

# The 1958 national year-book of the N.S.H.

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## THE 1958 NATIONAL YEAR-BOOK OF THE N.S.H.

The 1958 Year-book published by the Nouvelle Société Helvétique is a notable production. Once again, under the intelligent and enterprising direction of Théo Chopard, its able editor, it manages to break new ground. Last year's issue contained the views of the "under thirties" — the "angry young people" one was tempted to say! The present issue is devoted to femininity and consists of a number of essays — thirty-three in all — contributed by women of the Swiss intelligentsia.

These contributions constitute a comprehensive study of the position women occupy in the national life of Switzerland. They cover a wide field and give an impressive picture of feminine activity in many spheres: social, educational, family life, housing, church, labour conditions, public affairs, politics, international problems, science and the arts, and the Press. In many of these, women have only recently played a role. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that in the intellectual realm women, far from holding a second place, have caught up with and in some respects outstripped the mere male.

The burning question of women's emancipation and their political enfranchisement is not unduly stressed but it looms in the background by implication, unavoidably so. In his foreword, Mr. Chopard takes care to mark the distinction "Ce n'est pas un livre féministe, c'est un livre féminin". None the less the reader cannot help being struck by the anomaly that among the Western democracies Switzerland of all countries should be the one to deny political equality to its women. The reason for this paradox lies probably in a deep-rooted conservatism which, notably in the rural districts, underlies popular opinion in spite of all progress and enlightenment. There are signs, however, that public opinion is beginning to veer round and there is reason to hope that before very long justice will be done. It is because of the imminence of a solution to this question that the Year-book is so timely and topical, and Mr. Chopard's initiative, in allowing woman's voice to be heard, so much to be commended.

One of the most interesting studies is that by Dr. Biske, a lady attached to the statistical department of the municipality of Zurich. Accompanied by a number of graphs and tables which to the layman are of great help, her treatise deals with woman's place in the country's statistics. As in most other communities, in Switzerland the female population exceeds the male; it has done so ever since statistical records were kept. The reason for this preponderance lies in the greater expectation of life of the female — actually more boys than girls are born. In old age the tendency becomes even more marked, the number of women over 90 is, it seems, more than double that of men of the same age. Marriage, divorce, children, the professions, the influx of foreigners — all angles of woman's position in the Swiss economy are analysed and beautifully set out. A remarkable contribution.

Equally absorbing is Eliane Lavarino's paper entitled "Contribution de la femme à la vie communale". Woman, she writes, was not always looked upon as an inferior being and as far back as the middle ages she played a not inconsiderable role in public life. Before the 1874 constitution became law,

women of a certain social standing were admitted to the Bernese local governments; after 1887 their relegation was complete. Since then and especially during the war years women entered the civil services in increasing numbers, mostly in a secretarial capacity. In the communes, however, they often became responsible executives. An instance is quoted where during the last war a woman had sole charge of a communal centre in which she directed, by herself, all rationing, the requisition of war material and, believe it or not, the mobilisation of men and horses. She was on duty day and night and did the work of several men. Such was her success that after the war some high-ranking army officers came along to meet "the woman who did the mobilisation".

The foregoing is a small fragment only of the book. A work of this kind, composed as it is of many contributions of much variety, does not lend itself to a detailed review. One can but admire it and acknowledge its merit.

It is, in short, a fine symposium of feminine endeavour and achievement contributing in no small measure to the welfare of all Swiss people and their national life.

J.J.F.S.

## NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

A large audience attended the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's Open Meeting held on 22nd April at the Swiss Hostel for Girls, 9 Belsize Grove, N.W.3, and were delighted by a display of colour photos taken in Yugoslavia by Mr. R. A. Memory, of Hambros Bank Ltd. This was followed by another display of photos showing the attractiveness of some West of England scenery not normally visited by the tourist. The lecturer is a keen photographer, and his humorous comments were much appreciated by those present.

The Society hope to hold their next open meeting on 20th May, arrangements for which, in the absence abroad of the President, are in the hands of Dr. Egli, Vice-President. Members will, of course, be advised later in the usual manner.

W.R.

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