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**SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.****Monthly Meeting held on 9th May, 1951.**

Mr. W. Burren acted as Chairman for the evening in the absence of our President, who was on his way back from Lausanne, where he had attended the annual Delegate Meeting.

The following were accepted as members: Mr. U. G. Binz, from Fribourg, Mr. Max E. A. Schuler, of Hotel Plan (who was present). On the other hand we accepted the resignations of: Mrs. Hopkins (formerly Miss Bachofen), Mr. Hans F. Nussbaum (returned to Switzerland).

Mr. Burren informed the meeting that the S.K.V., Zurich contemplated a conducted tour of members to this country, on which subject we had made suitable suggestions. Basle Section had, however, already completed plans for such a visit, which had been open to other S.K.V. section members.

In his quarterly report on the College the Chairman stated that the 170 students attending the present course constituted the limit of accommodation. The introduction of two interim entry dates in each term, which enabled the College to hold more frequent diploma examinations, was taken full advantage of. In reply to a question, Mr. Burren answered that 73% of the students qualified for the subsidy, while 27% did not so qualify, not being in commercial pursuits.

The Chairman then introduced the lecturer of the evening, Mr. Hitchon, a member of the scientific staff and assistant export manager of Bakelite Ltd., London. By way of introduction, Mr. Hitchon said that the patent for bakelite was taken out in 1908 and the industry, therefore, was about 40 years old. His own firm which, in 1927, employed 300, now had a staff of 2,500, of whom 140 chemists are working in Birmingham. Half a million persons were employed in the plastics industry in this country. Quoting from the pamphlet distributed to the audience, plastics are man-made. They provide a combination of properties not possessed by any other group of materials. They are all organic materials and are, therefore, compounds of carbon. They are all derived basically from coal, petroleum and agricultural products. The importance of wood, stone, metals is undiminished. Plastics can

perform many tasks better, but the greatest contribution of plastics to industry and to life generally is made in association with the older materials rather than in competition with them. The great quality of plastics is that they lend themselves to mass production of a great variety of articles made to very precise specifications and diverse qualities.

Then followed a sound film showing the chemical processes employed in the making of plastics. To follow these processes intelligently presupposes a knowledge of chemistry probably not possessed by the majority of those present. The method of illustration chosen yet enabled us to obtain, in a general way, an understanding of the essentials upon which the making of the great many types of plastics are based. The film which took only twenty minutes, whetted the appetite for knowledge of the audience. For well over half an hour question followed question upon many aspects of plastics which have puzzled us in our daily experience, and to all of which Mr. Hitchon had his ready answer.

Towards the end of the meeting Mr. Meier entered the lecture room. Before we dispersed he conveyed to us the greeting of the Central authorities and of our old friends, Mr. O. Roethlisberger and Mr. Jean Trachsel.

E.H.S.

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