

59th anniversary celebration of the Swiss Mercantile Society

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59th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
of the
SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY
at the
Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

How many of us have not, at one time or another, taken part in birthday celebrations, and sung that ditty "Happy Birthday to You;" such celebrations have usually been very jolly and gay, and our affections to the "birthday child" have manifested themselves in various ways, either by presentation of gifts, embraces or by drinking their health in stimulating beverages.

The 59th birthday of the Swiss Mercantile Society, which was celebrated on Saturday, November 8th, 1947, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1, differed somewhat from the traditional customs in which such anniversaries are kept. Firstly no presents were given, no doubt due to the fact, that "Purchase tax regulations" do not encourage such generous practices, secondly, there was no kissing going on (at least as far as I could see), as presumably it would have been too much of a strain to embrace nearly 300 members and guests who attended this function. In a way, it was a pity, as I should have been quite prepared to make a start, say with the first fifty, using my discretion and fancy, and thirdly the health of the "Jubilar" could not be drunk in anything stronger than tea, owing again to regulations which forbid us poor mortals, during certain hours of the day, getting a kick out of life by stimulating our harrassed and tired nerves with a little extra cheer.

One could conclude from this that the birthday party was a pretty tame affair, but I am glad to say, that in spite of the handicaps mentioned, it was an enjoyable and happy gathering full of laughter and merriment.

For the first time for many years, our younger generation was again preponderant, and it is a matter for congratulation that the S.M.S., headed by a young and vigorous President, has been able to attract our youngsters. It is a healthy sign, and much of the future of any Society in the Colony, will depend on their participation, not only in the social, but also in other spheres.

As much as rejuvenation is desirable and necessary, this should not mean that the "old guard" is to be thrown on the rubbish heap; it must not be forgotten that it is due to them, that the Society — in fact any Society — has been able to keep going and achieve what it has, therefore I was particularly pleased to see so many older members present.

It is obvious that the principal item at a *Thé Dansant* is the dancing, and so as not to lose any time the dancing started soon after 3 o'clock, before the guests at the top table put in an appearance, which was a sensible thing to do, and I sincerely hope, that the bad habit, of being late, so prevalent, at one time in the Colony, will in the future be remedied.

It was an extremely cheerful crowd which waltzed and two-stepped on the excellent dancing floor encouraged by the efficient band of the Dorchester Hotel, and for once, would you believe it, there were more gentlemen than ladies anxious to dance, so that "wall flowers" so dreaded by the "gentle sex," were non-existent.

To many to whom physical exertions were too strenuous, the announcement that tea was ready to be served was welcome news, and it was at this time, that the toast-master announced that the President wished to address the company.

Mr. Meier, who was heartily greeted on rising, said:

Monsieur le Ministre, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is not customary to make speeches at a Tea Dance, but before we continue the dancing I should like to say a few words.

Before the War we used to celebrate these Anniversaries with a dinner and dance. In fact we used to call them Banquet and Ball. Last year and the year before we had a Luncheon and Tea Dance. This year we have just a Tea Dance and I leave it to you to speculate whether next year we shall have a Tea without Dance, or a Dance without Tea.

However, I think we have no reason for complaint, but must be thankful that we have come safely through the war and are able to meet in this elegant hall. After all, more important than any delicacies we might or might not eat is the spirit of good fellowship in which we meet. And it is in this spirit that I extend to you all a very sincere welcome.

We have followed traditional lines in inviting a number of friends to be our guests. We are, indeed greatly honoured by the presence of the Swiss Minister and Madame Ruegger. We know that our Minister shows a real and personal interest in the Swiss Societies and if the Swiss Mercantile Society has taken rather more of his time than some of the others, it is because we were determined to reopen our College for Swiss Students and in this way render a service which we have long regarded as a patriotic duty.

May I take this opportunity to thank you, Monsieur le Ministre, for your interest and assistance and I would add, that all our problems have always been attended to with unfailing courtesy and efficiency.

The same must be said to any requests for advice or assistance addressed to members of the Minister's Staff and to show our appreciation of this, we have invited those who by reason of the posts they occupy are, perhaps, more closely in contact with our Society than their colleagues. We have asked Dr. Escher, M. and Mme de Graffenried, M. and Mme Clottu, M. and Mme Umbrecht.

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For the first time since our Golden Jubilee, in 1938, we have distinguished visitors from our parent Association in Switzerland, the Central President, Mr. Strickler, and the Secretary General, National Councillor Schmid-Ruedin. Mr. Strickler has been entrusted with the highest honorary office in the S.K.V. by reason of his outstanding abilities for this task. This is a truly gigantic one and must take up a good deal more than his spare-time. It is with great pleasure that I welcome him to our gathering.

Mr. Schmid-Ruedin has for many years been the chief architect of the S.K.V. and the members, now numbering over 48,000 owe much to his vigorous, yet always well reasoned and tactful activity at the Conference table and in Parliament. As you are probably aware, he was re-elected a fortnight ago a member of the National Council, having secured over 27,000 votes, more than any other candidate of the Democratic Party in his Canton. I am sure you will all join me in congratulating him on this success.

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Our visitors are staying in London for several days. Tomorrow they are privileged to witness the Armistice Ceremony at the Cenothaph from accommodation secured for them by courtesy of the Swiss Minister. On Monday they will see the Lord Mayor's Show, while on Monday evening at 7.30 p.m. we shall have our Monthly Meeting at Swiss House, when both Mr. Strickler and Mr. Schmid-Ruedin will address us.

I am sure every member will wish to be present to hear them.

On Tuesday morning they will pay an official visit to the College and in the afternoon, again through the courtesy of the Swiss Minister, they will be attending a sitting of the House of Commons.

On Wednesday they will be returning to Switzerland by Air.

We are happy to entertain Mr. De Brunner, a Trustee of the Society. Earlier this year his name was added to the Roll of Veteran Members of the S.K.V. having been a member for over 50 years. Mr. De Brunner is the first member of our Society to gain this distinction, but there are quite a number to follow him shortly. Mr. De Brunner is at present engaged in negotiating a new Lease of Swiss House, a task to which he brings a great deal of experience, patience and skill. *(At this moment a touching little ceremony took place, when Central President, Mr. Strickler, pinned the golden pin on Mr. De Brunner's lapel, honouring him thus for 50 years membership and for conspicuous services rendered to the Society. Both Mr. Strickler and Mr. De Brunner appeared greatly moved during this ceremony, and the words expressed by the Central President were heartily cheered by all present.)*

Our other Trustees, Mr. Eichenberger and Mr. Steiner, are unable to be with us, but they have sent greetings and best wishes.

We have again invited the Ministers of the Swiss Churches in London: M. and Mme Pradervand, who as you are aware, are shortly returning to Switzerland. Our sincere good wishes accompany them to their new sphere of activity; Herr and Frau Pfarrer Blum and Father Lanfranchi, who all have many personal friends amongst our members.

I welcome also our friends of the Press. The Swiss Observer has endeared itself to most of us and so has its Editor, Mr. Stauffer, who is accompanied by Mrs. Stauffer. Dr. Egli is here too, and so are Mr. and Mrs. Keller. Both Dr. Egli and Mr. Keller have made a name for themselves as interpreters to their readers in Switzerland and abroad of day-to-day events in London. They have both held the distinction of presiding over the Foreign Press Association in London and Mr. Keller is its President again now.

Dr. Egli is also here in his capacity as President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, which is taking such a prominent part in the cultural life of the Swiss Colony. The City Swiss Club, which caters for the social and intellectual welfare of its members is represented here by its President, Mr. de Cintra, while Mr. Berti and Mrs. Berti are our guests of the Unione Ticinese, that enterprising and popular Swiss Society of which Mr. Berti is President.

We are to-day celebrating the Anniversary of the Swiss Mercantile Society. The year which is

drawing to its end was marked, as far as our domestic affairs are concerned, by the presence at Swiss House of the builders. They have been with us for the best part of twelve months to put right the bomb damage, and not unnaturally we are glad to see the back of them. Our College has had to carry on with a certain amount of inconvenience, but the enthusiasm of our students has been unimpaired and the building has been full to capacity. I am glad to see in the company Mr. Marfurt, Mr. and Mrs. Slade and Mr. and Mrs. Kitchen of the Teaching Staff and a number of students.

The members' thirst for intellectual fare and up-to-date information on economic and political matters in Switzerland has been ably and efficiently taken care of by such speakers as M. de Graffenried, M. Umbricht and M. Clottu and others. Early this summer we had a homely ceremony to mark Mr. Boos's retirement from the Presidency after eight years, and his election as an Honorary Member of the S.K.V., a distinction that has only been bestowed on one other member living abroad, Mr. Stahelin, a past President of this Society.

Our Ladies Group has again been full of initiative and ideas. They gave our children a very happy Christmas Party at Swiss House, complete with a Christmas Tree and Father Christmas. At one of our Monthly Meetings they provided, from their own members, a complete musical and theatrical entertainment, which was most successfully and wittily introduced by none other than the Editor of the *Swiss Observer*.

This Ladies and Gentlemen, is a very rough sketch of the Swiss Mercantile Society in its 59th year. I sincerely hope that we shall all meet again next year to celebrate its 60th.

Prolonged applause greeted the oration of the President.

After a short interval it was announced that the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, wished to address the gathering, and on rising from his chair he was greeted with acclamation.

The Minister expressed his pleasure at having been able to attend the 59th Anniversary celebration of the Society and tendered his and Madame Ruegger's congratulations on this auspicious occasion.

He voiced his appreciation at seeing so many of our younger compatriots present, and stressed how important it was for the commercial community in

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Switzerland, to be able once again to visit industrial cities in this country such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and others, where they would be able to gain experience, and learn the language, a language which will prove a dominating factor in their education.

"That this exchange has become possible," he said, "we have to thank in the first instance our two principal guests, Mr. Strickler, Central President of the S.K.V., and National Councillor Schmid-Ruedin, for their incessant efforts in this direction."

Monsieur Ruegger terminated his address by wishing the Society a further period of fruitful expansion.

Long applause greeted the words of our Minister.

In concluding the official part of the proceedings, National Councillor Schmid-Ruedin, who was heartily greeted previous to his address, voiced his, and his colleague's sincere pleasure at being present once again, after a lapse of nearly ten years amongst the members of the S.M.S. in London.

"We, in our home country, are proud of you; by your efficiency, by your hard work and capabilities you, Swiss abroad, have helped to maintain the good name which our country enjoys everywhere."

These sincere words, so ably expressed by the Secretary General, found a warm echo in the hearts of his audience, and were acknowledged with hearty cheers.

Mr. Gandon, the accomplished accordion player then played a few Swiss waltzes which brought young and old on to the dance floor, he was followed by the Dorchester Dance Band, who, shortly after 6 o'clock terminated their performance by playing "God Save the King."

A very pleasant and enjoyable birthday party thus came to a successful end, and there remains the pleasant duty to close this report with the best wishes to the Swiss Mercantile for

"MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY."

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