

News from the colony

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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

Lecture "From Peking to India by Caravan."

Whilst Mr. Tschiffely's epoch-making ride is still in vivid recollection the Swiss Mercantile Society was fortunate in being able to persuade another distinguished Swiss traveller to lecture to its members and friends.

On this occasion, however, it was a lady, Miss Ella K. Maillart, who by her journey with Peter Fleming, the famous *Times* Correspondent and author of "News from Tartary," placed herself among the great travellers and explorers of the world. The Swiss Mercantile Society deemed it prudent to arrange for this auspicious lecture to be held at Kingsway Hall and the audience of about 500 fully proved the keen interest which the members had in the story of this hazardous journey from the famous compatriot herself. November 10th proved indeed another red-letter day in the annals of the Society.

Mr. A. Steinmann, President of the Society, in introducing the lecturer, mentioned that Miss Maillart was no doubt known to most of the audience, either by Peter Fleming's articles in *The Times*, or by her talks on the wireless and no less by her recently published book "*Forbidden Journey*," which has proved a best-seller in London for the last few weeks.

Amid hearty applause Miss Maillart then proceeded to give her lecture. She at once had the audience rapt in attention and in her narrative style vividly described her great adventure. She said that while she had been going slowly across Asia for days, weeks and months on horse back at an average speed of 8 miles a day it had been her ambition to stand one day in front of an audience such as she was addressing and show parts of a country very little known. But it had seemed to her that she would never be able to show these things so far away from Europe because she had been travelling backwards through many centuries and had felt they belonged to another world. In 1932 she had begun to realise her plan and dream to go across Asia like the caravans of Marco Polo. She had started from Russia but had been stopped because of civil wars in Chinese Turkestan. During that journey she had realised how much she had wanted to explore these un hospitable tracts of land and that she would have done so when an opportunity had presented itself. Her chance had come in 1935 after she had spent three months in Manchukuo. She said it was difficult for her to explain the reasons why she had wanted so much to go on that journey but Asia had always had a great fascination for her, the land of very big contrasts, at the border of which big Continent they had been pushing us white people away, where they had had enough of us all and had wanted to rule their own country as they had thought fit. Into the heart of that country she had wished to penetrate, where they still led the old life and where one found the steps of Christians and Chinese, south of the Gobi Desert where the air became thinner and through Tibet, a country nobody knew very much about and where the men were supposed to have extraordinary powers. What she had been going to hear and find in that country had been impossible to foresee. Of Chinese Turkestan she had been told that if she had been lucky enough to get inside that province she would have been put into prison and shared the fate of many Germans and Swedes who had gone there and had been incapable of securing their liberty. She had known that there had been two big caravan roads going to Chinese Turkestan but that she would have had to avoid these two roads, to journey where nobody had lived and where nobody would have stopped her i.e., through the southern part. In Peking she had met her friend, Peter Fleming, and had made plans to go back to Europe overland and to pool their finances and try their luck together. They had had to be quick for they had been in February and had had to reach the big oases before the month of October. So they had got ready and had bought some food which could not have been obtained inland and bottles of brandy for the time when their spirits would have got low. There had been another serious question, that of lice. She had previously found out that those "pets" had not despised her and she had not wished again to have been at their mercy. So she had had a new vaccine, which had rendered missionaries immune from typhus which had been transmitted by lice, injected into her arteries, germs collected from an equivalent of about 200 lice. Foreigners had been forbidden to go inland and she had been unable to get a passport in order to go into the interior and therefore had had to be content with a "laissez-passer" from the Legation in Peking. Supposing one had been attacked by bandits there would have been no police as most of the people who had gone inland had disappeared and their Legation had claimed indemnities from the Nanking Government, the authorities had thought that the best thing would have been to forbid foreigners to go inland.

Thus the day of their departure had arrived and some friends had gone to see them off,

amongst them a compatriot of Miss Maillart, a reporter named Bosshard, who had taken any amount of photographs. When he had been told that all that photographing had been rather embarrassing Bosshard had remarked that one day he would have been able to make much money out of them as he had not expected them to return. Thus the adventurers had set out on the long and lonely trail.

Miss Maillart now illustrated her travels and experiences with a large number of slides from her own photographs. From Peking the journey went through Inner China across the Yellow River, the Chinese Far West, Tibet, through the Himalayas down to India.

By courtesy of the League of Nations Miss Maillart was able to show, as a kind of "entr'acte" which greatly added to the interest of the lecture, a film depicting the customs and lives of the natives. Miss Maillart running commentary made it more vivid and the manner in which she related her experiences made the audience feel that she was travelling in her mind again across those vast tracts of land which to the Western eye are so strange and yet so fascinating. There were pictures of tiny Mongols, camel caravans in the Tibetan deserts, Buddhists temples, praying Lamas, Slalom, the lecturer's "one-horse-power vehicle," etc. As a fitting interlude Miss Maillart, who is used to subsist on almost any diet, gave a practical demonstration of how to make Tsamba, the Tibetan national dish, a piece of butter mixed with toasted barley-flower dropped into boiling, salted tea. The whole had then to be kneaded with a skilful hand till it became a solid ball and ready to eat.

On went the journey on the seemingly endless trail enduring countless hardships but not without their reward for the thirsting wanderers in quest of the secrets of these un hospitable regions. What fascinating places and peoples, Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan and Mongol! by contrast with the slow trip across Asia the travellers returned to Europe by aeroplane rich in knowledge and experiences and thus came to close a most interesting and instructive lecture which will long be remembered by those who had the pleasure and privilege of listening to it.

Mr. Steinmann expressed thanks on behalf of all present to Miss Maillart and said that they felt particularly proud of the fact that this marvellous feat was accomplished by a compatriot of theirs. The Chairman's vote of thanks was vociferously endorsed by the audience.

W.B.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Annual Banquet and Ball

at the

Grosvenor House, Park Lane, W.

Friday, November 26th, 1937.

We wish to state that members of the Swiss Colony who desire to attend the Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club, which will take place next Friday, November 26th, at the Grosvenor House, Park Lane, W., should book their tickets not later than Tuesday, November 23rd noon. — (In order to avoid disappointment re seating, it is essential that all applications should be made by this date.)

As mentioned in a previous issue, the City Swiss Club has invited on this occasion, a number of distinguished guests, who are well-known in the public life of this country.

Colonel and Alderman Sir John D. Laurie, T.D., J.P., President of the City Livery Club, will also be amongst the guests of the Club.

We hear that arrangements have been made to engage, apart from a very fine Dance Band, a first class cabaret, which should prove to be an additional attraction to an evening, which promises well to be one of the most brilliant functions the City Swiss Club has held in the past.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

The "Swiss Home for Aged People" at 31, Southampton Street, W.1, was given a charming surprise last Sunday. Our well-known compatriots from the Coliseum, Mr. Toriani and Mr. Hans Schärli, with Willy and Jean-Pierre Cordey, unexpectedly arrived at the Home and treated our people to a yodelling concert to the accompaniment of a Handharmonika. Their repertory was inexhaustible and they sang Bernese, Appenzeller and other yodels by request — all in perfect rendering — to the enjoyment of their listeners. Every member of the Home was present, and one of them was even noticed to wipe away a hidden tear.

The performers, "The Wonder Child Yodelers" of "St. Moritz" at the London Coliseum, with their "Godfathers," need no introduction. Their action, however, in sacrificing their well-earned free Sunday for the benefit of our aged countrymen deserves our greatest praise and is well worthy of imitation.

THE SWISS ACCORDION CLUB'S

First Supper and Dance.

On the 26th of this Month, the Swiss Accordion Club intends to put up a grand show at the Schweizerbund, 74, Charlotte Street, W.1. When I first heard of this, I thought the lads were rather thinking a lot of themselves, as I knew the club has not been in existence six months, and most of its members had not tried their luck with the accordion before, so curiosity got me, and I set forth rather pessimistically to investigate. I, however, promptly had to change my views when I heard the Clubs members practicing, and Mr. A. L. Gandon, the leader, completed the job when he settled down to enlighten me in a few words in what he realized I was utterly ignorant.

I understand there are various types of Accordions: the Piano-Accordion which is most popular in this country, incidentally also referred to as "Squeeze-Box — Pleated-Piano — or Overgrown Concertina," has a full range of piano keys, complete with black ones, on the right hand side: that, of course, providing one holds the instrument the right side up; and, on the left, one has rows of buttons to contend with. This type, however, is not the one which interests us mostly. Next comes the Chromatic-Accordion, which has only buttons, and is considered the most efficient of "Squeeze-Boxes" being very popular in Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland where accordion playing is a real art. I understand that a full size Chromatic may have as many as 90 buttons on the right hand side and anything from 80 to 140 on the left. These endless rows of buttons, which all look alike, are apt to cause a spot of bother to the fellow requiring a particular one, I should imagine it is like looking for a needle in a hay-stack. To overcome this difficulty the Swiss Accordion Club has adopted another type; the Diatonic which is considered in Switzerland as the "Wonder-Accordion" and, is adopted there by practically all the clubs. It only has two rows of buttons on the right and, only eight buttons on the left, but has a full range of notes and anything can be played on it. Furthermore I am assured that a normally intelligent person, i.e., one who realises that to get a sound must press the buttons and work the bellows at the same time, without being told twice, can learn how to play satisfactorily in three months. It seems almost incredible, nevertheless it is true and, the tangible proof will be supplied on the evening of the 26th.

Well selected numbers of Ländlermusik will be played by the concert band, yodling and surprise items followed by dance till 2 a.m. With the price of the ticket which is 2/6 a light supper will be supplied.

I appeal to every Swiss in London to lend all the support they can to this group of plucky fellows who are endeavouring with their efforts to bring that Home Atmosphere in our Colony.

C.F.

"INVITO"

Che bel piacere
Avremo indendoli
Alto vibrare
Dotte canzoni e belle:
E' or le guerriere
Imprese pingerè.
Ora cantare
Gli amor de le donzelle."

Thus Father Giampietro Riva (1696-1785) of Lugano who rose to the governorship of the Order of the "Somaschi" Fathers, and who has left us some excellent poetry.

The "Unione Ticinese" cannot find better words, let alone verses, to invite one and all to the *Concert and Ball* they are organizing at *Pagani's* for Wednesday evening, December 15th, in aid of the *Fonds de Secours*.

To avoid the petty formality of paying Entertainment Duty at the doors, tickets this year are being sold inclusive of tax, price 3s. (instead of 2s. 6d. as previously). They are obtainable from all Committee Members, or direct from the Secretary, P. De Maria, 4, Luxemburg Gardens, W.6.

So the "Unione Ticinese" are waiting to give one and all a big hello on Wednesday, December 15th next (with apologies to Damon Runyon).

PERSONAL.

We deeply regret to inform our readers of the death of M. Edward Frey, of 294, Pickhurst Rise, West Wickham, Kent.

Mr. Frey, who was 76 years of age, was for many years in the Silk trade, he died after a short and serious illness.

Drink delicious "Ovaltine"
at every meal — for Health!