

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: - (1940)
Heft: 973

Artikel: Switzerland, a living miracle
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693568>

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>

heavily wounded prisoners who are to be released from captivity. These soldiers will either be taken home via Switzerland or interned in Swiss camps under most comfortable conditions.

Some of the delegates of the International Red Cross are already abroad. As Germany took numerous prisoners during her campaign against Poland, two Swiss doctors are now visiting camps for prisoners of war and civilian internees within the German border; this commission will go on to Poland and Norway from there. Another delegation has been sent to France, while the delegate to Great Britain, Dr. Haccius, has left England only a day or two ago.

Another task of the Genevan Institution, which has rapidly increased owing to Hitler's latest invasions, consists in establishing the fate and whereabouts of civilians. For this purpose the central enquiry bureau for prisoners of war at Geneva has opened a special branch department for enquiries and correspondence about civilians, where queries concerning Dutch, Belgian or Luxemburg citizens should now be sent. There have been in existence since the outbreak of hostilities special sections dealing with enquiries about British, French, German, Polish, Danish, Norwegian and Egyptian nationals.

It is obvious that the departments for enquiries about prisoners of war are run on a similar system of the various national sections; here, too, new departments had to be opened for the Belgians and Dutchmen, while the buffer state Luxemburg could not boast of an army and therefore now has no prisoners of war to claim. The German authorities already two weeks ago have disclosed the names of all their Dutch and Belgian prisoners; however, owing to the latest developments most of these unfortunates may have been released and sent home.

Whether you wish to inquire about an internee of the *Graf Spee* at Buenos Aires, a Norwegian prisoner of war or a more recent victim from the Western Front, whether you wish to send a postcard or a huge parcel containing everything from the socks up, in every case the Institution in Geneva will be helpful, as the many letters of thanks prove that are pouring in from all over the world.

MOTOR IN A TIEPIN.

(*"Tit-Bits,"* 13.7.40.)

Most ingenious of all the marvels at the recent Swiss National Exhibition was a perfect little electric motor — or, rather motorette — weighing only about one-sixth of a gramme. (And remember, there are sixteen grammes to one ounce!) It was made by M. Huguenin, a watchmaker in the Vevey district of Switzerland.

Now M. Huguenin has beaten his own record by producing a midget masterpiece. Using powerful magnifying glasses, he has constructed a machine weighing less than 1-500th of an ounce. It runs perfectly, on current supplied by a dry battery. And it is so small that he has placed it in a pearl, cut in two, and mounted the pearl in a tiepin.

SWITZERLAND, A LIVING MIRACLE.

The following is reproduced from the May number of our contemporary "Der Schweizer" published in New York, U.S.A.

Way back in 1803 the great Napoleon Bonaparte declared: "Nature destined Switzerland to become a League of States; no wise man would attempt to conquer it." This pronouncement seems fully justified when one considers that of the country's 4,068,000 inhabitants, 2.9 million speak German, 830,000 French, 242,000 Italian and 44,000 Romansch. Until 1937 only German, French and Italian figured as Switzerland's official languages. In that year, however, Romansch was recognized by the government as the nation's fourth language. Federal decrees have since then been issued in four, instead of only three tongues.

Romansch formed itself in the course of the centuries from the every-day Latin of the Roman soldiers and settlers in the Grisons mountain valleys of the rivers Rhine and Inn, and from the Celtic language, which was the mother tongue of the original conquered population. Formerly Romansch was spoken by many more people and over a much wider territory. It was the language of the Davos valley; for example, the Romansch name of Davos being "Tavau."

In literature the very musical Romansch language began to appear in the 16th century only. In recent decades, however, thanks to the tireless efforts of the "Rateo Romansch Society," it has definitely asserted itself. The Romansch press is spreading and Switzerland is no longer just a trilingual country.

The Swiss people, according to the author Hans Rudolf Schmid, are a fusion of numerous Bronze Age elements comprising Rhaetian, Gallic, Celtic, Roman, Ligurian, Illyrian and Teutonic components which, in the course of time, gave birth to a mixture that is unique. Thus Swiss are also entitled to include among their ancestors some 110,000 Helvetians, who after their honourable defeat at Bibracte by Julius Caesar in 58 B.C., were compelled to return to their settlements in Switzerland which they had abandoned in their desire to migrate westward, away from constantly threatening invaders from the North. — Only 16% of Switzerland's population are of the fair-haired, blue-eyed type, while this percentage rises to 64 just beyond the northern frontier.

Switzerland has an area of 15,737 square miles. Three of its four languages are of Latin derivation. This lingual diversity of the nation occasions cultural problems of various kinds, which are not to be solved merely by the publication of official Federal decrees in the four languages. The very fact that the lingual elements live side by side in the one State makes it necessary for the individual citizen to learn at least one other language. Thus, in German speaking Switzerland, the school children are taught French from the Junior-High stage on, and in the French and Romansch speaking sections they learn German instead. In the Italian speaking portion of the country German or French will be the second tongue they are taught and in intermediary schools and higher institutions of learning throughout Switzerland it is customary for students to embark upon the study of a third language, the same being Italian or in many

instances English. Young people who are planning to adopt business and especially the hotel industry as their vocation find it advantageous to even learn a fourth or fifth foreign language.

In Switzerland language frontiers have never been political frontiers. Quite the contrary — Switzerland owes her very foundation to divergent influences resulting from community of languages with neighbouring states.

Thus, for example, it was principally the German-speaking contingent who fought victoriously along the Rhine for complete separation from the German Empire in 1499. In 1512 the Italian speaking inhabitants of the present canton of Ticino severed their connections with the Dukes of Milan and put themselves voluntarily under the protection of the Swiss Cantons. In 1536 Geneva, threatened by Savoy, appealed to the strong canton of Berne for help. To-day, this brilliant French speaking district takes pride in emphasizing that it is 100% Swiss.

In the year 1815 Switzerland was guaranteed perpetual neutrality. This neutrality, as one Swiss writer puts it, was all the more important for a state with four different languages. The natural trend of adherents to four different civilizations had to be subordinated to one principle: the will for a common political existence in a Federal Democracy free and tolerant, the purpose of which is actually to guarantee the maintenance of those differences and to allow each citizen to live his own life in a manner compatible with his individuality.

Such is the strength of the Swiss democratic ideal, this writer continues, and of the spiritual ties that unite the Swiss, that the national frontiers are guarded — a fact that would appear paradoxical anywhere else — precisely by troops speaking the same language as spoken in the neighbouring country.

Switzerland, with four different languages, yet perfectly harmonious and in normal times very prosperous, is a present-day miracle, and a ray of hope for the world at large.

A RELIGIOUS MANIFESTATION.

(“*Life of Faith*,” 3.7.40.)

Great interest has been aroused in Geneva by a large map exhibited in the window of the *Action Biblique* Bible House, representing the world situation from the spiritual aspect. Countries where the Bible is officially forbidden are painted black; those where it is tolerated or threatened, in dark grey, or in lighter colour according to the political situation affecting the Bible. Towns in which there are Bible Societies, depots or Bible Houses, are indicated; and where these have been closed, or are working in threatened circumstances, is shown by a cross. The countries where complete religious freedom obtains, are in white. The result is to demonstrate that night is falling upon large tracts of the world. The effect has been most striking. Opposite the Bible House a German “touring agency” has been opened, to the

indignation of most of the people of Geneva. Consequently policemen are stationed nearby constantly, and have commented upon the splendid witness and work of the Bible House. They say that they read every night the open Bible which is illuminated in the window.

Not only in Geneva, but in its other Bible Houses — particularly in France — the *Action Biblique* is distributing remarkable numbers of Scriptures. In his latest circular letter Mr. H. E. Alexander, the founder, tells of eager reception of the Word of God, by men of the Forces. “The need and demand,” he writes, “surpass anything we have seen.” One German-speaking Swiss regiment eagerly accepted 2,000 copies of the Gospel of John; in response to an approach to another regiment, the Colonel himself wrote gladly accepting 6,000 gospels and 500 New Testaments for his men; other detachments have received smaller numbers.

SWISS RELIEF CENTRE.

The Colony will be glad to know that Swiss House is now fully organised to receive any compatriots who may become victims in the present emergency.

The Committee are anxious that every Swiss now in Great Britain should know that the Swiss Relief Centre at Swiss House, Fitzroy Square, is open to any compatriot who may be rendered homeless either through air raids or any other cause due to the war.

Whilst we appear to have been fortunate so far in not having any victims it cannot be denied that attacks on England may cause casualties amongst our compatriots at any minute, and the committee once more appeal to all Swiss to support the Swiss Relief Centre so that their work may be successfully carried on for the benefit of the whole Colony.

Donations so far have been coming in nicely, but all those of our compatriots who are in a position to do so are reminded that they should:—

1. Send their donations marked “Swiss Relief Centre,” to Swiss Benevolent Society, Swiss House, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

2. Send to the same address any of the following items which they may be able to spare, namely: Pillow-cases, blankets, quilts, rugs, sheets for single beds, hand towels, bath towels (in case of difficulty about despatching, advise us and we will try and collect).

3. Send to the committee full particulars of any accommodation they may have to shelter victims. As previously stated, Swiss House can only be regarded as a first shelter to possible victims after which these will have to be accommodated elsewhere.

It is the duty of every Swiss in Great Britain to co-operate in this patriotic effort and the committee look forward to the support of all.

PLEASE ACT NOW.