

Swiss students as guests of the Royal Navy at Chatham

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SWISS STUDENTS AS GUESTS OF THE ROYAL NAVY AT CHATHAM.

(Impressions of a Student of the Swiss Mercantile Society's College.)

What a fine idea it was to arrange this excursion to the Admiralty Docks at Chatham! The time was particularly well chosen, for, after the first part of our examination, we all needed some relaxation and a stimulus to enliven our minds and to re-collect our forces for the next part of the "ordeal." So everybody was brisk and gay when the three coaches drove us to Chatham on that bright summer morning.

Admittedly, on entering the dockyard we were somewhat astonished; the place was deadly quiet with a silence of isolation. In that quietness the hammering of the workers, here and there, seemed to us almost to amount to a violation of the peace. This impression, however, was perhaps attributable to our ignorance of all naval matters.

So we walked along through the immense place and were accompanied by some competent Admiralty guides, who, with kind explanations, helped us to get a few ideas of the difficult nature of the work. Here was a submarine to be repaired; there were materials lifted by enormous cranes; in large workrooms we noticed numerous engines utilized in the turning out of various spare parts.

Moving further on, we were fortunate enough to see various types of ships of which, until then, we had heard only in reports and communiqués of war. There were mine-layers, mine-sweepers, cruisers, etc. As we saw them laying peacefully in the harbour, we should hardly have believed what an enormous amount of destruction can be caused by them.

We kept a watchful eye on all those interesting things and listened with great attention to our guides. It must be added that the task was not easy for them; and they honestly earned our gratitude for their endeavours and, above all, for the patience which they showed us.

The lunch, which we were offered in the canteen, was an agreeable change in the course of our exploration and was welcomed by everybody. We also had an opportunity of appreciating the welfare institutions which are, in gradually increasing number, created for the purpose of ameliorating the hard life of the workers. Furthermore, it is no exaggeration to say that we felt quite proud to share their meal in this general atmosphere of work and endurance in which human efforts are made for the progress of mankind.

The things which we now were to see completely surpassed all our expectations. After a short drive we alighted from our coaches just in front of the heavy cruiser H.M.S. London, which, for about two hours, was the object of our undivided admiration. Most of us had never even seen a battleship in our lives, far less thought of ever boarding one. Yet, as she lay there majestically — a symbol of power — we felt overwhelmed at placing our feet on its deck. The smile which played on the lips of the ship's officers on receiving such unusual visitors was, perhaps, the most charming welcome which we could imagine. That moment will probably be remembered by many of us for a long time.

With great eagerness and hearty willingness the officers showed us their delightful "home" from top

to bottom; with indefatigable zeal and interest they explained to us the functions of the — it seemed to us — infinite number of engines and guns.

It is neither odd nor incongruous to say that during our inspection many of us felt that they would be only too glad to stay with them and to join in the adventurous life of a sailor. But, alas, let us not cry for the moon, but let us go back to our visit.


It was a real pleasure to see how every one of the crew was busy in washing, cleaning, painting, polishing, and scrubbing, to make everything trim, smooth, and glossy, in fact ready for a cruise to Hongkong.

The last but not least surprise of that memorable day was the delicious refreshment which had been laid out on deck and which was all the more enthusiastically accepted because it had come from the ship's own cook-house.

The time allowed for our visit passed only too rapidly, and everybody deeply regretted leaving the ship. Words fail us in expressing our profound gratitude to the Admiralty for their gracious permission and to the officers and sailors for all that they did for us.

Furthermore, our thankfulness is extended to the management of the school for kindly arranging this successful excursion, and to our teachers, who, with their usual kindness, gave their valuable assistance.

H. U. MAAG.



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