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Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Club, Birmingham

P. BRUN,
President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham.



The weather, added to the misfortune that befell the famous football team, did not offer a very cheerful welcome when the Swiss arrived from London last Saturday evening to join the Birmingham Swiss Club for their Annual Dinner. The subdued air at the Midland Hotel gradually gave way to a general feeling of joyfulness and eager expectation as the members and their friends filed into the reception room to make their obeisance to Madame Brun and her popular husband, the president of the Club.

About 125 participants sat down to a sumptuous dinner served both liberally and expeditiously; the ingenious assortment described on the menu as "Frivolités," and representing Swiss mountains and chalets, evoked all-round admiration.

The loyal toasts having been proposed and honoured, Mr. Brun rose to propose the "Birmingham Swiss Club and The Guests." He said that he was not going to make a speech, nor would he allow anyone to encroach in this manner on the limited time at the disposal of the "dancers"; he, however, felt it his duty to extend a most hearty welcome to Mr. E. Montag, the Swiss Consul at Liverpool, who was accompanied by Mrs. Montag. For the last seven years Mr. Montag had, at considerable personal sacrifice, honoured this annual function with his presence, and for the speaker and his committee this fact constituted a precious encouragement and incentive. Mr. Brun then expressed his pleasure in greeting the official representatives of sister societies, who had journeyed to Birmingham from far and near; he mentioned Mr. and Mrs. Th. Schaerer (City Swiss Club, London), Mr. J. J. Boos (Swiss Mercantile Society, London), Mr. Keller (Union Helvetia, London), Dr. Schedler and Mr. E. Kuebler (Swiss Club, Manchester), Mr. Geneux (Swiss Culinary Society, London), Mr. E. Rubli (Swiss Culinary Society, Province) and Mr. and Mrs. P. F. Boehringer (*Swiss Observer*).

Mr. Montag, who on rising was met with a vociferous ovation, felt that he could not say all that he wanted in the short time allotted to him by the President. He considered himself a father to the Swiss Colony in Birmingham, and though he felt somewhat disconcerted in staying with his family once only in the twelve months, he knew that the "affairs of state" were safe in the hands of such excellent men as Messrs. Brun, Reinhard and Brunner, and if this trio ever failed him he was no less confident that he could always fall back on Mr. Kunzle. Mr. Montag paid a warm and eloquent tribute to the ideals and disinterested work which had become identified with the name of Mr. Kunzle. And this reminded him of a tale:—A clergyman—a very sick man—was ordered by his physician to spend three months in Switzerland; not having the advantage of knowing Mr. Kuenzle, he demurred. The doctor put before him the alternative of going straight to heaven or to . . . Switzerland. After some meditation, he chose Switzerland, and was hale and happy ever afterwards.

Mr. Schaerer, who replied on behalf of the official guests, was reluctant to speak for the many distinguished representatives and perhaps deprive the ladies of their share of the evening's enjoyment. He thanked the members of the Club for their regal hospitality; he complimented the President on the great success of the gathering, and added apologetically that he never realised that he was face to face with such a conspicuous compatriot when he used to meet Mr. Brun in London.

Mr. Brunner made the traditional charity appeal. He said that one of the foremost aims of their club had always been to assist those of their countrymen who had fallen by the way. He hoped that as we were enjoying ourselves this evening we would bear in mind those who were not so fortunate. The President called upon some of the ladies present and urged them to take up their quarters near the gentlemen and not leave them until they had made the best of it. (The collection amounted to £14.)

An agreeable surprise was sprung upon the company when at the command of the President in walked the *chef*, clad in the stately garb of his calling. Mr. Kunzle addressed him in French.

He said that, being a member of the profession, it afforded him great pleasure to testify to the excellency of the dinner. He—the *chef*—had placed before them a repast that fully confirmed the fame that French cookery had established the world over. It was one of those classical dinners that preceded and assisted successful diplomacy. Similar thanks were returned by Mr. Kunzle to Mr. Oerli, the banquetting manager of the Midland Hotel.

After a short interval the company adjourned to the ballroom, where Terpsichore reigned supreme. Yoddlers, led by the inimitable Mr. Gattiker, supplied a welcome diversion. Time flew all too quickly, and by midnight the gaily decorated rooms were dark and deserted. However, "Die Schweizer nahmen immer noch einer bevor sie gingen," and a few of us managed to stay behind and talk of old, forgotten times.

On Sunday morning a charabanc excursion, followed by a few private cars, took us to Droitwich. Snow had fallen during the night; the countryside looked bleak and chilly, but we enjoyed the "Fruehschoppen" all the more. On our return lunch was served at the Midland Hotel. We started bidding "au revoir." Mr. Schaerer once more expressed the appreciation of the guests for the way in which their comfort and enjoyment had been attended to personally by the President; Mr. Montag seconded this vote, adding humourously that he had discovered only that morning the beautiful scenery by which Birmingham was surrounded. It was hard to part from our friends; Mr. Brun himself was not satisfied with inviting us to tea (an invitation which, we hear, found a ready response), but he insisted on our passing the night at his private house.

In conclusion, we cannot but express our admiration at the way in which the Birmingham Swiss celebrate their annual banquet. If any of the London Swiss are still labouring under the spell of the "depression," we advise him to chum up with some Swiss in Birmingham.

In writing this report it strikes us that one essential item is missing. Mr. Brun, in his modesty, has forgotten to "blow his own trumpet." We would have liked to hear something about the activities; there must be occurrences which are worth dwelling upon at such an annual function. We know that the Club has a membership of 35, and that the arrangements for such a successful gathering involve a tremendous task for the organisers and personal sacrifice on the part of every member.

There were also present, apart from those already referred to: Mr. Langlais, French Consul at Birmingham; Mr. and Mrs. G. Ellison, Mr. Dommon, Mr. R. Stoll, Mr. W. Studer (Goole), Mr. and Mrs. Goth (London), Mr. Victor Berlemont (London), Mr. Horrocks (Liverpool), Miss Margaret Mansell (Liverpool), Mr. G. Marchand (London), and Mr. R. Ryf (London).

A SUNDAY SCHOOL SOCIAL.

The Sunday School of the "Schweizerkirche" held a Social Afternoon at the Foyer Suisse on Saturday, March 17th.

In spite of the Boat Race and the Rugby International, the attendance did not suffer; in fact, the pleasant little hall at 15, Upper Bedford Place, proved to be too small to contain all those friends who wished to spend a pleasant afternoon amongst the youngsters of the Colony.

The Swiss Minister, who was unavoidably prevented from attending, was represented by Dr. W. Rüfenacht, First Secretary of Legation, who, in the course of the afternoon, made a pleasant speech to the audience, conveying the greetings of Monsieur and Madame Paravicini. Pastor C. Th. Hahn also addressed the company.

The performance started with a film, "Photographic Shots of Switzerland," shown by Mr. F. G. Sommer, depicting views of Zurich, Lucerne and the Bernese Alps. The "hA's!" and "Oh's!" of the audience proved how much everybody enjoyed these beautiful views.

The "star" turn of the programme, however, proved to be a Play in Six Acts, specially written by Mr. W. Fischer, and presented by the children of the Sunday School, the title of which was, "If We Went to Switzerland."

For the information of those who missed this most enjoyable function, I give a summary of the play:—

Act I.—Two children meet in a London road and speak about the prospects of a journey to Switzerland. Their imagination is alive, and they describe how they think Switzerland looks. As a result of their talk, they decide to make arrangements together, and to find other children who also want to go there.

Act II.—The same children meet again, together with several others. They have now all they need for the journey, and are getting ready. (At Victoria Station.)

Act III.—A cottage in Switzerland. Mountains in the background. Three farmers in Swiss national costume. One plays the hand organ. Beside him a lady dressed in Swiss national costume, knitting. As the farmer finishes his piece on the hand organ, they start a talk on music, until the London children appear on the scene, who meanwhile have arrived in Switzerland. The children express their surprise as they see the farmers. One of the children says that they are trying to find the chalet "Switzerland," whereupon the lady offers herself as guide. They all leave, after the farmer with the hand organ has played them a tune.

Act IV. (shadow-play).—Two of the farmers whom the children met are engaged in a talk in an Alp-hut in the evening, and one tells the story current in the valley about a mountain called "Strubelhorn." Later on they talk about the Swiss abroad, their feelings and longings towards the homeland which they can never forget. The subject of the talk leads to the children who arrived from London, and they decide to help them in whatever way they can.

Act V.—Two Swiss children, later on joined by another two, are engaged in a talk in Swiss dialect. They leave the scene, whereupon the London children appear. They bear Swiss handkerchiefs round their shoulders. They speak about the experiences they had in the mountains, and of the near return to England. They finish by dancing around to the tune of a Swiss song, accompanied by the hand organ.

Act VI.—Back in England. At Victoria Station.) A few parents of the children waiting at Victoria Station. Some are Swiss ladies, and they speak of the good old time they had when living as children in Switzerland. Presently the train arrives, and they leave the scene. — From the opposite side arrive the customs officials, and the children pass through the customs. They are surprised not to see anybody at the station. Presently, however, they discover their parents, and all are happy to meet again. They sing the Swiss tune once more, and then leave the scene.

Before I go any further I wish to congratulate most heartily Mr. W. Fischer, the author of this little play; he was successful in conveying throughout his play the ardent love which all those who know our country harbour in their hearts, and he was equally successful in awakening the longing of all those who only know our homeland from hearsay.

As to the numerous artistes, I have nothing but praise to bestow, and it is hardly fair to pick out any individual performers. I wish, however, to record that I was greatly impressed by Rudi; he was no doubt the *pièce de résistance* of the play; and Joggy came as a good second. The pathetic and sincere words of Edith, a Swiss girl: "I cannot leave my country. It is too dear to me, but I will wait for you, and you too come back another year. This country is also yours, and we shall always welcome you," made a great impression on the hearers.

The artist who was responsible for the scenery has no mean share in the success of the play, and I sincerely hope that further performances will be given, especially as the funds for sending Swiss children over to Switzerland will benefit by it.

Mr. W. Fischer, at the conclusion of the play, received a great ovation from both the performers and the audience, and a charming afternoon amongst our little ones came thus to a successful end.

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