

Cultural life in Switzerland

Autor(en): **Huber-Renfer, F.**

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CULTURAL LIFE IN SWITZERLAND.

By Dr. F. Huber-Renfer.

Have you ever made the trip from Berne to Lausanne? If you have, then you will recall that moment when, immediately after Puidoux-Chébrès, the view spreads out before you in a magnificent sweep. Across the vineyards, down to the Lake, our glance travels over the picturesque townlets and villages, and then passes across the deep-blue lake towards the Savoy Mountains, majestically crowned by the Mont Blanc massif. It is a view that no one ever forgets, who has been privileged to see it, and one that brings happiness with it each time that it emerges before one's eyes, bringing with it a fresh revelation of the beauty of this unique spot.

What an abundance of objects of interest are offered us by the settlements on the Swiss banks of the lake. To-day, however, we do not intend to devote our time to speaking of the big centres, or the world-famous tourist resorts, but of the little town of Nyon.

In order to go there, we take the boat. What a pleasure it is to sail on this, the biggest lake in Western Europe, to which the melted snows of 239 glaciers contribute their waters. We meet and pass some heavily laden barks, their sails tightly stretched by the light winds. Small towns, villages, chateaux and Villas seem to greet us from the shores, and soon we glimpse from afar the object of our journey. Involuntarily, we think of the copper-plate engraving by Mathias Merian, made in 1642, in which the entire charm of the mediaeval townlet is so cleverly caught. In the foreground we see the harbour, with a bark that is being laden; then the town spreading along the shores and receding into the background, and finally, surrounded by a circlet of high towers, the imposing Castle, with its rounded corner-towers, and next to it the gables of the burghers' houses. It is true that the last centuries, and more especially the recent decades, have brought about many changes, and the peace and tranquillity so finely expressed by Merian have now given place to the bustle of modern life and its business activities. And yet, as soon as we leave the boat we become conscious of the fact that we are treading on old, historical ground. Already the name of the place, reminds us of this, for it goes back to the stronghold which was built by the Helvetii, in pre-historic times in order to barricade the Geneva highway. Noviodunum was the name given to the Colonia Julia Equestris, where the Romans, after they had conquered Helvetia, made a settlement for their soldiers, their veterans who had served their time. A beautiful head of Jupiter, in marble, as well as mosaics, amphorae, glasses and bronze hanging-lamps, all bear witness to the presence of the Romans, at that time. Numerous artistically chiselled stones bearing Latin inscriptions pointing the way to Nyon, which have been found built into Genevese houses, betray the fact that the Roman ruins of the town were used for building purposes, as was the case also in other places, as for instance, in Aventicum, now known as Avenches.

For several centuries Nyon was a "Municipium", that is to say a Roman free state; later on, it became an episcopal seat, belonged at one time to the Archbishop of Besançon, and was then, for a certain period, the central seat of the Government of Vaud.

After the conquest of Vaud by the Bernese, in 1536, it became the seat of the High Bailiff, under the German name of Neuss. It was the Bernese who built and extended the old stronghold into the Castle, which stands there to-day.

It was towards the end of the Bernese domination, that the most brilliant period of the little town's existence, set in. It was then that it became the centre of the European porcelain industry, for, in 1781, Ferdinand Müller of Frankenthal and Jakob Dortu of Berlin established the manufacture of Nyon porcelain, the products of which now constitute the greatest ornament of the big collections, and are the pride of their possessors. All the pieces that are signed with a small, blue fish come from the master-hand of Dortu. The breakfast and dinner services, the cylindrical mugs, the tea-cups, the boxes, the two-handled "trembleuses" and the vases, are all in the most perfect taste. Here they charm us by their gay posies of flowers or by tastefully strewn flowers, there by their insects, painted in a masterly manner, or perhaps delightful landscapes, and finally by finely executed trophies, monogrammes or silhouettes. Dr. Edgar Pelichet, in his comprehensive publication entitled "La Porcelaine de Nyon", speaks with great truth when he observes: "One must admit that everything which is pretty or beautiful, whether created by Nature or by man, has been made use of by the Nyon decorators". It is with an expert hand that Dr. Pelichet, who is the Curator of the Castle Museum, has set out these brilliant little masterpieces, which still retain all their original freshness and beauty, and can be viewed and admired — I would say, *should* be viewed and admired — by everyone who comes to Nyon.

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