

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:	- (1978)
Heft:	1737
 Artikel:	Switzerland
Autor:	Meier, Herbert
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686222

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: 17.02.2026

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

Features

Switzerland

(see November 1977)
(continuation and conclusion)

Banks and insurances

Many Swiss work in the services sector, in health and education, in tourism, in banks and in insurance. Swiss banks are known to hold a strong position inside the country and in the world's centres of finance. There is a bank for every 1400 Swiss. For the Swiss are keen savers and own 8.7 million savings accounts. The banks also provide capital in the form of loans and credits to foreign enterprises. By so doing they promote the sale of Swiss goods and can afford to buy foreign imports with the interest.

The banks are responsible – as are banks in all parts of the world – for keeping the finances of their clients secret. The only special feature is that Swiss banks are not obliged to open their books even to the government or to the tax authorities. Numbered accounts are another form of protection. They were introduced in the early days of Nazism in Germany to protect the capital of people who were being racially and politically persecuted. Bank secrecy, however, is not a taboo: Where there is

a well-founded suspicion of a criminal offence the courts can demand access to bank records. The National Bank is responsible for monetary and currency policy. Its gold reserves exceed 10 000 million francs and cover a large percentage of the banknotes it issues.

Insurance and reinsurance companies also play an important part in the country's balance on current account. They have carried on insurance business all over the world for over a century. On the home market 18 per cent of the gross national product is used for insurance. The Swiss is the most highly insured inhabitant of the globe.

Science, art and alphorns

Switzerland accounts for two per mille of the population of the earth. That is not very much; but the intellectual impulses that have originated here have represented a somewhat higher proportion. It began with theology. Zwingli and Calvin, who were, with Luther, the founders of Protestantism, taught

in Zurich and Geneva. Calvin left his mark on civic and democratic thought, Zwingli on morals and tolerance. A revolutionary theologian of our own century, Karl Barth, gave a new vision to the Christian believer. In medicine the alchemist and physician Paracelsus developed a chemical theory of active elements in the sixteenth century and regarded healing as the work of vital forces. He furnished ideas for the evolution of psychology, biology and chemistry in later centuries. In many ways the work of C.G. Jung is based on him. Jung set up a theory of psychic energy and of archetypes. Jean Piaget contributed to child psychology and to the epistemology of the humane sciences. Among chemical research workers P.H. Müller, the originator of DDT, and Paul Karrer, who first isolated the vitamins A and K, are outstanding names, both of them Nobel prize winners. The biologist Adolf Portmann has expounded a comprehensive theory of living organisms. The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, established in the early years of the Federal Government, has repeatedly attracted world-famous scientists to its faculty. The same applies to the country's eight cantonal universities. Democratic education began with Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. He sought for elementary teaching methods that would penetrate deeper into human nature and brought a renewal of education after the French Revolution. He was a cultural revolutionary whom the Swiss are fond of citing.

Switzerland first entered literature in songs of battle. Then with the Reformation came a surge of political writing. Broadsheets and moralities or religious plays took the historical situation as their cue. Later nature was discovered, the landscape, the idyll, the earthly Paradise. Into this idyll erupted the misery of the early industrial age.

The pilgrimage church of Madonna del Sasso above Locarno



Features

as reflected in the writings of the small farmer Ulrich Bräker. The idyll now becomes ambiguous, less fathomable, and in our own day turned to a parody in the work of Robert Walser. In the novels of C.-F. Ramuz nature is a mythical mirror of humanity. He also sees the situation of his country in a political light. «Need for greatness» is his thematic motto. The narrowness of the Swiss scene is praised by Gottfried Keller, the champion of radical liberalism, but becomes ground for revolt and provocation among the moderns, Frisch and Dürrenmatt and many younger writers. Narrowness as a reason for escape is a guiding theme of painters and sculptors, who are always seeking wider spaces. Henry Fuseli of Zurich – his real name was Johann Heinrich Füssli – painted in London in the second half of the eighteenth century. Frank Buchser travelled in America at the time of the War of Independence, then in Morocco and Spain. Escape was also a theme; for Fuseli into Shakespeare's mythology, for Buchser into the exotic, for Arnold Böcklin into Greek antiquity. In the Federal State the country's history became a picturesque subject of art and literature. Ferdinand Hodler rediscovered the mountains, which became the manifestation of the invisible, the idea of a purified world, a form of art that appeals to the Asian as well as to the Westerner. The fantasy of power is captured in the metal sculptures of the Bernese Bernhard Luginbühl: half animals, half apparatus, technology as a primeval myth. In the



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (Photos SNTO)

work of Jean Tinguely of Fribourg technology becomes instead an absurd and ironical game. A human image of the atomic age is incarnated in the heads and figures of Alberto Giacometti. He lived in France, as did also the great architect Le Corbusier, who was born in the Swiss Jura, or the composer Arthur Honegger, who hailed from Zurich. Swiss music of the Classical and Romantic eras was overshadowed by greater European contemporaries. As a new political awareness emerged, the national festival took shape, a popular form of musical theatre. A few names are now known to the outside world; Othmar Schoeck, Arthur Honegger, Frank Martin, Vladimir Vogel, an immigrant who taught the Swiss new ideas. The young composers today move over the broad spectrum of the

international language of modern music.

In recent years the Swiss film has also reasserted itself, particularly in Frenchspeaking Switzerland. Films by Alain Tanner, Michel Soutter, Claude Goretta have achieved international success. They are socio-critical and full of the poetry of landscape, much as was Hans Trommer's «Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe», a classic Swiss film of the forties. At that time Swiss film-makers also won international distinctions, for instance Leopold Lindtberg with «The Last Chance».

Folk music also survives. It was mercenary soldiers who brought many instruments home with them, for instance the fifes that are still played at the Fasnacht, the carnival celebrations in Basle, the country's biggest street spectacle. The Swiss did with the instruments what they have done with many things; they borrowed them from others, then adapted them to their own ends. There are now Swiss accordions, zithers and dulcimers. Landscape and language are mirrored in the songs. Yodelling, in which the changes are rung on the normal voice and falsetto, is still cultivated in many regions. With the alphorn, a large horn cut from a bent pine trunk, and cowbells it forms the «natural voice» of the Swiss, which is heard at many popular festivals and occasionally as a folklore performance for tourists.

The real voice of Switzerland has a different sound. *Herbert Meier*

Herbert Meier was born in Solothurn in 1928. He studied history and literature at the Universities of Basle and Fribourg. A free-lance writer, he is the author of novels («Ende September», «Verwandtschaften» etc.) and numerous plays («Die Barke von Gawdos», «Jonas und der Nerz», «Der König von Bamako» etc.). He wrote the present article for the pamphlet «Switzerland», published by the Coordinating Committee for the Swiss Presence Abroad («Spühler Committee»).



The Solidarity Fund brings good luck

3. It assists