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*Our literature and its critics*  
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**OUR LITERATURE AND ITS CRITICS**

It is a recognised fact that writers are seldom included amongst those who earn a reward for their work, since between themselves and the buyers of their product stands an intermediate figure, the critic, and my article will apply to them.

Why I have chosen this subject should be clear to every observant philatelist since the indefensible state of affairs existing, especially at this point in philately, cannot possibly continue. Why is it that philately attracts so few specialist writers, or *why does one so rarely read a single word of explanation from the coryphées\* of science?* These are questions which have often concerned me. The answer is quite simple. *The great majority are guilty of ingratitude and indifference.*

With care and trouble it was possible to bring together the small number of subscribers for the translation of **Möens'** work despite the challenge of our major societies, and many other examples of the same type could be quoted.

The publishers are often not in a position to take on the risk of printing, still less to pay an honorarium or send out free copies. What do **Meyer, Lübker, Krause**, et al., expect for their work? Definitely not to get a financial return for their efforts.

However, is the collector the only guilty party? No. A large part belongs to the critics of the specialist press who, unfortunately, often depart from the truth. I will not split hairs and will only distinguish between:

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\* A ballet dancer who dances in a small group instead of as a soloist or in the corps de ballet and ranks between the two.

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1. The mechanically toadying critic

2. The biased egotistical critic
3. The nagging critic
4. The objective critic

*Our knowledge is imperfect*, that is a fact that cannot be avoided in reading through the most classic work, but *research and investigation must be our aim*.

We need to penetrate further and further into the secrets and dark places of our young science and this calls for people who are industrious, unprejudiced and not looking for recompense.

The Mechanical Critic is pretty certain to be the one met with most often and every thinking philatelist must give a sympathetic laugh when they find every new publication described with the unvarying formula *we can therefore ... only recommend*, like a museum viewed from the outside.

It should be obvious to everyone that there is neither sense nor purpose in this kind of unthinking assessment of all new intellectual products: it is of no service to philately.

Something similar applies to the Biased, Egotistical Critic who, unfortunately, tends to work for individual magazines and is a great obstacle to the expansion of our literature. Books and pamphlets from rival firms will be hushed up, whilst his own firm will be represented as the only source of good, usable, or even brilliant material, unless one looks at other magazines. This means the public is not being served.

An author will send in a book, hoping at best for a mention, only to have it simply ignored, whereas fairly good stuff from the same firm will be printed under false colours.

A large part of the readership of periodicals will consist of developing philatelists who derive their knowledge from a simple *organ for their own interests*. Thus it is obvious that their education is very one-sided.

Thus we are not dealing here with the overall interests of philately, but with business advantages: it is not a love of the subject but the crassest egotism.

The third category are the Nagging Critics wanting to pull everything down: unfortunately they have become very widespread in recent years.

They criticize, or rather carp at, everything without being able to improve it, and indeed everyone who has given up his time to write periodical articles or pamphlets must lose the last remnants of enthusiasm when people whose earlier performances have simply been to produce a pile of articles on one and the same subject suddenly appear as literary critics.

Does it really promote collecting or the acquisition of new skills if the layman chances on an abusive review of a work such as, for example, **Krause's** *Lehrbuch* which, in spite of numerous mistakes or flaws that call for much more reasonable treatment, still contains a large amount of new and interesting information which no other earlier work contains.

All new publications should serve as foundations for further work and it is the law of the world that the later should learn from the earlier and attempt to surpass it. However, to the

solace of all true philatelists, there are knowledgeable, rightly-judging critics who blame or admonish only when necessary.

*Philatelist*, *Postwertzeichen* and other magazines are known for their sharp but unbiased reviews and the collectors' world may be proud that these are the magazines that serve as organs for the majority of experienced philatelists and the major societies.

Might one yet arrive at the conclusion for philatelic journalism that argument will never increase the reputation of a journal nor also in this way put the collector under tutelage.

Sooner or later knowledge comes, however, and the aim will be noted.

If, however, our literature is healthy and finds publishers it will be as much the task of the specialist press to support appropriate efforts as of the collectors' world.

Every philatelist might think, in particular, that apart from the large economic undertaking of the few publishers, support for philatelic literature is not a matter of talk only, but should be founded in love and selfless effort.

Thus, if it is not possible to make the criticisms more reasonable, less spiteful, and above all more scientific and less partisan in form, then the number of writers damaging the development of our philately should be reduced.

**END**