At the court of St. James's

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AT THE COURT OF ST. JAMES'S

(We reproduce herewith, by courtesy of the Editor, an article which has appeared in the June issue of the "TATLER.")

What is the secret of the lifelong fascination exercised by China over cultivated European visitors? Is it the serenity, the assured intellectual background, the sagacity of a civilisation which has evolved over thousands of years? The questions are raised by the recent arrival at the Court of St. James's, on transfer from China, of His Excellency M. Henry de Torrenté, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the four and a half million citizens of the 657-years-old Confederation of permanently neutral Switzerland.

M. Torrenté admits the remarkable hold of the Far East, and wonders about the real cause, as do so many others who know the pearl of the Orient, Penang, or colourful Manila, or stirring Rangoon or, in sight of Everest, little-frequented Khatmandu.

It is a measure of the affection and respect felt for Switzerland in high quarters in this country, notably since the recently terminated mission of Dr. Paul J. Ruegger, that his successor should be summoned to Buckingham Palace well inside the week of his arrival, and received the same day by the busy Foreign Secretary. He was fêted in the evening by the hospitable and active Swiss colony in London.

Torrenté, pugnacious looking, with resolute jaw, has the ability to think in English. Maybe he began the process in 1922, during a two-year stay here to study social questions. Miss Margaret Bondfield, Under-Secretary for Labour, showed him modern industries, and Sir Frank Benson assisted with a feast of twenty-eight Shakespeare plays in three weeks at Stratford-on-Avon.

London will like the courage and candour of Torrenté, both proved. Dr. Ruegger was expelled by Mussolini from Rome, Torrenté from Paris by the Nazis. Torrenté was Swiss Chargé d'Affaires in Paris from 1940 to 1941. His defence of Swiss interests was hearty and persistent; he might have been the ambassador of a great Power. Torrenté returned to the Swiss Army, in which he has served since 1929, on and off, on the General Staff. He became a Commanding Officer on the French frontier, and controlled various units. Finally he became Colonel of the staff, a rank he still holds.

Son of a former president of the Upper Chamber of Deputies, Torrenté was born in Sion in November, 1893, and educated (with particular enjoyment of Greek) at Sion and Einsiedeln. He took good degrees in law, social science and economic science respectively at Berne, Basle and Geneva. Then he became associated with the Swiss delegation of the International Labour Office in 1922, and subsequently learnt much about psychology, on the international level, at conferences in Geneva and Rome. When pre-Tito Yugoslavs posed a lot of trade inquiries to which the answers were a monotonous "No," their head told Torrenté: "Splendid: we can now spend a fortnight in the Bernese Oberland and return quietly." He did, and on his return reported the sad results, but not the Oberland interlude.

Next there were thirteen years in Paris, as First Secretary, as Counsellor, and often as head of mission. Torrenté repatriated Swiss citizens, and stayed for a blistering year while the chief of the Legation was sent to Vichy. Subsequently Torrenté spent three years in conducting important negotiations with the United States, with Spain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Holland. Having been promoted Minister Plenipotentiary in February, 1945, a few months later he went to China, as first Minister to Chiang Kai-Shek. And now he has come to London, a worthy successor to a celebrated and popular Minister.

"FUNNY CUTS."

A certain London Club has replaced its familiar black-coated servitors with young, and sometimes pretty waitresses. One of the old diehard members who had strongly opposed the idea dropped in to lunch.

"How's the duck to-day?" he growled, glowering at the girl who came to serve him.

"Oh, I'm alright," said the waitress perkily. "How are you, Sir?"

* * *

A woman troubled with nightmares and who frequently cried out in her sleep was advised by her doctor to live with a cheerful family in order that her nerves might improve. She accordingly advertised for a room with "a family who would not object to screaming in the night."

She received several answers, and among them was one which asked: "How often would you request us to scream?"



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