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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

BY GOTTFRIED KELLER

NOT MOPING

An amusing story has recently gone through the press of Israel. According to it the Swiss Embassy there is the only one to run a motor-bike with a CD-plate attached to it. The Ambassador, so the story goes, asked Berne for credit for an additional Embassy car—but Berne, conscious of the need to economise, only granted the money for a moped.

One would be inclined to think that the story is an anticipated 1st April joke.

But the facts are slightly different. The Swiss Ambassador in Israel did not ask for credit for a car, but did in fact ask for credit for a moped. Apparently the mail in Israel and particularly in its capital city, is on the slow side. And the town itself, it appears, tends to get very crowded with traffic jams.

Thus in order to deliver letters or messages of urgency to various Ministries or to other diplomatic missions it has been found that a moped, duly equipped with CD-plates, is the quickest and most suitable. In other words: the Swiss CD-moped in Israel is not the result of economy measures, but the

practical adaptation of a means of transport most suitable for a modern big city.

* * *

Swiss diplomats, it has been confirmed in Berne, are at present "in somewhat short supply". About one-third of the diplomats in service will fairly soon be reaching retiring age and the reservoir, out of which they can be replaced, is insufficiently "stocked".

The main reason for the existence of a bottleneck appears to be that up to the early sixties the economic boom conditions made recruitment into the diplomatic service difficult and it was only in the seventies that conditions began to improve again. According to available figures ten young would-be diplomats were recruited in 1975, 18 in 1976, 14 in 1977 and 15 this year. Candidates for the diplomatic service have to be Swiss citizens, have to be in possession of a University degree and must not be married or engaged to a lady from an eastern bloc country. They have to pass an entrance examination in two foreign

languages, in economics, international law, federal law and history, after which the "apprenticeship" begins.

This leads to another examination, after which, if the candidate is successful, he becomes Secretary of Embassy 3rd class. From there the climb up the ladder starts, which may, within 15–20 years, lead to the top rank of "Chef de Mission". Ambassadors usually stay for four to five, sometimes even six years in one and the same post abroad, but only three in countries with difficult climatic conditions.

As regards transfers, Berne tries to meet personal wishes as far as possible, but should a diplomat definitely refuse a particular transfer, this would be a reason for terminating his contract. Out of the 15 would-be diplomats recruited this year, five are ladies. What would happen if they should marry and if any of the respective husbands would have no inclination to follow their wives wherever they may be posted, nobody knows.

(The above-mentioned figures have been given to the Migros paper *Brückebauer* by the Federal Political Department — the Foreign Office, as it were — in Berne.)

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