

Société de secours mutuels des Suisses à Londres

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A. L. GANDON,

President: Société de Secours Mutuels.

SOCIÉTÉ DE SECOURS MUTUELS DES SUISSES À LONDRES

250th Anniversary Celebration

on WEDNESDAY, 16th DECEMBER, 1953,
at "SCHWEIZERBUND," 74 Charlotte Street, W.1

In the Chair: MONSIEUR HENRY DE TORRENTÉ,
MINISTRE DE SUISSE.

Anniversaries in the Swiss Colony do not happen every day, but when they occur they are usually celebrated with much pomp and circumstance.

During the last twenty-five years I have had the pleasure of attending 25th, 50th, 60th, 75th and 100th anniversaries of various Swiss Societies either in London or in the Provinces, but never yet one which marked two and a half centuries, nor is there any likelihood, that anyone of our generation will ever do so again.

The "Société de Secours Mutuels des Suisses à Londres", which has attained this venerable age, had, as is right and proper, decided to mark this conspicuous event with a dinner, to which were invited all the members with their Ladies, as well as a few guests. This simple, but impressive function was not held in any of the palatial West End Hotels, but at the "Schweizerbund", the headquarters of the Society.

I think, considering the nature of this Society, this was a wise decision, and I feel sure, that all who attended this anniversary festival, — where a most friendly and congenial atmosphere prevailed throughout the evening, — felt at home from the very beginning.

Many, no doubt, who made the first acquaintance with this Society, expected a gathering of very old and white bearded Gentlemen, and although there were a number of veterans present, who had exceeded the allotted span of life, the majority consisted of middle aged or even young people, which is a healthy sign.

Before dinner was started, cocktails were served in the attractive bar, and many an old friendship was renewed with a hearty handshake, and many pleasant memories were recalled.

The dining hall was attractively decorated with flowers and various cantonal escutcheons, and in the middle of the hall hung the banner of the Society, which was presented 50 years ago to the Society by the Ladies of the Colony, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary.

The dinner consisted of "La Bouchée Anniversaire", followed by "La Choucroute Garnie Bartholdi"; for those whose "insides" were too delicate to master this, — one of our national dishes,

— Le Tournedos Bruscheiler" was provided for, accompanied by "Les Pommes Rôsti" and seasonable vegetables. For the dessert "Délices des Dames" were served, followed by "Le Café", and the stewards of the "Schweizerbund", Mr. & Mrs. K. Caluori, are to be congratulated on the fare provided.

The usual loyal toasts to H.M. the Queen and to Switzerland were proposed by the Swiss Minister and accompanied by the playing of the respective National Anthems.

As the occasion warranted, various speeches were delivered, and I must warmly congratulate the different speakers, especially the President of the Society, Mr. A. Gandon, as well as the Vice-President, Mr. A. Martin, on their oratorical achievements; what might have easily become a rather tedious undertaking to recall the long history of the Society, turned out to be not only interesting, but also amusing, and was a pleasure to listen to.

The first speaker of the evening, was announced by Mr. F. Delaloye, who very efficiently acted as Master of Ceremonies, to be the President, who was warmly applauded by the entire company.

Mr. Gandon expressed his, and the members pleasure at having the company of the Swiss Minister and of Madame de Torrenté, on this great occasion.

"We are not given to the holding of social gatherings", he said, "we are quite pleased to leave that side to others of the numerous societies in the Colony. For that reason, it is the first time that we have had the pleasure of H.E. the Swiss Minister's presence, I sincerely hope that, as the evening draws on, he may feel at home and really one of us."

The President then gave a short *resumé* of the history of the Society which was founded on the 27th of December 1703, by 14 members mostly originating from the canton of Vaud. He related, that in 1718, another Society was founded under the name "La Nouvelle" which was composed mainly of "Neuchâtelois", and which later on amalgamated with the "Secours Mutuels". In December, 1718, he said, that 21 Gentlemen from Geneva, which canton then had not yet entered into the Confederation, applied for membership, they were admitted and the name of the Society was changed to "Société

des Suisses et Genevois Réunis", and eventually in 1863 to its present title.

Amongst more recent events the President mentioned, that in 1942, the remaining members of the "Schweizerbund Sick Society", founded in 1879, joined the "Secours Mutuels", and in the same year, after some rather heated discussions, the Society was duly registered under the Friendly Societies Act, 1896.

Regarding the finances of the Society Mr. Gandon reported that the early days were far from easy ones, but that thanks to the generosity of various members, who had the interest of the Society at heart, and who had founded a committee of "Bienfaiteurs", the "Secours Mutuels" was able to strengthen its financial position, and that to-day all their assets were safely invested. This satisfactory state of affairs even allowed the Society to make various donations to other Swiss institutions.

The speaker then referred to a number of gifts which were, at one time or another given to the Society, such as the banner (now in safe custody of the Swiss Legation) which was presented by King George II to the Swiss in London as a sign of gratitude for their having offered to supply a battalion of 500 men when Bonnie Prince Charlie landed in Scotland.

The President further referred to the relationship between Catholic and Protestant members during the XVIII century, which he termed as "rather strained". The founder members from the Vaud and those from Geneva and Neuchâtel were Protestant. The fact of being a Catholic debarred any Swiss in those days from being eligible to the Society. As far

back as 1799, and then again in 1813, 1818 and 1827 propositions for admittance of Catholics to the Society were made, all without success, and only in 1863 they were admitted to equal membership.

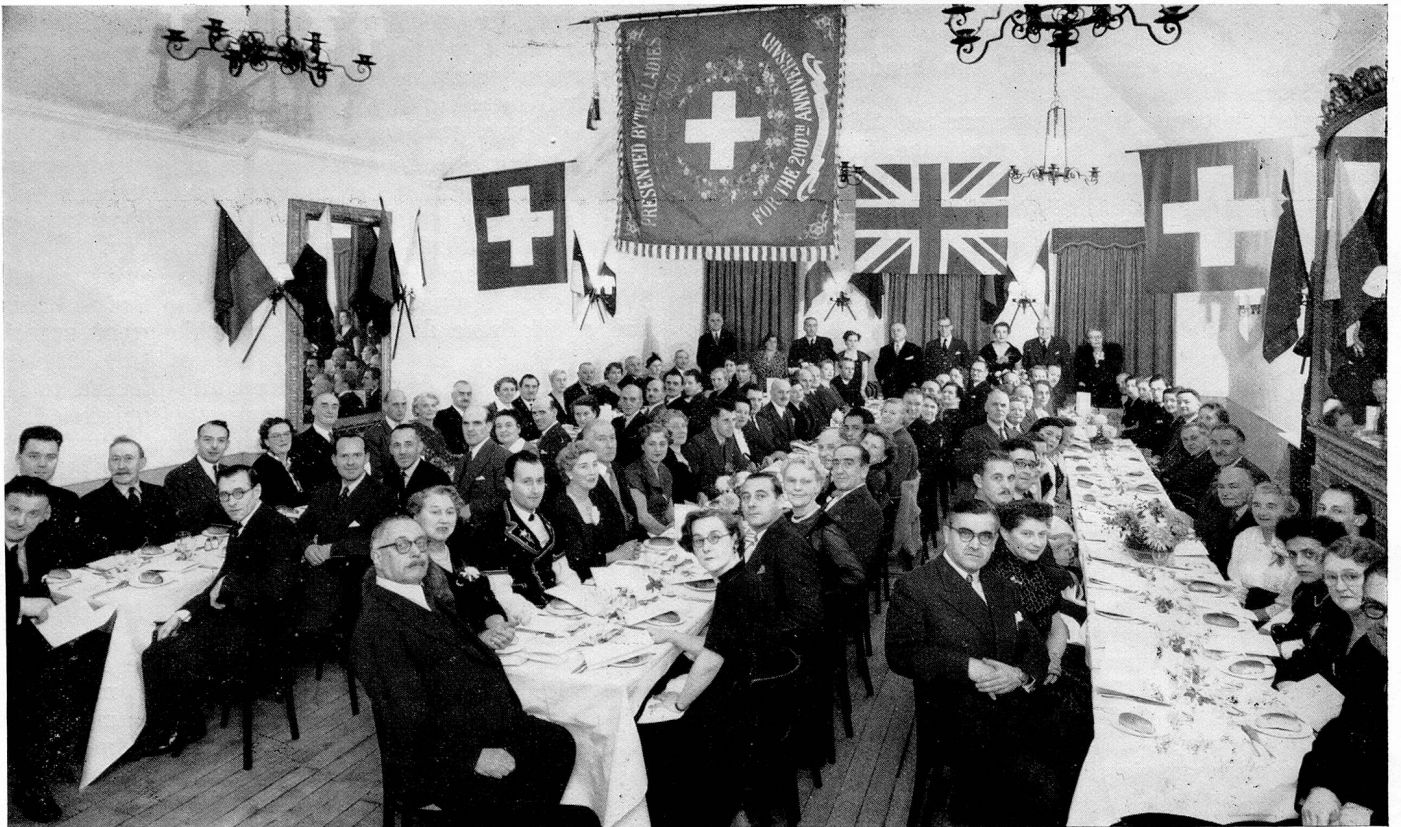
In conclusion the speaker referred to the various Presidents of the Society, who had held their office for periods of 21, 19, and again twice for nineteen years, expressing the hope that this Society will not now keep its Presidents until they die of old age.

"To-day" he continued, "we are 82 members, all equal, irrespective of religion or language, some speak French, some speak German, some speak neither, and so we speak our adopted country's language, which we all understand." (Until quite recently, all the meetings were held and recorded in French.)

Before resuming his seat the President asked the members to drink with him to the health of the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté. (Long applause).

The next speaker was the Swiss Minister, who received a cordial reception on rising. Speaking in French, Monsieur de Torrenté expressed his pleasure at having been accorded the opportunity of attending, as representative of the Swiss Government, the 250th anniversary, recalling the fact, that one of his predecessors, Minister, Dr. Carlin, was also in the Chair, when the Society attained their 200th anniversary in 1903.

The Minister then heartily congratulated the "Secours Mutuels" on their long and distinguished record, and on the valuable services the Society had rendered not only to its members, but also to the Colony as a whole. "L'histoire de votre Société",



GENERAL VIEW OF THE DINING HALL.

he said "est celle d'un monde en miniature. Dans ce microcosme, comme dans un univers, les passions, les sentiments, les énergies, parfois les violences se déchaînent, s'opposent, révèlent le caractère, les vertus et les défauts, le comportement de nos devanciers à travers deux siècles et demi époque mouvementée."

After having related various incidents in the history of the Society, the Minister concluded his address by thanking the "Société de Secours Mutuels" for having nominated him as "Président d'Honneur", an honour which he said he greatly appreciated coming from the oldest Society of the Swiss Colony, and by wishing this institution many more years of prosperity. (Loud applause).

To Mr. A. Martin, Vice-President of the Society was entrusted the task, to propose the Toast to the Guests and the Ladies, a task which he performed most efficiently intermingled with numerous remarks.

He warmly welcomed the following "invités": the Swiss Minister, and Madame de Torrenté, Sir Bernard and Lady White, Chief Registrar of the Friendly Societies, Father A. Lanfranchi, of the Swiss Catholic community, Pasteur and Madame C. Reverdin, of the "Eglise Suisse." (Pfarrer H. Spörri of the "Schweizerkirche" was unavoidably prevented from attending), Mr. & Mrs. J. Huber, Swiss Consul, Mr. F. Streit, Chairman of the Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in Grt. Britain, Mr. & Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer", Mr. & Mrs. Schneeberger, representing the "Schweizerbund" and "last but certainly not least. . . pour le dessert et guise friandises. . . the world's best. . . the ever-charming Ladies."

Mr. Martin then introduced each guest separately to the company, he did this very humorously causing much hilarity.

The last speaker on the Toast-List was Mr. F. Streit, Chairman of the President's Assembly, who, on behalf of the guests, expressed the thanks for the invitation extended to them, and wished the Society a long period of prosperity and success.

Thus the official part of the evening came to its

close, and an entertainment followed, during which Madame Flory Scheerer at the piano rendered many a homely melody in her usual charming manner. Ming Chow, dressed as a Chinese, but hailing from somewhere north of the Gothard, gave an amazing performance of making wallets, watches, cigarette cases, etc. etc. disappear from the pockets of gentlemen in the audience and members of the Accordion Club played lively tunes, which greatly helped to maintain the cordial "Stimmung" which was so prominent throughout the evening. Shortly before midnight the company dispersed, after having spent a few hours of real congeniality amongst good old friends.

The 250th anniversary of this ancient and honoured Society, was an event which will not easily be forgotten by all those who were privileged to attend, and I join the various speakers by wishing the "Société de Secours Mutuels"

AD MULTOS ANNOS!

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(Photograph taken on the evening can be viewed at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.)



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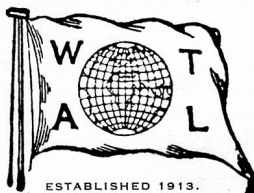
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