

Spitteler in English [to be continued]

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SPITTELER IN ENGLISH.

W. G. LOCKETT.

I have always remembered with pleasure the good lunch and the good talk I had with Dr. James F. Muirhead at the Grand Hotel and Bellevère in Davos one day in the summer of (I think) 1922. I found in him a man who knew and loved Switzerland — knew it thoroughly and loved it wisely. But the most memorable and most surprising discovery was — the first and only Englishman I ever met who really knew something about Carl Spitteler!

Last summer I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Muirhead again, at the headquarters of the English Speaking Union in London. On that occasion there was further talk about Spitteler. And by that time I had discovered that Dr. Muirhead probably knew Spitteler better than any Englishman whatever; for he had in the meanwhile translated a bookful of his essays and many of his poems.

The name of Muirhead is associated with two of the most famous series of guide-books in the world. For thirty years J. F. Muirhead was connected with the world-renowned enterprise of Karl Baedeker. The outbreak of the Great War put an abrupt end to all that. With a sigh of regret at loss of income, and another of relief at leisure gained, he turned to various literary and other schemes that interested him. First of all, however, he helped his younger brother, Findlay (who had long before become his colleague in Baedeker work) to start an independent English Guide-book undertaking. In 1915 Muirhead Guide Books, Ltd., was founded, with Findlay Muirhead as organizer and editor of the Blue Guides, of which a good shelf-ful have now been published in English and in French. The major part of the Blue Guide to Switzerland, first published in 1923, was written by James F. Muirhead, who especially revisited Switzerland for the purpose; and then it was I had the pleasure of meeting him at Davos. A second edition has been issued in 1930 and Dr. Muirhead came to this country again in the summer of 1929, on a visit of revision.

The original preparation of this guide was a factor in his undertaking to write "The Wayfarer in Switzerland" for Methuen's well-known series, and it was while he was in Switzerland gathering material for this book that his first real acquaintance with Spitteler began. A Swiss friend of his at Lucerne said, "You must mention Spitteler in the 'Wayfarer'!" Dr. Muirhead thereupon bought Spitteler's "Ballads" on the way back to his hotel, read some of them that same evening, and fell immediately and irretrievably under Carl Spitteler's spell.

He did put Spitteler into his "Wayfarer." In a chapter entitled "Soleure, Liestal, and a Poet," he gives in less than five pages what is perhaps the first anything like adequate account of Spitteler in the English language — a persuasive compact characterization. Those illuminating pages include translations of two of the shorter poems, "Glöckleins Klage" and "Adamsruh," chosen he says, because they were relatively easy to translate. The form of the translation owed much, Dr. Muirhead added, to the collaboration of Miss E. C. Mayne.

Miss Ethel Colburn Mayne, whom Dr. Muirhead managed to inoculate with the Spitteler virus, is best known and will probably be longest remembered for her important biographical works on Byron and Lady Byron, books with a solid fundamental research value, that no future student of Byron can afford to neglect. Miss Mayne herself would prefer to be remembered for her creative work, and above all for her short stories, which have indeed been widely read, and highly esteemed by the most competent judges.

Like Muirhead, she has an unusually thorough knowledge of the German language, and an even more unusual aptitude for translating, both from French and German. She has put into excellent English several well-known recent German books, such as Emil Ludwig's "Goethe" and his "Wilhelm II"; but she also possesses the still rarer gift of being able to change German poetry into English poetry. She has translated, for the mere love of the thing, the whole of Heine's poems, though she has not yet found (if she has sought) a publisher for them. Indeed, it may be doubted if she ever seriously supposed that a publisher would be found for the Spitteler verse translations, into the doing of which she entered vigorously and voluminously, probably, too, for the "fun" or love of the thing!

As a matter of fact, Mr. Muirhead could not at first find any publisher who would consider publishing translations of Spitteler's poetry; so he paved the way with a volume of essays taken from the "Lachende Wahrheiten," and published in 1927 by G. P. Putnam's Sons, London and New York, under the title of "Laughing Truths." Dr. Muirhead, whose good clear prose is appreciated by all who have read his "America, the Land of Contrasts," "American Shrines on English soil," and his other writings, has given

us a version of Spitteler's essays that presents the witty, keen-cutting, satirical, often waggish, yet sometimes solemn, thought-winged wisdom of the original in an English of real charm.

Dr. Muirhead puts in the forefront of his book a quotation from Romain Rolland, who describes Spitteler as "Our Homer, the greatest German poet since Goethe, the only master of the epic since Milton." Then the translator gives in seven pages a useful introduction to the book and its author, with a sketch of his life and work, and an explanation why this particular book was chosen to introduce Spitteler to the British public, rather than the epic which is the sun around which his other works revolve. First, it is because it is prose, therefore required less courage than the translation of poetry; and secondly because these essays "cover practically the whole field of Spitteler's interests, not only as author but as musician, artist, citizen, nature-lover, and man." Essays by Spitteler attracted the attention and the admiration of Nietzsche before any of them appeared in book form. Some of those translated in this book throw valuable light on the workings of Spitteler's mind, and the noble way in which for years he fought his way to the height of achievement that he ultimately attained. I do not know any more impressive self-revelation of the enormous strain and warfare that the poet's function inflicts upon him in the exploration of his own world and the perfect utterance of it, than can be found in some passages of the essay entitled "The Personality of the Poet." But in order to appreciate this to the full it is necessary to know something of the story of Spitteler's life. (To be continued in next issue).

FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE FEDERAL RAILWAYS.

The outstanding feature of last year's working was the steady decline in receipts which, in spite of the electrification, began to influence the earnings from passenger traffic. This may be attributed to the steadily growing general economic crisis, to the unfavourable weather conditions during the summer season, to the restrictive measures established by the German Government in order to prevent its nationals from travelling abroad, and to the serious depreciation of the pound sterling. On the other hand, although the French Colonial Exhibition in Paris was visited by a large number of Swiss people, the short-train journey to the frontier was not sufficient compensation for the lost tourist and holiday traffic in the country itself.

As regards freight traffic, the Federal Railways were hard hit by the ever-increasing road traffic, this being due especially to the lack of proper regulations applying to motor traffic as far as its liabilities and activities are concerned, except in the case of passenger traffic where a well-organised licensing system has resulted in an exemplary co-ordination of the railways and the feeder motor-car services.

The returns for passenger traffic during 1931 show a loss of more than 5 million passengers and Frs. 8,788,264. As for freight traffic, there were 815,298 tons less conveyed and a decrease in receipts amounting to approximately 10 mill. frs. The working receipts amounted to Frs. 387,231,544 and showed a loss of over 18 mill. frs. It was impossible to balance this decline by corresponding economies in expenditure, the latter amounting to Frs. 268,262,356, i.e., only 5 millions less than in the preceding year. The savings were realised mainly in respect of maintenance, mechanical and electrical material, and rolling-stock. Further reductions in the future will prove a difficult problem for the management, as during the last few years the Federal Railways have conscientiously rationalised all their services and have introduced cuts in their staff as much as possible. On the other hand, the chief expenditure being in respect of wages, it is difficult if not impossible to effect any economy here, as these are fixed by Federal Law and depend entirely on the decisions of Parliament.

Although the working surplus amounts to Frs. 118,996,191 as against 132 million francs in 1930, the profit and loss account shows a deficit of 12 millions, owing to the extremely high capital charges which require a special fund of 131 million francs for the payment of interest, amortisation and investments. The financial position of the principal enterprise in this country is frequently discussed in the press, and will also be examined by Parliament during the Spring Sessions. As the war deficit resulted from causes outside the control of the Federal Railways and could be reduced only to 138 million francs, it is possible that a solution of the problem may be found in Government aid, which may also help to influence the competition between rail and road. Certain feelers on the subject, which have appeared in the press, show the difficulty of any decision in this direction, as they invite the Board of Management not to put too much trust in relief measures on the part of the political authorities.

R.G.

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DAS JAHR IN DER FREMDE.

DER ÜBERSEER.

(Schweizerspiegel)

Ich habe 19 Jahre lang in Argentinien gelebt und mancherlei Schweizer kennen gelernt, die ihr Jahr in der Fremde absolvierten.

Viele kamen daher, als hätten sie einen Lorbeerkranz auf dem Hut und eine Karte: Ehrenmeldung für Elite-Rasse, Jakob Streuli aus Zürich, Vollblut-Schweizer!!! Das ist ein amüsantes und auch melancholisches Kapitel: jeder Schweizer hat irgendwo in der Schule oder im Verein gehört, dass man im Ausland die Schweizer durchweg mit offenen Armen empfängt. Er "weiss" genau, dass Deutsche oder Franzosen, geschweige denn solch minderwertige Rassen wie Spanier oder Italiener punkto Intelligenz, Ehrlichkeit und Tüchtigkeit mit keinem Schweizer konkurrieren können. Im Ausland erlebt er dann eine Enttäuschung nach der anderen. Kein Mensch schlägt bei seiner Ankunft vor Entzücken die Hände zusammen; keinem Menschen fällt es ein, den Schweizer einzig und allein seiner Nationalität wegen für ein höheres Wesen zu halten; die Ausländer wissen nicht einmal, dass die Schweizer die besten Schützen der Welt sind.

Dagegen macht Jakob Streuli die Entdeckung, dass mancher Argentinier unter seinen literarischen Schätzen die Tagebücher des Genfer Philosophen Amiel besitzt, sogar liest und immer wieder liest. (Wer ist übrigens dieser Amiel? Den hat man doch in der Schule nicht "gehabt" ...?)

Am ersten Abend war man mit ein paar argentinischen Studenten zusammen, empfohlen durch einen in Zürich studierenden Argentinier. Aber was erlaubten sich die jungen Leute dem ausländischen Gast gegenüber? Führt ihn in ein Café wo man bis in die Nacht hinein sitzen blieb, einen Schwarzen nach dem andern trank und den Fremdling in aufdringlicher Weise um seine Meinung über den Völkerbund, über Gandhi, Picasso, Zuloaga, Nurni, Le Corbusier und Unamuno anbot.

Einer der Studenten sah den schneidigen Bierzipfel des Herrn Jakob Streuli alias Bambus, hatte aber kein richtiges Verständnis für dessen Bericht über das studentische Verbindungswesen in der berühmten Republik. Er wollte nicht einmal glauben, dass in der Schweiz mancher krummgehockte Buchhalter, manche Putzfrau, mancher Lehrer den letzten Franken opfert, damit der hoffnungsvolle Sohn studieren kann, ohne daneben zu arbeiten. Damit er aber auch