

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

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1929)

**Heft:** 395

**Artikel:** The monks of the Grand Saint Bernard

**Autor:** [s.n.]

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689667>

#### **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:** 16.01.2026

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

mentiers." Experiments have also taken place in 14 communes in tobacco planting, with satisfactory results, the mild Basel climate being very suitable for the production of a good quality tobacco. The average crop of dried leaves amounted to some 20.25 kg. an acre (about four poles). Interest in this new venture is keen.

"Throughout Eastern Switzerland, a number of large and small embroidery works are closed. It is estimated that in the Canton of St. Gall alone there are 58,606 square metres of unused factory space, while the capital invested in these buildings bringing in no interest whatever, is computed at from 10-12,000,000 frs. As a result of the untiring efforts of the Central Executive for the Establishment of New Industries, it has proved possible to start a few artificial silk mills, some works for the manufacture of optical instruments and special apparatus, finishing mills, knitting mills, hosiery factories, etc. Satisfactory progress is being achieved in the comparatively new hosiery industry, especially in the manufacture of stockings, which, in spite of keen German competition, are steadily gaining a hold on the domestic market. A good quality stocking in a mixture of artificial silk and wool is now being produced by former embroiderers.

"Recently the industrial associations of Sion, in the Valais, approached the local authorities with the request that measures should be taken to create new industries in that town. It was suggested that the power generated in the municipal electric works should be utilized in Sion itself for running the proposed new industries and not sold, as hitherto, to the Aluminium and Lonza Society.

"The Swiss Government has authorized the competent authorities to continue their discussions with the various Cantonal and rural centres with a view to the development of cottage industries and has allocated a subvention of 165,000 frs. for the promotion of such industries. Among the principal grants, 20,000 frs. has been ear-marked for the encouragement of cottage weaving, together with a loan of another 20,000 frs. free of interest. A subvention of 12,500 frs. has been granted for the creation of a Central Executive for the Promotion of Home-work. A grant of 25,000 frs. and a loan of 50,000 frs. have been allocated to the Canton of Berne.

There is no doubt that it is due to the intelligent and energetic measures of the Swiss authorities that Switzerland has been able to alleviate unemployment."

And, as if to follow the order of ideas provoked by the above, we may pass on to *The Spectator*, 20th April, and read the following nice appreciation of one of our best Swiss Newspapers :—

#### Centenary of the Journal de Genève.

"Liberalism is dead, long live Liberalism," might well be the motto of the *Journal de Genève* which has, like ourselves, recently held centenary celebrations. It was founded in 1826, but owing to an interregnum, it has only now claimed a hundred years of regular publication. *Un siècle de vie génévoise* contains a plain and admirably printed account of the distinguished editors and contributors which have made of the Genevan daily one of the most widely read newspapers in the world. To-day its circulation is probably as large abroad as in Switzerland—mainly owing to the reputation which M. William Martin, the foreign editor, has built up for himself as a leader writer in the League of Nations and international politics. All who are free from the numbing infection of dogmas such as Socialism or Individualism, will endorse the standpoint of the *Journal de Genève* on the economic question, namely, that private enterprise should be encouraged when and wherever State control is not more beneficial to the interests of the community."

#### Britain's Lead in Sport on Ovaltine.

The supremacy that Great Britain once enjoyed in all branches of sport has been under a cloud for the last few years. Other countries have captured championships in many games in which the British were once undisputed masters. The recent triumph of the British team over America in the competition for the golfing trophy known as the Ryder Cup is one of the many indications that the tide is now turning and that British sportsmen and sportswomen are regaining the supremacy they once held. This is chiefly due to the general recognition that to excel in games demands a high standard of physical and mental fitness. In this connection it is interesting to note that all the members of the British Golf Team signed a letter testifying to the fact that "Ovaltine" was a regular item of their diet, and that they found it a first-class "pick-me-up" after long hours on the golf course, and a genuine help to steady the nerves. Famous athletes, swimmers, motorists, aviators and members of the best known boat crews and rowing clubs regularly use "Ovaltine" and testify to the wonderful way in which it nourishes and strengthens the nerves and muscles, and also creates an abundant store of nervous vitality—that "will-to-win" which is of supreme importance.

#### THE MONKS OF THE GRAND SAINT BERNARD.

At an altitude of 8,150 feet, between the groups of mountains known as the Grand Combin and the Mont Blanc, stands the Hospice of the Grand Saint Bernard at the summit of the Pass of that name, famous through history and recalling memories of stories told us in the days of our childhood of its self-sacrificing monks and its wonderful dogs.

Let us assume for the moment that we have arrived at Montreux, that beautiful town on the shores of Lac Leman (Lake of Geneva), for a brief holiday. From here the Hospice may be easily visited in the day by motor car, the return journey being about 185 kilometres (say, 115 miles).

The Hospice was founded in the 10th century, the building on our left-hand side, containing about 100 beds, being built in the year 1558, the earlier buildings having been destroyed by fire the previous year. The building on our right-hand side was not erected until 1900; it is connected with the other by a covered bridge. In this building, during the summer months, an excellent lunch may be obtained for parties arriving by motor car, at reasonable prices. Up to a few years ago meals were provided free to all and sundry, a box in the porch calling for contributions.

With the advent of the motor char-a-banc, however, visitors arrived in such numbers and, we regret to say, after being fed by the hospitable monks, forgetting or ignoring this box, the brethren were forced to make a charge for meals. At the present time any person arriving at the Hospice on foot or by ordinary bicycle, may obtain free board and lodging. In this connection, we would ask any person who may read these lines and may visit the Hospice at some future time, not to forget this box in the porch, but to augment its contents as is their duty.

The dogs, of which there are generally 8 or 10 in number, have their kennels underground, this being done to correct their eyesight in the dim light after the fierce glare of the snow when they have been on duty. They are not like the St. Bernard dogs we read of years ago; the original breed is extinct, and instead of the animals we were familiar with, the breed is now short-coated, crossbred, with a heavy head. The principal dog is always called "Barry," after his famous predecessor which lived over 100 years ago and is credited with the saving of about 40 lives.

The story of his death is tragic. He is supposed to have come on a soldier buried in the snow; obedient to his training, he stretched himself out beside the body, trying to instill into the inert form some of his own warmth. The soldier, recovering, thought he was being attacked by a wild animal and stabbed Barry, killing him. The remains of this wonderful animal were preserved and stuffed, and are now in the museum at Berne and have recently been renovated.

Like the "huskies" of the Esquimaux, these dogs will find a trail through freshly fallen snow many feet deep and through the darkness will unerringly lead the monks or belated wayfarers to the Hospice.

We leave the Hospice, and pass along the road that runs round the lake, a dark and forbidding sheet of water in which no fish live with the exception of the minnow, which was imported there in the year 1822. Near the Hospice may be seen a signboard. This has the Italian colours painted on it, and a stone in the road at the bridge marks the frontier.

We now pass into Italy; close to us stands the statue of Saint Bernard, which was unveiled in the year 1905. There is also a cross erected here, with the words "Deo Optimo Maximo."

The monks are Canons Regular of the Order of Saint Augustine, with their headquarters at Martigny. They number between 60 and 70, and minister to their parishes throughout the valley and district, 12 or 14 of them being stationed at the Hospice. The Prior is elected every three years, and the novices enter when they are 17 or 18 years old and take their vows in the Chapel. Climatic conditions are so severe that they are unable to spend more than 12 or 14 years at the Hospice; nervous disorders and rheumatism take their toll. This is not to be wondered at when snow 30 feet deep is common in winter. No later than the year 1927 eight of the monks were overtaken by an avalanche and three lost their lives. They were caught in one of the perils from which they uncomplainingly and unselfishly try to save others.

Their dress is worthy of notice. A linen strip which divides at the waist in front goes round the neck and joins at the waist again. This strip has been worn in this manner since the year 1484 and takes the place of the surplice, an order having been made in the year 1438 by the Provost Jean d'Arc that the surplice was to be worn outside the Chapel as well as in it. This order has never been rescinded.

Recent innovations have made their existence within the Hospice happier and more comfortable. Central heating has been installed in all the buildings, and the greatest boon, perhaps, is the telephone. Nowadays when the weather is severe and

storms are raging at the Hospice, the inns on both sides are warned by its use, and travellers are not allowed to proceed. Should a traveller be on the way the monks are notified and set out to meet him. Skis, too, are very much used since they were brought into Switzerland from Norway about 40 years ago, and in this connection it is interesting to note that the monks of Saint Bernard were the first people to adopt this mode of transit now so common throughout the Federation.

The dogs, too, are unable to stand the strain, and it is not an uncommon sight to see in Martigny or one of the villages in the Rhône valley what appears to be an old monk with an old dog. If we inquired we might find that the monk was about 30 years of age, and the dog 6 or 7.

The writer of this article was at the Simplon Pass in the year 1926. At the Hospice situated at the summit of this Pass, worked in a similar way and for a similar purpose as the Grand Saint Bernard by the same order of monks, he asked a monk who had shown him over the Hospice his age. He was apparently an old man, bent and withered. His answer was as follows: "Monsieur, j'ai vingt-huit ans." (Sir, I have 28 years). The writer admits he was staggered.

Though railways have been built and tunnels have pierced the mountains, a number of Italian workmen, too poor to pay their fares on the railway, still use the Pass, leaving their own country in their search for work in March and April and returning in November. The monks still have to carry on the good work started nearly 1,000 years ago.

In the year 1800 Napoleon transported an army of over 40,000 men across the Pass from the Swiss side. To take an army, big in those days, across a Pass over 8,000 feet high, with all the attendant difficulties of transport, through deep snow, when practically no roads existed, in order to make a surprise attack on his enemy, the Austrians, shows his remarkable military enterprise.

Our driver is starting up his car. There is a big yellow char-a-banc filling up with its human freight and he is anxious to get in front as the opportunities for passing this modern monster on the downward journey will be few. We take a last look round, and waving our hands in farewell to the genial priest we are off.

Back again in our comfortable hotel, with all its modern luxuries and friendly faces around us, our thoughts stray back to that heroic band of men who, in a few weeks, will be snowed up in their mountain home, seeing few faces except their own for eight long, weary months. And as we think also of their dumb friends, who in their own faithful way are just as heroic, we remember the motto of this wonderful institution: *Fideliter, fortiter, feliciter.*

(Reprinted from *The Irish Independent*.)

#### Yield of Wood of Swiss Forests.

In spite of the development of cities, the importance of agriculture and the dense network of means of communication, woods and forests still form a large part of Swiss national wealth. Switzerland is one of those countries of Western Europe which have kept up the largest proportion of wooded areas. The yield of wood in Switzerland now amounts to about 3,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>, viz., 1.6 to 1,700,000 m<sup>3</sup> of wood for fuel and 1.2 to 1,300,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber. This yield does not, however, entirely cover Swiss consumption, and the value of the wood annually imported amounts to 40-50 millions of francs. It has been calculated that the total consumption amounts to about 4,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>, i.e., to about 1 m<sup>3</sup> per head of the inhabitants.

#### THE SWISS CHOCOLATE INDUSTRY IN 1928.

The business done in the Swiss chocolate industry has shown an ascending curve during the whole of 1928, as compared with the preceding year. The value of the exports amounts to Frs. 34,508,670 in 1928, against Frs. 33,029,095 in 1927. There is therefore an increase of 5,238 q.m. and of Frs. 1,479,575 in 1928. This increase equals 3.85 per cent. on tonnage and 4.47 per cent. as regards value.

It should also be observed that 1928, with exports amounting to 88,629 q.m., is not only ahead of 1927, the results of which have been stated above, but also of 1926, when exports amounted to 78,428 q.m. In spite, however, of the fact that exports have increased during the last few years, pre-war figures have not yet been reached.

England remains Switzerland's most important customer as regards the chocolate industry. This market, however, now consumes slightly less Swiss chocolate than formerly, owing to the energetic propaganda carried on in England on behalf of the consumption of home products, and to local manufacture of goods similar to those made in Switzerland. This outlet is, nevertheless, very important for the Swiss chocolate trade. The amount of Swiss chocolate exported to England in 1928 has risen to 49,637 q.m., with a value of Fr. 19,148,766.

(From *Swiss Industry and Trade*).