

# Cultural survey

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1951)**

Heft 1155

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690435>

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**CULTURAL SURVEY.**

By Dr. HANS EHINGER.

French-speaking Switzerland, to which we intend to devote ourselves exclusively to-day, has lost two of its outstanding personalities during the last few weeks. The Abbé Joseph Bovet, who died at the age of seventy, was a popular bard, such as one comes across only too seldom. The greater part of his artistic life was spent in the ancient city of Fribourg, where his activities were centred on music and teaching. He was an excellent conductor and pedagogue. For many decades he acted as Choir-Master in the St. Nicholas Cathedral, that beautiful landmark which stands out among the many lovely buildings, in which the city is so rich. In this capacity he was able to develop his musical talents within a large radius, and similarly, as a educator he found large fields for his activities within and around the University. The number and variety of compositions which he leaves behind him, are simply astounding. He has written countless — so it would seem — works of a religious character, although he was perfectly aware that in many cases, the religious music which he had composed would not outlive the occasion for which it had been written. But there lay deep within him a spiritual urge to sing the praises of his Lord ever afresh and in some new way, and he never troubled in the slightest about any satisfaction to his artist's pride. How he managed, in addition to all these activities, to still find time to do a great deal of translating, will remain his secret. The large number of transpositions he made from operas, oratoria, cantatas and other choral works, would alone have sufficed to fill any other man's life. Little will remain of all this, but the Abbé Bovet will long continue to live as a composer; it is even possible that some of his melodies will go on being sung, when he who wrote them has been forgotten. For, in a modest form, he was able to compose folk-like melodies — very similar to those of Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, who preceded him into the other world, only last summer — possessing a simple beauty of their own. During his life, the Abbé Bovet enjoyed both honours and recognition. He was made an Honorary Doctor of the University of Fribourg, whilst the Federal Singers' Association bestowed on him honorary membership. With his passing away, the world of music — not only in the French-speaking regions, but throughout the country — has lost a kind, charming personality. To show

how much he was loved by the people — during his funeral at the Cathedral, thousands who had been unable to get in, sang his "Vieux Chalet" and other songs, on the Cathedral square.

The death, in his 66th year, of the writer Robert de Traz, which occurred some time ago, spells the loss of a thinker and poet of high quality. He was born in Paris in 1884, and throughout his life he maintained close relations with France, although, at the same time he was first and foremost a Swiss and a Genevese. The number of novels written by him is not small, and some of them have found their way to the German-speaking regions, his stories of soldiers' lives being particularly popular, as for instance "The Man in the Ranks" and "In the Service of Arms". But, it is perhaps in his literary and political essays and studies that the best of Robert de Traz can be found, such as his work on Alfred-de Vigny and those writings of his which cover various grounds and are to be found in the volume entitled "Essays and analysis".— It is most regrettable that his most valuable periodical "Revue de Genève", could not — as has been the case with so many of its kind — be maintained, as it really had a mission to perform. Nevertheless, we have much remaining to us of the artistic life and works of Robert de Traz.

There is still time to mention one or two things concerning French-speaking Switzerland: some time ago, the composer Roger Vuataz, himself conducted a performance of his oratorio "Jesus", a work which requires highly skilled talent for its execution; the première took place in Geneva. . . . An International Competition for Opera Singers was held in Lausanne: the judges awarded six first places, the competitors being three Italians, one American, one Swiss and one Swede. . . . In La Chaux-de-Fonds there has been an exhibition of the works of the sculptor Ossip Zatkine, Frenchman of Russian origin. There were some 60 exhibits on show, a number of them being large sculptures, in addition to which there were also drawings and water-colours. . . . And finally, there is Neuchâtel, which, once a month, makes it possible for the public to see and admire those wonderful, life-size automatic dolls, which some 200 years ago were the admiration of the whole of Europe. They were made by the clock-maker, Pierre Jacquet-Droz and were regarded as the greatest masterpieces of their kind — which they still are, as anyone who has seen them function will most certainly agree to.

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