

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 10 (1944-1945)  
**Heft:** 8

**Artikel:** Switzerland observes delightful old customs in May  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942766>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

of all political parties.

The Catholic "La Liberte" says: 'The distressing news has also been a hard blow to the neutral countries, for President Roosevelt has always been an idealist, a generous and noble man and a friend of justice and righteousness in general.'

The Radical paper "Bund" in Berne declares: 'The unexpected death of the American President is a hard blow to the whole world which is facing the end of war and a still unknown future. Considering the outstanding position of President Roosevelt in the foreign policy of his country, his death may be of a decisive influence on the establishment of peace after the war. The new President of the United States, Mr. Truman has a difficult task to take over.'

The Radical "Neue Zurcher Zeitung" writes: 'In his career President Roosevelt has not only surpassed all his predecessors in his country, but by his work he earned an uncontested place of honor among the greatest Presidents of the United States and among the leading statesmen of our century. Roosevelt has been the determined and mighty opponent of Hitler and the other dictators. Step by step he answered the Third Reich's conquest with concrete measures. Thanks to his farsightedness, the United States was able to present itself as a strong military power on the various battlefields shortly after its entry into war. This, in the framework of world policy is Franklin Delano Roosevelt's historical part. However to be able to understand and feel the full extent of the United Nations grief for the loss of one of their greatest Presidents, one must also consider the outstanding role Roosevelt had played in the field of social and economic reforms.'

The Conservative "Berner Tagblatt" states: 'Events of this 292nd week of the war are overshadowed by the tragic death of the American President. A world without Roosevelt is a world without a man who has had all the qualities of a really great statesman. The Americans mourn for a President who deserves to be mentioned in one breath with Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. But the Americans are not alone in their grief. In the eyes of the whole world, President Roosevelt was the champion of the great cause for which the United States has done so much, the cause of liberty. Unfortunately, he has not been able to see the victorious end of the war. Before he died, however, he knew that the just cause would win. He will be an everlasting example to all humanity.'

In the Conservative "Basler Nachrichten" we read: 'Now that war has assumed an almost breath taking speed in its development, the news of this great American's death strikes us more deeply than any event in the great storm around us. One thing, however, is certain, President Roosevelt's sudden and tragic death will not change anything in the final outcome of this war. The dice was cast a long time ago. However, it would be futile to break one's head about what will happen afterwards, now that this outstanding political personage has passed from among us.'

.....

#### SWITZERLAND OBSERVES DELIGHTFUL OLD CUSTOMS IN MAY:

Many of the nicest and most poetic old customs still in vogue in Switzerland are celebrated during the month of May. The "Singing-in of May" by the children is one of them and may be observed at its best in some villages of French speaking Switzerland. The first Sunday of May is usually the day when the youthful songbirds, carrying green branches or bouquets of flowers, parade through the streets, announcing the arrival of Spring with a glad song.

In early days it often was customary for a bridal couple to walk at the head of the procession. These young married people were regarded as a symbol of the fruitfulness of the New Year. In the canton of Neuchatel the boys were permitted to "sing-in" the month of May if the beech trees

were in foliage on the first Sunday of that month. If the verdure was retarded the young girls alone could sing. Luckier still were the boys of Rochefort in that region, for they were permitted to kiss the girls if the beeches were green on May Sunday.

Quite an old custom used to be in vogue at Estavayer on the lake of Neuchatel. Here the boys paraded in carriages bedecked with white flowers, and while they called out teasingly to the girls, the latter's revenge consisted of throwing yellow blossoms at them in return. Yellow flowers were often affixed high onto the homes of the boys who tried to remove them as soon as they had discovered their presence.

In many cantons, such as Vaud, Soleure, Zurich and Ticino, the putting up of May trees proved a gay occasion, also the decoration of ancient fountain statues with new greens. The latter tradition is still popular in the districts of Neuchatel and Schaffhausen.

Girls who are respected by the boys for their fine character are honored with a prettily adorned May tree placed in front of their homes. But if a girl does not measure up to high standards she probably will discover a straw puppet before her window instead.

The chiming of church bells still heralds the advent of May at Sargans and environs in Eastern Switzerland, while prayers are being offered to God for the year's crops.

Many jolly pastimes were and are yet enjoyed on the first day or the first Sunday of May. Thus, at Nendaz, in the Valais, the boys formerly journeyed to an especially appointed place where they competed in a curious ball game known as "tsarat". At ancient Coire, in the Grisons, boys and girls celebrated a happy fete of youth. Today, in that city, it is customary to hike up to the Maiensassen, a nearby popular point of view.

Ascension Day in Switzerland is closely interwoven with old May customs. Climbing mountains in the neighbourhood to witness the sunrise is the vogue everywhere. Thus, the inhabitants of Zurich ascend the Uetliberg, the people of Schinznach-Spa the Gisliflüh, the Bernese the Bantiger, and the inhabitants of Maienfeld near Ragaz the Luziensteig.

On Ascension Day, too, the solemn blessing by the clergy of newly awakening fields, and the offering of prayers for the new crops, is still customary in many parts of the country. This ritual is especially impressive at Beromunster near Lucerne where it started in the 14th century and has been maintained in its original form ever since. Some 400 horsemen participate in the cavalcade which stops at four "stations" while thousands of devout pedestrians follow behind.

The church dignitaries, wearing white surplices trimmed with the finest lace, are noble figures in this cavalcade which lasts about eight hours. Fully aware of the solemnity of the occasion are the many mounted civilians which follow the clergy. On this day all the horses, whether they be thoroughbreds or of the humble plow variety, have their heads adorned with wreaths or sprays of flowers.

Beautiful altars and flower-entwined triumphal arches stand along the road taken by the procession. Years ago, in the hamlet of Saffental, it was the custom to present each horseman with a piece of bread and butter. In recent times the riders declined this refreshment in favor of the poor gathering at this point to view the cavalcade.

The main open-air church service takes place in the village of Rickenbach where a simple meal is afterwards served in the parish house to the members of the clergy. Opportunities for refreshments are available to the people in different inns. Presently the procession resumes its way, with pedestrians occasionally dropping out and others joining it.

Between two and three P.M. festively adorned Beromunster, the starting point, is reached again. And while the church bells are lifting their voices in



glorious unison the spectators, lining the spacious main thoroughfare, fall reverently down on their knees. The parish priest, carrying the Blessed Sacrament, now pronounces his benediction.

A rather unusual feature is the fact that while the procession winds its way around the historic abbey at Beromunster, the ascension of Christ is figuratively depicted within the church. By means of an artistic device an image of the Redeemer rises towards the ceiling and disappears in clouds of incense. The erection of such an image is also customary in Fribourg, Lucerne, Zug and Schwyz.

.....

#### DIFFICULT TIMES FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY.

The number of unemployed people in Switzerland has remained unchanged during the past years. This has been due to two principal reasons, the carrying out of the plan for agricultural extension on the one hand and the mobilization of large numbers of troops and large scale defense works on the other.

However, the reprovisioning difficulties, particularly in such raw materials as coal, and the partial interruption of exports are today causing much anxiety to many Swiss industrialists. In fact, the plan to meet unemployment problems known in Switzerland as the Zipfel-Plan from the name of its chief author has already found a practical application in many cases.

The plan provides first of all for immediately productive measures, making it possible for factories to keep their employees at the same or a similar occupation as in the past. The military authorities and the Federal Railways have given orders that would have had to be filled some time or the other, but which had been held in reserve to meet an upsurge in unemployment. This farsighted policy is not possible, however, in all branches of the nation's economy. The government could hardly come to the rescue in the same way to the aluminium industry, for in this case it is not orders that are lacking but raw materials. Nor could the same help be extended to the watch making industry, for the state does not need watches as it does railway cars or uniforms for postmen. Thus some enterprises have not been able to avoid laying off workers.

The Swiss labor market will depend in the first place on our commercial relations with the outside world. If Swiss industry is able to get the needed raw materials and if exportation is possible, our workers will again have work. But if the present situation continues, there is no doubt that Switzerland will be confronted very soon with heavy unemployment.

.....

#### THE QUESTION OF AN OLD AGE AND SURVIVORS' INSURANCE.

One question which continues to preoccupy the Swiss public opinion, is the problem of a general and obligatory old age and survivors insurance. This is probably the most burning question in our internal policy.

The idea of an old age and survivors insurance dates back twenty years. In 1925, the Swiss people laid the foundation for the insurance by accepting a new article in the Federal Constitution, dealing with the principles of such a social enterprise. In 1931, the first law project for the practical application of these principles was rejected as it was generally considered insufficiently worked out. This first negative decision of the Swiss people in this matter naturally caused a great delay. The present war has again stirred up the problem. A popular initiative was launched to oblige our authorities to concentrate again their efforts on this task. For more than one year now a number of experts have been at work, elaborating a new project which is generally expected to be published before the end of this war. But as in our country parliamentary procedure is particularly slow, and because of the popular vote by which this project will have to be approved, one can hardly expect the full realization of this insurance before the beginning of 1946.