

# Duerrenmatt's new play

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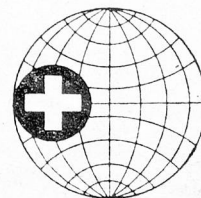
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# 1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

## GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD



On 23rd April, the Golden Jubilee of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is to be celebrated by a special ceremony at the Basle *Rathaus*. The Basle Government will be host to a number of guests, among them Monsieur Gonzague de Reynold, founder of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, Madame Robert de Traz, widow of the founder of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, and a number of personalities who have been active in the N.S.H. and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. The Presidents of the National Council and the Council of States will be further guests of honour, as well as the Presidents of the twenty-five Cantonal Governments.

Also invited have been the members of the Com-

mission of the Swiss Abroad, whose spring meeting takes place the day before in Berne. The honour of replying to the welcoming speeches has been given to the representative of Great Britain, Mrs. Mariann Meier; for it was in London on 8th June 1916 that the first *Auslandschweizergruppe* of the N.S.H. was founded.

The reason for having the commemoration in Basle is partly because the Swiss Industries Fair, which is also celebrating its Golden Jubilee, was originally responsible for arranging the first Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad.

At a Banquet following the official ceremony, the participants will be the guests of the Basle Government and the Management of the Swiss Industries Fair.

### DUERRENMATT'S NEW PLAY

Like many of his plays, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's latest comedy "The Meteor", had its first performance at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich. It was a great occasion, and the "Times", on 26th January, carried a write-up with photograph. Its Special Correspondent called it "Dürrenmatt's Shavian Comedy about Death". He says that throughout the bitter comedy, the Life Force blows with gale strength, and that every line is a winner. In his opinion, Dürrenmatt had no difficulty in making the very human characters and their preconceived notions easy targets for his scurrilous satire.

Also according to Swiss critics, the play is exceptionally well-written and well-produced. There have been adverse voices, too, and Dürrenmatt has been accused of making fun of the resurrection. He said in an interview that the title of the play was symbolic, and it should remind us of a stone or meteorite coming from nowhere and burning energy in earth's atmosphere; the play, states his author, deals with the strength which a dying man is capable of developing. In an early play, "Pilatus", Dürrenmatt had said "Denn alle Dinge . . . waren nur da, weil Gott da war und Er und nicht anderes, und waren da, weil es zwischen Gott und den Menschen keine Verständigung gibt als der Tod . . .". And now as counterpart to death, Dürrenmatt has chosen resurrection. Once again he offers no consolation, not because he wants a disconsolate world, but because the consolation to which we and others have grown used, misses the tremendousness (*Ungeheuerlichkeit*) of death and the world.

Reinhardt Stumm ("Basler Nachrichten") calls "the Meteor" Dürrenmatt's Small Testament." He maintains that once again, the great playwright has failed to prove his theory that our world can only be portrayed in comedy.

On 26th February, the Zurich Schauspielhaus organised a public discussion meeting. The hall at the Kunsthau was filled to capacity, over 500 people attending. The author himself was present, and there were personalities from the Church, science, literature and the Press.

The writer Peter Truedinger spoke on behalf of a group of students who had booed and whistled at the *première*. He said that they had felt the author had made fun of his audience, and above all, they criticised the lack of any constructive force; they argued that nihilistic plays

had been modern a generation ago, but today's youth wanted different food.

Two Ministers expressed their concern regarding the play's attitude to death and resurrection. It was, they said, a challenge to Christian teaching, a negation of Christian hope of resurrection, and they called the conception of the play blasphemous.

Two members of the Faculty of Philosophy of Zurich University spoke in favour of the play. "Since there is a Friedrich Dürrenmatt, it is a pleasure to teach Swiss literature", said Prof. Dr. Karl Fehr. He, like others, were of opinion that the critics had taken the author too seriously; Dürrenmatt had managed to give tremendous format to comedy, a term which had become too narrow in German literature.

In twenty points, the playwright himself explained the dramatic principles and central idea of his work, the story of a man who has risen after death, but cannot believe in his resurrection. He said that the main character in his "Meteor" was a figure, not an allegory, of occidental Christendom. The annoyance caused by his play originated in this idea. Resurrection is a miracle. For the believer it is a proof of his faith and hope, for the unbeliever it is an unknown phenomenon, an annoyance, and thus, a man risen from death becomes a double annoyance. He is a paradoxical figure, tragic and comic at the same time. Friedrich Dürrenmatt stressed that the play was no parody; that he took the work seriously.

A discussion ensued in which various voices were heard. Amongst them was a young girl who challenged the author with a statement that youth objected. She asked him if he had not lost touch with youth. The producer of the play appealed to youth to try and find contact with the author. Dürrenmatt said playwrights could not give the answer to all things. Their task was to show man as he is with all his possibilities. The present crisis could only be understood if it was accepted as having been made by man.

(Based on information received by courtesy of above-mentioned papers and A.T.S.)

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"Ich glaube, es sei das Wesen der wahren Sittlichkeit: Lieber Unrecht leiden als Unrecht tun."