

ART. XIX. All the decrees and the decisions emanating from the Federal Council are signed on behalf of the Federal Council by the President of the Federal Council and by the Chancellor, or by those who are acting in their stead.

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THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS ARE TAKEN FROM THE WORK OF SIR FRANCIS ADAMS, BRITISH ENVOY TO BERNE.

The electoral franchise is based upon manhood suffrage; general election every three years. There are two Chambers: (1) The National Council, 147 Deputies, one for every 20,000 electors; (2) the Council of States, which consists of forty-four deputies, two from each Canton. In general they sit separately, but for some special purposes they deliberate in common. The Federal Council is the executive authority, and is chosen as shown in the articles on that behalf, which *vide*. The Referendum, which provides for the revision of the Constitution, can be called into requisition by either Chamber, by eight of the States, or 50,000 Swiss citizens. If the majority of citizens pronounce for, then the Chambers are renewed to frame the desired measure, which when formed is referred to the popular vote before becoming law.

The most remarkable part of the Swiss Constitution is that which is also most notorious—that is, the institution known as the Referendum. All Federal laws, as well as resolutions of a general nature which are not declared to be urgent, after having been passed by both Chambers, are submitted for adoption or rejection to the Referendum, if the demand is made either by 30,000 vote-possessing citizens, or by eight Cantons. All measures accepted by the people become valid upon being published by the Federal Council. There are also Federal resolutions declared—perhaps in some instances rather arbitrarily—to be of an urgent character. These come into operation at once, and are not submitted to the popular vote.

The Swiss Constitution, in which the Executive has no negative voice, simply gives to the people the power which the American Constitution gives to a magistrate chosen by the people. To those who do not think it well that a Legislature, or one branch of it, should be absolutely unrestrained, there is clearly nothing very wonderful in the Referendum.

The debates of the Swiss Parliament are carried on with much decorum. There is seldom a noisy sitting, even when the most important subjects are being discussed; interruptions are few, and scenes, such as have unhappily have of late been painfully frequent in our House of Commons and in the House of Representatives, New Zealand, do not exist.

The Federal Council, having been elected by the Federal Assembly for three years, cannot be dissolved by that body in the interim any more than it can itself dissolve the Assembly. Its members take part in the debates of both Chambers. It does not in any way depend upon the majority in the Assembly. Its members, each in his own department, prepare Bills and resolutions either suggested by one of the Chambers or of their own initiative, and these measures, when agreed to by the Council or even by a majority of its members, are submitted to the Chambers, who deal with them in the manner already described. The Council does not consist, as is the general rule in the English Cabinet, of a body of men all holding similar views.

The initiative is the exercise of the right granted to any single voter, or body of voters, to initiate proposals for the enactment of new laws, or for the alteration or abolition of existing laws.

The Swiss Executive is an elective Council, or Ministry of seven persons. No one can doubt its ability. It transacts a mass of business, such as falls to few Cabinets. It guides the policy of a State eternally menaced by foreign complications; it preserves harmony throughout a Confederacy made up of twenty-two Cantons, each jealous of one another, and sympathising only in common jealousy of the Federal power. Peace and prosperity prevail throughout Switzerland. This is strong proof that the Confederacy is served by Ministers of marked ability and of sterling character.

The Swiss Parliament gives the strongest proof of its own wisdom which can be demanded from any legislative body. It maintains in office a practically permanent Executive, which in point of stability stands in the most salient contrast, not only with the ephemeral Ministries of France, but also with the short-lived Cabinets of England. No American President has ever held office for so long a period as have many members of the Swiss Council.

The excellence of the educational system in Switzerland can best be judged by its results. That “every child in the entire Confederation, who is not mentally incapacitated, is able to read and write” is no mere idle boast on the part of the Swiss, but a well-authenticated fact. The poor value the right which their children possess to be educated at the cost of the State as one of the most treasured privileges conferred upon them by their constitution, and the rich on their part look upon popular education as one of the surest and best means of preserving the tranquillity and prosperity of the Confederation, where the Government is practically in the hands of the masses.

“Defence not defiance” might well be adopted by the Swiss troops, for they are essentially a force of militia intended for defensive purposes to secure the neutrality of the country—an army framed upon the strictest economy. Great Britain, approximate cost per soldier, £64 10s. 4d.; Switzerland, approximate cost per soldier, £7. Population, 2,933,334 (or three millions roughly); imports (1887), £33,481,396; exports (1887), £26,843,705. It must be remembered, in the case of Switzerland, that nearly the whole of the raw material as well as the half-finished goods used by the manufacturers, require to be imported; and also that large quantities of articles of food of all kinds have to be brought into the country.