

René A. Marchand

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RENE A. MARCHAND

I have received a little booklet entitled "This is your life", written by a Mr. Horace Roxby, a personal friend of the subject of this article. It deals with biographical notes of our old friend René Achille Marchand, who some time ago retired from business, and is now enjoying retirement partly in the land of his birth. For many years, he occupied a conspicuous role in the London Swiss Colony, and also in business circles in this country and abroad. The booklet is dedicated to his many friends in all parts of the globe.

René was born in Bienne in 1892, the son of a renowned watch manufacturer. He received his education in his native town, and after leaving school he was apprenticed in Geneva, followed by a spell in his father's factory at Bienne. Like so many of his compatriots he was anxious to gain more experience, and a wider outlook on life abroad. His travels took him first to Serbia for a year, and afterwards to Pforzheim (a centre of the watch and jewellery industry) and Karlsruhe where he received advanced training at a commercial college.

In 1910 Mr. Marchand came to London, entering the firm of Wheeldon & Company (wholesalers in the watch trade). After only one year with them he made such progress that the firm appointed him to be their Sales Representative, travelling on their behalf throughout England, Scotland and Ireland. During that time he had the good fortune to meet a compatriot, Mr. Léon Jobin (who, like him, later on was a well-known and popular member of the Swiss Colony).

A lasting friendship started from this meeting which produced such splendid results as the two young enthusiasts found themselves in complete agreement on their aims and ambitions. In 1913 René Marchand and Léon Jobin commenced business under the name of Marchand & Jobin Ltd. Success soon followed and branches were opened in Birmingham, Glasgow and Liverpool.

During the first World War, the firm became busily engaged in the production of munitions of war. René was put in charge of a Chiswick factory and organised the production of Fuses at the works both in England and at his father's factory at Bienne. The following excerpt from an official letter signed by Lord Torpinchen will show the appreciation in which he was held, therein the noble Lord "desires to place on record the great services you have rendered to this section of the Ministry and the unfailing courtesy and energetic assistance you have displayed".

The war years were an exceedingly busy time for our friend. Within this period the following business ventures were founded: Simplex Watch Cases Ltd., Birmingham; Marchand, Jobin & Chumas, London, General Stampings Ltd.; Chiswick and Platinum Watch Cases Ltd., Hatton Garden.

After the 1914/18 War, Mr. Marchand was widening his business interests still further. In 1919, he visited America where he founded the associate company Marchand & Jobin, Ltd., New York. In 1922, he became a Director of Milex Eleen Watch Co., Bienne, in 1926 he was instrumental in founding the firm of British Watch Cases Ltd., London, which became one of the largest of its kind. In 1945, he became the proprietor of the Royal Bell Hotel, Bromley, Kent, and in 1948, he founded the René Marchand Wines Company, Bromley. Many more firms elected him on their Boards.

The booklet also deals with René's private and social life, from which we learn that in 1916 he married Miss Connie Dean at the Eglise Suisse, Endell Street, London, who presented him with a son, Roy Achille in 1918. Roy who had been educated at Westminster School and King's College intended to make Medicine his career, for which purpose he attended the London University Faculty of Medicine. He, however, subsequently changed his original intention and joined the Royal Air Force in March 1939, gaining his Wings in August of that year. At the outbreak of the war in September 1939 he was drafted to France with the 73rd Fighter Squadron, his being the first two Squadrons to go. On 15th September 1940, Roy was killed during the Battle of Britain. The plane he was piloting crashed in a cherry orchard at Mount Farm in Sittingbourne, Kent.

René Marchand was also a prominent Freemason attaining the rank of Worshipful Master of several Lodges (he was one of the founders of the Helvetica Lodge in 1927, and afterwards Master). He held London Grand Rank in the Craft, and in 1959 was appointed Assistant Grand Standard Bearer (Acting) in the United Grand Lodge of England. René was a member of the City Swiss Club, Swiss Rifle Association and the Anglo-Swiss Society. Shortly after his retirement he and his wife embarked on a world cruise lasting four months, to be followed some six months later by another voyage lasting five and a half months.

This then is a shortened review of this booklet, depicting a story of success, and big achievements, a story showing great abilities, keen sense of business instinct, responsibility and a great deal of hard work.

The reviewer, who counts himself a personal friend of René Marchand, wishes him and his life's companion a happy eventide of a life that was well worth living.

We are proud to call him "one of us", because he has added in no small measure to the good name with which Swiss business people have always been regarded in this country.

ST.

(Written sometime before Mr. Stauffer's death.)