

The Swiss minister with the Rotarians

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THE SWISS MINISTER WITH THE ROTARIANS.

International Luncheon

of the

ROTARY CLUB OF ST. PANCRAS

at the AMBASSADORS' HOTEL, Upper Woburn Place, W.C.1.

on

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15th, 1938.



PHOTO: RAPHAEL

The President and Council of the Rotary Club of St. Pancras entertained as its chief guest, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, at the Ambassador's Hotel, Upper Woburn Place, on the occasion of the Club's International Luncheon, on Tuesday, February 15th.

This was the first of what is to be an annual event of the Club, when they will consider in turn the contribution of various States to International friendship.

The large gathering of members and friends was presided over by Mr. J. W. Kingsley Maile, who extended a hearty welcome to our Minister.

Mr. G. J. Morley Jacob, paid a warm tribute to the Swiss Minister and to our country mentioning the great services which Switzerland has rendered for the last three centuries to International peace and friendship.

The toasts to the Swiss Minister and to the Swiss Rotary Clubs were honoured with great acclamation.

Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, on rising, to respond to the toasts received a vociferous ovation, he said:

I am to speak about some aspects of international good-will.

On being called upon to do so two facts came to my mind which throw a certain light on the subject I have to tackle.

Firstly, I am standing here in the very centre of an Association which is in itself a prototype of good-will and friendship. These two ideals are, as we know, the living impulse of the Rotary Club and the very religion of every Rotarian. Without them a Rotary Club is unthinkable — so much so that not only the Club but each of its individual members makes it the rule of his existence to think of others first and of himself second: a rule which is most adequately expressed in your motto: "Service before self."

Secondly, in your welcome and courteous invitation to me I myself see a gesture of friendship and good-will not only to me personally but to the country for which I stand.

I am not by any means the only representative of Switzerland although I am the accredited envoy from Government to Government. There are numbers of Swiss envoys in this country whose activities and merits in the field of Anglo-Swiss intercourse are of the same or of even greater value than my own achievements in this respect.

If we speak of Switzerland's — or of any other country's contribution to international friendship and good-will, we must, I think, first and foremost remember one thing and that is:

The fact that the desire to entertain friendly relations with others is a feeling and an impulse which, in our time, is to be found in every civilized people.

The times when the natural human instinct was to keep aloof from men beyond your frontiers, to distress them, to attack them because this seemed to be the most obvious thing to do, are happily long past.

Civilized men and women are to-day practically without exception imbued with a mentality which makes them realise that friendship is preferable to enmity and that peace is better than war.

Let us take Europe.

If one of us were to go round Europe, to each one of its countries, one after the other, and talk there to every man and woman he could reach, and ask them what their thoughts were, we all know that he would get nothing less than an unanimous vote in favour of friendship and peace amongst all nations. He would not only get this vote, but he would get proof that in every individual there exists the will to contribute actively towards that movement.

And yet, who ever spoke more of animosity, of discontent with each other, of irritation, bad will, war danger and of war itself than we do to-day?

This makes us think that the individual man and woman may have the right feelings but that there are nevertheless circumstances and forces stronger than these feelings which, when it comes to the point, govern the fate of the nations.

We know that these forces are there, for we ourselves all work around them, with them, against them, whether we like it or not, whether we are forced to do so, or whether we think that it is our duty to do so.

These circumstances and forces, or rather the currents they create, the reactions they provoke, the confusions which result from them, the occasional brighter spells — all these together are called "The international situation."

And here I may say something about my own country, something about the part that she may play amongst the nations.

Switzerland with perhaps a few other European countries, is by nature placed in a favourable position to further international good-will and friendship. She is one of the small countries, of Europe. There are other small countries which are in somewhat similar positions to hers. We believe — and I think you will agree with me — that that group of small nations is an important factor in the affairs of the world.

Amongst these few countries Switzerland is perhaps more favoured by nature than any other to fill the part of a contributor to friendship and good-will. Her geographical position is essentially central, so central that she forms the meeting of three of the most important European races and languages.

Her frontiers are definitely settled. She has no desires, no ambitions, no incentive for more power. Her citizens, though of three different peoples, speaking three different tongues, live together in peace, and friendly competition, yet determined each to preserve his own language, habits and conventions.

Nowhere is the desire to live in friendship and peace with the peoples beyond the frontiers more complete, more traditionally developed, than with the Swiss. For them, that desire for all round friendship is one of the maxims of life, one of the ambitions of their existence.

Now when you speak of all round friendship politically, you call it neutrality. Switzerland has been neutral for three centuries and more, but neutrality and friendship are the same thing. Neutrality may be friendship with those who are not necessarily friends amongst themselves. The relations between others do not concern us. We are willing to be friends with all, no matter what their affairs outside our own affairs may be.

We Swiss have had the good fortune to have been spared once more during the Great War. We have been able to make ourselves useful to some extent in alleviating sufferings of others. We have not only done so gladly but with the consciousness that this was our duty. Everyone would have done the same in our place, and indeed other peoples acted similarly.

If, therefore, you ask me what contribution my country makes to international friendship and good-will I am inclined to reply, she makes her contribution:

By the example of her national life itself, throughout a long number of generations;

by having been friends with all her neighbours for over 300 years;

by showing that good-will towards others and unity at home constitute the best way to live in peace;

by educating her citizens to work, to believe in their country and, when others are in trouble, to put "service before self."

Long applause greeted the very excellent exposé of our Minister.

Mr. Sperti, the Mayor of St. Pancras in a splendid address eulogized Switzerland as a country of great achievements, "Switzerland," he said "should be to the entire world a shining example of what unity and love of peace can achieve," he ended his oration in Italian, saying that he had spent a long time in "that lovely and beautiful canton of Ticino" where some of his ancestors used to live.

The generous compliments paid, both to our country and its official representative were greatly appreciated by a large number of Swiss visitors present.

Altogether a very enjoyable gathering.

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