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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

The ordinary Monthly Meeting was held at Swiss House on Wednesday, January 18th, at 8 p.m. and was preceded by a supper.

The President of the Society, Mr. W. Lehmann, was in the chair, and in opening the proceedings apprised the meeting of the death of two members, Messrs. P. Bott and A. Wellauer, both of whom had belonged to the society for over ten years. An obituary of the former has already appeared in the Swiss Observer. The latter was an employee at the Swiss Bank Corporation and died at his home in St. Gall after a prolonged illness. Both members were still in the prime of their lives and their loss was greatly regretted. The meeting rose in reverence for the deceased colleagues. Mr. W. Meier, Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee, in a report on the working of the Education Department, gave an account of the recent success of the Day Class students at the examination in Commerce held on December 20th under the auspices of the Institute of Commerce. All candidates were successful, 17 gaining a first class and 9 a second class pass.

The Meeting was immediately followed by a lecture on

"Life in Russia To-day," by

J. Locke, Esq. The large attendance of about 50 members was no doubt in no small measure due to this lecture, which was part of the programme to enliven the meetings.

The lecturer purposed to give the audience nothing more than his own impressions of what he saw in Russia. He went to that country at a most unusual time, taking an unusual route, entirely alone, at the end of the winter ending in April 1931. He approached Russia through the North via Stockholm and aboard an icebreaker to Finland. He found himself on the frontier at 11 o'clock where he was greeted by the Russian symbol, a bright, sharp bayonet proffered by a member of what we call the OGPU, the secret police or soldiers of Russia. He was well dressed and wore a headgear like a Balaclava helmet. He had a ruddy blue nose and a raw unshaven face. On entering the customs but the immigrants were searched firstly for revolvers and secondly for roubles, for a traveller must not take any roubles into Russia. Mr. Locke did not like to say that they (the OGPU) had all the revolvers. Thirdly they were searched for books and newspapers which are regarded as dangerous. A Danish newspaper with Mr. Locke's photograph aroused suspicion. The immigrants now boarded a train for Leningrad and on entering the railway station perceived the timber stacks of which we hear so much. The first impression which the lecturer had of Russia, and which he had all the time he was there, was the appearance of a country engaged in a first class war. Bearing that in mind, one could get a truer picture of Russia as everything one could see resembled somewhat England in 1916 and 1917 with all the search lights in the sky. The lecturer then referred to the food queues waiting for food and other things. He stood in one of these queues just to see what would happen. People came and asked him what he was waiting for, but he could not say, nor could they, but they still kept on waiting. The shortage of food was very striking and also the strict censorship by the Government of everything that is said and written. In cinemas, theatres, in short everywhere the lecturer went he could see slogans, a message in white letters urging one to fight for the existence of the State. The Russians have a real fear that they are going to be invaded. Just as a child may have a fear of going into the dark, so Russia has a profound and widespread fear that one day she is going to be invaded. Fear is a matter of controversy and the Government does nothing to dispel it, and kindles the desire to fight for the existence of their country. If one added all those things, food shortage, the strict censorship, the war feeling, the fight for existence, one would get an unmistakable impression that the country was actually engaged in war. The lecturer approached Leningrad by the same direction that Lenin took from Switzerland. Lenin entered by precisely the same road in 1917 for the overthrow of the Kerenski régime, addressing the crowds from an armoured car. The gigantic statues of Lenin with his outstretched arm, is as sketched by Low, England's premier cartoonist. Lenin died in 1924 and they scooped his inside out to preserve his shell. The lecturer stood at two o'clock in the snow outside the Kremlin to view the tomb of Lenin. In the great red marble tomb he looks very austere. There he rests on scarlet cushion with decorations on his breast, different from all his statues. His features are quite different from the effigies one sees everywhere, they are really delicate, and the sandy pointed beard, makes him look quite distinguished.

The lecturer now returned to his first glimpses of Leningrad where he had the impression that all looked very unreal. It seemed as if one were looking at a film, a silent film. The whole scene appeared to be a study in black and white, a great

contrast to Stockholm, where everything appeared in bright colours; there (Russia) the grey buildings, the dark overcoats of the people and the dress of the people by contrast of the snow made the whole scene look very unreal. He wondered as to why in Leningrad and Moscow there was plenty of room in the streets whilst the pavements were crowded. He could only ascribe it to the wish of the people to flock together to protect themselves from the icy blasts in the streets. If you want to get about in Leningrad and Moscow if you are very lucky and you got to be a privileged man, you take a taxi. Otherwise you have to take a droszky (Russian low four-wheeled carriage), an old vehicle kept together with old ropes and straps, usually waiting at a corner of a street and curiously always at the windiest corner. The lecturer had an experience with an old driver with a beard like Father Christmas, as he called him. The driver asked 20 roubles for the fare and the lecturer offered 5 roubles, knowing the exact fare was two roubles, and by the time he had reduced it to that the driver was asleep and would not take him at any price. The lecturer had a striking experience in getting on a tram. He did like everybody else was doing, wondering what was going to happen. In about five minutes' time a tram came along, but he got nowhere near it. The next time a tram came along all swept near it but without success.

The next time he got hold of somebody who was clinging on to someone who just got hold of the tram. No wonder an English engineer was recently killed when trying to get on a tram. The whole procedure is very dangerous on account of the electric standards which come right down to the road. You do not board a tram, something literally sucks you into the tram. To get out of the tram you have to pass through the tram as you cannot get out by the way you got in, if you try to get out the way you came, the passengers will tell you in very round language what they think of you. — Both Leningrad and Moscow are crowded. The population of Russia is increasing very rapidly. The 150 Million people in Russia increase every year by 3½ Million whereas the rest of Europe increases by 2½ Million. The Russian Government have been able to reduce mortality by social welfare of the nation. Another reason why Leningrad and Moscow are so overcrowded is the inflow of people from the country into the towns. The result is, that despite the houses for workmen, the whole question is faced with great difficulty and the housing position is, to put it mildly, acute to the last degree. English newspaper reporters and correspondents of British newspapers know how many books, boxes, etc., can be put into four walls, and people get in there to live, and the lecturer was pleased to get out into the cold, frosty night. — Every fifth day is a rest day.

There are four methods of getting about, viz., taxi, droszki, tram and walking. That is the way people of Leningrad do get about. The Government supports the opera and encourages you to patronise it, but if you went to the opera at night you would be at a loss when you have come out, how to return home. The Government has not provided enough facilities. It is a very paradoxical country.

He now came to the food shortage in Russia. If some people say that butter costs 30/- a pound in Russia he would neither confirm nor deny it. There were two sets of prices in Russia. This was the position then, which has altered since. There were co-operative shops for the manual

workers where one did not pay more than in England, even if the quality was very much inferior, but goods were not always there. One might have had to queue up for butter. Supposing one belonged to the less fortunate class, the brain-workers, (e.g. a professor), which the Russian Government want to destroy, one had to go to the "free shops," which were anything but free. One then paid what one's necessity compelled one to pay, if there was any butter! This was the position when Mr. Locke was in Russia. People were not starving. There was plenty of black bread. The Russians were not starving but the fact was, that they were undernourished. So he walked out to see what he could find, and was surprised to see carts from the country lined up along the gutter, peasants exchanging potatoes for bread; direct barter at work. He was not a worker and very unsuccessful in convincing people that he worked! He did not occupy any "privileged" position and had to pay the "free" prices when it came to buying. If you want to go to Russia and if you go alone for the sheer fact of going there, you get it, as the vernacular goes "in the neck." You pay a top-notch rate if you are not of the privileged class. Certain things like oranges are priceless. As an extreme case the lecturer quoted the story of an orange in April 1931. They were a penny each in England, 1½d. in Berlin, 3d. each in a restaurant car in Germany, 9d. in Poland and 5/- each in Russia. The lecturer asserted that he did not eat many oranges whilst in Russia. He added by way of illustration a remarkable simile, that in Andalusia he could pick up oranges from the ground. There is no encouragement for saving money, but to spend money, to create a constant demand on goods. State Lotteries keep everybody on the alert. — He could remember having had a bath in a Leningrad Hotel, and as his last piece of soap got worn out in Scandinavia, he had a piece of soap given him in his bath. As a nice piece of ethics, in a fit of premeditated absentmindedness he packed it in his suitcase and walked out. — In Russian cities there is none of the external glitter which is a common factor in the night life of Berlin, Paris and London. There is nothing of that in Moscow life. There is too much hard work and lack of resources. The public dance-halls, casinos and cabarets are entirely missing. Only one thing is illuminated viz., the Kremlin, a very beautiful, illustrious and most impressive building, 600 years old. The museums and palaces inside are enormous and the Kremlin would swallow up the Tower of London including Westminster Abbey. It is the only building which is illuminated.

There are two kind of criminals in Russia, the ordinary and the political criminal. If you ask a Russian whether his country is at war he would answer "Yes we are at war. There are still people who will try to prevent the revolution," and if you belong to this class of "criminal" and get into the hands of the secret police you will just disappear. You will be judged and executed by this police and nothing more will be heard of you. If you are an ordinary prisoner you will be treated very humanely. In a prison the lecturer saw a message by an English journalist, very flattering to Russia, namely "what a pity it was that the governors of the prisons of other countries could not see this prison." The prisoners were just on holiday, expected to return! Here again the acute housing conditions showed themselves. Cells were occupied by four prisoners. However they led a very advanced type of life.

There is no liberty in Russia, no political liberty of any kind, no opposition party, no opposition press. There is only one party as the others are prisoners in the Kremlin. The men of the secret police know everything. As an Englishman, Mr. Locke could not agree with the system of the secret police, but he could not deny its efficiency, and a friend to whom he had been talking for fourteen minutes asserted that the secret police by then knew that he had been talking to him. Another characteristic of war time was the way a rumour spread like a plague of locusts. Persistent rumour would travel like wild fire.

In order to illustrate the contentment with oblique criticism the lecturer quoted two specimens of the humour of Leningrad and Moscow. One was the story of a Frenchman, a Russian and a Jew. Before being executed they were granted a last request. The Frenchman asked for some champagne; the Russian wanted to be converted to Communism because there would be one scoundrel less when he died. When asked what he would like, the Jew said he would very much like some strawberries and when told he would have to wait till June as there were none obtainable "All right, I wait," was the laconic answer. Secondly there was the story of a concert-hall proprietor who charged 10 roubles. The rouble was worth to the Russian what 1/- would be to an Englishman although the lecturer only got 9 roubles to the £ and if you went to Russia to-day the £ would only be six roubles.

10/- for a concert is no mean charge and the manager announced that if somebody had any

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reasonable grounds for complaint against the last item of the programme, he would give him 100 roubles. This was "Money for Jam" a sheer get-away with 90 roubles! It was a dreadful concert. Everybody was getting ready to complain. The last item was a band of the secret police, which played the "Internationale" and everybody was glad to crawl out without saying anything. Despite the very stern and hard life humour bubbles up. There is an equalitarianism where everybody can do what he likes. If you walked into Stalin's office in pyjamas he would not be surprised. The lecturer, i.e., went to the opera in flannel trousers and a cricket shirt.

In an anti-religious museum the lecturer found a slogan running: "Religion is the opium of the people." Many churches have been destroyed and used for other purposes such as clubs and warehouses. They are being destroyed for various reasons, and a church was taken down to make way for the traffic, but when the lecturer looked round he could not see where the traffic was. There are, however, still opportunities for worship in Russia. A good deal of misrepresentation is made of the women in Russia. They simply have taken their place side by side with the men in the general work. They take their place in public life to the same extent as they do in England. There has not been a woman commissar yet, but women go down the coal mines, bless them! Full rights are granted to the women's organisations. They are united in one woman's movement. In Russia there is a woman attached to every social institution on behalf of the women's movement. The director of the institution is the embodiment of wisdom. He is a red director, because he is a good Communist and technical expert! Entering a court the lecturer found four tables with a chair to each. At one table one got married and nearby divorced. At this table one registered births and at another, deaths. The four ladies in charge were women of training. When the lecturer enquired whose fault it generally was that people got divorced, she replied that she could not tell and did not know herself. She gave divorcees for the mere asking. In Russia one can get divorced with as little trouble as one can get a postal order at a British post-office. In Spain you get a divorce under the new Constitution, if both parties ask for it. In Russia at the instance of either party you get a divorce. However, in America one marriage in six is dissolved in the divorce court. In Russia it is only one in four. Again the percentage is much higher in Moscow than in the country. The lecturer recommended the audience to go and see the Russian play "Squaring the Circle," which is due at the London Kingsway Theatre after a long run in Russia and Germany. The lecturer saw it in Prague. He added that plays eventually did come to London.

The lecturer was allowed to visit Moscow schools where children were permitted to ask him questions such as, whether workers were allowed reservations, such as English geography, etc. They were, however, told to ask "comrade" any questions. The Russian adult is singularly uninquisitive, but children asked the lecturer lots of questions such as whether workers were allowed to go to the theatres in England, and whether they were allowed to walk in the main street. They also enquired the reason why the lecturer came into their country, and also, what is called a supplementary question in the House of Commons, "how he proposed to get out of Russia."

The lecturer then reverted again to the question of food shortage in Russia. It began with the Five Years' Plan and has been worse since. Very important is the fact, that the economical system is incapable of producing sufficient food. "Russia is starving itself." The industrial system withdraws capital to build bridges, railways, oil-wells and is engaged in the upbuilding of a gigantic scheme. How long will it be till they relax that system? When Stalin recently announced the second part of the Five Years' Plan, he said that Russia would concentrate upon giving the people what they want. How long will it be for the relaxation of the political repression of the people? There is no sign of that whatever. In conclusion the lecturer said that it was impossible to round off in a few words such a vast and paradoxical subject as Russia. It is not easy to give an exact picture, and very difficult to understand a country occupying one-sixth of the land's surface of the earth, with 150 Million inhabitants with most diverse languages and culture; a country where you find the name of a railway station in four different languages; a medieval country which missed all influences of the reformation and the renaissance, trying to rush into the future by adopting high speed American methods of mechanisation.

A very interesting discussion ensued and questions were fired from left and right. It was nothing short of a cross examination, which proved that the lecture was an unqualified success. The Committee will do well in repeating the venture of following the Monthly Meetings by a lecture.

W.B.

Our readers have no doubt seen or heard about the article, which appeared in the *Daily Express* on the 24th of this month, under the heading "Swiss Slander on a British Airman."

One of our subscribers has taken the trouble to reply to this article, and we have much pleasure in publishing this correspondence, as, speaking from experience, we do not expect that our friend's communication will be published in the *Daily Express*. We may mention, that practically the whole Swiss Press strongly criticizes the attitude of the British Airman.

January 24th, 1933....

To the Editor,
"Daily Express,"
8, Shoe Lane,
London, E.C.4.

Dear Sir,

With reference to your article "Swiss Slander On A British Airman" in to-days issue of your Paper, please allow me to send you herewith a translation of an article which appeared in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on the 22nd instant. Please have the kindness to compare your version of the affair with it.

It seems quite incredible that an important Newspaper which you have the honour and responsibility to direct, should try to turn the noble and heroic efforts of the airmen concerned in the search for Capt. Hope to ridicule, and accuse the Swiss of slandering one of your famous Airmen.

I cannot help thinking that Capt. Hope is alone to blame for what occurred. He had every opportunity to let the Aerodrome La Blecherette know of his whereabouts on Thursday. He should have done so, especially as, according to reliable information, he intimated that he would be back at La Blecherette at about 4 p.m. on Thursday. To make your readers believe that there is no telephone at Sion, is to say the least, doubting their intelligence. Sion is the Capital of the Canton of Valais, a fairly big town, and has an excellent Telephone Service. As a matter of fact, you can telephone there from your own Office. Considering all the circumstances, I do not blame the Swiss for charging Capt. Hope for expenses incurred, and at frs.400 they seem very low, you will admit that. If you consult the Financial Page of your Newspaper, you will find that the exchange value of the £ in Switzerland has been well over 17 for some time.

I do not think you will publish this letter, although it would only be fair to let your readers see the affair in its true light.

I am a Swiss and have resided in this Country for 14 years. I have been a registered reader of the "Daily Express" for many years and you will understand this sort of thing is very painful to me, especially as in many respects I find your Paper excellent.

One of the greatest qualities of the Englishman — and the Nation as a whole — is his love for fair play. Why you and your Paper should make an exception, I cannot imagine. I should think one can pursue an Empire Policy and at the same time be fair to a country smaller in size, whose people have always been friendly to yours.

Yours faithfully,

H.O.E.

Extract from the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of
January, 22nd.
Lausanne, January 21st, 1933.

According to the result of further investigations, we are able to fully confirm the information contained in the Saturday morning issue of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" relating to the search for Capt. Hope. The attitude of Capt. Hope cannot be understood here and indignation runs high. As a result of exhaustive inquiries, checks and re-checks, it has been definitely established that Hope, who left Lausanne with the alleged intention of looking for his lost compatriot in the Valais and Bernese Alps, landed at Vetroz 21 minutes after his start from Lausanne. This corresponds exactly to the time required for a flight direct from Lausanne to Vetroz, and a Lausanne paper points out ironically, that Hope has even beaten the record for this section, and that he could not possibly have devoted one minute of his time to fly over the snowfields and glaciers for the purpose of looking for Hinkler. Without a care and unconcerned they stayed at Vetroz and later at Sion where they apparently remained Thursday evening and Friday morning.

At Lausanne in the meantime the agitation and concern for the fate of the two airmen grew rapidly and when, on Friday morning there was no news, First Lieutenant Kammacher, Director of the Aerodrome La Blecherette and Cherix, a lawyer in Lausanne and Director of the Aero Club Lausanne, decided to fly to the rescue of the two lost airmen. Early on Friday morning they cruised over the Vaudois and Valais Alps, the alleged route of the missing men, and also went to Thun where the Chief of the Swiss Air Service decided on their information to organise an intensive search campaign. On Friday a number of

Military and Civil Airmen searched the Alps from Les Diablerets to the Simplon Range — without any result, of course, as nobody was aware that the missing machine had already landed in the Rhone Valley on Thursday. This only leaked out when a local inhabitant of Vetroz, on the strength of a Radio S.O.S. advised the Aerodrome authorities at La Blecherette, Lausanne, that a machine as described had landed at Vetroz already on Thursday! On Friday evening the two missing airmen arrived at Lausanne, safe and sound and at dusk Kammacher and Cherix landed at La Blecherette, amazed at the news that Hope and Hinley were already at their hotel.

The latest information from La Blecherette shows that the English airmen have offered neither explanation or an apology.—

On going to Press, we receive the following communication, which appeared in the National Zeitung on the 25th of January:

HOPE ENTSCULDIGT SICH.

Lausanne, 25. Januar.

Am Sonntag abend richtete der Lausanner Flugplatzdirektor Kammacher und der Präsident der westschweizerischen Sektion des Aero-Clubs der Schweiz ein Telegramm an die Redaktion der Londoner Zeitung "Daily Mirror," die einen ungläubwürdigen Bericht über die Flüge des englischen Fliegers Hope veröffentlicht hatte. Im Telegramm wurde gesagt, dass der betreffende Artikel "ein Lügengeschäft sei und dass die ausdrücklichsten Vorbehalte gemacht werden müssten, sofern nicht ein berichtigender Artikel erfolge."

Hauptmann Hope sandte hierauf an die westschweizerische Sektion des Aero-Clubs der Schweiz folgendes Telegramm:

"Ich habe soeben den Artikel des "Daily Mirror" vom letzten Samstag gelesen. Er enthält in der Tat viel Unrichtigkeiten. Wir sind z. B. nicht fünf Stunden in der Luft gewesen, und ebenso wenig erschöpft gelandet. Ich habe auch nicht versucht, mit London zu telefonieren. Ich bedaure die Veröffentlichung des Artikels, der ohne meine Zustimmung und Kenntnis geschrieben wurde. Ich bitte Sie, für die Ihnen entstandenen Unannehmlichkeiten meine Entschuldigung anzunehmen."

"DAILY EXPRESS," PLEASE TAKE NOTICE.

PERSONAL.

We much regret to inform our readers of the death of Mr. Alfred Muller, at the age of 76. He was for many years collector for the Swiss Churches and the Swiss Benevolent Society, and a former Secretary of the Société de Secours Mutuels. A funeral service was held yesterday at the Swiss Church, Endell Street.

We also regret to acquaint our readers of the passing away, last Monday, of the wife of Mr. Marc H. Mange, at 299, Trinity Road, Wandsworth, S.W.18, after a long and painful illness.

Mrs. Nellie Mange was devoted to all good work, and members of our Colony may remember, the active part she took in the last Swiss Bazaar at Caxton Hall. We wish to extend to her husband and family our heartfelt sympathy.

PIANO LESSONS.
MAESTRA VIOLETTA MONTUSCHI,
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