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Editorial...

Somewhere between the letters k and m it was, that she got lost reciting the alphabet. The Pre-school must have recommended the 'little artists' learn to memorise the sequence of the alphabet, I thought to myself as I smiled on our four and a half year old Granddaughter.

At that moment the thought flashed through my mind what a wonderful asset we have in the written word.

What a difference it must have made to the lives of people 'of old', once they mastered the written word.

Isn't it hard for us, in this age of general schooling and extensive education for the masses, to imagine how restricted daily living would

have been in the days when the art of writing was reserved for the wealthy and the specially-educated only !? Don't we now take it for granted, that everyone can read and write, that we receive our daily newspaper, that we can choose from a multitude of books of all subjects, that some of us can read the computer screens all day if so desired and that most of the worlds people are literate and can put 'pen to paper' whenever they feel like it or there is a need to ? For a lot of people as for myself, and I presume for you as well, books can be treasured friends. It is good to know that despite the computer invasion, the love for all manner of books remains with people. Even after a lifetime of

reading we can remember the contents of childhood books and we stay conscious of the imagination such books created within us. Imaginations and emotions feed on books, they are the source of most films and documentaries, as biographies they describe the lives of people famous and in-famous and have done so since books became available. Science, technology, medicine, the arts as well as religion have grown and expanded with the help of the written word, the books of knowledge.

Our local Primary school held a book week recently, so was I informed by our Grandchildren attending there. At the same time the Swiss-news on short wave radio and on Internet contained a very interesting report on the recent International book fair held in Geneva.

A most popular event it must have been with thousands of local Swiss and foreign visitors attending.

It appears that this year's guest of honour was Germany and I found out that this was appropriate in more ways than one.

The radio news informed me that Germany with a potential market of 100 million readers is the biggest publisher of books in the world and that Switzerland, (sharing the same written language), receives one quarter of all books Germany exports.

This year the German nation is celebrating and remembering the birth of Johann Gutenberg around the year 1400. This most famous son of the German nation, Switzerland's neighbour to the north, became the inventor of the printing press, making use of 'movable type' to print with hand-set-type cast in molds. The first major book printed in movable type was the so called Gutenberg Bible in 1456. Gutenberg's innovations simplified bookproduction and made it economically feasible and relatively easy. 180 Bibles were produced by the publisher Gutenberg in Mainz/Germany, and a mere 49 are known to still exist world wide. Four of these are known to be held by two libraries in Moscow and 13 in different libraries of USA. Recently a university in Tokyo/Japan has purchased a Gutenberg Bible from a vendor in California for several million Dollars.

Two years ago Switzerland was

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guest of honour at the Frankfurt book fair in Germany.

Book fairs are celebrations of cultural events and I would have loved to have been one of the thousands visiting Geneva recently, (the town where nearby I spent one year of learning French and nursing a considerable amount of homesickness). Never mind I say to myself, here in New Zealand our adoptive country, we have an abundance of libraries with books, magazines and newspapers available to satisfy the desire for information, entertainment and education. Most of us if not all of us had the opportunity to learn the art of reading and writing and thereby enriching our lives. Let us be grateful for these assets and let us make use of them to ennoble the human spirit.

President's Message

Over the past few months, all the Clubs around New Zealand have had one particular function in common - the Annual General Meeting.

Attendance at meetings varied, but on the whole, when reading Clubs' AGM reports, it seems that members are happy with the way committees are organising and running things. At most of the AGM's there were a few changes to committees, some of which I'd like to mention here.

In Auckland, the position of Secretary has passed from Albert Ryter to Trudi Fill. Thank you, Albert, for your contribution to the Society over the years, especially in the form of some very well written articles to the Helvetia. And Edi Brändli, who set up our Website and also looked after the Club's membership list, is moving to Australia shortly, so new Treasurer, Heinz Matsysik, will now keep the Society up to date with the Club's membership details, ensuring that no one misses out on receiving their Helvetia. To Edi and family, good luck on your big move.

At Hamilton's AGM the main change was the 'retirement' of the Rifle-master, Bill Miles, along with one new Committee member being elected.

And as Taranaki Club recently reported, the low turnout at their AGM was a sign that things must be running smoothly or more people would have attended their meeting! So here, the status quo will remain for a further year.

But Wellington's AGM brought about

a number of changes, reporting three departures from their committee, and three new members.

As well, this "inaugural function" took place just one week after taking over the new Club House, which also seemed to help attract a very high attendance to an AGM!

My congratulations to the Wellington Club on both the purchase of your new Club House, and also to the many members who helped make it happen. A lot of work and effort was put into this project, and I hope that both current and future members will all be able to enjoy the Club's "new home" for very many years to come.

By the time this Helvetia reaches your mailboxes, we will be only a few days away from our Society AGM being held in Auckland over Queen's Birthday Weekend, already marking three years since Hamilton Club "took over" the administration of the Society.

A reminder that all details regarding the weekend's programme and the agenda for the meeting on Sunday afternoon can be found on page three of last month's Helvetia (May Issue). Also included are the directions to both the "Swiss Farm" at Kaukapakapa, and the Alexandra Raceway Function Centre, where the Dinner and "Evening of Folklore" will take place.

Once again, I'd like to encourage as many people as possible to attend the AGM, as well as the Dinner, and look forward to meeting everyone there. If anyone has any queries and would like further information about the weekend; or is unable to attend the meeting and would like to submit a formal apology, please contact either myself; your Club representative; or Auckland Club members, Trudi Fill, Ph. (09) 376 4923, or Rolf Bertschi, Ph. (09) 444 2970.

Many of you will probably recall that last year we tried to put together a "Business Directory" - a list of Swiss businesses to issue to our members. Although we did receive a reasonable number of responses following several requests in the Helvetia, there were unfortunately still not sufficient to warrant the work and expense of compiling, printing and producing such list. However, although somewhat belatedly (for which I apologise), I would like to thank all those who made the effort to send information about their business to us. It is all being kept for future reference if necessary.

I have recently written to our new Ambassador at the Embassy in Wellington, Mrs Sylvie Matteucci, on behalf of the Society, to welcome her here to New Zealand.

In my letter, I also invited the Ambassador to become our Society's new Honorary Patron for the duration of her posting to New Zealand, a position which I am delighted to report she accepted.

Mrs Matteucci will also be attending and addressing our AGM on 4th June, so this will give members an ideal opportunity to meet our new Ambassador.

To everyone travelling to Auckland - please drive carefully and have an enjoyable and pleasant weekend.

My kind regards and best wishes to everyone, Beatrice.

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