

# Sir Hanns Vischer

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## SIR HANNS VISCHER

1876 - 1945

We deeply regret to report the death of Sir Hanns Vischer, C.M.G., C.B.E., which occurred on February 19th, at Tykeford Lodge, Newport Pagnell, Bucks.

Sir Hanns Vischer, the son of Adolphe E. Vischer-Sarasin, was born on September 14th, 1876, in Basle, although the deceased spent practically all his life in the service of this country, he remained deeply attached to his native town and to our homeland.

Whenever his arduous duties allowed, he spent his holidays in Basle or in other parts of Switzerland; there he felt happy and there he received fresh inspiration and made new plans for his life's work which brought him honour and fame.

Indeed, Sir Hanns Vischer remained a faithful and never-failing son of his native town. Throughout his distinguished career he rendered innumerable services to the "Museum für Völkerkunde," where his generous gifts formed the greater part of a valuable collection. He took a great interest in the development of the ancient city of Basle, whenever he had an opportunity he attended functions of the guild "Zum Schlüssel," of which he was a member, or other patriotic demonstrations.

Sir Hanns was a frequent and welcome visitor at many of the celebrations of the Swiss Colony in London, where his sincerity and his strong sense of humour made him a delightful companion. Shortly before his untimely passing he attended one of the meetings of the City Swiss Club, where he made a humorous and charming little speech, relating some of his early schoolday experiences; throughout this impromptu address ran a warm feeling of affection for our native land.

He received his first schooling in Basle, and later on, was sent by his father (a fervent Anglophile) to Cambridge University, where, after a few years, principally devoted to the study of languages, he terminated his University education with the degree of Master of Arts. He then joined the Hansa Mission of the Church Missionary Society, with which he worked for two years. His ambition was to enter the administrative service, and for this he had many qualifications. Soon an opportunity presented itself. At that period the Colonial Office had taken over the control of Northern Nigeria, and in 1903 Vischer entered the newly-established administration under Sir Frederick (now Lord) Lugard, who enjoyed a great reputation as a colonizer.

Sir Hanns very soon became a useful collaborator with the acting Resident. From an early age he was deeply interested in ethnology, in the study of which he was encouraged by his uncle, Fritz Sarasin, the well-known ethnologist, and Leopold Rütimeyer, a friend of the latter. With great enthu-

siasm he set himself to study the principal native languages, and learnt what he could of Koranic law as practised in the Moslem Courts.

Two years after entering the Nigerian service he was promoted to Resident and stationed at Bornu.

In this important post, full of obstacles, which seemed at times almost insuperable, he, in accordance with the policy that the development—whether social or political—of the African races should be achieved by their own efforts through the institutions and customs they understood, began with a small "arts and crafts" class. By tact and perseverance he overcame suspicion, and new ideas could be introduced. The welfare of the African peoples became at that time the dominant motive of his life, and it was then a long record of political and educational service commenced.

From his father, who spent many years in China, he inherited a strong desire for exploration, and in 1906 he determined to return from leave by crossing the Sahara from Tripoli to Lake Chad by caravan. The story of this expedition was published in 1910 under the title "Across the Sahara."

This Saharan journey gave him an honourable place in the ranks of African travellers, and earned for him the Back Grant from the Royal Geographical Society.

In 1908 Vischer left the political department in Northern Nigeria to become Director of Education in that protectorate, a post which he held for 10 years; during this time he endeavoured to provide an education (literary and technical) adapted to the needs of the various tribes.

The 1914-18 war, interrupted his educational work. In 1915 he joined the British Army, and in 1919 he was demobilized with the rank of major.

Subsequently Sir Hanns Vischer occupied many important posts, such as: member and secretary of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, established by the Colonial Secretary; member and joint secretary of the Educational Advisory Committee of the Secretary of State for the Colonies; Secretary-general of the International Institute of African languages, representative of the Colonial Office Education Commission East Africa; member of the Gordon College Commission of Inspection.

Vischer was also a corresponding member of the Société Astronomique de France, the International Colonial Institute and Institut Royal Colonial, Bruxelles; Hon member Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Basel, Geographische Gesellschaft Berne, etc., etc. In addition he was a member of the French Légion d'Honneur, Crown of Belgium and Crown of Italy. He was made a C.M.G. in 1934, and created a knight in 1941.

In 1911 he married Isabelle, daughter of G. de Tschärner, a Bernese patrician, and had four sons.

To Lady Vischer and his sons we express our deepest sympathy in their great bereavement.

Thus a life full of success and rich in attainments has come to its close. Sir Hanns Vischer leaves a great inheritance behind him. He received many well-deserved honours and yet remained "schlicht und einfach." He was a great cosmopolitan and a faithful servant of his adopted country, as well as a true and eminent son of his native land.

We as Swiss, were proud to call him one of us. By his great work, he brought honour to our country, and at his bier we bow our heads with gratitude and admiration.

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