THE READER

THE most important person there exists for an editor is THE READER. Whether the editor is writing an article himself or reading authors' manuscripts; whether he is compiling the program for the next issues or choosing photographs—his main thought is: How will THE READER feel about it?

The answer to this question is difficult enough for the editor of a magazine which appears in a part of the world that is, politically and nationally speaking, more or less united. It is far more difficult for the editor of a magazine appearing in Shanghai and having among its readers members of every possible nation, race, religion, and ideology, readers who have only one thing in common: namely, that they can read English.

With our issue of June 1942 we sent out a questionnaire which, we gratefully acknowledge, was filled in by many of our readers in all parts of East Asia. The statistics compiled from these replies have enabled us to form a more concrete idea of the hitherto vague outline of the reader of The XXth Century. The replies have shown us that the reader is a person mainly interested in the political developments of our time. Among every 1,000 readers, 982 indicate "approval or interest" as regards political articles, and 960 study the maps accompanying the political articles. 713 are interested in political documents, and 708 in "The Window." Second place in the reader's interest is taken by the travelogues (827), which also usually touch upon political subjects, while art and cultural topics (796) and science (774) follow in third and fourth place. Then come short stories and the appendix in small print. The reader expressed great approval of photographs, illustrations, and cartoons.

To the question: "Do you find the magazine on the whole too serious? too light? well balanced?", 946 out of 1,000 answered with "well balanced," while the remaining 54 were almost equally divided between "too serious" and "too light."

Then our readers were asked to name articles which they had particularly liked. A compilation of the replies shows that almost every article of the last few months was mentioned. Apart from the Editor's own political articles, the following three articles received the highest number of points: "Alaska—Bridge or Barrier?" by Dr. H. Tichy; "The Butterflies Told Me," by Dr. H. Höne; and "The Strange Case of Leprosy," by the Drs. Gehr. The space in which readers were asked to name articles which they had not liked was left empty in the great majority of the questionnaires returned. For every article adversely criticized, fourteen were praised.

A number of readers have made some interesting suggestions for future issues which will be made use of in the next few months.

The overwhelming interest of our readers in political questions as revealed by the replies to our questionnaire appears to us as an encouraging symptom of the mental attitude of our times.
Diving for Pearls

The activities of an editor can be compared to those of a pearl diver. He opens many shells in vain before he finds one hiding a pearl. There are countless people who can write, but comparatively few who really have something to say. To find these is the task of an editor. The majority of our contributors are not authors by profession; they are people who, during the course of their lives, have assembled experience and knowledge in certain branches and who place this knowledge at the disposal of our magazine. This was the case, for example, with Dr. Hone, who collected and assorted hundreds of thousands of butterflies throughout his life and then generously presented our readers with the results of a lifetime's work. And it was also the case with the leprosy research workers Dr. Gehr and his wife; with the “Super-cargoes of New Guinea”; with the “Student of Buddhism,” and many others.

From month to month the number grows of those who, as a result of reading our magazine, wish to contribute an article. There can be nothing more satisfactory for an editor than the knowledge that readers are so mentally stimulated through his magazine that they feel the urge toward some literary activity of their own. Thus it has in several cases happened that a theme which was “in the air,” and on which the Editor had already commissioned an article, was at the same time used in manuscripts sent in by several new authors. Yet the Editor can only print one of them. Or it may happen that, in the opinion of the Editor, a manuscript sent in is not suited in its subject. For these reasons, it is advisable for readers who wish to contribute an article to come to an agreement first with the Editor regarding the proposed article before going to the trouble of writing it, instead of sending in the finished article. Experience has shown that it is much easier for author and editor to agree on an unwritten manuscript than on a completed one.

In the search for authors, one can meet with many a strange experience. One day I received a letter from a young man who wrote that he possessed special knowledge about a certain subject and that he would like to contribute to our magazine. The letter was postmarked in Shanghai. Since I was interested in the subject he mentioned, I asked him to see me. I was surprised when at the appointed time an embarrassed, nervous sixteen-year-old boy appeared in my office and said:

“Please forgive me for deceiving you. I wrote you that it was I who wanted to write articles for your magazine. But that isn’t true. It is not I, but my sister. You see, I have a wonderful sister, who should write for you. But she is so shy that she would never come to you on her own. And so I thought that I had better force her to do it. If you would write me a letter saying that you desire an article on this subject, I will show it to my sister, and as she knows that I cannot write such an article she will have to write it in order to save the family honor. I just wanted to tell you beforehand how things really are and to ask your forgiveness for the deception.” When the article by the sister appeared later on, the brother was prouder than the author herself.

After having always introduced our authors in the short foreword preceding each article, we would like to present the photographs of some of them in this issue. It is a matter of particular satisfaction to us that our collaborators are members of so many different nations. Thus the wish has come true which we expressed in our first number, namely, that the magazine might become a meeting place for “people with wide horizons and open minds” from many countries.
Hilaire du Berrier, "on the café terraces of most of the capitals and watering places of Europe. Down in the Red Sea I embraced Islam. But if I stay one more winter in Shanghai, I am going in for fire worship."

STAFF COLLABORATORS

Having spoken of the readers and authors of The XXth Century, we should like to add a word about some members of the staff whose names are still unfamiliar to our readers. Mr. and Mrs. W. Vennewitz are the "stylists" of the magazine. Every manuscript is examined and edited by them from the point of view of style. They also do all translations from the German, French, and Italian. We believe that, like many others of our collaborators, the Vennewitz's are among the decided talent discovered by the magazine. In our editorial office, we have invented a new verb. The phrase, "This article has not yet been Vennewitzed," means that its style has not yet been polished. Mr. Kurt Fischer is responsible for the special maps, which, to judge by the replies to our questionnaire, have met with unusually great interest on the part of our readers. Mr. Ushiroda in Tokyo supplies the translations from the Japanese. The Messrs. Obenaus (Max Noessler & Co., Shanghai) and Masui (Nippon Dempo Tsushinsha, Tokyo) have placed their experience at our disposal for distributing the magazine in East Asia and have been of great service. The neat make-up and print of the magazine are the work of the ABC Press in Shanghai.

There is an "unknown collaborator" whom I should like to mention specially—the Chinese printer. Anyone who watches an English-language magazine growing from the hands of Chinese setters and printers who do not speak a single word of English must feel it to be a miracle that the magazine can appear every month. The miracle is explained by the innate intelligence and industriousness of Chinese employees. They take such pains that they sometimes even go a little too far. Our readers may remember Hedda Hammer's beautiful series of photographs, "The Sacred Mountain," among which there was also the dignified face of an aged monk. The expression on his face of philosophical abstraction is enhanced by the fact that there is a fly on his forehead which does not seem to bother him in the least. The Chinese engravers, however, were sure that this fly was a mistake and eliminated it by touching up the photograph. They were very surprised when a new block had to be made including the fly.

In October 1941 the first issue of The XXth Century made its appearance on the bookstands of East Asia. Since then the magazine has reached a circulation far beyond our expectations. We wish to thank our readers for their interest and our authors and staff members for their efforts during the first year, which is, for every magazine, the hardest.

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During the years of the world crisis, discussion has been rife in all parts of the world as to whether mental labors should be carried on in an isolated ivory tower or in the midst of human masses and passions. To us, both extremes seem wrong. He who lives in an ivory tower loses touch with reality; and he who moves only in the lowlands of daily events cannot survey the great developments. Our times have no room for ivory towers. But there cannot be enough towers from whose high windows men, conscious of their responsibility, can strive to watch, understand, and interpret the meaning of our time. There are few places left in the world from which, in the midst of a world war, one can maintain so wide a horizon as in Shanghai.