

# Modern tendencies in Swiss education and instruction

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## "MODERN TENDENCIES IN SWISS EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTION.

(A Lecture by Dr. PAUL LANG.)

The Secretary of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique does not take his lectures lightly. Compilation of facts and expressions do not satisfy him: the materials he gathers are subject to a searching analysis, and an organised whole issues forth from the synthetic process. National education is a tremendously vast subject, and, as Dr. Lang does not belong to the pedagogic profession, he must have waded through mountains of books in order to master the subject in the way he did. The pity was that the excellent exposé had to be given to such a small audience.

After pointing out that Switzerland is a land of pedagogues, Dr. Lang gave an account of the educational factors and ideas which have arisen in Switzerland since the beginning of the century, imbuing his statements with such interest and clarity that his audience cannot have failed to take home with them a vivid mental picture of this most intricate question.

We have not space here to enter into any of the detailed information contained in this lecture, but would at least like to touch upon the main points embodied in it, the three "educational ideas," as Dr. Lang termed them, which have been the principal impetus towards the reform of education in Switzerland.

The first of these ideas is what Dr. Lang described as the "national idea," an idea which, though it did not first take root during the years of the war, certainly grew most vigorously then, the want of unity amongst our people having an opportunity of being recognised more clearly in these difficult years than ever before. This resulted in suggestions coming from the most intelligent sections of the Swiss people regarding the necessity of making the teaching of political economy and the principles embodied in the constitution of Switzerland an obligatory branch of study. The necessity of having a textbook in the three sister languages introduced into all schools was also emphasised. Such innovations, of course, could not be made in a day or even a year, and many were the heated arguments and discussions arising from these suggested reforms. But they have gradually fought their way forwards with the help of Dr. A. Barth and other eminent Swiss scholars until they have found themselves in the official paragraphs regarding education in Secondary Schools.

The second educational idea is that of the "democratisation of education." Dr. Lang is of opinion that, although in the eyes of the law all Swiss citizens are equal, yet when it comes to educational matters there is much to be desired in this respect, a university training being, as a rule, dependent not upon the boy's ability, but upon his father's banking account. Switzerland, it is true, has probably fewer illiterates than other countries, but she has rather poor facilities in the way of bursaries and scholarships when compared with many of them. Movements are now afoot, however, to bring higher education within the reach of everybody. Special committees have secured certain funds and have given many a young man a chance he would not otherwise have had. But there has as yet been no scheme pursued on the lines of providing for the maintenance of students. In this connection, too, the Volkshochschule must be mentioned, a movement to provide evening courses of instruction for working people. Up till 1918 very little had been done in Switzerland in this respect, but now these evening courses have found approbation in all the big university centres. The names of Fried. Stingelin, Hans Berlepsch-Valendàs, and Fried. Wartenweiler should be known by all those who cherish the idea of democratisation of education, for they founded what were known as Volkshochschulgemeinden, small circles for expounding and discussing different scientific, artistic literary, and philosophic subjects amongst working people under the guidance of university scholars.

"Self-Government," the third idea, arose out of a widespread feeling amongst most of the younger schoolmasters that much in the organisation of Swiss schools had become mechanical, the pupils having no opportunities whatsoever of showing initiative. With this idea was linked the principle of the "Arbeitschule" which favoured manual work in education. The "Ecoles Nouvelles" are private and public schools founded in order to provide education on the so-called "Arbeitsprinzip," and in these schools instruction is therefore coupled with practical manual work whenever possible. Unfortunately, these schools are rather expensive and are thus limited to wealthy people, no detailed scheme as yet having been brought forward to found State schools on similar lines. Self-government has,

however, gradually found its way into the State schools, only to a small extent, it is true, in the Elementary Schools, but some of the Secondary Schools have adopted schemes whereby the pupils are granted leave to co-operate with the school authorities, each class being able to elect delegates to a central committee which deals with matters of minor importance, the more important proposals being discussed at General Assemblies of all the pupils. In the Universities self-government has developed very widely, most of the universities now having students' parliaments which share the administrative management of the university. In July, 1920, all these students' organisations joined together and founded the Confederation of Swiss Students' Organisations, which, in its turn, became a member of the Confédération Internationale des Etudiants. These organisations provide unique debating opportunities for the students, and they have also their own central secretariat and press service, and are starting such big schemes as the founding of students' homes and a Sanatorium Universitaire.

The answers to the various questions which were put after the lecture strengthened the proof of the thoroughness with which Dr. Lang had studied his subject. Mr. A. F. Suter spoke a few appropriate words in defence of the English educational system, giving the lie to the idea, prevalent in the mind of many Swiss, that schools over here are so infinitely inferior to our own. A close study of them reveals quite a different picture, and as a complement to Dr. Lang's lecture it would be interesting if at some future date the N.S.H. could get a scholastic with intimate knowledge of both educational systems to give a comparative review of them. By.

## CONCERT DE L'UNION CHRETIENNE DE JEUNES GENS DE LANGUE FRANCAISE.

Le Récital de Vendredi soir (le 27 Janvier) au King George's Hall, Y.M.C.A., n'a certainement pas désappointé les 500 personnes qui s'y étaient rendues malgré la pluie et le mauvais temps. Et les organisateurs de cette charmante soirée musicale ont pu se féliciter d'un gros succès à tous points de vue.

Les Artistes qui, à cette occasion, avaient offert généreusement leurs services à la très bonne cause de l'Union (Jeunes Gens de langue française) ont gagné et bien mérité les fleurs et les chaleureux applaudissements de l'auditoire. Au fait le petit louveteau qui insistait à leur présenter ses hommages avant la fin des pièces, traduisait en quelque sorte ce que les auditeurs charmés ressentaient eux-mêmes.

Madame Paravicini a gracieusement patronisé jusqu'à la dernière minute cette petite fête et S.E. le Ministre, en venant joindre avec une simplicité toute démocratique les rangs des nombreux auditeurs, a grandement aidé à donner à l'assemblée son atmosphère suisse et a sans doute ainsi tenu à montrer combien l'oeuvre de cette Union est digne de l'intérêt et du support de la colonie suisse de Londres.

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