

The Swiss seen by a Swiss... "Kantonenligeist"

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Art masterpieces from some of Europe's leading museums are on show at the All Saints' Museum, Schaffhausen, until October 28th. The exhibition, which opened in July, is a delight to art lovers, and contains works by Jan van Eyck, Altdorfer, Cranach, Memling, Dürer, Konrad Witz, Holbein, Brueghel, Fra Angelico, Mantegna, Titien, Raphael, Rogier van der Weyden and Botticelli. The paintings have been loaned by the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, the "Mauritshuis", the Hague, the "Kunsthistorisches Museum", Vienna, and the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

* * *

More visitors than ever before have been visiting Switzerland's historic Castle of Chillon — famous throughout the English-speaking world as the scene of Lord Byron's poem "The Prisoner of Chillon". During August visitors totalled an average of a thousand a day. The Castle of Chillon is at Territet near Montreux, on the shores of the Lake of Geneva.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, October 26th, 1951. We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: W. Kilchenmann, W. Flory, J. H. Speich, Anonymous, Miss E. F. Irvine, Mrs. F. Schreck.

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THE SWISS SEEN BY A SWISS . . . "KANTÖNLIGEIST."

To start off this short essay on a subject with which we are all very well acquainted, admittedly or not, I can think of nothing better than a short conversation I overheard one day in a tramcar of Switzerland's capital. A local trader, who was obviously a great admirer of our national hero of the wheel, said: "Gäll Du, der Kübler het ne wieder mal zeigt was d'Schwyzzer chöi". Replied his friend: "Goppel ja, de Färdi ischt halt en Zürcher!" This reply, which is by no means only typical of an inhabitant of the Canton of Zurich, seems to set the whole problem and to answer it at the same time.

"Kantönligeist," if an adequate description can be given at all, is a harmless and friendly competition between Cantons, an urge to shine in front of one's neighbour who has the misfortune to be born in another part of the country, and lastly the satisfaction of being a little different by either dialect, tradition or outlook. It is a never-ending source of amusement for the many and a cause of extreme annoyance to the few.

It may lead to heated arguments, but never does it result in public disorder or civil war. "Kantönligeist" is on no account to be taken seriously, for if it were, a "Bunter Abend" on Saturday night or a "Quart d'heur Vaudois" would be impossible to listen to without switching the programme off. Newspapers don't help matters, either. The majority of jokes contained in the space reserved for this purpose are sure to have some connection with the subject under discussion.

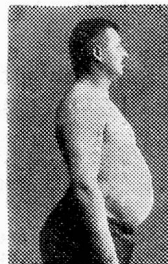
Talking of jokes, who doesn't know the little tale according to which a crocodile, sent as a gift from the Basel Zoo to the one in Zurich, died of anger and frustration within the hour of its delivery, having realized that the biggest mouth was no longer his. Well, it is quite obvious what the story is referring to, but do the people concerned mind? Not a bit! On the contrary, they hit back.

And what about the eternal state of war between the honorable cities of Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel, each trying to convince the others that the French spoken by its inhabitants is purest? Nobody feels in the least offended, one just nods, smiles, and keeps believing in one's own point of view.

All these examples are but an imperfect illustration of what "Kantönligeist" means and will always mean to the Swiss: it is a part of his national character without which he wouldn't prove a worthy son of Wilhelm Tell.

Helveticus.

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