

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1962)
Heft: 1415

Artikel: 1962 The Rousseau year [to be continued]
Autor: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692634>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 01.02.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Thurgau Police are to have new barracks at Frauenfeld. This was decided by the Cantonal Council. They also debated far-reaching proposals for the new education laws, as well as new salary scales for doctors, judges, school-teachers and policemen.

* * *

The Cantonal Council of the Ticino has for some time been discussing the project of an oil pipeline which would be carried through the Ticino from Genoa to Southern Germany. There is a great deal of opposition to this scheme. The Urban Council of Lugano wants to take the matter to the Federal High Courts, based on an opinion by experts of the ETH (Federal University of Technology) with regard to pollution of the water sources in the Vedeggio Valley in case of a possible leak in the pipeline. On the other hand, a group of citizens has announced its intention of starting an initiative in favour of the pipeline. If the 5,000 required signatures are collected the Council will be empowered to start the pipeline project.

The first Ticino life insurance company was floated in Lugano. The "Ticino" has a capital of 15 million francs.

The dam of the new hydro-electric works in the Blenio Valley is nearing completion. Mid-July the millionth cubic metre of cement was filled into the wall in the presence of several official visitors.

* * *

The head of the primary school section of the education department of the Canton of Vaud, Adrien Martin, has resigned after devoting himself to the Vaudois schools for 45 years.

* * *

The Cantonal Council of the Valais has agreed to a project for new administrative buildings in the centre of Sion, including a cantonal school.

The foundation stone of a holiday village was laid at Nax (south-east of Sion). It is the idea of the "Confrérie Libre" of the Geneva suburb, St. Gervais, and is intended for old people, children and guests from Geneva.

* * *

School reform has been occupying the Neuchâtel cantonal authorities; new proposals will have to be worked out since the electorate rejected the first ones. Apparently women voters went to the poll in especially large numbers.

The Lake of Neuchâtel shows signs of dangerous pollution and the Councillors have urged that the first filter installation be begun soon. They received assurance that it will start work in 1965.

New laws regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages were debated, including a decree prohibiting young people under 15 from entering some public places after certain hours.

* * *

Five million francs is the surplus shown in the annual accounts for 1961 in Geneva (total income 66.5 million). The proposed garbage disposal plant will cost 36 million francs, and a floodlighting system will be installed at the Frontenex Stadium. Fr.400,000 will be spent on a promenade, over a million on the improvement of the Carl-Vogt Boulevard and a credit of 35 million is asked for to start on the erection of the first group of buildings of a new congress centre, one of which will have accommodation for 3,000 people.

Mariann.

(Based on news items received from the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

1962 THE ROUSSEAU YEAR St. Peter's Island in the Lake of Biene THE FIFTH STROLL

By JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

I have stayed at many delightful places, but none has made me so truly happy or left me with such deep nostalgia as the Isle of Saint Pierre in the centre of the Lake of Biene. This islet, called the Isle de La Motte in Neuchâtel, is little known even in Switzerland. Nevertheless, it is pleasant to a degree and its location is ideal for the lover of solitude. I may have been the only man in the world forced by circumstances to dwell in isolation, but I cannot believe that I am unique in loving it, though I have yet to find this taste so highly developed in others.

Being more closely fringed by woods and cliffs, the Lake of Biene is wilder and more romantic than the Lake of Geneva, but its shores are no less idyllic. While there is less arable land, fewer vineyards, townships and hamlets, there are more expanses of natural woodland, more meadows, more sheltering grooves; there is a greater variety of hill and dale, light and shadow. As these happy shores are bereft of highways, the countryside is seldom frequented by travellers and is hence a refuge for those of a contemplative and solitary disposition, who delight in savouring the charms of Nature at their leisure and dreaming in a silence untroubled but for the cry of the eagle, the twittering of birds and the sound of torrents descending from the hills.

This beautiful lake, in form almost circular, bears two small islands in its centre. One, inhabited and cultivated, is about half a league in circumference; the other, smaller, lies deserted and fallow, and will in time be destroyed by the constant removal of its soil for use in repairing damage caused by waves and tempests to its larger neighbour. Thus must the weak ever suffer for the benefit of the strong.

There is but one house on the island. It is spacious, pleasant and comfortable and, like the island itself, belongs to the hospital at Berne. Here dwell the tax collector, his family and servants. He maintains a thriving poultry yard, fish tanks and a pigeon run. Though small, the island is so varied in form and aspect that it abounds in attractive sites and can be used for every kind of culture. It encompasses ploughland, vineyards, woods, rich pastures shaded by coppices and shrubs of many species, all kept fresh by the nearby water. A high terrace, planted with two rows of trees, runs the length of the island; half way along it stands a pavilion, where people from the neighbouring shores assemble and dance during the vintage.

On this island I took refuge after the stoning at Môtiers. I was so delighted with the place and led a life so well suited to my tastes that, resolved to end my days there, I had only one misgiving: would I be permitted to fulfil this wish, which did not accord with the idea of sending me to England, the first effects of which I was already beginning to feel? With this foreboding, I prayed that my refuge might become a prison for life, where, in perpetual confinement and without means or hope of escape, I would be denied all communication with the outer world. In this way, being out of touch with society I would forget its very existence, as society would forget mine.

I was allowed to spend only two months on the island, but I could have stayed there two years, two centuries, indeed eternally, without a moment's tedium, even if my good friend and I had enjoyed no other company than that of the tax collector, his wife and servants, all of

whom were good, simple folk and nothing more. That, in fact, was precisely what I needed, and I look upon those two months as the happiest time of my life, a period of such felicity that it would have satisfied me forever, leaving my soul untroubled by the most fleeting hankering after other pleasures.

But what was this happiness, in what lay its secret? I doubt that any description of my life in those days would make it clear to my contemporaries. A precious *far niente* was first and foremost among the joys I set out to savour with such relish, and my every activity contributed to the pastimes of a man dedicated to leisure.

I hoped that it would be found convenient to leave me in the loneliness in which I had become enmeshed and whence I could not emerge undetected and unaided, nor enter into any correspondence without the help of my island companions. As a consequence, I entertained the further hope that I would end my days more peacefully than I had lived them hitherto and, as I imagined that I would have the time to settle my affairs at leisure, I started by making no arrangements at all. Transported there without warning, alone and lacking everything but the clothes I stood up in, I was later joined by my companion, my books and my modest luggage. I was pleased to leave my effects packed and my crates remained in that condition, while I lived in the quarters which I intended to occupy for the rest of my existence, as though in an inn that I meant to leave on the morrow. Life was too perfect to be tampered with, even to the extent of unpacking a few things.

One of my greatest pleasures was to leave my books in their crates and to be without a writing case. If some letter arrived, obliging me to take up my quill in reply, I would reluctantly borrow the tax collector's writing materials, which I hastened to return to him, in the vain hope that I should not have to use them again. I banished all books and dusty papers from my room and filled it instead with flowers and grasses, for I was still in my first fervour for botany, in which the good Dr. Ivernois had initiated me, inspiring a fancy later to become a passion. Spurning all forms of work, I required an occupation to my liking, the effort of which would not be beyond appealing to an idler.

I undertook to classify the *Flora Petrinsularis* and to describe all the plants on the island, without omitting one, in such detail as to keep me busy for the rest of my days. A certain German is said to have written a book all about the rind of a lemon: I would have written one about each seed of the fields, each piece of moss in the woods, each lichen clinging to the rocks; not a blade of grass, not an atom of vegetable matter was to escape my notice. To implement this brave project I sallied forth every morning, after breakfast, of which we all partook together. Armed with a magnifying glass and my *Systema Naturae*, I would visit a given part of the island, which I had divided into squares, intending to explore them one after the other in each season. Nothing could be more singular than my delight whenever I observed the structure and organisation of some plant or other, or the interplay of the fertilizing organs during fructification, a system hitherto quite unknown to me. I learned how to distinguish generic characteristics (about which I was formerly utterly ignorant) by verifying them in the more common species while awaiting to encounter rarer ones. The fork formed by the two long stamens of the prunella, the tensile stamens of the nettle and the pellitory, the bursting of the fruit of the balsamine and the box capsule, these and other fascinating aspects of fructification filled me with wonder. I would

go about asking people if they had seen the horns of the prunella, in the same way as La Fontaine used to enquire whether they had read Habakuk. After two or three hours I would return home, having garnered enough to keep me amused indoors should the afternoon be rainy. The rest of the morning I would spend with the tax collector, his wife and Thérèse, inspecting their fields and chatting with their labourers. Sometimes I lent a hand with the work and on more than one occasion visitors from Berne found me astride the branch of some fruit tree, helping with the harvest. What with my exercise in the morning and the resultant good humour, I greatly enjoyed the mid-day break, but if lunch was too prolonged and fine weather called me outside, I would slip out while the others were still at table, climb into a boat and, if the weather was calm, row myself away from the island into the middle of the lake. There, lying at full length in the boat and gazing into the sky, I allowed the boat to drift, sometimes for hours at a stretch, while I indulged in vague yet delicious day-dreams. Though without any well defined object, these seemed to me to be infinitely preferable to all the enjoyment that I had ever derived from the so-called pleasures of society.

Often, warned by the setting sun that it was time to make for home, I was obliged to row with all my might lest I be overtaken by nightfall. At other times, rather than row out into the lake, I would hug the verdant shores, where the clear water and the cool shade would tempt me to bathe. A favourite trip of mine was to row to the neighbouring islet, and spend the afternoon there, either walking within its narrow confines, among the tallows, alders, persicarias and shrubs of all kinds, or exploring a sandy knoll, carpeted by turf, thyme, wild flowers and even sainfoin and clover that some human had must once have sown. The place was ideal as a sanctuary for rabbits, which might multiply there in peace without causing the least damage. I mentioned this idea to the tax collector, who had a few bucks and does sent from Neuchâtel. The collector's wife, one of his sisters, Thérèse and I then conveyed the rabbits with all honours to the islet, where they had their first young before my departure and have doubtless since prospered, provided they have resisted the rigours of winter. The foundation of this little colony was a memorable event. The pilot of the Argonauts himself was no prouder than I, as I triumphantly led my companions and the rabbits from one island to the other; and I could but congratulate myself on the fact that the collector's wife, who was always terrified when afloat, embarked confidently under my leadership and betrayed not the least fear during the crossing.

When the lake was too rough for boating, I spent my time wandering round the island, gathering plants on my way and occasionally pausing at some lonely, pleasant spot to rest and dream a while. At other times I would climb a bank or knoll in order to enjoy the superb prospect of the lake and its shores, on the one side crowned by the nearby mountains and on the other extended by rich and fertile plains affording an unobstructed view of the distant blue peaks forming their limit.

(To be concluded.)

The Fifth Stroll from The Reveries of a Solitary Stroller is published by the Swiss National Tourist Office on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the great philosopher and citizen of Geneva, who was one of the first to sing the praises of Switzerland's charms and the benefits of the Return to Nature. It is dedicated to the young people of all nations.

English adaptation by F. R. Pickering.