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SWISS BAZAAR 1968

Westminster Hall, 26th October

To obtain a true picture of this year's Bazaar in aid of the Swiss Church in London, I tried to find out what people really thought.

Most comments were ventured without my having to ask. One visitor who had specially travelled up to London from quite a distance to visit the Bazaar, enthusiastically exclaimed: "Do you know, coming up to the Bazaar even if you had to drive through the worst storm possible would still be worth while. My Swiss palate has never been disappointed!" He held up a packet under my nose and shouted triumphantly: "Do you know what this is?" It was marked 7/-. I could smell real Emmentaler Cheese. "There is only one more thing I should like to see here: real Swiss honey!" Somehow he felt that this was too much to ask. "From which Canton are you?" I asked without batting an eyelid. "From the Grisons", he replied. "In that case go across to that Stall: there they not only sell real Swiss honey, but honey from the various Cantons, even from your Grisons!" Somewhat incredulously and yet hopefully he went off in the direction I had indicated — and he was not disappointed.

An *au pair* girl carried a pile of second-hand books under her arm, as well as some Christmas cards as *her* moderate spoils. "What do you think is the most beautiful thing about this Bazaar?" I asked her. Her eyes lit up and she replied without hesitation: "The fact that among the things set out for sale we recognise so many objects which we have produced by our own hands: it is really *our* Bazaar!"

From the expression on that astute business man's face I could see at once that even at a bazaar his business instincts prevail. "I have already done all my Christmas shopping. Here are three rag dolls, Swiss chocolate, French scent, this flowering pot-plant, Swiss specialities for smokers, a whole family of toy owls and, for my relations in Switzerland, five *Züpfen*." "But these *Züpfen* will be as hard as stone by the time they reach Switzerland", I interjected. "Ah, no fear," he replied with a twinkle, "the *Züpfen* are not yet made; I have just ordered them and paid in advance, they will be baked and dispatched in Switzerland by former members of the Swiss Church. So they will be fresh and crisp and arrive at the right time and I no longer have to worry about anything".

A housewife with a large shopping bag went past me. "Do you know what we shall have for lunch tomorrow? Dried beans, chicken and tartlets — all from the Bazaar. These cakes and pastries are from the stall over there. If I may give you some good advice: Get what you need before it is too late. These are not just average quality cakes — much Swiss care has been stirred into them!"

An elderly gentleman who was quite oblivious to his surroundings stood in front of a second-hand stall turning the handle of an old coffee-mill, his thoughts back in the past. My greeting brought him back from his reveries. "I have already made my traditional purchase. Every other year I buy a tie at the Swiss Bazaar. See, how well this one matches my suit!"

On the way to the Restaurant I met a newly married couple. They had found all sorts of things for their new flat: two colourful waste paper baskets, saucepans, several plastic goods, a flower vase and two door mats. Heavily laden they steered towards the exit.

The Restaurant did a roaring trade. As a hungry visitor contentedly observed: "Once again Swiss sausage,

sauerkraut and potato salad!" Later on I saw numerous guests enjoying a chat over cups of tea or a glass of cider and some cakes. At one corner of my table sat a completely ragged figure of a man, bearded and dirty. One of the poorest of this city who had somehow found his way in from the street and, lost in apathy was now enjoying the comfort of a chair. I pushed a piece of cake over to him. With one bite he devoured it without saying a word. But perhaps he thought as so many did at the Bazaar: How lovely!

After the last remaining visitors had dispersed in the direction of the exit I found the cashiers in one corner of the Hall still at work. "The result is excellent!" was the unanimous shout from behind the table, "at least £1,650 net profit!" How lovely! U.S.

THE JUG OF WATER AND THE LOST PENCIL

Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club

In conjunction with the Swiss Economic Council

5d. on petrol and cigarettes, 4/- on whisky, purchase tax up, import controls, credit curbs: this third package of drastic restrictions within a year is what the news placards announced to the rush-hour public on the evening of Friday, 22nd November. The spirit of disappointment and general weariness that we all felt on receiving the news, was left *outside* the Dorchester Hotel. Of course, there were a few caustic remarks — "have a double brandy and cigar — it will be the last one if this regime goes on" — but there was certainly no atmosphere of despondency at the City Swiss Club Dinner and Dance. The ante-room and later the ballroom were full of smiling men and women (282), all set on enjoying themselves. Some had been attending this social event year after year; for them, the occasion was precious, linking many happy memories of the past with the present. Nostalgia, too, was felt, for many dear faces were missing. Pleasure only was felt by others who had enjoyed themselves last year and possibly the year before and were anxious to repeat a worth-while experience. And there were some newcomers, Swiss and British, young and old, whose very first occasion this was, and they reacted in different ways — "jolly nice evening", "great fun", "very friendly", "never expected anything as grand as this what with excellencies and a red-coated toastmaster" — I agree with them, there is something to be said for a certain formality which is still adhered to, though some of the erstwhile courtesy may at times be sadly lacking. Things have changed, no doubt, as the Swiss Ambassador remarked in his witty after-dinner address. When he had attended this event the first time in the early 'fifties, he had been a mere *membre de passage*, whilst now he had the privilege of attending as Honorary President. He had moved up from a minor diplomatic position to that of Head of Mission. He said he now had fewer illusions and less hair, though his love for London and his attachment to his many friends here had not been impaired through absence and advancing years. At that time, men were in full dress suits (and short evening dresses for women had not yet been introduced), but, and Monsieur Keller considered this an advantage, there were far more young people now than in those days. Personally, I don't altogether share this impression, and I'd be inclined to say that on the whole, people *look* younger, the dresses are more youthful, hairstyles more flattering, and the dances have more swing, though, sadly again, they have lost some of the graceful charm (not even a tango all evening).

I could not help thinking that the club was like a jug of water which stands under a running tap: new water flows into it all the time, gradually and imperceptibly replacing the old water, but it is still the same jug and still good, clear water. The City Swiss Club is 112 years old, and this year's was the 103rd banquet and ball. It has weathered many storms successfully, and it would be futile to pretend that there have been no changes. Once upon a time, when members present were asked to rise and drink the health of the guests, one and more rose from each table — this time their numbers were painfully thin. Dinners used to be sumptuous, wines reasonable in price and the service impeccable. Then there were the speeches which went droning on and on, often of excellent substance, but frequently giving dreary details of why we were there and why there should be a collection for charity. Now there are no speeches at all, simply a few remarks, a general welcome by the President, a short address by the Ambassador and a brief reply on behalf of the guests.

Mr. Carl Nater, in the chair for the second year, expressed gratitude for the hospitality we were enjoying in this country, despite temporary difficulties. He welcomed the Ambassador and Madame Keller and singled out two of the other guests and their ladies, i.e. Mr. M. P. Ward, F.R.C.S., of Everest fame, President of the Alpine Club which is senior to the City Swiss Club by one year, and Captain T. D. Richardson, O.B.E., the well-known skating expert at home at St. Moritz as much as in London.

The Ambassador amused his audience with a few anecdotes relating to his stay here 18 years ago. How his varsity days at Cambridge told — they had certainly left a remarkably British mark on his natural gift of oratory.

Mr. Ward referred to Switzerland as the Mecca of the mountaineer, whether beginner or expert, and he stressed the value of friendship between peoples. He cited as example the school in London created and run by an Englishman who educates his boys partly at Glion in Switzerland. (Those who know Colonel Townend are well aware of the excellent contribution he makes to Anglo-Swiss understanding). Mr. Ward proposed the toast of the City Swiss Club, his good wishes finding a willing echo in our hearts.

Indefatigable Arthur Salisbury and his orchestra played during dinner and for dancing, and the response was most encouraging right from the start. Then came the cabaret, but just at that moment I discovered that my pencil had wandered away with the members' book (not to worry — I has signed legitimately as a visitor only). That compelled me to stop taking notes, but I was glad. What could I have said about a couple playing the xylophone and dabbling a bit in dancing, singing and other instrument playing? It was frankly boring, and my thoughts wandered. What could one do with the fabulous fee such performers command! Just one idea — why not invite instead a few fellow countrymen and women who do good work for the benefit of the Swiss community, but who can't afford the price of the ticket? Even older people who, I am told, want something else than dining and dancing, would surely agree. In any case, the vim and vigour some of the portly, grey-haired or baldish gentlemen displayed on the dance floor, hardly implied that they would rather watch and listen. Their dinner jackets may have been tailored in the time of "Heinrich dem Heizbaren", but their hearts are as young as ever. And let nobody pretend that there is no fun watching a floor full of people dancing and enjoying themselves in

other ways! Even if there are no more "Palais-Glide", "Lambeth Walk" or "Gay Gordons".

By the time, the tombola draw took place, my pencil had been retrieved, and I was able to continue my copious notes. The prizes were magnificent, ranging from gold watches to handbags, from food hampers to champagne, from scent to theatre vouchers and a trip to Switzerland. Many more tickets could have been sold, and the handsome net profit is being distributed to Swiss charities and Churches in this country. Naturally, there is always criticism; the Swiss love a good grumble. But Mr. E. Tobler who worked very hard organising the tombola is willing to hand over the thankless task to anyone who has complaints and better ideas.

All too soon, the evening came to a close, rather suddenly, for regrettably, no more last waltz was announced, which meant a careful eye on the watch during the last half-hour, so as to make sure one had one's favourite partner at hand for the final dance. No Auld Lang syne, no presidential couple in the centre to express one's appreciation. Just a drum roll and the two National Anthems. Full stop.

But the water will go on running into the jug keeping it fine and clear, and every future Press reporter will make sure that he (or she) has a pencil at hand to record much which is good. Mini-budget, freeze and squeeze may darken the morrow, but tonight we still feel with the men and women who attended the 102 previous banquets:

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,
For the sak' of auld lang syne.*

MM

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