

# A panorama of Swiss culture

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# A PANORAMA OF SWISS CULTURE

described by an American

The most concise and comprehensive study of Switzerland's cultural achievements is probably the work of an American: His name is *Walter Sorell*. He is on the faculty of Columbia University, has written a number of books and reviews poetry and literature for the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and leading American periodicals. The cultural panorama of Switzerland which, under the title *The Swiss*, bears his signature is so good that it is actually in the course of translation into German. The book was launched simultaneously in London and New York and its publication here was celebrated by a reception at the Embassy before Christmas. The publishers are Oswald Wold Wolff. The tome has 304 pages, is cloth-bound and costs £3.00.

## A gallery of great men

One is pleasantly surprised to realise that Switzerland has produced so many great men, and astounded to know that an American should be so familiar with the details of their achievements and have such deep insight into the meaning of their work.

For anyone but the scholar of Swiss history, a great many creators dealt with by Sorell must have been gloriously unknown figures. The gallery of writers, artists, theologians, psychologists and scientists who are given a place in this cultural travel-companion leaves out none of the more familiar names, such as: *Pestalozzi, Henri Dunant, Benjamin Constant, Jung, Le Corbusier, Hodler, Topffer, Paul Klee, Giacometti, Jeremias Gotthelf, Keller, Frisch, Durrenmatt, Honegger, Ramuz, Euler, Bernouilli, etc.*, not counting the many men of science and letters who have been claimed by other countries (e.g., *Rousseau*) and the innumerable artists and thinkers, from Lizst to Einstein and from Byron to Hermann Hess who have found an intellectual haven in Switzerland.

## The concern for God

The Introduction gives Max Frisch's assessment of the reasons why Switzerland has attracted so many artists from all over the world. According to this Swiss writer, Switzerland is a country of refuge because it offers an atmosphere of political and social noninvolvement, because of her *Geschichtlosigkeit* ... which has essentially appealed to radicals and those who wanted to retire to an atmosphere conducive to creativity as much as to an atmosphere of peacefulness and security safeguarded by traditional neutrality.

Sorell aptly names his chapters to throw into relief and salient and eternal features of the Swiss mind. This cultural

journey appropriately begins with a chapter on *Religion* with due emphasis on Switzerland's influence on the Reformation (Calvin, Zwingli) and on modern theology (Karl Barth). The next chapter deals with *Education* and is significantly sub-titled "or the belief in love".

The didactic concern of so many Swiss writers is noteworthy and so is the fact that three of the world's greatest and most influential educationists (Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Steiner) were Swiss. Dealing with science, Sorell devotes several pages to Karl Gustav Jung. The anecdote of Einstein flunking his entrance examination at the Zurich Polytechnic Institute and being considered as a "lazy dog" by his professors is amusingly recalled. Sorell also writes that Einstein wanted to go through the training of the *Miliz* and was very unhappy when the authorities rejected him because of his varicose veins and flat feet.

## Humanitarian streak

An interesting account of the life and work of Leonard Euler, who ranks as one of the greatest mathematicians of all times and a description of that extraordinary family, the Bernouillis, highlights Basle's importance in the progress of thought. Among several others, the names of Erasmus, Jaspers and Burkhardt are linked to the history of that city.

A humanitarian streak is often found in Swiss men of action. This is true of *Henry Dunant*, the failed businessman who founded the Red Cross, and of *John Augustus Sutter*, a pioneer settler in California, founder of Sacramento, capital of California, and on whose land gold was discovered in 1848. *If the feeling of narrowness, as so often claimed, can drive the Swiss into self-imposed exile*, writes Sorell, *then it can certainly nourish a man's curiosity and make him search for the unknown in faraway countreys, particularly when his latent soldierly instincts can be channelled into the courage needed by the explorer.*

Embodying this statement, Suter became a powerful man but remained a dreamer unrealistic in his enterprises, *but he would not have been a Swiss dreamer had he not founded frontier industries, cultivated land and raised cattle.*

## "Heidi" and a child's dreams

Writing in a following chapter on French-speaking Swiss writers, Sorell deals at length with the pathological life of the Romantic *Henri-Frédéric Amiel*, on whom Mathew Arnold has devoted a study; and tells of C. F. Ramuz, Vaud's most famous 20th Century writer.

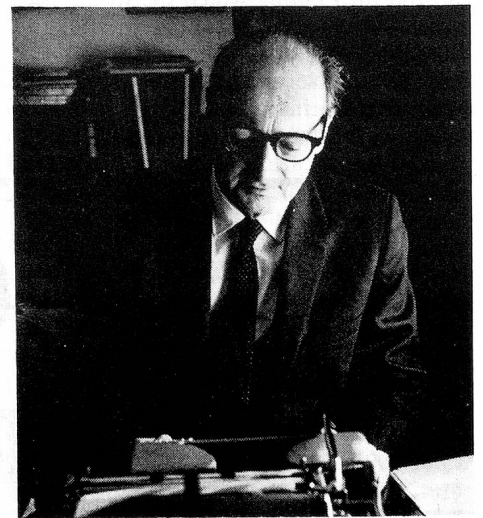
Sorell has no trouble in preparing

a long list of German-Swiss authors from which to draw, and begins his account of German-Swiss literature with *Heidi*, by Johanna Spyri (1827-1901), a story that has all the necessary ingredients to captivate a young person's mind.

"*Johanna Spyri's insight into the mind of the child*, adds Sorell, *mingled with restrained gaiety and cheerful wisdom, gave most of her stories their attraction. True, 'Heidi', her best work does not have the symbolic depth and many-faceted meaningfulness of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' nor does it have the value and substance of Hans Christian Anderson's stories. But 'Heidi' has disarming naïveté and endearing charm in common with its memorable fictional companion*".

## "The universe in their heart"

Sorell occasionally makes a halt and views the object of his narrative from some distance. This leads him to the



Walter Sorell

following remarks throwing light on the urge of many Swiss writers to rise from the particular and the finiteness of their parochial environment to the Universal:

"*It has been said before that one can see the entire world from one's own window. Some writers are born with the universe in their hearts, visible and palpable in their own four walls, in the valley in which they live, in the street of their little town. Many Swiss writers whose native tongue is German show a creative power that grew out of their specific Swissness, but also far beyond it. They succeed in formulating their experience in a universally legible and identifiable manner. Characters grounded in the narrowness of their country grow wings ... from Gotthelf and Keller to Dürrenmatt and Frisch, the literary world recognizes the valid image they create, the*

human pulsebeat and the moral in the message of these writers”.

“They never deny their heritage”, adds Sorell, “their Swiss background reveals itself in many ways. Since *Switzerdütsch* is used as the vernacular on all social levels, its idioms phrase and colour the writer’s language. His civic-mindedness and social conscience are blended with his tendency to explain himself while teaching a lesson, but, most of all, to ratify the innate need for self-realization. The German-Swiss writer is prompted by a didactic purpose to chastise evil, to defend the higher values in life. There are many reasons for this, but the roots for it can be found in the religious background of most of the writers, who have never completely freed themselves from the sermon”.

### The Schauspielhaus

Sorell devotes nearly a whole chapter to Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Switzerland’s two leading author-playwrights, and in this connection stresses the central role of Zurich Schauspielhaus in the war-time and post-war history of the stage. He notes that Schauspielhaus had an enviable series of firsts while the Nazis were in power (“a cultural windfall for Switzerland”). These included Brecht’s four most important plays (Mother Courage, Galileo, Good Woman of Sezuan and Puntilla); Steinbeck’s “The Moon is down”, and Thornton Wilder’s “Alcestiade”.

Sorell’s introduction to Swiss art begins with Ferdinand Hodler (1853–

1918) “who is for Switzerland what Johann Strauss is for Austria or Goethe for Germany. He is the most representative for the nation whose people can easily identify with significant and immediately recognizable features of his work”.

In the same chapter, the author pointedly reminds the reader that the writer-caricaturist Rodolphe Töpffer, “a nineteenth-century James Thurber”, was father of the cartoon. He adds that Wilhelm Busch, who is generally credited with discovering this technique, and Edward Lear could not have accomplished what they did without Rodolphe Töpffer, the creator of humorous drawings with explanatory text.

“Switzerland has brought forth far more than its goodly share in the artistic exploration of our existence and identity”, writes Sorell. Referring to modern art. Owing to the country’s neutrality, it could give birth to such a revolutionary movement in the arts as Dada, and in this context the abstractionists Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber are placed on a high pedestal. Klee and Max Bill are given the prominence they deserve, and so is the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, “a towering figure, an artist of international stature”.

### Joyce and his declaration of fortune

Returning to the “creative atmosphere of Switzerland”, one is impressed on the profound attachment (either to the scenery or a way of life) expressed by so many of the artists who have chosen to live in Switzerland. This is

particularly true of the poet Reiner Maria Rilke, the German writer Thomas Mann, and is not untrue of James Joyce. The Irish exile found refuge in Switzerland during the war (he died in Zurich in January, 1941) but obtaining the authorisation was not easy, as he explained in a letter to a friend: “*The Swiss, having finally discovered that I am not a Jew from Judea, but an Aryan of Erin, have requested a bank deposit and a guarantee of 500,000 French francs. This was done. The Swiss next demanded a detailed declaration of my personal fortune. This was done also, and we are waiting . . .*”

### Thomas Mann and those “Helvetia stamps”

The extraordinary impact which cultural environment can have on the work of a writer is illustrated by the following letter sent by Thomas Mann to Hermann Hess, another German writer who chose to work and live in Switzerland. After having lived several years in Switzerland and left for California, Mann acutely felt a difference. He wrote:

“Dear Mr. Hess, a letter from Switzerland and from you gives me much joy. You can’t imagine with which intensity I pull out such a letter with the Helvetia stamp from among those stupid, long American envelopes and give it preference over all other things. Strangely enough, the Schwyzers have not all behaved particularly nice towards all of us who were without a fatherland and not on good terms with our government. Yet the five years of my life spent there

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have made me feel so heartily attached to the country that thinking of it looks to me like homesickness”.

That was in 1941. Eleven years later Mann settled in Kilchberg, near Zurich, where he lived until his death in 1955.

The glimpses we have given of this excellent cultural panorama only reveals the small details of a wide landscape. We can only recommend a book which will probably inspire a comment similar to this one by Max Frisch:

“He who already knows and likes to live with the cliché that Switzerland has, above all, produced cheese and clocks and mountains need not read this book: its wealth of surprising and profound information about theology, architecture, pedagogy, theatre, painting, music, literature and so forth could easily deprive him of his cliché for ever”.

# Swiss Firm Helps to Fight Arthritis

Spare-parts surgery is one of the fastest moving fields of medicine, not least because of the rise of road traffic accidents and the application of various electronic devices to the regulation of the human organism, one example being the heart-pacemaker. However, problems of rejection not unlike those raised by organ transplants appear if these foreign bodies react in any way with the acceptor organism. The implant, whether it is used for fixing bone fractures or replacing worn parts from joints, must be of a chemically inert material. This appears simple, but, as the last issue of the *Sulzer Technical Review* emphasises in an interesting article, this requires years of painstaking tests and research.

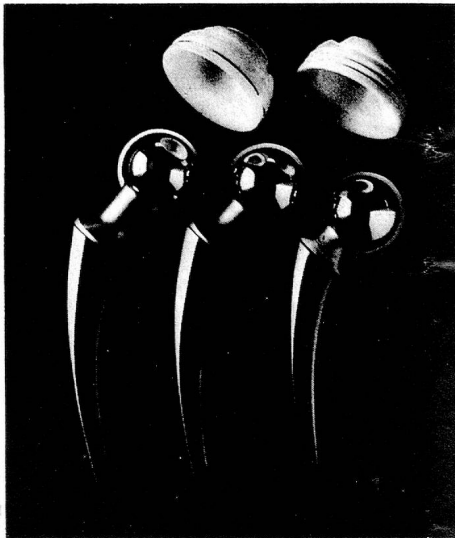
Sulzer brothers of Winterthur are better known as the makers or licensors of two-thirds of the world's marine diesel engines and of a sizeable fraction of the world's spinning and weaving machines. However, they have also established their reputation in the technology of casting and forging complicated workpieces of metal into precise shapes. Sulzer's have forged the pump and boiler casings of Switzerland's nuclear reactors. In a somewhat less bulky domain, they have developed the technology of manufacturing so-called *joint endoprotheses* (see picture) which allow total hip joint replacement for people suffering from arthritis. Sulzer's are a world leader in a technology which has already helped tens of thousands of people to lead near-normal lives.

The total hip joint replacement is made up of three parts: a prosthesis shaft which is embedded in the thigh-bone, a hollow-ball and a socket. Each are manufactured from different and highly sophisticated materials satisfying very strict specifications. The prosthesis shaft

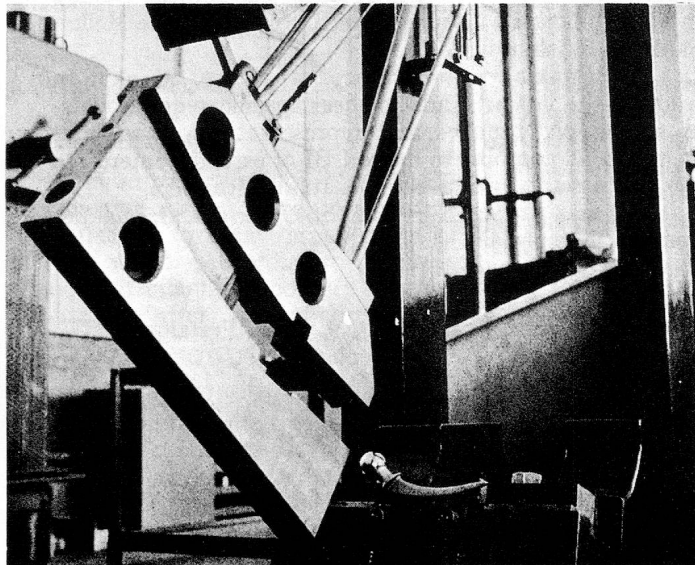
must be extremely strong, sufficiently flexible and, of course, completely “inert”. It must be remembered that fixing these devices in an arthritic patient requires a long operation followed by a lengthy period of convalescence. For all practical purposes, an implant is therefore inserted once and for all and must be able to sustain the 200 million cycles of flexural and torsional stress which that piece of metal can be expected to sustain during the patient's life-time. This calls for complicated stress calculations and tests, like the ones shown in the photographs below.

The hollow-ball must also have special qualities. It must first of all be absolutely smooth. This requires the most refined forging or casting techniques. It must be extremely resilient, “bio-compatible” and “corrosion resistant” or inert indefinitely. Cobalt-base chromium/molybdenum alloys have been developed to this end. Sulzer's have come out with a highly technical substance called *Protasul-10* which is used in the forged state for producing implants. Finally, the material of the socket must be such that friction with the metal ball is reduced to a minimum and at the same time be extremely strong. New kinds of high-density plastics presenting the required characteristics have been developed over the years.

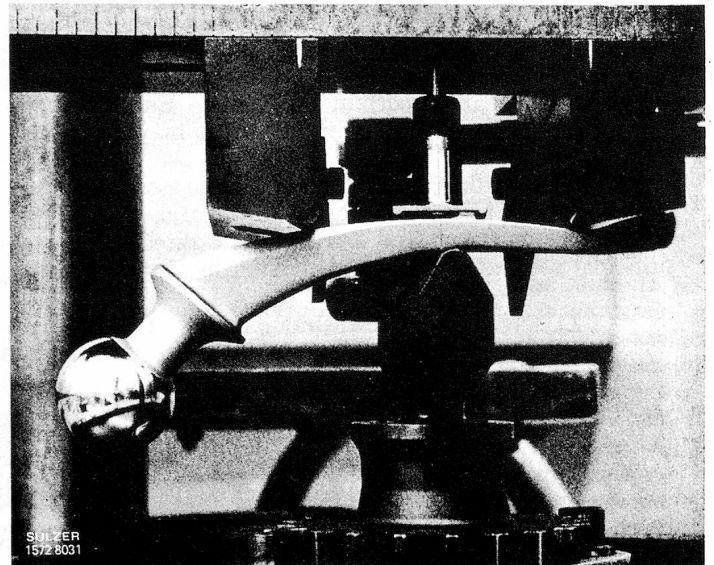
All these devices are subjected to elaborate mechanical and chemical tests before being tried on animals – and then on human beings. One is however never quiet sure that an implant that has proved adequate on a guinea-pig will not cause problems on a human patient. Clinical experience is therefore indispensable to complete the knowledge obtained in the laboratory.



Total hip joint replacements. The picture shows prosthetic shafts of various sizes of the kind which are embedded in the thigh bone of patients suffering from arthritis. Articulation consists of a hollow ball made of a special casting alloy and a socket of high-density polyethylene (by courtesy of Sulzer Brothers Ltd.)



Impact test hammer for testing impact toughness of hip joint shaft at its middle.



Bending load test on a hip joint shaft designed to plot a load-deflection curve.