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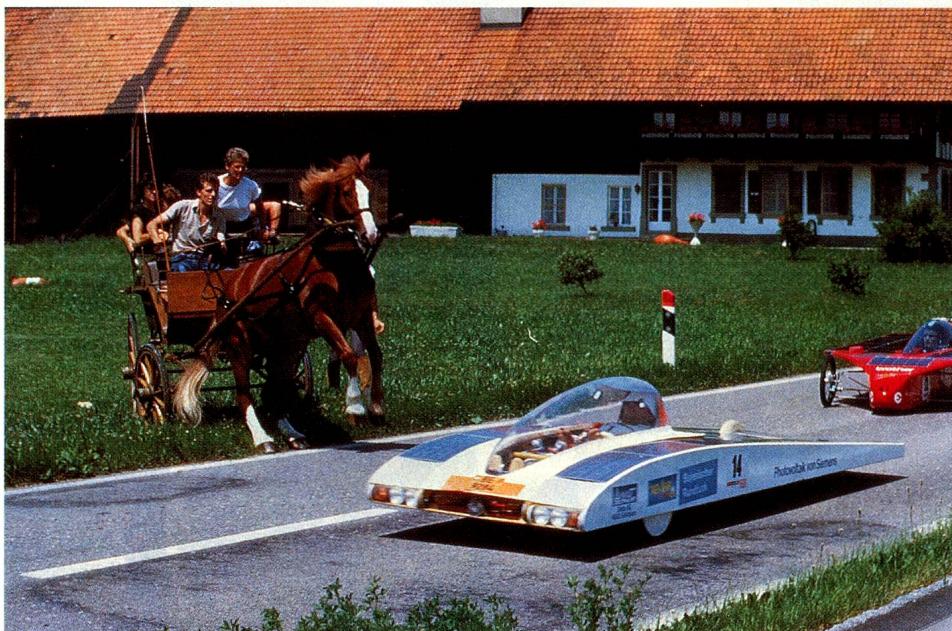
«Swiss Image»: a new picture book about Switzerland

No Clichés – no Taboos

Critically but with plenty of humour and lots of love for his subject, Michael von Graffenried, a young photographer from Berne, has in a varied and sophisticated manner compiled a photographic «journal» depicting Switzerland in the eighties. The pleasure that one experiences from the beauty of the pictures is nicely balanced by the reflections inspired by the far from everyday message that some of them express.

For many of us who have already wanted to find out what lies behind the “post card” façade of a country, it is sometimes difficult

ture of a dump for poisonous garbage, an August 1 national day bonfire and the famous «Onion Market» in Berne. One par-



Classical dessert from the Emmental.

ticularly successful photograph shows a horse-drawn cart, which had to brake abruptly to avoid a collision with a solar-powered passenger car (see our illustration). One common feature of this collection of pictures on the theme of Switzerland is that at first glance, one sees something familiar – as for instance the Tell Monument in Alt-

to escape the feeling that we have not succeeded in coming to grips with the realities of our own native land. A photographer from Berne, Michael von Graffenried, has been admirably successful in lifting the close-knit veil from the clichés of snow-capped mountains and troughs filled with flowers, of lush meadows and contented cows – and in so doing, he has not made things too easy for himself or for the onlooker.

Surprising themes

These range from a child's school via the «school for men» (i.e., scenes from military service) to the entertainment in a disco, that was banned later on. In a contrasting manner, the taboo of death is followed by a ball organised by the Officers' Club, then huts where asylum-seeking refugees are housed, alternating with children at play and other children who are ill. Under the ambiguous heading «Switzerland's Climate» one sees a computer in a cow-shed, alongside of a pic-



East and West hand in hand. (Photos: Michael von Graffenried)

From top to bottom:

In many places, people distrust foreigners, with or without justification.

Because of the initiative in favour of its abolition, the army has come under heavy fire recently.

What an endlessly dreary Sunday afternoon.

(Photos: Michael von Graffenried)

dorf, but on taking a second look, one finds the atmosphere is disturbed by a figure in the foreground who is irreverently spitting out cherry-stones. An even more provocative «combination» picture shows a young soldier in battle-dress standing in front of the wall of a house, on which someone has sprayed «Do they know you?» (see our illustration).

Irony and Dedication

The author of this unusual book finds many ways of establishing a rapport with his themes which is cheerful at times, and sad at others. He does this skilfully, showing for instance a hamburger factory wedged between two pictures of cows. Or following the photograph of the dump for poisonous garbage by a shot of an «auto graveyard» for scrapped motor-cars. The legends that Graffenried has chosen can also be ironical, such as for instance «Dance of the Officers», «Back to School» or «Swiss Sunday» - they show that he has taken as much care over them as he has done on the pictures. We must specially mention the «couple of questions» put persistently by Swiss author and cabaret performer Franz Hohler, as



also the epilogue written by Charles-Henri Favrod, one of the leading champions of Swiss photography.

Moreover, the plucky and unconventional activites of the photographer have at times produced quick results. The pictures of a boxing match between women taken in the disco caused that "attraction" to be banned on the following day, and the publication of shots of a mass camp for Tamil refugees led to the hut being rebuilt in the form of 4-person rooms.

This is an ambitious and far from commonplace book ... even to the extent of omitting the customary hackneyed photograph of a sunset at the end! **WIL**

Michael von Graffenried. «Swiss Image». With texts by Franz Hohler and Charles-Henri Favrod. Published by Benteli Verlag, Berne 1989. Price Sfr. 78.- (can be ordered from Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne, post-free)