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Signing off ...with tears

FOR 52 years I have written for the *Swiss Observer*, and today I am compelled to write my final piece for the last issue to be published. It is perhaps the most difficult bit of writing I have ever done.

My thoughts go back over the years to the beginning of the S.O. During the First World War, relations between Great Britain and Switzerland were somewhat strained, and in 1916, the Nouvelle Société Helvétique (New Helvetic Society) was founded in London.

Its main task was to strengthen the ties among the Swiss in this country and to re-establish the old Anglo-Swiss friendship by means of better mutual information of the Press in both countries.

Dr Arnold Laett took up his work as full-time secretary of the NSH in London, and thanks to his sterling work the Group's activities were highly successful.

It was in 1919 that a few influential friends of the NSH and

the City Swiss Club gathered round Mr Paul F. Boehringer of the Frederick Printing Company and launched the project of a new paper for the whole of the Swiss community in Great Britain.

There had been an attempt at running a colony paper before – Mr Scheidegger's very small "Gruetli" which, however, had not been successful.

Mr Boehringer could give the necessary financial backing, and Dr Laett was invited to be the first editor, a job he could easily combine with his secretarial work for the NSH.

On November 17 1920, the first copy of the *Swiss Observer* was published from 21 Garlick Hill, EC4. It was a fortnightly periodical of eight pages, and the annual subscription was 8/6d.

In its "Publishers' Introduction", Mr Boehringer said among other things:

"The *Swiss Observer* will be run on independent lines, independent of any party, creed or group, and its columns will be open to all shades of opinion compatible with Swiss honour, traditions and aspirations.

"It will exert itself in strengthening the existing societies in the Swiss colony by giving their reports and announcements a publicity which they are unable otherwise to obtain.

"It will coordinate in the most economical way any efforts and movements undertaken by the colony as a whole, and it will assist in the formation of a sound and well-considered judgement and appreciation of any question vital

to our colony or country".

To say that the S.O. went from strength to strength would be far from the truth. But it overcame many difficulties, mainly due to the valiant efforts of the founder and his son Oscar, assisted by a successive number of editors.

The first Editor's term of office was a short one: Dr Laett was asked to become London Editor of the *Anglo-Swiss Review*, the official organ of the British Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland.

Dr A. Lang and Dr H.W. Egli followed Dr Laett in the Twenties. In 1929, Mr Boehringer proposed a new man who was to edit the S.O. most successfully for three decades and more – Alfred Stauffer. When he took it on the paper was a mere child. It was left to Fred to guide it through to its adolescence – it grew in size and appeared weekly.

All through the second war, the

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S.O. appeared regularly though it was necessary to reduce its appearance to fortnightly. The problems the publishers and Editor faced were considerable but the paper survived, being published at 23 Leonard Street in the City.

Mr Paul Boehringer died on April 6 1948. An advisory council was formed a few years later.

Subscribers came and went, but Fred Stauffer carried on, staunch, unruffled, with his sense of humour and lovable Bernese ways, writing, editing, pasting-up and correcting proofs, canvassing for adverts and writing letters and reminders and doing all the jobs normally left to the office boy, plus attending untold dinners, meetings and other gatherings loyally supported by his wife Elsie.

Early in 1961, the faithful ST retired after 32 years of devoted service. A young Vaudois Pierre Hofstetter took over for a short time. Then Fred came back for a few months until I took on the job – the council had appointed me after the death of my husband, I became the first woman Editor.

Fred Stauffer went on helping me, and gradually I learned the business of producing a paper from him and from Oscar Boehringer and expert members of his staff. Sadly, Fred died in 1965, mourned by the whole community.

I had been engaged as a part-time Editor but the work filled all my days, and after seven years I felt I had to give up the job as it became too much for me, writing, editing and office work, as well as

covering many events.

Mr Pierre-Michel Béguin took on the editing, followed by Mr W.G. Sommer and then Mrs M. Hill-Mosser. Much of the administrative work had been taken over by Mr H.J. Thomson of Frederick Printing Company. I still gave some assistance always with the founder's ideas as an example.

Some five years ago, Mr Oscar Boehringer decided that he could no longer carry the *Swiss Observer*, and he offered it to the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK. A new publisher/Managing Editor was found in the person of Mr Derek Meakin, and the S.O., which had become a monthly publication some time before, was published near Manchester from June 1980.

I wanted to retire from active participation, but the new management persuaded me to continue my contributions especially because I was also a member of the Information Commission in Berne.

Already when the paper was published in London an agreement had been reached to have the *Review* incorporated in it, the quarterly publication the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs sends to all Swiss registered abroad. Difficulties arose with Berne, and the two were separated two years ago.

Now when a new understanding had been reached with Berne, and the *Review* was to have been included again as from the end of the year, the publisher informed the Federation Committee that he could no longer carry on with the publication after November. This was a great blow to the Federation and its president

for the past ten years, Mr B. Simon, after having worked so hard to support the S.O. and trying to get the *Review* incorporated in the *Swiss Observer* again.

And so it is the end of a valiant undertaking which became an institution in the Swiss community of this country. It has often had to struggle, but always surmounted the difficulties thanks to the devotion of some men and women, the support from individuals and companies, not forgetting the Embassy in London and the Consulate in Manchester.

Like many other institutions in the Swiss community before it, the S.O. will now cease to exist.

I admit that its passing means a great personal loss. Of course, I shall be relieved of much work. I shall no more have to set up the *Helvetische Spalte*, write painful obituaries, articles at midnight and reports often on Sundays to meet the deadlines.

I shan't have any more worries and frustration at last-minute calls for articles and fill-ins, and

disappointments that the paper sometimes failed to reflect the needs of the Swiss community. But I shall miss the involvement which has given me much joy and happiness.

It is a long time since I sent my first modest contributions, a poem and a story, to the Editor 52 years ago.

Looking back, I appreciate all the support and encouragement that I have received from many throughout my close association with the paper. It all helped me to cope with the consequences of my mistakes, with misunderstandings and disappointments.

I also met interesting personalities and was accorded privileges which I should otherwise not have had such as attending one of H.M.'s Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace.

Above all, I have made many friends, and their love and affection will remain.

Good-bye, dear, dear S.O. Once again it is midnight, and for the last time I am signing off . . .

MM

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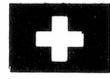
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