

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 16 (1951)  
**Heft:** [2]

**Artikel:** The tragedy that stirred Europe  
**Autor:** Cupelin, Reginald  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942717>

### **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:** 19.11.2024

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

## NEWS OF THE COLONY

### OBITUARY.

Mrs. J. L. Chamberlain (Kaponga).

The death occurred at the Hawera Hospital recently of Mrs. Marie Regina Chamberlain, a well-known member of the Swiss community in South Taranaki, who had resided at Manaia Road, Kaponga, for 30 years.

Born in Switzerland 62 years ago, Mrs. Chamberlain in 1920 married Mr. J. L. Chamberlain, who had lived at Manaia and Kaponga before returning to Switzerland to be married.

Mrs. Chamberlain, although of retiring disposition, was a highly respected member of the Swiss community and a regular attender of St. Joseph's Church. She was always a willing helper at any functions connected with the Church or the Swiss community. She is survived by her husband, five children, Messrs. J. L. D. Chamberlain (Kapuni), C. F. and E. E. Chamberlain (Kaponga), Mrs. E. Steiner (Mahoe) and Miss A. Chamberlain (Kaponga), and two grandchildren.

Requiem Mass at St. Joseph's Church was attended by a very large congregation, including Swiss from all parts of Taranaki. The funeral was conducted by Rev. Father Breen, Eltham, and the pall-bearers were Messrs. J. Steiner (Mahoe), D. Luond (Awatuna), J. Chamberlain (Kaponga), D. Chamberlain (Kakaramea), L. L. Ancombe (Kaponga), and J. Robson (Kaponga). The funeral cortege consisted of over 70 cars, and there were many floral tributes.

May she rest in peace.

## THE SWISS TRADES UNION MOVEMENT AND COMMUNISM

By PIERRE BEGUIN.

The Swiss "Union of Syndicates" is a powerful body which represents the greater part of the working class movement in this country. There are indeed a number of Christian unions and unions of radical tendencies, but the vast majority of Swiss trade unionists belong to this single influential Union of Syndicates which is capable of bringing considerable influence to bear in political as well as professional life.

There has been no counterpart in Switzerland of the internal dissension which has occurred during the last few years in the trades unions movement of so many other western countries. In Switzerland the Communist leaders have been unsuccessful in capturing leading positions in the trades union movement, and there has been no breakaway under Communist inspiration, from the trades union movement. In this respect the situation in Switzerland is not very different from that in Great Britain.

This has been shown once again at the tri-annual congress of the Swiss Union of Syndicates which has just taken place in Lucerne, where the very important question came up for discussion whether the Syndicate should join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions.

In 1946 the Swiss Union of Syndicates joined the World Federation of Trades Unions, in obedience to the wish which the leaders in all countries of the trades union movement have always cherished, to preserve an international workers' united front. But even then doubts were expressed whether it was possible to organise fruitful and harmonious co-operation between the free western trades unions and the strictly government-controlled trades unions in the peoples' democracies of Eastern Europe. But all the same we joined; we took this risk. But as our trades unions leaders have just stated in Lucerne, the experiment was a complete failure. The

Communists very soon succeeded in taking over a dominating part in the World Federation of Trades Unions and of making this body completely subservient to Soviet policy. And for this reason the free trades unions of the western countries decided to leave the World Federation and to set up a genuinely democratic supra-national trades union organisation.

This left Swiss trades unionists with the task of deciding whether their national organisation would join the new international body. This question was discussed at length and in great detail in Lucerne, and the Communists had ample opportunity to put forward their point of view. They cannot claim that the decision which was finally taken was arrived at without full investigation and complete objectivity.

The result was that the Swiss trades unions decided by 325 votes to only 22, to join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions. This was not only a clear majority. It was a crushing one. A crushing victory of progressive thought over revolutionary tendencies. The Swiss working class have now shown by voting in this way that they think no more reforms are necessary; they have shown that they will have nothing to do with totalitarian methods.

The decision was taken in full freedom of mind, and it will strengthen the position of the socialist party and also the present position of the trades unions chiefs. On the other hand it will prevent the Communists from continuing their penetration of working class organisations, and so will reduce their influence. The Swiss working class movement is healthy and united, and we have good reason to be thankful that it is so.

## THE TRAGEDY THAT STIRRED EUROPE

By REGINALD CUPELIN.

As thousands of men and women climb mountains of their own or other countries during the summer there will be much talk about joys and dangers of mountaineering, which now claims clubs all over the world.

When dangers are discussed, conversation will inevitably drift to the subject of Whymper and the Matterhorn and the most famous mountaineering disaster of all time.

More than threequarters of a century after it occurred, aspects are still coming to light of the full story of that tragedy—a tragedy that stirred Europe, caused Queen Victoria to ask the Lord Chamberlain if mountaineering could be lawfully banned, and brought forth the thundering "leader" on mountaineering in "The Times," which demanded: "Is it life? Is it duty? Is it commonsense? Is it allowable? Is it not wrong?"

In 1865, Edward Whymper, a young London engraver, had made seven unsuccessful attempts to climb the Matterhorn, that giant obelisk which rises above Zermatt and the summit of which lies on the Swiss-Italian frontier.

On July 14th, Whymper at last climbed the mountain from Zermatt; simultaneously, an Italian party, led by one of Whymper's former guides, Jean Antoine Carrel, failed to climb the peak from the Italian side. Whymper's victory was short-lived.

During the descent the youngest member of the party, a youth named Hadow, slipped, shot off into space and dragged with him two of the other amateurs in the party—the Rev. Charles Hudson and Lord Francis Douglas—and one of the guides, Michel Croz.

There were three others in the party, Whymper and two Zermatt guides named Taugwalder, who were father and son.

The rope broke between the four falling men and the remaining three; and Whymper and the Taugwalders were left clinging to the rocks, watching their companions sliding to death over a precipice thousands of feet high.

There were two immediate public reactions to the accident. One was the declaration that mountaineering was a very rash business, this view arising from the fact that the general public then knew little about the sport.

The other reaction was a scurrilous campaign carried out on the Continent by sensational newspapers alleging that Whymper had "cut the rope." They did not explain how he could have done so in the circumstances, even had he wished to.

These stories, seen to be without foundation by all who considered the facts, gradually died down.

Certain points were commented on during the following years, however. One was that Whymper gave up serious mountaineering in the Alps immediately after the accident. The report of the interrogation of the Taugwalders, carried out as a matter of course by the Swiss authorities just after the accident, was kept secret until 1920, eight years after Whymper's death.

Most curious thing of all was that the rope linking Lord Alfred Douglas with elder Taugwalder—the rope that broke—was the weakest of three used by the party.

Many of the Zermatt guides accused Taugwalder of responsibility for the accident, though in what was never clearly indicated. It was felt by many members of the climbing fraternity that Whymper had not told all he knew about the accident. The danger of creating an "international incident" was generally accepted as most likely reason for his reticence.

For more than 80 years men who climb mountains have talked of the Matterhorn disaster, even after the mountain lost much of its old terror and was being climbed by dozens of people every day in the summer.

Three films were made about the accident, books were written around it, but when Edward Whymper died in 1912 it seemed unlikely that any further light would ever be shed on the disaster.

Then, in 1932, Lord Conway of Allington, one of the great climbers of the later Victorian age and a man who had known Whymper well, published his autobiography, "Episodes in a Varied Life," a book which began the Matterhorn argument over again.

For in it Lord Conway said of Whymper: "He always told the story in exactly the same words, whether in his letter to 'The Times,' in his lectures and his book. That story was very carefully written and revised.

"The late Dr. G. F. Browne, once Bishop of Bristol, who in his turn became President of the Alpine Club, told me not many years ago that he was the only living man who knew the truth about the accident and that the knowledge would perish with him, as it has perished"—Bishop Browne having died in 1930.

"It appears that he was at Zermatt at the time of the accident," Lord Conway said. "Whymper came to him for advice as to how much of the story he should tell."

So here, nearly 70 years after the accident, was the first authoritative statement that the full story had not appeared in the published records.

But Conway went further. After suggestion that two or three strands of the rope might have been severed beforehand without anyone's knowledge, he added: "The end of the rope engraved in 'Scrambles' (Whymper's 'Scrambles in the Alps') is not the one where the breakage occurred. It is the right rope, but not the broken end."

So Conway, it appears, believed that one of the Taugwalders had in fact tampered with the rope.

Now, in a book published in Switzerland and written by Charles Gos, the well-known Alpine historian, there has appeared yet another footnote to the Matterhorn disaster.

Gos says that, shortly before he died, Whymper went to the Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge, the Oxford don who became the greatest Alpine historian of all time, and told him the full story of the accident. When such a meeting took place—if it ever took place—we do not know.

But anyone who follows up the story of the Matterhorn disaster will find a curious letter sent by Whymper to Coolidge as early as 1883.

That letter is in Switzerland and, so far as I know, has never been published. It is interesting for it holds a number of implications which might solve some of the queer questions that the Matterhorn disaster still raises.

"Many thanks for your frank and manly letter," Whymper wrote. "It has grieved me much to think how gravely I must have been misunderstood by you whom I always respected and have grown to look upon with a warm feeling of regard.

"My trouble now is the thought of the pain it must have cost you to write to me on the subject. Let me remove the sting of it at once by saying that as I never had the least mistrust in you and was wholly ignorant of your mistrust in me I heartily rejoice that this mistake has been rectified and earnestly hope that ours may be a life of friendship."

Coolidge was then editor of "The Alpine Journal," and it seems that he may have learned the full story of the broken rope, possibly from his acquaintances at Zermatt, possibly from Bishop Browne.

It would probably have appeared to him that Whymper had been gravely negligent and he may have written, in his blunt way, to ask what Whymper's position was. Whymper evidently explained and "the fiery lamb," as Coolidge was sometimes called, was forced to reply in his "frank and manly letter."

What seems certain is that the full story of the Matterhorn disaster has not even yet been told.

—"Yorkshire Evening News."

## THE CAT WHO CLIMBED THE MATTERHORN

The exploit of Mitza, the cat who climbed the Matterhorn by accident, is still being discussed by tough Alpine climbers on both sides of the mountains. Mitza, who is seven months old, belongs to Josephine, who works as a cook in a hotel at the foot of the Matterhorn.

"The hotel," explained David de Krassel in a talk in "The Eye Witness," "which is the last outpost of civilisation at the foot of the Matterhorn, is the usual starting point for parties attempting to climb the mountain. Thus the kitten has watched many dawn departures from her hotel home, and has heard many queer stories of mountain adventures from the guides who never fail to visit Josephine in her kitchen when their employers stop at the Belvedere. Thus perhaps it is not surprising that Mitza decided one day to see for herself where it was that all her human friends went, and who knows what dreams she may have had of a mouse El Dorado as she set out one morning following the footsteps of her favourite young guide, Edward Biner, who was taking a party of climbers up the mountain.

"But she was not able to keep pace with the men and was soon left behind. At about midnight, Mitza gave another guide quite a nasty fright, for he took her at first for the ghost cat which is said to guard the treasure which lies hidden in the Lake of Schwarzsee at the foot of the Matterhorn. Meanwhile Josephine, the cook, realising that her beloved Mitza was missing, had sounded the alarm; and as the cook at the last outpost of civilisation is a very important personage, there was no lack of helpers. The first report came from the caretaker at the Solway Hut, 12,500 feet up the mountain, who informed the cook that Mitza had reached his hut.