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Autor: Meakin, Derek

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MRS. DALE : HAS THE B.B.C. GONE TOO FAR?

DEREK MEAKIN writes an open letter to SIR IAN JACOB, Director-General of the B.B.C.

Dear Sir Ian,

When Sir William Haley, your predecessor and one of my former colleagues, left the B.B.C. to become Editor of "The Times" he had the reputation of being one of the most criticised men in Britain. As you now know only too well yourself, one of the disadvantages of being the head of such a powerful organisation as the B.B.C. is that you become the butt of all those critics who insist that the B.B.C. can never be right.

I am not one of those individuals. I admire the B.B.C., but at the same time I, too, have a complaint — one which I believe merits your most serious consideration. It is made on behalf of those thousands of Swiss citizens living in Britain, and the many British people who themselves know and love Switzerland.

It concerns Mrs. Dale's Diary. This, as you know, is one of the most successful programmes the B.B.C. has ever broadcast. It is estimated to have a daily audience of 12 million listeners.

A few weeks ago a character joined Mrs. Dale's team — a Swiss girl called Trudi Bäume, who was in London to learn English and study art.

Sir Ian, the only thing that is Swiss about this girl is her name. Everything she has said and done up to now has been foreign to Swiss nature.

There are certain inherent characteristics which can be found in every Swiss man, woman and child.

Probably the most marked, so far as English visitors are concerned, is the amazing insistence on cleanliness. If any bus tickets, cigarette ends or spent matches are found on a Swiss street they have been dropped there by tourists. This is not an opinion, but a fact. Litter-louts are unknown among the Swiss.

I have yet to see a kitchen in Switzerland which is not a model of neatness and tidiness.

Then there is the Swiss reputation for hard work. It is not for nothing that Switzerland is the most prosperous country in Europe. It is not purely by luck that this little country has the world's soundest currency. This prosperity is due to one main factor — the almost unlimited capacity for work of the Swiss citizen.

Idlers and wasters like Trudi Bäume simply do not exist in Switzerland. It is no defence for the scriptwriters to say that Trudi is an exception. There are no exceptions to what I have written above. Trudi Bäume is a myth — but a myth which is doing irreparable harm to all the honest Swiss citizens in this country as well as to Switzerland generally.

By labelling this character "Swiss" the B.B.C. is libelling the many Swiss girls who are over here to learn English. They are greatly offended by this slur. They find it is a source of almost daily embarrassment. And things are going steadily from bad to worse.

Let us look at this character played by Daphne Maddox. Trudi is a silly, stupid girl, whose expensive tastes seem unlimited. She has a ridiculous accent, far removed from any Swiss accent I know,

which puts her on the wrong side of listeners from the start.

Despite all this, young Bob Dale is attracted by her and seems to think she is an intelligent creature. They start going out together, and Trudi makes an utter fool of herself by her goings on.

Then she has measles, and, mercifully, we hear no more of her for several days.

But soon she is back with a vengeance. Mrs. Isabel Fielding falls ill, and about the same time she is deserted by her maid. So Trudi volunteers to look after her.

One day Mrs. Dale and her daughter Gwen call to see how she is getting on and find the house upside down. The kitchen is in a terrible state. The sink is piled high with dishes, and no attempt has been made to clear up the mess.

We learn that Trudi hasn't the slightest idea how to look after a home. She cannot cook. She does not know how to light a fire. She is frightened of doing the shopping. The beds are not made, Mrs. Fielding has not been getting proper meals, and her son has to go out to do his homework as there is no comfort in the cheerless, fireless house.

Then Gwen decides to pay another call on conceited Trudi. The house is still in a filthy condition, but Trudi has the excuse that "it comes dirty very quickly".

While Gwen is there a call comes through from Trudi's boy friend, Hans, asking her to go and see him. What about sick Mrs. Fielding? Trudi is not worried. She will only be away two hours, she promises, and will bring something back with her for lunch.

That was at 9 a.m. By 12.30 there is still no sign of her and Mrs. Morgan vows: "When she comes back I'd give her what!"

Gwen spends the day clearing up the frightful mess at Mrs. Fielding's. There is so much to do she has not time to eat. When he arrives home from work at night, her husband David is naturally furious about Trudi.

Next we see Trudi standing with Bob in the drive and giggling away for all she is worth. "I had such a wonderful time, Bob", she says. "My friend took me to lunch in a nice restaurant . . . After lunch Hans wanted me to see some friends of his . . ."

David, his voice trembling with anger, interrupts all this to tell Trudi. "When you promise to look after someone who is ill you do not take the first opportunity to walk out on them."

Mrs. Dale tells us that "Trudi behaved very badly." Her husband remarks: "What a stupid girl Trudi is."

And so it goes on. Trudi, it seems, is always in the wrong, and as a result of her stupidity Swiss girls staying with families throughout Britain are having to suffer.

You may be interested to know, Sir Ian, that while the B.B.C. is slandering Switzerland in this manner the Société suisse de radiofusion is running a powerful campaign in favour of Britain's flood victims.

When Trudi Bäume was shocking the women of Britain by her disgusting conduct at Mrs. Fielding's, Roger Nordmann of Switzerland's "Chains du bonheur" was making an impassioned appeal to Swiss listeners to dial the number 11 on their telephones and asked the special operator to put such-and-such a sum on their telephone bill to help flood relief. This appeal was so effective that within two or three days an initial two million francs (£163,300) had been contributed, and more money was still pouring in.

I hope you will agree with me that Trudi has done enough damage. Cannot she be pushed over a cliff? Or be sent back home? Or be made to admit that in actual fact she is a Stateless person masquerading as a Swiss in order to excite sympathy.

I shudder to think what additional harm she can do if she is allowed to continue without check.

It seems to me that in this matter the writers of "Mrs. Dale's Diary" have gone a little too far. The picture they have succeeded in painting of this so-called Swiss girl, a picture to which they are adding day after day, is giving people in this country a totally wrong impression of what the Swiss are really like.

Yours sincerely,
Derek Meakin.

* * *

We have since heard, that the B.B.C. had no intention to cast a slur on our Swiss girls, and that this much discussed and fictional Trudi Bäume, will finally emerge in a more favourable light.

ED.

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