

Editor's postbag

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A speech short though it may be is always a difficult task, especially for a young man somewhat nervous. But, however, I am glad to have this evening the honour of transmitting, in the name of all the Students, their heartiest thanks to the members of the Swiss Mercantile Society which is the London Section of the S.K.V.

Not a few people owe to the evening classes held in Switzerland both a better education and a brighter position in the commercial world than would have been possible without the assistance of such classes.

The S.K.V. is an institution almost unique in the world. Wherever our Swiss countrymen go, they are at liberty to form Sections and so keep in touch with the Homeland. Thus the Swiss spirit and Swiss traditions are kept alive, no matter where the Swiss may be.

Like the parent society in Switzerland, the members of the Swiss Mercantile Society have devoted much time and money for granting educational facilities for their compatriots in London. Several members of my family have retold on many occasions how, when they were in London, they learned English at the evening classes of the S.M.S. There was no day school.

As years went by, and may I say rolled by, members of the Committee of the S.M.S. suggested the formation of a College or Day classes for those Swiss who came to England solely for learning English. As far as we Students are concerned we know very little of the activities of the London Section of the S.K.V. apart from their educational work and we, young Swiss, who have taken or are taking advantage of receiving tuition at Swiss House owe a deep debt of gratitude to the S.M.S. for all they do for their young compatriots.

I am sure, I am expressing the views of my fellow students in saying, that there is no other school in existence which can be compared with ours. Our building may not be of the best, but our teachers and our Principal are without doubt the best.

Let me assure the Committees of the S.M.S. that their efforts on our behalf, though their work is one away from us, are greatly appreciated and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

Every year hundreds of young Swiss enjoy the benefit of the college of the S.M.S. Whilst in London we are given the opportunity of visiting many places of interest which we would not otherwise have been able to visit by ourselves. Our stay at the College has been not only to our material advantage, but also to the betterment of our general outlook which must in the course of time be to our interests.

May I be permitted to suggest to my fellow-Students that for the interests of the College, and for the benefit of our friends, we shall always recommend the school founded by the Swiss Mercantile Society — The London Section of the S.K.V.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the pleasure and honour of giving you the toast of the Swiss Mercantile Society, and ask you to rise and drink to the health of the Swiss Mercantile Society, coupling with it the name of Mr. Steinmann, the President of the S.M.S.

Mr. Steinmann, the President of the Society, replied to the last speaker, saying:

I rise with great pleasure to reply to the toast of the S.M.S. so ably proposed by Mr. Glauser, and to thank you all most sincerely for the cordial way in which you have supported it.

I also wish to thank you for the kind invitation extended to the members of the Education Committee and several members of the Council and House Committee. We are indeed honoured to be amongst you to-night.

The honour of being President of the Society has been mine for only a few months, and this is the first occasion I have had of coming into actual contact with you students, although the atmosphere is not completely foreign to me as I am one of the young "Old Boys" of eleven years ago.

I can assure you, that the sincere appreciation and the good will expressed by your Spokesman is a welcome encouragement to the members of the various committees and the Council, who, I can assure you, already spare no efforts to play their part in making this College of ours worthy of its traditional good name enjoyed not only here, but in the Homeland. I may say that Mr. Hardmeier as Chairman of the Education Committee, is, as he always has been, a very hard working servant of the College.

I take this opportunity of emphasising that without the substantial help, both financially and morally, of patriotic and disinterested persons since the inception of our Society, we could not have stood where we now stand, and I therefore ask you to join in with me in ex-

pressing our very warm thanks to those numerous unnamed benefactors. We are also indebted to the Federal Authorities for their generous financial help, and to the Swiss Legation for its moral support as a result of which we are enabled to retain an efficient teaching staff, and to make the curriculum as attractive and useful as possible, while keeping the school fee at a reasonable figure.

I am sure that everyone of you on returning to Switzerland will feel completely justified in recommending our College to others and I urge you on behalf of the Society to do so. It naturally follows that you will continue to be part of the College, by joining the nearest Section of the S.K.V. which can give you still further assistance in your future careers.

There is no need for me to tell you that conditions everywhere are not as bright as we should wish. It is my sincere hope, however, that the clouds will break in the very near future, and that, in the better times that we all desire you all will play no small part, as a result of the excellent training you have received as Students of the College.

This speaker was also rewarded with applause for his excellent address.

That Mr. A. C. Stähelin, Vice-Chairman of the Council, is perhaps the most popular member of the S.M.S. was proved by the almost riotous applause which greeted him, when he was called upon to propose the Toast to the "College and the Teaching Staff."

Born orator as he is, he urged the students in moving words, to make the best use of their stay at the College, "it is for your own good and the good of your future." He pointed out that the College of the S.M.S. has a most efficient teaching staff, willing to assist the students in every direction, and to prepare them thoroughly for their future career. Mr. Stähelin also paid a great tribute to the Office Staff so ably headed by the Secretary, Mr. J. J. Schneider. He concluded his oration with an appeal to present and former students to make propaganda for the College.

Long applause greeted Mr. Stähelin's words, a sure proof that his work in the past and in the present is appreciated.

Mr. Portmann, another student of the College, on behalf of his colleagues, asked Mr. A. Levy, to accept, as a mark of the high esteem in which he is held, as Principal of the School, a gift of robes in commemoration of the recent honour bestowed on him by the Institute of Commerce, in conferring on him its highest degree, that of Fellow of the Institute. The robes were handed over to Mr. Levy by the Vice-Principal, Mr. Burraston amongst thunderous applause.

Mr. Levy thanked the students for their present which he highly appreciated. He made a spirited appeal for co-operation, and encouraged them besides studying hard, not to neglect their physical welfare and to indulge in sport and physical exercise; he said that S.M.S. does not only stand for "Swiss Matrimonial Society," or "Santée, Meditation, Succès," but also for "Studiere Mit Sport."

Judging from the hearty applause which was so spontaneously given, Mr. Levy must be a great favourite with the students. This was the last speech, and the company was asked to adjourn to one of the adjoining halls, where a most enjoyable "Schnitzelbank" was sung by one of the students. The pictures were very cleverly executed, although to be quite frank, I preferred some hanging on the wall.

Then suddenly the orchestra started a lively dance tune, and all and sundry started to swing around.

A Polonaise, headed by M. Schneider was a most enjoyable affair, all the more as the couples had to pass underneath a large bunch of mistletoe, with the obvious result of receiving or giving a kiss. Now some were very shy, some only just a little so, and others seemed to enjoy it, judging from their unwillingness to move on, and give the other fellow a chance. I won't say, to which category I belonged, for the good reason, that my partner in life who was not present, still reads the Swiss Observer.—

It was a fine evening and I feel sure, the memory of it will remain with all those present for a long time. ST.

EDITOR'S POSTBAG.

17th, December, 1933.

Dear Stauffer,

When I promised you to review "*Dieu Sait Pourquoi*" — Letters written by the late Mrs. Suzanne Hoffmann-de Visme during her illness to her husband, the Rev. R. Hoffmann-de Visme, I undertook a task which is beyond me.

Most of us treat Religion very much like we treat other things, which are of daily occurrence during our earthly life. We take breakfast, without thinking much about it. We work for a living, we play for our amusement and in order to keep fit, we laugh and weep, grow up, marry and grow old again, but, as long as our health is fairly good, as long as no severe interruptions threaten our daily routine, as long as we feel fairly comfortable and safe, we do not bother much about Religion, beyond attending to its outer manifestations, such as going to Church, insisting on having the Church's blessings on our more important events, such as weddings christenings, etc.

In other words, Religion is one of the many things which combine to make our so-called civilized existence what it is. We have our clergymen, our priests, we have our churches, our charitable institutions, we celebrate our religious and semi-religious festivals and, some of us, we even read the Bible sometimes, or listen to a religious lecture, either in Church, or, more comfortably now, at home, tuning in our wireless set. And, our cemeteries testify to the glorious lives we lead, on the whole. The inscriptions on the head-stones prove what good and excellent fathers and mothers, sons and daughters we all were and presumably still are.

We are apt to suspect those who exhibit their religious fervour. We do not like demonstrative religion, except from those whom we pay to so demonstrate.

We feel serenely confident that, as far as Religion is concerned, we are on a very much higher plane than the heathens and pagans.

And now comes this *Voice from Beyond*.

Remember, these letters were not written for publication. They are the equivalent of the daily talk between husband and wife, who, loving each other, fortify each other by an exchange of thoughts, by spiritual help, freely given and as freely taken.

Remember the two, deeply attached to each other and to their six children, have been ideally happy comrades for 21 years, before this dread illness attacked the wife and necessitated her spending most of the two last years of her life in Switzerland, there to fight for her life, successfully above all expectations at first, and there too to discover in her innermost soul that strength which enabled her to write

"Prends courage et regardons en-haut, avec larmes peut-être, mais en-haut!" (page 30).

"Avec larmes peut-être!" My vocabulary is utterly inadequate to convey my feelings when readings these "cris de coeur" and reading, as I read on and on, how her faith in God keeping her in His care grew and grew and became an absolute unshakable certainty.

Mrs. Hoffmann-de Visme would not have been human, had her faith not faltered at times, or rather had she not hoped that she might be spared the bitter cup. In turn these pages reveal how she suffered from "Heimweh" after her husband, after her children and after her work in London.

"Nous sommes entrées chez Nyffenegger prendre une tasse de thé. Hélas, à la table à côté de la nôtre, se trouvaient avec papa et maman, deux petits bonshommes, de cinq à six ans environ, et cela m'a donné du noir." (page 42).

or again

"Oh! oui, les vagues s'agitent pour pas grand-chose: "un petit jersey bleu comme en porte Guy, vu dans une devanture de magasin, suffit!" Mais le fond est calme." (page 46/7).

Le fond est calme!

As I go on, reading letter after letter, feeling more and more humbled by the courage and fortitude which enabled this woman, physically weak, to give forth such wonderful a testimony of undaunted faith, I have to sit back again and again to re-read some passage in order to extract from it its very essence, often to my pain and anguish, because, the nearer one approaches the truth, the more one gets hurt.

That is it, perhaps. There emanates from these pages an aura of spiritual Truth which hurts. It hurts because I am made so acutely conscious of how far from it I am, myself. These pages, written by a frail gracious lady, suffering untold pains, show me a personality possessed of such strength of Faith, of such wondrously fine character, of such sublime belief in the goodness of God's purpose in all things, that my lack of these things, my indifference, now so terribly revealed by this voice beyond, humble me, shame me.

And yet, thank you, Stauffer, for putting this small book into my hands. Not for anything would I have missed it.


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It seems to me as if this book continues the good influence which this lady must certainly have exercised over her immediate circle while she was among us. When I read, on page 67:

"ma conscience ne me laissera jamais faire quelque chose que je crois être sciemment contre la volonté de Dieu, dût mon cœur en saigner bien fort ... en fin de compte, notre conscience doit être le flambeau de notre âme, le guide de notre vie. Et, si, dans ces conditions encore, notre conscience se trompe eh! bien., Dieu est là pour réparer les brèches et pardonner."

I glean from that a great courage and feel that I am able to accept that for myself too, albeit with fear and trembling, but with renewed hope.

And, shortly before she entered upon her Eternal Life, on October 27th, 1932, when she knew that the end of her earthly pilgrimage was in sight, we have her words:

"Je t'assure que, devant Dieu, je suis prête, quoique bien sûr, j'aimerais encore vivre un temps. Il y a longtemps que j'ai remis tout cela entre les mains de Dieu."

I am quite sure now, having re-read what I have written so far, that my powers are much too feeble to do justice to this publication.

But, as we are celebrating the *Nativity* once again, it may be permissible for me, although I wish so very much that I could do it with irresistible force and persuasion, to recommend this booklet to our readers as a truly precious gift to be given at Christmas.

As the Rev. R. Hoffmann-de Visme writes in a fore-word to this publication

"C'est un trésor que nous n'avons pas le droit de garder pour nous-mêmes. Il est fait pour aider et encourager"

As far as I am concerned, this booklet, this message of *Fortitude* and *Faith* will be my close companion henceforth.

Yours with all the very best wishes for "Weihnachten."
Kyburg.

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Tuesday, January 2nd, 1934 — at 8 o'clock — City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting, preceded by Diner at Pagani's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W. (See advert.).

Saturday, January 6th, 1934, from 7 to 1 a.m., Fancy Dress Ball — Swiss Mercantile Society Ltd. — at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras Station, N.W. (See advert.).

Saturday, January 13th, 1934 — City Swiss Club — Cinderella Dance — at the Mayfair Hotel, Park Lane, W.

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Owing to lack of space we are unable to insert the report of the last monthly meeting, same will appear in our next issue.

For the same reason the football news will be inserted in our next issue.

The Report of the Unione Ticinese will be published next week.