

Swiss Mercantile Society

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

NOT SHOP-WORN AND TATTERED

Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Mercantile Society

With devastating self-criticism, the President of the S.M.S. welcomed nearly 120 members and guests to the Annual Dinner and Dance at the Dorchester Hotel on 1st February. He introduced himself as a "shop-worn and tattered chairman for the eighth time". Nobody, however, would agree — his warm welcome and lively wit belied his statement and testified not only to the alertness of himself as Chairman of the Council, but also to the success of the Society.

As if more proof were needed, the Hon. President of the S.M.S., Ambassador René Keller, gave convincing testimony and praised the valuable services the Society was rendering to Switzerland through excellent tuition provided for hundreds of Swiss students every year. Some of them were present, as were members of the office staff and Principal and Vice-Principal of the College. The efficient Secretary, Mr. Walter Burren, was also present, and other guests included the Rev Father Bossard, Pasteur Nicod and Pfr. Stefan. Dr. H. W. Egli was invited as President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, and the President rightly praised his efforts in trying to bring about the creation of a Swiss Cultural Forum at the Swiss Centre in Leicester Square. Miss H. Siegrist was welcomed as Warden of the Swiss Hostel for Girls, and Messrs. W. Burren, R. Chappuis and O. Grob as Honorary Members. A special mention was given of the Trustee and Hon. Member Mr. L. Krucker.

The President was happy to point out the excellent relations which exist between Embassy and S.M.S., and the contingent headed by the Ambassador and Madame Keller, included Monsieur R. Gaechter and Vice-Consuls Abegglen and Dudli.

The Press was represented magnificently not only by some of the Swiss journalists accredited to London's Fleet Street (the Editor of the "Swiss Observer" was relieved to think that whilst she was a guest, she was present as a member in her own right and because of many long-standing and personal connections with the Society), but above all by the Director and General Manager of "Times Newspapers Ltd.", Mr. G. C. Rowett, and by Mr. C. Westcott, Vice-President of the "Times" Football Club, an old friend of the Society.

The Ambassador, who proposed the Toast of the Swiss Mercantile Society and its College, commended the excellent introduction to the English language the students were given, but above all to the British way of life, so important for Switzerland who had always had good relations with Great Britain and who were partners in EFTA. He referred to their relationship as one between the giant and the dwarf.

Mr. Rowett, replying for the guests, elaborated on the same theme and expressed admiration and envy that the S.M.S. had managed to keep going for eighty years and been able to give such excellent training to young students at their College. He felt that large countries could still learn from small ones, and in fact ought to if they wanted to have them as partners. He was surprised that anyone should *want* to come to England, except, of course, for many traditions of which one could be proud. He was glad that Swiss students had a chance of getting

to know such strange customs as that of Closing Time and the intricacies of the ideological argument about the 4d. and 5d. post! He thought that there was much the Gnomes could teach the British, and suggested the City should be exchanged for the Gnomes!

The reader may wonder why, so far, not a word has been said about the ladies. It is certainly not because the Chairman had asked for young *men* to come forward as new members of the Society and possible candidates for committee work. The answer lies in the tradition which the S.M.S. follows: the President's Toast is "The Guests and the Ladies". Most of the above-mentioned guests were indeed accompanied by their wives, and Mr. Jaccard, himself supported handsomely by his wife, ended his speech as follows:

"Finally I come to that section of our guests whose presence is welcome most of all, the ladies. They are really the reason for our being here tonight and I should like to thank them for looking as charming as ever.

"They know very well my devotion to them, and I am confident that they will not hold it against me for quoting something attributed to the writer André Maurois.

"Whether he was speaking from personal experience or from observations among his friends, he was once heard to say . . . The wise husband never becomes indignant. Like a sailor in a storm, he slackens the sails, waits, hopes, and the passing storms do not prevent him from loving the sea. . . a maxim which some of us lesser mortals might do well to remember when the marital sky darkens and the wind starts to veer in our direction."

The Annual Dinner of the Swiss Mercantile Society always has a special, rather intimate *cachet*. The generations come and go, but the friendly atmosphere remains. There is no tombola, no music during dinner, some of the students wear lounge suits yet the food is just as tasty and the dancing just as enjoyable as at more pretentious parties. Young men with flourishing beards gambolled with nearly as much gusto as older men with enviable moustaches. Girls in mini-dresses vied with matronly elegance — all colours of the rainbow floated around the dance floor, to which the pale Wedgwood-blue décor of the Orchid Room gave a pleasing background. The red-coated toastmaster stood behind the top table like an avenging angel, and the only thing which could possibly be called drooping were the two national flags at the side of the band. Everything else was alive, and the evening really went with a swing.

No, Mr. President, nothing tattered and shop-worn — there were too many Golden Needles of Merit around for that (sign of distinction awarded by the SKV for services rendered), and too many young people. So carry on, S.M.S. and many happy returns of a happy evening.

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"SWISS OBSERVER" PUBLICATION DATES

The "Swiss Observer" is published every second and fourth Friday of the month. Our next issue will appear on 14th March. We shall be glad to receive all articles and reports not later than Tuesday, 4th March. Short news items only can be accepted after that date.

Our next issue but one will be published on Friday, 28th March. All contributions for that number should be to hand not later than Tuesday, 18th March.