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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Annual Luncheon and Tea Dance

on

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21st, 1953

at

THE DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

In the Chair: W. MEIER, President

The Swiss Colony has, on various occasions been compared with an extinct volcano, or adjudged slowly "fading out", owing to the lack of new blood, due to restrictions imposed on the immigration of young people into this country.

Whilst, I have noticed in the past a regrettable lack of interest in some of the functions, — especially meetings and lectures —, which are often staged with much care, I must say, that during the last few weeks which have passed, there have been few signs that the volcano is "dead as mutton", quite the contrary, and I must congratulate the respective organisers on managing to crowd into eight weeks no less than fifteen social functions, lectures, concerts and meetings. This is a remarkable feat of organisation, but whether it benefits the attendance at the respective arrangements, I leave it to my readers to judge.

The Annual Luncheon and Tea Dance of the Swiss Mercantile Society was, I believe the last of the social functions of the season, if it was, it was certainly not the least of all the many celebrations, which I have attended during the last six months. I was particularly happy on this afternoon; firstly, the company numbering nearly 120, was very congenial, and secondly I could look forward to a short respite from my official duties. The thought that my numerous speech making friends have, at least for a few weeks given me a rest, filled my heart with joy, not because they have unduly bored me, but with all due respect to their oratorial achievements, they have taught me very few new things. I am, of course, more than ever convinced, that we Swiss are a fine body of men, and it was perhaps hardly necessary to stress this point so often.

I have professed quite candidly on previous occasions, often to the annoyance of some of my friends in "other circles", that the Swiss Mercantile Society is one of my "first loves", and I am glad to say that we have been faithful to each other, no mean achievement in these days of short lived affections, and therefore meeting an old sweetheart is always a joyful event.

* * *

The afternoon started with cocktails, after which the company adjourned to the Banqueting Hall where a very fine luncheon was served. After the customary toasts to H.M. the Queen and Switzerland, the

President, Mr. W. Meier welcomed the following official guests: The Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, M. & Mme R. Keller (Swiss Legation), M. & Mme. G. Lepori (Swiss Legation), (Dr. V. Umbricht and Mme. Umbricht were unable to attend owing to their absence abroad), Mr. & Mrs. F. G. Sommer (Trustee), Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor "Swiss Observer", Mr. C. Westcott, "The Times", Father A. Lanfranchi, Pasteur & Mme C. Reverdin, Pfarrer and Mrs. H. Spoerri. It was mentioned that Mr. & Mrs. C. Seinet, President of the City Swiss Club, Dr. H. W. Egli, President of the N.S.H., Miss A. Gretener, Hon. Secretary of the N.S.H. and Mr. & Mme Miesch of the Legation were also present.

Mr. Meier also tendered a special welcome to the Ladies present, and to such trusted old friends as Messrs. Louis Chapuis, H. Pfirter, and F. Danmeyer. He took the opportunity of thanking his colleagues on the committee, especially Messrs. W. Burren and L. Krucker (Vice-Presidents) for their work, the staff for their well rendered duties, and the Federal authorities and donors for their financial support.

Owing to the fact that the Annual report of the Society was going to be sent out in the near future, the President only briefly touched upon the activities of the S.M.S.

The toast to the "Swiss Mercantile Society" was proposed by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, who said:

It is my privilege now to propose the customary toast to the Swiss Mercantile Society.

I don't think I can do better than relate the story which was published in the Press the other day: A Swiss, now resident in India, paid (to the Office Fédéral de l'Industrie, des Arts et Métiers et du Travail) with compound interest, a loan received 20 years ago for the purpose of studying at the Swiss Mercantile College in London. The sum was refunded in the hope that the money might enable another young compatriot to complete his education.

It is hard to think of a greater compliment to your Society. It is equally hard to think of anything that would encourage you more to continue your work in the interest of our young compatriots.

There are, however, two sides in this story. The first is a man who has not forgotten the gift he

received in his youth, and the other is a Swiss so successfully established abroad, that he can return the kindness. I do not doubt for one moment that you and your Society are still as willing to help. It is, however, much more difficult for our young to-day to establish themselves abroad and reach a position where they are able to repay past kindness. This second aspect concerns us all and I can tell you that other countries without dominions overseas, countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, are at a loss, too, and search anxiously for means by which they can rejuvenate and keep alive their colonies. For all of us it is essential to have compatriots abroad who, as commercial and cultural ambassadors, can ensure close contact between hosts and native land.

The last world war, and its restrictions in free trade and free migration, has not only prevented our young men and women from establishing themselves abroad; worse still, it has dulled the awareness of how seriously old liberties have been curtailed. Passports only started 40 years ago, labour permits 20 years ago, and financial restrictions 14 years ago! The young can no longer imagine what life was like without those obstacles.

A first attempt in the right direction is perhaps the recently concluded Anglo-Swiss Agreement concerning the transfer of old age pensions. A second step is now under consideration, the negotiations for the avoidance of double taxation. A third important step, of course, would be if some formula could be found by which the convertibility of money could be re-established. This will have to come one day.

One of the big obstacles to the re-establishment of free migration within Europe is, however, the high standard of living we enjoy in Switzerland. Often our young people do not *want* to go abroad and risk the harsher conditions of life and the economic uncertainty of other countries.

Your College is of great service to those who came here to learn the language. But one day the trend might change. Should "Hochkonjunktur" no longer reign in Switzerland, your college and its courses are of even greater importance, because they help your students to understand also the ways of Great Britain and the world at large and thus are a valuable preparation for those who want to settle abroad.

At the same time it is therefore all the more necessary that we make every effort to expand the number of students and stagiaires who are allowed to come.

Before I close, I want to express to you, Mr. Chairman, to your members, to the Principal and the Staff of your College, my thanks and appreciation for the work you have done and pay tribute to the ever ready help you are giving me, my Legation and the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

In the knowledge that the S.M.S. will continue its good work, I wish them every success, and ask you all to raise your glass and drink with me a toast to their future and success.

The address of the Minister was loudly cheered.

To Mr. F. G. Sommer, Trustee of the S.M.S., was assigned the task of saying "thank you" on behalf of the guests. He did so in his usual efficient manner.

Mr. L. Krucker, Vice-President, paid a great tribute to the President for his arduous duties so well and efficiently carried out, and presented to Mrs. Meier a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the Members of the Society, as a small compensation for the many hours she has been deprived of the company of her husband.

Dancing then started which was only interrupted for tea, when it continued until 6 p.m.

A really enjoyable afternoon, which deserved a larger attendance, thus came to a close, and I feel sure the memory of it will remain with all those present for a very long time.

ST.

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