

Swiss literature

THE most famous Swiss literary creation is undoubtedly Heidi, who, as the main character of one of the most popular children's books ever, has come to be a symbol of Switzerland. Her creator, Johanna Spyri (1827-1901), wrote a number of other books around similar themes, most of which have now been forgotten.

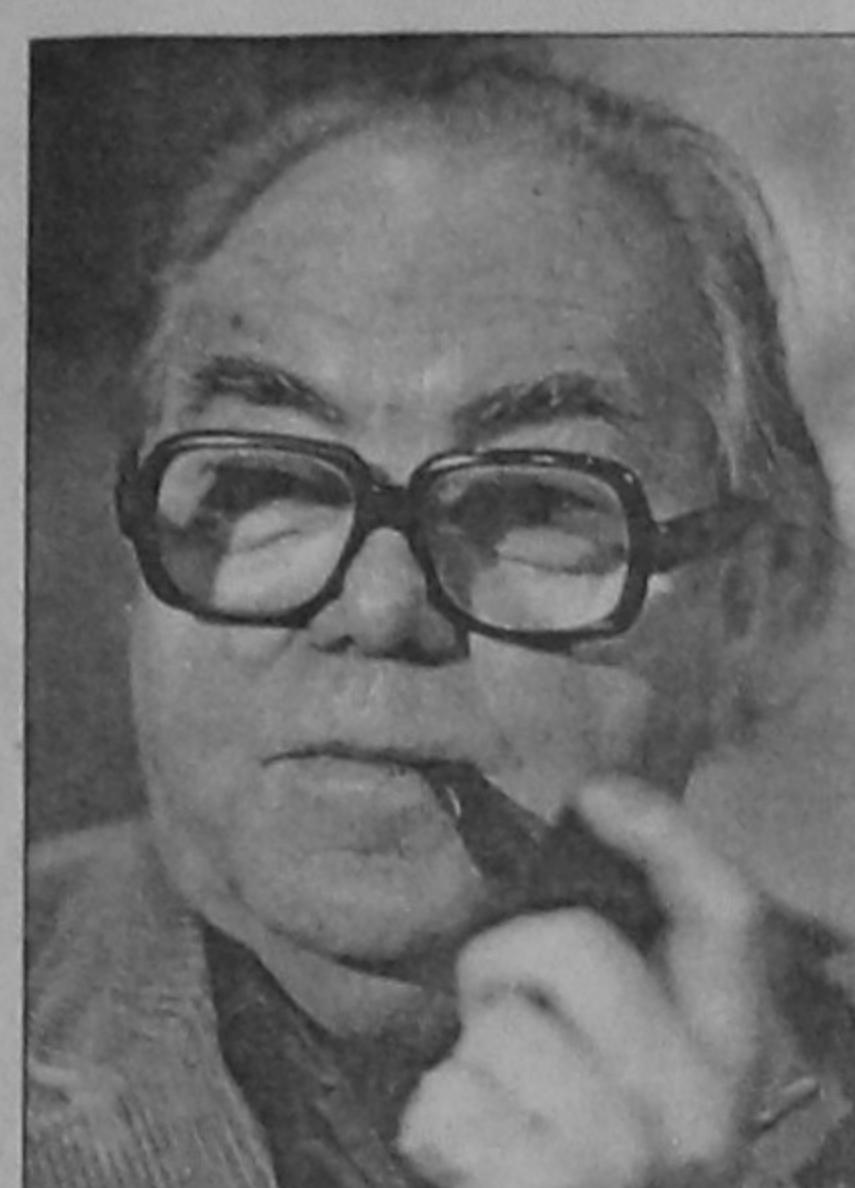
The classics of Swiss German literature include the pastor and writer Jeremias Gotthelf (1797-1854), who depicted farming life in the Emmental. Middle-class life in the 19th century was portrayed by short-story writer and novelist Gottfried Keller (1819-1890), who opposed the idea of a Swiss national literature, insisting that every writer should remain within his own language community. He regarded his own works as belonging to German literature.

In the early part of the 20th century, Robert Walser (1878-1956) was a pioneering modernist writer, and yet

his name was and is often obscured by his contemporaries Hermann Hesse, Franz Kafka and Robert Musil. For his part, German-born Hesse (1877-1962), whose works include Siddartha, Narziss und Goldmund, Steppenwolf and The Glass Bead Game, became a Swiss citizen in 1923. And in 1919, it was a Swiss who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature - Carl Spitteler (1845-1924). Olympischer Frühling (Olympic Spring) is the title of his epic work, consisting of five volumes.

The undisputed giants of 20th century Swiss literature are Max Frisch (1911-91), whose works include Homo Faber, Biedermann und die Brandstifter (The Fireraisers), and Stiller (I'm Not Stiller), and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-90), whose repertoire includes Die Physiker (The Physicists) and Das Versprechen (The Promise), released in 2001 as a Hollywood film.

A number of important French-



Max Frisch

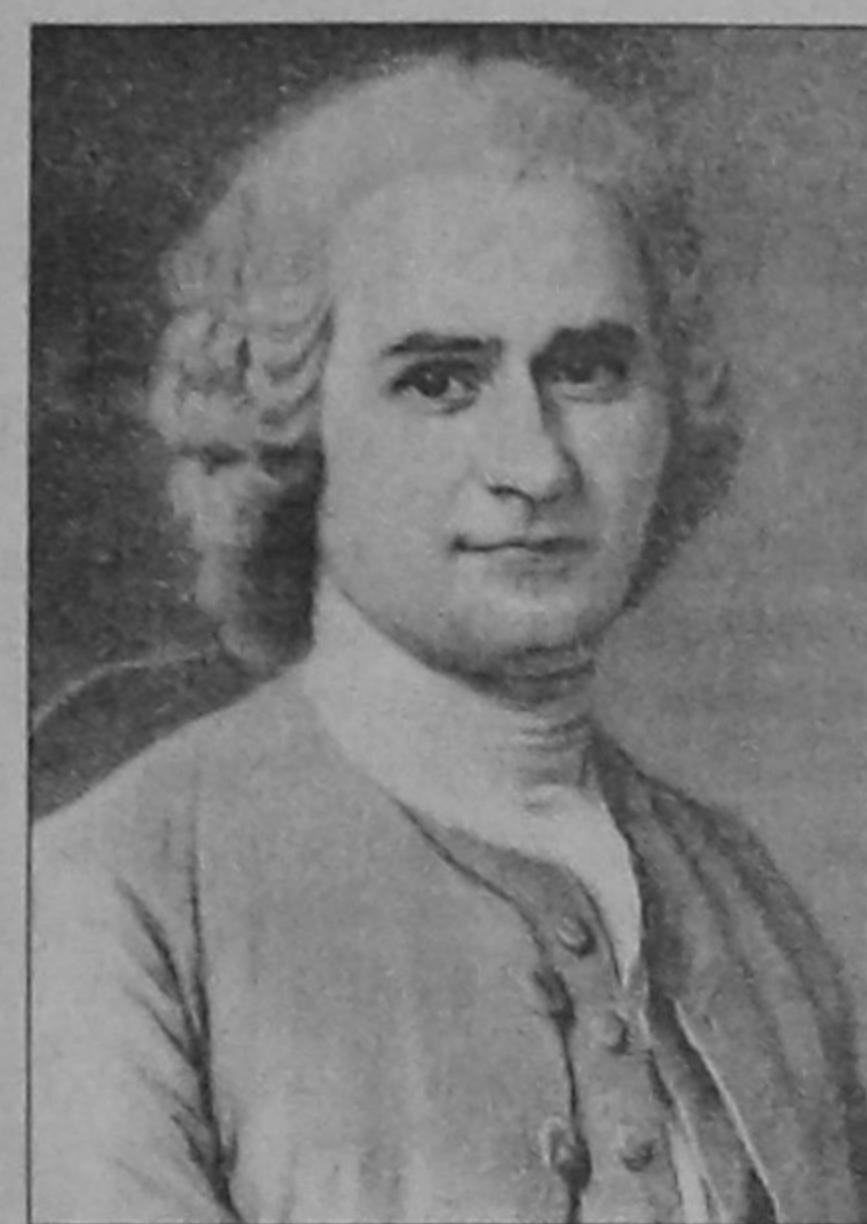
speaking writers of the 18th and early 19th century were Swiss. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was born in Geneva (which was not at the time part of Switzerland). Germaine de Staél (1766-1817), although born and brought up in Paris, came from a Genevan family, and moved to Switzerland when exiled by Napoleon. Her lover and fellow-author, Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), was born in Lausanne.

In more recent times, French-speaking authors include Charles Ferdinand Ramuz (1878-1947), most of whose novels describe the lives of peasants and mountain dwellers, set in a harsh but beautiful landscape. He is known for his poetical use of language.

Blaise Cendrars (born Frédéric Sauser, 1887-1961) is another well-known French-speaking Swiss writer, although he spent so much time abroad that references to Cendrars and his works often neglect to mention his birthplace. In 1910 he settled in Paris and became a French citizen.



Franz Kafka



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Indirect and direct democracy in Switzerland

IN Switzerland, as in all democratic countries, citizens elect representatives to act on their behalf. But Switzerland gives its citizens the chance to take a direct part in decision-making as well. Although direct democracy is by no means unique to Switzerland - Italy and many US states are among those who also give voters an important decision-making role - the Swiss system is probably the most extensive in the world.

Swiss citizens can both propose legislation of their own, or thwart legislation already approved by parliament. The only case in which parliament can override this right is if it decides that the motion being proposed is unconstitutional, or if it violates international law.

There are two different ways to consult the people, depending on the nature of the issue: the popular initiative, and the referendum.

Popular initiative

Any Swiss citizen has the right to propose new legislation by launching an initiative - although normally initiatives come from pressure groups rather than individuals. If they manage to gather 100,000 signatures in support of the proposal, it must be put to a nationwide vote.

In theory, an initiative can only deal with constitutional matters, but in practice they have been held on a variety of issues.

Initiatives have been held recently on matters such as cutting military spending (rejected) and

limiting the foreign population to 18% (rejected).

More "exotic" initiatives have included making it easier to open casinos (accepted), protecting marshland (accepted) and banning the production and sale of absinthe (accepted). The first initiative under the current system, put to the vote in 1893, called for a ban on the Jewish method of slaughtering animals without stunning them first. It was accepted, against the advice of parliament.

Referendum

The Swiss use the term "referendum" for a popular vote called to challenge a piece of legislation already approved by the Federal Assembly. If any person or group opposed to the new law manages to collect 50,000 signatures

within 100 days of the official publication of the proposed legislation, the voters as a whole are given the chance to decide.

In most cases, a referendum is only called if those who feel strongly about the issue manage to collect enough signatures.

However, the authorities are obliged to hold a referendum if the legislation involves an amendment to the constitution initiated by the government or any proposal for Switzerland to sign a major international agreement which cannot be rescinded.

In the case of an initiative or a mandatory referendum, there has to be a "double majority" for it to pass, meaning a majority of the people as a whole, and a majority of the cantons must approve it.



Inside the Swiss parliament.

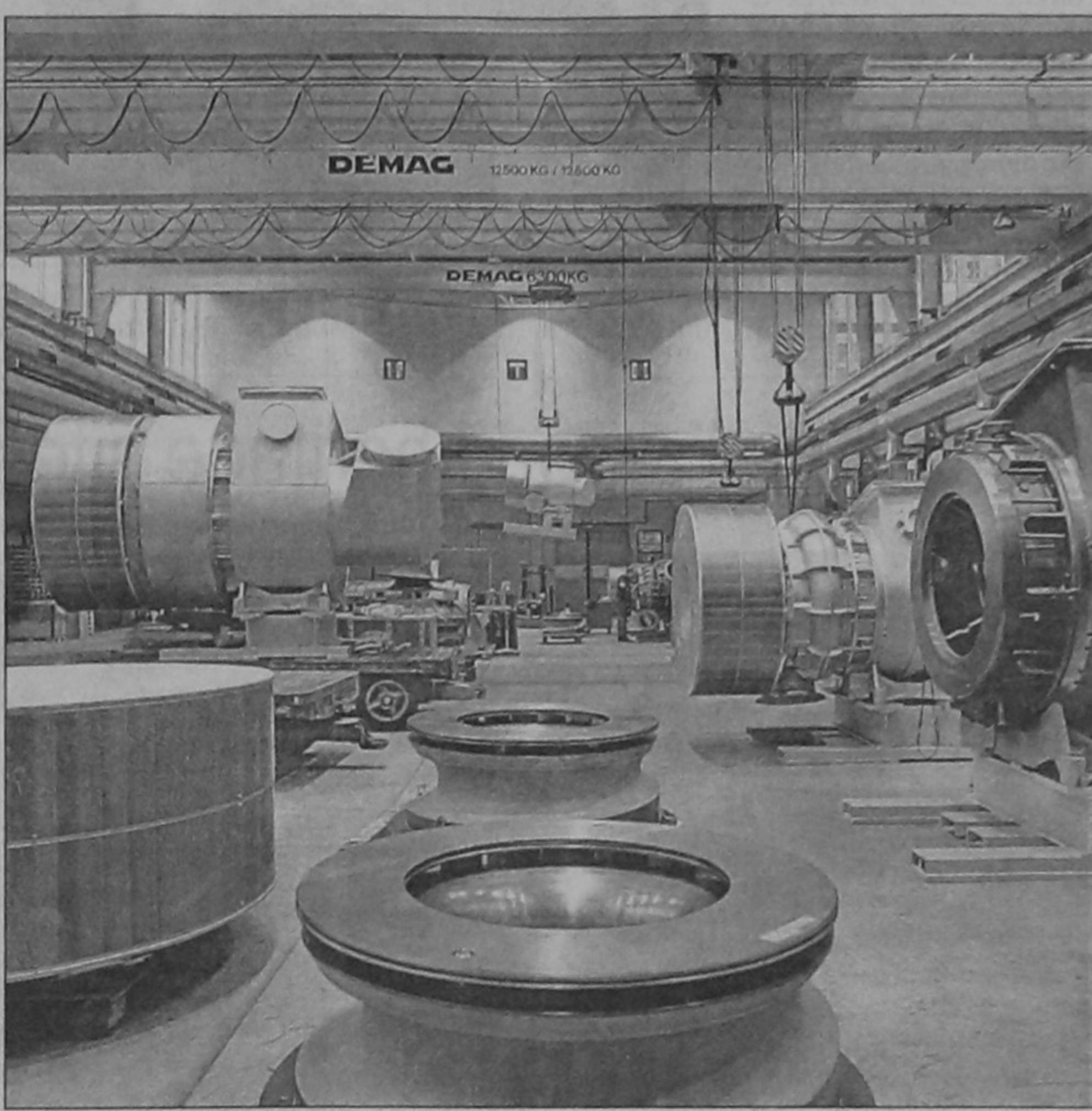
Switzerland: A trade dependent country

SWITZERLAND has virtually no mineral resources and a restricted surface area. It depends for its wealth on foreign trade. The relatively small size of its domestic market - a total population of just over 7,500,000 - is another factor which has encouraged Swiss manufacturers to look abroad: they need foreign markets in order to make investment in research and development worthwhile.

Switzerland imports bulky raw materials and exports high-quality goods. In 2003 the value of one tonne of exported goods was two and a quarter times more than that of the same amount of imports.

Swiss companies are extremely competitive in world markets. In some branches, more than 90% of goods and services are exported. The best-known export items are watches, chocolate and cheese, but in fact mechanical and electrical engineering and chemicals together account for over half Swiss export revenues.

The areas where Switzerland is a leading supplier include looms, paper and printing machinery, blanking tools for metalworking, elevators and escalators, packaging equipment and rack-and-pinion railways.



Mechanical and electrical engineering is important.

However, many of the components for these items are now manufactured abroad.

Switzerland's main trading partners are European Union members.

By far the biggest partner is Germany. In

2005 it was followed in descending order by Italy, France, Austria, the US and the United Kingdom. In 2005, 62.3% of exports went to EU countries, and 80% of the imports came from EU states. This is despite the fact that the

Swiss have consistently voted to remain outside the body.

Swiss economic policy has always been based on free trade, with low import duties and virtually no import quotas - the only exception being for agricultural produce. Even here many of the restrictions are being eased as a result of recent agreements with the EU.

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