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Introduction

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Secretary of the SAHS

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On December 29, 1966, the Swiss-American Historical Society held its Annual Meeting in New York. On that occasion, Dr. Thomas Gelzer, Assistant Professor for Classics at the University of Zürich, at present Fellow of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C., read the following paper. As it goes to the heart of the basic relations between the United States and Switzerland, it may be of interest to many Swiss here in America. The Swiss-American Historical Society therefore gladly presents it not only to its own members, but also to the readers of the Bulletin for the Swiss Scientists and Engineers in North America and to friends of Switzerland.

L. Burckhardt
Secretary of the SAHS

SOURCES OF THE AMERICAN AND SWISS CONSTITUTIONS IN ANCIENT GREEK POLITICAL THOUGHT

by Dr. THOMAS C. GELZER

Looking for a suitable subject for the Swiss-American Historical Society within the reach of a classicist, I found the question of the Ancient Greek Sources in the American Constitution. Although not a historian, I thought that would mean treating matters of historical significance as well as of unbroken continuance of the effects of classical thinking. In addition to that the Constitution is one of the living connections which links the mighty United States of America with the tiny Swiss Confederation. But, big or small, both nations have drawn continuously vital forces from the order of life which is shaped by these constitutions. Their similarities and kindred aspirations are embodied in the similar structures of these documents from which every right and law in these countries derives its legality. And these similarities do not rest on superficial coincidence. They are in fact the result of conscious acceptance of structural elements of the American example by Swiss legislators in shaping their own state. So the philosophical background of the American constitution affects Swiss and American political life alike and reflects basic principles in the political purposes of both nations.

In dealing with these problems I am indebted to many authors who have treated this subject. Instead of a lengthy list, I would like to mention...