

# Carl Spitteler - a centenary

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**CARL SPITTELER — A CENTENARY.**

(The following article is reprinted from the May issue of our excellent contemporary "The Swiss American").

On April 24, 1945, Switzerland observed the centenary of the birth of Carl Spitteler, distinguished Swiss poet who was the recipient of the Nobel prize for Literature in 1920.

Carl Spitteler was born in Liestal, near Basle, on April 24, 1845, and shortly before his death, on December 29, 1925, appeared his last great epic, entitled "Prometheus the Sufferer."

After acquiring his elementary and intermediate education at Basle, he attended the universities of Basle, Zurich and Heidelberg. From the study of Law he changed to Theology, but Teaching and later on Literature became finally his chosen vocation. Poetical inspiration came first to him in Russia where, from 1871-1879, he earned his livelihood as a tutor. Upon his return to Switzerland his best and most devoted friend Joseph Victor Widmann, a Swiss writer of note, and at that time Principal of a High School for Girls in Berne, gave him a position in that institution of learning.

Two years later Spitteler went to teach at Neuchâtel on the lake of Bièvre. There, at the age of 36, he made his initial bow as a poet with his masterful epic poem, "Prometheus and Epimetheus," published in two volumes. Between 1885-1892 Spitteler was literary editor of several leading Swiss newspapers, including the well-known *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

By 1892 his financial situation permitted him to settle down in Lucerne as an independent man of letters. Most of his important works were created there, during the last 32 years of his life.

Spitteler's first epic was followed by another of similar style, called "Extramundana." Then appeared in succession: a volume of charming lyrics entitled "Butterflies"; a romance "Lieutenant Conrad," and a partly autobiographical novel "Imago." "Literary Parallels" came next and through this first volume of essays Spitteler acquired fame as one of the foremost essayists of the Old World. In due time an anthology of "Ballads" confirmed that Spitteler was an eminent poet.

In the year 1900 "Olympian Spring," an epic which has had several editions, was classified as the greatest of its kind written in German in modern days. "Laughing Truths," which bring the reader close to the poet's innermost feelings, and "My Earliest Experiences," an autobiography, are other high ranking literary products of his.

Carl Spitteler never took part in political life, but his sincere concern for Swiss neutrality in World War No. 1 induced him in December 1914, to make a memorable speech in Zurich on "Our Swiss Standpoint," appealing to his countrymen never to swerve from absolute neutrality.

In private life Spitteler was so simple and unassuming that he was frequently seen doing the shopping for his wife in Lucerne on market days, carrying home vegetables and other produce in a basket. His chief hobby was music and his admirers often declared that he might have attained fame as a pianist. Another favourite diversion was afforded to him by his extensive grounds where he loved to experiment in planting different kinds of trees, especially conifers, to see which would thrive best in that region of the country.

Spitteler received many coveted distinctions at home and from foreign lands. In addition to the Grand Honorary Prize of the Swiss Schiller Foundation he was honoured in 1920, at the age of 75, with the Nobel prize for Literature, thus reaching the pinnacle of world recognition in his particular field.

Marie Widmer.

**SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION.**

Arrangements for the Swiss National Day Celebration at the Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, on Sunday, 29th July, are well advanced. The performing societies — Swiss Choral Society, Swiss Accordion Group, *Unione Ticinese Choir* — are busy rehearsing. Three typically Swiss films, only recently arrived from Switzerland, will be shown together with the latest film dealing with the work of the International Red Cross Committee, all four films being new to the colony.

A patriotic address will be given by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, and the audience will be invited to join in the singing of our national hymn and songs.

Every care is being taken to ensure the success of the celebration, in accordance with its traditional simplicity and dignity.

The Committee is very sorry that circumstances beyond its control will not permit of refreshments being served during the interval in the programme.

It will not be necessary this time to queue up at the entrance of the theatre in the uncertain hope of getting a seat; intending visitors can, and indeed must make sure of it by applying in advance for their numbered ticket at the Swiss Benevolent Society office, 31, Conway Street, W.1. Application may be made either by a personal call on weekdays between 2 and 4 p.m. (Saturday excepted) or by post on condition that a 2½d. stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. No other correspondence can be entertained and the names of all the intending participants must be stated on application.

Ticket holders who may eventually find themselves unable to attend the celebration will help others by returning unwanted tickets as soon as possible to the Swiss Benevolent Society.

THE COMMITTEE.

**NEUTRALITE.**

Il est un nom, qu'en temps de guerre,  
De bon aloi ne s'entend guère  
Et quand un peuple se dit neutre,  
On le soupçonne d'être pleutre.

Mais, pourtant, quoiqu'on en dise,  
Généraliser c'est faire méprise,  
Car ce n'est seul au carnage  
Que se révèle le vrai courage.

Guardienne des monts et de nos vallées,  
L'arme au poing, notre solide armée,  
Seule, et sans espoir de secours,  
Fit face au danger, tous les jours.

C'était la neutralité en armes  
Qui exigeait des sacrifices;  
Quant à la neutralité des âmes,  
On ne la connaît pas en Suisse.—

C.J.B.