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LITERATUR NACHRICHTEN

In ordinary life railway timetables, telephone books, price lists and reference works in general, are not looked on as literature. It is quite different in philately. Price lists (catalogues) and other reference works form a prominent part of philatelic literature. Anything beyond that, which does not give prices, will usually not have much of a chance of selling (long experience).

I am of the opinion that this is not, or at least not only because stamp collectors are currently not great readers. According to my own unfortunate experiences, it is due to a great extent to the fact that the literary representation of the subjects concerned leaves a great deal to be desired, since philatelic specialists who could write don't seem to have wanted to do so for quite a while. We have got so used to the state of affairs in philately, that stamp dealers very often no longer take the trouble to bring out and supply philatelic literature that goes beyond the catalogue. This means that interesting philatelic literature has to be sold via the book trade.

This state of affairs is not a law of nature. It could be altered if the philatelic material available was not just informative in the philatelic sense, but was also made interesting and readable from the general point of view. If people were ready to write philatelic books in such a way that even non-collectors could read them and find them interesting, it would be really surprising if stamp collectors failed to buy the same reading material.

An annual volume which is well-known to have far too small a readership circle in spite of the great value of its contents and the indefatigable nature of its research is *Literatur Nachrichten*, published by F. Gaedicke in Berlin. This is a reference work on philatelic literature and is thus not to be found in the shop windows of stamp dealers.

The new Volume 62/73 that has just appeared is again outstanding and contains a vast quantity of information from all over the world on all aspects of philately and the resulting literature, from books to magazine articles.

Because of the great mass of material let us pause for a moment and think of the classic adage “restraint denotes the master!”

Is it not conceivable that less material, weeded and presented with care, would reach a wider circle of readers?

I am thinking in particular of book reviews. It would really be better if the routine reviews taken from magazines which often owe their wording less to the reviewer’s considered thoughts than to the publisher’s laundry list, were replaced by the actual list of contents. This would at least tell the philatelist what he is actually being offered. It is not much help to keep on hearing about books which are supposed to be an inexhaustible source of information for the beginner and the experienced old hand, when there is no list of contents and no assessment of the text that one could expect in a reference work of this type.

Things are very much the same as regards periodical articles. Anyone who attempts to use these will know that the title of a book or article fails to give an adequate idea of its subject. This is just what *Literatur Nachrichten* should set out to do, if its items are to be useful.

This means that less, not more, material should be dealt with and evaluated. It does not fill me with rapture to find so much space given to books about coins and “Castles and Noblemen’s Houses in Holstein”

However, critical remarks aimed at making the contents of *Literatur Nachrichten* useful to a wider range of German collectors should not lose sight of the fact that far too many member societies of the BDPH still do not subscribe to *Literatur Nachrichten*. The Society’s Literature section might send out specimen index cards to all societies. Possibly members might then come forward who would be ready to evaluate a given journal for a period of time, but are not willing to take on an unpaid commitment permanently. This simply means that criticism of unpaid work is looked on as not very proper, and that idealists are much more likely to praise, whether their work is useful or not.

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