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PROFESSOR WILDI ON GERMAN SWISS LITERATURE.

An N.S.H. Lecture.

On April 2nd the Nouvelle Société Helvétique held an Open Meeting at the Swiss Hostel for Girls in order to hear Professor Max Wildi talking on German Swiss Literature. The lecturer is Professor of English Literature at the E.T.H. Zürich and President of the "Schweizerisch-Britische Gesellschaft". It was therefore an especial privilege for the members and friends of the London Group of the N.S.H. to be able to welcome Professor Wildi in their midst. In agreeing to talk to us on Swiss Literature Professor Wildi stepped outside the field of his own academic calling. He drew rather on the knowledge of the writings of our own country which he acquired by his reading for pleasure. His lecture gained thereby a particular charm without losing in literary interest. It kept the large audience enthralled for about an hour from the first word to the last. The ovation he received at the end showed how deeply the lecture was appreciated. Before the meeting dinner was offered the lecturer and Madame Wildi. Following is a short summary of Professor Wildi's talk.

The lecturer pointed out in his introductory remarks that the German Swiss authors are contending with the particular difficulty of writing not in their native idiom but in a foreign language, albeit acquired from the first years of schooling. Whoever speaks of the Swiss contribution to literature, declared Professor Wildi, inevitably thinks in the first place of the giants of the 19th century: Keller, Gottlieb and C. F. Meyer. They gave us by their work an illustration of local literature rising into universality by sheer power of vision, transcending the limitations of dialect. Their influence can still be felt today, although the world has changed so much during the intervening decades. But whatever is most original in modern Swiss writing in verse or prose of the last twenty years was born of impulses from a world that is far away from our classics.

Professor Wildi continued his lecture with a short characterisation of some of our newer writing and authors which he has enjoyed reading and learned to appreciate. He mentioned especially Robert Walser of Bienne, with his novels, "Die Geschwister Tanner", "Der Gehülfe" and "Jakob Gunten", a writer who was the first to effect a complete breakaway from the Swiss 19th-century tradition. There is a tragic streak

in Walser's life and writing. Great success of a different kind was attained by Ernst Zahn and John Knittel with their romanticising of mountain life and the peasantry. Robert Faesy, the author of "Füsiliir Wipf" and of the trilogy of historical Zürich novels, is the doyen of the Zürich circle of writers. Felix Moeschlin, born at Bâle, and Konrad Bänninger, the Zürich poet, have survived many of their contemporaries. Karl Stamm, who died all too early, has left some very fine verse behind. Max Pulver, who had known Paul Klee in Berne, later worked in Munich. Most of these writers of interwar period started as poets, amongst whom also Hermann Hiltbrunner and Siegfried Lang should not be left unmentioned. The greatest Swiss poet of that period was Albin Zollinger who died, fifteen years ago, a schoolmaster at Oerlikon. Another contemporary was Albert Steffen.

The art of the German Swiss region in our own days is profoundly conservative, in contrast to such writers as the great Charles Frederick Ramuz, the literary rebel of French Switzerland. New writers like Max Frisch who are trying to express themselves in new styles meet with much opposition. In a more traditional vein Meinrad Ingling has attained considerable success with several novels, especially "Werner Amberg", an autobiographical of great charm, and his masterpiece, "Schweizerspiegel", described by Professor Wildi as one of the finest novels of contemporary Swiss literature. Albert Jakob Welti, son of the well-known Zürich painter, Albert Welti, has written several dramas and a number of original novels. Some years ago the London Colony was given the chance to get to know him personally through a lecture he gave at a meeting of the N.S.H., followed by a reading of his own works. Arnold Kübler is a delightful essayist and has written comedies and humorous sketches. Amongst women writers Professor Wildi mentioned Johanna Spyri, Regina Ullmann, Cecile Lauber and Ruth Blum. Others enumerated by the lecturer were Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Kurt Guggenheim. It was a proud galaxy of minor and major stars on the firmament of literary production of sons and daughters of our country in the course of the last hundred years or so which Professor Wildi recalled in his lecture. His modest conclusion that the claims of a very distinctive Swiss literature, especially German Swiss literature, can no longer be doubted, was surely no exaggeration.

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