

Plays and films : films and plays

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12 YEARS SWISS OBSERVER AND WHY:

Lord Palmerston on a memorable occasion expressed himself to the effect that "if Switzerland did not exist, it would have to be invented" and the same remark might be applied to the Swiss Observer who, — and I think I am quite right in saying "who" i.e., taking the lusty youngster to be a young boy promising a very healthy and interesting manhood — to-day celebrates his 12th Birthday.

There are still a number of Swiss in this Country and notably in and around London who remember the time we had no Swiss Observer, no weekly devoted to the affairs of the Swiss Colony in London and in Great Britain, no Swiss Paper published in England giving us the important news from home and forming a bond between the Swiss living in these hospitable Isles.

Those were the days when we had to rely on occasional newspapers sent us from home and when, in practice, we found that such newspapers provided too much reading matter and were often left unread and even unopened. I remember accumulating piles of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, unopened and unread. Finally I made a great effort and cut out the articles I particularly wanted to read and that big bundle of articles littered our drawing room at home until such time as she who presides over the amenities of my home put down her dainty feet and, alas and alack, those articles went into the fire, unread most of them.

With the birth of the Swiss Observer a great void was filled. The Swiss Observer, week by week, brings tidings of what happened at home, of all sorts of things. Elections to the Grand Council, elections to the Federal Parliament, votes taken upon new bills, all sorts of minor events and accidents, all these we now find presented to us, as concisely as possible, every Saturday in our own Swiss Newspaper published in London. Each week-end we commune with our homeland, we get to know what they are talking and thinking about at home, we get impregnated as it were by the spirit of Switzerland, we get our blood stirred by a tingling of the chords, oft dormant during the week, that unite us still to our HEIMAT and, thanks to the Swiss Observer, we feel Swiss, purely and only Swiss for a span of time, every week-end.

That alone, dear Readers, is worth a tremendous lot.

As our readers know, Kyburg feel EUROPEAN in the first place, i.e., thinks it most important to be a citizen of EUROPE.

But, in order to be a good citizen of the larger commonwealth of EUROPE, one must first be a good citizen of the smaller entity or country in which one is born. There is no doubt in my mind that that feeling of "home" that we all know and which has for much too long a time been exploited in the pseudo-sacred name of patriotism, is a feeling which has its root in the soil from which we spring. To feel purely Swiss for a short while now and again, is vitally important for Swiss living abroad, because they thereby renew their strength of the emotions which can only be got from contact with one's native soil and if such contact is impossible directly, the next best thing surely is to obtain it through a medium such as the Swiss Observer and in the manner explained above.

If we Swiss believed in decorating people who have desered well of the Country, the founders of the Swiss Observer, would receive a medal of honour. To carry a paper like the Swiss Observer for 12 years on their shoulders, to get it out, week by week, mainly with the aid of purely honorary collaborators, is a task as difficult as one might well imagine. To shoulder on top of that the financial responsibility and the losses which during the first few years were inevitable, has put their patriotism to the highest test.

Of later years, the publisher has found a staunch and extremely valuable helper in our friend Mr. A. Stauffer, known to our readers as "ST." His articles have brightened up the paper a good deal and his biographical reminiscences have endeared him to the readers, the male readers as well, because he has shown himself to have been "one of us."

"ek" in his corner is always highly interesting and often extremely amusing. He shines especially when reporting meetings of the C.S.C., but also infuses us with a sense of inferiority when he discusses learnedly on musical and other cultured matters. Also, at times, he has been known to indulge in gentle leg pulling at the expense of

his more stolid and heavier — in a literary sense (where is your oft vaunted modesty? Ed.) colleague Kyburg.

Kyburg, of course, is the chappie who shows the Statesmen of the World where they are wrong and how they could improve human affairs, if only they followed his, Kyburg's, wise directions. When on his hobby-horse, "political economy" Kyburg has no feelings of mock-modesty. He thinks he knows and he does not care to hide his light under a bushel. He often tries to amuse, but is much too heavy and stodgy and when reading out his effusions to his wife, he is very rightly taken down a peg or two, nearly each time. All the same, it is the considered opinion of Kyburg, if it is of no one else, that his views on human affairs are fundamentally right.

I have mentioned a few of the collaborators of the Swiss Observer only and with great modesty have given Kyburg the fattest paragraph, (where is that trumpet?)

But what of our READERS? They, of course, pay a very small subscription which provides them with a weekly tonic for a whole year. Good value, to be sure. But why don't they, in their turn, DO SOMETHING for the Swiss Observer? Why do not they write articles for publication, letters to the Editor, etc., why don't they send in criticisms and complaints, so that we, the chosen few, could read them in our next issue and make them look the silly chappies they are? They are afraid, they fear our vitriolic comments on their efforts and rather than lay themselves open to retaliation, they stop their subscription if they are angry enough with us. What a spectacle!

Being 12 years old, the Swiss Observer feels strong enough now, or almost strong enough anyhow, to tick off anyone who thinks he knows better. In fact, the Swiss Observer is now entering into his years of "gamin" or "Efelgjahre" and our Readers had better look out!

There is one way by which our Readers may placate us. That is by getting new subscribers. I am informed that there are still several THOUSANDS OF SWISS who are not subscribers to the Swiss Observer, although they live in England. SHAME!

I think a Birthday gift from the Readers might well take the form of a resolution whereby each reader promises to find at least one new subscriber! If you, dear Reader, do that, you are serving a double purpose. Firstly, you help the Swiss Observer to carry on and to improve, and secondly, you help yourself, because you will in time receive more enjoyment from reading your Swiss Observer.

And remember, to help the Swiss Observer is a patriotic task! Patriotic in the best sense of the word.

Kyburg.

PLAYS AND FILMS: FILMS AND PLAYS.

There are novels, plays and films. This is a platitude. Some novels are good and make good plays and good films. This is rare. Good novels may also make good plays and bad films, or bad plays and good films. But all good novels do not make good or bad films or plays, and the possible permutations are practically unlimited.

Therefore, it is interesting to compare the film and the play based on the same story, and the following remarks have been inspired by seeing Mädchen in Uniform and Grand Hotel.

It is the more interesting to compare these two because, although they are essentially different, they are both supposed to take place in the same country.

Mädchen in Uniform made an exceedingly interesting film but was disappointing as a play. The reason for this result is the difficulty of representing situations which are typically German in character and thought by players who speak in another language and whose outlook, and noetical expression are totally different. In the film, we had the impression that we were watching events taking place in a German school, with German people thinking and acting like Germans, whereas, in the play we were watching English girls, talking as English school girls are supposed to talk and behaving like English girls, at the same time trying to make us believe that the play is taking place in Prussia. The result was a failure because there was an element of unreality which is not present in the film. The objection may be made that such an argument holds good for all plays which depend on the expression of noetical characterisation, which are essentially racial in their manifestations, and that it is only when the action might take place equally well in any country that the difficulty is overcome.

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Another reason for the success of the film when contrasted with the play, is limitation of space. For instance, in the play the dormitory scene was a failure, whereas, in the film, one had the impression of a large room filled with girls. This is principally due to the fact that the theatre can only represent a given dimension at one time, whilst the ease with which a camera can be moved from one place to another enables us to obtain various aspects of the same situation, thus giving an impression of space which it is impossible to realise in the theatre. The same defect was visible in the closing scene. A very different effect was obtained in the film by showing the different aspects of the staircase, and the various phases of the search by her companion for Manuela.

I have referred to the question of languages on several occasions, and in such a story as *Mädchen in Uniform*, this is of paramount importance. There are certain idiomatic necessities of the German language which sound just as idiotic when translated into English as "My Lord" does when reproduced on the Continent as "Milord." No German girl ever talked as the characters are made to talk on the stage, and the plea that the English slang was intended to represent the German equivalent makes no difference. It was impossible to overcome the difficulty that English girls were trying to express in English, not only events, but psychological processes taking place in German.

As usual, the only character made to talk with a foreign accent was the unfortunate French governess who made use of the ancient device of saying something in French and then repeating the same in English. No French person of my acquaintance ever does talk in this manner, but it is a time honoured custom on the stage and in a certain type of literature. In this particular play, it was unusually irritating, as other performers who were also supposed to represent foreigners were talking English in the most English of ways.

In *Grand Hotel*, to my great surprise, the result was exactly the opposite. The play was much better than the film and yet the possibilities were immense, for instance, the entrance hall of the hotel. I was expecting that this scene would be more realistic on the screen because of the limitation of space in the theatre, and yet it was not so. I am still puzzled why this should be, because the opportunity of showing the hall from various aspects, to say nothing of a vertical shot taken from the top of the central shaft, made me think that the result would have been different.

Although the film story was practically the same as the play, something seemed to be lacking. For one thing, I do not think the characters were so happily cast. I liked the *Flammchen* of the play infinitely more than in the film. But this does not explain everything. In theory, the film should have been as good as, if not better than, the play. But it was cut up too much into incidents, and stress was laid on some trivial details when attention to more salient features in the story would have been an improvement.

For instance, the scene in which *Kringlein* gets intoxicated would have been equally effective if it had been cut short at the moment when he enters his bedroom. The rest is superfluous and lacking in taste. *Grand Hotel* is a very good example of what I have been trying to explain above with regard to the question of language.

Although the story is supposed to take place in Berlin, it does not matter in the least that all the characters talk in English.

The action flows on smoothly and naturally. But in *Grand Hotel*, the story is essentially cosmopolitan, and might equally well take place in any other country, whereas, *Mädchen in Uniform* is essentially racial in both thought and action.

I have just been reading again the book of *David Golder*, and I have been struck by the close way in which the film follows the story, and by the fact that one slight alteration makes an enormous difference. In the book the death of *Golder* occurs during a storm on board ship in the *Black Sea*, whilst in the film the storm is replaced by a fog. The change is wise, for it is easier to describe in words (word picture) the sequence of events taking place in a storm, whereas, on the screen, the dramatic effect (Visual picture) of the fog is much greater than that of a storm, which would only have produced a disagreeable oscillation transmitted to the retina of the spectator's eye.

Numerous films have been made from books, but I have mentioned these two as they have recently been shown and have received a good deal of publicity.

Last week I went again to see "As you desire me" and I was just as pleased with it as on the first occasion.

I still consider it to be one of the most interesting films I have seen for the reasons given in a previous article.

I am also hoping that one of these days we shall be shown in London "Zwei Herzen in drei viertel Takt".

ck.

RIFLESSIONI.

Guizza la fiamma su su verso la nera cappa: faville leggere, schioppettano allegramente, e, a volte, impetinenti, impetuose, irrompono fuori dal cammino, diventano neri punti sul pavimento: i grossi ceppi, bruciando, lanciano intorno sulle pareti oscure, bagliori rossastrati, interrompono con subitanei sprazzi di luce le ombre della sera.

E seduti accanto al focolare stanno i vecchi, silenziosi, fissando il fuoco, meditando, rievocando altri tempi... "i miei tempi," sui quali ritornano così volentieri con il pensiero o parlando con i giovani. Più nulla è come allora. Si sono adattati a tutti i cambiamenti della vita, hanno accettato filosoficamente (torse non sempre!) le evoluzioni volute dal continuo progresso, in cuor loro approvandole, ma... ai miei tempi si stava meglio"... Meditano accanto la focolare, loro che rappresentano il passato... ma ecco che l'avvenire arriva! E' l'eco balzuziente di un dolce cinguettio, sono passi oscillanti, incerti, un cosettino dal capo biondo sulla cui fronte è nascosto l'enigma, è lo sguardo di occhi interroganti... l'avvenire che tende rotondette braccia al passato, per invocarne quasi aiuto, sostegno... E i nonni dimenticano ogni tristezza umana... in quell'aurora che si nasconde dietro azzurre spire di nebbia, il tramonto ridiventa luminoso... par quasi vogliano fondersi. Le ultime battute dell'esistenza si accordano con le incerte note dell'infanzia, mirabilmente formando un unico assieme. La culla rende meno triste, amabile quasi, il sepolcro.

E la grave voce del nonno narra di cose lontane, di fate e di maghi; ascoltano i bimbi, entusiasti, cercano imprimere nel loro cervellino tutte quelle avventure vissute o fantastiche che sogneranno poi la notte, che rievocheranno poi più tardi, quando anch'essi saranno il tramonto. Il ciclo della vita continuerà... Quei dolci momenti saranno il ricordo che custodiranno in fondo al cuore, saranno ricompensa per la loro bontà, saranno conforto per i loro dolori. Nel corso degli anni faranno altri sogni, seguiranno altre chimere, ma nulla potrà cancellare dall'animo la dolcezza dei racconti del nonno... e nelle burrascose ore rievocheranno anch'essi "i miei tempi." Come l'avvenire si volgeva al passato, il tramonto si volgerà all'aurora...

Tacciano i vecchi, sognano i bimbi. Il ceppo più non sfavilla, langue la fiamma che s'assottiglia sempre più...

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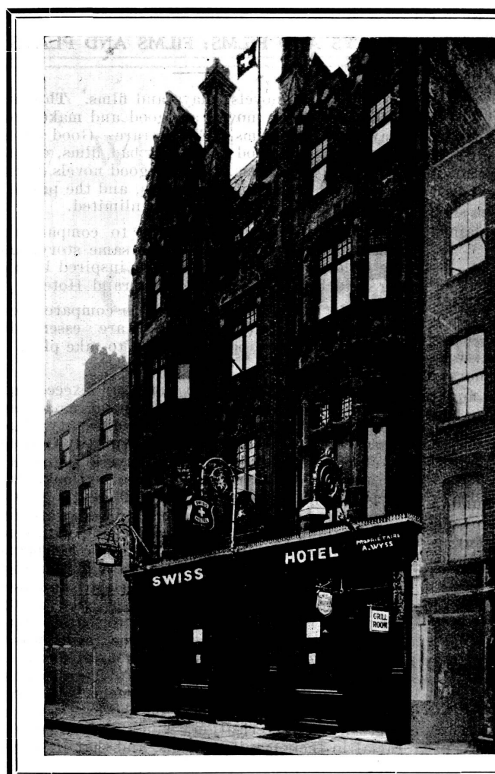
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