

Our fatherland [continued]

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **18 (1954)**

Heft [10]

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942651>

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Lausanne, Vinet was called, at the early age of twenty, to teach the French language and literature at the "Gymnase" in Bâle. His stay on the River Rhine was to last twenty years and he used it to complete his own instruction while earning his living. These were fruitful years, made still more rich by a happy marriage. There was mourning soon enough, and illness also to blend with the brighter hours, but Vinet's intense activity never lessened.

In addition to his teaching which was all but light, Vinet was going on with his personal work. He was supplying his pupils with a "Chrestomathie française" unique of its kind which inspired for almost a century generations of young scholars. Articles and books followed in close succession. The "Memoire sur la liberte des cultes" aroused heated discussions on the question of the separation of Church from State. The "Essais de philosophie morale et de morale religieuse" helped to train innumerable readers in the practice of serious meditation. The reputation of the young professor was growing. Several foreign universities came forward with flattering offers, but he modestly felt that he wanted to devote himself entirely to his native land. In 1837, he left Basle, regretfully, considering it his duty to accept a professorship at the Lausanne Academy. He was installed on the very day Sainte-Beuve started his famous course on Port-Royal. Difficulties of a political and ecclesiastical nature were to bring Vinet's official teaching to an end eight years later. During the last months of his life he devoted himself to the private school for girls which today still bears his name and to the new "Faculte libre de theologie."

In Lausanne as in Basle, the Vinet's home was a hospitable and lively place. Many were the Swiss who found there durable friendship and intellectual stimulus, not to speak of foreigners such as the critic Sainte-Beuve, the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, the Scotch philosopher Erskine, and many others. All enjoyed meeting there for free conversations. But Vinet never allowed social duties to interfere with his writing, which included, besides his "Essai sur la manifestation des convictions religieuses," speeches, articles on current problems, literary criticism, poetry, to say nothing of a voluminous correspondence rich in good advice, solace, encouragement and understanding. In 1847, a premature death put an end to this active life. Vinet died at Clarens, in the very house where the fantastic genius Byron had written some of his immortal verse.

Vinet's life is devoid of outstanding events but few human careers have been so rich in experience and humanity. Gravity, simplicity, severity toward himself, torturing struggle, sharp scruples, all played their part. Vinet's

thought never ceased to radiate in a variety of fields. The very principles for which he lived and struggled are of a burning actuality: fight for liberty of conscience, for respect of opinions, for defence of the individual and his primordial rights.

A convinced patriot, Vinet was deeply attached to his native land. He dreamt of a fully republican and truly democratic government, of magistrates lacking in personal ambition and eager to assume responsibility. He saw in Switzerland the prototype of Europe and humanity which some day would find in an enlarged federalism the status consistent with reason and evangelical teaching. In his mind religion and mankind were closely bound together.

As stated before, the scope of Vinet's words exceeds the borders of his country. The problems that attracted his attention are of a universal order. Vinet belongs to the tradition of Pascal. The esteem that men like Hugo and Lamartine had for him, the numerous testimonies of respect which came to him from all quarters, are proof of his universality. One should not forget Brunetiere's admission that he had rarely had an idea which Vinet had not expressed before him.

As philosopher, theologian, moral leader and literary critic, Alexandre Vinet remains one of Switzerland's outstanding personalities, a worthy servant of human thought in some of its deepest and loftiest manifestations.

OUR FATHERLAND

(By L.E.M.)

(Continuation)

TICINO: One of Switzerland's most unusual, but also beautiful and picturesque Cantons, is the southernmost Tessin. Its people, although predominantly of old Italian stock, are now more and more influenced by migration from northern Switzerland. The steady inter-mixing is doubtless improving the hardy mountain people. They are hard-working, simple folk, very independent, typical Tessiner in outlook, but above all ardent Swiss in character.

Because of the key position to the important St. Gotthard Pass, frequent quarrels occurred between the major powers since Roman time, and the Tessin suffered much. After gaining full independence she finally joined the Swiss Confederation in 1803.

Few of us realise that this canton is also one, if not the most interesting from the point of view of art. There are a great many fine churches, paintings, sculptures and buildings of real beauty in most parts of the Tessin. And still less do we know these days of the great artists like Domenico Fontana, joint architect of the Vatican; Carlo Maderno, who built the facade of the great St. Peter's Church in Rome; Baldasare Longhena, the architect of the Church

Santa Maria della Salute in Venice; Dominico Trezzini, planning St. Petersburg when it was created capital of Russia; and Pietro Solari, who built the major part of the Kremlin. Thus it is not surprising that the Ticino possesses many gems of architectural charm, even in some remote valleys, and an interested and understanding traveller will see much.

Before the Gotthard tunnel was pierced in 1880, a spectacular horse-drawn Postcoach traversed the pass in sun, rain or snowstorm, past the famous Devils Bridge below Andermatt and the Russian inscription hewn in the rock, commemorating General Suvarov's campaign in 1799, when the Russian army attacked the French revolutionary army and where two fierce and bloody battles were fought twice in a few weeks.

Any of us, fortunate enough to visit our Fatherland, hardly would miss to travel through the Gotthard and, reaching the exit at Airolo, one is instantly struck by the contrast from the Alpine austerity of the northern side and the sunny south. The fast express takes you first past a type of wooded, rugged mountain scenery with numerous rushing little streams and scraggy shrubs, but before long the fleeing scene changes to the strange phenomenon of more southern vegetation, with clusters of chestnut trees, magnolia, or rhododendrum.

Although, whilst passing the long narrow valley opening widely at Bellinzona, the upper Tessin would offer many charming and interesting visits, the impulse of all travellers is to press on to Lugano and Locarno. Both offer a climate and conditions very similar to those of the Riviera, and even some of the sceneries are identical. Lugano, the gem of Switzerland, is fully conscious of being a beauty spot. In spite of studying the needs of the thousands of visitors, it seems to have that sleepy ease, that informality, that sun-warmed grace which assures the visitor to relax completely and make an agreeable stay. The handsome city has excellent shops, hotels catering for all tastes, sheltering the rich and the poor in a spot so blessed by beauty and peace.

Lugano has preserved some of its ancient character in its old stone buildings, its narrow streets and arcades. Here also, on certain days, a typical Italian market is held with a crowd of noisy, animated merchants, where goods seem heaped on the sidewalks, but do not detract from the charm of the scene. And leaving the market, you walk out to the quay, where you face a splendid and typical Riviera picture; a beautiful promenade along the lake, past large hotels and happy, well-dressed people. And it appears, wherever one looks, in Lugano one sees the blue lake branching out in two or three different directions, with its shapely curved shores, built on sometimes right to the water's edge. Or if you look up from the lake level, you behold cone-shaped hills backed by high mountains. Some nearby hills are now

thickly built over, so that at night the whole hillside sparkles with lights almost like a jewel. There is always something to do in Lugano. One can go to Gandria by boat and see the jumble of ancient Italian-looking houses, clinging to the hill and looking rather though they were about to drop vertically into the lake, which lies immediately below their windows. Or about half-way to Gandria by road, just outside Lugano and within easy walking distance, is the Villa Favorita at Castagnola, housing the magnificent private collection of pictures belonging to a rich patrician. The collection has recently been made accessible to the public on certain days. A state-ly avenue of cypress trees leads you to the long, windowless modern gallery, buried in the trees behind the orangerie, and there you can see pictures by great masters equal to the best in any public gallery in all Europe, or in all the world, as some have been repatriated from America.

There are plenty of longer expeditions by motor boat and steamer from Lugano. One can cross the lake to Campione, whose church bells one can hear plainly pealing on a Sunday evening across the water, or to Marcote, which clings to the base of Monte Arbostora, or you may go to Ponte Tresa, where one can stand in the bridge with one leg in Switzerland and one in Italy, before buying a few trinkets and taking the train back to Lugano. But of all expeditions from Lugano the best is the one to Monte Generoso. One ascends from Capolago, at the southern end of the lake, which can be reached either by train or by boat, the latter being much more attractive. You go up Monte Generoso in little open, eight-divisioned railway carriages, pushed by a small, quite unique looking, slanted steam engine, which has been doing this for more than 50 years and which bears a strong resemblance to a dachshund, for it has tiny low wheels in front, whereas the cab at the back is elevated at a considerable angle.

(To be concluded)

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Printed by McKenzie, Thornton, Cooper Ltd., 126 Cuba St., Wellington for the Swiss Benevolent Society in New Zealand (Inc.).