

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: 979

Artikel: A visit to the zoo
Autor: F.I.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694504>

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: 04.01.2026

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

system." The next few months will probably decide this issue.

* * *

The "British Weekly" reproduces an exchange of greetings between the two churches on the occasion of our National Day:—

A group of British Christians recently telegraphed the following message to Switzerland:—

On eve of Swiss National Day British Christians send fraternal greetings to fellow Christians of Switzerland; the liberties of both nations date from the thirteenth century, the British from Magna Charta, the Swiss from the founding of the Confederation. British churches remember gratefully many links of fellowship since Reformation times. The two voices mentioned in Wordsworth's poem, one of the mountains, one of the sea, are still sounding the claims of Christian liberty of thought and conscience.

The message was given wide circulation by the Swiss Evangelical Church Union, and Professor Keller has telegraphed in reply:—

Swiss Protestants express their warmest thanks for the fraternal message of British Protestants on August 1st, when the origin of our liberties was celebrated by the whole people, conscious more than ever of this unique treasure of our history. Faithful to these historical traditions. Swiss Protestants feel indissolubly bound together with their fellow Christians in Great Britain and wherever followers of Christ stand and work for His kingdom of liberty and justice.

* * *

Another discovery is reported in "*The Times*," August 17th. Though it seems in the first instance to benefit humanity we have a strong suspicion that the war gods will soon adapt it to their own nefarious purposes:—

After patient researches and experiments, several of them on himself, Dr. Gerard C. Savoy, of Lausanne, has produced a preparation which is the most efficient known antidote to yperite (mustard gas). It is already being produced in great quantities for public use and is easy to employ.

It is simply applied on the affected part. Fifty per cent. of the yperite present in the wound is destroyed after one hour and 100 per cent. after 10 hours. In a few hours, it is claimed, all that can be seen on the skin is some spots, which quickly heal.

* * *

Here are a few lines from "*The Star*," August 15th, about an old friend of our mountains who recently celebrated his 80th anniversary:—

But for the war, Sir William Ellis, G.B.E., D.Eng., of "Weetwood," Sheffield, would now have been in Switzerland preparing to mark his 80th birthday, which he will celebrate on August 20th, by climbing 13,800 feet to the top of the Jungfrau, as he did on his 75th birthday.

He still hopes, however, to spend the day indulging in his favourite pastime of mountaineering,

for when our reporter called to offer congratulations on the approaching attainment of this notable anniversary, Sir William was on the point of departure for the Lake District, with its charming facilities for this inspiring sport.

Yet at this anxious time for both countries he will be in the thoughts of many friends in Switzerland — fellow members of the Swiss Alpine Club and of the community of guides who have known him for 40 years.

Recently, as a mark of appreciation of the help and comradeship he has had from guides during expeditions, often of danger, he gave £4,000 to endow a Fund for the benefit of old or injured guides or their widows.

A VISIT TO THE ZOO.

Being tired of endless discussions and arguments about the war I thought that a visit to the Zoo would make a pleasant change. As George Elliot said: "Animals are such agreeable friends, they ask no questions and pass no criticism."

True enough, the visit turned out to be most interesting and proved an agreeable diversion and entertainment, despite the fact that our old friends the elephants had been evacuated to Whipsnade and that the Aquarium had been closed down for the duration.

Otherwise "Business as usual" seems to be the motto of the Zoo. The great attractions are still the lions, which applies to the king of beasts as well as to the sea lions; the tigers, panthers and leopards — being the spitfires of the Zoo —, the monkey family, the bears, both the diving and climbing variety, the beasts of burden, the beasts of prey and last but not least the winged creatures of wonderful variety, from the bird of paradise displaying his finery to the pelican with his "how the hell he can."

And after spending hours in examination and contemplation I realised what a lot there is to see and wondered how much I had missed. I had been advised not to follow the maddening crowd but to make an exploration of my own and to observe and study the less spectacular but none the less interesting inmates, such as the busy ants, the creepy crawlers, the beautiful wart hog and the nimble tortoise.

As a Swiss, I naturally paid a visit to the graceful and surefooted chamoix, some of which surveyed the scene from the lofty pinnacles of the Zoo Alps, and I wondered whether they, like myself, were yearning for the real thing in all its vastness and grandeur.

Needless to say, I did not neglect the horned creatures, such as the buffaloes and bison, nor could I possibly miss the long-necked giraffe. As usual, I was thankful that the neck of my inquisitive neighbour the notorious Mrs. X., was of normal size, otherwise I would have to add a good many more inches to my garden wall.

Incidentally, there are quite a number of nosy Parkers and "Cooper's snoopers" at the Zoo, such as the waddling and shuffling Penguins, full of insatiable

curiosity, the inquisitive monkeys and the ant-eater poking his long nose into anything and everything, whilst the chatterbugs reside at Parrot house and I suppose the flamingo, standing for hours in perfect immobility on one leg, represents the silent column, having retired into "innocuous desuetude."

And talking of topical matters reminded me of other things connected with the war and which a keen observer at the Zoo cannot possibly miss, such as camouflage and signals.

Some of the animals can beat the Army and Navy into a cocked hat as far as camouflage is concerned. For instance, flies looking like wasps or defenceless rodents looking like pugnacious shrews. The most common way of camouflage for animals is to assimilate the colours of their environment. Others disguise themselves to look innocent with the result that unsuspecting victims fall into a trap and are promptly captured and devoured.

Desert creatures adopt the smoke screen by "kicking up a dust" when pursued, whilst certain marine animals, when disturbed or attacked, will shoot out a fluid from special glands to cover retreat or half blinding the enemy.

And, of course, everybody has heard about the chameleon, the champion of all the colour changers.

As regards signals:— when mountaineering in Switzerland I have myself repeatedly heard the shrill whistle of the chamoix standing on guard. A similar whistling sound is also given by the Penguins, whilst beavers smack the surface of the water with their queer flat tails and gorillas slap with their open hands upon their breasts and so make a deep drumming noise. As everybody knows, the house dog just emits a good old angry bark, as distinct from the joyful noisy greeting on his masters return or the plaintive howl when listening to the neighbours piano, thus signalling his disapproval.

When I left home in the morning I wanted to get away from human society but soon realised that there is a lot of human nature at the Zoo, good and bad, full of love and hate, friendship and jealousy. There you find courtships, weddings, hen-pecked husbands and brow-beaten wives, joy and grief, illness and death, quarrels and exhibitions of bad temper ending sometimes in deliberate murder. The Zoo is full of characters, beauties, freaks and monstrosities; good-natured animals with peaceful instincts or malignant beasts with dictatorial and tyrannical dispositions. It sounds quite familiar, does it not?

There are workers and parasites; slow eaters and gobblers, man haters and woman haters, stay-at-homes and travellers, who like Hitler, look for "lebensraum" and in so doing invade and subjugate other communities.

Then again, there are architects who scheme and plan and build, such as beavers, birds, ants, bees, wasps and spiders, and there are lazy opportunists taking advantage of others, like the cuckoo which deposits its eggs in other birds nests.

And talking about birds reminds me of a discussion I once overheard, a fellow contending that men

take more interest in birds than women. I did not listen to the end of the argument but speaking for myself it entirely depends on the kind of birds my friend had in mind.

As far as the Zoo is concerned I was certainly impressed with the variety on view in the Aviary:— small and large, pretty and ugly, singing birds, talking birds, mimicking birds, humming birds, mocking birds, trumpeters, gay old birds and birds of prey, not forgetting the knowing birds, like the wise old owl.

As usual, the parrots were either screaming or jabbering. There do not seem to be any versatile talkers, just the stereotyped "Hello" or "Pretty Polly" and I was wondering what the Zoo authorities would say if one of the parrots suddenly yelled "Heil Hitler."

One of the keepers told me that there was plenty of night life at the Zoo, there being quite a number of creatures with nocturnal habits, namely bats, cats, owls, rodents, ant-eaters and night herons, whilst the members belonging to the Zoo night club in the Aquarium consisted of crabs, shrimps and lobsters, as well as the octopus.

But unlike the Piccadilly fraternity, the Zoo prowlers do not indulge in gambling, bottle parties or riotous living generally.

The Zoo authorities and keepers are to be congratulated on the way they manage their affairs, particularly in these times of rationing and food control.

What a family to look after — the feeding, the disagreements and the cleaning up!

As I made my way homewards I could not help but reflect on the orderly life of the animals in the Zoo and the mess civilised mankind has made of things. Before going to bed I turned up Genesis and read the wonderful story about the oldest and greatest Zoo.

Old Noah's ark housed two by two
Of all the creatures in his Zoo:—
Giraffes and tigers, — dogs and cats —
Pigeons and eagles — fish and gnats —
And when old Noah read the call
The parrot spoke for one and all.

F. I.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.
and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W. 1.

Capital Paid up s.f. 160,000,000
Reserves - - s.f. 32,000,000
Deposits - - s.f. 1,218,000,000

NEW YORK AGENCY
15 NASSAU STREET.

All Descriptions of Banking and
Foreign Exchange Business Transacted