

The federal thirst

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THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND THE TICINO.

It is not an extract from some recent issue of one of the dailies of the Ticino, but the following comments on the "Freedom of the Press" are taken from one of the books by Stefano Franscini, written about 1827. They should be of interest to the present generation also. Stefano Franscini is perhaps the best statesman the Ticino has ever produced and was one of the seven members of the first Swiss Federal Council, that of 1848, so that his words are not without importance. This is what he says:

"In Switzerland, where the republican form of Government is very old and where the word 'liberty' is on everybody's lips, there are nevertheless numerous people who do not understand the incalculable advantages of the freedom of the press. There are even many citizens who consider it a dreadful and abominable thing. How can we, however, be surprised at such opinions when we find that these 'republicans' do not have a correct idea of what the freedom of the press means and think that it enables individuals to speak evil with impunity. The freedom of the press, I will say with an eminent French writer, means that every citizen, as long as he does not offend religion or public morals, nor commit a breach of the law, shall have the right to discuss and criticise to his heart's content the actions of the Government, of the other authorities and of public officials, or deal with any other matter. This is never harmful because, in the end, truth will always prevail. But you find immediately men in large numbers who shout as loudly as they can of the abuses which may be made of such a right and demand its abolition. Let us however beware of their arguments and opinions because, if we were to dance to their tune we would find ourselves compelled, for similar reasons, to deprive ourselves of every other kind of liberty, as any right may be abused.

As, however, no man who is not a vile coward desires despotism, whether it be monarchical or republican, it is essential that of the present liberties we should value and stoutly defend the freedom of the press, exterminator of any despotic régime and soul of a truly free and civilised community. . . . It is strange, however, that the written constitutions of the Swiss Cantons, with the only exception of that of Geneva, do not contain even a phrase guaranteeing such an important object. Such silence does not, however, deprive the Swiss citizens of their right.

During the first few years that followed the revolution of 1814 not much use was made in Switzerland of the liberty of the press, but matters changed somewhat just after 1820, and as the Swiss appear more daring in talking of other peoples' misfortunes than of their own ills, a lot was written about foreign affairs. It was not long before the greater Continental powers, who were the soul of that alliance which styled itself "holy," lodged bitter complaints with various Cantonal Governments and even with the Federal Diet. As it was to be expected, the complaints of such monarchies could not fail to have complete effect on republicans, many of whom were themselves afraid of the liberty of the press. Therefore, in 1823, the Federal Diet decreed that the Cantonal Governments should submit the press to censorship, so that nothing should be written in Switzerland which might displease foreign powers. So that even certain "kinglets" within Switzerland should not be disturbed from their lazy slumber, various Cantons established the censorship even for internal affairs.

It must be said that in some parts of the country the censorship for internal affairs was not enacted, but it would have been often useless to do so, as hardly anywhere were there men who would take the trouble to publish through the press their opinions about public affairs and the actions of the governments. It is now the fourth year that the Swiss citizens are compelled to forgo such a precious portion of their liberty. Who knows how much longer it will last? The supreme authorities of various cantons have deserved well of their citizens by the measure of freedom they give to the press. Among them I would mention Basle, Lucerne, Argovie, St. Gall, Vaud and Appenzell Auser-Rhoden. In Geneva the censorship has been abolished, but a law has been passed which is accused of undue rigour.

I am, however, proud to affirm that the Grand Council of the Ticino in refusing, with admirable unanimity and splendid patriotism, to comply with the bidding of the Federal Diet and to apply any restriction whatsoever to so legitimate a right of man as the freedom of the press, has deserved the finest of praises. I am, moreover, fully certain that at no future time and for no other cause will it stain its record."

It seems a stroke of irony that while Stefano Franscini so highly praises the defiance of the Federal Authority, on the part of the Ticino, he should himself later on have been chosen as one of the members of the first Federal Council. That Franscini was a true interpreter of the spirit of the Ticinesi, as mentioned in his last phrase, is clear from what happened in 1924/1926, when we had a position similar to that of a hundred years

ago. Reaction again holds up its head around our frontiers and several of the dailies of the Ticino, particularly the "*Libera Stampa*" of Lugano, the daily of the socialist party of the Ticino, open their columns without reserve to Italian refugees. The Federal Council calls upon the authorities of the Ticino to curtail the freedom of the press and the right of asylum but, to begin with, without getting a hearing. Even the fact that from Berne the pressure is mainly exerted by Mr. Motta, as spokesman of the Federal Council, and in the Ticino we find Cattori, himself a fellow leader of the catholic-conservative party, at the head of the Cantonal government, did not make the passage of arms any less bitter and Mr. Cattori no doubt had the support of the great majority of the Ticinesi, irrespective of party allegiance.

The attitude of the Berne authorities appeared to be based mainly on the principle of "anything for a quiet life," while the authorities of the Ticino contended that the fundamental principles of humanity and the traditions of Switzerland were not to be tampered with in order to please anybody, not even a dictator. Eventually the catholic-conservative party, at the head of the tide somewhat, but there is no doubt that a lot of the friction which has existed in recent years between Bellinzona and Berne is due to the great divergence of opinion on such questions of principle. O.B.

SWITZERLAND-THE MOST INVENTIVE NATION.

Mr. Mark Jefferson, an American publisher, has established a classification of various nations based on the number of patents issued for every million inhabitants of all the countries concerned. The results obtained are the following: India 0.5; Russia 0.6; Portugal 2; Japan 3; Mexico and Lithuania 4; Poland and Rumania 5; Bulgaria 7; Latvia 8; Greece and Yugoslavia 9; Argentine 10; South Africa 17; Spain 21; Finland 40; Italy 42; Hungary 68; Czechoslovakia 108; Great Britain 188; France 195; Norway 229; Netherlands 233; Denmark 236; Germany 271; Austria 298; Sweden 299; Switzerland 930.

It is obvious that these figures cannot be absolutely accurate and the fact should be taken into consideration that the protection extended to inventors varies greatly in the different states. Switzerland, however, occupies far and away the first rank, and this result has been further confirmed by the following figures: In the course of 1928, 542 Swiss patents (per million inhabitants) were obtained against 382 during the same period in the United States.

THE FEDERAL THIRST.

It is fairly well known that there are a good many Swiss who believe that "another drop won't do us any harm." According to recent statistics our small country imported in 1928 alcoholic beverages for Frs. 99,800,000, of which sum 68 millions were spent on wines; 65 million litres were imported from Spain, 37 millions from Italy and 14 millions from France. Italy provides us with Chianti, Tiroler and Veltliner, France with Bordeaux, Rosé, Champagne and Médoc, wines which are in all cases consumed in their natural condition. As far as the imports from Spain are concerned they are in most cases used for the "manufacture" of Liqueurs, etc. A great part is also used for mixing it with home-grown wine of not quite so sweet a quality. Many a local wine, proud of its dialect name, could tell a long long story, and might too often wish the happy consumer a "good health" in a language unknown to him. However, as long as the various mixtures are named in the proper manner the authorities are satisfied and they are at least in all cases Nature's products, however difficult it might be to ascertain their geographical origin.

It is a fact that 125 litres of imported wines are consumed per head of our population, to which have to be added our own products. The authorities which govern the "Schnaps Monopol" are responsible for the importation of 56,168,000 litres. About 8 million litres are produced by our own farmers and one might think that this ought to be quite enough without importing foreign produce. To crown it all we are told that imported hops and malt amount to 25 million francs. How many barrels of beer are brewed from that we cannot say. It has been ascertained that the various beverages which our thirsty populace swallows yearly would easily fill the Wallensee.—*Translated from the Zentral. Schv. Volksblatt.*

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PEACEFUL SWISS.

Investigation of the nations which claim the longest record of peace shows that Holland is out of it. She had a war in Europe in 1830, against the revolting Belgians and their French allies, and has had several "little wars" since in her overseas possessions.

Norway was involved in the Napoleonic Wars as an appanage first of Denmark and afterwards of Sweden. Switzerland remained passive in Napoleon's time, and the last time that the Swiss took up arms in earnest was in the resistance of some isolated communities to the French republican armies in 1798.

Switzerland seems to hold the palm. But probably Norway has suffered the least from war.

Yet as late as 1857 (or thereabouts) Switzerland was "in a state of war" against Prussia over Neuchâtel, which was claimed by both parties.

It was before the unification of the German Empire, and the situation was Gilbertian. Prussia rattled the sabre. Switzerland assembled its armies in defence. But neither could get at the other without violating neutral ground.

The matter was settled without bloodshed, so it can hardly be considered a case of war.

BOOK REVIEWS.

Pestalozzi-Calender. (Published by Kaiser & Co., Berne, Price Fr. 2.90.)

The 23rd edition of this favourite publication of the young generation in Switzerland is as rich and as varied in contents as any of the previous issues which have gained the Pestalozzi-Calender the unfailing popularity with its small and big readers that it fully deserves. It is published in all the three languages of our country and that in two editions each, one for the boys and one for the girls. How the editor succeeds in providing for almost every conceivable interest that the school boys and girls may have is something amazing. Besides the numerous instructional pages there is plentiful matter for entertainment and amusement. The Calendar is a veritable hand-book for the diligent schoolboy to assist him in his homework, containing many tables, amongst which may be mentioned one of the measures, Continental as well as English. There is as usual a scribbling diary with interesting ornaments. The illustrations and picture reproductions are as always chosen with a discerning taste. Hints to encourage the young reader to make things with a few tools are not lacking. The Calendar remains the most charming guide and help-mate for the young, decidedly better than any similar publication we have seen in other countries. To the boys and girls in our Colony, who may be fortunate enough to get the Calendar this year, it should be the most pleasing reminder of their far-off home-country. Dr. E.

* * *

A very amusing book of rhymes on winter sports has just been published by Messrs. Jenkins, Ltd., "*Winter Sportings*," text by Reginald Arkell, illustrations by Lewis Baumer, price 7/6. It is a charming book of nonsensical verse about the human and humorous aspects of the varied clientele in our winter resorts. With the permission of the publishers we reproduce below the last valedictory poem in the book, containing a good humoured gibe at the legendary prices charged at the hotels:

"OH, WHAT A CHARGE THEY MADE : "

In History you cannot miss
The fine achievements of the Swiss,
When there was any war about,
Their mercenaries doubled out.

They always fought—it was their boast—
For anyone who paid them most;
And every time their pikemen charged
Some other country was enlarged.

Though Chivalry, with folded wings,
Broods on her Captains and her Kings;
The gallant Swiss, for foreign gold,
Still keep on charging as of old.

THE EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

The Editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed by Correspondents and cannot publish anonymous articles, unless accompanied by the writer's name and address, as evidence of good faith.

IN PRAISE OF THE S.O.

To the Editor of *The Swiss Observer*.

Dear Sir,—I enclose my subscription which I am afraid is overdue.

I am one of the many Swiss residents in London who until recently was not a regular subscriber to the *S.O.*, but I now look forward to the post on Friday. I enjoy the *S.O.* from cover to cover, and I must congratulate you, Mr. Editor, for the interesting news, amusing articles, and all the other good things that go to make it such a good publication.

I am always sad that there is so little news about our dear Ticino, but I suppose all my compatriots from the other twenty-one Cantons could say the same, and then your task would be a colossal one!

With all good wishes for the success of your recent appeal for new subscribers.

Yours truly,
93., Abingdon Road, W.S. (Miss) A. BERTAZZI.