

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: - (1938)
Heft: 862

Artikel: Swiss neutrality
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691502>

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: 10.01.2026

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

SWISS NEUTRALITY. (TIMES 16.5.38).

The spontaneous desire of the Swiss people to recover their ancient neutrality has found a first expression in the request of the Swiss Federal Government, now granted by the Council of the League, to be absolved from participating in any action that may be taken by the League under Article 16, commonly called the "Sanctions" article.

Switzerland on her own application was formally absolved from taking part in military sanctions in 1920 on the ground that Swiss neutrality, the recognition of which dates from 1815, is not governed by particular circumstances, but is a permanent neutrality, lying at the very root of the existence of the Swiss Confederation as "the faithful guardian of the Alpine passes." But for the confirmation of this by the Allied and Associated Powers in Article 455 of the Treaty of Versailles, Switzerland might not have joined the League at all. Exemption was obtained on condition that Switzerland undertook to defend her territory in all circumstances and accepted the obligations of the Covenant in respect of economic and financial "sanctions." Defence may be capable of various interpretations. Switzerland is not a geographical unit, and Swiss independence continues to exist only because it is the will and determination of the Swiss people that it shall do so. The obligations in respect of economic "sanctions" were accepted unwillingly and have never been popular.

"SANCTIONS" DANGER.

The sudden annexation of Austria struck the Swiss people with dismay at the bare thought of what might confront their own land, and added one more argument against the existing relations between Switzerland and the League. Switzerland had originally reckoned that economic and financial "sanctions" would come almost automatically into operation and would be universal, and that there would be no change in her position as a neutral. Abyssinia, which brought her near to a dangerous collision with Italy, showed that this was not so. It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate economic from military "sanctions;" on the outbreak of war the one would almost automatically involve the other and the consequences are likely to be the same.

In Switzerland the belief is firmly held that the *Anschluss* represents only the beginning of a course of action in Central Europe in the process of what Dr. Goebbels called "the decisive moment that may never recur." As part of the undertaking of 1920 Switzerland modernized her army and her defensive system at great sacrifice on the part of her people. She now finds herself with three neighbours instead of four, only one of them being an adherent of the League. What was modernization yesterday is unpreparedness today. The determination to preserve Swiss independence appears stronger than ever; with it goes an equally strong determination to avoid anything that could afford the least excuse for foreign diplomatic interference or intervention.

DEFINING NEUTRALITY.

The question may easily arise what the defence of Swiss neutrality really implies. Does it mean the strict defence of the frontiers against all invasion — i.e., the lines of the Rhine and the Jura and the mountain slopes of the Grisons and the Tessin? Or would it be consistent with the conception of neutrality to withdraw to a line of natural defences, leaving the lowlands undefended against the passage of a possible invader seeking an alternative route? The problem is now the more complicated in that ruthless war has gone into a third dimension.

The necessity for being prepared is unescapable. Recent questions on defence in the Swiss National Council afforded an insight into Swiss misgivings. They embraced the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief in time of war and an Inspector-General of the Forces in peace time; an Inspector of Military Training and the lengthening of the periods of service and subsequent training; the extension of the air arm and the motorizing of units. To these the debate added the problems of officers' training, the reorganization of military administration, and an increase in the professional staff for the training of recruits. The need for an ever-ready striking force, to be thrown in as a screen behind which mobilization would take place, has also begun to be considered.

These are technical military questions and fall within the province of military experts. The Swiss hope to solve them without departing from the Federal military basis of their system, by which the entire army remains a citizen force. It is in the details that the gaps are found, gaps due mainly to the rapidity of modern attack and movement. There will be no time for elections and improvements, no time for the units to march to the scene on foot, or so say the Swiss. The creation of a striking force may be a matter

of organizing the trained recruits still under arms at the time. But the cost of lengthening the recruit period of training to three months and the periods of subsequent training to 20 days (including the days of joining and dispersal) will add very appreciably to the military budget, already a serious burden to Switzerland's finances. The Minister responsible estimated that it would cost at least 200,000,000 Swiss francs to fit out the army with adequate motor transport of its own. Switzerland has greater powers of resistance than had Austria, but by the nature of her neutrality she is committed, to the strategic defensive.

Neutrality carries with it one vital obligation — that it must be 100 per cent. neutral. Whether this is possible under modern conditions has been doubted by high authorities. Perhaps only experience can show how far this is true; and the price of experience is such that any effort is worth while to avoid it.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

The Monthly Meeting was Held at Swiss House on Wednesday, May 11th. A large number of members was present and Mr. A. Steinmann, President of the Society, was in the Chair.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. M. Paschoud, a former President and Honorary Member of the Society, who was in London on business.

The Chairman mentioned that during his recent visit to Switzerland he had called at the Central Secretariat where he had discussed preliminary arrangements for the forthcoming Golden Jubilee Celebrations in October next, when a party would be coming from Switzerland.

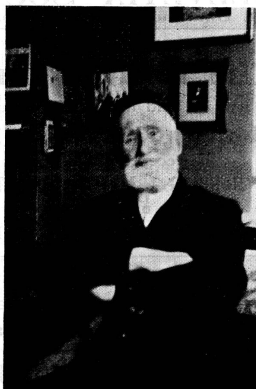
Mr. M. Schneider, Hon. Secretary, was elected to represent the Society at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Swiss Young Men's Christian Association.

Miss H. Simmen, Matron of the Swiss House, was unanimously elected a Member of the Society and also a Member of the House Committee in place of Mrs. Lunghi, who recently resigned from that office. Miss Simmen will henceforth look after the welfare of the lady students at Swiss House.

The Chairman thereupon informed the Meeting that Mr. A. C. Stahelin, Honorary Member and former President of the Society, would represent the Society at the Delegates' Meeting of the S.K.V. at La Chaux-de-Fonds, on May 21st and 22nd. The Chairman expressed thanks to Mr. Stahelin for having accepted this mission, to which the Meeting responded with hearty acclamation. The Meeting asked Mr. Stahelin to convey to their colleagues in Switzerland the friendly greetings of the London Section and the best wishes to the S.K.V. for a very successful meeting.

Mr. W. Meier, Chairman of the Education Committee, reported on the activities of the College. He was able to record an unusually large influx of new students. About 90 students had commenced their studies at the beginning of May when the number of students on roll had reached 220, the largest for many years. He also announced that the College would pay one of the periodical visits to Fords Motor Works at Dagenham on Wednesday, May 18th. The College Football Team had played 17 matches during the past season of which six had been won. The Chairman expressed thanks to Mr. H. H. Baumann, Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee. (Continued Back Page.)

GEORGE FORRER †.



A descendant of a very old family, was born at Winterthur on 18th January 1844. After his apprenticeship and short stages in Lyons and in a spinning mill in Lombardy, he proceeded to England in 1868 and since that time this country has been his second fatherland. He was engaged in commercial pursuits in the City of London for forty-six years the greater part of which he spent with the private banking firm of Morris Prevost & Co. until their dissolution in 1914, when he retired from business. In those days one of the partners of the firm, Mr. Henri Vernet, was in charge of the Consulate General for Switzerland and the deceased acted as his deputy with the rank of Hon. Vice-Consul from 1876 to 1883.

From the beginning our friend took a lively interest in his countrymen and all their activities. For a while he was a member of the City Swiss Club, but he felt particularly attracted by the *Société de Secours Mutuels*, which he joined in 1877 and of which he was President for very many years.

Some time after its foundation in 1870 our compatriot joined the Committee of the Swiss Benevolent Society. For 33 years he served the cause of the poor as Hon. Treasurer with unflagging zeal, displaying the keenest interest in the work of the Society. In recognition of his distinguished, unselfish and conscientious service, he was, on relinquishing his functions in

1914, presented by his colleagues with an illuminated address and elected Hon. Vice-President.

He was a longstanding member of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique* and his services to the Swiss Church in an unofficial capacity are perhaps also worthy of mention.

During the last period of his life the deceased was Doyen of the Swiss Colony. It was a proud moment for him, as such, to be invited to sign the congratulatory address presented to Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on their accession to the throne last year.

On May 11th he passed away peacefully in his 94th year; his loving and faithful life's companion having predeceased him in 1933. He leaves three sons to whom we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

At 1 o'clock on Monday, 16th May, a funeral service took place at the Swiss Church in Endell Street. The Rev. U. Emery officiated and the Rev. C. Th. Hahn played the organ. Mr. Charles de Jenner, Counsellor of Legation, addressed the congregation in the name of the Swiss Minister, as Mr. Paravicini was prevented from attending.

Those of us, who not only worked with him, but also had the privilege to know him in his private life, learnt more and more to appreciate the sterling qualities of Mr. Forrer. He was naturally of a cheerful disposition and if consulted in any difficulty, would always proffer sound advice. He had very decided opinions and in all he did he was most painstaking and neat. This showed itself also in his fine handwriting, which he preserved all through his life.

He did not often go to his friends' houses, as he preferred to receive them at his own home, where he would entertain us with most generous hospitality. He would then proudly show the latest treasure his sons had brought him from Java or the Far East. He had a remarkable memory and would recall the minutest details of events which happened years ago and he knew the life story of every one of his early Swiss contemporaries.

Our friend was and remained to the end a true Swiss who did not spare himself, where the weal of his compatriots was concerned. May he rest in peace and his example serve as an inspiration to us who remain.

T.R.