

# An ethnological racial picture of Switzerland

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OBITUARY.

With profound regret we announce the death of Madame E. Blau, mother of our former Swiss Consul Mr. A. C. Blau. Many of our members will recall Mrs. Blau as a most charming and hospitable lady and we all regret deeply to receive this sad news. Our sincerest condolences are tendered to the relatives. Mrs. Blau was cremated in Bregmarten on January 26th last.

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AN ETHNOLOGICAL RACIAL PICTURE OF  
SWITZERLAND.

The political and moral unity of the Swiss nation does not by any means rest on racial unity. There are indeed few countries that bring together in so small a territory such a great number of races and of cultures. The setting for Helvetian life has been determined, from the very earliest times, by geography and history. But this framework contains a population of a surprising ethnological diversity.

First of all, there is the well known fact that the Swiss Confederation recognises the existence of four national languages. These four languages are German, French, Italian and Romansch. But languages and races must not be confused. In Eastern Switzerland, for example, the word "alemannic" does not mean at all that the population is exclusively German or even Nordic. It indicates rather the language spoken there. The dialects spoken in Alemannic Switzerland belong indeed to the same group of Germanic dialects as the dialects spoken in Alsace, in certain districts in Baden and on the banks of the Lake Constance. But when reference is made to prehistoric times, ethnography and anthropology, it is seen that the population of Switzerland represents an extraordinary mixture of races. A country at the cross-roads of Europe, Switzerland was in the past the theatre of many migrations and invasions, each of which finally helped to form a certain number of ethnological and human types.

The first inhabitants, in the neolithic period, (new stone-age), came probably from the East. Coming up the Danube, they brought the first elements of civilisation (when they colonised the country). New invasions took place in the bronze age, four thousand years ago. Then, about 700 years before our time, tribes that knew how to work iron came and settled on the left bank of the Rhine. All these peoples, coming from unknown parts, all these inhabitants of unknown race, name and language, form the ethnological basis of the Swiss people. It would be useless mentioning them if they had for us merely an interest that might be described as "zoological". Now, archaeological excavations, that are very frequent in Switzerland, prove that these

prehistoric inhabitants possessed a fairly high degree of civilisation. They prove that agriculture, especially the cultivation of cereals, is very ancient; that the inhabitants possessed domestic animals - even horses; that they could spin and weave linen; that they worked metals very ably and finally, that they led a sedentary life. In two different ages, the one widely separated from the other, in the neolithic age and in the bronze age, the inhabitants lived in lake villages, built on piles on the shores of lakes. In brief, it might be said that the prehistoric inhabitants of Switzerland passed on to their descendants the rudiments of a sedentary agricultural and manual civilisation.

The first invaders known by name were the Celts. The Helvetians, a Celtic tribe, settled about 450 years before our era, in the land to which they were to give their name - Helvetia. We are certain that their dialects belonged to the great family of Celtic languages and that in certain valleys in the Alps, these dialects were spoken up to the time of the middle ages. In the dialects spoken today in Alemannic Switzerland, Celtic expressions are still found. Celtic geographical names are common in Switzerland. For example, the root of the name Zurich (Turicum, root tur or dur = water, Turicum = water town) is doubtless of Celtic origin. Four centuries of Celtic or Helvetian domination helped to form the spirit of the population. The warlike spirit of the Celtic peoples is well known, also their pride, the nobility of their minds, their nature, quick to take offence, their finesse and their leanings towards the occult. We do not think that the good qualities nor the faults of this race have completely disappeared from the Helvetian character. On the contrary this character seems to us to be shown in certain characteristic manifestations of the Swiss mentality.

After this period Switzerland came under the domination of the Roman Empire for five hundred years. It is unlikely that the Roman and Italic element played a very important part in the formation of the physique of the Swiss type as there were few colonists of Italic race in Helvetia. But their influence on the civilisation of the country was great and lasting. As in all countries over which they ruled the Romans brought to and, where necessary, imposed on this colony their law, order and high standard of living - in a word, the Pax Romana. They founded the Civitas Helvetiorum, the capital of which was Avenches, fortified the Rhine frontier, established garrisons, covered the country with a net-work of roads, some of which (for instance the road from Baden in Argovie to Coire by way of Zurich to cross the saddles of the Alps and come out to the plains of Lombardy) are still the basic routes of the great Swiss network. Roman colonisation in Switzerland has left many traces. In a canton that is purely Alemannic in appearance, the canton of Zurich, 122 communes out of 187 showed traces of the Roman occupation and in this canton the sites of a hundred Roman villas, some of which were very luxurious, are known. These villas were doubtless the property of wealthy Romans whose agricultural settlements were worked by the people of the country. Thus in Helvetia was formed a Gallo-Roman civilisation that could not be very different from the Gallo-Roman civilisation in Gaul. It is thought, however, that the population of present eastern Switzerland was more rebellious towards romanisation than the inhabitants of the western part of the country, where was the capital city of the Civitas Helvetiorum.

The Germanic invasions were long repulsed by the Helvetians and their Roman masters until the Alemanni, who doubtless came in great numbers, found themselves able to settle finally in eastern Switzerland during the fifth century. In western Switzerland, another Germanic tribe, the Burgundians got a footing at the time of the decadence of the Roman empire. The Germanic invaders settled for preference in the neighbourhood of the Roman settlements where the land was already cleared. In the canton of Zurich, for example, 71 of the 122 communes where the presence of the Romans has been discovered, have also shown the presence of Germanic tombs. The Alemanni and other Germanic tribes had fought the Romans fiercely and had greedily seized upon their territories. Their warlike valor is undoubted and the energy with which they took possession of the conquered country is shown by Germanic colonies situated in



the most hidden valleys of the Alps. However, they added nothing to the Gallo-Roman civilisation in Helvetia. For example, no Germanic settlement has yet been discovered, doubtless because the dwellings were of wood and modern villages have been built on their ashes.

Little by little the different parts of present day Switzerland became differentiated from the linguistic point of views. As it was less romanised the population of eastern Switzerland more easily adopted the Germanic speech, whereas in western Switzerland, on the other hand, the German invader allowed himself to be romanised by the Gallo-Roman population. In Rhaetia Romansch has only very slowly given way to the Alemannic dialect and it has been preserved up to the present day in many valleys in the Grisons canton. On the southern slope of the Alps and even in certain valleys formerly Rhaeto-Romansch, Italian was the language that was finally adopted.

As regards religion, the inhabitants of present-day Switzerland adopted Christianity early. From the political point of view, and in spite of attempts made by a few Alemannic chiefs to keep their independence, the former Civitas Helvetiorum came under the domination of the Merovingian and then of the Carolingian kings. But all subsequent history, as far as politics and civilisation are concerned, brought no changes in the ethnological composition of the Swiss population. Since the great invasions during the first centuries of the Christian era, no new invasion, no migration took place to modify the ethnological picture of Switzerland. In the 19th and 20th century, however, the populations of the different regions of the country were destined to become mingled to a greater extent.

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FASCINATING OLD CUSTOMS ARE OBSERVED IN SWITZERLAND  
IN CARNIVAL TIME.

Climax of Carnival festivities in Switzerland is the Basle Carnival, known throughout Europe for its art and wit. In preparation for this gay event groups are formed and costumes are fashioned with the greatest secrecy. Clever illuminated posters and lanterns make fun of all that happened in the city during the past year. Blunders of the town council and of magistrates are revived, and whosoever provided food for the gossips or disturbed the peace of the citizens gets some sarcastic knocks.

The festivities start at four o'clock in the morning, when all lights in the centre of the town are turned out. Then to the sound of drums, groups arrive from everywhere on Market Place, while Fife players begin to furnish a befitting accompaniment. The Basle Drum and Fife players are famous for their skill and artistry, also for their so-called Beresina uniforms-- an attire reminiscent of the participation of Swiss troops in the ill-fated Napoleonic Russian campaign in 1812.

Drum concerts are a specialty of Basle and school boys receive early training in this form of musical expression in regular drummers' schools.

On the big carnival days, inns and restaurants are fully prepared to receive the early paraders and delicious soup of roasted flour, as well as open-face onion pie, are obligatory delicacies served everywhere. After 7 a.m. the merry-makers usually proceed to their daily tasks, but at 2 p.m. the real festivities begin. A kaleidoscopic parade heads the program and is later followed by fancy dress balls and other gaiety far into the night. There are scores of historical cliques in Basle who exist for carnival only, and who rack their brains months before for the most original group in the pageant. Often their float is shaped according to the particular subject of their sarcasm. Each time a vehicle passes people rush to obtain a leaflet explaining in jolly Basle dialect the subject of its display. Later prizes are given to the best groups by a committee of judges.

The second festive day belongs more to the children, and they, too, have their masquerade parade and their opportunities for dancing.