

Home affairs : "Women's suffrage in Switzerland

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It was on April 15th, 1803, that the deputies of the two regions of Switzerland that came under the Abbey of St. Gallen and those of several old Confederate bailiwicks proclaimed the foundation of a new Swiss Canton — that of St. Gallen.

On April 15th this year the present cantonal Parliament meets in solemn session to commemorate this historic date. But it will be several months later — on either Saturday, August 22nd, or 29th, before the long-awaited 150th anniversary celebrations will take place. The fine medieval "Klosterplatz", which is dominated by the abbey church and is classed as one of the most beautiful in Switzerland, will be the scene of a specially written festival play with words by the poet Georg Thürer and music by Paul Huber. There will be speeches by the Landammann (the president of the cantonal government) and the President of the Swiss Confederation.

In the afternoon a colourful carnival procession will wind through the streets of the old town, and in the evening there will be popular festivals in the parks, the squares and the public buildings of the city that is known throughout the world for its textiles and embroideries. All parishes in the canton will celebrate special religious services on either Sunday, August 23rd, or 30th, and these will be followed by civic celebrations.

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A new road atlas of Switzerland, which divides the country into 17 sections and includes maps of all the main towns, a list of 29 Alpine passes and a distances table, has just been published. Its practical make-up permits easy reference. The publishers are Kümmerly and Frey of Berne.

HOME AFFAIRS.

PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN SWITZERLAND"

Both here, and abroad, it has often been observed that although Switzerland is unquestionably the oldest democracy in the world, and one that has developed to its extreme limits the system of government by the people, she is at the same time of the last of the civilised States to refuse votes to women.

This brief recapitulation of the situation is perfectly exact. It should be remarked, however, that in all those countries where women's suffrage has been introduced, this has been done by an act of Parliament or by the Government and that, nowhere, have the men been consulted. In our country, however, no reform of any kind whatsoever can be undertaken without the electoral body, that is to say the entire body of adult males, being under the obligation of expressing their opinion on the matter. And that, no doubt, forms a serious obstacle to an innovation which comes within the logical order of things and of general evolution. This obstacle has not been met with elsewhere. There is nothing to tell us as to whether men, in other countries, if they had been consulted by means of a popular referendum would have shown themselves willing to share with women those rights of which they are the sole possessors, up to the present.

The fact must be faced also that, if men were not consulted in other countries regarding the institution of women's suffrage neither have the women been asked, up to now, to declare officially as to whether they

desired to enjoy civic rights. Rights were allocated to them, regarding which it was not known, as the result of an incontrovertible test, whether or not they really wanted them.

Now, however, such a test has just taken place. And, this, in Switzerland, in Geneva, to be more exact. After several negative votes on this subject had been registered during the last few years, in various of the Cantons, the Genevese decided to settle the matter, one way or another. They argued as follows: "It is often said by those who are against women's votes, that the women themselves have no wish to enjoy this right. We will consult them regarding this. Before giving them the vote, we want to know what is their opinion on this subject." And that is how it came to pass that recently, all the women of Swiss nationality domiciled in Geneva, took part in a kind of plebiscite, which proved to be a most interesting consultation.

We are now in the possession of the results of this extremely original consultation. The women who participated in the voting showed in a very definite manner that they were in favour of the extension of civic rights to women who had attained their majority. This opinion was expressed by six to one votes. The result is therefore quite clear and definite, if one considers that it will no longer be possible to pretend that women are not interested in an eventual active participation in public affairs.

There is, however, a shadow cast on this picture by the fact that more than 40% of the women kept away from this consultation and refrained from expressing any opinion. They just stayed at home. They did not want to be bothered. If they proved anything, it was their thorough lack of interest. And, this aspect of the consultation must also be borne in mind, quite impartially.

Indeed, by reason of these far too numerous abstentions, it is only a little less than half the women who have demanded in a clear and unequivocal manner the granting to them of civic rights. All the others — that is to say, rather more than half — have refused the present which was offered to them, or else have confessed to having no opinion at all, on the matter. If one takes this into account, then the consultation held in Geneva, loses some of the precise clearness which it appeared to possess at first glance.

This means that plenty of water will flow under our bridges before feminine suffrage is established in Switzerland. But, this is merely a question of time.

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Prelude in B minor.....Frank Martin
Study on finger substitution }.....R. d'Alessandro
Prelude for the left hand }
L'Isle Joyeux.....Debussy
Sonata in A flat major, Op. 110.....Beethoven

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