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# The Swiss Observer

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## SWITZERLAND'S NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS

A Nobel Prize was first awarded in 1901. Since that time this distinction has been bestowed fourteen times on prominent Swiss citizens or on persons closely associated with Switzerland. Compared with the size of her population this puts Switzerland in the front rank of nations alongside Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. In absolute figures France, Germany, Great Britain and the USA can register more Nobel-Prize winners. The USA has had more than 50. Whether such a list is compiled on the basis of origin or domicile is immaterial.

The fact that Switzerland deserves honorable mention for the part she has played in the international competition of scientific research, literature and efforts for peace has served to enhance her international reputation. Switzerland is the only country which three times won the Peace Prize for international institutions with their headquarters in this country, which are closely connected with its humanitarian aspirations (the International Office for World Peace, in 1910, the International Committee of the Red Cross, in Geneva, 1917, and again in 1944).

Of the 14 Swiss Nobel-Prize winners five were chemists, two physicists two medical men, two poets, and three pioneers of humanitarian works.

By resolution of the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament, the very first Peace Prize was awarded to *Henri Dunant* (1828–1910), the founder of the International Red Cross and the actual initiator of the Geneva Convention of 1864, together with the Frenchman *Frederic Passy*. Only a year later, the full Peace Prize again went to Switzerland, the winners being *Elie Ducommun* (1833–1906) of Neuchatel, descendant of a family of watchmakers, and *Charles-Albert Gobat* (1843–1914), of the Bernese Jura. As early as 1868, Ducommun had edited the review "Les Etats-Unis d'Europe"; later he founded the "Ligue Internationale de la Paix et de la Liberte" from which the International Office for World Peace in Berne

evolved. In 1892, *Charles-Albert Gobat* presided over the Fourth Inter-parliamentary Conference, which led to the foundation of the "Bureau interparlementaire", whose headquarters are also at Berne.

These three Noble Peace-Prize winners could do as little as their successors from other countries to prevent the outbreak of the First World War. However, in the opinion of the Nobel Foundation, they belonged to the most prominent fighters for World Peace. They certainly fertilized the discussions on war and peace, which have occupied the minds of men much more than at any previous period. *Henri Dunant's* work has, moreover, stood the test of history: in two world wars it saved what was left of humanitarian inheritance among civilized nations.

The first Nobel Prize for scientific research to go to a Swiss was given in 1909 to *Theodor Kocher*, the great Professor of Medicine at Berne University (1841–1917), in recognition of his fundamental research and therapeutical work on goitres. He literally saved thousands of individuals from cretinism and in next to no time reduced the formerly very high rate of death from goitre to about three in a thousand.

The next Nobel Prize winner for Switzerland was *Alfred Werner* (1866–1919), a chemist, Alsatian by birth, Professor at Zurich University. He was one of the most prominent theorists and methodical research workers in chemistry, which is indebted to him for his work on theories of valency and coordination (based on research into complex salts).

In 1919 *Carl Spitteler* of Liestal (1845–1924), was awarded Switzerland's first Nobel Prize for Literature. In metres borrowed from antique models, he gave expression to his own prolific imagination and creative power in his "Prometheus and Epimetheus" and especially in his epic poem "Der olympische Fruhling" (The Olympic Spring). Spitteler was a courageous and independent person. He did not hesitate to express his opinion even in the field of international politics

while explaining Switzerland's position as a neutral state during the first World War ("Der Schweizerische Standpunkt"). In doing so, his popularity in Germany suffered. However, his contribution helped significantly to ease the alienation then existing between the German and French parts of Switzerland.

*Charles-Edouard Guillaume* (1861–1938) of Neuchatel, director of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures at Sevres, near Paris, was the first Swiss to win the Nobel Prize for Physics. He discovered the alloy "invar", which is of special importance for the watchmaking industry. For the same industry he also invented the "integral balancer", the "compensation spiral", and further made numerous other improvements in the accurate measuring of time and temperature.

The next Nobel Prize for Physics to come to Switzerland (1945) was awarded to *Wolfgang Pauli* of Zurich (born of Austrian parents in 1900, died 1958). Elected Professor at the Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich in 1927, he worked on relativity and quantum theories, and on the periodical system. He discovered the still very important principle of exclusion of quantum mechanics, which goes under his name and has become the starting point for the fermi statistics of the modern quantum theory.

Imposing is the number of Nobel Prizes awarded for Chemistry and Medicine. *Alfred Werner's* successor at Zurich University, Professor *Paul Karrer* (1889–1971), was the first to isolate vitamins A and K and to synthesize vitamins B2 and E. He made fundamental discoveries concerning the carotinoid colourings and the yellow colours of leaves, flowers, and berries. These colouring substances have since proved of equally great importance in industry, biology and medicine. A few years ago, Karrer also succeeded in fully synthesizing carotinoids. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1937.

Two years later the prize went to *Leopold Ruzicka*, who originally came

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# COMMENT

## THE JESUITS JUST MAKE IT

By a surprisingly low majority, the Swiss people voted to abolish two articles in the Constitution forbidding the Jesuits from exercising activities in churches, schools and universities in Switzerland and prohibiting religious orders from building new monasteries and convents in the country. The referendum was held on the weekend of 19–20th May. 790,799 citizens decided that the Jesuits should no longer be considered the enemies of the Swiss State, 648,959 chose to keep the two articles. Only 16½ cantons elected to scrap them. Berne, Zurich and Vaud were among those that chose to keep them. 38 per cent of the electoral roll participated in the vote.

The articles which the electorate decided to abrogate (nos. 51 and 52) were introduced in the Constitution in 1848 at the end of the Sonderbund War, in which a majority of Protestant and progressive cantons were pitted against a minority of Catholic and conservative cantons leagued around Lucerne. The Jesuits were held partially responsible for this short war, in which fewer than a hundred lives were lost, because of their strong educational influence in Lucerne.

The first of these articles stated the following: "The Order of the Jesuits and affiliated societies may not be admitted to any part of Switzerland and their members are forbidden any sort of activity in church or school. This prohibition may be extended, by means of a federal decree, to other religious orders whose activities are dangerous for the state or disturb the peace among the different creeds".

The second stated: "The establishment of new convents or religious orders and the re-establishment of those which have been suppressed are forbidden".

When these provisions were decided, the Jesuits were not only considered as an obstacle towards progress and intellectual evolution, but their attachment to Rome appeared as a barrier in the way of creating a new nation.

It was obvious that the two articles no longer had any justification in 1973. The preservation of confessional peace (an argument put forward by the "anti-Jesuits") was already provided for by Article 50. Secondly, the influence of the followers of Ignatius of Loyola is no longer what it used to be in the past as religious passions are hard to arouse nowadays. Moreover, the Confederation



Wolfgang Pauli

from Yugoslavia, where he was born in 1887. He was professor at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. His most important works bear on the terpenes and polyterpenes. It was he who discovered the "Isoprene Rule". One of his later successes was the synthetic production of male sexual hormones (and rosterone, testosterone).

When the Second World War drew to its close, there was great danger of epidemics, especially of spotted fever, which, in the days of Napoleon, had destroyed the French armies in Russia. A violent outbreak of the epidemic in Naples in 1943 was a deadly threat to the armies. The danger was checked by Paul Muller of Basel (1899–1965), a scientist working in the service of the chemical industry. It was he who discovered DDT. Dr. Muller was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1948.

Tadeusz Reichstein, born in Poland in 1897 but naturalized in Zurich, was professor of Organic Chemistry at Basel University when he succeeded in demonstrating the importance and composition of the hormones produced by the supra-renal glands. After most difficult and complicated experiments executed in close collaboration with his assistants and partly in race with foreign rivals (especially with American scientists), Reichstein discovered corticosterone and succeeded, at least partially, in the synthetic production of desoxycorticosterone, which has proved very efficient against Addison's disease. In the summer of 1954, he announced the discovery of electrocortine, the most active hormone so far known. It seems to have important functions in the metabolism of mineral substances and in

controlling the water supply of the human body. Reichstein received the 1950 Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology.

In 1949, the Prize for Physiology had gone to Professor Walter Rudolf Hess of Zurich University (born 1881) in recognition of his remarkable experiments and comprehensive studies on the reactions of the vegetative nervous system of the mid-brain. In this connection he also discovered the extremely complex field of vegetative functions of the brain basis that influences sleeping and waking.

As one of her Nobel Prize men Switzerland may also claim the poet and novelist Hermann Hesse. Born in Germany in 1877, he became a Swiss citizen in 1921 and died in his home near Lugano in 1962. Our country had long been his spiritual home, however closely associated he remained with all German life and letters and with world-wide humanism. In his "Glasperlenspiel" (The Game of the Glass Beads) to which he chiefly owed the prize, he shows the dangers of modern technology and mediocrity, which he endeavours to counter in the portrayal of a voluntary ascetic hierarchy. At the same time he tries to answer fundamental questions on human existence.

If we limit our survey to Nobel Prize winners living in Switzerland we must leave out Albert Einstein (1879–1955), who was a born German and ultimately became an American. He had become a citizen of Zurich in 1900. He was subsequently an official of the Office of Intellectual Property in Berne as well as lecturer at the University and the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. It was here he made the decisive discoveries that led to his theory of relativity. For the same reason of "extra-territoriality" we must leave out the physicist Felix Bloch and the pharmacologist Daniel Bovet.

In conclusion we would mention that Switzerland possesses something like a national counterpart to the Nobel Prize in the "Marcel-Benoist-Foundation". Established in 1920, it promotes all kinds of scientific, literary and philosophic studies. Its prize-winners are also pioneers with international reputations in their respective fields.

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