

# City Swiss Club

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**R. PFENNINGER,**  
President, City Swiss Club.

# CITY SWISS CLUB

## 89th Annual Banquet and Ball

at the

DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, LONDON, W.1

on

FRIDAY, 19th NOVEMBER, 1954

*In the Chair:* THE SWISS MINISTER, MONSIEUR HENRY DE TORRENTÉ

The Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club is every year the forerunner of the festive season, that season which we associate with good cheer and extra friendliness towards our fellow-men.

The nearer we get to Christmas the more companionable people get as a rule; take the postman f.i., whilst for the last eleven months he has treated you as a complete stranger, suddenly, and without any warning begins to become very friendly, cheerily wishing you "a very good morning", the dustman, who for an equal length of time has, when collecting the bins left half of the rubbish in the drive, as a souvenir that he has called, now carefully picks up every article which might have fallen out, and even replaces the cover on the bin, a thing unheard of before. The railway station personnel, who for the greater part of the year hustle you and push you into the carriages as if you were a herd of cattle, hold the door open for you with a friendly gesture and a polite "mind your step". Then again the shop assistants who have treated one for many months with utter contempt, as if you were their servant instead of *visa-versa*, now fetch half the shop out and display it on the counter for your examination, and finally the wine merchants, who for quite a time have ignored you, are sending you their price-lists accompanied by a cheery letter.

Some people ascribe this sudden change to ulterior motives, it may be so, but nevertheless this friendly spirit puts you in an equally friendly frame of mind.

\* \* \*

This atmosphere of brotherly love and merriment made the 89th Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club such a great success, and the nearly 300 people who had gathered at the Dorchester, left the palatial building in Park Lane — which by the way is now the headquarters of the Club — with the exuberant feeling of having had a "jolly good time".

As customary, a reception previous to the guests sitting down for dinner was held in one of the ante-rooms, by the Swiss Minister and Madame Henry de Torrenté, accompanied by the President of the City Swiss Club, and Mrs. R. Pfenninger; after which the company adjourned to the cocktail lounge which became rather crowded and uncomfortably warm. The more Sherries, Martini's and Gin italians were served, the more convenial the atmosphere became.

The chief attraction was again as usual the Ladies in their fine ball gowns, they looked as lovely as ever, their sparkling eyes and gay laughter created the "Stimmung" and gave a *cachet* which makes every function of the Club an enjoyable one.

The animation and the babble of tongues, where we heard the eloquent French, the melodious Italian, the homely "Schwyzerdütsch", and, of course, English, were suddenly silenced when the red-coated toast-master in a stentorian voice exclaimed "Your Excellency, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, dinner is served".

With the orchestra playing a lively tune, the company adjourned to the gaily decorated Banqueting Hall, awaiting the entry of the principal guests. They were accorded a hearty ovation when they took their seats at the top table, Mesdames de Torrenté and Pfenninger carried beautiful bouquets of flowers in our national colours, which had been previously presented to them. When everybody was seated the Rev. H. Spoerri said grace and the dinner began.

It started with "La Petite Marmite", which no doubt, reminded our Geneva compatriots of their famous Escalade marmite, and was followed by "Le Filet de Sole d'Antin". Instead of Turkey or "Poulet rôti", so popular around this time of the year, a delicious "La Selle d'Agneau Viveur" with "Les Petits Pois au Beurre" and "Les Pommes Noisettes" was then served, and the Menu finished with "La Macédoine de Fruits Mimosa", and "Les Douceurs des Dames", the latter, no doubt, as a compliment to the "Sweetest of the Sweet", and "Le Café". Choice vintage wines grown on the sunny slopes of our country were a welcome addition to a very fine dinner, prepared by the head-chef of the Dorchester, who is a compatriot of ours, and who by his culinary mastery deserves the thanks of the revellers.

Les Brown and his orchestra provided the "Tafelmusik" with Viennese waltzes and excerpts from the Student Prince, etc., which were much applauded.

No Banquet of the City Swiss Club would be complete without the traditional Toasts and speeches.

The delivering of speeches at official functions of Swiss Societies has been for years debated *ad nauseam*. Some are of the opinion that no speeches should be given at all, others have no objection pro-

viding they are kept at reasonable length, containing matters of general interest to the respective audiences.

Well do I remember former Banquets held by the Club between the two wars, when detailed reports concerning the economic conditions of Switzerland were given together with specific figures of imports and exports. Some of these speeches took the best part of the evening, and those who were looking forward to enjoying a dance or a cabaret performance, had "to whistle for it".

Thank goodness this objectionable custom has been done away with, but I consider, that from the moment a Society invites "official" guests, they are bound to address a welcome to them, giving them a reason why they have been asked to adorn the gathering with their presence. For that very reason I have no objection to speech making as long as it is not overdone.

The oratorical part of this year's Banquet should not give any cause for complaint, the speeches were not too long, and were interesting and humorous.

The Swiss Minister in his capacity of Chairman, proposed the toast to "Sa Majesté la Reine", and "La Suisse", both were accompanied by the respective National Anthems.

The President of the Swiss Club, Mr. R. Pfenninger was entrusted with the Toast "La Patrie et nos Invités". In his opening address he briefly referred to the approaching hundredth anniversary of the Club, expressing the hope that many who were present tonight would be again in attendance on that memorable occasion.

Mr. Pfenninger extended a specially warm welcome to the Chairman, and Madame de Torrenté, saying: "If I may use a Shakespearean term, it is "with an auspicious and dropping eye" that I see them here today, "Auspicious" because we are all very happy to see them here today, and "dropping"

because we think of the fast approaching days when they will leave us to take residence and their new duties overseas in the capital of the United States."

He also welcomed Dr. and Madame E. Bernath, 1st Counsellor of Legation, and Mr. and Mrs. F. Streit, Chairman of the Presidents Assembly. Time did not allow to refer to all other Swiss guests individually.

Almost since the foundation of the City Swiss Club, it has always been a special feature to bid our English friends to this Annual function.

The President warmly greeted Lord and Lady Mancroft, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Home Department, and a Member of H.M.'s Government, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomashoff, representing the High Commissioner of South Africa, the latter unfortunately being prevented from attending, saying: "We have a particularly strong reason to be grateful to the Government of this country, and the Government of South Africa, the reason of our thanks are, the quite extraordinary generosity the two Governments have shown towards the Swiss Colony in connection with the Sandoz Legacy."

Mr. Pfenninger further greeted Lord and Lady Nathan of Churt, at one time a Member of the Government and Chairman of the London County Council, Sir Douglas Sévory, M.P., Professor and Mrs. Herbert of the Alpine Club, Mr. and Mrs. Crepin, representing the British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, and the Rt. Hon. Philip Noel-Baker, M.P., President of the Anglo-Swiss Society.

The President concluded his address by making various comparisons between the citizens of Switzerland and British subjects, which were much enjoyed, commenting on the feeling of superiority the Englishman has, his humour, his lack of appreciation for good cooking, but how these characteristics seem to



PART VIEW OF THE BANQUETING HALL WITH TOP TABLE.

blend with the Swiss character, and that the two nationalities can always work together in harmony.

After the applause with which the President's address was greeted, had subsided, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, rose from his "Fauteuil Présidentiel", amidst hearty cheering.

The Minister expressed his pleasure at seeing so many of his compatriots present with their ladies. "The Swiss", he said, "do not always remember the justice, deference and consideration which is due to the weaker sex, and I think they might well take lessons from other, even remote countries. When the President of Portugal visited last summer various tribes in Angola, he was also received by Queen Nhacatola who was surrounded by the ladies of the Council of State. She informed General Craveiro Lopez, that her Kingdom was the happiest in the world, because it was ruled by women, and that women ought to rule all countries where happiness and peace were the first consideration.

Monsieur de Torrenté concluded his eulogy to the ladies by saying "of course, in my position I cannot very well advocate that you ladies should elect a Queen of Switzerland and appoint yourselves as Councillors of State. I would commit a grave offence against the constitution. But Queen Nhacatola's statement is worth thinking about, even by us of the inferior branch of *homo sapiens*."

The Minister then said, as this was his last chance before his departure, he would like this opportunity of thanking the ladies for all the work they have done in the Colony. "You deserve", he said, "my admiration and my praise all the more, because the work you have done is mostly outside and on top of the famous three K's "Kinder, Küche und Kirche."

After having paid a tribute to the various ladies for their work in the different Societies and institutions, he referred to the Swiss Home which is nearing its realisation, as follows, "This Home, will before long be an established fact. In order to carry out this idea, we do not only need premises and furniture and money, we need something that is far more important, far more precious and often much more difficult to obtain. I speak of the human understanding, the sympathetic collaboration, the warm heart and the friendly hand without which it is impossible to give lasting help to those of our fellow beings who are in trouble. I couple therefore my thanks to you Ladies, with the appeal that, when the Home has come into being, you will give it your support in that spirit of generosity and love which is the glory of womanhood."

Amidst applause and the blushes of the ladies the Minister resumed his seat.

The task of saying "Thank you", on behalf of the guests, was entrusted to Lord Mancroft, M.B.E., T.D., who very humourously referred to his connections with the Swiss and the Swiss Legation in particular, saying that since his early days he had been a neighbour of the Legation's quarters, and on many occasions had to direct visitors, who were apparently lost, to its front door. One day, he said, he saw a man look around in Bryanston Square, and in order to be helpful, he asked him whether he was looking for the Swiss Legation, the man's answer was: "No Sir, I am the local pest officer, and I am looking for an owl's nest." (Laughter). Another link with

the Swiss Legation, Lord Mancroft said, was, that he went to school with Vincent Paravicini, the son of a former Swiss Minister in London. In concluding his address the speaker mentioned, that not being particularly brilliant at winter sports, he preferred to visit our country in spring, summer or autumn, and that all his stays in Switzerland had always been most enjoyable and rich in pleasant memories. (Applause).

The last speaker on the list was Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, who gave the Toast to "La Charité". The City Swiss Club, at all of its Banquets, has always remembered those of our compatriots who, through no fault of their own, have fallen on evil days.

The President of the Swiss Benevolent Society made a moving appeal to the generosity of the company, to give a helpful hand in reducing the deficit of the Society, and I am glad to report that his words did not fail to soften the hearts and to open the purses of those present. The amount collected was £80 (For the first time, English visitors were not asked to take part in the collection, which is quite correct, I still remember the words of the late George Dimier, a former President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, who said, "We Swiss will look after our poor, without any outside help".)

This ended the official part of the Banquet and dancing began, which went on until 1.30 a.m. when the orchestra played "Auld lang syne".

And so one more of the famous Banquets of the City Swiss Club has passed into history. That it was a successful one, is in no small way due to the work of the committee, and especially to the Hon. Secretary of the Club, Mr. Charles Gysin, who, as usual, left nothing unturned to assure a smooth running.

There are many uncertainties in life, one thing, however, is pretty certain, namely, that the City Swiss Club, will in two year's time put the 100th candle on their birthday cake, an event to which we are all looking forward to with lively anticipation.

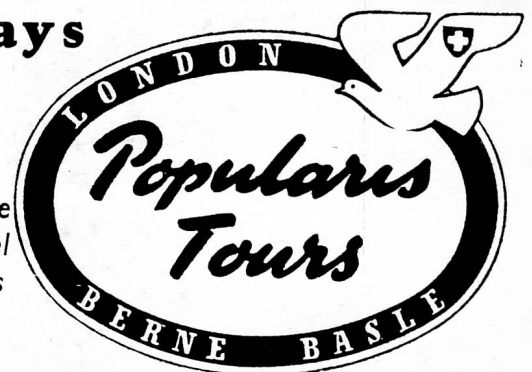
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