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THE VIRTUES OF CONCILIATION.

PIERRE BEGUIN.

On 4th June last the Swiss people voted on a proposal for the reform of the federal finances, and rejected it by a large majority. The proposal was on federative and decentralising lines. But the majority against it was so big that there could be no possible doubt that the people would have none of it.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to draw very definite conclusions from the result of the vote, for in fact this did not show perfectly clearly what the intentions and the tendencies of the Swiss people were. It would not be correct to claim that the Swiss people has drifted away from the federative principle or that it is anxious to see the influence and the budget of the Federal government, as opposed to the local governments of the various cantons, increase more and more. If to-morrow it were asked to vote on a proposal which would quite clearly increase centralisation and Government intervention, in other words, on a proposal of Socialist tendencies, this proposal would be voted down just as decisively. Nobody has any doubt about that, least of all the successful party in the recent vote. This is clear from their public resolutions and their newspaper articles.

Do we then have to draw the conclusion that the Swiss people is allowing itself to drift into a dangerously negative attitude and that, although it is capable of rejecting plans drawn up by the Government and the Parliament it would, to say the least, be very hard put to it to scrape up a sufficient majority to approve a positive and constructive proposition? It seems indeed that such is the case. There is no doubt that any party or any group which places itself at the head of the opposition has very good chances of victory, because in any case it can be sure of the support of all the people who vote against any and every measure — because they are tired or disappointed or distrustful.

In this we can trace very clearly one of the most evident characteristics of the Swiss mentality, which is that it does not follow party slogans perseveringly and consistently. Each citizen retains his freedom of opinion and his freedom in voting. Indeed, even when he belongs to a political party he may ignore its advice and vote for its opponents.

But don't run away with the idea that positive action is impossible in Switzerland. The Swiss character is independent but it is also prudent. It doesn't like adventures, and it will often abandon a doctrinaire

attitude in favour of a practical, halfway, common-sense solution.

A fresh proof of this is that just after the big campaigns which took place before the vote on the fourth of June, the victors refrain from exulting over their opponents, who in their turn show no inclination to give way to discouragement. The victorious party, that is, the left wing, are well aware that they could not push through Parliament any solution whose effect would be to increase centralisation or government intervention, without losing a tremendous degree of public support. The defeated groups, that is the representatives of the political, religious and linguistic minorities, do not for a moment doubt the excellence or the permanency of their federal principles. They know very well that it will never be possible to make any proposal triumph if it contradicts or ignores these principles too openly.

And so everybody just now is talking of the virtues of conciliation, victors as well as vanquished. The problem is being tackled again. For a start, the transitional arrangement which has been going on for so long is to be extended for another four years. And during this time everything possible will be done to bring the opposing sides together and to perfect a plan which will respect federative principles and at the same time be generous enough to the less favoured classes of the community to appease them as much as they desire.

No doubt one of the most powerful reasons we have for getting together on a friendly basis is that above all things we are afraid of our system of government being shown up sooner or later as ineffective. We would go a long way up the path of compromise and conciliation to avoid that!



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