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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

The Swiss Federal Railways, in addition to the abolition of the surtaxes on the goods traffic over the Gotthard railway, propose, as from January 1st next, to issue "kilometer" books to the residents of the adjoining valleys in the cantons of Grisons, Ticino and Uri, i.e., the fares will be based on the distance alone, the existing mountain surtax being dropped.

\*\*\*

An unusual accident befell Mr. Häfliger-Fournier from Santodoz (near Montreux) who was caught in a thunderstorm on the outskirts of a wood. He opened his umbrella, when he was immediately struck by lightning, the latter being evidently attracted by the steel rod of the umbrella as it passed into the earth via the victim's watch chain. His wife, who was on the point of giving him her arm, received severe burns, from which, however, she is expected to recover.

\*\*\*

A German aeroplane with five passengers on board, in trying to make a forced landing last Wednesday night (July 22nd), was totally wrecked just outside Baden. The pilot, who, owing to engine trouble, left Stuttgart three hours late, was flying to Munich. He was caught by a gust of wind, lost his bearings in the darkness and was driven into Switzerland; when circling round Zurich he imagined he had reached Munich.

\*\*\*

Temporarily blinded by the glaring lights of another automobile, M. Clovis Bertrand, the manager of a Lausanne garage, misjudged the width of the road, with the result that his car fell over the bank into a stone quarry, where it overturned. The unfortunate driver was subsequently extricated from his precarious position and transported to the infirmary at Morges, where he died the following day from his injuries.

\*\*\*

The large Dough and Paste Factory Spanioli in Martigny (Valais) was completely destroyed by fire last week, together with large stores of corn. The fire is said to be due to a short-circuit.

**Pour le 1er Août. Les insignes de 1925.** — A l'instar de ce qui a été fait les deux années précédentes, on vendra le 1er août, dans toutes les parties de la Suisse, villes, villages et hameaux, des insignes de fête. Le produit de la vente et les recettes provenant des cartes postales du 1er août sont destinés aux sourds et aux sourds-muets.

En 1923 et 1924, les insignes de soie de la Suisse orientale, excellents produits des fabriques de broderies de Saint-Gall, ont trouvé un écholement facile comme symbole de notre fête nationale. Cette fois, le comité s'est adressé à l'industrie de la Suisse romande. La maison Huguenin frères et C°, au Locle, chargée de l'exécution de l'insigne, a livré une médaille attachée à un ruban rouge et blanc qui fera certainement la joie de tous les amis et partisans de notre fête nationale. Un vigoureux jeune homme parcourt le pays le bâton de voyageur à la main; dans le fond, des lignes délicates esquiscent les montagnes où des feux de joie illuminent la croix fédérale vers laquelle s'élève, dans le geste du serment, la main droite du pèlerin. L'image est un symbole touchant de l'amour de la patrie et de l'enthousiasme pour le jour de notre fête nationale, dont la date est inscrite en trois langues autour de la croix. Nous souhaitons à cet insigne en métal le même succès qu'à ses devanciers. (*Communiqué du comité de la fête nationale*)

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

### Switzerland.

There is probably a number of Swiss-by-marriage in our Colony here, and they will be much obliged by getting some authentic information of their new home-land. The following from the *Daily News* (18th July) will therefore be of particular interest to them:—

This well-known country is in Switzerland. The natives are called Swiss, from their habit of swishing people and adding in the date.

Switzerland is largely populated by Alps, which is what they call their mountains, because they don't know how to spell mountains. There are also large numbers of condensed milk cows who nestle among the chocolate trees.

The principal inhabitants of Switzerland used to be the famous family Robinson, but some years ago they were wrecked on a desert island, since when they have used no other.

The mountains (or Alps) are very high, but you should see the hotel bills, some of which have snow on them all the year round.

Switzerland has no navy to speak of, and that's why I am not going to speak of it.

It is in the snow-covered Alps that the famous St. Bernard dogs are found. These curious creatures carry a barrel of brandy tied round their necks, which assists them to discover lost tourists. That, at least, is the popular superstition, but the real facts are that the lost tourist smells the brandy and thus tracks down the dog, who then leads him home.

The passes through the Alps are inhabited by large quantities of old men and young women. The former make a living by advising the tripper to beware the pine tree's withered branch and to keep his eyes skinned for the awful avalanche.

On the other hand, the young women are in the habit of entreating the traveller to stay and rest his weary head upon their chests. This healthy competition serves to keep the prices down; but the young women generally win.

The highest mountain in Switzerland is Blanmengen, or something like that. It is frighteningly high, and even the best disinfectant doesn't seem to do any good.

### Matterhorn on the Move.

*Evening Standard* (27th July):—

The Matterhorn has begun to move and threatens to engulf a number of villages and hamlets situated on the Italian side in the Val Tournanche at an altitude of 6,000 feet.

Small avalanches of stones fell in this district about a month ago but no notice was taken of them by the villagers.

When, however, large crevasses appeared on the mountain side, and great boulders began to tumble down to the valley, snapping trees in their path like matches, the villagers appealed to the authorities at Turin for aid.

The inhabitants of Ussin, the largest village in the Alpine valley, and a dozen smaller villages and hamlets directly in the path of the landslide, have been sent down already to Breuil, as the authorities considered that their lives were in danger.

There were heartrending scenes when the villagers, mostly poor peasants, had to evacuate their homes. They refused to leave them, declaring to die there, and the soldiers were ordered to employ force to make them leave the danger zone with their cattle and chattels.

Engineers and a detachment of Alpine troops are now encamped near the threatened spot.

The melting of the winter snows and the recent heavy rains in the Alps are the causes of the landslide. It is the first time in history that the solid frowning Matterhorn, which is 14,775 feet high, has moved.

The above may give some people an unduly alarming picture, and some who may have seen—and who has not?—pictures of the "Cervin" may be appalled at the idea of that mighty giant falling or moving to destruction. The facts are, of course, that a very disastrous landslide may occur, many of them even, without making much of an impression on the mountain itself, without being noticeable even to the casual visitor afterwards. However, our sympathies will go out to those unfortunate people whose homes are being threatened, and all Swiss who know something of the tenacity with which mountain people cling to their homes will understand what terrible sorrow such calamities produce.

### Funeral March of the Ice-fields.

*The People* (12th July):—

Locked in the crawling ice-river of the Glacier de Bossons, six human bodies have for over half a century been making their last journey down Mont Blanc. They are the corpses of the ill-fated members of the Corkindale-Bean expedition which perished in the Alps in 1870.

Scientists, measuring the slow progress of the glacier, declare that the ice may be expected

to deliver up its dead this summer. Last week the watchers saw the vague outline of an embedded ice-axe, and almost any day now the last grim discovery may be made. Here is the story of that remote and awful tragedy whose last chapter may at last become known.

All Switzerland is watching the lower end of the famous Glacier de Bossons for the remaining six members of the Corkindale-Bean expedition, who, for fifty-five years, have been travelling slowly with the vast ice-mass towards the valley below Mont Blanc.

It is hoped that upon these bodies, which will have, even after the lapse of over half a century, every appearance of life and perfect preservation, will be found the full story of the disaster which overtook the intrepid party on their way back after conquering the giant snow-clad peak.

Something is already known of that catastrophe. The body of Dr. Bean was recovered, and upon it was found a poignant diary describing the coming of death on the blizzard-swept heights above Chamonix.

One entry, addressed to the doctor's wife, ran:

September 7, Evening.

My Dear Bessie,—We have been two days upon Mont Blanc in the midst of a terrible tempest of snow. We have lost our way, and we are in a hole dug in the snow at a height of 15,000 feet. I have no hope of descending.

Perhaps this notebook will be found and sent to you. We have nothing to eat. My feet are already frozen, and I am exhausted. I have only the power to write a few words. I die in the faith of God and in thoughts of love for you.—Yours for ever,

This last communication from a man doomed to spend years frozen in the heart of a glacier is scrawled in a shaky hand—the hand of a slowly freezing man. Since then the funeral march on the ice fields, with its freight of dead men, has been moving towards the valley of Chamonix at the rate of 500 feet a year.

Whether the five guides and the remaining members of the party are now to be recovered, and whether upon these stiff bodies will be found the story of their end, may be known within a few days.

Forty years ago the relics of the Hamel Expedition were found in the lower end of this same great ice mass.

Dr. Hamel was a Russian naturalist. He set out in the face of every sort of warning from experienced Swiss guides who foresaw dirty weather. Eight guides unwillingly followed him.

At 600 feet above the Grand Crevasse the feet of the roped file of climbers started an avalanche of new snow. The whole party were engulfed under 200 feet of snow and swept into a crevasse of the glacier.

The bodies of these men and their notebooks were all given up by the glacier.

In 1864, two Austrian counts, accompanied by Swiss guides, set out to master the peak. They reached the summit, but on their way down, while crossing an ice bridge over the Grand Crevasse, the snow gave way, and they were precipitated into the yawning depths below.

For 20 years after this fatality there lived at Chamonix a widow in deepest mourning. She never spoke to any of her fellow-guests in her hotel. And every day she went to the edge of the village from where she could contemplate the majestic peak, which had snatched from her life's happiness.

The unhappy countess lived for one event—the recovery of her husband's body from the ice. She spent thousands on watchers, whose task it was to explore the vast glacier depths for signs of the dead man. But he was never found, and now his widow rests in the little cemetery of Chamonix.

No less tragic was the fate of the party which set out in the same year as the ill-fated Corkindale-Bean Expedition. It consisted of a Mr. and Mrs. Marks and a Miss Wilkinson, and a number of guides.

The party were nearing the summit when Miss Wilkinson became exhausted. Two guides were detailed to return with her. A few minutes after the party had separated, wild shrieks were heard. Mr. and Mrs. Marks and their guides hurried back. The other party had disappeared through a hole in the snow.

They were seen 50 feet below on a ledge of ice, battered, but alive. But when the ropes were lowered to them, they were found to be just a few feet too short.