

**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:** - (1937)  
**Heft:** 811

**Artikel:** Legendary in stone at Zurich  
**Autor:** Hughers, Hilda  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693849>

### **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:** 10.08.2025

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

## CITY SWISS CLUB.

**Summer Meeting at the Brent Bridge Hotel, Hendon, on Tuesday, June 15th.**

The Club has once more decided to hold their summer meeting at the Brent Bridge Hotel in Hendon.

The meeting will be, as usual, followed by a dance to which the Ladies are cordially invited. This event has in the past proved a great attraction to the members and their friends, as the spacious gardens are most inviting during this time of the year.

Owing to lack of the necessary accommodation the Committee of the Club has been unable to arrange a social gathering during the Coronation week, it is now anxious to make amends for this omission. It is proposed to give this gathering a special *cachet*, artistes having been engaged for the occasion.

The members of the City Swiss Club will be specially advised during the next few days, and in order to allow the Committee to make adequate arrangements it is advisable to book as early as possible.

**LEGENDARY IN STONE AT ZÜRICH.**

By Hilda Hughes.

Zurich, the largest city in Switzerland, and an important airport, has a wealth of legendary and history which have left their mark on façades and even on fountains.

The casual tourist, aware of the tempting shops and lake-side cafés, may pass through this busy city without paying attention to its legendary and history, but if he does, he will be puzzled by attractive devices on numerous façades.

Even the state seal of the canton, which has been in use since 1803, and was from 1125 to 1798 the seal of the city, has its own vivid piece of legend.

It depicts the three patron saints of Zurich, decapitated, and carrying their heads in their hands. They are wearing Grecian robes. Their names are Felix, Regula and Exuperantius.

According to the legend, Felix was in the Roman Legion of Thebes, which had been converted to Christianity. The pagan Roman Emperor, Maximilian, to punish the entire Legion, transferred it to the wild mountain region of the Valais (Switzerland). The soldiers remained true to their new faith and Maximilian in his rage ordered the execution of one man in every ten; the remainder were to be tortured.

Felix, his sister Regula, and their servant Exuperantius, escaped. They fled by way of the Furka Pass—to-day a pass with zig-zag roads like forked lightning—and the Glarus mountains to the Lake of Zurich. But their escape was only temporary. At the lower end of the lake there was a Roman fortification of Turicum—from which the name of Zurich is derived—and which was the home of the Roman Prefect, Decius.

When the three Christians preached at the outlet of the lake, where the famous Wasserkirche now stands, they were seized by order of the Roman Prefect and commanded to offer sacrifice to Jupiter. When they consistently refused, they were repeatedly tortured, and in A.D. 312 were beheaded on the shore of the river Limmat.

Tradition says that after their execution they arose, seized their heads and carried them in their arms up the hill about fifty yards about the Limmat. There they quietly lay down, side by side, and were buried by their Christian converts.

Zurich has experienced political upheavals and constitutional changes during the centuries, but the three headless martyrs have held the imagination of the people and have lately been immortalised in stone by the sculptor Julius Schwyzer on a municipal building, the Amtshaus.

The Emperor Charlemagne—the founder and ruler of the Holy Roman Empire—was in A.D. 800 the mightiest monarch of his time. He ruled over a great part of Europe, including Switzerland.

Charlemagne is said to have been hunting near Cologne when he saw the finest stag in his experience, and pursued it up the Rhine and Limmat valleys to Zurich. Here the stag and horses of the hunt fell on their knees before the graves of the three decapitated saints, refusing to go farther.

The Emperor regarded this as a sign from God. He decided to build a church (now the famous Grossmünster) over the graves of the martyrs. He buried the remains of Felix and Regula in the aisles of the minster, according to the legend, and the bones of Exuperantius were taken down the Rhine to Aix-la-Chapelle and buried there.

Charlemagne grew fond of Zurich, paid many visits to it, and had it fortified with ramparts and moats. He used to stay in the Haus zum Loch, which had been built by his order for the canonry chapter and which is still in existence.

Four sculptures on an old house opposite the Wasserkirche represent scenes from the snake saga, a legend associated with Charlemagne.

The story says that Charlemagne, who was respected for his justice, was sitting at his table in the Haus zum Loch, when the bell used by those who came to seek justice was rung. A startled servant found a huge snake on the bell rope. Charlemagne went to the door and the snake dropped to the ground and led him to the river shore, where a large poisonous toad was sitting on the snake's eggs. The toad was burnt to death at the Emperor's command.

A few days later the grateful snake reappeared, and coming into Charlemagne's dining-room, dropped a jewel into his cup. The jewel possessed the magic power of bringing the Emperor's love to its wearer. Charlemagne gave it to his Empress, and from that moment she had to accompany him on all his journeys as he could not bear her to be out of his sight.

At Charlemagne's desire a church (the Wasserkirche) was built on the spot where he had seen the snake's nest. Because it stood half on piles and half on the water it was named Wasserkirche.

After the death of the Empress the jewel was given to a knight, who became the Emperor's favourite. He became so persecuted by jealous courtiers that he threw the stone into a hot spring near Aix-la-Chapelle, which in consequence became so popular with Charlemagne that he built a cathedral on the spot (now known as Aachen).

The sculptures which introduce the snake and the precious stone are among the most interesting in Zurich.

A monument to Charlemagne was placed by devoted citizens on a high niche of one of the towers of the great minster. So a rugged looking Charlemagne, with crown on his head and a sword across his knees, looks down upon the Swiss republicans to-day, the lovely lake and the mountains beyond.

Women who saved Zurich have also been immortalised.

In 1292 the citizens were in trouble. They had quarrelled with the Duke Albert of Austria. The Duke, after a victory at Winterthur, besieged Zurich and would have captured the city if the wiliness of the people had not saved it. They dressed their women as soldiers, giving them helmets, cuirasses and lances. Led by drum and fife band, they marched with their men up the Lindenhof, a small hill in the centre of the city. The Duke's army, from another hill, the Zurichberg, was so impressed by the unexpected and formidable display of troops that they lost hope of capturing the city. The Duke, consequently, made some favourable peace terms.

The fountain of the Lindenhof commemorates these women soldiers, so does a fine fresco on the façade of the house named Leopold in the Strehlgasse.

The tourist, who pauses to photograph either, will be reminded of a clever coup that was a turning point in Zurich's history.

**SUMMERING IN THE REALM OF THE MATTERHORN.**

By Marion Forster Gilmore.

High up the mountainside above Zermatt, in full view of that dread outline which is the wonder of the world, we spent the long days of summer. From the small natural platform, directly in front of the hotel, it was possible to include both the opposite peak and the village far beneath, in a single glance. The Matterhorn reared its fearful form in menacing attitude against the heavens, an object of worship, nevertheless, for all his aspect of grim cruelty. Every morning very early he accepted my homage from our tiny dormer window through which we obtained a marvellous view of the entire valley and its colossal guardian and by degrees there developed a silent but thorough, and I might even say, psychic, sympathy between us.

We were not so fortunate as to see the Alpine glow at any time, for it was not the proper season; only a tinge of rose appeared sometimes on the rugged sides of the Matterhorn. After all it was enough to breathe the air of that high, free place, to run over the grassy rolling knolls behind the hotel, to lie down, in the sunshine, near some weather-stained chalet and to see the shining of the evening star, apparently quite close to the dark crest of the mighty mountain opposite. I remember once noticing a web of gold, at sunset, encircling the crooked mountain with its ethereal vapors, then drifting away, to return, like a guardian spirit, as though it loved to cling to and caress the lonely form. Such splendid sights as these could we see and more, included in the one vast picture.

One day we talked with a returned guide, whose fingers and one foot had been frozen off in the Andes, and who, in his day, had made many ascents, among them that of the Matterhorn. He seemed

to consider the latter feat simple enough, and really very safe with due precautions. He was a fine-looking specimen of manhood, barring his pathetically maimed condition; an almost gigantic, thoroughly genial mountaineer, who seemed to take pleasure in showing us his remarkable museum, with its interesting charts, relief-maps and photographs. Also, its painful relics of the numerous victims to that mountain conquering madness, which I, for one, cannot condemn, since it seized, to some extent, on my own imagination, while in sight of those siren heights that call and beckon with a mysterious enchantment, from their frozen solitudes. There were nailed shoes and caps, knapsacks and ice-picks, all marked with the names of their owners, who had lost their lives, in snowstorms, from avalanches, or from some treacherous misstep on the edge of a precipice. There were an appalling number of causes enumerated; but the chief reason for most of these catastrophes seemed to spring from human rashness—complete indifference to the proper season for such undertakings; as, for example, attempts to scale the Matterhorn or the Lyskamm or lofty Monte Rosa as late as October, at which time the chances of blizzards and avalanches are very great.

Within the little English church of Zermatt are several tablets commemorating loved ones, lost in this way; perished among the dread mountains which shut in the lovely valley from the rest of the world. Outside in the churchyard are many, many slabs of stone, under which rest the bodies of those who followed the mysterious call of "excelsior," the strongest lure of life, I believe, even to those who cannot comprehend its meaning; yet, sooner or later, give ear and follow it. On the walls of the interior of the sanctuary are inscribed, in great letters, those mighty words from "Benedicite," and as I read them they rang like the universal voice of boundless nature, adoring God: "O, ye frost and cold, O, ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him forever." This upon the left-hand wall, and on the right was written: "O, ye ice and snow, O, ye children of men, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him forever." There came to me an uplifting sense of the divine and brooding glories of creation, from the perusal of these grandly simple words, there, in the midst of the mountains and hills, and in sight of that glittering, eternal ice and snow.

I wish I were able to describe, with satisfactory vividness, the unique delights of our situation on the hillside, above the village. The sport we most enjoyed was to set out, through the woods, armed with a kodak, in pursuit of the goats. They were the most elusive creatures I ever dealt with. But even when our pursuit was vain, we were blissfully happy. We would rest at intervals, and listen to the floating tantalizing music of the cow bells far above us and in the further woods to the east.

I shall never forget the afternoon on which we made friends with the goats. The herd numbered nine in all, including three cows and a delightful snow-white kid, guiltless of horns or beard. We seated ourselves on one of the great rocks, by the water, and watched them come up from milking. Cling, cling! Clang, clang! rang the bells in their varying tones, through the deep, sweet forest around us. One of the cows, a goat and the kid wore round, exquisitely-toned bells, and the rest carried the deep-voiced, conventional cowbells. The kid's bell matched its owner's dainty proportions, and sounded light and fine as his silvery little bleat. Under the boughs of the great evergreens, along the whimsical course of the rushing torrent, they clambered slowly, cropping peacefully. The three sturdy, beautiful cows made rare pictures, with their soft, fawn-coloured coats shining against the green of the juniper that carpeted the rocks. The goats frisked back and forth, across the rocks and into and over the stream in their search for tender plants to nibble. I was much impressed by the cautious air with which the kid made his way over the brook, mincing from stone to stone, his ridiculously small head, set on his wee stalk of a neck, held on one side, as though he would say, in the manner of Will Scarlet, "Alack-a-day! See now, 'tis a pretty pass that I must thus be put to it! I would fain not wet my toes." And he managed admirably with the skill of a rope-dancer, although there were moments when I thought he was lost. We sat quite still, as the animals drew nearer, but for a while they were shy of the human creatures, that resembled tourists rather than herdsmen, and consequently were suspicious characters. But being such, we naturally aroused their curiosity, and by and by, we were the centre of a magic circle of large eyes, twitching ears, wagging beards, and long, curved horns. They sniffed grass in our hands and even allowed us to scratch their noses.

If it were not a subject far too sublime and magnificent for a hurried description, I would attempt to write of our trip to the summit of the Gornergrat; but it is an epoch in my life—as I suppose in other lives also—that deserves individual and very reverent treatment. I cannot make mere passing mention of it, except inasmuch as to say that we went, and with our own eyes beheld the infinite glory which lies round about that famous pinnacle.