

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: - (1931)

Heft: 499

Rubrik: Personal

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 02.04.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Dr. Husmann.—They are very important. Every child should become the study of the teacher. You must not, indeed you *cannot*, standardise in education. Individuality must be considered and deftly handled. Only in this way can school education be changed from the performance of tasks, irksome to youth, to an interesting course of adventure into the various fields of knowledge. Moreover, the modern boarding school must be a real home, retaining only that minimum of restraint which is essential for the maintenance of discipline in the boarders' own interests.

Myself.—And how is this attention to individual character and training to be got in the public school attended by, say, hundreds of boys and girls?

Dr. Husmann.—Only by the formation of small classes. Even in these disparity in attainment occurs, so that a boy will be weaker in one subject than in another, and will require individual attention in his weak subject in order to become on a par with his class fellows.

Myself.—But a teacher can hardly be expected to give class and individual instruction simultaneously?

Dr. Husmann.—I obviate that difficulty by a system of movable classes. A boy who is weak, say, in French, may take his French lessons in a lower class than that to which he belongs, and yet retain his proper place in the school. He will not be kept in a lower class simply because he is weak in one subject. In this way he does not feel aggrieved, as he would do by being kept back in his old class till he has made himself proficient in every subject alike.

Myself.—That is an excellent idea, which I shall commend to the consideration of head masters at home. And, again, the purpose of it all?

Dr. Husmann.—To train leaders of men—no, not commanders, but leaders.

It is only when we have mastered somewhat our educational difficulties, when we have begun to *THINK* for ourselves and when we have learnt how to form and associate different views and ideas, that we can risk going a step further in our mental gymnastics and that we can read, with profit to ourselves, about

The Government of Switzerland:

Huddersfield Examiner 29/4/31.

In which article the Rev. A. E. Creedy gives his readers his views on the comparative merits of the Swiss and the British Constitution.

The chance remark of a native—that women had no vote in Switzerland—led me to study the political conditions of this country, a study which was very interesting, seeing that the constitution is so radically different from that of England. No one can hope to understand the present situation without knowing something of the history of the country and the evolution of its political system.

The Swiss look back to the year 1291 as the beginning of their independence, for it was in that year that three cantons (one of these was Schwyz, from which the country gets its name) bound themselves together in a league that they might "better defend themselves and their own." From time to time other States sought for membership in the League, until at the end of the Napoleonic Wars there were twenty-two. All these were self-governing cantons with varying customs, different criminal and civil codes, and diverse constitutions, but all united in the respect that they were jealous of their powers and resented any encroachments on their rights. Gradually it dawned upon the people that the league was not sufficient and that some form of a constitution for a sovereign State was desirable.

Looking to America.

For a long time the leaders of political thought had turned their gaze on the American federal system, and it was not surprising that in 1848 the country adopted a constitution moulded on the American pattern, preserving to a large extent the local autonomy of the cantons as far as that was compatible with the functions of the central government. The federal authorities reserve the rights of negotiating with foreign Powers, levying customs and taxes, settling disputes among the cantons, running the railways and post office, putting down internal disorder where such would threaten the interests of the Republic, controlling the army, currency, and weights and measures, and administering the civil, but not the criminal law; outside of these powers, generally speaking, each canton manages its own affairs.

The Assembly, or Parliament, consists of two houses. Members of the Upper House, the Council of States, numbering forty-four are chosen, two by each canton, and their period of office depends upon the goodwill of those who elect them. There is no hereditary chamber, as titles are unknown in this country. Members of the Lower House, the National Council, are elected by the male pop-

ulation over twenty years of age in the ratio of one member to every 20,000 persons, and they turn nearly 200. The elections are held triennially. If it is the acme of democracy that a person should be given the vote because he or she is a separate entity or personality, then a prize must be given to the Swiss, for there are no property votes and no University votes. On the other hand, it is strange that the names of women are not on the electoral roll, for their emancipation in many directions is just as advanced as in other countries. All legislation to be effective, must be passed by both Houses; if they cannot agree the Bills are dropped.

The Federal Council, corresponding to the English Cabinet, consists of seven members, who must not at the same time be members of either House, although they may speak in both. They are chosen for three years, and it is a rare thing for them not to be re-elected; death or resignation are almost the only occasions when vacancies occur. Each is in charge of a department of State, and they very much resemble English permanent officials.

One is chosen as President for the year, and he cannot be successively re-elected. For convenience he is regarded as the Head of the Republic, but his position within the Council is strictly *primus inter pares*. The Council prepares the business for the Assembly and shapes the Bills in their proper legal form, but, should its proposals not be accepted, it does not resign, but bows to the wishes of the Assembly.

In England the Cabinet is the master of Parliament; a defeat on an important issue means resignation and usually a general election. In Switzerland the Federal Council is the servant of the Assembly; a defeat means nothing more than the dropping of the Bill.

Of party politics there is little compared with English, since the Liberals, and following them the Radicals, have had a majority in the National Council since its inception. Whilst the Radicals and Conservatives have remained stationary, the Socialists have steadily increased in recent years.

It will be seen from this political sketch that there is no position corresponding to the English Premiership, for the President of the Executive Council is little more than a Foreign Secretary, who receives official visitors and ambassadors in the name of the Republic. That is why very few people outside of Switzerland have ever heard of his name.

The Referendum.

No outline of the constitution would be complete without some reference to the referendum since this device is used fairly frequently in the politics of the State, of the cantons, and even of the towns and villages. Switzerland wholeheartedly believes in the principle, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people," and it is by means of the referendum that this principle is in the last resort effected; indeed so often has it been used that it has been called "the third House."

Amendments to the constitution and important matters affecting the State must be submitted to a vote of the people if a petition bearing the requisite number of signatures is submitted to the federal authorities. For the referendum to be successful there must be a majority of the people and cantons in favour of the proposal. Should the majority of the people be on one side and the majority of the cantons on the other, it falls to the ground—so nicely did the originators of the constitution preserve the rights of the cantons.

So, too, in the cantons themselves and the towns, important matters and large items of expenditure are submitted to a direct vote of the inhabitants. Critics of the referendum in England have argued that it is the negation of personal leadership. It seems to me that the whole political system of Switzerland has been so constituted as to minimise party politics and the influence of individual leaders.

Perhaps no other system would have worked in this country, since it is divided up into three distinct sections, each speaking different languages, and the Protestants are only just in a majority—to say nothing of the incessant vigilance of the cantons over their rights and powers.

From time to time proportional representation has been advocated, mainly by the Socialists, but so far in national elections the ordinary method has not been disturbed, although in some cantons, for cantonal elections, proportional representation is in vogue.

Another question very much to the fore in England just now is the abolition of the death penalty. In Switzerland it has been suspended and a sentence of imprisonment for life substituted for a long number of years in all cantons except three, which still carry out executions by the guillotine, although these are rare.

Switzerland, too, has had its religious wars, but fortunately the question of religious teaching in the schools has been amicably settled. Naturally there is no uniform agreement, but, speaking generally, where the Protestants of a canton are in the ascendancy a minister is allowed to visit the schools so many hours a week to give religious instruction, and the Catholic and Jewish children retire to their own sectarian premises for suitable teaching; and, *vice versa*, in a Catholic canton, the priest has the right of entry and the non-Catholic children retire to their ministers and teachers. It may be that some such arrangement as this will be the solution, in part at any rate, of the controversy in England.

A NOBEL PRIZEMAN.

"Prometheus and Epimetheus." By Carl Spitteler. Translated by James F. Muirhead, M.A., L.H.D. (Jarrolds. 7s. 6d.)

Those who make known to us a foreign author of any worth deserve our gratitude. When the author is one whom his own countrymen regard with veneration it is the more necessary for us to be attentively grateful. This is not the first of Spitteler's works which Dr. Muirhead has prepared for English readers. He translated "Laughing Truths," a collection of essays, to which Romain Rolland contributed an "Appreciation" of the author; and in collaboration with Miss Ethel Colburn Mayne he has translated a good many of Spitteler's poems. Yet it may be feared that in spite of these efforts, which were widely acclaimed by serious critics, the German-Swiss poet remains almost unknown to the English "reading public," though he was honoured by the French Academy, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1919, and is thought so much of in his own land that the Swiss Government is having a National Edition of his works prepared. Such a reputation, as Dr. Muirhead remarks, "is one that English readers can hardly afford to ignore."

It is only about five years since Spitteler died. He was a young man when he wrote "Prometheus and Epimetheus," in 1880, under the pseudonym of "Felix Tandem," because he felt that "at last" he had accomplished something; rather a characteristically young-man attitude. This prose epic which Dr. Muirhead has translated has all the zest and abounding vitality of youth. It is an amazingly exuberant piece of work. Allegory, myth, descriptive passages of uncommon beauty, irony, pure narrative of folk-tale quality, ardent feeling, matter-of-fact human touches (King Epimetheus, who chose to follow Conscience rather than to keep the freedom of his own soul, could not sleep "in spite of blankets and hot-water bottles"), humour (Conscience, deserting Epimetheus at last, ran away home "cheerfully and briskly, in a series of symmetrical bounds"), fecundity of invention, sonorousness of rhythm give an almost overpowering vitality. The symbolism is not always easy to follow. Spitteler himself said, "I also sometimes find it rather obscure," when somebody ventured to inquire about it.

But he is not to be read for his teaching; rather, for his abundant outpouring of fantasy beauty, and wisdom—or, as he put it in one of his essays, for that "elementary beauty, working direct without regard to combination, as against the excessive valuation of technical and relative skill." Dr. Muirhead's translation gives a rich measure of this "elementary beauty," which may be discerned even by the reader temperamentally at variance with Spitteler's method of approach to it. *Observer, 10/5/31.*

PERSONAL.

We extend our sincere sympathy to Monsieur L. Micheli, 1st Secretary of Legation, whose father, Monsieur Horace Micheli, former National Councillor died in Switzerland.

OBITUARY.

We regret to announce the death of our late co-founder and honorary member Mr. R. Oberholzer. We convey to the relatives, our deepest sorrow and sympathy.

Swiss Gymnastic Society
Swiss Club (Schweizerbund).

On the 24th of last month the death occurred of M. E. Chaudoux, the oldest passive member of the City Swiss Club. (1891). M. Chaudoux was wellknown in the City of London, and his passing away has come as a shock to his numerous friends. We extend to the members of his family our heartfelt sympathy.

CONCERT—NEWS.

We wish to remind our readers, that the Pianoforte Recital of Mlle. Pugnì, which was announced in our last number is taking place on Tuesday next, May 19th, 3 o'clock at Wigmore Hall, Wigmore Street, W. 1. We hope that a great number of our readers will be able to be present.