

City Swiss Club

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CITY SWISS CLUB.

Lecture by The Rev. C. E. Raven, D.D., T.C.D., F.B.A., former Chancellor of Cambridge University, at the Dorchester Hotel, on Tuesday, Oct. 13th, 1955.

Scarcely a month had passed before the City Swiss Club had again arranged a lecture for its members, and once more the attendance was unsatisfactory, as only about fifty members (out of 250) turned up.

This is to be regretted especially as the committee had procured for that occasion an outstanding lecturer. Both the speaker, and the subject of his address should have deserved a "full house", and all those who stayed away, for one reason or other, missed not only a most interesting evening, but also an excellent dinner.

Before the second part of the evening began, Mr. Ch. Gysin, President of the City Swiss Club, welcomed the distinguished guest of honour, as well as the Swiss Minister, Monsieur A. Daeniker, and the following members of the Legation: Messieurs R. Faessler, E. M. Bircher, H. Miesch, and J. Huber.

The President voiced his, and the members regrets at the approaching departure of Dr. H. Miesch, 1st Secretary of Legation, who has been transferred to The Hague, wishing him success in his new post.

Canon C. E. Raven, a former Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, has the unique distinction of possessing a passport where a Russian visa faces, and immediately precedes, an American visa. In a sparkling discourse, brilliantly delivered, he told the meeting of the impacts which a Russian journey, sandwiched between two trips to America, had made on him. He told of the interpretations from the Christian point of view, which he, an entirely non-political individual, put on what he had seen and heard and the conclusions he had drawn.

Canon Raven's earlier (but by no means first) trip to America was made late in 1953 during the height of the McCarthy period. All over that vast country he found a tremendous and genuine fear of communism and the Russians. In the autumn of 1954 he was invited by the Metropolitan of Moscow to visit the Russian Church. In Russia he found a similar fear of the western powers. Fear is never conducive to commonsense behaviour, be it in animals or humans. It seemed to him, therefore, imperative that the utmost

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be done to reduce that ultra-nervous state of apprehensiveness, which is but the breeding ground of panic reactions. The "Geneva spirit" which now reigns over the relations between East and West seemed then quite unattainable. In the speaker's view it is of tremendous value and ought to be supported in every possible way.

According to Canon Raven, the fear in either camp was largely based on ignorance. He reminded the audience that the vast majority of Russians know England and the West only as pictured by Dickens, they cannot conceive that these conditions no longer exist. Similarly, we in the West know the Russians mostly by press reports written, at times, in the sensational style of the crime novel. We picture the Russians as a people, led and controlled by a gang of wicked men. In his view the vast majority of Russians are not only quite content, but hopefully certain that their way will lead to earthly paradise. We in the West forget, and the Russians are unaware of, the fundamental differences between us. Western civilization is individualist, the Russian is collectivist. In this respect the Russians are much closer to the Far-Eastern, the Asiatic philosophy and attitude to life than to ours. The Russian sees his salvation in the complete submersion of self in the tribe or nation. Personal suffering and abnegation for the sake of the whole are natural and call for no rebellion in the average person. Canon Raven rather felt that communism as such was dead, but that the people have

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fallen completely for the "mystic" of technological progress, where Stalin had tried to assume the rule of the Messiah. It is true that since Stalin's death the Russian Church has increased its old appeal. Untold thousands attend the services, and no obstacles are put in the way of old or young to follow divine worship, It is, however, rather the mystic appeal of the church, than the Christian Religion, which draws the people. Even if the Russian Church should regain her ancient domination, thanks to her emotional appeal, it is doubtful whether she can solve Russia's problems. Because she lacks social consciousness, the mystic of progress will always draw particularly the young and coming generations.

Since Stalin's death the situation is fluid. Today a committee rules the fate of Russia. As long as this situation exists there is hope; hope to create better and greater understanding and so find a way of co-existence. The situation might change rapidly if ever the Russians should find a new Messiah, a new Napoleon, who could not only control their destiny, but centre or canalize the tremendous emotional energy of 215 million Russians as well as their ability, nay willingness to suffer on to his own person.

In the speaker's view all the more value must be attached to increasing the contacts in every sphere of human activity. Mutual participation in sporting and cultural events; exchange visits and study tours on technical, agricultural and economic problems, are of tremendous benefit. The speaker felt that an event like the meeting of eastern and western scientists

at the Atomic Conference in Geneva is a high-light in our relations. He paid a touching tribute to our country, whose mental atmosphere had done much and could render still more valuable services towards the spreading of the Geneva spirit.

* * *

At the conclusion of the Canon's address, which those who attended will not soon forget, Mr. Gysin thanked him most warmly for having come along and given us such an excellent talk.

E.M.H.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique and Anglo-Swiss Society

OPEN MEETING

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