

Reminiscences

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SWISS OBSERVER 15th BIRTHDAY.

As we grow older, we realise more and more the true meaning of the old adage, "to give is more blessed than to receive."

As we celebrate the 15th Birthday of the "Swiss Observer" — celebrate, that is, in our mind and not, alas and alack! with a wonderful banquet to which all of the present day and former collaborators might have been invited, had profits permitted, we realise that this youngster in years is an old hand at that prerogative of elders, namely, the making of GIFTS.

True, we pay a paltry few shillings every now and then to enable the Paper of the Swiss Colony in England to appear. True also, we — i.e., some of us — do send in some "copy" to the Editor when we feel in the mood, but, when all is said, the fact remains that the "Swiss Observer" gives us all a great deal more than it receives from us.

There must be a great number of Swiss living in England just now who cannot remember the days when we had no Swiss Paper appearing in this Country. They cannot realise what the regular arrival of this little "Chaesblättli," as some of us may call it affectionately, means to us. They do not remember the days when we had to rely on papers sent from Switzerland and on tales of people who had recently been "home" for news such as the "Swiss Observer" now gives us week by week. Again, they cannot realise how difficult it was in those days to know what was actually going on in the Swiss Colony. To know that, one had to attend a lot of functions, spend a lot of time, especially evenings, in Town, and, incidentally, spend a lot of money, too.

Again, who, except a very few among us, read the Swiss newspapers regularly in those days and so kept abreast with what was going on at "home"? I remember piles and piles of "Neue Zürcher Zeitungen," "Winterthur Tageblatt," etc., un-opened and un-read, simply because I could not find the time to read them.

All that is changed now, thanks to our Birthday Child. The "Swiss Observer" gives us a tremendous wealth of news which it would be very difficult for any of us to find otherwise. It gives us all the little tit-bits which are of real interest. It keeps us informed from time to time of the political and economical situation in Switzerland. It brings us news of new books, of musical affairs, of all kinds of things which I am sure we simply would not and could not know otherwise.

The "Swiss Observer" gives us excellent reports of the social affairs of the Colony, so that all those who learnt their momentous

speeches by heart and then let them off and did not bungle them, can find a fairly faithful report of their prowess in the next week's issue of their own Swiss Paper. I often wonder how many copies of the "Swiss Observer" are carefully stored away, like heirlooms almost, because they contain a report of father's or brother's witty or noble utterance at this or that function?

Well, that is as it ought to be. But remember, dear Reader, there was a time when no such reports could appear, because there was no "Swiss Observer." Can you imagine it? Wonderful speeches lost to posterity, simply because there was no Swiss Newspaper to keep a record of them?

Then again, do you know of a better mental tonic than the arrival of the "Swiss Observer" in his chaste green, hopeful and fresh-looking girdle, every Saturday morning? It happens, in my home, occasionally, that the "Swiss Observer" arrives by the evening post only. What a wretched Saturday morning breakfast that means. Something missing, something wanting, something wrong! Be the bacon ever so nice and sizzling, the egg (singular, please!) ever so fresh and tempting, the melodies from the nearby radio ever so pleasing and lilting, that breakfast, without the "Swiss Observer," is a sad meal, instead of being THE breakfast of the week.

If we Swiss believed in decorating people who have deserved well of the Country, Mr. P. F. Boehringer, the founder and publisher of the "Swiss Observer," would receive a medal of honour. To carry a paper like the "Swiss Observer" for fourteen years on his shoulders, to get it out, week by week, is a task as difficult as one might well imagine.

And what about the collaborators of this "Swiss Observer," those men and women who send in that much needed "copy"? They work for the love of the thing, without any thought of remuneration — see reference to "banquet" in opening paragraph.

And what about our EDITOR, who sinks his identity under "ST.," but whose cheerful face and friendly manner are known and beloved by everyone who has met him? He works hard to keep the little paper alive and kicking; he rings up this and that possible contributor, asking for "copy," always tactful, always flattering, always, or nearly always, succeeding. And his articles have become the best, improving steadily, I often fear soon that one fine day one of the big Daily Newspapers may make him a fabulous offer and snap him up. Provided he does not join one of the naughty Uncles, I would

wish him luck! He, dear ST., is really an excellent Editor and a splendid reporter, a real newspaper man.

And, dear Reader, is it nothing to you that you receive every week a little paper which gives you readable matter in three, sometimes four, languages? The sparkling French, the melodious Italian, the manly German, and, now and again — or am I dreaming, and it is something that is going to happen only? — the Romantich, that old-world language, closely related to the pure old Latin. What an education for our Readers!

Friend ST. asked me to put in a word for new collaborators! Some of us, especially "Kyburg," are getting somewhat lazy and played out. We cannot go on for ever, writing about the same thing all the time. Kyburg, for instance, cannot point out the infallible way to cure the political ills of the world, week after week, month after month, only to find that the real politicians do not heed his wisdom, but continue to make things worse and worse. It is tiring and tiresome to find that one's pet ideas are scorned and spurned by those who are supposed to know better. But, as things economical and political are getting worse — apart from a small recovery due to the fact that for several years people simply did without and now have to replenish stores — and as the "proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof," Kyburg consoles himself with the thought that other great "seers" have "seen" before their time!

Well, to sum up: I think I have demonstrated to everybody's satisfaction that our "Swiss Observer" is a great benefactor to all its readers. It is up to the latter to see to it that their friends join the happy crowd of subscribers and regular readers. There ought not to be ONE Swiss living in these Islands who is not a subscriber to the "Swiss Observer." Not one!

Point out to your friends that they will receive more in joy, amusement, knowledge, etc., than they will have to pay for in hard cash, that the subscription is a mere nothing compared with the weekly treat which it brings.

Open your door wide to the green-clothed weekly paper that will bring with it a touch of Switzerland, of Swiss news, Swiss thoughts, Swiss yearnings and Swiss aspirations.

The best way in which to celebrate the 15th Birthday of our wonderful little paper is to present it with a new subscriber! I think and hope that many of our readers will see to this being done, so that, when we celebrate the little fellow's coming-of-age party, it may be possible, perhaps, to get all its contributors together at a solemn Banquet!

KYBURG.

him. One fine day I even gave a back answer to Sergeant Rösti, a thing which nobody ever dared to do. The members of my platoon nearly collapsed; they were under the impression that I must have gone suddenly mad, it being a hot day. The sergeant winced, but did not say a word. From that day, I advanced my status in the eyes of my colleagues. There was no more mocking laughter at my awkwardness. It was also whispered around that an uncle of mine was an army corps commander, a rumour which, when it came to my ears, I did not contradict (much to my shame), knowing full well that my uncle was only an army chaplain. (*O, vain heart!*)

One evening the sergeant told me that I could now get a little bolder, as Rösti's answers were very encouraging; he intimated to me that perhaps a little poetry would not be out of place. He thought of inserting a poem which he once learned in school and of the reciting of which he received a prize. It started:—

*"Lieblich war die Maiennacht
Silbervölklein fliegen."*

I thought it was a good idea, although perhaps not quite adequate, considering that we were then deep in the month of August! but when he suggested that this poem should be signed by him as his own product, I energetically protested that it was not fair to Lenau, and if it should be found out, it might undo all the good work which so far had been achieved. I suggested that either he or I should write a verse or two, and after he tried in vain to kindle his poetic flame, I put the following lines down:—

*"Steh ich in finst'rer Nacht
Einsam auf kalter Wacht,
Gedenk ich dein,
Herzliebchen mein."*

It only afterwards dawned on me that we were still in August. He thought that was fine (I didn't), and copied it was. That very letter contained a considerable number of kisses, allusions to heavenly eyes, a warm-beating heart, sun-kissed locks and dainty hands. Nightingales were singing and chirping throughout the letter; it

was simply an orgy of loving and tender thoughts, and if dear Rösti would have been near me that evening, I would have forgotten myself, sergeant or no sergeant. Rösti, on copying it, actually had a tear in his eye; but I made him use the blotter. Rösti must never, never know that tears disgraced this martial face; the weeping must be left to women.

That letter did it. I was convinced beforehand that it would. I poured into it the feeling of my own lonely heart; it would have softened even a heart of stone. For the first time since our mutual conspiracy, the sergeant showed me the reply. There it was, in simple, affectionate language. She told him that she loved him, and that she had told her mother all about it, and that he may call. Needless to say that I dined that night at the canteen, in full view of my comrades, with the sergeant, and more than one bottle was carried away from the table; and if it would have lasted much longer, I, too, would have been carried from the table. Owing to the fact that the sergeant was now allowed to call, my job as writer came to an end, but many a pleasant evening I spent with Rösti, and what was the subject of our conversation I need hardly mention. When the day of our parting dawned, he told me that I would get that very day my calling-up papers for the non-commissioned officer's course, and so it happened. Now to this day, I do not know whether I achieved this with my pen or through the merits of my military achievements. "Good luck!" I shouted to Sergeant Rösti, when he left the barracks; "and when is the wedding to be?"

4 Years later. November, 1914.

On the Route Porrentruy — Bonfol, 11 p.m.

Tramp, tramp, tramp—through nearly a foot of snow a long column of tired soldiers wended their way towards the frontier. It was a bitterly cold night and snowing hard; not a sound could be heard, only in the distance the muffled roar of heavy guns in action. Over there, too, columns were marching, marching towards death; over there war, war to the bitter end. Here, still peace — still hope to see those from whom one parted only a few months ago; but for how long?

Perhaps to-morrow the furies of war would be let loose. . . .

Tramp, tramp, tramp — onwards with heavy loads, with a heavy heart. Here and there a groan, a cough, perhaps even a half-uttered oath, suppressed in order not to break the awful stillness of the night. An icy cold wind lashed the snow into reddened faces, frozen fingers convulsively gripped the snow-covered rifles. To-morrow, perhaps, that weapon might stand in good stead. Suddenly a loud challenge, "Who goes there?" Some sharp commands; our column has come to a standstill. There was some conversation going on in front. Nobody cared — sleep, sleep — is all that was wanted; and yet it must not be. Snow-clad soldiers are passing us now from the opposite directions. No words are exchanged; it looks like a long procession of ghosts. Suddenly they stop, too. I enquire to which unit they belong, and was told that they were the 2nd company of the 3rd Battalion, being relieved from the frontier outward posts. This was the battalion and company to which Sergeant Rösti belonged. "Is Sergeant Rösti with you?" I enquired of one of the men. "Not sergeant," he replied, "but sergeant-major now"; and down the line went a tired whisper of the name of my old sergeant. Out of the darkness his countenance suddenly appeared. "Hallo, sergeant-major!" I shouted, in a half loud voice. "Here Corporal St." A glance, a handshake. "How is Rösti?" I enquired, half-fearing that it might awaken unpleasant memories. "Fine she is, and so are the two boys. "Glad to hear it," I said. Then a command. Onwards — tramp, tramp, tramp — a parting handshake, a glance, and he was gone; but now a feeling of gladness and of joy overcame me. The darkness of the night seemed to me less apparent. There was just a glimmer of light piercing through the wall of heavy snowflakes. The thought that I had given Rösti to the sergeant and two strapping boys to my country, made me feel glad. Surely, I reasoned with myself, never before had I taken up my pen in a nobler cause. That day, on snatching a few hours sleep, I dreamed again of Rösti and her bonny boys. . . .