

Four languages and one harmonious entity

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FOUR LANGUAGES AND ONE HARMONIOUS ENTITY.

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 "Raeto 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. The Swiss are also entitled to include among their ancestors some 110,000 Helvetians, who after their honorable 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 neighboring 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. Today, 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 these 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 neighboring 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.

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FORTIFICATIONS IN SWITZERLAND.

During the four years of the World War the Swiss army, watchful and ready, manned the extensive front in the south in face of the belligerents. Since then Switzerland has not neglected the training and equipment of her militia. In the last few years especially she has shown, by the allocation of considerable sums of money, that she is afraid of no sacrifice in order to carry out properly this task involving her neutrality and integrity.

Among the measures taken we must above all note the comprehensive defensive works created in recent years. More than 100 million Swiss francs have been spent on these works. The construction of these fortifications gives evidence of a thorough study by the military authorities of plans for national defence and for the best utilisation of natural topographical obstacles. The alpine chain which traverses the country from end to end, had earlier been strengthened by fortifications to serve as a central rampart. These works are already well known, namely the central massif of the St. Gotthard defences and the St. Maurice lines of resistance, which bar the western entrance to the Rhone valley. Both these systems of fortifications have been considerably extended, and in this connection it must be remembered, that this small country enjoys a great reputation throughout the whole world in the spheres of engineering and building, and especially in tunnelling. It can thus be understood how fortifications have arisen here, designed to make proper use of the native rock and which, with their modern armament, are impregnable. Finishing off the central alpine system of fortifications we have the last strategically important point, the gap called the Sarganser Gate, which forms an opening in the alpine wall to the East. Here, as a counterpart to St. Maurice, great defensive works have recently been constructed.

Besides this systematic construction of fortifications in the centre, frontier works have been built everywhere. Actually every possible point of ingress which is strategically important has been made sure and further work is constantly being done to complete this protective belt. Switzerland has provided these lines with an excellent modern armament and given the greatest attention to the reliability of the building technique and the materials used, which are generally on a foundation of native rock. Similar care has been bestowed on the training of the garrisons, who add to their skill in handling their weapons an unconquerable enthusiasm for the defence of their country and an ardent love of their native land.

A comparison with the terrain of Poland as we saw it in the recent war operations there provides a striking contrast; for the broken nature of the Swiss topography accentuates the evident advantages enjoyed by the defence in this mountainous country, whereas in Poland extensive plains offer no obstacle to an advance by motorised troops, except in the case of heavy rains; the Swiss roads and tracks pass through mountain ranges and