

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: - (1927)
Heft: 294

Artikel: A pioneer in alpine tours [to be continued]
Autor: Ashton, Arthur J.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688494>

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: 13.08.2025

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

wenn irgend ein Gebiet der Wissenschaft ange-Beachtung wert zu sein? Wenn es dem Nationalrate daran gelegen ist, seinen Kredit zu untergraben und den Gegnern dieser Art von parlamentarischer Arbeit und demokratischem Nutzefekt beweisendes Material zu liefern, so braucht er nur in gleicher Weise fortzufahren. Er darf dann bloss nicht erstaunt sein über den Erfolg.

Wasserbau.

Wenn auf der Generalversammlung des Schweizerischen Energiekonsumentenverbandes nachgewiesen worden ist, "dass der Dampfbetrieb bei gleichzeitiger Abdampfverwertung bedeutend billiger ist als die Energieerzeugung durch Wasserturbinen," so erhält diese Tatsache ihre Ergänzung im positiven, für die Schweiz sehr wichtigen Sinne durch die Gründung einer Versuchsanstalt für Wasserbau in Zürich. Der Bundesrat ist für die Ausführung, verschiedene Kantone, Elektrizitätswerke und andere Interessenten haben die Summe 400,000 Franken zur Verfügung gestellt, so dass die Versuchsanstalt nach vieljährigen Vorarbeiten endlich gesichert sein dürfte.

Zu einer Zeit, da die Verbesserung der Wärmekraftmaschinen, die Erhebung von Zoll auf ausgeführten Strom durch Italien dazu drängt, die Elektrizitätserzeugung mit Hilfe von Wasserkraftanlagen so rationell wie möglich zu gestalten, ist es wichtig, dass wir wissen, wie wenig wir noch von den Bewegungsgesetzen des Wassers wissen, und nichts unversucht lassen, um das Gebiet des Unbekannten und Zufälligen zu verringern. Solange die Konkurrenz noch nicht gross war, der Ausbau von Wasserkraften verhältnismässig billig zu stehen kam, konnte man sich mit den bekannten Ergebnissen begnügen. Heute sind wir zur Erforschung aller in Betracht kommenden Faktoren gezwungen, wenn wir unsere Position wahren wollen. Mit Erhebung eines Zolles ist auf diesem Gebiete nichts zu machen. Man muss sich auf eine wertvollere Art helfen: durch Verbesserung der Leistung! Das ist gutschweizerisch und im höheren Sinne auch europäisch, denn wir gelangen zu neuen, fruchtbringenden Ergebnissen, die allen zugute kommen, während ein Zollschatz nichts Neues schafft, sondern eher dazu verleitet, im Alten zu verharren, als sei man im Zustand einer Unveränderlichkeit angelangt, die nichts anderes mehr erwarten lässt.

Felix Moeschlin in 'N.Z.'

EXPERT PRAISE OF THE SWISS ARMY

VIEWS OF U.S.A. GENERAL.

By Captain A. A. E. GYDE.

A book is about to be published in America which would surely give great pleasure to any Swiss reader who likes to think his nation is appreciated by others. The book is called "Statesmen and War," and its author is General Palmer, a highly placed Officer in the Army of the United States. But since the book is not likely to be published in London, nor for that matter in French or German either, some note of it may be interesting here.

It seems that not long ago the Government at Washington felt that in view of the pitiable state of its country's unpreparedness for the Great War, it would be advisable to consider some plan of organisation to meet the possibility of War in the future. The Government accordingly appointed a Commission to collect expert advice upon the subject, and this body summoned General Palmer to advise them. A leading politician on the Commission named Wentworth was so struck with the wisdom of General Palmer's views that he recommended the Officer's address to be published in book form, and himself wrote a preface to it.

General Palmer's advice to his countrymen is, in essence, this: to turn their eyes to Switzerland and to admire the excellence of the Swiss military machine. He is at some pains to explain to his readers many things which are obvious enough to any European. He compares the organisation of an Army which expects to take the offensive immediately on the outbreak of War with the organisation necessary for an Army which is solely intended for national defence. The aim of the former, he explains, is to hold great formations of troops at strategic points near the frontiers facing the possible enemy. Some such organisation as that of the French Army is necessary for this, holding an enormous mass of the country's youth in arms for a considerable period, so that a great standing Army may always be ready to strike literally at a moment's notice. But for national defence, he points out, it is not necessary to keep a large standing army under arms. It is sufficient to make and maintain a machine which is the nucleus of an army, a 'skeleton' which can be

manned by civilian soldiers previously trained when the time of danger comes.

Having prepared a background for American eyes, unused to these problems, General Palmer proceeds to explain the Swiss methods, too well-known to need repetition here. He makes no attempt to disguise his opinion that the system is the ideal one, and moreover that Switzerland is the ideal Democracy! From page to page the book is one song of praise for the Swiss national character and ideals, and for the organisation of the Army which could defend those ideals in time of need. He ends his book with the suggestion that a Committee of American Officers should proceed forthwith to Switzerland to study the Swiss Army in more detail. Indeed, his enthusiasm seems to have made such effect upon his Commission that even now he may be walking beneath the impressive castle walls of Colombiers, or maybe through that magic medieval street of Thün!

Appreciation is not generally counted as an American *trait*, and so this praise should be all the sweeter. At least, the Swiss professional military ear should blush with pride and gratification!

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

In connection with the scholastic programme the following lectures were given by the students during last week:—

Miss Gertrud Gaugler, Olten: "Michael Angelo." Miss E. Keller, Winterthur: "Holidays in the Grisons" (part 2). Mr. August Trueb, Aarau: "My Impressions of Scotland." Mr. Yves Jéquier, Neuchâtel: "Nation and Civilisation." Mr. Emil Schubiger, Solothurn: "Trips in the Neighbourhood of Naples." Miss Andrée Montandon, Neuchâtel: "France and Poland." Miss M. Siegenthaler, Zug: "William Wolfensberger." Miss Elizabeth Kunz, Oberhofen (Thunersee): "Spring." Mr. Ernst Suter: "Management of Swiss State Railways (Barrier-System)." Mr. Otto Boesiger, Langenthal: "The Importance of the Spanish Language." Mr. Charles Noll: "Temperance Legislation." Mr. Ernst Wendel, Berg: "What Claims the Commercial Profession Requires." Mr. Karl Rau, Zurich: "The Origin of the English Language." Mr. Alfred Kaegi, St.

A PIONEER IN ALPINE TOURS.

By ARTHUR J. ASHTON.

One morning last June I left my comfortable quarters at the Hotel Stampa in Casaccia, and having buckled on my rucksack, began the ascent of the Maloja Pass en route for Pontresina. When halfway up the zigzags, I became aware of the sound of drum-taps, proceeding from the heights above, and in a few minutes a band of merry children, boys and girls, swung rhythmically past me, the drummer in the van and two sober-looking pedagogues bringing up in the rear. They responded courteously to my salute, but a bend of the road soon hid them from my view, and the drum-taps sounded fainter and fainter as the little band emerged from the windings of the path into the broad and smiling Val di Bregaglia.

My salute was not only the conventional sign of fellowship in travel, it was also an act of homage to Rudolfe Töpffer, who was the pioneer among schoolmasters of holiday vagabondage in the Alps for the children of the schools and whose "Voyages en Zigzag" have often served as a stimulus to my own Wanderlust.

It is now more than a century since his initial enterprise. He had been forced by eye-trouble to abandon the career of landscape painter, had qualified himself for the work of teaching, and in 1823 was assistant-master in a boarding-school in Geneva, his native city. The tour of 1823 was carried out strictly "according to plan," the daily stages being fixed beforehand without regard to contingencies, by the strategy of the headmaster, who did not accompany his forces into the field. It was a strenuous and joyless campaign, entailing both fatigue and hardship, and when two years later Töpffer set up a school of his own he wisely abandoned the cast-iron plan and introduced an element of desultoriness (*flânerie*) which converted what had been a toil into a pleasure. A general line of route was adopted, but the successive stages were left to the needs and circumstances of the moment and were often decided not by the fiat of the chief but by the vote of the whole assembly. The result was entirely satisfactory, and the record of their holiday tours in Töpffer's "Voyages en Zigzag" gives us the picture of a merry and devoted band led by a youthful-spirited master, enduring sometimes cold and sometimes hunger but never down-hearted nor ever at a loss how to spend a day of rain in the most God-forsaken inn or mountain chalet.

The "Voyages en Zigzag" cover a period of about twenty years (1823 to 1842) and are nearer to the days when mountains were regarded as "horrid excrescences, reflecting small credit on the Architect of the universe," than to the sophisti-

cated Switzerland of the present. Railways had not yet crossed the frontier, but a steamer had begun to ply on the lake of Geneva, and as our travellers were in most tours eastward bound they generally made the first stage by boat from Geneva to Villeneuve, though Töpffer more than once wonders if he is justified in exposing his precious charges to the risk of being hurled to the clouds by the boiler-tubes of a machine at high pressure. The tours lasted from two to three weeks, and were generally bisected by a stay of a few days in some civilised centre to allow time for laundry work and general replenishment. The most strenuous was the Tour de Mont Blanc, when eight passes were crossed in seven days. The most ambitious was the tour to Venice in 1842, the outward journey by the Grimsel, the Oberalpe, the Bernina and the Stelvio, and the return by the Simplon—"une entreprise colossale pour nos jambes, colossale aussi pour une commune bourse, ladre et recalitrante." "La bourse commune" is personified by Töpffer, both in description and in drawing, as a buxom lady glowing with health and embonpoint, conveyed against her will on to the steamer at the outset, only to be brought back after three weeks, emaciated and in extremis. The other lady of the tours is Mme. Töpffer, who in all their discussions as to ways and means stands out for a little extra comfort in the shape of a carriage or gondola or a plenteous meal and is, therefore, regarded by "La bourse commune" with an unfriendly eye.

The little band numbered about twenty, and its members were drawn from various countries, England, America, France, Germany, Greece and Egypt (for dating from Pestalozzi's fame of Swiss educational reform had gone out into all the civilised world) and the journal of every tour begins with a character sketch of each. There is no attempt to drill them into uniformity, their individualities are allowed full play and we read how each one reacted to the experiences of the day. There is Bryan who reverts to the savage life, swarms up trees in pursuit of birds, scales rocks, fights with insects in the air, and after a prolonged digression returns to the party, holding a snake by the tail or with his hat (once round but now polygonal) full of butterflies; Grey, tripping along on his toes, wearing a "chapeau de haute forme" which, having attained a fabulous and irremediable shape, is discarded at Lucerne, probably to become one of the most curious objects in the local museum; Harrison, who is the philosopher of the tribe; and Verdet, a Provencal, who is the orator. Another, unnamed, has the happy idea of leaving Geneva with all his letters written, dated and addressed, to be posted from their various halts, each one with the information that he is well, that all the rest are well and that they are getting on famously. And, to take a last

example, there is Leonidas, a "touristicule" of eleven, "fated to pass through some famous Thermopylae" whose haversack is generally carried by an older pupil and who, thus left free, runs and leaps and catches butterflies. An indispensable member was David, Töpffer's servant, who acted as major-domo, procuring sleeping-places "where there were no beds and food where there were no provisions."

The march from Samoens to St. Gervais over the Col d'Anterne will serve to illustrate not only their procedure but their prowess. It took place on the second day of their 1837 tour. They had slept on the previous night in three different houses in Samoens and were awakened at 3 a.m. by a fusillade of pebbles against the windows. An aged but hefty mare was hired to carry their provisions for the day. At six they were joined by two guides, a porter and a mule which relieved the weaker members of their haversacks. A march of four hours brought them to the first plateau, from which the chalets of Anterne are visible. There the aged mare and her conductor refused to go further and it needed all Töpffer's eloquence to prevent the mule and the porter from joining the retreat. After the chalets there was a stiff climb over rocks and snow to the col, and there on the leeward slope the sack was unloaded and they feasted on cold leg of mutton, bread and wine, and for dessert enjoyed the view of Alpine splendours. Guides and mule were then dismissed and they descended to Servoz in three divisions: first, the vanguard of stalwarts; then the main body of moderate and limping walkers, captained by the chief; and at last, the rearguard—the American boy Bryan, who, in pursuit of "serpents" and what he calls "parpaillons," covers twice the necessary distance. About halfway a short halt is called to allow time for a haversack, dropped by an unwary member, to be fished up from the bottom of a ravine. At last, after ten hours of marching, Servoz is reached and at the inn there is beer for the thirsty and forgetfulness of their weary limbs. Servoz, however, is not the goal, for they decide to push on to St. Gervais for the night. A char-à-banc, driven by a veteran with a wooden leg, is requisitioned for Madame Töpffer and the weaklings, while the others continue their march, feasting their eyes on Mont Blanc in its evening glory—all save Bryan, who still lifts stones and shakes bushes in the hope of prey and gives not a glance to the mountains. Darkness overtakes them, they miss the path and are involved in a frog-haunted marsh, but finally the dusty high-road is reached and they are soon sitting down to supper at the Baths of St. Gervais, and in view of their unusual exertions it is unanimously resolved that the march shall not be resumed until the afternoon of the following day.

(To be concluded.)