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FROM THE EDITOR'S WORKSHOP

When people ask me about my "staff", when I receive letters addressed to the "Advertising Director", the "Film Critic", the "T.V. Correspondent" and other interesting officials of the "Swiss Observer", I realize that most of my readers have little or no notion of what my editorship entails. Frankly, I myself had no idea either of what was involved in the making up and publishing of a paper, even of a fortnightly periodical like the Colony's official organ.

Perhaps the most important aspect of my work is the contact with the Colony, the close co-operation at which Mr. Stauffer, the previous Editor, was so good. He had patience, tact, a sense of humour and a lot of dedication. And now it is my turn, and I have to try and do a good job. But I have already found that to every unkind, impatient and unfair reader there are scores of friendly, understanding and approving readers, and many are the friends that I have had the privilege of making already in the short time of seventeen months. My work entails attending a good many meetings, dinners and other functions, I enjoy getting to know my readers and I find it rewarding to study the wishes of the Societies. I have met with much kindness, and this has made it easier for me to find my way in this maelstrom of excitement, worry, hope, delight and despair which is the production of the S.O.

My first concern is to have "copy" available in good time for each issue. Not that there is any lack of it — on the contrary — the difficulty is to get it ready. The news reaches me in thick wads of yellow sheets from the Agence Télégraphique Suisse three times a week. The news sheets are issued daily by the agency and contain all the local, regional and national happenings anywhere in Switzerland. It is a phantastic mixture of parliamentary decisions, honour awards, weather forecasts, new appointments, crimes, deaths, accidents, festivals, the bank rate, art, international agreements, foreign policy, jubilees, scientific discoveries and new exotic animals at a zoo.

These sheets (they are known as the "yellow peril" in my home) have to be sorted out according to subjects. This is a somewhat complicated business — every available chair, table, desk and the whole floor of my work room at home are used as depositories — before the papers are finally put away into some fifty classified files, to be taken out again when I want to write an article on a particular subject. Then there are the papers and magazines to read, dozens of them, and after the reading and sorting comes the writing. Of course, most news reaches me in German and French, so it means re-writing it in English, and some of the specialised expressions flummox me — take "Leichtbenzinspaltanlage" or "Hochleistungselektronenmikroskop", "Hubschrauber", "Güterzusammenlegung", "Rettungsflugwacht", just to mention a few. I have to consult experts, dictionaries, reference books, until I have what I want. Some of the articles of a political or economic nature take me the best part of a day to compile and type. The easiest thing is to write a report on a social occasion or a meeting, and I do that immediately — sometimes in bed late at night — in order to convey as much as possible of the atmosphere as long as I am still under the influence of it myself. It could mean a concert, an annual meeting, a dinner, a garden party all in a row, and this shows not only how important it is to bring a new light to bear on each individual "do" and not to have them all tarred with the same brush, but also how many late nights are involved.

Luckily, I enjoy this side of my work very much indeed and my rude health stands me in good stead.

Most of the writing I do at home in comfort and at my own convenience and often for hours at a stretch. I am however, quite attached to my little office in the City, kindly put at the disposal of the S.O. by Frederick Printing Company, with its huge built-in desk, and shelves of bound volumes of forty-odd years of "Swiss Observers" and the gay Swiss posters and calendars on the walls.

When articles and reports, my own or other people's, are ready I hand them to the compositors' shop. Ten days before publication the last of the "copy" must be off my hands, though there is usually a last minute scramble because people will not stick to the dead-line always published in the previous issue, or things get lost in the post, or some news item comes to hand which **must** go in. I am also responsible to get the advertisements ready in time.

The material is set on the linotype machine and the long strips, called "galley proofs", are then ready to be corrected. A week before publication is "paste-up day", when the galley strips are cut up and pasted to an old copy of the S.O. Together with the adverts due to go in, the lay-out has to be planned. This is one of the most exciting jobs trying to create the new issue. It is like a jigsaw puzzle in which you have not only to find the pieces but to cut and shape them as well. Sometimes it is easy and the individual bits and pieces lend themselves quickly and naturally and the job is done in no time. But more often than not articles are too long, the right kind of news does not fit the available space, the German article would just be the right length, but as I had German last time I must use the French one today which means cutting it, and so on, and it can take several hours until I am reasonably satisfied. A final check that all the forthcoming events are in chronological order, that all the pages are numbered consecutively, that all the titles are suitable, that I have really put OECD and not EEC, that all the adverts are in, that no acknowledgments have been left out, that the restaurants and hotels on the back page are marked "in rotation", and then I hand the "dummy" in for "locking up" for the printing machine. The next stage is the checking of page proofs, and only they give an idea of what the number is really going to look like.

So far for the production. But my work does not end there. I have to write letters, send specimen copies, answer all kinds of enquiries on the telephone, alter the index cards for changes of addresses, mark the payment of subscriptions, hand the money to the accountant and sort out the printed wrappers according to when subscriptions are due so that reminders can be included. (If readers only realised that a great deal of time could be saved if they paid up promptly when their subs are due). After a reminder has been put in patiently for a few issues and still no payment arrives a letter has to be written — and it all costs time and money. I have a typist available occasionally and I don't have to do the accounts, but apart from that I am in full charge. I am my own sub-editor, staff manager, filing clerk; I am entirely responsible for all the "hatches, matches and dispatches". My employment is called part-time, but my work has turned out to be nearly a full-time occupation, not counting my voluntary travels to other parts of the country. I don't grumble, I find the work fascinating. Of course, I wish that we could increase the number of our subscribers so that I could get some office help and that we would be able to put photos in when we like and not only when readers, friends, or firms kindly offer to pay for the blocks.

I do my job with three aims in view, to bring news from home to my compatriots, to make our homeland known to the second generation growing up in this country as well as to our English friends, and to act as link between the various groups and societies in the Colony. I consider my readers my friends who may at times exasperate me, but who give me much encouragement by honest praise and constructive criticism.

When I took over the work, someone told me an editor needed a thick skin and a poisonous pen. I doubt whether I have either, but does it really matter?

Mariann.



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