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### Thank you

The December 2007 edition of "Swiss Review" with the golden cover photo of the angel from Einsiedeln monastery is still lying on my lounge table in front of me. It was a pleasant surprise to receive this publication between Christmas and New Year, and then to read about the history of the monastery in its full context. I would like to say thank you for this and the copies of "Swiss Review" over all of the past years. May 2008 bring us all wonderful inspiration from the past for the future.

HEIDI BLACK-GOGEL, AUCKLAND,  
NEW ZEALAND

### Wonderful memories

As a Swiss National living near Manchester in the UK, I really appreciate the quality articles in "Swiss Review". As a child, I have wonderful memories of being hosted by Swiss families for long, happy summers, particularly with Lili Furrer-Amsler in Berne, organised by the Projuventute. My only contact with Switzerland now is through exhilarating skiing holidays in Zermatt! I have been particularly impressed by your "Green" articles, including how climate change has affected glaciers and snow levels.

LAURA DANIELS, CHESHIRE,  
UNITED KINGDOM

### Four national languages in Switzerland

I have just received the February edition of "Swiss Review" and I agree with the views expressed by David J.L. Bongard. I actually come from German-speaking Switzerland, but it annoys me that, considering the diversity of our beautiful homeland (where the various official national languages provide confirmation of the "togetherness" of all the different parts of the country), French and Italian are increasingly marginalised. The Swiss are often the envy of others because we speak several languages, which helps us (especially me) in our careers.

So please, let's preserve our wonderful languages like French and Italian (Romansch should not be allowed to die out either), so that we can continue to enjoy our linguistic culture in Switzerland.

KURT E. GROETSCH, MURCIA,  
SPAIN

### Different mentalities

I live in Munich, practically on Switzerland's doorstep, and visit Switzerland from time to time. I nevertheless enjoy reading "Swiss Review" which provides quality information about Swiss affairs in a concise format which you cannot get access to yourself despite living relatively nearby. The reason for my

*Alfred Escher, rise and fall*

With a fixed gaze and statesman-like demeanour, Alfred Escher has been standing on the plinth of the monument in front of Zurich's main station since 1889. This monument recognises probably the greatest of Swiss statesmen, the real founder of modern Switzerland. Following the death of the 63-year-old "federal baron" and "king of the railways" on 6 December 1882, leading figures from government and business joined the funeral cortege – Federal Councillors, around a hundred members of the National Council and Council of States, executive and municipal councillors, business leaders, academics and artists, "old and young, distinguished and ordinary mourners".

No-one else led the emergent federal state into the modern age with the same energy and far-sightedness as shown by this son of an upper-class Zurich family. Alfred Escher dominated politics in Switzerland and Zurich for decades. He

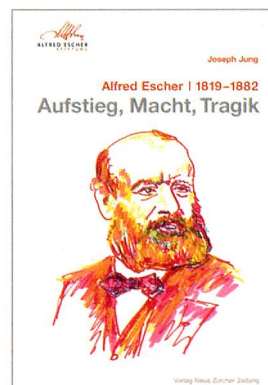
was a member of the National Council for 34 years and was four times its president. In the Canton of Zurich, he sat on the cantonal council for 38 years and on the executive council for seven years (four times as president). The name Escher is associated with new ventures of historical significance – the north-east railway (the largest private railway company of its day), the construction of the Gotthard tunnel, the Swiss federal polytechnic (now the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich), the Swiss credit institution (now Credit Suisse) and the Swiss pensions institution (now Swiss Life). "No other politician of the 19th and 20th centuries achieved as much as Alfred Escher", writes biographer and historian Joseph Jung.

He demonstrated a tireless, almost super-human dedication to the common good throughout his life. Escher was a powerful man and a powerful politician who could be uncompromising and radical. His prominent positions in politics and business and his wide network of contacts gave him an unparalleled power base that also gave rise to stiff opposition. The railway construction and the creation of the polytechnic were his great projects, likewise his economic achievements, in particular the construction of the Gotthard tunnel.

His rise to power and lifetime achievements were as remarkable as the end of his political and private life was tragic. He was blamed for financial problems with the north-east railway and the construction of the Gotthard tunnel. His own liberal camp abandoned him. Escher was not even mentioned at the ceremony of 1880 to mark the 25th anniversary of the polytechnic. Neither was he invited to the proof-of-concept celebrations for the Gotthard tunnel in the same year. The Gotthard pioneer did not receive any official letter of thanks from the Federal Council. He suffered illnesses continually in his later years. At the end of his life, he had to endure great hostility rather than appreciation and recognition. "As

a politician, Alfred Escher stood head and shoulders above the rest in a way that is not tolerated in Switzerland", writes the biographer. – Joseph Jung's book is a fascinating biography of an extraordinary statesman and business leader, and also a portrait of Switzerland in the 19th century.

ROLF RIBI



JOSEPH JUNG: Alfred Escher (1819-1882). Aufstieg, Macht, Tragik. Zurich 2007, published by Neue Zürcher Zeitung, CHF 48, EUR 31. Only available in German.