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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

A full house awaited Mr. Philip Schmid-Ruedin, General Secretary of the Swiss Mercantile Society and National Councillor for 26 years, and his wife at Swiss House, on Wednesday, 28th May.

Mr. W. Meier welcomed our guests, in whose honour we departed from our custom and conducted the meeting in German. Our President referred to the thirty eventful years during which Mr. Schmid-Ruedin had been at the head of our society which now numbers more than 53,000 members and 6,000 junior members. He also praised the comprehensive labours, many of them of direct concern and benefit to the Swiss abroad, which our guest has to his credit.

Owing to a previous engagement our Minister, Mr. Henry de Torrenté, was able to stay for a moment only to shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Schmid-Ruedin. The Legation was nevertheless well represented. Moreover, we had the pleasure of the company of our veterans, Messrs. Gattiker, Dannmeyer, Kibiger, and Pfürter.

Mr. Meier again had the sad duty of reporting the death of one of our members, Mr. Fritz von Bergen, who in years gone by frequently entertained the colony with his songs and yodels. The gathering paid the usual tribute by standing in silence.

Mr. Schmid-Ruedin presented our veteran, Mr. F. Kibiger, with the plaque commemorating fifty years membership of the S.M.S. He regretted that Mr. Kibiger had not been able to collect the plaque at Chur, where he would have received it at the hands of a pretty Grison maiden. Our veteran fittingly responded to the presentation.

Here we came to the important business of the evening, when our President called on Mr. Schmid-Ruedin to address us on the working of the Swiss Parliament.

The present Swiss constitution, with some modifications, goes back to 1848, and was largely influenced by the constitution of the U.S.A. Besides the National Council (Volkskammer) it provides for a second chamber, the State Council, representing the Cantons. There are 196 national councillors (not less than one per canton) and 44 state councillors. These two combined constitute the Bundesversammlung, which has considerable rights and powers. It prepares laws and revokes them, elects the federal councillors, the members of the federal court of justice, the federal chancellor, and in times of international tension, the General. It supervises the work of the Federal Coun-

cil and the state finances through sub-committees. It grants amnesties, reverses sentences. The presidents of the two chambers work hand in hand and arrange the order and distribution of the parliamentary business. Every Swiss aged 20 is eligible for membership. In practice most of them are 30-40 years of age when they enter parliament. It requires many years of druggery and hard work in subordinate positions in political parties before the electors consider a man worthy of promotion. The councillors are not very liberally treated in the matter of their expenses. They receive frs.50 per day. The fare to Berne is paid only once for a session lasting two to three weeks. They enjoy no special facilities on the Federal Railways.

Having given us this general outline, Mr. Schmid-Ruedin proceeded to explain how the political work is accomplished. He elucidated to us the meaning of the Postulat (suggestion to the FEDERAL Council; Motion (initiation of an act of parliament to be ultimately accepted by both chambers); Interpellation which requires to be sponsored by nine other councillors and deals with matters of political concern to the Swiss electorate; question time, which has not proved popular in the Swiss parliament.

Interspersed with anecdotes and actual experiences, the address was listened to with close attention and enjoyed by all. A short period of questions and answers, and a very apt and glowing vote of thanks moved by Mr. Stahelin to the speaker and Mrs. Schmid-Ruedin, concluded this memorable meeting at 9 o'clock.

E.H.S.

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