

Editor's farewell

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EDITOR'S FAREWELL

It is well past midnight. I have written since breakfast in order to have all "copy" ready by to-morrow morning. I have left the last item till the end — cowardly procrastination, for I feel a little nostalgic now the moment has come to write my farewell as the paper's Editor.

It will come as a surprise to most of my readers, and in a way I am still somewhat astonished myself; for as recently as April I had no inkling that I should be taking leave of my readers so soon.

I have long been concerned about the future of the S.O., realising increasingly that it would become more and more difficult to find a successor one day, able and qualified, and willing to run the paper on a shoestring, to be not only Editor and P.R.O., but secretary, typist and office boy as well, and all that at no more than modest remuneration. I recognised that the financial structure would have to be altered to allow for an assistant and that we should never find a successor at all unless this was done. But how to get more revenue, more subscribers, more advertisers?

At the same time I became aware that in spite of my robust health, the long days, short nights and very brief holidays were beginning to tell. I found it difficult at times to muster enough patience and optimism to cope with news summaries, printers' deadlines, to placate grumbling subscribers and to deal with complex advertising problems. Last autumn, I asked the Advisory Council to study the possibility of an assistant and to explore new sources of revenue.

By a stroke of good luck, a young journalist came forward, willing to take on the job. I knew that such an opportunity would not come again so soon, and saw in a sudden flash of realisation that the young man had to be given the full responsibility and that this was the moment for me to retire.

Nevertheless, it was not an easy decision. I can honestly say that, on the whole, I love my work. Just how much I shall miss it, has become clear during the past few weeks when I wrote certain regular features for the last time. And now I have to write what somehow seems the most difficult piece of writing I have ever had to compile.

First of all, I should like to assure my many readers, advertisers, societies, friends and supporters that Mr. Pierre-Michel Béguin whom the Council have appointed Editor as from the middle of August, is truly anxious to make a success of his job. I firmly believe he will succeed if he is given the same trust, encouragement and support which I have been granted all along. As his appointment will be on a different basis, the Council will have to organise the necessary help and reconsider the financial structure. I am willing to give

a hand during the transition period and to help Mr. Béguin find his way in the maze of Colony activities and complex set-ups of patriotic groups and interests. But I have faith based on my own experience that there, too, he will be shown patience and forbearance as well as receive valuable help. From your next issue onward, P.M.B. will replace MM as Editor, although you will see my initials also sometimes in the future, because I have been asked to continue reporting on special questions concerning the Swiss Abroad and to contribute occasional articles. But all my responsibility ceases, and the last thing I want is to hover in the background like some kind of elder statesman. I wish Mr Béguin every good fortune in all his endeavours to carry the S.O. through to its Golden Jubilee next year and to a prosperous period beyond.

* * *

I have often been asked how I came to be the Editor. How did it all start? I began writing at about 10, and my first contributions were published on the women's page of a well-known Swiss illustrated weekly when I was 14. That was when I was still at the *Mädchengymnasium* in Basle. By then I had several stories in my desk, one novel and one thriller. Another story was added when I was at the finishing school near Neuchâtel and one when I learned Dante's language in Italy. But as those two were written in French and Italian respectively, they were not worth keeping and have since been destroyed. I blush when I think of my youthful conceit at that time!

In 1932, I came to England — I was 18 then — and I met my husband Walter Meier at the City Swiss Club Annual Banquet and Ball that November. That is when I wrote a poem (in German) and my first article (in English) for the "Swiss Observer". I returned to Basle, and two years later, we were married. The 26 years beginning in June 1935 were the finest of my life, even though they included the war years spent in London. We were blissfully happy, had no worries and were fortunate in bringing up four children. My husband urged me to continue writing and introduced to me many responsible activities in which he was engaged in the Swiss community. That is where I began to acquire my experience with Colony work. I continued to study English and attended two speakers' schools. During the war, I worked for a time at the Swiss Benevolent Society, looking after unmarried mothers and mentally unstable girls. Many times — like other Swiss houses — our home served the purpose for which the Swiss hostel was later created. I was elected to a number of committees, helped with ladies' activities at the S.M.S., the Church and later the Hostel, and finally, I became President of the Swiss Welfare Office. All the time



I went on writing for the S.O., especially the S.B.S. reports for 19 years. I also wrote articles and contributed regularly to the "Echo". I compiled a booklet on Chinese Art and wrote a potted history of the Associated Country Women of the World, on whose London Council I have represented Switzerland for over 30 years and on whose journal's editorial committee I learned a lot about magazine publishing. In the early 'fifties, I was approached by a London publisher to write a book. "The Young Traveller in Switzerland" appeared in three editions in the U.K., was adapted for the American market and translated into Danish, Japanese, Hebrew and Portuguese.

And then, in October 1961, my life changed when my husband died of cancer at 53. Was it surprising that the Advisory Council offered me the editorship of the S.O., taking into consideration my experience? It may have been obvious to them, but it certainly was surprising to me. I shall never forget the day when Fred Stauffer told me of their proposal. He had retired after 32 years of loyal service; how could I ever become an adequate successor? Besides, I knew of considerable opposition to any woman in such a job.

After a sleepless night and much thinking, I decided not to take it, not least because I still had two children at home. But when I faced the Council a few weeks later, my diffidence was boldly brushed aside and I found myself agreeing to a trial period of six months. And I have been trying ever since!

By now I feel I am practically composing my own obituary, when all I really wanted was to give you the background to my ever becoming Editor. You know that now, just as you are aware of the circumstances which prompt me to retire.

I must confess that the thought of no more battles with the "Yellow Peril" (as the daffodil-coloured ATS daily news

sheets are called in my home), of relaxed week-ends, more sleep and proper holidays, no more work accompanying me wherever I go, is an attractive one. I shall continue to write as free-lance, to lecture on Switzerland (a job I love, but have had to refuse so often for lack of time), and perhaps I shall even polish my novel and my thriller. But I shall have more time for my home, family and friends, music and other pastimes.

If ever I do write my autobiography, a thing I have often been asked to do, my 7½ years as Editor of the "Swiss Observer" will fill a long and vital chapter. I should be able to talk of all the many friends I made among my readers, of all the kindness and ready help I received from the Publishers, in particular Oscar Boehringer, and the late Fred Stauffer, both of whom gave me much valuable counsel. I should describe the happy co-operation which has at all time existed with members of the Frederick Printing Company's staff, some of whom have been in their service for decades, but treated me, the newcomer, with nothing but respect and useful advice. I should write of my hopes and disappointments, my mis-

takes and failures, and perhaps enumerate with some pride a few successes — if I may be permitted to call them that. I should recall many sad and comic incidents, and I should not fail to express gratitude for all the encouragement and generosity of so many of my readers and advertisers, the backing of the Advisory Council, the active interest of the Embassy and Consulates, the welcoming ever affectionate acceptance by societies and organisations.

My ideals were to do a job to the best of my ability, to continue to serve my readers in particular and the Swiss community in general in the manner I had been taught by my father and my husband. If, through my work, I have helped in a small way my country and Anglo-Swiss relations, I am content. Ideals are like the stars. Though we may never reach them, we chart our course by them in sunshine, in clouds, in fog and storms. I have tried just that.

Thank you, and God bless the S.O. and all who have anything to do with it now and in the future.

Mariann Meier.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

It is with much regret that the Publisher and the Council have agreed to accept the resignation of Mrs. M. Meier from the Editorship of the "Swiss Observer". After a very impressive seven years at the helm of our paper she now wishes to enjoy a well-deserved rest from printers' deadlines. She began her association with the "Swiss Observer" at the tender age of eighteen years and she will continue her support of the Colony's paper in the future with the same keen interest as she has always shewn in the past.

For technical reasons the handing over to the new Editor is unfortunately taking place when most of the "Swiss Observer" Council members are on holiday. The Council and the Publisher are anxious to express due appreciation to Mrs. Meier for her untiring efforts, and this will be done more adequately in a subsequent issue.

In the meanwhile they wish her a happy and well-deserved holiday and to the new Editor the best of luck in his responsible work.

OFB

NO MORE PRINCELY POSTAL SERVICES

The Swiss postal service, generally thought to be one of the best in the world, is just 120 years old.

It was in June 1849 that the law enabling the Federal Government to run a nation-wide postal service was passed.

The law put into practical effect the principle of the federal postal monopoly already included in the new Federal Constitution adopted in the previous year, and it ended more than a dozen separate postal services and scales of charges within the borders of Switzerland.

As elsewhere, the first postal services on Swiss territory were run by princes and ruling families but with the rise of commerce they were extended by private arrangements.

The merchants of St. Gall, for instance, had a regular courier link with Nuremberg in Germany more than five centuries ago and after they started up another one with Lyons, in France.

Most Cantons preferred to let private interests run their services, in return for a payment.

In Berne, Beat von Fischer-Reichenbach was granted a postal monopoly for a twenty-year period with a promise that his descendants would be given special consideration. They were—the von Fischer family ran postal services for two centuries.

Beat von Fischer built up an efficient postal system that extended well beyond the Bernese and even the Swiss boundaries, by making agreements with other cantons and foreign states for delivery and transit of mail.

The beginning of the end came for the von Fischer postal empire with the arrival of the French-run Helvetic Republic.

When the Republic fell, the Cantons got their powers back, although Berne let the von Fischers go on running their service until 1832.

In 1847 there were 17 different cantonal postal authorities while in another Canton, Schaffhausen, the service was actually part of the German postal system run by the Princes of Thurn and Taxis.

Romantic looking relics of those days can be admired in the PTT Museum in Berne postmen's elaborate and handsome badges, posthorns, post-coaches and old letter boxes.

But to anyone who wanted to send a letter, the clash of different systems must have been irritating. To have a letter conveyed from Geneva to Zurich sometimes cost more than to send one abroad.

There, was not even a standard rate for inland items. As each little administration calculated—or miscalculated—its transit charge, the progress of a letter across Switzerland could be painfully slow.

Remote places were neglected, because they did not pay postally. They got their post at irregular intervals and recipients of registered letters sometimes had to fetch them from post offices several hours away.

Postal unity was also not helped by the fact that there were nearly 300 different coins, belonging to several different money systems, in circulation. Postmen on horseback would have to negotiate with some of the 400 customs posts and road and bridge tollhouses.

The chaotic situation was remedied

by the Federal takeover of postal services, though the Cantons had to be compensated for their lost revenue.

At that time there were about 1,500 post offices throughout Switzerland; now there are more than 4,000, many of them offering elaborate services their fore-runners could never have dreamed of.

In 1849 the romantic-looking but uncomfortable horse-drawn post coaches carried nearly half a million passengers. Their successors, the neat and shiny postal coaches, now convey more than 14 million people a year.

And now the PTT is preparing to enter an age of mechanisation and electronic control, of telecommunications assured by satellite. Beat von Fischer would probably have been all for it.

("Weekly Tribune" Geneva)

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF YOUTH ORCHESTRAS

On 18th August, twelve leading youth symphony orchestras from nine different countries will arrive at St. Moritz in order to participate in the first international youth orchestra festival. The festival will start on the following morning at 11.30 a.m. in the concert auditorium especially constructed for this purpose. An alpine horn blower is to welcome the young musicians at the auditorium which has a capacity of 2,000 seats. The ceremony will start with a flourish especially composed for the festival. It will be played by the appropriate members of all participating orchestras (a total of 36 trumpets, 44 bugles, 26 trombones, 8 tubas, 8 drums with 8 cymbals, altogether 130 musicians) and conducted by the festival's musical director, Blyth Major.

(S.N.T.O.)