

News from the Colony

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SMS DANCES AT THE DORCHESTER

London's Dorchester Hotel was, as has become customary over the years, the splendid venue for the Swiss Mercantile Annual Dinner and Dance on Saturday, 5th February.

After enjoying the sort of dinner that those fortunate enough to attend this function have come to expect, the new S.M.S. President, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, took on what he admitted was for him a daunting task — he addressed the assembled company for the first time. But although Mr. Hausermann has only been President since March of last year, he had no need to worry. His address was witty and informative and indicated that this young President (he is only 40) intends to do his best for the Society which has so honoured him.

After formally welcoming our Ambassador and Mme. Thalmann, Mr. Hausermann turned his attention to immediate past-president Mr. A. Jaccard who, with Mrs. Jaccard, was among the guests. Paying tribute to Mr. Jaccard's many years of devoted service to the Society Mr. Hausermann said it would be extremely hard to follow in the footsteps of such an able and dedicated man.

In his own words "in all probability there was no one else mug enough to take it on". But Mr. Hausermann is no mug as the following abstract from his speech will confirm.

"I feel just like the inexperienced Chairman who had to propose a toast before an important assembly of diners. When the moment approached, the understanding Master of Ceremonies came up to him and said, with the best of intentions: 'Are you ready now, Sir, to speak or shall I let them enjoy themselves a little longer?'"

It is a great pleasure to see so many of you here tonight at what is surely the highlight of the Society's social activity and I would like to welcome you all, and especially our Ambassador and Madame Thalmann. We really do appreciate your presence, and the great interest you take in the affairs of the Society and its College".

Mr. Hausermann went on to welcome Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Costa, admitting that there may well have been an ulterior motive behind asking them to be the Society's guests. Mr. Costa, apart from being the President's father-in-law, is also his Chairman. Mr. Hausermann wanted him to meet his colleagues on the Committee and officials of the College and to see for himself what a serious and dedicated bunch of people they are!

"He could, after all, be forgiven for thinking that there might be something fishy every time I leave the office early, with the excuse that I have to attend a

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

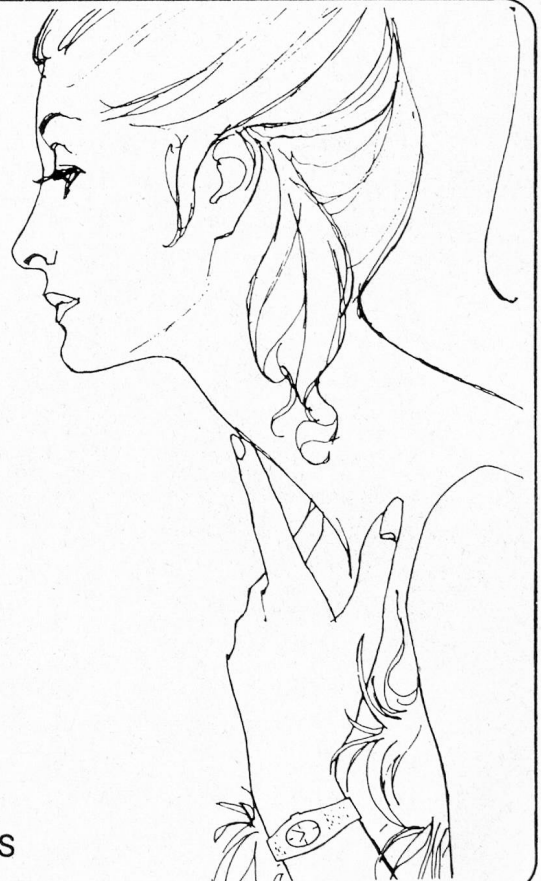


Swiss Mercantile Society President, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, addresses the guests at the Society's annual dinner and dance.

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meeting, sign the diplomas, check the dry rot in the building or meet the Principal, etc. . . . I do hope you are now convinced that I am not up to any funny business!"

Other acknowledgements from Mr. Hausermann were to the presence of Mr. B. Simon, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in Great Britain and Mrs. Simon.

He also welcomed the Reverend Paul Jungi who was representing the Swiss clergy.

Mr. Hausermann next welcomed Mr. Jean-Pierre Zehnder, Councillor of Embassy, and Mrs. Zehnder, and Mr. Julius Keller, Commercial Attache and Mrs. Keller.

A particular welcome was extended to Mrs. Mariann Meyer, present not only as a member of S.M.S., but in her capacity of President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

Next it was the turn of Mr. Walter Burren and Mrs. Burren. Mr. Burren was described as the perfect, efficient, hardworking and unflappable Secretary, a deserved compliment indeed.

A successful college must also have a first-class Principal who can build around him a good team of teachers, and Mr. Hausermann said that we are indeed fortunate to have as our Principal Mr. E. W. Makin ably assisted by the Vice-Principal, Mr. L. Cane.

"Last, but not least, I would welcome Mr. Jaccard, immediate past president and Mrs. Jaccard. No doubt you must be quite pleased to sit down there and not in my place! Our Society owes you a great debt for the services you have rendered, steering it as you did through one of its most difficult periods. I shall do my best to keep the old ship on course and I am greatly encouraged to know that I can count on the help and guidance of my colleagues on the committee."

Try as he might Mr. Hausermann could not find a suitable quote from the infamous Lord Arran with which to conclude his address! So, he said: "As another famous man once said: 'Since brevity is the soul of wit, my kindest act must be to sit!' " And that is what he did.

Our Ambassador then rose to address the Society. As usual he was brief and to the point. Dr. Thalmann singled out for attention the valuable contribution the Society's school had made to Anglo-Swiss trade and relations, and added a warning that so-called boom times were probably gone for ever.

After thanking the President and members Dr. Thalmann reflected on the service the S.M.S. has offered for almost 90 years (it was founded in 1888). He said:

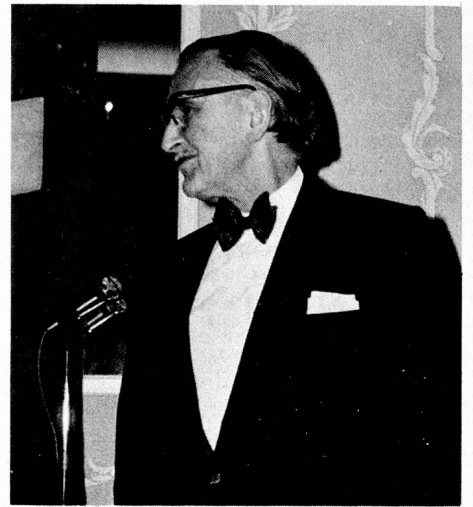
"The Swiss Mercantile Society has seen numerous young Swiss come to this country to study, and many of them have subsequently settled here permanently. Britain has always had a great attraction for the Swiss, just as Switzerland has attracted the British. Whereas the British have come to Switzerland mainly as tourists, the Swiss have flocked to Britain to do business.

The United Kingdom has historically played a major role in world trade, and the Swiss have been able to profit from the British, by learning how to conduct business, developed into a fine art by this country.

The British have also spread their language all over the world through their involvement in world trade, which has brought about its general acceptance, not only in trade, but also in science and in world politics. This has promoted the idea of a stay in England, which is still one of the main aspirations of many of the students at our mercantile schools in Switzerland.



Our Ambassador, Dr. E. Thalmann, makes reference to the valuable contribution the Society's School has made to Anglo-Swiss trade.



Mr. A. G. De Costa, replying for the guests.



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Just a few of the many guests who enjoyed the dancing until midnight.

It is therefore gratifying to note that your society, because of its interest in our young Swiss, founded the day-school in 1923, thus enabling some 20,000 students to take advantage of the courses offered. Today, more than ever, trainees are finding it increasingly difficult to find suitable jobs in foreign countries. The Swiss student therefore needs the type of training you offer in the English language if we are to maintain our position in world markets.

So you can always count on the Embassy's full support in the promotion of the Swiss Mercantile College in London. Switzerland cannot expect its customers to learn 'Schwyzerdütsch', although they may learn some French instead; the importance of being able to speak your client's language cannot be stressed enough. It certainly helps us to compete with the manufacturers of other countries."

His Excellency concluded by saying that he was convinced that the recovery will take much more time than expected and that economic booms have gone for ever. This means that we shall have to tighten our belts. The only way to brighten up this rather gloomy picture a bit, he said, is to repeat what Swiss Federal Chancellor Ritschard said recently: "All those who are talking about tightening belts are wearing braces".

Replying for the guests Mr. A. G. Costa tinged his words with just a soupçon of satyr. He said there had been some "fishy business" surrounding his invitation to attend the dinner as a guest.

It was only when he was asked to speak that he realised he was right.

Mr. Costa admitted, tongue in cheek, that he had always regarded the Swiss as a nation of yodellers and alpenhorn players.

"But I was wrong" he continued, "the Swiss have learned the refined British torture of wining and dining people and then subjecting them to speeches!"

But Mr. Costa justifiably wanted to claim just a little credit. In his business as a food importer he has for many years needed people able to type in various languages and the S.M.S. School was always able to supply the right people.

In 1958 he was sent a man who seemed even brighter than most and it seemed a pity to let him go. So he set about convincing the young man that he should stay because prospects in Britain were at least as bright as those in Switzerland. Surprisingly, perhaps, the young man agreed.

That man was F. O. Hausermann, S.M.S.'s new President.

"How wise it was to establish the Swiss Mercantile Society all those years ago" concluded Mr. Costa - "Who knows how many business connections have been established through its good offices?"

The evening continued with dancing until midnight and a good time was had by one and all.

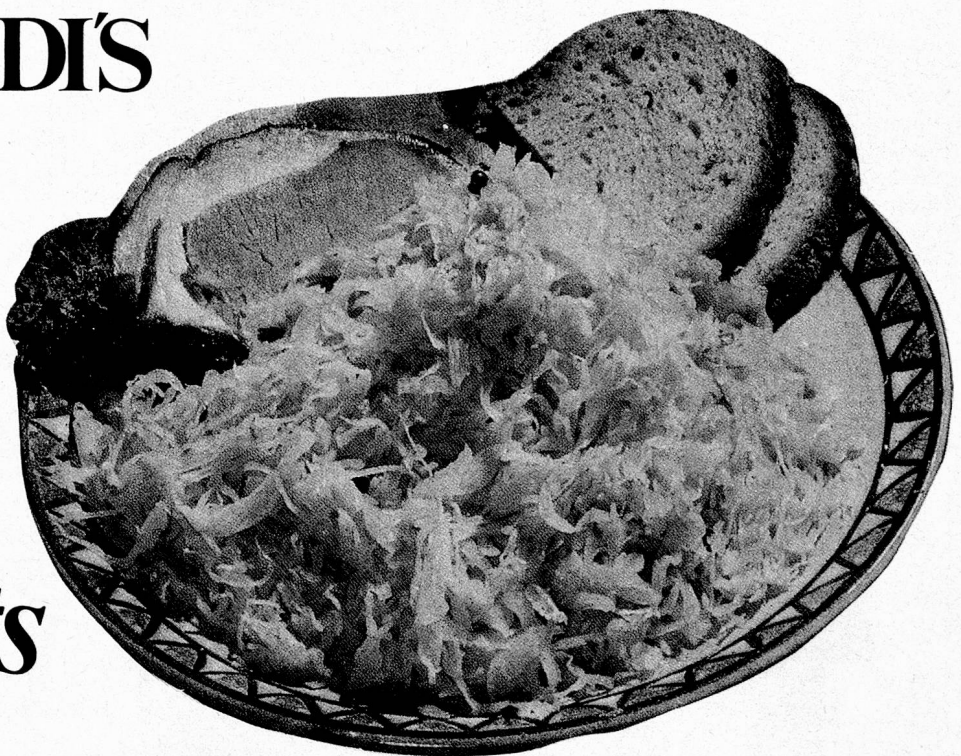
W.G.S.

IN MEMORIAM

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FOLLOWED BY ITS AGM . . .

The 88th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held at Swiss House on 16th March, 1977.

Reporting on the activities during 1976, the Chairman, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, referred to the problems of rampant inflation and the decline of the currency, which had affected everyone, particularly those retired on fixed incomes. There were, fortunately, signs of a slow recovery of the economy, which should eventually assist trade and industry and, it was hoped, rebound to the benefit of the Society and its College.

Having returned to Swiss House in the autumn of 1974, the Society was able to spend its first full year at its recently rebuilt and redecorated premises, which had made life easier for all concerned with the running of its affairs.

A full and varied programme of activities had been arranged and some, if not all, of the members' meetings and social functions were well supported.

Unfortunately, the membership was still on the wane and renewed efforts would have to be made to recruit members from among the considerably smaller number of Swiss employed in the U.K. on a long-term basis.

As customary, the main activities at Swiss House were centred on the College. The Chairman was able to report that considering the recession which had affected Swiss trade and industry during the period under review, the attendance at the day classes could be deemed satisfactory. The number of full-time students admitted during 1976 amounted to 546, compared with 581 in the preceding year, the average attendance being 208 and 226 per month respectively.

The trend was noticeably reversed towards the end of 1976, when advance bookings for March to June 1977 were all up by 50 per cent by comparison with the previous year. At the time of reporting, all courses up to July 1977 were in fact fully booked, which augured well for the future success of the College and should ease the strain on the Society's finances.

A novel feature was the introduction in January of a day-course of preparation for the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English examination in June, in addition to the customary evening courses. This had proved successful both as regards attendance and results and the venture was repeated with notable success in the autumn for the December examination.

A high standard had to be attained by candidates to obtain the College diploma, which vouched for a good knowledge of English, both from a linguistic and commercial point of view. Last year 320 students were awarded the diploma compared with 350 in 1975, the percentage of passes being roughly equal.

As a consequence of Great Britain joining the Common Market, only relatively few young Swiss were able to find employment in England. It was above all difficult to obtain the necessary labour permit, as citizens of Common Market countries did not require such permits. This reflected itself in the attendance at evening courses, which had dropped from 19 classes with 346 students in 1975 to 15 classes with 237 students in 1976. Fortunately, many of the day students attended the preparatory courses for the Cambridge examinations, which helped to keep the evening classes going.

Apart from the Cambridge examinations in 1976, the College also entered students for the examinations in English, Stage III of the Royal Society of Arts, in March and November. Of 33 candidates who sat, 30 were successful, one passing with distinction. A total of 140 students sat for the Cambridge First Certificate in English examinations, of whom 121 were successful, whereas 35 candidates, out of 60 who sat, obtained the coveted Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency.

The College employed a full-time staff of 15 teachers, all of British nationality, the majority with academic qualifications and several with practical commercial experience.

The language laboratory with 20 booths was again regularly used by all classes and assisted students in improving their spoken English, on which special stress had been laid of late.

Full-day excursions to places of historic and cultural interest and visits to

commercial undertakings were arranged in each term. In the field of sports, tennis practice and games in summer and football matches in winter again formed part of the extra-curricular activities.

Due to the difficulties mentioned earlier in the report, the Society's efforts to assist students in finding suitable commercial employment here on completion of their studies had met with only very limited success. Efforts in this direction would, nevertheless, be pursued in the hope that the problem of unemployment, which had made the position more difficult, would ease in due course.

On the brighter side, it could be recorded that through the pedestrianisation of Fitzroy Square, which had been completed by the previous autumn, all noise from through traffic and parking had been virtually eliminated. This had proved a great boon to the College, where the tuition could now proceed in the heart of London's West End almost as undisturbed as in any country area.

The problem of furnishing Swiss House in keeping with the building alterations and extension, as well as the newly-decorated rooms, which had had to be deferred at the time of the reopening owing to lack of funds, was also solved in 1976. Due to the special efforts of our member, Mrs. Mariann Meier, a generous donation had been obtained from the Swiss First of August Committee (Bundesfeier Spende) which would enable the Society to proceed with the improvement and renewal of the furnishings.

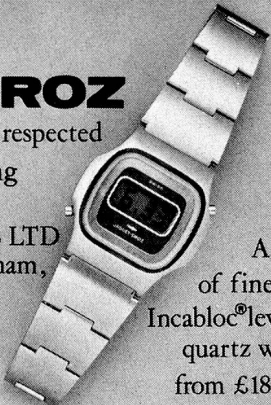
Finally, the Chairman thanked the Swiss Ambassador and his staff for their goodwill, the Swiss Government for their continued financial assistance, the Central Secretariat of the S.K.V. and the Swiss Commercial Employment Office in Zürich for their ever-ready help and support and finally the members of the Council and the Committees for their co-operation during the past term of office.

Acting as Chairman *pro tem.* for the election of the Council and the Committees for the ensuing year, Mr. A. Jaccard expressed thanks to the President and Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, for the successful way in which he had conducted the affairs of the Society and the College, and all the other members of the Council and the Committees, as well as the staff, for their loyal support during the past year.

Mr. O. Luterbacher, who had tendered his resignation, for health reasons, from the Council and the Education Committee, was heartily thanked for the many years of service which he had given to both the Society and the College.

All other members, having declared their willingness to continue in office for another year, were declared duly elected, with Mrs. A. R. Sharp as an additional member of the Education Committee, and the proceedings then terminated.

W.B.



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