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Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Mercantile Society

A. STEINMANN, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society



When, some two weeks ago, I appealed through the columns of this paper to give the Swiss Mercantile Society the support of the Colony for their Annual Banquet and Ball at the Midland Hotel, I had some serious misgivings as to what the result would be; I know, of course, that I was championing a fine cause, but then so many deserving causes nowadays receive little or no encouragement. To cut a long story short, I am glad to say that the Colony, the members and friends of the S.M.S., have nobly answered my call, which proves that the *Swiss Observer* has once more justified its existence. To be frank, no record was beaten, nor was one established; but amongst the 150 participants were many of the old friends and members one used to meet in bygone days, and I am sure I do not exaggerate when I say that it was a very happy and homely gathering. True enough, the accommodation at the Midland seems to many of us now a little old-fashioned, and perhaps a change in the future might be considered as an incentive for a larger attendance; but to many of the older members the Midland still harbours many sweet remembrances of times when worries were little and money plentiful. But then a new generation is coming along, and the day belongs to them, and we older ones must give way.

Previous to the dinner a reception was held by Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, accompanied by Madame Paravicini and ably seconded by M. Steinmann, President of the Swiss Mercantile Society.

The dinner started fairly punctual, considering that a dense fog over various parts of the Metropolis must have delayed some of the guests. The loyal toasts to H.M. the King and Switzerland were proposed by the Swiss Minister and duly honoured; the bandmaster must have heard that Switzerland is intending to change its National Anthem, because the tune the orchestra played was different from the one we are accustomed to sing. It is, of course, appropriate that the national emblems of the two countries should be displayed — well, they were there — but with all deference to the Swiss Flag and the Union Jack, I have never seen such shabby and delapidated articles. I quite agree that economies must be made, but I hope that the S.M.S. will another time consult one of its old members who is an authority in the decorating line, and thus make a better show of it.

Shortly after the dessert was served, M. J. J. Schneider, the energetic Secretary of the S.M.S., announced that the President of the Society wished to address the company. I take this opportunity to report that he handled his little hammer with much more restraint; as a matter of fact, I hardly recognised my friend, who on former occasions has hammered to his heart's content, and the roaring of the lion gave way to the voice of the dove. The ladies present, who on former occasions nearly used to go into hysterics at his performance, smiled at him and said he was an awfully nice man, with which I heartily agree.

Amongst loud applause, Mr. Steinmann rose and addressed the company as follows:—

This is the first occasion in the capacity of President on which I have had the pleasure and privilege of extending to you the most hearty welcome on behalf of the Swiss Mercantile Society. I hope you will enjoy this evening as much as I did in previous years, when I attended this annual function in a more comfortable obscurity.

It is gratifying to me personally, and I am sure to the Council, to see so many here this evening. It is a splendid culmination of a year of constant effort and one "devoutly to be wished." Particularly does it please me to see so many old friends amongst us. It would seem superfluous for me to call upon you to enjoy yourselves to the full.

We are all very pleased to have our Minister and Madame Paravicini with us, and I extend to you, Sir, and Madam, a most cordial welcome on behalf of all of us. Our Minister does not only come to us on social occasions; he is the Honorary President of our Society, and I can tell you that, in spite of the many calls on his time, he keeps in constant touch with our activities.

On behalf of the Society, may I also express our pleasure that our Trustee, Mr. De Brunner, is with us to-night.

In the middle of last year, Mr. Lehmann found it impossible to continue as President, and it is due to his retirement from that office that I find myself acting in his stead this evening. It is now my pleasant task to report briefly upon the outstanding features of the Society's activities during the past year.

Although progress during that year would not provide startling headlines after the manner of the Loch Ness Monster, we can congratulate ourselves that we have no need to hide our record in any Loch! We have weathered the storm of the world's economic blizzard.

Mr. Pfaendler has continued his struggle as chief of our Employment Department, and his efforts have met with a success that certainly could not have been achieved under the abnormal conditions of last year by a man of less ability.

The evening classes have shown a fall in numbers, but a satisfactory increase in attendance. The number of classes was 48, as compared with 64, and the number of students 308, as compared with 590 in the previous year. The attendance of 80 — 12 per cent. — is the highest yet attained. The College also experienced a falling-off in numbers of about 20 per cent., the monthly average having been 169 against 211 in 1932. In all the examinations taken by the students of our College, the same high percentage of successful passes has been maintained. This speaks a great deal for the efficient work of the teaching staff during an exceptionally difficult year.

At this point, I might refer to a pleasing incident that took place during the year. The College was visited by Sir Eugene Ramsden, M.P., Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Trade and the President of the Board of Education. This Committee is to consider what further steps could usefully be taken to encourage suitable students to come to the United Kingdom for education and training — general, commercial or technical. In answer to our question how it came about that he was visiting us, Sir Eugene replied that the really good schools were well known to the British Authorities.

Bearing in mind these facts and many others which time does not permit me to mention to-night, we are fully warranted in stressing the national importance of our College, and I have complete confidence that I am more than justified in appealing to you to give the Society and its work all the support of which you are capable, both morally and financially.

Next year we have to face the problem of whether we shall be able to continue in our present premises or seek new ones, owing to the fact that our present lease expires next March. We are faced with a demand for a considerably increased rental, and the solution of our problem would depend very largely on the financial support forthcoming from the Federal Authorities.

The loyalty and hard work of all associated with the Society and the College are so general that it would be odious for me to make special reference to selected names. I therefore express my very sincere thanks to everyone, from the Trustees and Council downwards, for the part they have played, each and all, in maintaining the high standard of the Society during the past year.

With the horizon brightening and hopes of better times ahead, I am confident that our Society will have the opportunity of playing a still more important part in furthering the professional education of our compatriots, and I can assure you that we shall do all in our power towards the welfare and happiness of our beloved Switzerland.

The applause which the sympathetic President received on concluding his speech was richly deserved. Another gentle tap with the hammer commanded silence for the Honorary President

of the Swiss Mercantile Society, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister. On rising from the Fanteuil présidentiel, M. Paravicini received a hearty ovation.

The Swiss Minister then said that he would propose the toast of the S.M.S.

Referring to the remark which had just been made by the President, he could not, like the remarkable speaker who had just sat down, say that it was the first time he had addressed the Members and Guests at that Dinner. He quite believed that if one's name were not included in the Toast List it would contribute greatly to the enjoyment of the evening, but he himself had never had the good fortune to experience such a comfortable obscurity.

It was a great pleasure to Madame Paravicini and himself to sit at that table, and they were both touched by the reception given them by the President and the assembly. It would be a good plan for that night to be optimistic and enjoy oneself, as things did indeed seem to have a better aspect all round, although the improvement might only be in its initial stages and might still take a considerable time to lead matters up to a point which could be considered as reassuring.

The respective positions of Switzerland and Great Britain without doubt showed a certain similarity, though the latter country was the better off at the present juncture. However, signs of improvement were perceptible on somewhat the same lines in both countries; budgets had been successfully balanced, much more favourably, it is true, on this side; the heavy and adverse trade balance had been reduced here and there, and the aspect of unemployment was no longer as desperate as it had been in the past.

The relations of Switzerland with her neighbours were still beset with difficulties as far as her economic and financial problems were concerned, and the debt payments complications with Germany, a question on which much had of late been read in the English papers, were only part of the drawbacks of international intercourse. Switzerland had continually to negotiate terms on which it might, under the present disturbed conditions, be possible for her to deal with foreign customers, and no one could say how long this period of day-to-day measures and short-term agreements would yet have to last. It was a comfort to know that in Minister Stucki Switzerland had a negotiator of exceptional ability, who had found a means, even under special difficulties, of effecting satisfactory, or at least acceptable, conditions for her trade. Now and then there were bright spots in the grey sky; for instance, the recent success of the Swiss Machine Industry in Ireland, due to the efficient efforts of the London agent of the Swiss Machine Factory concerned, and also, worthy of mention, on account of the direct intervention of the President of the Confederation with the Irish Government.

It was gratifying to witness a decided upward tendency in the Winter Sports traffic, and the renewed keenness of British guests to visit Switzerland's snowfields. The efforts to reduce travelling costs and hotel expenses, made by the Swiss railways and hoteliers, were certainly an encouraging factor, and the improvement in the tourist industry would without doubt make itself felt, directly and indirectly, in the activities of the mother society and of its London branch.

He always listened with great interest to the reports given him by M. Rüfenacht, the Commercial Secretary, and it was a matter of satisfaction to all that the S.M.S., notwithstanding a certain reduction in numbers at the College, as mentioned by the President, was very successfully maintaining the high standard attained by the students in the examinations and the remarkably good name which it enjoyed in English circles. They could therefore look into the future with confidence, and he offered them his best wishes for further success and good work.

This remarkable speech of the Minister was greatly applauded.

A Swiss Mercantile Banquet without guests is unthinkable, and true to their generous traditions, the Society invited well over thirty guests to sit down at their table. The toast to the Guests and the Ladies was entrusted into the capable hands of M. J. J. Boos, who accomplished his task with great efficiency. He informed the company that the following gentlemen from the Legation were present:—

Monsieur Ch. de Jenner,
Monsieur W. A. de Bourg,
Monsieur P. Hilfiker.

(Monsieur W. Rüfenacht was unable to be present owing to his absence in Switzerland).

The Swiss Churches were represented by M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme. M. Th. Hahn was unfortunately prevented from being present.

That the S.M.S. entertains friendly relations with all their sister Societies was proved by the attendance of the following Societies:—

City Swiss Club,
Société de Secours Mutuels,
Fonds de Secours,
Swiss Club (Schweizerbund),
Swiss Orchestral Society,
Unione Ticinese,
Nouvelle Société Helvétique,
Swiss Gymnastic Society,
Swiss Choral Society.

The Union Helvetia Club and the Swiss Club, Birmingham, were unfortunately unable to be represented.

Mr. Boos also welcomed Mr. G. De Brunner, one of the Trustees of the Society; Mr. Stauffer, Editor of the *Swiss Observer*, and Dr. Egli, London correspondent of the "Bund," and last, but by no means least, he paid a well-deserved compliment to Mrs. Lunghi-Rezzonico, who takes such motherly care of the lady students of the College.

I do not wish to blow my own trumpet, but I cannot help thanking the speaker for the very flattering remarks he made about the *Swiss Observer*, describing it as a concern run by father (Mr. Boehlinger) and son (yours truly); but he must have had a very poor opinion of our parental relationship, because he put us miles asunder, and I even heard him use, as an excuse, the words "in case they quarrel." Well, we did not, nor did the fatherly hand bid me go to bed when midnight arrived.

The presentation made to me of a large silver (or was it silver paper?) medal for services rendered in connection with the function was a great and pleasant surprise, and I shall treasure it as long as I live (as a matter of fact, I lost it twice during the evening). I hope that perhaps (?) one day I shall be able to show it to my children, explaining to them how the beautiful medal was presented to me, in the presence of an illustrious company, consisting of Diplomats, Captains of Industry and Commerce, shining lights in the Banking profession, beautiful ladies, etc., etc.

The toast to the Guests was coupled with the one to the Ladies, and the compliment which Mr. Boos paid to the fairest of the fair made all blush with modesty — and what is sweeter than to behold a blushing maiden!!! I feel convinced that those who "have caught" (I am not quite sure whether this is the right word) their life partners amongst the S.M.S. members, will have sent a silent prayer to heaven, thanking the authorities above for blessings received. A further compliment paid was to the "Paying Guests," which was most appropriate, because from the Society's point of view they were much more profitable ones to the Exchequer than the others.

Compliments so lavishly bestowed require and deserve an acknowledgement, and the task of saying "Thank you very much" was entrusted to Mr. Senn, President of the City Swiss Club, who, by the way, is also an old member of the S.M.S. He said:—

This is a very proud moment for me. I have to respond to the toast of the Guests, *Paying Guests*, and the Ladies.

I feel, however, somewhat of an imposter, because, although I happen to be the President of the City Swiss Club at the moment, I am, after all, also an active member of the Swiss Mercantile Society, and yet I am numbered among the guests. It is certainly a very nice compliment, but one that might be taken both ways.

There is an old English adage which tells us to walk a mile after supper. I think that after such a banquet as we have just had, we ought all to walk a dozen miles, which I suppose some of us will have done by the time the dancing is over.

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, long speeches are never popular, and all I will say, therefore, is that on behalf of the Guests, *Paying Guests*, and myself, I beg to offer our heartiest thanks to Mr. Boos, who proposed the toast, and to you gentlemen for the splendid hospitality you have shown us. I am sure I am expressing the feelings of all your guests, when I tell you how greatly honoured we all feel by your invitation to-night. We have enjoyed and will enjoy very much the few hours we are privileged to spend with you, and we congratulate you on the undoubted success of this gathering. The Swiss Mercantile Society, that school famous for everything worth having in public and business life, has done a great deal, perhaps far more than is generally realised, and I hope it will not only continue, but extend its influence.

We Swiss in this country are privileged to enjoy under the Union Jack a wonderful hospitality and freedom, but we never forget that other flag, "Das Weisse Kreuz im Roten Feld," which brings home to us all that we hold dear. Let us then see to it that by our lives here the

high ideals symbolised by both flags and impressed on us by the activities of the Swiss Mercantile Society, are not discredited. All that I have said on behalf of our Guests applies equally to the Ladies, who, I know, greatly appreciate your kind invitation and would wish me to tender you, on their behalf, their hearty thanks for a very enjoyable evening.

I myself have very little experience of the fair sex, but from what I hear occasionally, I imagine that they are more likely to be interested in dancing than in listening to any inane babblings that may emanate from me. Therefore, Gentlemen, I will now call upon the Ladies, my Fellow Guests, and *Paying Guests* to raise their glasses and drink deep and long to the Swiss Mercantile Society and its continued success and further prosperity.

The applause which Mr. Senn received on resuming his seat was a hearty one and was fully deserved. The only criticism I have to offer is that a "bachelor-girl" should be singled out to reply for the Ladies. It has always been a puzzle to me, in these days of women's emancipation, that no lady can be found to acknowledge the toast to their own sweet sex. If that could be done, we would then perhaps hear once what the ladies really think of us men. We are acquainted, of course, on some occasions, in the sanctuary of our own homes, with the truth, or what they imagine is the truth; but I should like to hear it once publicly stated, so that we men know where we stand.

That the members of the S.M.S. are nice people was proved on this festive occasion by the remembrance of their more unfortunate brethren who are in straightened circumstances. The Appeal for Charity, was entrusted into the capable hands of Mr. Stahelin, in the absence of M. J. Pfendler, who was unfortunately prevented from being present, owing to illness.

Mr. Stahelin, accomplished speaker as he is, asked without using many words for help, and help he received. The collection amounted to nearly £33, and I have been given to understand that this amount constituted a record, and I am glad to say that it is a record the Society can be proud of.

This appeal concluded the speech-making, and the company adjourned whilst the Banqueting Hall was made ready for dancing. I need hardly say that the second part of the programme was equally successful, or even more so, than the first.

It was altogether a most enjoyable evening, and the presence of Monsieur and Madame Paravicini until nearly to the end of the function was greatly appreciated.

ST.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

The February meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Tuesday, the 6th inst., when about fifty members and guests were present.

On this occasion the Club was honoured by the presence of the Swiss Minister, Mr. C. R. Paravicini.

I was told by one of our most eminent members, whose information is generally correct, that this was the first time that the Minister had been present at one of the ordinary monthly meetings.

I hope he enjoyed his evening, and as his visit was unexpected, no special arrangements had been made to welcome him, and his visit being thus informal, he was able to get an idea as to the procedure at one of our meetings.

The Minister, being an Honorary President of the Club, occupied the Chair, and after dinner proposed the toast of The King, and then, in a delicious and informal speech, kept the members in roars of laughter with his witty remarks about some of the Members of the Committee and the guests.

Among the latter was Sir Arnold Theiler, K.C.M.G., who is the big noise in the veterinary world in South Africa.

From the Minister's speech, it would appear that Sir Arnold Theiler has collected most of the academic and scientific honours which could be bestowed upon him, by South Africa, America, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Switzerland, and various other countries.

In reply to the toast of the Visitors, Sir Arnold Theiler told us something about his early adventures in South Africa; how he worked on a cattle farm in order to gain practical experience; how an epidemic of smallpox gave him his first opportunity; how he was then commissioned by President Kruger to investigate the means of fighting the great epidemic of rinderpest; how he succeeded, so that in place of 99 per cent. of cattle dying from the disease, 99 per cent. were saved by serum treatment, and how he was afterwards called into consultation by the Government of Australia and by the American Government concerning an outbreak of the disease in Texas. A most interesting account of an interesting career.

Mr. A. F. Tschiffeli, the famous author of the book "Southern Cross to Pole Star," who was invited, was unable to attend owing to a previous engagement.

After these speeches, the ordinary business of the Meeting was quickly despatched by Mr. Senn. One new member was elected. Three resignations were announced. Three delegates from the Club for the Swiss Sports Committee were elected, or rather re-elected.

Mr. Senn reminded the members that the next Cinderella will take place at the May Fair Hotel on Saturday next, February 10th. And then a most successful and enjoyable evening was brought to a close, and everyone was unanimous in expressing the hope that the Minister would be able to find time to visit us on some future occasion, and give us the opportunity to listen once again to another gem of oratory.

ck.

UNIONE TICINESE.

Domenica, 4 febbraio, aveva luogo nel locale sociale la prima Assemblée Generale del 1934 dell' UNIONE TICINESE. All'adunata, il cui forte era dato dagli anziani, erano intervenuti pure dei veterani, ai quali il solo nome della Società richiama alla mente fieri ricordi di vita ticinese nella Metropoli britannica.

La seduta si aprì con la lettura del verbale dell'ultima assemblea dell'anno scorso e la presentazione del rapporto dei revisori dei conti, seguiti da una succinta relazione sulla gestione 1933 da parte dell'attivo Segretario.

Alla nomina della nuova Direzione, il Presidente, Signor W. Notari, dando effetto al proposito già accennato in una precedente occasione chiede di non essere rieletto. In due discorsi, notevoli l'uno per la pacatezza e l'altro per l'incisività degli argomenti, i Soci Gambazzi e Berti pregano il Socio Notari di voler riservare alla Società per un altro anno ancora il suo valido ministero e coronare così una carriera indimenticabile nella storia dell'Unione Ticinese. Con unanime plauso il Socio Notari riprende il seggio presidenziale motivando la sua accettazione con la ricorrenza quest'anno del Giubileo Diamantino dell'Unione, un'occasione nella quale più che in ogni altra urge una mano esperta al timone.

Il Consiglio di Direzione per l'anno in corso risulta così composto:

W. NOTARI, Presidente;
O. GAMBAZZI, Vice Presidente;
P. DE MARIA, Segretario;
G. EUSEBIO, Vice Segretario;
C. BERTI, Cassiere;
A. MORESI, Esattore;
E. BIUCCHI, figlio, Membro;
C. BÖLLA, Membro;
G. CAMOZZI, Membro;
U. HAUSWIRTH, Membro;
D. LUNGI, Membro.

In seguito venne proposta e dall'Assemblea rimandata alla Direzione per l'organizzazione, la Festa Sociale annuale che quest'anno secondo desiderio unanime dovrà essere celebrata in modo degno del sessantesimo anniversario della fondazione.

Votati le altre piccole poste dell'ordine del giorno, fra le quali una elargizione a favore del Fondo Premi del Tiro Federale di Friburgo, l'Assemblea è dichiarata chiusa.

EUSJ.

INFORMATION FOR THE NOVICE IN SWITZERLAND.

The Swiss language is very easy to learn; in fact there is no uphill work about it. The only phrases you need bother about express, with three exceptions, your desire to check descent.

We will first deal with the exceptions. These are *Hell*, *Dunkel* and *Kirsch*.

Hell means light beer;
Dunkel means dark beer.

Having drunk however deeply, you need not flatter or encourage yourself with the idea that either has gone to your legs. Nothing will make any difference to the latter after your skis are on.

Kirsch means *Kirsch*, and spells that pride which goes before a fall. It also goes to the head, giving Swiss courage, and accelerating descent down to a point (probably the point of someone else's ski-stick).

Achtung is an ejaculation meaning "Hi!" "Get out!!" "Hell!!!" or "Oh, dear!!!" according to number of exclamation-marks indicated by the intonation. It is used to express the fact that you are going faster than you can and that recumbent or more slowly-moving bodies must look out for themselves.

Achtung (archaic) means "Fore!" and is shouted arrogantly by those who are masters of their skis. Novices need not try to perfect this pronunciation.

Achdamm! (corruption of *Achtung*), used in prolonged emergencies.