

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: - (1931)
Heft: 505

Artikel: English influences on Swiss intellectual life [to be continued]
Autor: Latt, A.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693502>

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: 13.08.2025

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

CAPTAIN EDUARD SPELTERINI. †

*"Steige, steige, Riesenglocke!
Meine Seele schwebt mit dir.
Eine windverwehte Flocke
Flattern Felder unter ihr,
Tanneneid tief die leidbeschwerten,
Schicksalsrollen Erdengärten
Und verhauchten wie das Lied
Das von warmen Lippen schied."*

J. C. Heer.

The death is reported of Captain Spelterini, the wellknown pioneer of the "ballon libre." Many of our compatriots will no doubt remember having seen—or made a flight with him in their earlier days.

Captain Spelterini was born in 1853 at Kirchberg (St. Gallen) and his original name was Eduard Schweizer, he was the possessor of a fine baritone voice which decided him to make his career on the stage as an opera singer. He studied music at the Conservatoires of Paris and Milan with such success, that he received at once an engagement for a début at the L'Opera in Paris; before this, however, could take place he was taken ill with a very severe attack of pneumonia which after a lengthy convalescence left him almost without a voice so that he had to give up his ambition of becoming a singer. It was in 1875 when young Spelterini witnessed for the first time a balloon flight in Paris, the weather was extremely bad, and no would be passenger could be found to accompany the pilot, so our young countryman offered himself and was accepted, the flight was a stormy one but Spelterini kept cool and so impressed the pilot that he recommended him to take up flying as a profession, which he did. He studied very hard and after 3

years, passed the exam as a full blown pilot, his certificate bearing the remark of the Académie d'aérostation de France, "Vous le méritez plus que les autres." From 1879 onwards he became a professional pilot.

Not before Spelterini had undertaken seventeen flights by himself did he start to take passengers with him. He commenced now on travels which took him to England, Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium, Hungary, Rumania, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, South Africa and Denmark. In the meantime, however, he paid a visit to his native land in 1891, where he made his first ascent having as a passenger J. C. Heer, the wellknown Swiss writer. In 1892 he undertook the famous Berne flight, having on board Count Zeppelin, who at that time was building his first Airship, he piloted his balloon through a terrible storm and landed safely on the Pilatus. In 1898 he flew with his balloon "Vega" for the first time over the Alps, a deed which never before had been achieved, he also flew over the Montblanc.

His board books register altogether 570 flights with a total of 1237 passengers, which figures are a striking proof of the life work of this courageous pilot.

Capt. Spelterini was one of the most popular men in Switzerland, and an Honorary Member of the Swiss Aero Club. A life full of energy is extinguished, an eye which looked death in the face on more than one occasion, has closed for ever, but he will for all times be known as one of the pioneers in this, special field of aviation.

*In dem lichten schönen Schweben
Ahn' wir ein ewig Leben.—
Flügel rauschen leis im Wind—
Schwingen trägst Du, Erdenkind!*

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR.

M. Paul Kipfer, from Bienne, Canton of Berne, who, with Prof. Piccard, from Lausanne made the recent record breaking balloon ascent to a height of nearly 10 miles (16,000 meters), arrived last Saturday on a short private visit in London.

He was received at Croydon by the Master of Sempill and in town by M. W. de Bourg, First Secretary of the Legation, the Gaumont Film Co. and numerous representatives of the Press. On Sunday he was the guest of the Hanworth Aero Club and Reading Aero Club where he stayed for the night. The next morning our compatriot called at the Legation and in the absence for a few days in Switzerland of our Minister, M. Paravicini, had a long conversation with the Counsellor of the Legation.

On the same day M. Kipfer was invited at the Belgium Embassy where in his honour a lunch was given at which the Swiss Legation was also represented.

He stayed for the evening at Croydon Aerodrome from where he left again for Brussels at 3.30 on Tuesday morning.

We understand that Prof. Piccard will be in London some time during the month of October to give a lecture at the Royal Aeronautical Society, and he will most probably be accompanied by his assistant Ingénieur Kipfer.

It is hoped that on this occasion the Legation and the various Swiss Clubs and Societies will be able to arrange a reception in honour of our highly distinguished compatriots.

ENGLISH INFLUENCES ON SWISS INTELLECTUAL LIFE.

(Written for a proposed English Special Nr. of the "Zürcher Student" 1930).

By Dr. A. LATT.

One need not be a prophet to assure the "Zürcher Student" that success will crown his efforts to direct the attention of the academic youth of Switzerland to Anglo-Saxon models and sources of inspiration. Well known historical analogies are here to prove that our intellectual life can but profit from closer intercourse with English Thought and Art.

It was a group of young Zurich students who first established those intimate relations of personal and spiritual friendship which so long united the Reformed Churches of Helvetia with the High Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Through Bullinger was the centre of the remarkable correspondence known as the "Zurich Letters," it is clearly proved that young students had brought it about. Rodolph Gualter, John Stumpf, Alexander Schmutz, and John Ulmer, who went to study at Oxford in the reign of King Edward VI, could hardly realise then what a mighty current of ideas would result from their modest efforts to bring about a friendship and correspondence between their reluctant Zurich teachers and their English friends. Augustine Bernher, one of them who was not even a brilliant scholar in his native city, was destined to go down in history as the truest friend and most faithful collaborator of Latimer, Ridley, and Bradford, and as the saviour of Jewel and Grindal, "the Good Samaritan" of many of the martyrs of the English Reformation.

Only about 200 years ago another group of young Zurich scholars found in English examples the key to their own poetical powers. England gave them not only arms to oppose the overwhelming French influence of the day, but through the study of Addison, Milton, and Shakespeare, also the means to carry even the letters of Germany to a new freedom and a new blossoming. In their preface to the "Discourse der Malern" young Bodmer and Breitinger confess to "The Illustrious Spectator of the English Nation" their indebtedness to Addison's paper for their origin, their methods, and perhaps all that is most valuable in them. Nevertheless, every student of German Literature is proud of the remarkable influence Zurich then exercised on the rising poets of Germany. Not what they wrote was of importance and lasting value, but the fact that they were able to show the way to freedom to greater men than themselves. On national ground too, they were heralds of a fine intellectual movement with which are linked such names as Albrecht von Haller, Joh. von Müller, Iselin, Hirzel, Pestalozzi, Lavater, and their friends of the "Helvetic Society."

Whilst the "Painters" flourished at Zurich, Berne and Geneva were brought into closer touch with English intellectual life through Bât Louis de Muralt's "Lettres sur les Anglais," which

marked the victory of what in French Literature is called "l'anglomanie du XVIIIème siècle," a mouvement which went far to prepare the ground for J. J. Rousseau. Thus Geneva did to France what Zurich did to Germany,—they acted as propagators and interpreters of English thought on the Continent. Who would deny that the Continental nations are again in need of such guidance back to common sense and the main springs of sound creative work? Have not the Anglo-Saxons kept more than others free from the eccentricities of dozens of rapidly passing schools of Philosophy and Art, and preserved an admirable detachment in the midst of rapidly changing moods and fashions?

Literature, after all, is only one intellectual pursuit, and hardly an element of primary importance in the formation of the Swiss national character. English influence has come to us through many other and wider channels. Its bearers have been the men travelling from one country to the other for the purpose of studies, business or pleasure.

Most of the great religious movements, for instance, which succeeded each other in England since the Reformation have had some adherents in Switzerland. The theological writers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, Hummel Turretini, Osterwald, Frey, Grynaeus, Scherer, Roustan, Vinet, Secrétan, Merle d'Aubigné owed much to English examples, and some of the best of the present day freely acknowledge their indebtedness to English and American contemporaries: Ad. Keller, Pfister, Koehler, Ragaz, etc. English influences are most intensely felt in such movements as the Sunday Schools, the Salvation Army, the Y.M.C.A., the Baptist and Methodist Churches, Christian Science, and sectarian revival movements.

Medical men were sometimes fairly numerous among the Swiss guests of English universities. Think of Th. de Mayerne, the Diodati family, Odier, de la Rive, and young Dr. Scheuchzer of Zurich, who for Sir Hans Sloane, laid out a collection which, in the course of time, became the Natural History Museum. Haller, Herrenscheidt, Bonet du Luc, and others were corresponding members of the Royal Society. And at the present day we see again numerous young medical men, surgeons, physicians and dentists go to England or America to complete their practical training.

Most numerous have long been the young business men and students of Political Economy. It is evident that they see a great deal to learn from a nation which has long been the leader in commerce, engineering and industry, and on the field of social legislation and public welfare, a nation whose political traditions and qualities fit her so well for the testing of new theories. Knowledge of English and English experience are considered indispensable in most of our great export industries, for many of which London is still the greatest market, and the British Empire the chief purveyor. The history of the Swiss cotton, silk and machine industries speaks of English influences; so do banking and engineering. Our proud tunnel-builders may be reminded that British miners and experts taught them their craft at the old Hauenstein Tunnel. Even

with girls of good families it has been the fashion to go to the English boarding school or a private family for the finishing touch in ladylike behaviour. They usually come back delighted with their experiences, and for the rest of their lives keep a special tenderness for English homes and manners. English is in fact so much spoken and still more widely read among us that it might almost claim rank as a national language. According to the statistics of a certain training school which has branches everywhere, it would appear that more young people are learning English than Italian at Zurich or German at Geneva. There is nothing very new in this fact, for we know that already in 1730 the students of Basle had an "English Club for studying the language and practising boxing." Later on we hear of meetings at the salons of Geneva where half the members spoke English. Gibbons attests the same for Lausanne. Whilst a French garrison manned the walls of Geneva, Sismondi could still tell the world that "Geneva is a place where people speak and write French but read and think English." At the same time, when it was high treason to speak well of England, the brothers Pictet started their "Bibliothèque Britannique."

And what about Alpinism? Were not the British the first to appreciate the grandeur and beauty of our Alps, the first to make climbing a Swiss sport, the first to conquer some of the most obstinate summits, the first to add winter sports to the delights of "The Playground of Europe"? Sports go with fashion, and both have a powerful prestige with youth and beauty. Tennis, golf, yachting and rowing, horse-racing, football, bobsleigh and tobogganing are all British gifts. In many of our schools we see just now the old established cadet corps in full retreat before the conquering British system of the Boy Scouts. Schoolmasters are putting away their sticks and some other rusty methods of enforcing discipline, instead of which they are trying self-government by the boys, education of character rather than mere intellectual drill.

British influences may be less evident in future, civilisation having become a more intimate collaboration of all nations. But which nation can afford to refuse to learn from others? Even in an ideal League of Nations friendships will still be necessary, yea, more necessary than ever. Let us make our choice in time, and in accordance with our best traditions and with our best interests. English influence, as we have tried to show, has long been strong and surprisingly various. It was confined to a select class of people; now it tends to become popular. It has never been otherwise than beneficial for our public life. It has never threatened our intellectual or even political independence as French and German influences did at times. It has rather given us a backing and sometimes a key to our own mind, British ways of thinking and British institutions being so congenial to our own. It cannot be otherwise, as long as the two nations remain faithful to their common ideals of liberty for the individual and the community, and common sense in the conduct of life and business.

TO BE CONTINUED.