

The week at home

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THE WEEK AT HOME.

By MAX NEF.

During the Autumn Session of the Federal Parliament, which ended a few weeks ago, the Council of States in one of its last sittings voted in favour of the proposal, put forward by the Federal Council, that Swiss women should be granted equal rights with men in respect of Popular Referendums on matters pertaining to the Confederation. In other words, that the Swiss woman citizen who has attained her majority should be given the same active and passive electoral franchise in respect of the Federal elections, and the same voting power in respect of Referendums on practical questions, as are possessed by the men; the Federal Constitution to be revised in this sense. The Government's proposal was adopted by the Council of States by a bare 19 to 14 votes majority, from which it will be seen how strong the opposition continues to be in Switzerland to the introduction of women's suffrage. The advocates of political equality of rights for women consider, however, that their cause has moved a step forward through the acceptance of the Federal Council's proposal by one of the two Federal Chambers.

Among those members of Parliament who voted against the Bill were to be found a few supporters of women's votes. These hold the opinion that this innovation should first of all be introduced, in accordance with the old Swiss method which has proved its worth, in the Communes and Cantons, where it could be tried out and then, only afterwards, be transferred to the Federal plane. As it happens, such attempts have already been made several times but have never come to anything.

The tenacious opposition which exists, more especially in the farming and the Catholic-Conservative circles, against the granting of equal political right to women is considered by a great many people — more especially abroad — to be an absurd anachronism. In order to be able to understand the situation better the fact should be recalled, however, that this is not solely a matter of giving women political franchise. The Swiss citizen possesses the right, by means of his voting-paper, to decide on many practical matters pertaining to the Commune, the Canton or the Confederation, such as, for instance, whether a municipal transport company should acquire a new type of bus, whether an airport should be extended, and whether many other things

should be done. A great many people are of the opinion that a thorough knowledge or understanding of such, very often complicated, technical problems, as well as of involved political questions, is contrary to the nature of most women and that, therefore, this proposal should be rejected. Nevertheless, whether they want it or not, the Proposal of the Federal Council will again be discussed next December, this time by the National Council, after which it will be subjected to a Popular Referendum sometime next year.

The affair which occurred in the Swiss Federal Office of the Attorney-General last spring and aroused so much comment — leading as it did to the suicide of the Attorney-General, M. René Dubois, the arrest of one of the Federal Police Inspectors and the recalling of an Attaché belonging to one of the foreign Embassies here — was reopened last week at a sitting of the National Council, through an oral report on this subject made by the Federal Minister of Justice, Federal Councillor Feldmann. A very careful enquiry into this affair, which was recently concluded, has brought clarity to some of the most important facts and has eliminated various hypotheses as being incorrect. This enquiry shows that M. Dubois and the Police Inspector concerned went considerably beyond the prescribed limits for the exchange of confidential information with foreign agents. The arrested Inspector is now awaiting his sentence by the Court. It should be mentioned that neither he nor the Attorney-General, M. Dubois, ever received any money or presents for the information given — or, at any rate, no indications of this could be found in the enquiry. Moreover, the information in question had nothing to do with Swiss affairs.

The whole business — it can now be perceived — was grossly exaggerated by the foreign Press, and its foreign political aspect is in no way as serious as was feared at one time. In any case, according to Federal Councillor Feldmann's statement, the assertions made that Swiss neutrality had been violated do not in any way correspond to the facts.

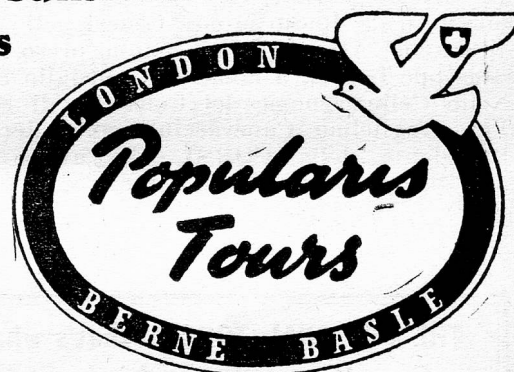
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