

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

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NEUE ZUERCHER ZEITUNG.

In the intellectual life of German-speaking Europe, no less than in banking and commercial circles, there are few publications wielding greater influence and authority than the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung"; it holds an outstanding position in the realm of journalism.

The reputation of the N.Z.Z. is not limited to Switzerland; it has its admirers in many other countries including Great Britain. One of these is Professor Elizabeth Wiskemann of Edinburgh University, who has set herself the task of studying the history and development of the paper from its foundation nearly 180 years ago down to the present day. The result of her researches is embodied in a book, "A Great Swiss Newspaper, the Story of the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*", now being published by the Oxford University Press, price 18s. net, a handsome volume of 90 large-size pages with a number of illustrations and facsimiles of the journal's front page at various periods of its existence.

The author is well qualified to write a book of this kind. She is Professor of International Relations at the University of Edinburgh and served as Press Attaché to the British Legation in Berne during the last war. She displays a thorough knowledge of her subject and a deep and sympathetic understanding of the problems which beset the Swiss Press, especially during the war years.

The N.Z.Z. made its first appearance in 1780, five years before the London "Times". Its name was then *Zuercher Zeitung* and it consisted of a half-sheet published twice weekly. The owners, whose name appeared on the front page, were Orell, Gessner, Fuessli & Co., and the first editor was J. H. Fuessli, younger cousin of that other J. H. Fuessli who emigrated to England to become famous as a painter and a leading member of the Royal Academy under the name of Henry Fuseli.

The circulation of the Z.Z. was between 800 and 1,100 copies; in 1820 it had dropped to 419. It was then decided to transform the paper into the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* and to issue it three times weekly. The rebirth of the paper was marked by the arrival on its staff of P. Usteri, another famous son of Zurich who, until his death in 1831, edited the N.Z.Z., with Fuessli in control of foreign news. Fuessli died a year later and was followed as editor by H. Escher, soon to be appointed Professor of Law at the newly founded University of Zurich. In these early days, under the direction of brilliant men such as these, the foundations were laid of what was to become one of the finest publications of its kind.

Further changes took place: In 1843 daily publication was adopted, in 1858 a literary section (feuilleton) was added and larger folio pages used. In 1868 the N.Z.Z. was taken over by a new company, in 1869 it appeared twice daily and from 1894 three times daily; in 1946 the type was changed from Gothic to Latin. During the general strike in 1918 the paper appeared under the name "Burgerliche Presse Zuerichs."

The news service in those early days of slow communications was adequate and reliable. In the first number, back in 1780, the editor had his little joke when he wrote "Es wird uns nicht moeglich sein, die Weltbegebenheiten früher anzuzeigen, als sie geschehen

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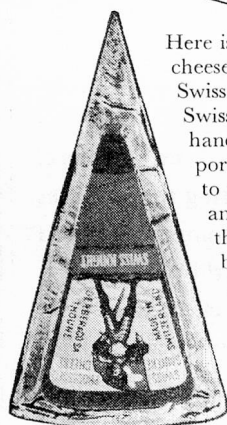
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sind". Actually it took eight days to make known the storming of the Bastille and nine days before the outcome of the battle of Waterloo could be published.

The files of the N.Z.Z. represent, in fact, a running commentary, as it were, on the events that have made history from the time of the French Revolution to the present day.

The two world wars created enormous difficulties for a paper which, while observing neutrality, meant to uphold freedom of opinion and respect for human rights. An interesting sidelight on the N.Z.Z.'s impartiality during the 1914/18 war is given by the complaints that were received from both Germany and France.

When Hitler came into power and the persecution of the Jews began, the N.Z.Z. stood up gallantly against the totalitarian creed and the abuses of the Nazi regime. The uncompromising attitude it consistently maintained aroused the wrath of the German Government and in 1933 the offending newspaper was banned for a while. The N.Z.Z. realized from the beginning that Hitler was more dangerous than Mussolini or Stalin and that the Nazi doctrine offered the most direct challenge there had ever been to the principles held by decent, liberal-minded people. From this conclusion it never deviated. As the author puts it: "In some ways the years from 1932 to 1945 were the heroic period of the paper."

The second world-war brought with it problems and difficulties far more acute than those of the 1914 conflict. Placed between the wish for a free Press and the necessity to comply with the military censorship, its editor and staff were subjected to considerable strain. They realized, however, that no amount of servility would save Switzerland from a German invasion if Hitler thought it worth while. They therefore pursued their policy of candour, truth and independence much to the annoyance of the Nazis and the apprehensions of the Swiss authorities themselves. Meantime, in 1940, the paper's Berlin correspondent was expelled from the Reich.

To the Swiss residing in Great Britain, the Egli incident in 1940 will no doubt be of particular interest. Dr. Egli, well known in the London colony and at one time editor of the "Swiss Observer", is the London correspondent of the N.Z.Z., and as such visited Coventry and Birmingham to observe the effect of the German air attacks. His report, outspoken, critical and deprecating, was duly published. The Swiss censorship intervened, but it was too late — the harm, if any, was done. In Germany Dr. Egli's account provoked a howl of rage and the German Press indulged in an orgy of abuse and threats, directed against the offending newspaper and the Swiss Government. It is probable that the Egli report was submitted to the Fuehrer and that subsequent issues of the N.Z.Z. found their way into his lair. Fortunately the affair blew over and the N.Z.Z. was able to continue its mission of propagating the truth.

A good newspaper not only reflects public opinion, it also moulds it. This the N.Z.Z. has done most effectively throughout the many years of its life. It was fortunate in its editors and staff, men of great ability and force of character.

Prof. Wiskemann has rendered the Swiss Press a signal service by giving the English-speaking reader an insight into the working of a paper such as the N.Z.Z. Her well-written, interesting book deserves high praise and is warmly commended.

J.J.F.S.