

# City Swiss Club : monthly meeting

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## CITY SWISS CLUB. (Monthly Meeting.)

The Monthly Meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Tuesday, March 13th, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. Mr. A. Bon was in the Chair, and there were 120 members and guests present.

The President paid a touching tribute to the late Sir Hanns Vischer, who, although not a member of the Club, attended many of its functions; he also acquainted the Meeting of the death of Mr. Luzio, who had joined the Club in 1940. The customary silent tribute was accorded to the departed ones.

A telegram of congratulations and best wishes was sent to Mr. P. F. Boehringer, on the completion of forty years' membership of the City Swiss Club.

Mr. Bon informed the Meeting that Monsieur A. Girardet, Counsellor of Legation, had been appointed Minister to the Czechoslovakian Republic, by the Federal Council. He warmly congratulated Monsieur Girardet on this well-merited promotion, saying that during his eventful stay in London, he had rendered great services to our country, as Counsellor and, at times, Chargé d'Affaires. "We are losing in him a good friend, and our best wishes will accompany him to his new sphere of activity," he said.

Monsieur Paul Ruegger, Swiss Minister, associated himself with the President, in wishing Monsieur Girardet success in his new and responsible post, and expressed his sincere regrets in losing a valuable collaborator.

The President also extended a hearty welcome to M. R. Mordasini, the newly appointed Chancellor to the Swiss Legation.

Monsieur Girardet in a witty speech thanked the President and Monsieur Ruegger for their eulogizing remarks, saying that it is not without regrets that he is leaving this country where he has made so many friends.

After having had Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Ministers addressing the Meetings of the Club in the immediate past, the Committee, for a change, had decided to engage the good services of two of its members, Major Schlegel, Military and Air Attaché of the Swiss Legation and M. Renou, both of whom have recently returned from a visit to our country, and who had kindly consented to record their experiences.

M. Renou addressed the company in a very competent manner, and good orator as he is, kept his hearers attention from beginning to end. He gave, to start with, a humorous description of his experiences during his journey to Switzerland. With great imagination he vividly recorded his impression on crossing the borders of the Confederation, and he succeeded in making all and sundry long more than ever to visit this peaceful paradise, which we call our homeland.

Restriction of space unfortunately prevents me to go into details of many interesting matters which he related in connection with the political and economical position in Switzerland, this is to be regretted, as M. Renou has succeeded in presenting an attractive picture of what has and is happening at home.

M. Renou had, during his visit, seen a great number of influential people, in all walks of life, including the President of the Confederation, Monsieur de Steiger and the commander-in-chief of our valiant army,

General Guisan. I shudder to think what these two Gentlemen will have to endure, when, in the near future, thousands of our compatriots returning home, will, "look them up" to say how do you do? He has, we were told, drank some of the finest vintages grown on the sunny slopes of our lakes and hills, he devoured such delicacies as "Fondue," no doubt washed down with sparkling Neuchâtel, he has tried to purchase delicious slabs of chocolate without surrendering points, in which, he confessed he was unsuccessful, "as the Swiss are honest people."

One piece of news, which was of special interest to me as a Bernese, was, that the bear, which for centuries adorned the escutcheon of the canton of Berne has been replaced by a snail, fitted up with double brakes, well, well, well, that this should have happened to our dear old "Bärner Mutz." Still perhaps it is just as well that we are not all as quick and temperamental as our friend, we still believe in the slogan "Slow but Sure," it has stood us in good stead during many a critical hour. M. Renou terminated his excellent and enjoyable exposé with a patriotic appeal to all Swiss abroad to keep in close contact with our homeland, invoking the blessing of God Almighty on that land which we love with all our hearts. He received a well deserved ovation on resuming his seat.

The President then called on Major Schlegel, who confined himself, in a very able manner, to the subject of our military preparedness in its various aspects. Here again, I shall not be able, for the same reason as stated above, to go into all details.

Major Schlegel stated that between the first World War and the present one the Swiss Army had never ceased to be prepared, and that Switzerland, situated in the centre of Europe, and realizing the unsettled conditions and growing tension on the Continent, had never relaxed, between 1919 and 1939, in maintaining, equipping and training her army of citizen-soldiers.

He said that shortly after the last war the annual training periods were reintroduced, and as far back as 1924 manoeuvres on a big scale were organised regularly.

"What was our aim?" he asked, and then proceeded to answer this question. "We had to instruct, train and equip with modern armaments an army entirely composed of citizens serving as soldiers. This army had to be made ready to fight for the integrity of our national territory."

Major Schlegel said that our defences had to be organised in such a way as to enable Switzerland to meet any attack, even by professional armies superior in number and equipment.

"One feature" he continued, "which is probably not known in any other modern army is that the Swiss citizen, after having served his compulsory time as a soldier, returns to his home, not only with his personal equipment but also with his own weapon and ammunition. This means that every Swiss, when called to his centre, is, in fact already a soldier equipped and armed to defend himself individually or in a group.

The speaker said that as far back as 1935 it was possible to foresee what a very important rôle the new armoured weapon was going to play on the battlefield; in consequence, it was necessary to improve our defence by completing our fortifications. This defence was composed of three big fortresses, or fortified areas which formed the pillars of the system: the Gothard as

central bastion, St. Maurice as Southwestern bastion and Sargans as Eastern bastion. In addition, another chain of fortified positions had to be built right on the political and geographical border of the country.

Major Schlegel said that at the beginning of the present war, the Swiss army was immediately and completely mobilized and its strength on September 4th, 1939, amounted to nearly 500,000 men.

He then gave a very interesting exposé about the new defence scheme which, at a later stage had to be planned and organised and which was called the "Réduit national." The organization and equipment of this "Réduit national," which took place during the years 1940, 1941 and 1942, were mainly carried out by the troops who were successively called up.

The speaker then mentioned that at the end of 1941, Switzerland, with a population of 4,265,000 inhabitants, was able to mobilize 806,000 people for her defence. This figure included besides the army proper all the auxiliary services, armed and unarmed, as well as the women's auxiliary service. To this figure should be added the strength of the Home Guard, making a total of more than 920,000, or one fifth of the total population.

In conclusion, Major Schlegel gave a few figures, showing the enormous financial sacrifices our country has made in keeping our army up to the maximum strength and our territory inviolate.

In his closing sentence he said "when a nation with a population of 4,300,000 agreed to shoulder a very heavy burden in order to maintain its independence it was because the Government and the leaders of the Army prepared the citizens in good time to face the dangers of a world war. It was also because we were convinced that we were thereby accomplishing a valuable mission in Europe, and above all because we have ever prized our centuries-old independence and are deeply attached to our way of democratic life, in which we see the very foundation of our liberties."

Loud applause greeted the speaker for his very interesting and lucid exposé.

The President, before closing the meeting, thanked both the speakers in "Schwyzerdütsch" for their contribution to an enjoyable evening.

Close of the Meeting 9.15 p.m.

ST.

MUSINGS.

*Adapted from J.P.'s dialect poem published in the "Swiss Observer" 25 August, 1944.*

Sometimes in quiet solitude  
Our mind the past surveys,  
And dormant mem'ries are renewed,  
Reviewing bygone days.

Much good and fine we recollect,  
Much beauty we recall;  
Why, on this pleasing retrospect,  
Did shadows ever fall?

In youthful days, now far away,  
Time never seemed to fly;  
But now that we are turning grey,  
How swiftly years go by.

O happy home and childhood's hours,  
When skies seemed always blue  
And all we hankered for was ours  
As if it were our due.

We learned a trade, became recruit,  
Our hopes were high and fair,  
But dreams and plans bore little fruit,  
Most vanished in thin air.

How thrilling our first lover's tryst!  
We waited, hoped and feared,  
Those blissful days, for ever prized,  
Too quickly disappeared.

When we set out the world to roam,  
The world so wide, yet small,  
What did we seek we lacked at home,  
What urge held us in thrall?

Our thoughts oft to the homeland stray,  
So bright, so neatly planned,  
May God protect it ev'ry day,  
That well loved Switzerland.

J.J.F.S.

SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED.

Continued from our issue of January 26th, 1945.

Mrs. Szarvasy, J. de Courcey-Ireland, J. E. Kupli., E. P. Dick, J. Zimmermann, O. Frei, E. Winzeler, G. Milli, V. Gay, J. A. Donat, A. H. Haab, Dr. G. E. Haefely, Z. L. Harben, Miss J. Kerr-Waddell, O. E. Wetzler, L. Bruni, J. J. Eberli, J. J. Huber, E. Chatelain, N. Morff, H. Steiner, R. Sanger, J. Weber, K. Kirchheimer, Miss Hochuli, Miss M. Iseli, A. Koerber, Rob. Schweizer, E. W. Fehrlin, L. Duffey, Mrs. W. Pike, F. Wechsler, F. Golay, E. Bader, Miss B. Sandmeyer, Hugo Tanner, O. Kissling, R. Gloor, Dr. G. E. Bucher, E. Torriani, H. Heusser, A. Keller, H. K. Ringer, M. Schaerrer, F. Schuetz, V. Berti, E. Etter, E. M. Bircher, Miss I. Villiger, W. Fuchs, Mrs. L. Hoch, C. E. Wietlisbach, H. Zimmermann, A. W. Luder, B. Frauchiger, W. Notari, C. Cuenod, E. Spleiss, Ch. Gignons, H. Kaegi, P. Bessire, A. Schneider, Mrs. S. Nicholls, Miss Ennisberger, A. P.

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