

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1944)

Heft: 1029

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society : visit of the Swiss Minister

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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.**Visit of the Swiss Minister.**

Prior to the Monthly Meeting of the Society, held at Swiss House, on Saturday, October 7th, the Council and Committee members had the pleasure of entertaining our new Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, at a luncheon at Brown's Hotel. The Minister's party included Monsieur W. Preiswerk, Head of the Special Division, Dr. Kamm, of the Swiss War Food Office, Monsieur E. de Graffenried, Commercial Attaché, and Mr. H. Bähler. Further there were present Col. Bon, President of the City Swiss Club, Dr. de Wolff, Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation, and Mr. A. Stauffer, past President and Honorary Member of the S.M.S.

About 100 members and friends were present when the President, Mr. J. J. Boos, opened the proceedings at Swiss House. He bade a special welcome to Messrs. W. E. Gattiker and Louis Chapuis, who have been members of the Society since 1895 and 1898 respectively.

Owing to prevailing circumstances, no meetings were held in July, August and September, and the President regretted to announce that during that period a number of members had suffered material damage, in some cases of a serious nature, but he was pleased to state that so far as he was aware none had sustained personal injury.

The President then paid a last tribute to two members whose deaths occurred recently, namely Mr. Paul Hilfiker, Vice Consul, and Mr. Alfred Moser. He also regretted to inform the meeting of the death of Mr. Percy H. Green, F.C.A., through whose passing away the Society had lost not only an excellent auditor but also a good friend.

The appointment of Mr. Robert Huxley, Chartered Accountant, as the Society's new auditor was duly confirmed by the meeting.

The remainder of the agenda was speedily dealt with and included the admission of three new members, namely Mr. Henri Amann, Miss Sylvia Neidhart and Mr. Charles Wanger. The meeting also accepted the resignation of Mr. M. Loosli, who has been a staunch member for a large number of years and who intends to return to Switzerland as soon as circumstances permit.

Mr. W. Meier, Vice President, reported on the educational activities during the past summer and gave an outline of the plans for the near future, whilst Mr. L. W. Krucker referred to the general activities at Swiss House.

The President then addressed the meeting. His speech was chiefly designed to acquaint our Minister with the history and aims of the Society. Following are the main points of his address:

Monsieur le Ministre,

It gives me the greatest of pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Trustees, Council, Committee Members, Members and friends of the S.M.S. to this our gathering, and in their name to thank you for honouring us with your visit.

Our relations with the Minister and the Legation have always been of the closest and most cordial. We have still to-day as Hon. President, the former Minister, Mr. C. R. Paravicini, and as Hon. President of the Education Committee, Mr. H. Martin (now Minister in Lisbon), both of whom did so much in the building up and furtherance of our

College. We also think of the collaboration of Mons. De Bourg and Dr. Rezzonico who, when in London, took great interest in our activities and were made honorary members of our Society. The late Minister, Dr. Thurnheer, also gave us valued support and we regret that illness made his stay in London such a short one, but are glad to hear that Mr. Thurnheer's health is improving. Mr. de Graffenried, the Commercial Attaché, is following the footsteps of his predecessors, who always became the Legation's Godfather to the S.M.S.

How I wish we could have shown our Swiss House as we knew it at its best, when between 200 and 300 happy young Swiss were at our Day School, and attending happy social hours in the evening in peace time.

Although our, at one time, main activity—the Day School, is suspended, the S.M.S. still carries on, and we beg of you, Mons. le Ministre, and your collaborators, to give us full hearted support and sympathy.

The past history of the S.M.S. and its manifold activities, the ups and downs, have been admirably described in our Jubilee booklet of 1938, of which you have a copy. I hope you will allow me to say to-day a few words about ourselves, our work, and our plans for the future.

The S.K.V. whose largest foreign section we are, its status, work and importance in the life of Switzerland is surely known to you. I would just mention that it embraces now 121 sections (3 abroad—London, Milan, New York), with a membership of some 50,000 including the young member groups, and is presided over by a most capable General President—Mr. Strickler, and guided by that active political and social worker National Rat Schmid-Ruedin, to whom the Swiss commercial employees at home and abroad owe so much.

Our London members share in the social welfare activities of the central society in regard to Old Age and Invalidity Insurance, Employment Dept., etc., and a very cordial relationship is maintained by Headquarters and our Section, at present only marred by difficulties in communications, etc. In 1939 the London Section had a signal honour conferred when one of our most prominent members—Mr. A. C. Stahelin—was elected an honorary member of the S.K.V., the first of a foreign section so honoured.

The outbreak of the war in September, 1939, came as a great shock to us and left us with heavy responsibilities both as regards lease, etc., of Swiss House and teachers salaries, and the Council therefore required not only the full support from members and donors, but also from our Home Authority, support which, I am glad to say, has been forthcoming generously.

We had the lease of Swiss House, Nos. 34/35 Fitzroy Square, where not only the S.M.S. but also the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the Swiss Choral Society, the Swiss Orchestral Society had their Headquarters and we were anxious to retain Swiss House as a centre of Swiss activities.

Our House was freely placed at the disposal of the Swiss Legation and the Colony; the organisation of the return of Swiss soldiers in 1939, and civilians

in 1939 and 1940, was arranged at Swiss House, and at the request of the Swiss Minister, Mr. Thurnheer, Swiss House, in July, 1940, was turned into a Swiss Relief Centre and Rest Home for bombed out Swiss, only to be bombed out itself in September 1940, and in March and April, 1941.

When it was apparent that the war would be prolonged we took advantage of the clauses in the lease to terminate the lease in 1942, and retained on a short agreement No. 35 Fitzroy Square only, the house we are now meeting in, and which to-day houses the S.M.S., our Employment Dept., other Swiss Societies and is placed at the disposal of the various Swiss Committees, etc.

What of the future?

SOCIAL. The S.M.S. will continue as well as circumstances will permit to do all in its power to carry on the social activities for its members, and in co-operation with the other Swiss Societies for the entire colony.

EDUCATION. On the education side we are restricted, but as already mentioned by the Vice President, Mr. Meier, we will carry on our Russian and French Classes and the French Circle. We also hope to arrange for the winter months some instructive and topical lectures.

In conjunction with the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems, the question of education of both young Swiss here and those wishing to come over from Switzerland has been given careful study. It has been agreed that the S.M.S. could, as in the past, safely be left to arrange Day and Evening Classes and our Education Committee will make every effort to make arrangements as soon as circumstances permit.

To make our plans, however, we need information from our Authorities, both B.I.G.A. and S.K.V. at home; we have frequently asked for information but so far have not yet received any news and I hope that you, Monsieur le Ministre, will help us to get whatever news we require to co-ordinate our plans with those of the desires and wishes of our people at home.

We are quite certain (the frequent English courses at the Frohburg have proved this) that the young Swiss commercants are as eager as ever to come over here to learn English. Through the kind efforts of the late Minister Thurnheer, the British Authorities had agreed, even during the war, early in 1940, for a certain number (about fifty) of young students to come over to London to our Day School, but unfortunately with the collapse of France, no travelling facilities were available and the scheme had to be dropped.

At Swiss House we have, even as at present arranged, facilities to house some 40-50 students in three to four stage groups, and we do not foresee great difficulties to obtain an efficient teaching staff for this number of scholars.

We hope, therefore, that as soon as hostilities in Europe end, diplomatic steps will be taken so that permits for our young Swiss can be obtained to come here for such courses at a Day School.

This would enable us to build up our Day College again gradually and work up to full requirements when peace reigns again all over the world, and restrictions will not be so stringent as they are bound to remain for some time to come.

EMPLOYMENT. The S.M.S. Employment Dept. in London has its own Advisory Board and Management, and is independent of the London Section. It was founded in 1889 and arranged in its present form since 1900. Mr. Pfaendler has been in charge for over thirty-five years.

The employment department has gained the respect of business circles all over the country and thousands of young Swiss obtained their "jobs" through the agency of the S.M.S.

Conditions to-day are, of course, very different, and most difficult, and it is quite likely that only the most energetic steps by the highest authorities will enable the Employment Department to be carried on in future years.

The question of Employment of Swiss over here is closely studied by the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems, the experience of the S.M.S. Employment Department is at our disposal. Certain steps have already been taken and the recommendation of the Council will in due course be submitted to you. We of the S.M.S. are specially concerned in the question of young Swiss commercial employees who wish to come over here to perfect their training and to learn English, partly with temporary and some, if possible, with permanent permits for stay in this country.

Anglo-Swiss firms, Swiss firms, or British firms trading with Switzerland should be asked to employ such young Swiss. Surely the British authorities considering what Switzerland did for this country diplomatically and humanitarian, and in view of Switzerland's special economic position will give some preferential treatment. Such an arrangement will assist Swiss trade in both directions.

Temporary, and in particular, permanent permits for our young Swiss commercial and engineering employees will not only help trade but it will maintain and rejuvenate the Swiss Colony here, so essential to maintain a healthy and prosperous Swiss community in this hospitable country.

SWISS HOUSE. I have already said that Swiss House to-day is only a shadow of its former self, but at its best it was never what we wished and what our Swiss friends expected it to be. Last year the S.K.V. at home made an appeal for restoration of the bomb damaged S.K.V. buildings in London and Milan. Approximately Frs. 60,000 were subscribed in Switzerland and £1,160 were received in direct subscription by the S.M.S. in London; how much of the Swiss subscription will be given to London we do not know yet.

Should after-war conditions be such that a Swiss Day College be necessary, a new centre will have to be found but the Council of the S.M.S. feel that until the future can be more clearly visualised it would serve no purpose to make big plans now. When, however, such plans can and are made, I feel sure that we can appeal to you, M. le Ministre, to our Home Authorities, our friends here and in Switzerland for their generous support; the S.M.S. alone could not possibly shoulder the burden.

Monsieur le Ministre, I have been somewhat at length to bring our history and difficulties before you, I felt that it is my duty to tell you, our new chief, of our successes, trials and difficulties, and I know that you will do everything in your power to help us.

Finally, I would say the S.M.S. has for years been one of the most active Societies in the Colony. Our members have always been loyal citizens and compatriots, have done their military duties, paid taxes, and when the call came in September, 1939, rallied round the banner, left their positions and went back to do their duty towards our Homeland as some of us did when danger threatened in 1914.

We have always taken our allotted part in the affairs of the Colony and I can assure you of the support of the Council and Members of the S.M.S., if needed, in your mission in London. You have come to England during most difficult times and tragic circumstances.

May God bless your labours for the benefit of Switzerland and Great Britain, where so many of us have found and made our home away from home.

The President was accorded a very hearty ovation for the excellent manner in which he had portrayed the work of the Society which he has always had so near at heart. The applause had barely subsided when the Swiss Minister rose amidst prolonged acclamation to address the members in the following terms.

Monsieur le Président, My dear Countrymen,

It is with a great and sincere pleasure that I have accepted the very kind invitation of the Swiss Mercantile Society of London. Amongst the institutions and associations of our Colony, the Swiss Mercantile Society is probably the one which is most largely known, in wider circles of active life in our own country. How often have I come across—only to mention this one single point of your activity— young or elder countrymen of ours who gratefully remember the times passed in the midst of your Society, in the congenial atmosphere of the Swiss House and, so frequently, the encouraging help of your Employment Department or, last but certainly not least, the opportunity generously afforded and so heartily welcomed by many of our compatriots of following the lectures and courses of your college. The Swiss Mercantile Society of London ranks amidst the Swiss associations and institutions abroad of which our country is justly proud.

Personally, I may add that I always have had, during the periods in which I served our country abroad, the most cordial relations of confidence and friendship with the branches of the Swiss Mercantile Society in various important capitals and commercial centres. I remember particularly the close co-operation I was fortunate enough, years ago, as Counsellor and Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, to maintain always with your sister Society in the French metropolis; later on, on the occasions of my frequent journeys from Rome to Milan, which is the commercial centre of the large and patriotic Swiss Colony in Italy, I never failed to look for and to find among the Swiss Mercantile group of that city, the same efficient, calm and constructive spirit which is the chief characteristic and the mainstay of our Mercantile Societies abroad.

Upon my arrival in London a few months ago, I remember having found—by chance, but by one of these chances which may have some significance—as the first paper on my desk the fine publication issued in 1938 as a souvenir of your Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations, which M. le Président Boos had kindly sent me. This appeared to me like a whiff of familiar air and, likewise, your kind invitation of to-day,

following the four or five other meetings I had during the last weeks, makes me feel at home amongst one more active and important group of our Colony.

Throughout the fifty-six years of the London Swiss Mercantile Society's existence, the life of your association has progressed along two main lines. Those of furthering *education* and *employment*. This is a double programme which reflects, in a way, aspects of deeper problems which our country, Switzerland, has traditionally striven to deal with in a generous and constructive manner.

Education and *employment* will, again, after this world war be in our country in the central field of civic problems. It is even to be anticipated that the state of mind dealing with these questions will be tremendously strengthened by the repercussions of the war. Switzerland can only hold her traditional place, after this war, by producing work of *highest average quality*, and this high average can only be obtained and maintained if facilities for education and also commercial training are largely given, and if the spectre of unemployment does not haunt and hamper national activities. The scope in which Swiss colonies abroad can act in this respect is, of course, limited. But the field which is open to their initiative is nevertheless not unimportant. It is, on the contrary, of the highest interest that possibilities be created for developing, amongst our young merchants, a full and thorough knowledge of the English language, ways and form of thought. In this respect the reopening of the classes of the Swiss Mercantile Society in the English metropolis will have its great and lasting significance.

So will also the activity of your association for furthering the possibilities of *employment* of our countrymen, those who are here at present as well as of those whom we hope to see here in future, be all important.

Switzerland, after this war, will have to seek again an outlet for her youth. The training they may find in part thanks to your organisation may be of greatest use to them in whatever part of the world they may finally settle down, to work and to strive according to the Swiss traditions which Lord Bryce in his famous book on modern democracies has so eloquently described — a book, the publication of which I myself had, by the way, a quarter of a century ago, the great privilege of following closely in furnishing certain data and in completing the proofs regarding the chapters on Switzerland. These Swiss traditions and qualities have been summarised by James Bryce as follows: shrewdness, moderation, common sense and a sense of duty to the community.

Jusqu'ici Monsieur le Président et Messieurs, je me suis plié à votre ancienne règle, une règle établie dès le mois de février 1890 et qui veut que votre langue officielle soit la langue du grand pays qui nous accorde sa généreuse hospitalité. Mais je voudrais que quelques mots au moins résonnent, dans cette maison suisse, dans nos langues nationales.

Les mots que je vais vous dire ne sont, du reste, pas des paroles inspirées d'un optimisme excessif. Il y a cependant, parmi les qualités des Suisses cette qualité primordiale de savoir regarder les réalités en face, sans peur et sans reproche. Les difficultés qui nous attendent dans l'après-guerre sont *grandes*. Ce serait une illusion facile de penser que nous reviendrons sans autre aux conditions qui, rétro-

spectivement, peuvent paraître idéales à un petit pays honnête, sans aspiration territoriale, mais ayant l'aspiration légitime de donner son apport à l'amélioration graduelle des conditions de la vie dans ce monde.

La vie dans le monde de demain sera hérissée de difficultés. Nos autorités disent et diront à notre pays la vérité crue. Les mécanismes établis pour la conduite de la guerre économique ne cesseront point du jour au lendemain leur activité dès la fin des hostilités et il est à prévoir que les barrières érigées ne disparaîtront pas aussitôt que d'aucuns, dans notre pays comme dans les colonies au dehors, sont enclins à le croire — surtout depuis que nous avons eu la nouvelle de la fin de l'encerclement de notre Pays après des années dures et longues. Notre peuple suisse, nos colonies savent courageusement regarder en face les réalités. Des barrières risquent, pendant quelque temps encore, de subsister tant en ce qui concerne nos exportations que pour ce qui est du passage des frontières pour notre jeunesse dont nos colonies ont un si urgent besoin.

Mais, avec de la persévérance, les difficultés dont notre chemin est et sera hérissé pourront être vaincues et nous pourrons, nous aussi, attendre l'avenir meilleur auquel notre Suisse sent avoir acquis un droit après toute son action équitable, charitable, humanitaire et constructive. A cet égard, nous avons notamment confiance en la compréhension du Grand Pays où nous travaillons.

Et je vais conclure, chers compatriotes, par ces mots qui sont inscrits en tête au livre d'or de votre association, sous la date du 26 septembre 1888, il y a donc cinquante-six ans :

'Wer sich vor dem Sturme beugt
wird wenig leisten
Wer aber durchaus siegen will,
dem misglückt es nie'.

The Minister's address was followed by tremendous applause from an enthusiastic audience who had listened to him with rapt attention. Mr. A. C. Stahelin eloquently expressed the sentiments of all present in a cordial vote of thanks to the Minister, which was heartily endorsed by the meeting.

After the official part of the meeting, tea was served by the lady members and an opportunity was thus afforded to members to have a chat and exchange reminiscences, which was particularly welcome in view of the fact that the Society had not met since June. It

The Rutli Ladies Club

Anniversary Dance

to be held at

THE ROYAL HOTEL,
WOBURN PLACE, RUSSELL SQUARE, W.C. 1.
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25th, 1944
from 7 to 11 p.m.

All Swiss and their friends are cordially welcome. Tickets may be obtained from members of the Rutli Ladies Club, 74, Charlotte Street, W. 1; Price 5/-.

THE COMMITTEE.

was at this juncture that Mme. Ruegger joined the assembly and she was given a very warm reception. Thus concluded a most successful and enjoyable meeting.

The next Monthly Meeting of the Society will be held on Saturday, November 11th. WB.

In the last few days the City Swiss Club lost a quiet, though very patriotic member in the person of Mr. E. Reichenbach. He was born in 1878, in St. Gall, the son of Louis Reichenbach, the great industrialist of that town. He came to London first in 1895 to learn English and to get acquainted with English business methods. At that time he joined the City Swiss Club. He returned to St. Gall in 1897 and entered his father's business. In the early thirties when the regulations regarding imports made it difficult for Swiss business to compete, he returned to London where he developed the making up part of his goods. He was suddenly taken ill and after only three weeks of illness, died on October 20th, at the age of 66. He was an artillery officer in the Swiss army and was proud of his Swiss nationality.

The body was cremated on October 23 at the Golders Green Crematorium, where his son-in-law spoke a few words for the family, and Mr. W. Deutsch on behalf of his friends in London.

MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS

HOUSEKEEPER wanted by Swiss business couple, out all day. Simple continental cooking. Suburb of North London. Write Box No. 58, SWISS OBSERVER, 23 Leonard Street, E.C. 2.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, November 4th, 3.30 - 6 p.m.—City Swiss Club.—Thé Dansant, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London, W. 1.

Saturday, November 11th, at 2.30 p.m.—Swiss Mercantile Society Ltd.—Monthly Meeting at Swiss House, 35, Fitzroy Square, W. 1., followed by a talk by one of the members.

Tuesday, November 14th, 1944.—City Swiss Club, at 6 p.m., preceded by a dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W. 1. (See advert.).

Saturday, November 18th, 1944, at 3 p.m.—Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Monthly Meeting. Swiss Minister will address the members, followed by Mr. J. G. Keller's usual talk on "Current Events".

Saturday, November 25th, at 2.30 p.m.—London Swiss Philatelic Society.—Monthly meeting at Swiss House, 35, Fitzroy Square, W. 1, followed by "Swopping".

Union Chretienne de langue française (French speaking Y.M.C.A.) 9, Soho Square, W. 1. Reunion chaque mardi à 5.45 p.m. Invitation cordiale à tous.

Printed and Published by THE FREDERICK PRINTING CO., LTD., at 23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.