

**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:** - (1934)  
**Heft:** 675

**Artikel:** London children in Switzerland  
**Autor:** Gasser, Ernie  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693522>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. 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. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **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. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **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. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 01.04.2025

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

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS WHICH REALLY WORKS.

If the world needs an example of how it is possible for all countries to work together in harmony for the common good of all, let it look to a little "bureau" in Berne, Switzerland, which controls the international communications of the world.

Here is a League of Nations that really works — that has, in fact, been working quietly and efficiently for over sixty years.

No better illustration of the benefits to be gained from international co-operation could be found. It stands to-day, the one great sane institution in a world of chaos.

The world control of communications began with the formation of the International Postal Union at the Congress of Berne which met in September, 1874.

Before this the dispatch and delivery of mails between foreign countries was a colossal muddle.

The cost of sending letters was high. The charges varied with each country. So did the weights. If you wanted to send a letter from England to Belgrade via France it cost you 5s. per oz. To California via Panama it was 4s. 8d. per half oz.

In some countries, too, the person receiving the letter had to pay an additional charge when it was delivered. So that an Englishman sending a letter to Spain paid 2s. 6d. per half oz., and on top of that the man receiving it had to pay a delivery charge.

To our modern ears, accustomed to cheap postage and reliable and quick deliveries, all this sounds fantastic. And the International Postal Union has brought about the change.

It was in 1874 that the Swiss Government, urged on by Germany, invited the world to send delegates to a conference at Berne to consider postal matters and to form a general postal union of all countries.

The response showed that the world was eager for some kind of reform. Twenty-two countries sent delegates, and these included all the countries of Europe, the United States of America, and Egypt.

At this meeting there was drawn up the first International Postal Convention, which has remained the foundation of the "Union" ever since, with comparatively little alteration.

The world agreed that for "postal" purposes the most sensible and convenient thing to do was to regard all countries as a single territory. This was, and still is, the main principle of the Union, to which every country agrees when it becomes a member.

### Frontiers Ignored.

Nationalities and frontiers have been swept aside. Only one thing matters, the speed and efficiency with which communication services are maintained. When one country is in difficulties through a serious breakdown another country steps in to help.

An instance of that occurred only last June. The submarine cable which carries the telephone lines from London across the North Sea to Holland became damaged. Until it could be repaired "traffic" to Holland was at a standstill.

Belgium was notified, and immediately arrangements were made for all calls to Holland to be diverted via that country. The ordinary submarine cable to Belgium was used for this purpose and from Belgium the calls travelled by land line into Holland.

The service was thus maintained until the repairs were executed — a matter of some days — and maintained so well that telephone subscribers knew nothing of the breakdown.

A second point of agreement is that every member of the Union will transmit the mails of every other member by the best means of transport which it uses for its own letters.

What is even more important because it simplifies postage so much, is that they have fixed the rates to be the same all over the world. So that when you post a letter to any country outside the British Empire you pay the same rate, no matter what part of the world you are sending it to. It costs no more to send a letter to China or Tibet than it does to Paris.

This uniform rate of postage for letters does not apply to air mails, partly because air mails are still in their infancy, partly because the air services which are utilised for mail carrying are privately owned. There is little doubt, however, that a uniform rate will come eventually, just as it has with ordinary mails.

What is more, since the Union has simplified things, the number of letters delivered has increased enormously.

Between them, members of the International Postal Union (and it includes now every country in the world except Albania, Muscat in Arabia, and one or two other small and unimportant states) now deliver some 40 thousand million letters a year.

### Very Few Disputes.

Laws, agreed upon by common consent, have been formulated to cover every other phase of post office work, including the sending of money orders, the registration of letters and parcels, and the size and weight of parcels which may be dispatched by parcel post.

Most questions which arise between any two countries are settled by the countries themselves. But when serious disputes arise which cannot be settled amicably they are referred to an arbitration court. Such disputes, however, seldom occur.

One of the greatest lessons this organisation has to teach the world, is how easily men can carry on international business satisfactorily, efficiently, and without friction, when they are all genuinely interested in a common aim.

The headquarters at Berne, presided over by M. E. Garbani-Nerini, the secretary, deals with all matters affecting all countries. It is constantly in touch with what is happening in the postal world. For instance, if a breakdown occurs in telegraph or telephone cables in, say, Hungary, the Hungarian authorities notify Berne, and Berne notifies the rest of the world.

If a breakdown occurs which will affect the carrying of regular mails, then Berne is told immediately and straight away the Bureau distributes the information.

The Union keeps its members supplied with other information of interest to postal authorities. It keeps statistics and publishes returns. It publishes a monthly magazine which gives the postal news of the world. It supplies lists of steamships for mail carrying purposes, and lists of air services.

When commercial flying began the Postal Union drew up new agreements to cover the new method of transport just as the old agreements covered the carrying of mails by rail, road and steamship.

### They Trust One Another.

Because of the agreements already in existence, as soon as a new air service is opened in any part of any country of the world, it automatically becomes available for carrying the mails of the rest of the world.

As with all other forms of communication, with air mails nationalities and frontiers have no significance. A British letter going by air mail to Batavia in the East Indies, is carried by a Dutch plane from Amsterdam.

Certain charges are made for transport by each country. These charges are fixed by the Union. And the Bureau acts as a clearing house for accounts.

But members of the Union trust each other so well that they only bother to settle their accounts once every five years.

To cover the cost of maintaining the bureau, each member of the Union pays a yearly subscription which varies from £15 to £350, according to the size and importance of the country. The Post Office of Great Britain, as one of the most important countries, contributes the maximum.

The convenience to be gained from being members of the Postal Union was obvious from the start. It began with 22 members. Ten years later, that is, in 1884, 86 countries had joined. By 1900 there were 113, and when China "came in" in 1914 she was the last big country.

As soon as any improved method of transport is adopted by a country, it automatically becomes available for all the letters of the world.

### Businesslike "Parliament"

The Postal Union is run on lines and with a smoothness that might make the League of Nations envious. Its "parliament" meets once every five or six years. The sitting lasts for three or four weeks and is held in the capital of a different country each time. The last one was held in Cairo early this year, the one before that in London in 1929.

Delegates come to it from every member country. They discuss and draw up working plans for every new development in the carrying of mails. They settle scales of charges and the weights for letters, newspapers, and parcels.

The bulk of business they manage to get through is very large. In 1929, 1,800 amendments were considered by the Congress. It is as if the British House of Commons considering 1,800 new bills in a month. The existing "laws" of the Union, too, are always being revised to keep pace with the changing conditions of postal requirements.

The system of international agreement had worked so satisfactorily with mails that when telegrams came the same machinery was used to draw up agreements controlling and developing their international use.

There is a separate bureau to deal with telegraph matters — a younger brother of the Postal Union, housed in the same building at Berne, and founded on the same lines. The last International Telegraph Conference met at Madrid in 1932. It passed new regulations which came into force at the beginning of 1934, reducing the rates of "code" and "urgent" telegrams.

Later when telephones came into general use a bureau was established to deal with telephone matters. All inventions and improvements are pooled for the benefit of the world.

The same thing happened with wireless, but here there was a slight break-away. The International Broadcasting Union decided to have its headquarters in Geneva and not in Berne. It is, however, patterned on the older Postal Union and is inspired by the same ideals.

I have said elsewhere that serious disputes seldom arise in connection with the bureaux which control the communications of the world. This is true. But an interesting case of it is that of Luxemburg over the new wavelengths introduced at the beginning of this year.

The International Broadcasting Union had decided that for the benefit of clear reception all over the world certain changes should be made in the existing wavelengths. All the world abided by the decision except Luxemburg.

### Friendly Help.

The result is that Luxemburg has been outlawed, and in good time the rest of the world will decide how the outlaw shall be dealt with.

It is largely, one might almost say entirely, by the friendly help the postal people give each other in every country that the amazing developments in rapid communication since the war have been made possible.

When you speak on the telephone to Budapest, for example, think of the number of countries your voice has to pass through, the number of exchanges in each country, the number of times the voice must be amplified for it to travel so far, the maintenance of all the lines, exchanges, and equipment in perfect working condition. And then remember that for the call you get in about a quarter of an hour, you must thank the good work of that little bureau in Berne.

*The Passing Show.*

## LONDON CHILDREN IN SWITZERLAND.

(Notes from my Diary).

*The last week at the "Châlet Switzerland" Gwatt.*

Sunday, 2nd Sept., 1934. — At Home.

Tempus fugit! I am aware of the fact, of course, but never before have I realised the full significance of the Latin tag. It's true meaning suddenly flashed into my mind early this morning, when I realised that two-thirds of our holiday had sped away. It seemed incredible to me, but the calendar verified the fact, and I knew that calendars never lied — at least not up-to-date ones.

We had Sunday-School by the lake-side this morning, and we were all filled with the peace and calm. We have reason to be thankful for every bit of this truly glorious holiday, and it is a wonderful fact that the Lord does provide in response to prayer and faith.

On Sunday afternoon our visitors arrived. I believe they came from almost every corner of Switzerland, by car and by train. They were relatives who had never seen us children before, and they were interested, of course, to know how we looked. On both sides efforts were made, by speech and gestures, to understand each other.

Monday 3 Sept. — Berne.

The weather was truly glorious and so we set out on our long-deferred visit to Berne. A very smart party we looked. Our berets with the Swiss Cross attracted everybody's attention. We first went by cable-railway to the Gurten, and found it a novel experience. Ahead, the track appeared like a thread of silver climbing the hillside, while behind the slope almost took our breath away. From the top we had a lovely view of the hills and snow-topped mountains, and in the foreground all Bern was spread out for our inspection. With the unaided eye we could easily distinguish the domed Parliamentary building and the tall spire of the Cathedral.

After a picnic we carried on sightseeing in Berne. Time indeed flies when pleasantly spent! Incidentally, money does too, as the souvenirs we bought testified. We were impressed by many things, but mostly by the bears. To see them stand up with crossed forepaws and beg for carrots surprised and amused everyone. A visit to the chocolate factory, Tobler, made us realize the extensive machinery required for the food which children like most. The fountains in the middle of the streets in Berne, struck my fancy. Each one had a different figure on top. In the Federal Palace we admired to the full the wonderful carvings and the beautiful paintings. The proprietor of the Kornhauskeller had kindly invited us to tea. The band played "Tipperary." By the way, we composed the following wording to this song:

It's a long way back to London,  
It's a long way, to go.  
It's a long way back to London,  
To the sweetest home I know.  
Goodbye! all you mountains,  
Farewell lake so blue.  
It's a long way back to dear old London,  
But we must leave you."

Tuesday 4th Sept. — Niesen.

As the weather was still lovely we decided to go on the Niesen. From Mülenen a cable-drawn carriage took us in thirty-three minutes to the top, which is 7,000ft. above sea level. It was an unforgettable experience to travel sheer up the mountain-side. The cable seemed dangerously frail, but we reached the summit in safety, and retraced our path with respectful awe. We had snow at close hand, and were soon in the thick of a furious snow-fight. Through the kindness of a friend in London we had dinner at the top of the Niesen. There was not a cloud to mar our view. We could see the Wildstrubel, Blümlisalp, Jungfrau and many other snow mountains. Most of us realised there for the first time the meaning of the word "Panorama." The sight was magnificent.

On our return to Mülenen four private cars waited for us and took us to the Blue Lake, which I had heard described as the jewel of the Alps. We first walked along a shaded path, past great boulders, and then came to the lake. I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw that the water actually looked emerald green in parts, with blue streaks and sapphire shades in others. It really has to be seen to be believed! The water was crystal clear and we could see the bottom of the lake with ease, even in the deepest parts, where lay petrified tree-trunks with branches edged by a vivid emerald streak. Someone threw a coin into the water and we watched the fish rush to bite it as it twinkled and sparkled to the bottom. We were very loath indeed to leave the lake, but were in some measure compensated, for we went back to the cars by an enchanting rocky path. Thus ended one of the most memorable of our excursions.

Wednesday 5th Sept. — Spiez.

Rest-day. — We contented ourselves with swimming or sun-bathing till dinner-time. We had been invited to tea at Spiez, and met there about twenty Swiss children, with whom we were soon firm friends. They had brought us gifts of fruit and sweets, and we were delighted, especially because of the spirit that prompted them. Very reluctantly we said good-bye to our Swiss friends, and returned home by train.

Thursday 6th Sept. — Justis-Valley.

Up at 6 for an excursion to the Justis! From Spiez we crossed the lake by steamer. The morning was still young and everything bright

and fresh. In Gunten we all got into a char-a-banc which, after a truly delightful ride, stopped about half-way up the mountain. We climbed up the valley and on the way tasted some cheese at an old farmhouse. The scenery occupied our attention. A little mountain stream bubbled its way between stones and pine trees, and on either side the valley was overhung by tremendous masses of rock. We decided to stay there for the day. At lunch-time we made a fire close to the stream, and cooked a real Maggi soup. Afterwards some children attempted to bridge the stream, while others explored the immediate vicinity. The more energetic of us went higher, and three boys attempted to climb the Beatenberg, a steep slope consisting of loose stones. Naturally they became stuck, and a cry arose: "Mr. Fischer to the rescue!" This was accomplished successfully, without starting any big avalanches of stones. On their return we discovered that time was pressing, and we raced back for the boat at Merligen.

Friday 7th, Sept. — Blumenstein.

First: cleaning boots and packing rucksacks, for this is our last day in Switzerland! We endeavoured not to think of the fact that we must soon say good-bye. We roused our drooping hearts and went swimming. We discovered the joyous fact that three of us, non-swimmers on our arrival, would leave swimmers.

We were due to leave Gwatt at 9 p.m., and so we accepted a last invitation from Blumenstein, near Thoune. It was in the nature of a final ride by char-a-banc. At our destination we walked along the bank of a stream, and came upon a waterfall. We were dampened with the spray flung up by the water, as it dashed against the rocks. It was an imposing sight. On our way back we passed an old church, and were soon enjoying the tea provided by our friends. To our surprise the table, attractively set out under the trees, was covered with a swarm of buzzing bees. Bread and honey was the lure that had brought them from some neighbouring hives. We plucked up courage and sat down. Bees must have consciences which prick them, for they soon stopped stealing our honey and left us in peace. Strange how this incident cheered us! On the way home we beguiled the time by singing. After a final plunge in the lake, to refresh us for our long journey, we had supper and then boarded the train for Calais. Our Swiss friends accompanied

us to the station, and with a last cheer and "adieu" Gwatt and the "Châlet Switzerland" lay behind us. It had been a really wonderful holiday. Everyone regretted leaving. If only time would stand still! But alas, time flies!

Saturday 8th Sept. — London.

Back in London once more, amidst the scurry and bustle at Victoria Station. We are all sun-burnt and our parents scarcely recognise us.

Our chief impression, apart from the scenery we had enjoyed, is the kindness and courtesy of our dear Swiss people. May we see them again soon! Finally, I may observe that we enjoyed this lovely holiday through the efforts of Mr. W. Fischer. He has the heartfelt gratitude of us all.

Ernie Gasser.

(Sunday School of the "Schweizerkirche.")

The first article appeared in the Swiss Observer on Sept. 8th. Back numbers can be obtained at the Offices of the Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

PERSONAL.

The Children, past and present, and Friends of the Sunday School of the Eglise Suisse, have been able to realise a cherished wish to commemorate the unremitting work of its much loved friend and founder, the late Madame Suzanne Hoffmann-de Visme.

A memorial executed by Sir William Goscombe John, R.A., will be unveiled on Sunday next, the 30th September, at the Eglise Suisse at the close of the morning service.

We feel sure that the many friends of the late Madame Hoffmann-de Visme will wish to take part in this simple ceremony.

\* \* \*

We extend our heartiest congratulations to our countryman Mr. A. Schorno, on his appointment as Manager of the catering Dept. of the London Zoo, which will take effect from January 1st, 1935.

Owing to the retirement of the present Manager, the council has taken the opportunity of amalgamating the catering departments at Whippsnade and in London. M. Schorno who has held his post at Whippsnade since January, 1932, has made a reputation for catering there, and we wish him every good luck in his dual position.

SWISS CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICA AND TO THE WORLD.

Address by Hugh G. Grant, attaché European Division, U.S. Dept. of State, at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, July 29, 1934, before the Swiss Societies of Washington at the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Bieber, Four Corners, Maryland, on the occasion of the celebration of the Swiss National Festival.

I am glad to be here to-day and I deem it a privilege to represent the Department of State on the occasion of the Swiss National Festival in celebration of the six hundred and forty-third anniversary of Swiss Independence. It is a pleasure to make this personal contact with the representatives of a country for which I have always had the greatest admiration. George Washington with his hatchet and the cherry tree and William Tell with his bow, arrow and the apple were my favourite boyhood heroes. I wielded my own bow and arrow often to the great danger of my companions in emulation of the great Tell.

I am reminded of an international broadcast from Tokyo, Japan, in 1931 of Colonel and Mrs. Lindbergh, in the course of which the distinguished wife of the famous Colonel declared that her girlhood conception of the Japanese was that they were people who "walked upside down upon the earth." As a school boy, fond of geography, I pictured the Swiss as a people who spend all of their time in merry-making and skiing down the snow covered mountains. It was not until years later that I learned the truth about Switzerland, of the sturdiness, thrift and industry of her people, of the centuries of heroic struggle for individual freedom and national independence, of the remarkable contribution of this little country to the ideals of Democracy.

The achievement of Nationality and the establishment of a Democratic Republic by the Swiss, which had its origin in the Independence movement of 1291, which you celebrate to-day, constitutes a remarkable story unique in the history of nations — a story of individual trials and sacrifices, of heroic deeds of both men and women, of bloodshed and of war throughout two centuries. In the annals of many battles with neighbouring enemies the decisive victories of Morgarten in 1315, of Sempach in 1386, of Näfels in 1388 and of Grandson in 1476 stand out as notable examples of the prowess of Swiss arms. The pages of Swiss history are dotted with the tales of heroic deeds, of men imbued with the zeal for liberty. Where is the Swiss who is not

familiar with the thrilling story of Winkelried, the bold knight from Unterwalden who at the battle of Sempach, upon the realization that his Swiss compatriots could not advance against the closed ranks of the Austrians bristling with spears, cried out, "I'll open the way for you, confederates!" and seizing as many enemy spears as he could grasp in his arms pulled them down with his weight upon his own breast and thus made a gap for his countrymen to penetrate the opposing ranks, resulting in victory for the Swiss.

The Swiss Independence movement was inaugurated by the men of Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden, mountainous districts bordering on Lake Lucerne (Luzern). To these forest men belongs the honour of being the pioneers in the centuries of struggle to free the Swiss land from foreign rule and to lay the foundation of a united Democratic Swiss Republic. On the chapel of Küssnacht there is displayed the couplet commemorating the birthplace of Swiss freedom:—"Wo Demuth weint und Hochmuth lacht, Da ward der Schweizerbund gemacht," which may be translated:

"Where humility weeps and pride laughs with scorn,

Is the spot where Switzerland's union was born."

At the end of the two hundred years of struggle with the Habsburgs the Swiss confederation became an asylum for republican ideas in the midst of monarchical and feudal Europe. Whereas in neighbouring states, the aristocracy, and the hereditary princes maintained their authority, in the land of the Swiss the burghers, the peasants — the common folk — held the reins of government.

To the three original cantons there were added nineteen bringing the total number up to twenty-two in 1815 when the Swiss Confederation and Swiss neutrality were recognised and proclaimed by the famous Congress of Vienna. The year 1848 and 1874 are also landmarks in the history of the Swiss Republic, a new federal constitution being introduced in the former year and revised in the latter. The document of 1848 transformed the Swiss Confederacy of independent States into a Federation of twenty-two Cantons. The document of 1874 completed the centralization of authority and to-day Switzerland is a Federal Republic, in which the Cantons are sovereign so far as their sovereignty has not been limited by the federal constitution.

And the remarkable thing about this unique development of confederation and subsequent federation is the fact that it has been brought about by people of three or four distinct races

speaking different languages, French, German, Italian and Romansch. Certainly no one will deny that Switzerland presents one of the finest examples in all history of the Democratic Ideal. As Eugene Ramert has declared, "Switzerland exists because the Swiss people will it, their only incentive is the freedom they enjoy. Other countries exist by the bond of race and blood."

The organisations represented here to-day are unique in that they comprise citizens who hold allegiance to two great Democracies, the Republics of Switzerland and of the United States of America. It is of interest therefore in this brief study to take note of some of the striking points of similarity in the political organizations of the two countries. I said a little while ago that Switzerland is a Federal Republic of Cantons that are sovereign insofar as they are not limited by federal constitution.

The Swiss Constitution like the American is a grant of powers, the federal government having only such powers as are granted to it. We have in America forty-eight states which are paramount within their own reserved fields of jurisdiction. The same is true of the twenty-two Swiss Cantons. Both countries have written constitutions. The federal government in each country consists of a Legislature, an Executive and a Judiciary and in each country the federal legislature is divided into two houses, in the United States, the Senate and the House of Representatives, in Switzerland the Council of States and the National Council. The Swiss Council of States, or upper House, contains two members from each Canton, the United States Senate has two representatives from each State. Each Republic has a President and a Vice-President. In striking contrast to the Presidency of the United States however, the Chief Executive of the Swiss Republic is plural, a Federal Council elected by and acting for the parliament. Switzerland is the ancestral home of the initiative and referendum. In the revised constitution of 1874 the referendum was extended to federal law which makes it possible for thirty thousand Swiss voters by petition to prevent the federal Legislature from adopting a measure until the people have had an opportunity to pass on it. The initiative applies to the Swiss Canton governments and it may be used also as a means of proposing amendments to the Federal Constitution. In America the referendum was first utilized in the adoption of State constitutions after the Revolution and has been extended in recent years to ordinary law making in several of the forty-eight States of the Union.

(To be continued).