

# Our fiery ancestors [continued and end]

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more-downtreading" elements. They stage banner-carrying processions, meet in committees and send representatives to the European Human Right Convention. The second is less publicised and less typified. A few years ago in Zurich, when the right of vote for women came up and was rejected by the people, it placarded a very conspicuous bill reading "Totale Verpolitisierung unseres Lebens? NEIN!" all over the city.

These militant elements, fighting against the right of vote, may be getting rarer to find, but the fact remains that the overall majority of Swiss women are just not interested in the political equality which their men are gradually working out for them. The reporter for the "Europa" programme on BBC 2 (Thursday, 19th January) discovered that for himself when he interviewed a good half-dozen women on the beach in Geneva and could not elicit one enthusiastic answer. A Swiss lady of my acquaintance, who watched the programme, was appalled by the lack of ambition of her compatriots. Although this may be arguable, it seems that Swiss women are more subdued and less open to the world at large than their French and English counterparts. For this reason, there's no saying that Swiss women would appreciate being vested with the moral obligation of going to the poll, they may even find it a little embarrassing! The majority of women are not ready in their minds to seize the right of vote, the majority of men are probably not much further ahead. After all, only five cantons have given their women the full right to vote, and, since the referendum must draw a "yes" not only from the majority of the people, but also from the majority of the cantons, the odds are that the time is not yet ripe for such a referendum. (P.M.B.)

—The Swiss Observer

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## OUR FIERY ANCESTORS

(Continued)

### THE DISASTROUS EXODUS

Caesar's refusal to tolerate the passage of a vagrant horde through Roman territory may readily be understood. But how are we to explain his continued hostility to the migration when the Helvetii had chosen another route which, crossing the Jura further north and passing by arrangement through the lands of the Sequani, no longer touched Transalpine Gaul? Was it the calculation of a politician, determined to provoke a conflict for the sake of the prestige which victory would bring? The imputation is not wholly just: the interests of Rome were involved as well as the personal ambitions of Caesar, for the establishment in western Gaul of a new Helvetian state near the Roman frontier might well be thought to represent a menace to the Roman peace. Whatever may have been his motives, Caesar took the offensive;

he pursued the Helvetii into Aeduan territory and defeated them, after stubborn battle, at Bibracte (Mont Beuvray, near Autun). The Helvetii who survived the battle he forced to return as dependent but privileged allies of Rome (**foederati**) to the Swiss lands which they had abandoned, lest the vacant area should attract further German advances.

Thus the history of Roman Switzerland may be said to have opened at Bibracte, which proved the prelude to Caesar's complete conquest of Gaul, a political achievement fundamental for western civilisation. And Caesar knew how to defend the empire he was founding: in the year of Bibracte he defeated Ariovist in Alsace and drove the Germans back across the Rhine.

## THE SETTLEMENT

Yet at Caesar's death much was still provisional in the relations of Rome to the Swiss area. An attempt in 57 B.C. to establish Romans in the Valais, and to secure the route from Italy to Gaul over the St. Bernard, broke down. But the Helvetii remained Roman allies, and two colonies of legionary veterans at Nyon on Lake Geneva (**Colonia Julia Equestris**) and at Augst near Basle (**Colonia Augusta Raurica**, founded after Caesar's death but apparently on his instructions) served as eastern outposts to defend Roman communications between the Rhone at Lyons and the new frontier on the Rhine. It was left to Augustus to complete

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Caesar's work and to bring the territory of the Helvetii into the provincial system of the empire. In the Augustan reorganisation of Gaul the Helvetii were attributed to **Provincia Belgica**. The same reign saw their eastern and southern neighbours lose their independence. Between 16 and 13 B.C. Augustus's stepsons, Drusus and Tiberius, carried out completely successful converging attacks on the Raetians and the Vindelician Celts who lay south of the Danube in the neighbourhood of Augsburg. These new conquests were thrown together with the Valais, where the Celtic tribes had submitted to Roman rule some dozen years earlier, to form the province of **Raetia**. The whole area of modern Switzerland had thus been brought under Roman administration, though it was far from being consolidated into a single unit of government.

## HELVETII AND ROMANS

Any account of the Roman occupation must draw its material almost exclusively from Celtic Switzerland; about Roman **Raetia** we are very ill-informed. Two elementary considerations are fundamental. First, the fact of Roman rule brought no great influx of strangers into Switzerland. The soldiers and administrators must always have been comparatively few, and they were drawn from every province of the empire: their origin might be Spanish, or African, or oriental; frequently, of course, it was Celtic. Of all the inscriptions which have been collected for the Roman period in Switzerland, not one must imperatively be referred to an inhabitant of the city of Rome. What united these soldiers and officials was not racial or national feeling but a common legal status as Roman citizens and the common enjoyment of a civilisation which they were convinced was the only tolerable way of life. And, secondly, the Celts among whom they came were not barbarians, separated from them by an impassable abyss of cultural inferiority. The Helvetii prized wit as well as military prowess. In weapons and tactics and discipline the Celts in Switzerland, as elsewhere, were inferior to the Romans who defeated them. Their social organisation seems to have been loose; the kings of earlier times had disappeared and an aristocracy of great landowners lorded it over masses of slaves and half-free men. But they had known permanent settlements; in preparation for the great migration of 58 B.C., Caesar tells us, they had twelve towns to burn and 400 villages. In agricultural technique they had much to teach their conquerors, and they were capable of fine decorative art, until native feelings was distorted by imitation of alien models. Nor were they wholly ignorant of the higher civilisation of the Mediterranean world. From about 600 B.C. there existed at the mouth of the Rhone the Greek colony of Massilia (Marseilles), and though the importance of Massilia as a channel through which Greek influences made themselves felt on the Celts has perhaps been exaggerated, there is reason to believe that considerable

communication took place by way of the Danube valley. The Celts of Switzerland, with gold washed from the Kleine and the Grosse Emme, had imitated the coins of Philip of Macedonia; in the absence of a native alphabet, Greek characters were borrowed to write Celtic words, and presumably the muster lists which, on Caesar's testimony, the Helvetii carried in 58 B.C. were drawn up in Greek letters in the Celtic tongue. We must not set the cultural level of the Swiss Celts in pre-Roman times too high: the imitations of Greek coins, originally excellent, soon degenerated, and literacy on any extensive scale awaited the introduction of Latin speech and script. But clearly the Helvetii had an appetite, an eager receptivity, for the new refinements and amenities which Rome could offer, and something indigenous to contribute, which would amalgamate with the importations from the Mediterranean to form a new regional civilisation.

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## A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE FAMOUS BASLER FASNACHT "MORGENSTREICH"

(By Ernst Studer)

Morgenstreich, that is a magic word for every citizen from Basle anywhere in the world, and every year it is hailed again, as the most beautiful moment of the year in all the newspapers from Basle. It is the beginning of the Basler Fasnacht (Carnival) and dates back to the 18th century. But the expression Morgenstreich is mentioned for the first time in 1808 and means official publication, proclaimed in the morning. At first it was only permitted at 6 o'clock, afterwards at 5, and then 135 years ago at the 4th stroke of the clock in the morning, which still stands. And the saying is, that if a Fasnachtler (Carnival fan) misses the Morgenstreich, he is furious about the Carnival and the world in general, so the first role is not to miss it and get up early enough in the morning.

I had heard so much about the Morgenstreich and the Fasnacht in Basle, that being at the right time in Switzerland and having the luck to have a real Fasnachtler from Basle in our village, I had to go and see for myself. So at 1 o'clock in the morning we packed our bags to leave for the promised fields. The temperature was 15°C below zero and a biting wind blowing, so that the defroster in the car had trouble to get rid of the ice on the windscreen. Two hours later we arrived at the outskirts of the city. Here the cars were already lining up. After an encounter with a traffic officer (they were very tolerant this morning), we found a parking place and were all set for the big adventure.

Large crowds were already gathering on the most favoured spots, like Marketplace and Barfusserplace. While waiting for