

News from the colony

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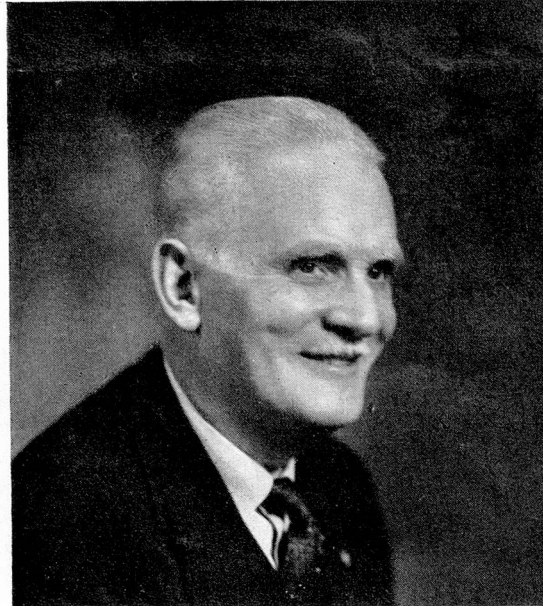
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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS CLUB, MANCHESTER ANNUAL BANQUET AND BALL



The President
Mr. E. Berner

After three decades of eager partaking in banquets and balls, dinners and dances, in the Swiss Colony in Great Britain, I may claim to have some experience. But it does not take thirty years to be able to gauge an atmosphere. In some of the societies of the Swiss community in England there has been a slight, in others a more noticeable change over the years. I don't mean only the reduction in the length of the speeches and the number of courses — one beneficial to our mental state *during* and the other to our physical well-being *after* the function. The relaxation in dress regulations plays a part in the change, too. Obviously, there is less splendour and brilliance in a gathering where "tails" have been done away with wholly or partly, and the ladies' elegant and sweeping evening gowns have in parts made room for the more practical, though sophisticated short frocks. Many are the facets of the change, the shifting of the average age of members, a transfer of social power and distinction from one class to another, new cultural and economic conditions, the decline of certain standards. I am not going to stick out my neck trying to pin down the changes which vary from one of our Swiss societies to another. I confine myself to the general statement, possibly with a sigh of regret that change there has been.

Having just come back from the Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Club in Manchester, I may state emphatically, however, that the atmosphere of this yearly function has altered far less than anywhere else and my observations are borne out by friends whose memory goes back much further than mine. I am still under the spell of my impressions, and not even more than five and a half hours on a train (Sunday travel in G.B. is famous for drawn-out and much-interrupted journeys) have been able to sober down my enthusiasm. Of course, many of the old familiar faces have, alas, disappeared. The young men that were, may have put on waistline and forehead, but also gained wisdom and maturity. And what the then young ladies

have increased in pounds, wrinkles and grey hair, they have also added in charm and serenity. The Manchester Swiss Club, too, has trouble in finding enough young members, and its Treasurer has no easier job than any of his long-suffering colleagues elsewhere trying to maintain a sound financial basis. Yet from the very first moment I was struck by the same informally happy and carefree atmosphere which I felt fourteen years ago when my husband and I attended the centenary celebration of the Club.

The members and friends, four score and more, gathered for drinks in the Foyer of the Small Ballroom at the Midland Hotel in Manchester on Saturday evening, 14th November. After the first get-together, they were received by the Guests of Honour, the Swiss Ambassador and Madame de Fischer, and the Club's President Mr. E. Berner and his wife. The two ladies — without intent — did honour to our national colours, for one was dressed in red, the other in white, and two fine figures they made! The lively and warm concern the Ambassador and Madame de Fischer always show when meeting members of the Swiss community has already endeared them wherever they have been, and Manchester is no exception. Everyone felt that their interest was intensely personal and not just a formal obligation as Switzerland's representatives at the Court of St. James's. Consequently, the handshaking was not just a formality, but a personal enquiry, and nobody minded that it all took longer than usual.

The dinner table, "E" shaped with two centre bars, was gaily decorated with red and white flowers, brilliant against the pale blue Wedgwood *décor* of the room. Each guest had his own, personal menu card, old-fashioned, maybe, what with angels holding up a garland of edelweiss and a shield with the Swiss cross, Rütli scenery on the front page and, on the back, a picture of the three stalwarts of 1291 swearing the oath one for all — all for one. It's old-world reminiscence was almost touching, and I fail to see how anyone could object. After all, it is the

"Grütlifeier" which, according to the Club's constitution, is held annually in November. The menu, too, was in keeping with the small mounted Swiss and British flags garnishing the tables and, as the President cautioned the diners, not to be taken away as souvenirs.

The first speech of the evening was delivered by Dr. H. B. Knuchel, the toast of Switzerland. He recalled the "Voie de la Suisse" at the EXPO, reminding us of the true Switzerland. He told us that an English friend of his had exclaimed with reference to the Zermatt epidemic and the Mirage affair "Thank goodness, you Swiss are human after all!" He reminded his listeners that the theme of the next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in August 1965 would be "La Présence de la Suisse" in which we Swiss abroad could play a considerable part. Our patriotism must also be critical in order to be constructive. We should love Switzerland not *in spite* of her faults, but *because* of them.

I am not in the habit of reproducing after-dinner speeches *in extenso*. It is usually like taking a sentence out of its context, and they often give the wrong impression because the surroundings, the *ambiance* of the gathering are missing. If I am going to reprint most of Mr. Berner's presidential address, it is because he created such a lively picture of the Club and its activities that it would be a pity not to reproduce it.

It is with a sentiment of deep satisfaction and with the greatest pleasure that we Swiss of the North wish to welcome you, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur and Madame de Fischer, and to express to you our very sincere thanks for having accepted our invitation and embarked on a journey which in many ways may be tiresome. We do hope, however, that your stay amongst us and your contacts with this great industrial, commercial and cultural city will compensate you for all this and strengthen your resolve to return again.

Also to our new Consul and Madame Brunner our hearty welcome. We have much affection for our Consulate, and in the course of years a fine spirit of collaboration and understanding has developed between the Colony, our Club and the Consular Authorities, and there is no doubt in my mind that this will be the case for many more years to come. I can assure you, Monsieur and Madame Brunner that you and your family will find only friends in this Club, and we shall try in our own modest but sincere way to make you feel at home amongst us.

Who does not know Mrs. Meier, Mariann of the "Swiss Observer" which under her able editorship has developed into an interesting and fine paper; we are so glad, Mrs. Meier, to see you amongst us, tonight.

I am also very happy to see at this table the President of the Yorkshire Swiss Club and Mrs. Mueller. You, Sir, and many of your friends are helping and actively contributing to our Club's efforts and we shall not forget this. Thank you so much and let us hope that we shall see you both on many more happy occasions.

A very hearty welcome to our British friends with us here tonight, to whom I should like to say how much we appreciate the hospitality given to us by your country, the security and employment, and how for many of us this Island has become our second home.

I'm not so old that I ought to take refuge in empty phrases of flowery expressions, so, dear Ladies, will you take me seriously when I tell you how profoundly happy I am to see you here tonight and how much this means to all of us, because your presence is necessary to give this evening that particular charm, that particular happy atmosphere, which otherwise would be sorely missing.

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, you have before you a Club laden with 114 years of experience, but still forward-looking, alive and active, purposeful in its work and not fearing the difficulties of our times. It is a Club whose spirit is alien to social classes, religious or other groupings, as a matter of fact it does not pursue a closed shop policy. We cater for old and young alike, we cater for everybody, a true cross section of the Swiss people as a whole.

At home they may look with some apprehension to the future of our Colonies abroad and the new world pattern, and the special conditions today prevailing in Switzerland are not always favourable to the healthy and steady growth of our Societies; however, I hate the word "Veralterung" and everything that goes with it. I can assure you that, although we in Manchester are suffering from this general trend, nevertheless we are willing and well determined to take good care and watch with love over the future of our Swiss Club. In this I am seconded by a devoted, dedicated and never tiring committee, and my heartfelt thanks go to every single member of it.

Dr. Obrist, (who had said grace preceding the Dinner) although established in Yorkshire, as I am, is a long-standing friend and member of our club. We are most fortunate to have in him an excellent Vice-President, whose "pre-fix" certainly does not do him any justice. Mr. Scheiwiller, our financial wizard, who, on the death of Mr. Sohm had at very short notice to assume the functions of a Treasurer, a post he fills successfully. Although the very nature of such an activity might at times invite some mild criticism I can assure you that our finances are in good hands. Mrs. Trudi Monney, our Secretary, carries a name with a long tradition. She is burdened with a great amount of work and responsibility, and we all are very much indebted to her for all she does in the interest of our Club.

We have suffered a grievous and painful loss through the death of Henry Monney and Johannes Sohm, two most prominent, devoted and patriotic members, and although tonight the two seats are empty we feel their spiritual presence amongst us. We lost also Mrs. Elsbeth Bébié who had a long and fruitful connection, both with the Swiss Club and the Swiss Relief Society, always so lively and charming, we shall miss her very much indeed. (I was glad to see both Mrs. Monney and Mrs. Sohm present — just as their late husbands would have wished them to be.)

Ladies and gentlemen, a Committee alone is not a Club, and we expect from all of you full support, morally and materially. Let us be loyal towards our Club, which after all represents for us a little piece of our home-country, our greater family and for many of us the only possibility to meet other Swiss. Let us not fail those who through special circumstances are unable to visit or retire to Switzerland, let us give them our company, show them our interest and pleasure to see them at our meetings, gatherings and functions; let us not only think in terms of taking but rather of giving.

Today emphasis is laid on youth, but this was always so. I for myself do not feel "veraltet or verrostet", I do like young people, I do like youth, I like to follow their aspirations, their hopes, to help them with their problems, but let this not be a onesided feeling only. I was a young man, myself, and I never felt displaced in the company of my older friends. I sought their friendship, and today I wish to be repaid likewise. I invite my young friends, ladies and gentlemen, to appear en masse at our business meetings and take a more active part in our proceedings, to discuss with us possible improvements of an already fairly full programme, and I can assure you that

you will have our most hearty help and understanding.

I feel that I ought to inform you that our Consul, after a very commendable and sustained effort, has succeeded in bringing the Swiss Youth of this City together and I understand that your wish is that this action recently started, and if properly conducted, may in the end be beneficial to those of the Swiss Club. — Monsieur le Consul, our sincere thanks for your efforts and may your name be recorded in history and remembered as the Patron-Saint of the Swiss Youth abroad. (Invitations to seventy young Swiss in Manchester had been sent out to a first social evening, fifty of whom had accepted, undoubtedly a considerable success.)

Our year's activities are multiple and varied and sometimes we might read in the "Swiss Observer" of some of the more outstanding ones, so that I may be excused from mentioning them, but I do hope and so do all of us, that your Excellency and Madame de Fischer may one day be able to honour with their welcome presence our yearly "Landsgemeinde" at Hardcastle Crags, where on the third Sunday in June, the three Northern Clubs meet in a congenial and patriotic function, first thought of by Professor Jean Inebnit of Leeds and our departed friend Henry Monney. It has gradually created for its members and for Switzerland great interest and much good will with the people of the town of Hebden Bridge and its worthy representatives.

I would like to thank all those members and friends who so generously contributed with donations in cash and kind to enrich our Tombola with lovely prizes and which proceeds will go towards the raising of a special fund, to enable our Club to organise some additional social or cultural functions if such occasions should arise. (I am glad to report the tombola was sold out before all interested parties could buy their tickets.)

Through lack of support from the young Swiss people, only three members of the Swiss Rifle Association attended frequently the Ranges of Holme Brook and Crowden, thus reducing the interest in our competitions. The Swiss Challenge Cup is awarded to Dr. H. R. Bollinger for the best four shoots and the Swissair Cup, of course, to Mr. H. Mettler of Swissair, for the best aggregate. (Madame de Fischer later presented the prizes.) Mr. Mettler shot with distinction in the Manchester Rifle competitions, reducing his handicap from 19 to 11, winning the "Vaud" Cup, presented by the Rifle Club of Lausanne, one spoon and a bronze medal for the aggregate competition. What a man!

The President ended his speech by thanking the hotel for their effort and asking the members of the Swiss Club Manchester to drink the health of their guests.

The President's speech, radiating his colourful personality to a degree, was very warmly received. He was followed by the Guest of Honour, the Swiss Ambassador, who delivered his address without any notes, sincerely and with ease and eloquence, on the three problems Switzerland is facing in the changing world of today.

Monsieur de Fischer started off by thanking the Club for their hospitality, it was the first time he had been to Manchester, though he was well aware of the existence of the Manchester Free Trade School, that Manchester had had the first shipping canal, that the first computer had been built there, and, also, that Manchester had the largest Swiss community in the British Isles outside London.

This may be the moment to record that the Ambassador attended a Civic Luncheon given in his honour by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of Manchester the previous day. The 110 guests included personalities from

commerce, industry and banking. The Swiss Consul Monsieur Brunner, the Vice-Consul Monsieur Ernst, as well as Mr. Berner and Dr. Knuchel were also present. The English audience was full of admiration for the Ambassador's excellent speech on the close relationship between Manchester and Switzerland through the ages. Switzerland was the first country to export cotton textiles. Then arrived the Manchester spinning machines, also in Switzerland. For protection against other foreign competition, Switzerland and England co-operated in creating the Free Trade School. The second phase was when the Manchester spinning machines in Switzerland needed up-keep and repair and in turn helped to create the Swiss machine industry. This led to better inventions and new textile techniques, also new dyeing methods in Switzerland. In the third phase, Switzerland realised that she had not enough means for supporting textile research, and that was the beginning for the establishment of the Swiss chemical dyestuff industry in Manchester.

To revert to the Ambassador's speech at the Club's Banquet: Monsieur de Fischer talked animatedly on the contribution Switzerland was making towards European integration, on the part she played in helping the developing countries and her contribution towards cultural, technical and scientific achievements. Switzerland's position, the Ambassador said, was an important one. Every Swiss citizen shared the responsibility for the future, whether living at home or abroad. It was our duty to make ourselves familiar with the problems in order to raise the values and help to build for the future.

After the much-applauded speech, the President read a telegram from the Manchester Rifle Club whose members joined the Swiss party shortly before midnight. There is a very close association between the rifle team of the Swiss Club and the Manchester Rifle Club, and they foster close fraternal ties with the "Exercice de l'Arquebuse et de la Navigation" in Geneva, said to be the oldest rifle club in Switzerland.

The second part of the evening was given over to dancing. And a very jolly time we all had, twisting, waltzing, trotting, watching and chatting. Whether we were more expert at the "Gay Gordons" or the Cha-cha-cha, whether we won one of the many spot prizes or missed every time did not matter in the least. I have never, ever, taken part in such a lively and unending "Paul Jones", a real mixer-upper, and rarely have I come across so much genuine enjoyment by young and old alike. The most amazing feature of the Swiss Club is still its homogeneous quality, affluent and modest members (youngsters were given a reduction in the price of the tickets), some well settled for decades and others resident only for a few weeks or months, some aged and some barely in their teens. Curiously rich lace and velvets do not clash with off-the-peg cottons when the Manchester Swiss Club meet. Costly diamonds and pearls look right side by side with Woolworth ware and winklepickers. The modest grey check suit of the young apprentice does not in the least detract from the satorial splendour of the full dress suit and starched shirt front of the business tycoon or the professional man. We hear much about democracy. It is often mistakenly applied by a lowering of standards. But the policy of the Swiss Club in Manchester proves that true mixing is possible, everyone sticking to his accustomed standard without any embarrassment to anybody and resulting in a pleasing harmony.

Thank you, Manchester friends, for a truly delightful evening, and may your efforts to grow and expand bear fruit in this, your 115th year.

Mariann.