

Prominent Swiss explorer visits New Zealand

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PROMINENT SWISS EXPLORER VISITS NEW ZEALAND.

All compatriots will be interested to know that Mr. Lucas E. Staehelin, representative of the Ethnological and Natural History Museum of Basle, Councillor of the Geographical Society of New South Wales (where he has been living for the last 12 years) and well-known broadcaster, is now in New Zealand.

He comes at the request of the Bund Schw. Kulturfilm-Gemeinden and he will be the guest of the Tourist Department, who will show him some of the many New Zealand beauty spots. He has been told that Swiss settlers in this country are prosperous and hospitable, and he is also eager to ascertain for himself whether this is correct.

After visiting New Zealand Mr. Staehelin will return to Switzerland where he is to lecture in Berne, Zurich, Basle, Baden, Soleure, Olten, Thoune, Winterthur, St. Gall and Lucerne.

We feel certain that compatriots in New Zealand will want to do all they can to assist Mr. Staehelin so that he may take away a very good impression of New Zealand and the Swiss settlers here.

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ASPECTS OF SWISS DEMOCRACY (CONTD.)

NO. 4. THE CANTON.

In Switzerland there are five cantons where the "Landsgemeinde", i.e. the legislative open-air assembly, - the original and most direct form of democracy - survives, where the enfranchised citizens of the canton meet, debate and vote in a public square. Here follows the description of a "Landsgemeinde" in the canton of Obwalden which took a particularly agitated course.

The mountains peep through the bright clouds, just as they used to do a thousand years ago. The young people are already assembled. The boys have climbed the trees and cling to them like cockchafers; everything is exactly as shown in the mural painting by Welte in the hall of the States council and no doubt as it has happened for centuries. It is as natural for these country-lads, as curious onlookers, to become familiar with their civic duties, as it is for them to get used to their work in field and stable; the best possible tuition indeed.

A choir, mostly priests, inspires the "Landsgemeinde" with its well-sung hymn "Veni creator spiritus".

The items of business to be considered are: The account of public expenditure, election of a member of the canton's executive, requests for naturalization, an object of public initiative prohibiting cumulation of offices and "chair-sticking" and requesting the term of office to be limited to 16 years and to the age of 70. The following quotation from the minutes, pertaining to the treatment of a request for naturalization may afford a striking example of the immediateness of such debates: "The discussion of requests for naturalization is also very lively. Owing to the sudden resignation of Mr. Odermatt, his substitute, Mr. Infanger, was compelled to improvise, since he had not been able to study the matter and to look up the documents 'in the lobby'. But that is here not necessary at all! Being himself an Engelberger, he knows the three petitioners from Engelberg from their earliest childhood, that is better than from documents, and he recommends them resolutely to be admitted as citizens. One in the ring, however objects: 'Dear people of Obwalden' he says, 'we must grow pithy Swiss families. There looms a danger of the steadfast Swiss nationality being infected!' But by claiming the 'thoroughbred' Swiss he strikes the wrong note and makes himself ridiculous. He is told that his was mere personal animosity against the petitioner and that this was not fair. Now a former school-fellow of the German asking for naturalization also addresses the people: 'He was a young rascal as we all were' he says, 'nobody saw a difference. Today I stand for his loyalty.' The citizens of Obwalden consent, though not without considerable opposition."