switzerland, Mlle. Brun, an artist of note, who, I am pleased to say, will sing to us later this afternoon.

" You will have noticed among the distinguished company at the President's table Dr. de Wolff, London Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation. The Swiss Bank occupies a very important place in the life of the Swiss Colony. In the first place the Swiss Mercantile Society keep an account there and secondly, many of our members are on their staff. This, you will agree, is sufficient to keep the Bank in the forefront of affairs in the City.

" As usual, we have asked the members of the Swiss Press to be our guests. Mr. Stauffer is presiding at his own table over there and I am sure we are all happy to know that he has returned to his desk in Leonard Street, where he puts pepper and salt into his reports in the ' *Swiss Observer.*' Then we would not miss Dr. Egli and Mr. and Mrs. Keller. Both Mr. Keller and Dr. Egli have distinguished themselves as Presidents of the International Press Association and readers of the ' *Times* ' will know of Dr. Egli's recent initiative for the creation of an International Press Centre in London. Mr. Keller has made a reputation for himself as representative of the ' *Basler Nachrichten* ' and the ' *Schweizerische Depeschenagentur.*' He is a former student of our College and has often lectured at Swiss House since. Mrs. Keller, also, is a frequent visitor there.

" We also have some guests who have not gained prominence in the political or financial or diplomatic field, but they have become true friends of many of us and our families. I mean the Ministers of the Swiss Churches, Pfarrer Blum, Pasteur Pradervand and Father Lanfranchi. Indeed, a gathering of this kind would be incomplete without them.

" In conclusion I would extend, on behalf of all the members of the Swiss Mercantile Society, a very hearty welcome to the ladies. We have, of course, lady members of our Society and we have a very active ladies' group, who have often delighted us with teas and refreshments at our meetings and with characteristic resource they have planned a children's Christmas party for us. Well, I include them in the welcome to all the ladies and I include the students of the College and their masters and any other guests of members of the Society. May you all spend an enjoyable afternoon in our company and carry away with you the memory of a pleasant reunion with the Swiss Mercantile Society."

After due acknowledgment of Mr. Meier's efficient address, Mr. A. Bon, President of the City Swiss Club, on behalf of the guests, thanked the Society for their generous hospitality; he addressed his words principally to the younger generation, hoping that a chance will soon be given to our young men at home, to visit foreign lands and thus perfect their education.

His excellent words were greatly appreciated by his hearers.

This concluded the official part of the proceedings and dancing began to the tune of the excellent Dorchester Band.

Young and old indulged in waltzing, Paul Jones, etc., and I was glad to notice that many of the " old ones " hopped about like youngsters. What was sadly missed was a Master of Ceremony, to introduce some of the younger gentlemen to partners; rows and rows of good-looking youngsters contented themselves by looking on, whilst rows and rows of equally good looking young ladies had to remain as wall-flowers.

During the dancing, tea was served, and Mr. von Bergen, accompanied by his daughter, gave a yodel solo. Mr. A. L. Gandon also played some Swiss tunes on his accordeon which were greatly appreciated.

Shortly before 6 o'clock, the 58th birthday party of the Swiss Mercantail Society came to an end; it was a happy gathering, and will long linger in the memory of all those who took part.

In conclusion, I extend my heartiest good wishes to the Swiss Mercantile Society, and may we meet again on their 59th birthday celebration.

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