

The "Swiss Observer" 45 Yars old

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER

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THE "SWISS OBSERVER" 45 YEARS OLD

Many were the changes brought about by the first world war. Life had been easy and pleasant for the Swiss living in England during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There was plenty of work for anyone who cared to settle here, and the relationship between the two countries was one of friendship and mutual respect. During the war the attitude changed. An ever-influential press became hostile towards aliens. The reputation of the Swiss underwent a change, and many were suspected of being pro-German. This attitude of the press caused alarm in the Colony as well as to the authorities at home. From a report by Dr. A. Laett we learn that "when the tension was at its worst in summer 1916, one of the founders of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique (1914), Professor Georges Bonnard, of Lausanne, gave a lecture in London on the aims and purposes of the new patriotic society which had done splendid work in removing misunderstandings between the Swiss and various linguistic regions. Never had the Swiss point of view been more forcibly expressed than by that former "Auslandschweizer" from Russia, Carl Spitteler, the poet. He seemed to speak out what every Swiss in England felt, too. And more than 260 present at Prof. Bonnard's lecture decided at once to join the N.S.H. and constitute the London Group. Its main purpose was to strengthen the ties of national brotherhood inside the Swiss Colony, and to re-establish the old Anglo-Swiss friendship, by means of better mutual information of the press in both countries".

On 1st April 1917, Dr. A. Laett took up his work as Secretary of the N.S.H. in London. It was two-way traffic all along. The Colony wanted reliable information about happenings in Switzerland. The N.S.H. at home wanted Dr. Laett to provide the English press with factual information about Switzerland, on her neutrality, the Red Cross in Geneva and many other subjects of vital importance. There is no doubt that the work done and the results achieved were of far-reaching consequence, and the activities of the London Group of the N.S.H. were highly praised and held up as an example to other Colonies.

It was in 1919 that a few influential members of the N.S.H. and the City Swiss Club — in the words of Dr. Laett — "gathered round Mr. Paul F. Boehringer of the Frederick Printing Company and launched the project of a new paper for the whole Swiss Colony in Great Britain". There had been an attempt at running a Colony paper before, Mr. Scheidegger's very small "Gruetli", which, however, had never been successful. Mr. Boehringer could give the necessary financial backing. Dr. A. Laett was invited to be the first Editor. He accepted in an honorary capacity as he could easily combine the editor-

ship with his secretarial work for the N.S.H. But soon afterwards he was asked to become London Editor of the "Anglo-Swiss Review", the official organ of the British Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland. This meant relinquishing his post as Editor of the S.O. Dr. A. Lang and Dr. H. W. Egli followed Dr. Laett as Editors of the "Swiss Observer" in the 'twenties. It was in 1929 that Mr. Boehringer proposed a new man who was to edit the S.O. successfully for three decades and more — Alfred Stauffer. When he took it on, the S.O. was a mere child. It was left to Fred Stauffer to guide it through its adolescence.

All during the second world war, the "Swiss Observer" appeared regularly, though it changed from a weekly to a fortnightly paper and, like British dailies and periodicals, reduced its format. It was a struggle to keep going. The difficulties the Editor and Publishers faced were considerable, but thanks to their idealism and tenacity and the support of the Colony the "Swiss Observer" survived.

Soon after the war, the paper's founder, Mr. Paul F. Boehringer, died (6th April 1948). His son Oscar took over the Frederick Printing Company and the publishing of the S.O. He, like his father before him, has made sacrifices to ensure the paper's success. Early in 1961, the faithful "ST." retired from his editorship after thirty-two years of sterling service. A young Vaudois journalist, Pierre Hofstetter, took over for a short year. Then Fred Stauffer came back for a few months until the present Editor took up her duties.

* * *

I don't know where the custom of celebrating a birthday originated. I have always felt that there is little merit in reaching a certain age, be it 20 (or 21), 50 or 80. And yet, it may be as good a time as any to reflect on life in general once a year. There is something to be said for counting one's blessings; one feels humbly grateful and strives to be more deserving of God's kindness in the future. It is somewhat different for a paper. The years come and go and there is nothing salutary in reflecting once a year — it sounds a little bit too much like blowing one's own trumpet. So it is usually only the silver and golden jubilees and, more rarely, anniversaries of 75 or 100 years which are accentuated.

Obviously, the smaller the paper, the more significance attaches to every year successfully accomplished. It was therefore quite natural that the Fortieth Anniversary issue of the "Swiss Observer" on 26th June 1959 was extended to thirty-two pages and published on art paper. Congratulatory messages from many personalities in the

Colony, Switzerland and abroad, historic reflections and well-deserved tributes to the founder and the Editor (who had then accomplished thirty years of editorship) made up a large part of the issue.

If we mark the forty-fifth anniversary with nothing more than a few words, it is not from lack of gratitude or want of respect. Nobody is more conscious than I of what we owe to the men who have made the S.O. what it is. Since I took over the editorship I am even more aware of their achievements. I feel that any special celebration would involve a pat on my own back which I hardly deserve after a mere two years of trying to cope with a difficult task. And, even more importantly, any extra expense to produce an enlarged issue would not be justified as long as the financial position of the S.O. is as precarious as at the moment.

IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF VALAIS

On 11th May, the Cantonal Parliament of the Valais met for the ordinary spring session in Sion. After the traditional Mass at the Cathedral of the town, the 130 Councillors assembled in the Council Chamber. Grossrat Alfred Escher, the son of the late Federal Councillor, was elected President of the Council; the new Vice-President is Councillor Aloys Copt. The new President of the Cantonal Government is Councillor of State Oscar Schnyder, (Vice-President: Mr. Marius Lampert).

The cantonal accounts for 1963 showed a deficit of well over 3½ million francs which brought the state debt to 115 million francs. The budget for 1964 expects a deficit of Fr.10,765,000.—.

Credits granted or proposed include 6 million francs towards the road of the Great St. Bernard, 7½ million francs for improvements in the two communes of Bagnes and Ayent, 13.5 million francs for the renovation of the Kollegium at Brigue, which was 300 years old last year, 16½ million francs for new school and hospital buildings. Over Fr.300,000.— were granted towards helping the typhoid victims of Zermatt. Incidentally, the electorate of Zermatt voted a five-million grant for sanitary and water purification installations. The citizens of Zermatt rejected by 200 to 82 a proposed scheme to erect an electricity plant at "Blatten" to be worked in conjunction with the "Grande Dixence", a project which would have cost 20 million francs. A new solution will now have to be found. A demand for a credit of 3 million francs to cover the deficit expected on the winter Olympic Games to be held in the Valais in 1968 was rejected by the electorate in December. At the same poll, the new Bill regarding the fire police was rejected as well as a proposal for an electronic computer for the cantonal administration.

The above-mentioned credits for the "Kollegium" and various school building projects were accepted by the electorate in mid-March. In the French-speaking part of the Valais, however, practically all communes rejected the proposal. The Federal Tribunal in Lausanne was approached by the minorities, and its findings caused great surprise: as several projects had been taken together and a global credit of 30 million francs had been asked for, it was considered that the individual citizen was unable to express his will clearly, and the polling was therefore ruled invalid. In this connection, readers may recall the article on "Administration in Switzerland" in the issue of 10th April, in which Dr. A. Roetheli explained the functions of the Federal Tribunal.

But I am an optimist and believe that our friends will once again rally and give their support unstintingly and even more generously than hitherto. A faithful reader recently sent a cheque for £10 by way of a birthday gift, asking me to publish his anonymous present as a challenge to be taken up by others. If I do his bidding now it is not as Editor, but as a reader of thirty-two years' standing, convinced of the important and useful function of the "Swiss Observer" as the Colony's paper.

"Ideals are precious things to be nurtured and cherished by care and understanding" (Geoffrey Tier). With my care and your understanding I am confident the "Swiss Observer" will continue successfully on the road to the Golden Jubilee, its quality improved, its finances strengthened and its reputation unimpaired. That will be a time to celebrate.

Mariann.

The latest project before the Valais Parliament is that of the Rawil Tunnel which would connect the Canton with Berne. The Valais has now a special office for town and country planning. Two projects are at present being studied, regional planning of the Goms and the Lower Valais from St. Maurice to the Lake of Geneva.

At present, the Canton counts 185 industrial undertakings employing about 11,000 workers. 18% are foreigners. Great efforts are being made to develop industrialisation.

A number of important installations were inaugurated last year. It began with the new oil refineries of Collombey-Muraz last summer. A few weeks later, the new cantonal sports centre at Ovronnaz was opened. At the end of August, the enlarged power plant of the Lizerne and the Morge rivers was inaugurated. The 51-million project was built in six years and differs from the usual type of hydro-electric power plants in as much as it has neither a dam nor an artificial lake.

The power plant of Entremont at the foot of the entrance of the St. Bernard road tunnel was inaugurated early in September. A few weeks later, the refineries of Collombey-Muraz started production. The pipeline leads from Genoa over a distance of 400 km., 58 of which are on Swiss soil, through the Aosta Valley, the new St. Bernard Tunnel, via Martigny to Collombey. Up to three million tons of crude oil can be dealt with per annum, and 400 people are employed.

Several projects to utilize water power are being studied, both for the upper and the lower Valais.

News of disaster has come from the Valais almost every month. First, there were the four mountaineers, two Germans and two Swiss, who lost their lives on the Matterhorn. At the end of December, there was a mountain slide between Fully and Saillon, causing a great deal of damage. In January, there was a big fire which destroyed several homes and barns in the little village of Mollens, and a fortnight later, a building firm at Ardon near Sion went up in flames. In February, there was another fire at Salgesch, and in March there was an under-water landslide at St. Gingolph, which destroyed the landing stage. In a mountaineering accident on the Dent d'Hérens, helicopters were used to transport the victims. Incidentally, aircraft equipped with water tanks are to be used in the fighting of forest fires. At the end of March, there was another landslide on the road from Trois-Torrents to Morgins. At the same time, several avalanches