

Der Witz

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DER WITZ

A FASCINATING STUDY ON HUMOUR

By WERNER R. SCHWEIZER

When a review copy of this new publication reached me, I was not aware at first of the identity of the author. I had read a hundred pages or so when I came across the mention of a multi-lingual verse in the "Swiss Observer", and it suddenly dawned on me that the author was one of my readers, none other than Prof. Schweizer, known to many of us as a collector of Swiss art. (He gave an illustrated talk on the Little Swiss Masters to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in London a few years ago.)

I read the book with even greater interest and found it absolutely fascinating.

In his preface the author reminds us that laughter and ridicule have at all times been an important part of our lives and sooner or later lead us to reflect on the timeless problem of humour. Prof. Schweizer has gone into the subject most painstakingly and exhaustively. He covers every aspect of wit, the first time, apparently, this has ever been done. So far, most theories concerning the comical have been confined to the linguistic or the pictorial and have rarely touched melody and music. Most students of humour seem to have forgotten that humour can appear in all media of expression. This and other prejudices Prof. Schweizer deals with and, amongst other things, shows the part that form and instincts play in the comic experience.

I asked him what induced him to write the book. He said that in the early twenties he wrote a book on Baron K. F. Hieronymus von Münchhausen, the eighteenth century Hanoverian, proverbial as narrator of ridiculously exaggerated exploits and a master of the joke of impossibility. Ever since then Prof. Schweizer has been trying to discover the true essence of humour and he has made extensive research. The book is an attempt at analysing all that is comical, witty and humorous from an empiric angle, and, to my mind, he has succeeded most admirably.

All media are referred to, art, architecture, language spoken and written, the dance and acting, mime, film, noises, smell, taste, sense of touch. He deals with the absurd, the affected, with plain teasing and cockney wit, with the shaggy dog story, the pun, the burlesque and the incongruous, the macabre and the gruesome, the erotic and the neotic. He includes religious and moral humour, expounds buffoonery and waggishness, the anachronism, the parody and the travesty. I have deliberately jumbled them all up to whet your appetite. There is no field which the author has omitted from his work, if not dealt with in detail, at least referred to.

The book gives a wealth of examples and is richly and attractively illustrated. It makes fascinating reading, and any lover of Till Eulenspiegel and Christian Morgenstern, Wilhelm Busch and Max Beerbohm, Charlie Chaplin, Groucho and Walt Disney, Jerome K. Jerome, Molière and Mark Twain, will be encouraged to take out old treasures and look at them with a new interest. He will find ample scope for reflection on the essential of humour. He will find himself enriched and happier.

Prof. Werner Schweizer, a Bernese by origin, arrived in England in 1920. In 1932 he became Head of the German Department of the University of Nottingham, a post he held until his retirement in 1957. The book is dedicated to his students there and the Freistudentenschaft Berne. He lives in London and is at the moment engaged

in writing another book on Münchhausen and his special brand of humour.

"Der Witz" is published by Francke Verlag Berne and Munich at 38 Swiss francs. I can warmly recommend it. "There is nothing more alluring than to discover the serious side of the jest" wrote the great Erasmus to his friend Thomas More.

PHILATELY AND CHARITY

On the face of it there does not seem to exist any connection between the two. The moment, however, we hear that the Swiss Philatelic Society, at their annual dinner, not only organise a raffle in support of their own funds, but also a stamp auction for charity, the connection becomes evident. At their last Annual Dinner at the Montana Hotel on Friday, 6th March, the philatelists raised £163.0 in aid of the Swiss Benevolent and (this time) Guide Dogs for the Blind. This venture was started twenty years ago by a former President and keen stamp collector, Mr. F. Streit.

On behalf of the S.B.S., their Honorary Treasurer, Mr. M. Rothlisberger, thanked the Philatelic Society for their efforts which, over the past two decades have resulted in the handsome total of £270 for the funds of the Swiss Benevolent Society. A similar amount has gone to a variety of other charitable institutions during the same period.

Whilst the charity money was raised by way of a stamp auction cleverly conducted by Mr. M. Uehlinger, the £18.10.0 for the Society's funds were the result of a raffle of many handsome prizes donated by generous members.

An excellent dinner — members were given the choice between equally delicious steak and *Bernerplatte* — preceded the money-making part of the evening. Mr. W. Burren, the jovial President, was in the chair and welcomed over thirty members and friends. The Editor of the "Swiss Observer", the guest of honour, was asked to present the challenge cup for the best philatelic show during 1963, awarded this year to Miss A. Grunberg. Last year's winner, Mr. J. Beken, was presented with a miniature replica of the challenge cup.

The Swiss Philatelic Society is a very active group with men and women members. They have monthly meetings at which interesting philatelic displays are given and special lectures and film shows are arranged. Anybody interested should apply to the Honorary Secretary, Mr. R. Thompson, 41 Leamington Road, Southall, Middx.

The Annual Dinner of the Philatelists was a very happy and carefree affair. The fact that pleasure was coupled with support of worth-while charity added to the enjoyment.

Mariann.

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