

The "national movement"

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1940)**

Heft 983

PDF erstellt am: **03.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694815>

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What is news to most of our readers is the discovery of a fifth language in Switzerland called "Matten English" and it has been unearthed among the conservative people of Berne. We do not propose to enrich the columns of the Swiss Observer by its inclusion but the "*Manchester Guardian*," October 1st, gives us the following introduction and perhaps a reader can supply some of the "curses" of which this hybrid language is said to be so rich.

Swiss philologists, still glowing from their triumph in getting the Government to declare Romansch the fourth Swiss language, have emerged with a new language with which to confound non-Swiss linguists — "Matten English." The distinguishing feature about Matten English is that there is not a word of English, or anything approaching English, in it. Even Professor O. von Greyerz, of Berne University, who is the outstanding authority on Matten English, has no hope of ever obtaining the same recognition for it which his fellow-philologists have obtained for Romansch.

Some Italians suggested that Romansch was only a distorted form of Italian. No nation could claim Matten English. No nation would want to, for of all the complex, hybrid languages Matten English is probably the worst. It is spoken more or less fluently by many old people and a few young people in the canton of Berne.

It originated with Swiss mercenary troops who travelled throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, lending their arms to any king or country who could pay well for them. Using the words picked from foreign lands, the mercenary warriors slowly developed a secret language of their own and brought it home. Roots of ancient Latin and Greek are found in it, with an incomprehensible mixture of the Balkan, Scandinavian, Germanic, and Romance languages. As might be expected from its origin, Matten English has no literature but it is rich in cuss-words.

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Another amusing piece of news is enlarged upon in "*The Times*," October 1st, based on experiments made for the purpose of curing whooping-cough by aeroplane flights.

Whooping-cough is likely to become a favourite complaint among Swiss children. Our Geneva Correspondent has sent news of the cure or alleviation of whooping-cough by taking the sufferer into high altitudes by aeroplane. Such a chance for joy-riding is not likely to be missed. The invalids will not only be passionately envied by the healthy; they will also be imitated. The cough of whooping-cough is very easy to imitate; and, though the farther symptoms are as unpleasant to the sufferer as to those in charge of him, childhood is not likely to shrink from the utmost self-induced sacrifice in order to achieve so glorious a cure. In passing, it is comfortable to think that, while flying is being called upon to cure evils far worse than whooping-cough and by more drastic methods than mere change of air, there is a country in Europe where it may still be employed in the peaceful preservation of health and the cure of childish ailments. But it will certainly have the effect of popularizing any complaint for which it may be found remedial; and

Swiss doctors, nurses, and mothers will have to keep a sharp eye open for the malingering at which childhood is even more adept than doghood.

Joy-riding in an aeroplane is a prize worth all the woes of a genuine and bad attack of whooping-cough. But the lesser illnesses of infancy each had its desirable compensation; and even jaundice was known to be worth having for the sake of some special diet superior to the regular nourishing but uninteresting fare of the nursery or the preparatory school. There were little luxuries like a fire in the bedroom, nicely flavoured jujubes, or a new game or a new picture-book, which painted the lily and gilded the refined gold of the one incomparable luxury of not having to get up in the morning. To nothing should childhood be so grateful as to the clinical thermometer, which, when in a good mood, rules decisively and without appeal that there must be no getting up. It may become tiresome to have to stay in bed as the day draws on and the outer world calls; but, especially in winter-time, only an extreme of peevishness would complain that the price was too high. To those who were not ill, at any rate, and could show no good reason why the thermometer should be put under the ready tongue, having a temperature seemed an enviable stroke of good fortune. But merely staying in bed on a cold morning is nothing compared with a flight in an aeroplane; and all childhood will hope that whooping-cough is not the only illness for which flying is found to be a cure.

THE "NATIONAL MOVEMENT."

In the last issue of our publication we published some comment which appeared in the English press about an interview which M. Pilet-Golaz, the President of the Swiss Confederation, granted to a small delegation representing the so-called "National Movement."

The audience lasted about 1½ hours and the spokesman of the trio was Jakob Schaffner, an author, who for some years has been propagating a new conception of political life in Switzerland; quite recently an article from his pen entitled "Switzerland in New Europe" appeared in the German periodical "*Das Reich*." Ernst Hoffmann was identified with the "Bund Freier Eidgenossen" and its spurious publications "*Schweizervolk*," "*Schweizer Degen*" and "*Angriff*" all of which were suppressed on November 15th, 1938, by decree of the Federal Council. The third in this constellation was Dr. Max Leo Keller who was the spiritus rector behind the defunct "*Neue Basler Zeitung*" whose short existence was embargoed by the Swiss Army Command after it had been proved that both intellectually and financially it was sponsored from foreign sources.

The episode has been adversely criticised in the Swiss Press, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* accusing M. Pilet-Golaz of having contacted people with a criminal record. The various political parties have also expressed their disapproval in an unmistakable manner but nothing else has since transpired so that the incident may be considered closed.