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A GREAT EVENT OF THE "SWISS SEASON"

The Annual Dinner and Dance of The Swiss Mercantile Society

The Swiss Mercantile Society is one of the most lively organizations of our colony in London, and this fact was proved once more by the large number of people who participated in its Annual Dinner and Dance at the Dorchester Hotel on Saturday, 27th January.

There were some 145 guests at this grand event of the "Swiss Season" in London, and Mr. A. Jaccard told me: "We had to refuse at least twelve people, as there wasn't room for them".

Well, now, everybody knows that the Dorchester has some of the finest cooking in town, so who would resist the temptation to share in a feast consisting of "Truite de rivière au champagne", "Médaille de veau à l'Emmenthal", and other culinary delights?

But, of course, at an annual dinner, it is the atmosphere that is important, and the gentlemen who prepared the evening, knowing this, did their best to make it a colourful, lively and memorable party. They succeeded so well that midnight, and the time to leave those hospitable premises, came all too quickly.

After toasts to the Queen and to Switzerland, Mr. R. Chappuis, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, rose to say a few friendly words and to welcome the guests and the ladies. He said:

Monsieur le Chargé d'Affaires, Madame de Stoutz, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to welcome you all very heartily. I am glad that you have responded in such good numbers to our invitation to our Annual Dinner and Dance and can only regret that, owing to the limited accommodation available for dancing, we had to disappoint several of our members who would have liked to be with us this evening.

It is now my great privilege and pleasure to introduce to you our distinguished guests. Our Ambassador and Madame Daeniker had very kindly accepted our invitation to be our Guests of Honour tonight but, unfortunately, Monsieur Daeniker was called to attend a conference in Berne, which was only due to finish today. We deeply regret their absence but we are very happy with their choice in having selected as their representatives, Monsieur Jean de Stoutz, First Counsellor of Embassy and Chargé d'Affaires, and Madame de Stoutz, to whom we extend a most hearty welcome.

We are also delighted to welcome Monsieur Marcel Heimo, Economic Counsellor at the Swiss Embassy, and Madame Heimo. Those of us who attended our last monthly meeting have still fresh in our minds the most interesting talk Monsieur Heimo gave us on "Present Swiss Economic Problems".

We are very happy to greet several other members of the Embassy, especially Consul Ribí, accompanied by Mrs. Ribí. I should like also to single out Monsieur et Madame Adrien Chapuis, who, I am very sorry to say, will be leaving us soon. Monsieur Chapuis, who is a member of our Society, is being transferred to Berne, where he will take up a post with the Office for Technical Co-operation of the Federal Political Department.

We are delighted to welcome Mr. E. Kuebler, Chairman of the Assembly of Presidents of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain, who is accompanied by Mrs. Kuebler. Our friends have come all the way from Manchester, especially to be with us, and I should like to tell them how much we appreciate their presence this evening.

Those of you who attended our Annual Dinners regularly in the last few years will remember that this beautiful Cup was already displayed on the last four occasions we met. It is the Lints Smith Trophy, the Times Football Club's Challenge Cup which is played for annually between the teams of the Times and the College. Well, I am very pleased to say that, by winning once again and for the fifth time running, our College has retained the custody of the Cup for another year. The match took place on the beautiful sports ground of the Times at Ravensbourne. So far, the contest has been won eight times by the Times Football Club and five times by the College.

What I have just said was as a foreword to introducing to you our next guests, Mr. C. W. Wescott, Vice-President of the Times Football Club, and Mrs. Westcott, to whom we extend very hearty greetings. Mr. Westcott is a very old friend of ours. It is chiefly due to his efforts that the sporting event I have just mentioned has taken place since 1937.

We are very happy to welcome for the first time at our Annual Dinner, Mr. P. Hofstetter, accompanied by Mrs. Hofstetter.

We are very pleased to have amongst us the representatives of the Swiss Churches in London, the Reverend and Mrs. Ph. Nicole, the Reverend J. Stüssi and the Reverend Father J. Scherer. We are very appreciative of the important work they discharge with so much devotion and we wish them well in their labours.

I am very happy to welcome two of our Trustees, Mr. J. J. Boos and Mr. C. Voegeli, accompanied by Mrs. Voegeli.

It also gives me great pleasure to greet several of our Honorary Members, accompanied by their ladies, Mr. W. Burren, our Secretary, Mr. O. Grob, my predecessor, and Mr. A. Stauffer, who was President of our Society in 1917/18. We are missing today an Honorary Member and Past President who, as far back as I can remember, had attended our Annual Dinner with his family. I refer to our dear friend Walter Meier, who did so much for our Society and who passed away a few months ago. May I say to Mrs. Meier how pleased we are with her company and that of her daughter tonight and how much we value this happy link with the past.

I am delighted to see Mrs. Pfaendler, the widow of our late Honorary Member Jack Pfaendler, who was for many years manager of the Employment Department.

I am also very happy to extend hearty greetings to a visitor from Switzerland, Mr. Max Schneider. Our old friend was our Honorary Secretary for six years until the outbreak of the war, when he was called up and returned to Switzerland. He is now happily settled in Basle. It is a real pleasure for us to welcome him tonight.

We regret that, neither the Principal of the College, Mr. Slade, nor the Vice-Principal, Mr. Makin, could manage to be with us but I feel that, even in their absence, I should express our thanks to them, as well as to the Teaching Staff, for the hard work they have put in, as shown by the good results attained by our students.

Here, I must also include our ever active Secretary, Mr. W. Burren, and the two young ladies who work in the Office, Miss J. Roulet and Miss L. Linder, who, I am glad to say, are both with us this evening.

It is usual at this juncture to say a few words about the activities at the College. During 1961, 496 students attended our day school and 1,003 students our evening classes, in both cases an increase of 35 on the previous year's attendance. Out of the 496 day students, 308 sat for the Diploma Examinations and 280, or 91%, passed and received the much coveted Diploma of our College. Once again, we benefited from a subsidy granted to us by the Bundesamt für Industrie, Gewerbe and Arbeit in Bern. This support from our Federal Authorities is gratefully acknowledged, as it enables us to offer exceptional facilities to our young students. More particulars will be given at our Annual General Meeting on 14th February and in our Annual Report, which will be sent to you in due course.

I take this opportunity of thanking most sincerely our Trustees and the members of the Council and the various Committees, and here may I single out our two Vice-Presidents, Mr. A. Jaccard, Chairman of the Education Committee, and Mr. L. W. Krucker, Chairman of the House Committee, for the loyal support they have given me during the year.

I now come to my last and most pleasant task, which is that of welcoming the ladies. I am sure that I need hardly say to you, Ladies, how delighted we are that you have come to grace us with your presence this evening. There is an old saying that ladies are those wonderful creatures who share our sorrows, double our joys and treble our expenses. For all that, Ladies, we bless you, as well as for the loving care with which you attend to our everyday needs and comfort.

H.E. the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, being unable to attend, was represented by Mr. Jean de Stoutz, First Counsellor of the Embassy. He said:

Mr. President, Mr. Chappuis, Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel both respect and diffidence this evening at being the guest — through your kindness, Mr. President — of an old lady who admittedly carries her 74 years of lively and fruitful activity very light-heartedly.

I am referring to that distinguished lady, the Swiss Mercantile Society. Although she was born in 1888 and has since 1922 been the mother of an ever-growing child, the Swiss Mercantile Society College, she has remained so young and dynamic that most of us may well envy her.

It is my pleasant duty to bring her and you, Mr. President and the members of this venerable society, greetings and best wishes from the Swiss Ambassador, M. Daeniker. He follows your activities with unceasing interest, I know, and he told me how very sorry he was to be prevented from joining us tonight by his official duties which obliged him to attend a conference in Berne.

As you will already have gathered from my English, I am a newcomer to this country, so I have not yet been fortunate enough to have much contact with the Swiss Mercantile Society. But curiosity impelled me to look through a number of recent annual reports, and I was impressed by what I read. The figures they contain demonstrate the encouraging development of your organization. Perhaps President Kennedy's message about the American budget has helped to make us rather blasé about finance. Even so, the more modest progress of the Swiss Mercantile Society's budget over the years indicates that this society is following an upward trend that is not likely to be reversed. Faced with these facts, one can only pay tribute to all her presidents, up to and including M. Chappuis. Together with the other enlightened personalities who have formed its councils and committees — and

those who hold office today — they have given to your organisation the creative impulse which has led to its present happy state. There is every reason to suppose that, under the guidance of those who are now assuming responsibility for the destiny of the Society, this happy state will continue and go on developing.

The College, that child of Swiss parents that has just entered its forties, is one of the outstanding achievements of the Colony in London. There thousands of young Swiss have studied English, which has been indispensable to them in their careers since it has acquired, in our time, all the importance of an international language. They are also indebted to the College for a valuable commercial education. This has made them familiar with the activities of the City which has had such a powerful effect on the financial and economic life of the world. So I was not surprised to learn that the numbers attending the courses have, for the most part and certainly in recent years, been continually increasing. That is an indication of the value of this establishment. People are inclined to speak rather inappropriately, I think, of the *ageing* Swiss colonies abroad, but you will agree with me that the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society is certainly not an example of this process!

It gave me great pleasure to see here Mr. Westcott, the Vice-President of the Times Football Club. His presence proves that those who are engaged in commerce are not solemn people dedicated exclusively to figures and the exchange of goods, but that they also value the joys and benefits of sport. I was glad to learn that the matches between the teams of the Times Football Club and those of the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society are now a most welcome tradition.

Finally, all of you here tonight prove something else by your presence: if the members of the Swiss Mercantile Society find enjoyment in sport as well as in their professional activities, they are also fond of dancing. Anyhow, as you won't be able to indulge in that pleasure if I don't stop talking, I invite you now to join in the toast of the Swiss Mercantile Society and its College. May they have a long and prosperous life!

The task of replying on behalf of the guests was entrusted to Mr. E. Kuebler, Chairman of the Assembly of Presidents of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain, who, with his wife, specially came from Manchester for the evening. Mr. Kuebler said:

Mr. President, Members of the Swiss Mercantile Society, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is strange that I, a comparative stranger in your midst, should be chosen to speak on behalf of the Ladies and the other Guests on this auspicious occasion. The only reason I can think of for my being asked to respond to the toast of "Our Guests" is, that I happen to represent the "Assembly of the Presidents of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain", of whose existence and work little is known amongst our compatriots, though it endeavours to bring the many Swiss Societies in closer contact with one another and to tackle the many questions arising in their activities.

I fully appreciate the honour conferred upon me, but I realise how difficult it is to do justice to my task and to speak for such a bevy of beauty and for my other fellow-guests. Yet, after such hospitality showered on us by the President and Members of the Swiss Mercantile Society, I can only thank them all most sincerely on your and my behalf for the invitation to this delightful evening.

I had been asked by your late President to attend last year's Banquet and Ball, but unfortunately had been unavoidably prevented from joining you. Only now do I realize what a treat my dear wife and I had to forgo, but I am happy to have the opportunity now to make up for lost time.

I am sure my fellow guests will agree with me when I say that this evening's festivity will remain one of the highlights of the "Swiss Season" in London. And all of us will look back many times to the happy hours spent among our friends. The happy faces, the joyous pleasantries exchanged all round and the look of anticipation of yet another few hours of partaking in the enjoyment of dancing to some tempting music is the surest sign of an evening well spent and the best proof of success for the Organising Committee.

And now, may I ask the Ladies and Fellow Guests to offer our warmest and sincerest "Thanks" to the President and Members of the Swiss Mercantile Society by joining me in a Toast to our *Hosts*.

* * *

A last and unprepared speech came from Mr. A. Jaccard, President of the Education Committee, who thanked Mr. Chappuis and Mr. W. Burren, the able Secretary of the S.M.S. He then proposed a toast in honour of Mr. Chappuis, and everybody sang "For he's a jolly good fellow". There was dancing to an excellent band, and the party went along with a swing! Yes, it really was a good evening.

P. H.

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