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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Will we have a twenty-sixth Confederate State?"

Switzerland is at present — and has been for a century and a half — divided into twenty-two Cantons. However, as three of these are sub-divided into half-Cantons there are twenty-five sovereign States within the Helvetic Confederation. There is no special régime applicable to the half-Cantons, except on two points: they are represented by only one deputy — instead of two — on the Council of States; they do not possess an entire vote, but only half a vote, when voting on constitutional matters. This is merely a question of a historical survival, and there is no major reason why any distinction should be made between the whole and the half Cantons.

It is possible that this situation may be modified in the years to come. In point of fact, the Canton of Berne, which is the largest after the Canton of the Grisons and the most densely populated of all, may very well come to be divided into two autonomous Cantons. It is its Northern part, that is to say the region where French is spoken, which shows a tendency towards separation and the constitution of a State of its own.

It must be admitted that the Canton of Berne in its present form has something artificial about it. Its greater part comes to it as a direct heritage from the ancient Canton of Berne, which played the most important role under the Ancient Régime. In 1815, however, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, it suffered the amputation of its subject territories of Argovie and of Vand. In compensation it was given the major portion of the former bishopric of Basle, which today constitutes — as it has done for the last 142 years — the Bernese Jura. Thus, if we consider it from the historical point of view and from the point of view of traditions, this community is not perfect.

What is curious, however, is the fact that during a century or so no problem arose in regard to this matter. It was only during the first World War that separatist tendencies manifested themselves in the Jura, among the French-speaking population of the Canton. Since that time these tendencies have never calmed down completely. On the contrary, they have revived since about ten years ago, and this with a vigour which cannot be denied.

It is difficult to discover the origins of this movement and of the malaise which makes itself apparent today. As a matter of fact, the Jurassians would make themselves ridiculous if they alleged that they were subject to an external authority and did not enjoy a full and entire equality in regard to the rights and good fortune of their German-speaking fellow-citizens. The problem which arises is far more of a sentimental and psychological nature. The Jurassians — or at any rate a large number among them — find it difficult to accept the fact of being a minority and of being governed or administered by fellow-citizens who speak another language. And that is why they wish to constitute a new Canton which will be as independent and sovereign as all the others.

During the last ten years the number of Separatists has been increasing steadily. They have shown themselves to be indefatigable; no compromise will satisfy them. But there is one thing which is not known: do they, or do they not, represent the

majority of the Jurassians? Do they consist of a minority which makes a great deal of noise, as a result of intense propaganda, or are they carried on the crest of a tidal wave which sweeps along the whole of this people, the whole of this linguistic minority?

This question is important, for it is necessary for a confederate belonging to another Canton to know what are the real aspirations of the Jurassian people. If the Jurassians want to constitute a separate Canton, then one cannot and must not prevent them from so doing. But if in their great majority they wish to remain associated with the ancient Canton of Berne, and with its German-speaking part, then there is no reason why one should favour the separatistic tendencies. This is a question which concerns the whole of Switzerland, because ultimately all the Swiss citizens will be called upon to express their opinion on this subject. They cannot impose on the Jurassians a solution which is contrary to their most profound desires. Democracy demands that a decision should be taken only with a full knowledge as to what the Jurassians themselves desire.

In order that this desire may have an opportunity to manifest itself the Separatists have just launched a Popular Initiative which will enable all the Bernese to express their opinion. Even if the results should prove negative for the whole of the Canton — which is quite possible — it would suffice for an important positive majority to manifest itself in the French-speaking part of the Canton, to render impossible any further ignoring of the Jurassian claims. This test will prove of the greatest interest. But when will it take place? First of all it will be necessary for the Initiative to succeed, and after that the Bernese will have to vote. All this will require a good many years.

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