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Book Review: Historical Dictionary of Switzerland, 2nd Edition

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Schelbert, Leo. *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*, 2nd Edition. Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2014.

In an updated version of the original *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*, Schelbert has added a multitude of new entries to the lengthy volume that specifically deal with the 5th Switzerland, as well as more contemporary issues. As part of the series of Historical Dictionaries by Rowan & Littlefield, this book attempts to address the complexities of Switzerland, all within the confines of a dictionary. The scope of this book is quite incredible. From entries on individual cantons or cities, to geographic locations, to historically significant people, Schelbert has compiled a truly invaluable resource for those who seek to understand more about the Switzerland.

One of the elements that makes the 2nd Edition so strong, is the inclusion of many entries about the so-called Fifth Switzerland. Traditionally Switzerland has been divided into its four linguistic groups, German, French, Italian, and Romansh. With the large amount of emigration that occurred in the 19th century, many Swiss abroad no longer fit into one of the four traditional groups. To discuss the specific needs of this group of Swiss, the term Fifth Switzerland came into usage. Albert Gallatin is a prime example of one of these Swiss who left Switzerland, and made a significant contribution overseas. His entry focuses on his time in the nascent United States, and of his role in various political positions including that of United States Secretary of the Treasury.

Another example of the Fifth Switzerland would be the entry on Max Theiler, who was a virologist, born to Swiss parents in South Africa. He later immigrated to the United States, where he was instrumental in assisting the Rockefeller Institute in its efforts to eradicate Yellow Fever. The entries are not limited to those who impacted the United States, but also the entire world. Alfred Ing, the court official to Menelik II of Ethiopia, has his exploits described and is emblematic of the diverse range of this Dictionary.

Both Theiler and Gallatin are excellent examples of how Schelbert has improved upon the 1st edition of the dictionary. The additions permit a much broader understanding of the way that the Swiss, and Switzerland has influenced and been influenced by the wider world. Schelbert writes in a way that is neither glorifying,

not deriding the contributions of, impact from, and role played by various elements, natural as well as man-made, in the history of Switzerland.

As with any published work, there are many decisions that must be made as to what to include or exclude. Every commune is not included as entries in the work. This is a little frustrating when reading about a specific topic or location that the reader has no knowledge of, and a topic is mentioned, but not elaborated on. Due to the requirements of printing this is understandable. Despite this there are enough entries to give the reader a great basic overview of the country.

From the historical perspective, the 91-page bibliography is a treasure in its own right. Organized by topic, region and geography, this portion of the appendix is a real valuable aspect of the overall addition to the Historical scholarship.

~ Rob Sherwood, Georgia Military College