

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: - (1934)
Heft: 649

Artikel: A great baptist of Argentina [to be continued]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688065>

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: 13.12.2025

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

WHITHER SWITZERLAND?

For the first time since the 1848 Constitution, our country has experienced what is known as a "Cabinet Crisis."

It started with the resignation of the head of the Federal Police and Justice Department, Dr. H. Häberlin, who resigned after the defeat in a national referendum of the Bill "for the maintenance of public order," of which he was the sponsor.

In fairness to Dr. Häberlin, it must be stated that the original Bill which he tabled at the time in the House, was mutilated during the discussion in both Chambers to such an extent, that a rejection by the people was almost a foregone conclusion. Perhaps never before in the history of our country has the departure of one of its chief magistrates met with such universal regrets, and the parting words which were extended to him, both in Parliament and in the Swiss Press, were richly deserved. Switzerland has lost in Dr. Häberlin one of its most capable statesmen and a most conscientious politician.

A few hours after the election of his successor, Dr. Baumann, the resignation of M. Musy, head of the Federal Finance Department, was announced, and created a great sensation. Rumours of an impending retirement of the Finance Minister were current for some time; it was known that only recently M. Musy presented nothing short of an ultimatum to his colleagues in the government. In fact, he actually resigned, but was induced to withdraw it. He laid down, however, certain conditions for remaining in office, including drastic economies and the enforcement of stringent measures against the Opposition. Whether the Federal Council has refused to sanction such measures, or whether the attitude of M. Musy, which earned him a mild censure from the President of the Swiss Confederation in the Musy-Straumann case (M. Musy used rather insulting language towards Captain Straumann, under whom his son was serving as a lieutenant), were adamant for his decision will perhaps remain for ever a state secret.

Contrary to statements which appeared in the English Press, that the resignation was due to his failure in getting his currency policy approved, we may state that the monetary policy of M. Musy was *not* the direct cause of his withdrawal from the Government. His repeated declaration in Parliament, that the maintenance of the gold standard was for our country a matter of vital importance, was never seriously challenged, and we are quite safe to declare here, once for all, that Switzerland will never entirely go off gold. There might be a possibility, if world economic conditions do not improve, that our country may, sooner or later, be forced to a certain devaluation of its currency, similar to the one which was adopted by President Roosevelt.

In times of a world-wide crisis, such as we are witnessing to-day, the position of a Finance Minister is at the best of times a difficult one. In view of the increasing deficits in the federal and cantonal household, a policy of strict economies was absolutely necessary; hence the Bill

which was tabled by M. Musy to reduce the salaries of civil servants. This Bill was thrown out by a referendum taken last year, and new sources of income had to be found. The increased expenditure was partly met by a crisis tax and by economies in other spheres, such as reductions in state subsidies, etc.

Measures of this kind affect almost every individual of the community, and do not add to the popularity of their instigator. But undoubtedly the chief reason for the departure of M. Musy was due to the fact that he felt he had not any more the support from his colleagues in the Government, a support which he rightly deemed to be imperative in order to carry on his responsible task. It was an open secret that, for some considerable time, the head of the Federal Finance Department did not see eye to eye with his colleague, M. Schulthess. It is not easy to characterise the difference between the policy of the one and the other; the truth is that two irreconcilable temperaments were thrown together who could not successfully collaborate. M. Musy was an individualist where his colleague was an "étatiste," and vice versa. No doubt at times, vexed by this unsatisfactory state of affairs, he looked for support outside the sphere of the Government, thus, perhaps unknowingly, impairing the prestige of his colleagues.

Such conditions, sooner or later, would have brought things to a climax, and although the departure of M. Musy is to be regretted for various reasons, it has cleared the air, and he is nevertheless to be congratulated for his courage in facing the inevitable consequences. Even his most bitter antagonists cannot deny that he has rendered invaluable services to his country. He was an untiring worker, and our country owes him a great deal. The tragedy was that his temperament did not fit in with the rest of his colleagues.

In this parting hour we join the entire Swiss Press in tendering to our eminent countryman the thanks of his compatriots; he has served his country with great zeal, and perhaps history will make some compensation for the tragedy of these anxious March days.

And now the question arises: To where we are heading!! There is no doubt that Switzerland is at the cross-roads. The prestige of the Government, as well as that of Parliament, has suffered an undeniable setback. Twice within a year our electors have strikingly demonstrated that they do not agree with the policy of the Government, a policy which was sanctioned by Parliament.

Those who have studied the political conditions during the last years must have come to the conclusion that a great process of re-orientation has taken place.

On the one hand, we have the ever-increasing "Fronten" movement; on the other hand, the Socialists, as well as the Communists, are making frantic efforts to consolidate their position, and it is of no use hiding the fact that the former have considerably increased their followers.

As regards the "Fronten" movement, we have in these columns kept an open mind, and we repeat what we have said on previous occasions, that if they succeed in burying the hatchet amongst themselves, and if they are able to get

rid of some of their imitations borrowed from alien sources, which are foreign to us, our country will be the richer for this movement. The one bright spot in the endeavours of the "Fronten" is the one to remedy the laxity in the naturalisation laws, and here they deserve the wholehearted support of every Swiss citizen who has the welfare of his country at heart. The present position is a farcical one, and will remain so as long as this most important matter is left to the discretion of the cantonal and local authorities. The deciding factor *who* should and *who* should not enjoy Swiss citizenship, should be left to a Federal Department. The granting of naturalisation papers for, in many cases, ridiculously small sums has degenerated to nothing less than a "Kuhhandel," and most of the troubles we have had to contend with in the last few years, can be traced back to the laxness with which this matter has been treated. The Federal Council has shown here a leniency which is simply amazing. For months and months agitators of foreign origin were allowed to preach without the slightest interference "revolution". As a result we had to register the disgraceful happenings at Zurich, Fribourg and Geneva. If the "Fronten" succeed in bringing radical changes in this direction, they will go a long way towards gaining the sympathies of those who at present are standing aloof.

Hand in hand goes the vigorous campaign against the Communists and Marxists; the "Fronten" demand a sweep with an iron broom, and rightly so. For centuries Switzerland has kept an open door, has given asylum to all political fugitives, and one would expect that these people, who were hounded out of their respective countries, should be grateful for being able to enjoy the hospitality of a free country. Nothing of the sort. With a few exceptions, they have started to poison the minds of our working classes, they have continued to preach the dogmas for which they had to leave their own country, they have sown the seeds of class hatred, they have insulted, ridiculed and besmirched the honour of our army, and as a recompense for their mischievous work, they have entered the council chambers of our constitutional bodies.

As an example, we might mention the case of M. L. Nicole and his intimate satellite, National Councillor Dicker, a Russian-born subject (!). Since the accession of M. Nicole to power he has used his privileged position to get rid of anybody in the administration who did not wholeheartedly subscribe to his manner of governing. He has interfered in a disgraceful manner in the administration of justice, and only recently the President of the Swiss Confederation had to warn him, that his utterances on the public platform were in direct contradiction to the oath which he had taken when assuming office. (Contrary to age-long traditions, "Monsieur le Président du Conseil" had refused to take the oath on the Bible — Ni Dieu, ni Maître.)

Here we have a man who has been, to use plain language, nothing else than a traitor to his country, a man who has, during the November troubles in Geneva, openly preached sedition, for which he was sent to prison. To-day he is the head of the government of the canton of Geneva. This

(Continued on Back Page.)

A GREAT BAPTIST OF ARGENTINA.

A Spanish Life of Paul Besson.

A Swiss Pastor's Son — Student at Leipzig — An Independent of Neuchâtel — With the Baptists of Lyons — "A Friendless Vagabond?" — His Mother's Watch — Boston Help — Arrival at Buenos Aires — A Long Apostolate — Scholar and Saint.

We received last week from the Baptist Publishing Board of Buenos Aires the authorised Life of Señor Pablo Besson, the famous Protestant teacher and scholar, who was for many years one of the most honoured personalities in that city. "When you go to London," said a pastor, "everyone asks if you have seen St. Paul's Cathedral; and here on the River Plate the first question is, 'Have you seen Don Pablo (Paul) Besson?'"

This book of nearly 200 pages has been written with excellent skill by Santiago Canclini. Well-chosen photographs bring us in touch with the man of whom a South American journalist wrote: "There is something in his appearance that recalls Darwin and Tolstoy." It is a pleasant book to handle; well-printed, bound in cream and blue, and produced in the best style.

A SWISS PASTOR'S SON.

Paul Besson was a son of the Swiss manse, and he carried to Latin America those grave and lofty ideals of religion which we associate with the names of Vinet and Godet. Paul's father, Edward Besson, belonged to Neuchâtel, and had studied medicine as well as theology in the University of Basle. Among his teachers were De Wette and Vinet. For 50 years he was a faithful minister of the Gospel in his native canton. His wife, Elisa Revel, daughter of a schoolmaster, had

come in youth under Moravian influence. Their only son, Paul, heard in childhood the story of the Waldensian martyrs. The valleys of Piedmont, to which some of his ancestors belonged, became for him like that sacred ground on which Mr. Fearing loved to be "tracing to and fro." It seemed natural that he should decide to enter his father's profession.

STUDIES AT LEIPZIG.

He received the best education, the most thorough, practical training that the Europe of his day could offer. From the classrooms of Félix Bovet, Charles Secrétan and Frédéric Godet at Neuchâtel he passed at the age of 20 to the University of Leipzig. There he studied Hebrew under Delitzsch — "my learned Professor, whose mind was rich in original thoughts, turning always to the deeper meaning of things." From Tischendorf he acquired that passion for Biblical criticism which was one of the chief interests of his later life. Luthardt was his master in dogmatic theology, to whose teachings he owed his conversion. He was ordained in October, 1870, and associated himself with the Independent Church of Neuchâtel, which broke away from the State connection in 1873. This separatist movement was profoundly evangelical, with a strong missionary impulse. Besson was sent for aggressive work to the great city of Lyons, and there he came in touch with a small Baptist congregation. He studied their teachings, and examined for himself the Scripture passages on which their witness rested.

BAPTISTS OF LYONS.

"On a certain day when Besson was to preach in one of the Free Churches, in Lantern Street, Lyons, he told the veteran Pastor Monod that he thought of taking as his text Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying. All power is given unto Me in heaven and on

earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Pastor Monod cautiously replied: 'I should not do it if I were you, for there are always some Baptists at the meetings and you might arouse opposition.'" Monod gave his young friend a book by a Lausanne minister, directed against Baptist tenets, but the more deeply Besson examined the subject, the stronger grew his conviction that believers' baptism had been the practice of the primitive Church, and that the rite should be administered by immersion. "One evening," he wrote long afterwards, "though I scarcely knew where the little Baptist hall was situated, I found my way to it, and at the door I asked God to give me a sign. If the pastor invited me to speak, that would be for me an indication that I ought to ask for baptism. Scarcely had I entered when Pastor Crétin asked me to address the meeting, and to the great surprise of the brethren, who had looked on me as 'refractory,' I asked for that symbol of death to myself and to my sins."

Paul Besson had everything to lose by uniting with this small community. His relatives in Switzerland were deeply disappointed, and thought he had been "got at" by a Baptist intrigue. "The step involved a rupture with most of his past life, and a launching out upon an unknown sea, but he acted in the firm conviction that he was doing the will of God, and had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision." His mother wrote to him, "Do you want to be a friendless vagabond and to be called a Baptist?" Professor Godet sent him a letter full of mournful affection, and Besson replied with quotations from the master's own writings. But what a change of atmosphere! If a Protestant pastor to-day were to change from any other denomination to the Baptists, the *Unitas fratrum* would not be broken.

(To be continued.)