

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1921)  
**Heft:** 4

**Artikel:** Schweizerische Kulturgemeinschaft  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686001>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 01.04.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

and plebeians, between genius and the multitude. Spitteler's first book, "Prometheus und Epimetheus," appeared in 1880, published by H. R. Sauerländer in Aarau; probably no publishing firm of greater fame would undertake the task. The poet waited "modestly and reverently" for the verdict of the public. J. V. Widmann, the literary editor of the "Bund" and intimate friend of Spitteler, published a eulogistic review in his paper, and Gottfried Keller, Nietzsche, Böcklin, C. F. Meyer and Adolf Frey expressed their appreciation of the book. But one or two swallows do not make a summer, and a poet cannot live on the admiration of a few. For the recognition of a wider public Spitteler had still to wait for many a year, and meanwhile he was forced to shackle his genius to the drudgery of school teaching and journalism. Widmann procured him a post at a girls' school in Berne; from 1881 to 1885 he taught Greek and Latin at a private school in Neuveville, after that he became editor of the "Gränzpost" and the "Basler Nachrichten," at last literary editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung."

Through an inheritance Spitteler became independent in 1891, when he removed to Lucerne with his wife and two daughters, and a never-ceasing stream of poetry has since flown from his Olympian height. But most of these works are of such a sublime nature that they needed a prophet to procure them a reading public. This prophet was J. V. Widmann for Switzerland, and the composer Felix Weingartner for Germany. Of Spitteler it cannot be said that he found recognition abroad before he became appreciated in his native country, because there was a Spittelergemeinde in Switzerland when not even his name was known across the Rhine.

In our humble opinion it is no mere chance that the fame of Spitteler's genius was first carried beyond our national confines not as a man of the art of letters, but of music. Indeed, the works of our poet have a musical rhythm such as we find in very few of the masters of German literature. Even his prose is not like ordinary prose: "Prometheus und Epimetheus"—which, while not written in metre, follows the rhythmical form—in some parts reaches such heights of transcendent sublimity that it sounds more like a symphony than like a prose work.

Yet greater is the affinity of Spitteler's poetry with the art of painting. Whereas his works have nothing in common with any other modern writer, we are reminded of Böcklin by the great mystical and epic creations and the richness of colour in the descriptive topography, and we think of Hodler if we contemplate the monumental, superhuman structure of the characters and the vigour of line in their presentation.

Spitteler is not a national poet as Gottfried Keller, Jeremias Gotthelf, and, in a minor degree, C. T. Meyer were. As his stage he has chosen the world, as players mankind with its hopes and disappointments, its aspirations and defeats. The theme which underlies, more or less obviously, all the works of Spitteler is the struggle between the genius and the multitude, the herd and the crowd. This hero-worship finds no limitation in the men of the greatest cultural achievement; even his peasant and farm-servant protagonists are types of supermen, standing high above their surroundings. As a Swiss Spitteler shows himself in the choice of scenery, and in the use of words from our dialect. His gods and goddesses with foreign names move about in our Alps and on our Jura, and scores of provincialisms are borrowed from the "Schwyzerdütsch."

Spitteler's philosophy, as expressed in his works, is one of resigned pessimism:

"Erbärmlich klingt's zwar nicht, allein es wird so sein:

"Der Weltenwert höchste heissen Form und Schein."

This is the verdict of Zeus about the aim of the world and our life, and all the Olympians acclaim the dictum. However, Heracles, the man brought up by Zeus as his own image, but bereft of fame, success and happiness by Moira starts his mission to the earth with the words:

"Mut sei mein Wahlspruch bis zum letzten Atemzug,  
"Mein Herz heisst: Dennoch! Herakles bedarf nicht Dank."

For a first acquaintance with Spitteler's genius the easiest access is through his short prose works. "Mädchenfeinde," "Conrad der Leutnant," "Gustav," "Friedli der Kolderi," and "Meine frühesten Erinnerungen" will appeal to everybody who loves good literature. They pave the way to "Imago," in which realism is united with symbolism; from there the path leads up to the ethereal "Prometheus und Epimetheus," which Gottfried Keller called a "sibylline book," and to the epos "Olympischer Frühling," Spitteler's greatest work. The climb is steep, but he who has reached the height enjoys a feeling of grandeur and sublimity such as very few books give.

#### SCHWEIZERISCHE KULTURGEMEINSCHAFT.

(BY OPTIMUS).

Die politische Krisis, welche die Schweiz während des Weltkrieges durchgemacht hat, ist uns in den grellsten Tönen geschildert worden; unsere heimatlichen Zeitungen redeten vier Jahre lang Tag für Tag von der Gefahr, welche unser Land bedrohte, und auch in Vorträgen im Schoosse unserer Vereine ist uns der Teufel mehrmals an die Wand gemalt worden. Noch vor wenigen Wochen wurde die ganze nationale Leidensgeschichte vor unserem Geiste heraufbeschworen, als ob es gelte den Beelzebub für immer unserem Gedächtnis einzuprägen.

Worin bestand die vermeintliche Gefahr? Darin, dass die Rassengemeinschaften, welche unsere Nation ausmachen, den rings um unsere Grenzen brandenden Krieg von zwei Gesichtspunkten aus betrachteten und so bei ungleichen Akten und Szenen des grossen Welt dramas Beifall klatschten oder in feierlicher Lautlosigkeit verharrten. Also Meinungsverschiedenheit, welche Meinungs austausch ruft. Ist aber nicht jede tiefgründige Ehe ein Ideenkampf zwischen zwei Seelen? Oder will jemand behaupten, dass jenes die Idealehen sind, wo die Gefühls- und Gedankenwelten der beiden Gatten restlos ineinander aufgehen? Mir scheint, dass der Geisteskampf vielmehr ein Zeugnis vorhandener Kulturwerte ist, der durch die gegenseitige Befruchtung neue Werte schafft. Natürlich darf dieser Kampf nur mit reinen, geistigen Mitteln geführt werden, und jeder Gatte muss dem andern Verständnis und Nachsicht entgegenbringen; wer sich durch Meinungsverschiedenheit zu Wutausbrüchen, Beleidigungen oder gar Miss-handlungen verleiten lässt, beweist damit nur seinen eigenen Unwert.

Wir haben diese Analogie gebraucht, weil sich Vorstellungen des Einzellebens leichter in Begriffe fassen lassen als die komplizierteren, uns weniger alltäglich vor Augen tretenden Vorgänge des Staatenlebens. Von einem lassen sich aber Rückschlüsse auf das andere ziehen, und Lehren und Grundsätze, welche für das Individuum oder von der Familie gelten, müssen folgerichtig auch auf die nationale Psychologie Anwendung finden. Und ist unsere Nation nicht das schönste Beispiel einer ehelichen Ver-

bindung zwischen Rassen, Sprachen und Religionen? Aber mehr als das; die Schweiz hat das Problem, welches Goethe im zweiten Teil des "Faust" symbolisch behandelt—das Problem der Befruchtung zwischen zwei Kulturen und der Erzeugung einer neuen hybriden Kultur—einer Lösung entgegengeführt. Wenn sich auch die beiden Kulturkomponenten, die germanische und die romanische Mentalität nie völlig ineinander vermischen werden, so ergänzen sie sich doch jeden Tag und weichen so immer mehr von ihren Originalen ab. Je stärker der Kampf zwischen den beiden Lagern tobt, um so rascher nähern sie sich einander—vorausgesetzt natürlich, dass der Bogen von keiner Seite überspannt wird und es nicht zum Bruche kommt. Gewiss können wir schon heute sagen, dass die kulturelle Verwandtschaft zwischen uns Brüdern des Westens und des Ostens eine engere ist als die Verwandtschaft mit unseren Urbildern.

Wenn wir uns selbst nicht bewusst sind, dass wir eine eigene schweizerische Kultur besitzen, so müssen wir es uns vom Auslande sagen lassen. Es ist da sehr lesenswert was eine englische Schriftstellerin, Marie Hay, in einer jüngst erschienenen überaus sympathischen Studie über Gottfried Keller\* vom Einflusse sagt, den der romanische Geist auf die deutschschweizerischen Dichter und umgekehrt der deutschschweizerische Geist auf die romanischen Dichter ausübt:

"Swiss literature has often been regarded as falling under the heading of the languages employed. We have been accustomed to class French Swiss writers among French authors, and the German Swiss writers we have considered as belonging to German literature. Obviously they have been influenced by the two languages, but there is a colour in Swiss writers' work which places it apart from German and French literature. Even Jean Jacques Rousseau and Madame de Staël are not French, but Swiss in mentality. Amiel, too, is unlatin in thought, and although he mastered German literature in his wide reading, his mind is not akin to the German spirit.

"It is difficult to define the character of Swiss inspiration as differing from that of the two neighbouring nations—an accent, a tone, an atmosphere are things heard, acutely felt, but elusive, subtle. As near as it can be expressed, this Swissness consists in a sobriety, a certain sternness, a Huguenot plainness. Poetry is not lacking, nor sentiment, but there is a marked absence of ornamentation. There is a tendency to preaching and, most noticeably, a conscientious emphasis on all that is democratic; and, save in the case of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's chiselled work, a studied rejection of elegance. Keller repudiated the classification of Swiss literature apart from the main body of German literature, but the difference exists for all Meister Gottfried's objection. He himself is essentially Swiss. This does not imply a restriction in his knowledge of other literatures, for like all great writers, he was master of much and varied reading. Books were the bread of his mental life. How alike are the passages which tell of the Grüne Heinrich's omnivorous reading, and the pages where Jean Jacques confesses his mania for books. "La tête me tournait de la lecture, je ne faisais plus que lire," Rousseau says; while Keller makes the Grüne Heinrich read some six-and-thirty volumes of Jean Paul in a month or two, and about fifty of Goethe's works in forty days."

\* Das im Verlage von Wyss in Bern erschienene englische Werk ist die beste Einführung in Gottfried Keller's Dichtkunst, welche wir kennen. Das Buch befindet sich in der Bibliothek der N.S.H. und kann den Mitgliedern warm empfohlen werden.

## FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

The import and export figures for the first three quarters of 1920 are: Imports, 3,214,279,670 frs.; exports, 2,585,000,000 frs.; as compared with 2,532,391,493 frs. and 2,282,000,000 frs. for the same period of the previous year. As the imports show a bigger increase than the exports, it is interesting to note that this is due primarily to larger imports especially of coal and of some raw materials, e.g., wool, silk and iron.

An event of first importance in Switzerland is the probable amalgamation of the Leu & Co.'s Bank with the Swiss Banking Association (Schweizer. Bankgesellschaft, Union de Banques Suisses). Leu & Co. is heavily engaged in Germany, as its claims against German debtors amount to about 40,000,000 Mks., of which only a portion of about 18,000,000 Mks. is repayable in gold. The negotiations are therefore nothing else than the consequence of the low value of the German Mark.

The scheme of amalgamation is reported to be the following: As Leu & Co. has not only been a commercial but also a mortgage banking institution, the whole undertaking is to be divided into two parts. The sound, commercial part of the business is to be taken over by the Swiss Banking Association, while the mortgage side will be formed into a company for itself and then go into liquidation. The shareholders of Leu & Co. will probably get one share of the Swiss Banking Association in return for four of their own, and one share of the company to be liquidated against one share of Leu & Co. It is, however, not yet sure whether this scheme will be adopted as the eventual solution.

According to the "Basler Nachrichten" Leu & Co. is the oldest bank on the Continent, with the exception of Italian banks. It was founded 1754 as a financial institution of the City of Zurich, and developed itself since 1798, and except the years 1854 to 1872, as a purely private undertaking. The Swiss Banking Association presents a strong contrast, being a comparatively young undertaking, as it was formed in 1912 by the amalgamation of the Bank in Winterthur (founded 1862) and the Toggenburger Bank (founded 1863).\*

We learn from Switzerland that the Swiss Bank Corporation and Lloyd's Bank, Ltd., have become the official bankers of the League of Nations.

Though the tension on the financial market in Switzerland is still very great, we have at the present time several cantonal issues pending, viz.:

The Canton of Basle City is at present issuing Treasury Bills up to an unlimited amount, the rate of interest being fixed at 7 per cent.

At the same time the Canton of Tessin is raising a loan of 5—6 millions francs. The interest is 6 per cent., the issue price 95 per cent.

The cantonal government of Grisons has been authorised to increase the capital of the canton's banking institution from 10 to 30 millions of Francs.

The canton of Zurich raised a loan of 10,000,000 frs. a short time ago for the purpose of increasing the endowment capital of the electrical enterprises of the canton. Recent reports state that the loan has been very successful, the whole amount having been subscribed.