

# Home news

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1927)**

Heft 316

PDF erstellt am: **08.08.2024**

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# The Swiss Observer

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 9595

Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD STREET, LONDON, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 7—No. 316

LONDON, OCTOBER 15, 1927.

PRICE 3d.

## PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIES	3 Months (13 issues, post free) . . . . .	3s 6d
	6 Months (26 issues, post free) . . . . .	6s 6d
SWITZERLAND	3 Months (13 issues, post free) . . . . .	Fr. 7.50
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(Swiss subscriptions may be paid into Postcheck-Konten Basle V 5718.)

## HOME NEWS

Steps are being taken by the Socialist Party to revive a proposal giving the cantons and communes the right to prohibit the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic spirits in their respective districts. This measure had already been advocated by a successful initiative demand deposited as long ago as March, 1922; the Federal Council, however, had omitted to present the necessary report and recommendations to the Swiss Parliament.

A general appeal for funds in favour of the sufferers from the recent inundations is being made throughout the canton of Zurich. In the meantime the cantonal treasury has already remitted Frs. 15,000 to the affected districts in the cantons of St. Gall, Ticino and Grisons, as well as the principality of Liechtenstein.

According to statistics just published by the "Vorort" (Schweiz. Handels- und Industrie-Verein) no less than 510 million francs have been spent in Switzerland during the years 1919 to 1926 in order to combat unemployment caused by after-war conditions. Of this sum 291 million have been contributed by the Confederation, 201 by the cantons and communes, and the remaining 18 million by industry. Over 150 million francs were distributed as doles to the unemployed.

The contents of the Polish National Museum, which since 1870 have been housed in the old castle of Rapperswyl, are now being removed to Warsaw.

The cantonal gymnastic festival which took place in Baden last July resulted in a profit of Frs. 8,037 which is being distributed among local gymnastic societies.

A delegation of 16 workers has left Basle for Russia in order to obtain first-hand information about present conditions in the latter country.

It is announced that the German aviation company, "Lufthansa," which controls the largest number of aeroplanes in Europe, has decided to equip all its engines with the "Scintilla" magneto, which is manufactured at Solothurn.

Dr. Charles Ferrière, the director of the entomological section of the Natural History Museum in Berne, has received an official invitation from the authorities of the British Museum to collaborate in certain research work with reference to insect life; he will leave his post in Switzerland and take up his residence in London.

Mr. Th. E. Wagner, from Läuelfingen (Basel-land) has been appointed honorary Swiss Consul in Colombo.

Through being run into by a motor car near Horw (Lucerne) Baltasar Greter, aged 47, a joinery proprietor from Kriens, subsequently died from the injuries received. A similar fatal accident befell Greg. Zermatten, age 51 from Mac near Sitter (Valais).

Coming into contact with the high tension line Ulrich Tobler, the chef de depot at Rorschach of the Swiss Federal Railways, was electrocuted; he leaves a widow and three children.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### Henry Fuseli.

Few of us will recognise under this name a member of a well-known Swiss family who, at the beginning of the last century, had attained a rare distinction in the country of his adoption. Joh. Heinr. Füssli was born at Zurich on the 7th of February, 1741, and died at his London residence on Putney Heath, on the 16th of April, 1825. According to "Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers" Füssli was originally intended for the Church, and actually entered it, but compelled by the enmity of a magistrate, whose dishonesty he had exposed, to leave his native town, he went to Berlin, and for some time devoted himself to literature, in which he was engaged at intervals

throughout his life. In 1765, at the instigation of the British Ambassador at the Court of Berlin, he visited England, and in 1767 an introduction to Reynolds, who praised his drawings, induced him to become a painter, and in the following year he went to Italy, where he stayed for nearly nine years, studying the works of Michelangelo; but he never fairly mastered the principles of drawing or colouring, and his works are esteemed more for the powerful imagination they display than for any artistic merit. He was of most eccentric habits and extravagant ideas, and these ideas are everywhere apparent in his pictures. Leaving Italy in 1778, and passing through Zurich, he reached England in the following year and in 1782 produced his famous picture of "The Nightmare." In 1786 he became a zealous worker in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, for which he executed nine paintings. In 1788 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, and an Academician two years later, and in 1790, too, he married one of his models. In 1799 he opened his Milton Gallery, comprising 47 paintings, the result of several years of labour. In the same year he was elected Lecturer on Painting at the Royal Academy, and in 1804 he was made Keeper, the bye-laws being altered to allow him to retain the lectureship.

Messrs. Orell Füssli, in Zurich, have just published a monograph written in German by Arnold Federmann, and the book (the price of which is Frs. 22) is reviewed in the Literary Supplement of the *Times* (Oct. 6th). The literary critic of our great contemporary has placed before his English readers a most fascinating appreciation of the Zurich poet-painter; here it is *in extenso* :—

"Heinrich Füssli, better known to us as Henry Fuseli, has rightly been made the subject of this able and beautiful first volume of a promising series of monographs on Swiss art. We English, too, may well renew and improve our acquaintance with this contemporary and friend of Blake, who spent so much of his life and energy in illustrating Shakespeare and Milton, was expected by Reynolds to become a second Raphael, and wrote a defence of Rousseau which some mistook for the work of Smollett. His promise as a young man was so great that Lavater considered him the peer of Goethe—Fuseli "mehr Poet," Goethe "mehr Mensch," he once wrote to Herder. Perhaps he did not quite fulfil this promise, but some of his work bears the mark of genius, and he deserved the tomb which was allotted to him in St. Paul's.

Last year Dr. Wartmann arranged in the charming Kunsthau at Zurich a remarkable centenary exhibition of Fuseli's pictures and drawings, many of which came from the collection of Lord Harrowby. But few, if any, of the English critics bothered their heads about this exhibition. The zeal and skill of Dr. Federmann, ably supported by the famous Artistic Institute of Orell Füssli and by Dr. Wartmann himself, have happily given us another chance to revise our impressions of this Swiss R.A., of whom Blake himself is recorded to have said, "this country must advance two centuries in civilisation before it can appreciate him." Dr. Federmann not only follows his hero's fortunes from his Swiss cradle to his English grave, but gives us also a judicious introductory essay, an excursus on Fuseli's forbears—a Füssli was at work as bell-founder and goldsmith as early as 1386—a critical account of England's influence on Europe between 1650 and 1760, a discussion of Fuseli's Scandinavian friends in Rome and his marked influence on the Northern artists, and three important pages on the friendship with Blake. Perhaps the influence of Fuseli is here somewhat overrated, but the evidence cited by Federmann cannot be overlooked. Its value, in any case, could only be adequately weighed by an expert familiar with the art of the whole period and as well versed in the work of Fuseli as in that of Blake. Federmann's book further offers us several catalogues of Fuseli's works, a full bibliography, and some eighty or more admirably executed plates and prints of his best pictures and drawings. The man behind the artist is revealed by more than a hundred pages of his own writings, chiefly letters and poems, for the most part here printed for the first time.

Fuseli, despite his eight years in Rome and his long residence in England, remained at heart a true Swiss and a German Swiss. A recent Swiss poster represents a peasant preparing to engage in a wrestling match: this bull-necked son of the soil, with sturdy widespread limbs bears an odd, if distant, resemblance to Fuseli's powerful heroes. Of a striking "Achilles before the Pyre of Patroklos" Federmann writes:

## ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

Oct. 18th, 1356.—Great earthquake in Basel which destroyed the whole town, and laid to waste the greater part of its suburbs. Fires, as the result of the earthquake, lasted over eight days. The inhabitants lost heart to re-build their town, but gradually did so when receiving help from near and far.

Oct. 21st, 1860.—Consecrating of the "Mythenstein."

Oct. 22nd, 1797.—Veltlin ceded to the Cisalpine Republic.

There is in this sketch something of Hodler's style and force. That this is not saying too much and that a kind of secret but unbroken line runs through the whole of Swiss art from Urs Graf and Nikolaus Manuel through Füssli down to Hodler is proved by another sketch of Füssli's. It represents a bearded man in a peasant's blouse reaching to the knees, standing with legs wide apart and raising above his head with both arms a huge block of stone, as if about to hurl it from him. Hodler, when this sketch was shown to him, asked "Who is this that draws like me?" and smiled on hearing it was a Zurich, dead these hundred years.

It is obvious to-day that Fuseli excelled as a draughtsman rather than as a painter in oils, Federmann (perhaps a little too boldly) acclaims him as, on occasion, the equal of Goya: the "Polyphemus" here reproduced, truly great in design, feeling and force, may go some way to making good this claim. But, in general, one saw at Zurich, and Federmann himself admits, that oil was not Fuseli's proper medium: "Anyone who wants to see him at his best and most characteristic must turn to his drawings and water-colours." Some of the latter are charming, but it is his drawings, in which he often makes brilliant use of the wash, which "gives far better than his oil-paintings the true reflection of his will and skill." Fuseli himself knew this and once described himself in a lecture as one who had courted—and still continued to court—colour, "as a lover courts a disdainful mistress." He was not, of course, lucky in his period, nor, even in his drawings, altogether unspoiled by the popular classicism. He delights here, too, at times in the bizarre and the hyper-realistic. But often he shows a true kinship with the great men of the *baroque* age; the forerunners who chiefly claimed his interest, besides Michelangelo, were Signorelli and Rembrandt. Of Dürer he seems to have known few, if any, originals. It is perhaps not fanciful to find in him a distinct affinity with El Greco, and his powerful, but somewhat theatrical, style may never make a wide appeal in England. Yet often he is strangely modern in effect, and he anticipated not only the Romantics but even the heroic shapes and poses of Rodin's sculptures.

Literature, with drawing, occupied Fuseli from early youth, whereas he was late in beginning to paint. Perhaps this interest in literature bound him down too closely to the illustrator's tasks. But it was inevitable, for he grew up in the literary circle presided over by Bodmer and Breitinger, the famous Swiss critics who attacked Gottsched and defended Milton. Bodmer it was who imbued Fuseli with a passionate worship for Klopstock and who urged the young exile—who had left Zurich for political reasons—to hurry on from Prussia, which Fuseli calls "this land of serfs and base, butterfly habits of mind," to England as the home of poetry and freedom. In London he developed greater independence and criticised Klopstock for "the unnatural refinement of the sentiments of his characters" and Wieland for "laying unholy hands on Shakespeare." From Lyons in 1766 he inquires if Bodmer has seen "Piercy's 3rd vol. of the Collection of ancient ballads?" If not, he will send them "to the Restorer of the Minnesong." In 1766 he signs himself "Fuseli" for the first time in a quaint mock-heroic poem in English beginning:

"God said to Fred'ric: 'Be the first of Names...'"

and ending on this personal note :—

"His nod call'd me. I trembled lest a Throne  
Should be my lot—but mildly-smiling He:  
'Take thou thy wish—the genial mind, the  
Tear,  
Thy Friend be Bodmer and thy Mistress—?'"