

City Swiss Club

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1955)**

Heft 1264

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

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CHAS. GYSIN,
President, City Swiss Club.

CITY SWISS CLUB

90th Annual Banquet and Ball

at the
DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, LONDON, W.1
on
FRIDAY, 18th NOVEMBER, 1955

In the Chair:

THE SWISS MINISTER, MONSIEUR ARMIN DAENIKER

The recently announced "credit squeeze" by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to which the President of the City Swiss Club referred to in his opening address, might have inconvenienced the "City", but its repercussions apparently have not yet reached the "West End". Considering that the majority of the members of the Club earn their "Bread and Butter" in the ancient City of London (hence the name of the Society), a "flop" in the attendance at the 90th Banquet, due to Mr. Butler's advice to the Bankers, and his increases in the supplementary budget, intending to curb spending, was expected and feared. These fears, fortunately proved groundless, in fact there was a slight increase in the attendance over the last year, and nearly 300 members, guests and friends attended the gathering at The Dorchester.

When I referred to this Banquet in a recent issue of this paper, I wrote that it might be considered as a pre-rehearsal for next year's centenary celebration, and I am glad to say, that the rehearsal was a complete success, and a promising augury for the coming 100th birthday jubilee of the Club.

For years now, the Banquets of the City Swiss Club have attracted considerable numbers of our compatriots, these annual gatherings one can safely say — without any intention of being snobbish — have a certain *cachet* which is unique in the London colony. Not the least reason for its continued success is, that on these occasions, a number of prominent English friends are invited.

It has always been the endeavour of the Club to foster friendly and close relations with leading personalities of this country — this was especially noticeable during the last war, under the leadership of Mr. Anton Bon — and if the Swiss community enjoys an appreciable reputation in this country it is due, in no small measure, to the City Swiss Club. By making contact with each other, in a spirit of friendly intercourse, we shall understand and estimate each other all the better.

* * *

As is the custom, the evening started with a reception by H.E. the Swiss Minister in the capacity of Honorary President of the Club. The Minister was accompanied by Madame Daeniker, and assisted by the President of the City Swiss Club, and Madame Gysin.

Both ladies were previously presented with lovely bouquets of flowers in the national colours.

After the reception cocktails were served in one of the luxurious ante-rooms, which was filled to capacity. In fact, one had hardly an opportunity to admire the beautiful toilettes of the many gracious ladies, who adorned the company, and what a babble of tongues there was? eloquent French, melodious Italian, homely "Schwizerdütsch", and, of course, English could be heard.

Some of the English guests wore decorations, and the Rt. Hon. Lord Sempill, A.F.C., Representative Peer of Scotland, who later replied to the Toast on behalf of the guests, was appropriately attired in the national costume of Scotland with kilt and sporran, looking very distinguished.

Suddenly, a voice emanating from the red-coated toast master could be heard, inviting the company to proceed to their seats, and presently the Chairman, and the President of the Club, with their ladies, made their entry into the Banqueting Hall amidst handclapping, and a lively tune played by the orchestra.

The Hall, which has the reputation — and rightly so — of being one of the finest halls in the West End, was in festive garb, apart from the lovely flower decorations, which are a feature of The Dorchester, there were two large banners, the Swiss and the Union Jack displayed behind the Presidential chair.

Grace was then said by the Rev. C. Reverdin, and the assembly sat down to a dinner which, as always comes up to the expectation of even the most critical *gourmet*, and the famous chef, Mr. Kaufeler, a compatriot of ours, has by his gentle art of cooking added to the success of the evening.

Towards the end of the dinner the Toasts to H.M. the Queen and Switzerland were proposed by the Swiss Minister and duly honoured.

I have yet to attend a Swiss function, where no speeches are made, and a Banquet without speeches would be an unheard of thing. I agree, that the moment official guests are invited, especially when they are not belonging to our country, it is indispensable that something should be said as to why they have been bidden to grace the company with their presence, and it is also such a fine opportunity to let

them know what fine specimens of the human race we Swiss are; after all if we do not blow our own trumpet nobody else will do it for us. This sets the ball rolling, so that in the end we have several speeches. I am anxious to make it quite clear, that I have nothing against after-dinner speech making as such, and have often enjoyed listening to same, as long as they keep to the point and are of reasonable length. If in the past, I have frequently advocated a certain restraint in oratory outbursts, I have done so for the sole reason, so that the second part of the evening should not be unduly curtailed.

Whether I have succeeded in my endeavours I must leave to my readers to judge, and I shall now never again mention this subject which I have for so long pursued almost *ad nauseam*, but as a parting shot, I would humbly ask those who will be in charge of next year's Jubilee Banquet to fix the start at 4.30 p.m. instead of 6.30 p.m., so as to give the ladies, who generally care little for speeches, a chance of enjoying a more congenial entertainment.

* * *

The first speech of the evening was given — as it should be — by the President of the City Swiss Club, Mr. Charles Gysin. He has during his year of office had many opportunities to address the members, and has always found the right words for every occasion. He was especially successful in winding up lectures and social evenings, and I particularly remember his very apt closing words after a recent lecture given by the Rev. C. E. Raven, a former Chancellor of Cambridge University, at The Dorchester.

It was, therefore, with pleasant anticipation that the company awaited his address, and I will say without further ado that he did not disappoint us.

His Toast was billed on the Menu card as “La Patrie et nos Invités”.

The President said that this was an occasion when the City Swiss Club meets not only “en famille”, within the Colony but also in the pleasant company of our British guests, many of whom are old acquaintances whose friendship we value very much.

He referred in a humorous vein to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's, “credit squeeze”, and related one or two anecdotes; in continuing Mr. Gysin said: “It is only natural that at a gathering like this, our thoughts are turned towards Switzerland, especially this year when there was the attraction of the Fête des Vignerons at Vevey. Our greetings and good wishes therefore go out to our homeland, the playground of so many nations, and to our Federal authorities who are upholding the traditions of this landlocked island which, paradoxically, is today the proud possessor of a modern and efficient mercantile fleet which came into being chiefly after the last war, and has Basle as its home port of registration.

The President then extended a spontaneous welcome to our Minister and Madame Daeniker, thanking them for the keen interest they have taken in the affairs of the Colony, although they had arrived in this country barely a year ago. He voiced his pleasure at seeing Monsieur E. Bernath, 1st Counsellor of Legation and Madame Bernath in our midst.

He welcomed very warmly Lord and Lady Sempill, of the former he said that he has been in aviation practically all his life, and that he was an active competitor in the King's Cup Air Race round Britain from 1924-1930.

“When Lord Sempill accepted our invitation”,



PART VIEW OF THE BANQUETING HALL WITH TOP TABLE.

the speaker said, "he was kind enough to suggest that there might be some affinity between the Scots and the Swiss. Both countries are indeed small, with a background of mountains and practically no natural resources, although the Scots score over us with their coalfields."

Mr. Gysin then greeted Lord and Lady Burden, saying that the noble Lord has had 25 years experience in local government administration, and had occupied the office as Lord in Waiting to his late Majesty King George VI in 1950/51, and is now Front Bench Whip of the Opposition Party in the House of Lords. "Last spring he visited Switzerland", the President said, "as Head of an Interparliamentary Commission together with Lord Sempill for the purpose of studying the working of the Swiss Parliament."

The speaker also mentioned the presence of the following guests: Sir Gavin de Beer, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a Director of the British Museum, Sir Edwin Herbert and Lady Herbert, President of the Alpine Club, Mr. and Mrs. F. R. Crepin, representing the British members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Mr. and Mrs. Hobhouse, of the Ski Club, Mr. and Mrs. Crammond, of the Cresta Club, Lt.-Colonel Stuart Townend, Chairman of the Anglo-Swiss Society, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer", the Rev. C. Reverdin, Rev. and Mrs. H. Spoerri, Father A. Lanfranchi and Rev. Lachat.

"Our Legation", the President said, "has turned out in full force, and we are very glad to greet, M. and Mme. R. Faessler, Dr. E. M. Bircher, Major and Mme. W. Koch, M. and Mme. P. Thevenaz, M. and Mme. F. Ansermoz, M. and Mme. E. Valloton, M. and Mme. A. Albertini, and M. and Mme. M. Luy."

In conclusion Mr. Gysin paid homage to the Ladies present by reciting a poem by the great Scottish poet Robert Burns. (Applause.)

The response to the President's Toast was entrusted to our Minister, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, who received a hearty ovation on rising from his "Fauteuil Presidentiel".

The Minister said that it is a proud moment for him to preside for the first time over the Annual Dinner and Ball of the City Swiss Club, and referred to the friendly and cordial relations which exist between the Legation, and the members of the Swiss Colony.

Monsieur Daeniker continued by saying: "This evening is of particular significance because it offers a most welcome chance to meet also the "gentler half" of our Colony. Unfortunately we Swiss have acquired a reputation for the treatment of our women which is said to be even less generous than the attitude of famous London Club's. Many of our English friends must have been startled by recent headlines in a London paper. We were accused of despotism and domestic indolence, and our country was described as a hell for women. Luckily our womenfolk came to the rescue and declared that we are, perhaps not too impossible as husbands (laughter).

I am not ashamed, however, to admit a grain of truth in these wild accusations. You all know that to this day official functions by our Government are seldom graced by the presence of Ladies, a tradition we share only with the now defunct Ottoman court. Truly, we are of a conservative nature, if not to say reactionary. I remember only a few years ago a

State Banquet given by the Bernese Government, where, as a great concession, the ladies were permitted to watch from the galleries. It possibly gave them a lot of merriment and fun to keep an eye on their dining and wining husbands — but, my friends for the whole of the evening I could not forget the memory of parties which I had attended in Indian palaces, where, during the gorgeous display at a Durbar, you were vaguely conscious of the Harem's sparkling eyes peeping through ivory grills."

His Excellency then referred to next year's Centenary of the Club, and a Centenary which occurred this year, namely the Treaty of friendship and commerce between Great Britain and Switzerland, which was signed in London on September 6th, 1855, also mentioning the visit this summer of a delegation

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from the "Mother Parliament", under the leadership of Lord Burden, and which included Lord Sempill.

Monsieur Daeniker's concluding words were: "During this last century the City Swiss Club has been a centre of Swiss cultural life, and thus formed a bridge on which messages of goodwill and understanding have been conveyed and exchanged. I cannot conclude my speech better, than by expressing my praise for a mission so successfully accomplished and couple this with my sincere wish that your Club may continue to flourish and expand for the benefit of Anglo-Swiss friendship". (Loud applause.)

To express thanks, on behalf of the guests, for the Club's hospitality, was reserved for the Rt. Hon. Lord Sempill, who received a vociferous reception on rising.

He started his oration by mentioning that he considered it a great honour and pleasure at having been selected to address this distinguished gathering from amongst so many who have taken, and still take, a leading interest in Swiss culture, and those sports which are so outstandingly associated with Switzerland.

Lord Sempill then continued as follows: "A few months ago I had the great good fortune to be a member of an Interparliamentary Delegation to Switzerland, and I am very happy indeed to see among the guests my noble friend, Lord Burden. His Lordship was the leader of this delegation, and I would be speaking for him, and for us all when I say to His Excellency how extremely well everything was organised by the Swiss Foreign Office".

He referred to the kindness which the Swiss people extended to them, not only in the council chambers but also during their travels through fields, forest and factories, and the willingness of the authorities to show them anything they wanted to see. Lord Sempill especially mentioned a visit paid to that great historic Christian centre of Einsiedeln, which he said was one of the highlights of their visit.

"We all have", the speaker said, "to learn so much from Switzerland in their approach to life, and their understanding of many things that go to make up the very happy homes in that unique country."

Lord Sempill then spoke about the Swiss army and airforce, which he said had gained the appreciation of no less a person than Field Marshall, Lord Montgomery, and of the pride of the Swiss people in their houses, railways and towns.

The noble Lord then concluded his address in French, expressing once more his sincere appreciation for having been enabled to spend an evening in the company of members of a country which has so much in common with his own people, and which, for centuries has been linked together in friendly relationship. "These words I have spoken to you", he said, "come from my heart, and I thank you."

Lord Sempill's address in its sincerity earned him loud applause from the entire company.

The last speaker of the evening was Mr. F. G. Sommer, President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, who made an Appeal on behalf of his Society, which received a generous response.

* * *

The official part of the Banquet thus came to a close, but before the Hall was made ready for dancing, a bevy of very attractive ladies sold tickets for a tombola. This is an innovation of recent date. To enable as many members and friends as possible to take part at this annual festival, the tickets for admission are kept at a very reasonable price, and each year the Club has had to make good a considerable deficit. I consider it, therefore, a smart piece of work of the committee to recuperate themselves partly, by appealing to the gambling instinct of the participants.

To make such an appeal a success, two conditions are imperative, namely both the ticket sellers and the prizes must be attractive, these conditions were fulfilled and consequently the tickets went like hot cakes. Among the prizes was a return ticket to Zurich by

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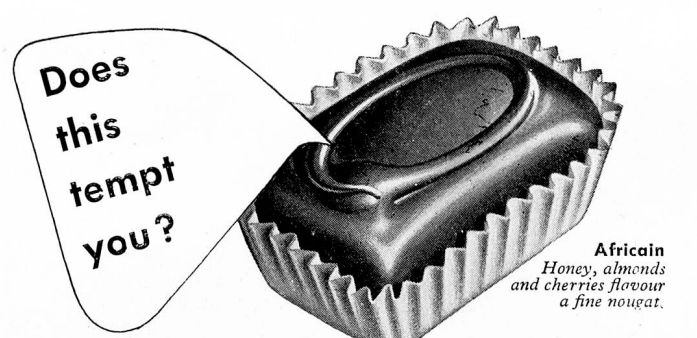
Swissair, a Cinex camera, a dinner and cabaret entertainment at The Dorchester, Swiss watches, bottles of perfume, a "bon" for a pair of ladies shoes, etc. All prizes were generously given by various members of the Club. After the lucky winners had gathered their prizes, and the unlucky ones recovered from the shock, the excellent dance band of Les Brown started the second part of the evening with an enticing waltz tune luring everyone on to the dance floor.

What a lovely sight it was to see young and old, titled and untitled turn around with great exuberance. Tangos, waltzes, fox trots, etc., followed each other in quick succession. The sparkling eyes of the ladies competed successfully with the bright sparkle of the large chandeliers which shed their light over the happy revellers.

Midnight came and passed, and still the dancers carried on, allowing themselves no respite, but all good things must come to an end, and shortly after 1 a.m. the orchestra played "God save the Queen", and a brilliant and enjoyable evening came to its end, or nearly so, because after a circle was formed, and the President and his charming lady ushered into it, the entire company sang "Auld Lang Syne", concluding with three cheers.

The 90th Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club, and the 99th year of existence of the Club came to a finish, and I feel sure that all those who were present at this auspicious occasion will agree, that it was a fine and unforgettable evening, and we all are now looking forward to next year, when the birthday cake, adorned with 100 candles, will be cut.

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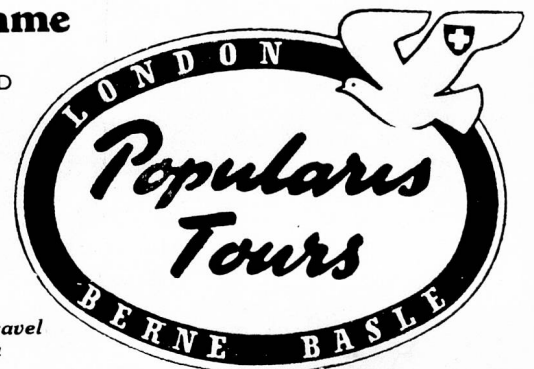
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