

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1961)

Heft: 1386

Artikel: A Glimpse of Zürich

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689854>

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A GLIMPSE OF ZURICH

In their beautiful series, "Cities and Landscapes of Switzerland", the Editions Générales of Geneva have just published another book of high artistic and scientific quality in English, this time about Zurich.

Several famous personalities have contributed their arts in paying homage to this great Limmat city. Mr. Benjamin Laederer, the publisher, writes in his introduction:

This portrait of Zurich is the result of a close association between authors and photographers who, armed with pen and camera, have attempted to catch the city's quiet charm and vivid life.

But there is hardly another city in Switzerland whose essence is as difficult to grasp as that of Zurich: in fact, it is impossible, at a first glance, to discover its inner nature. Varied in aspect, throbbing with life, Zurich has, since the beginning of our history, stood out from other Swiss cities; as a famous cultural centre where new ideas sprang up and thrived on fertile soil, it used to be known as the "Limmat Athens".

We have endeavoured to present Zurich as we see it: as a synthesis of North and South, of a modern city and unspoiled landscape, of a knightly past and a bold spirit of enterprise. As a city where Nordic severity meets Mediterranean fancy. Lastly, as a city whose opposites gradually merged in the course of the centuries until they formed a single entity.

* * *

We are privileged to be able to reproduce a chapter from this excellent volume, typical of the high-class quality of publishing in Switzerland to-day. The author of this extract is Prof. Dr. Karl Schmid, of the Federal Institute of Technology.

There are cities, comparable in size to Zurich, that photograph well and where a camera easily catches the things it is loved and remembered by. This is not the case with Zurich. Not that our city does not attract the eye. Anyone looking down on Zurich from the Uetliberg or, even better, who has the chance of flying over the city,

will be delighted by the sight of the town powerfully surging out of the bay, sending waves of houses against the green slopes. One heavy wave rolls right over the Limmat valley, another rushes westwards and dies along the river-bank and the thick green covering the surrounding hills saves it from being a mere multitude of stone and wood constructions.

There are scores of things to discover, to admire, to love, down in the city. For instance a walk through the cool greenery-lined Bahnhofstrasse to what is not an end but the beginning of the blue vastness of the Lake, where the greyish bodies of sea-gulls flash through an amazingly clear sky and silver-topped mountains edge the far-off horizon.

What I really mean when I say that Zurich does not photograph well, is that its personality is difficult to grasp. It discloses itself only to those who actually work in it. The Bay and the Limmat, the Town-Hall and the Cathedrals, the bridges and the towers, are witnesses of times when Zurich had barely begun to live its history; but for all their beauty, they give hardly a clue to the present-day nature of the city.

Utter the word "Zurich" in a conversation with a guest from abroad — let us say one who is familiar with the two or three dozen larger cities of the West. His reaction will be to visualize industries and trades, banks and insurance companies, stock exchange and business, theatres and museums, colleges, sciences, arts etc. To him, Zurich is a town living entirely in the present. I think he is right.

Stagnation is to be found nowhere in Zurich, not even in the maze of "Gaessli" and back alleys twisting about the two Cathedrals. This is definitely not a town living on memories. In fact, neither respect for history nor pride in heritage are common virtues in Zurich.

But it seems to be with cities as it is with people. Their weaknesses are but the reverse side of their qualities. No doubt much of the old and the romantic was blown out of Zurich's wide-open windows — and it is a pity — whereas Berne and Basle, for instance, took care to

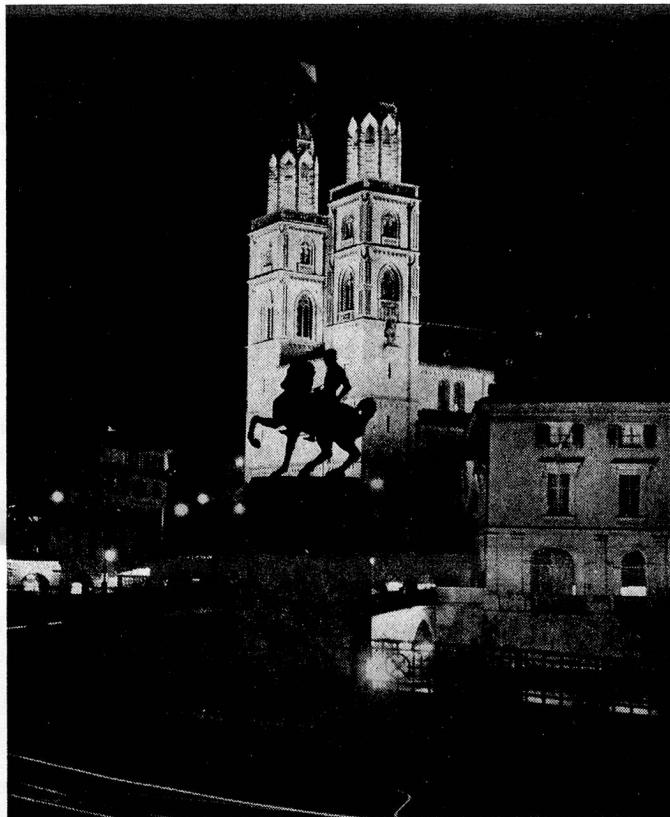
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preserve the vestiges of their past. But so much was blown in also! Zurich is a bit careless about its heritage, true enough, but its high capacity for assimilation has been to the advantage both of the city and of the new elements.

It is a town where newcomers quickly feel at home. Thornton Wilder, James Joyce, Thomas Mann and a hundred more loved it for its working atmosphere, as a city offering wide scope, ruling out nothing, allowing



Zurich by night
(Photo: Swiss National Tourist Office)

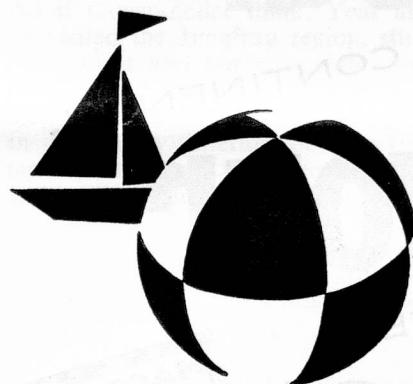
nearly everything. Franz Kafka noted in Zurich: "Stark Sonntagsgefühl bei der Einbildung, hier Einwohner zu sein". (A strong Sunday Feeling at the thought of being an inhabitant here).

In Zurich, achievement has always been held in higher esteem than the birth certificate. Our schools, though young in age, have acquired a reputation in the field of arts, science, mathematics, medicine, psychology. Zurich's reputation is one of *liberalism, progressiveness, work and broadmindedness*.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote in a Zurich guestbook: "The strength of the patrician spirit lies in declining, that of the democratic spirit in accepting . . .".

In this sense, Zurich is one of the most democratic, that is freedom-granting, cities of Switzerland and even of Europe.

Switzerland



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