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PRESS GLEANINGS on SWITZERLAND.

The Lötschen Valley.

"Piccadilly," July 20th.

The Lötschen Valley, in the Bernese Oberland, is one of the strangest regions of Europe. There, customs, modes of speech and fashions of dress exist in a state that has remained practically unaltered for five hundred years.

There the Middle Ages live on, quietly, eerily remote from the world of to-day, though the mouth of the valley lies but a few miles from some of the most famous winter and summer resorts of Switzerland.

Goppenstein, the little station at the southern end of the Lötschberg Tunnel, is the signpost to the valley. From there a road winds between the mountain spurs until, dramatically, two huge rock projections jut from either side to form a fitting gateway for the Lötschenthal.

For nearly six months of the year, Lötschen Valley lies locked in the snows of winter. But for the four vivid months of its summer, it makes up for this enforced seclusion. Every village of the valley has its little pageant of a religious procession on Saints' days. The children strew the most brilliant alpine wild blooms in the narrow alleys between the chalets.

Ferden, Kippel, Wiler, Ried, Eisten, Falleralp and Gletscherstafel—the Lötschen villages, lie like beads upon a string along the rugged track that winds beneath the very eaves of the mountains into the hidden heart of the Alps.

Excavations made in the Lötschen Valley reveal that, despite its secrecy and seclusion, some of its villages were inhabited in Roman times. There is reason to believe that these earliest dwellers there were legionaries of Caesar's armies who deserted, or became lost, during his famous crossing of the Alps.

Until about five years ago only a bridle path led to the valley, but this, for a good part of the way, has now been supplanted by a narrow but serviceable carriage road. The Lötschen home is a rough chalet whose one wide gently-sloping roof covers living quarters, stables, stores and hay lofts.

The men of the valley wear suits of dark-hued homespun and black felt hats. The dress of the women is almost sheer Tudor, with full black skirts reaching to the ankle, and a quaintly shaped close-fitting bonnet.

The Lötschentalers live almost entirely on their own produce. Farming is done in the fertile patches between the grim mountain rocks. Wool is taken from sheep and goats, carded, spun and woven into cloth.

At first these shy, kindly peasants may be reticent towards a stranger. But they quickly "thaw" and show themselves to be among the most warm-hearted and hospitable in all Switzerland.

Aerial Alpinists.

"Dublin Evening Herald," July 22nd.

Passenger aeroplanes are to be used for the first time this summer in a regular sight-seeing service above the Jungfrau, Matterhorn, Eiger, Mont Blanc, and other famous peaks and glaciers of the Swiss Alps.

Capt. Mittelholzer, the well-known Swiss "ace," has been commissioned to pilot one of the planes, which are Fokker of the latest three-engine type.

In the event of the failure of one engine over the mountains the other two will be sufficient to carry it without any loss of height for a distance of 1,000 kilometres.

The flights will be organised from Zurich, and from the fine new aerodrome especially designed for aerial tourist traffic which has just been opened at Lucerne.

A Swiss Village School.

"Christian World," July 18th.

I have a very great admiration for the educational system of Switzerland—so far as my knowledge of it goes—just as I have for those of France and Germany. My strong impression is that for specialised training, whether on the humanistic or the scientific side, no nation can beat us; and again, that in primary education, especially in the London schools, we can bear comparison with any; but that somewhere in the middle we fail badly, and the level of general education among our middle-class folk is lamentably bad, as compared with that of the continental nations. I have never before had an opportunity of getting into a Swiss school because I have always come here in holiday

time—and I seized my chance. Without any introduction or appointment, I walked one morning into the school-house at Grindelwald and asked to see the head master; and I was more than rewarded. There is a freemasonry in every land among those who are interested in education; and Herr D. was most kind and courteous, answered all my questions, and gave me the freedom of his school for the rest of my stay. I made full use of it.

The school is what we should call a mixed secondary school. The ordinary school period in Switzerland is nine years, as ours is; but it is from six to over fifteen, instead of from five to over fourteen (our compulsory period). But there is practically no social distinction, at any rate among the younger ones; the child of the wealthy hotel-keeper learns alongside the shepherd's child. I had an impression that all education up to university standard was free in Switzerland; but I was wrong. It depends on the wealth of the local community. In the towns it is free, but here the fee is forty francs a year (£1 12s. 6d.) excluding books. There are five classes in this school, but only three masters; which means that frequently two classes, at two different stages, must be kept going at once, which is not an ideal arrangement. I was specially interested in the language teaching, because it is there that we British are so defective. I found that some of these boys and girls, none of whom were over fifteen-and-a-half, were learning three besides their mother-tongue, which is Swiss German, and which is as different from pure German as, say, Dutch is. German and French are obligatory; English is optional, but almost every one of them takes it, and is moreover, intensely eager over it, as I saw for myself. I was delighted, until I was told the reason. Here in Grindelwald, no young person can expect to get into any situation in shop or hotel, or become a porter, or a cab-driver, or even a road-sweeper, without some knowledge of English!

I was allowed—even invited—to go to several English classes. Herr S., the master, spoke excellent English, and was familiar with English ways—he had spent a year or two in various parts of England and in London, and he had even bicycled from London to Edinburgh. (What energy and what initiative!) The children themselves delighted me. They were so fit, physically and mentally. The girls impressed me specially—some of them were really beautiful, with their dark eyes and their two long plaits of black hair. And they all worked so hard while they were at it, and I hardly think it could have been to impress me. Not that they were abnormal or priggish—they cribbed from each other at the blackboard in the most healthy way. From beginning to end, every word was in English—all the directions and corrections—and their accent was wonderfully good. I talked to them about London, and gave them all a general imitation (though I realized afterwards that the only "wonders" I had offered them were our black fogs and our traffic blocks). Finally, having congratulated them on their valiant and successful efforts to pronounce our difficult "th" sound, I brought the house down by reciting to them the famous tongue-twisting verse about "Theophilus Thistle, the thistle-sifter, who sifted a sieve of unsifted thistles." It was translated for them, and written on the board, and they copied it into their text-books, and I left them struggling with it, much hampered by attacks of laughter!

WATERWAYS of the 'SWISS SAHARA.'

Switzerland contains a semi-tropical desert—a region in which rain rarely falls, and which would be almost as barren as the Sahara but for an ingenious and fantastic system of artificial irrigation that has caused it to blossom like the rose, transforming its higher tracts into pastures and its lower levels into fertile vineyards and vegetable gardens.

This region is situated in the Valais plateaux lying at the foot of the snow peaks, high above the Rhone.

None of the water of the torrents finds its way on to these plateaux; it goes straight to the Rhone, roaring and foaming in the depths of gorges which are always precipitous and often inaccessible.

The region is, in short, a canyon country. Left to themselves, the plateaux and the slopes lying between the gorges would be barren wastes. Parts of the district, even now, present to the casual eye many of the characteristics of a desert only partially reclaimed. The problem is, and has been for hundreds of years, to tap and use the abundant water of the glacier torrents for the fertilization of the plateaux and slopes instead of letting it run to waste at the bottom of the canyons. That problem is solved by means of the remarkable artificial watercourses known as the *bisses*.

The very word *bisse* is probably quite new to many readers of this article: its etymology is uncertain. One may pay many visits to Switzerland without ever hearing of a *bisse*, though *bisses* have existed from a date lost in the mists of antiquity; but there is, at any rate, one *bisse*—and that a very striking one—which the tourist may visit without diverging very far from the beaten track.

He can pick it up at Montana, in the midst of a clump of trees, not very far from the big hotels; and he is likely to find it, even at that point, very different from any stream that he has ever seen before.

This watercourse is, perhaps eighteen inches broad and an equal number of inches deep, and is confined in an artificial channel as carefully banked as a canal. The water is icily cold, and quite opaque with dirt; even if the sun is shining on it, its surface refuses to sparkle. It flows silently, strongly, evenly, without a ripple; and in the gloom of the trees it has the weird effect of liquid swiftly-moving jet, or of a long black snake wriggling through the undergrowth.

Following the *bisse* through the pines, the tourist soon turns a corner and enters the canyon. Far below him, hidden from view by graduated pine-clad ridges, he can hear the glacier torrent storming its way to the Rhone; but his little aqueduct—filled, as he is presently to learn, from the melting snows of that same glacier—creeps along the face of the canyon, following all its bends, and turning innumerable corners, so that only a short stretch of it can be seen at any given moment. Beside it, but outside it, runs a footpath so narrow that two men could not possibly pass on it.

So far the foothold is good, and the drop is not sheer. Even if the position is a little suggestive of the tight-rope, there is nothing to make the normal healthy man feel giddy; but, as other corners are turned, the view alters and the difficulties begin.

The gorge is narrowing; its walls are becoming barer and more precipitous. At the point at which it was entered from the plateau, a man who tripped and fell off the narrow track would probably be able to arrest his descent by clutching at the dwarfed trees or shrubs growing on the ledges beneath him; but the vegetation gets scantier, the slopes steeper, and the ledges rarer. The sensation of tight-rope walking is intensified, and points are presently reached where the rocky cliff is so hard and steep that no channel for the water could be excavated in it.

Here a trough has been laid—such a trough as might be made by putting a number of packing cases end to end. This trough—always placed at a gradient which admits of the steady, but not too rapid, downward glide of the water—runs along the face of the precipice, being fastened to it by strong iron clamps. The place of the foothold, which necessarily comes to an end, is taken by a narrow plank, laid parallel with the trough and overhanging a profound abyss into which no living man has ever descended.

These are the *mauvais pas*—the bad passages—of the *bisses*. At first they are short and fairly easy to traverse, but gradually they become longer and more alarming—all the more alarming and perilous because the cliff in places, actually overhangs both the trough and the plank, so that even a man of medium height needs to stoop a little in order to get by.

The foothold is good enough unless, as sometimes happens, the plank is slimy or coated with ice. Mountaineers often walk on it boldly, using it as a short cut to the starting-place for some ascent. Peasants, too, frequently descend along it from the higher pastures, carrying bulky loads of hay on their backs; but they have to be very careful. Every now and again, one of them failing to crouch low enough at some *mauvais pas*, unexpectedly brings his load of hay into collision with the overhanging cliff, is jerked off his feet and

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off the plank, and falls hundreds of feet—to disappear for ever!

The average sightseer, when he has passed one *mauvais pas* and perceives that there are more to follow, generally feels that he has seen enough. Caution will probably prompt him to move slowly sideways, with his face to the cliff, clinging to the edge of the trough for safety, though the icily-cold water may spurt up his sleeve in a very disconcerting manner. Or fright may induce him actually to step into the trough, taking the risk of the bottom falling out under his weight, and so wading uncomfortably back to safety, there to inquire, at his leisure, who built this strange aqueduct and what purpose it serves.

Who first constructed it he will probably be unable to ascertain, for the point is one about which the antiquaries are at variance, some believing the *bisses* to be of Roman origin, others attributing them to the Saracens, and others again giving the Swiss themselves the credit for them.

He will learn, however, that there are about three hundred *bisses* in the country, that their total length is about two thousand kilometres, and that there are references to them in legal documents as early as the thirteenth century. He will have little difficulty in satisfying his curiosity as to the important part they play in the economic life of this Swiss Sahara. The full story is told in an interesting book just published at Lausanne: "Au Pays Des Bisses," by Auguste Vautier (Spes).

The problem has already been stated: it is that of supplying water to a dry and thirsty but potentially fertile soil in a country in which rain rarely falls. The only water available for the purpose is that contained in mountain tarns and glacier torrents. These, therefore, must be tapped, the points at which their waters are diverted being known as the "*têtes de bisses*," and varying in altitude from seventeen hundred to two thousand seven hundred metres. Thence the stream must be carried down and taken hither and thither to the waste places which require it.

Such ambitious canals as irrigate, say, the Punjab or the Egyptian Delta, are obviously impracticable in the Alps. Only the most minute of watercourses can be constructed on steep mountain ridges and along the flanks of rugged gorges. Even then the rocks often have to be blasted with dynamite in order to make way for the channel, and places are constantly encountered where no excavation is possible, and troughs such as those already described have to take their place.

The average *bisse* does not hold very much water, and most of them leak, but their flow is rapid. In the more modern *bisses* from five to eight hundred litres of water flow past any given point in a second; and a single neighbourhood is often served by several *bisses* at various elevations. The Commune of Visperterminen, for example, has no fewer than fifteen *bisses*; and in the gorge which descends from the Plaine Morte to Sion there are three, the highest watering the Montana plateau, and the lowest fertilizing the vineyards on the northern side of the Rhone valley.

The older *bisses*, though their structure was wonderfully ingenious, are relatively crude, the troughs being made by following the trunks of trees. The later *bisses*, of course are more elaborate; and there is an official report of the Sion Society of Agriculture, published in 1908, showing the trouble which it is sometimes thought worth while to take, and the expense to which Communes or municipalities are prepared to go in order to establish them.

The length of the Lienne *bisse* at Sion, of which particulars are there given, is fourteen kilometres; and the original estimate of the cost was three thousand four hundred pounds. The work, however, was found more difficult and costly than had been expected. Eight tunnels, of a total length of nine hundred metres, had to be made, in order to provide a passage for the water. Trenches were made for long distances in the solid rock, and large quantities of dynamite had to be used for blasting purposes.

At numerous points the channel had to be buttressed with masonry; and it was necessary, in places, to enclose the whole aqueduct as a protection against avalanches. The total cost amounted to six thousand eight hundred pounds and the annual cost of upkeep and repairs was about eighty pounds, but the *bisse* was considered well worth the outlay.

Repairs and upkeep are only less important than construction, and have always been so regarded. A statute of 1346 imposes on the inhabitants of a certain commune the obligation of "cleaning out the *bisse* every year in such a manner that it shall be in good condition in the middle of April." And both jobs are sometimes very dangerous.

The workmen employed on the task of clamping the troughs to the rocks often have to be lowered from the tops of high cliffs; and it is said that the Commune of Mund once had to buy a rope four thousand feet long for the purpose! Constant inspection is, of course, required; and there are places where an inspector is required to walk the whole length of the *bisse* every day, fetching a tally from the opposite end as a proof that he has duly accomplished his task.

The *mauvaise planche* on the same *bisse* is

hardly less trying to the nerves. Those of us who have walked these planks on fine summer days would certainly hesitate to do so at any other time; and the workmen on whom that duty falls take their lives in their hands—and often lose them.

More than one "guardian of the *bisse*," has fallen off a plank to his death, and places are pointed out at which a whole series of fatal accidents have occurred. At Mund, in the Haut Valais, the workmen sent to repair the *bisse* always insist that the *curé* shall accompany them in order that he may minister the consolations of religion to anyone who meets with a fatal accident; and there is a point on the *bisse* of the Torrent Neuve where the people of Savièze have erected a little chapel to Saint Margaret, in order that they may kneel and pray for the saint's protection before walking the plank and return thanks for their preservation when they get safely back.

Not all the *bisses*, of course, present these terrors. There are even places where the banks are the favourite promenades of tourists. Those to the south of the Rhone are much less romantic and exciting than those to the north of it.

The Federal Government recognizes their value and subsidises them to the extent, in some cases, of as much as forty per cent. of the cost.

The water in a *bisse* is not everybody's property, to be used at any time by those whose thirsty lands require it. In some communes it is supplied gratuitously; in others there is a tax corresponding to our water-rate, to be paid; but in all communes alike, the supply is under the control of a public authority analogous to our Water Board, and is the subject of a complicated network of regulations.

There is water enough for everybody in the *bisse* only on condition that these regulations are scrupulously observed. After it emerges from the gorge down which it has been so carefully guided, it is gradually split up into a number of small channels—the smallest of them are no larger than gutters—and there are tiny sluices, placed at intervals, by the opening of which the water may be made to flow on to this, that or the other proprietor's land.

The hour at which each sluice may be opened, and the length of time for which it may be kept open, are settled by the local Water Board. Every peasant is charged with the duty of keeping his little section of the *bisse* in good repair; and if he fails to do this—or if he is caught opening his sluice too soon or keeping it open too long—he is brought before the authorities and fined.

(Reprinted from "The Wide World Magazine.")

THE WORLD JAMBOREE.

On the occasion of the Boy Scouts Coming-of-Age World Jamboree which is to be held at Arrow Park near Birkenhead, about 400 Swiss boys from German, French and Italian Switzerland will travel by special steamer across the channel and by special train to Birkenhead, where they will join 50,000 other Scouts from 21 parts of the British Empire and 41 other nations who will be taking part in the greatest gathering of youth since the world began.

Mr. Fritz Scheurer from Basel, who is in charge of the Swiss Contingent, has been received by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Paravicini, who showed his great interest in the Boy Scout Movement by kindly promising to be present at the great Rally and Pageant of Nations which will take place at Arrow Park on Friday, August 2nd, in honour of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales.

After the Jamboree these Swiss Boys will travel to London and stay the 12th and 13th of August at the Empress Hall at Earls Court, where a Hospitality Camp has been installed for parties of overseas and foreign scouts during their stay in London before and after the actual period of the Jamboree. The Swiss contingent will leave again for Switzerland in the evening of the 14th of August.

MAX GYSLER.

BUNDESFEIER FILM "A TRAVERS LA SUISSE."

It is with the greatest regret we have to announce that, owing to the unexpected refusal by the Middlesex County Council to permit a cinema performance in a tent, we shall not be able to show the famous N.S.H. film "A Travers la Suisse" on the 1st of August.

As we have gone to a great deal of expense to show this film to the London Colony we are now trying to extend the period of the loan of it until September, when we intend to arrange a performance at a suitable Hall in London. We may also be able to offer the Colony a compensation for this disappointment in the hope to have with us our celebrated writer Mr. Felix Moeschlin to explain the film personally. Mr. Moeschlin has just completed a very extensive tour in North America where he has shown and explained the film in dozens of Swiss Colonies with tremendous success. Committee of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

EFFUSION of the "SILLY SEASON."

London, 1^{re} de Hundstage.

Mi liebi Trudle!

Du wirscht nüt däge ha, wenn ich Dir min Brief dasmol druck schicke, Du chunnscht jo de "Swiss Observer" sowieso regelmässig vo mir über nachdem ich en verhaue, ich meine verduet ha, also schpahr ich mer erschtens s'Porto für de Brief und zweitens verdien ich villichet öppis, mit andere Worte s' git am End zwo Flüge uf ein Chlapp.

Die grosse Herre wo nämlich jetzt am Rueter sitz vo d'r Adminischnation händ sich entschlosse, dass üser's Kolonie-Blettli a viel grösseri Verbreitig ha sött als effektiv de Fall ischt. Sie händ proklamiert (nid plagiert) dass vo jetzt ab fuf tusig Nummere under die englische Schwiizer, das heisst d'Schwiizer z'England inne, usegschickt werde muessid und zwar zu widerholte Mahle um z'probiere obs denn nid mögli ischt an aschtändige Leserschreis z'konstruere, aschtändig im nummerische Sinn; nid im moeralische, s'erscht schpielt a wichtigeri Rolle für's Exischiere von ere Ziefig, s'zweit überloht me am gschiedschte üseren Herre Kolonie-Geischliche, die sich gwüss au kei Mueh spared ihres beschte z'tue, wenn's au manchmol schwer fallt.

Ich hoffe natürlich starch, dass die Sach ischlaht, denn cha mir de Herr Redacktor (use mit em "C") liebe Setzer, suscht denkid die Leser Du sigst a uz'Hemmtal f'd Schuel gange) für mi Epischtle au e chli meh zahle als bis dato de Fall gsi ischt, wo me alles numme het sölle us purem "Patriotismuss" tue, "free, gratis and for nothing" wie de Engländer seit. Derigi ungenützig Lütli gits natürlil nid vil, das gseht me scho am Gsichtli vo üserem Kolonnieblettli a, d'Uszehrigh schtaht em scho lang i de Aengli drum grieffed jetz die Herre Doktore zu'nere Gwaltkuhr, nützt's nüt so isch es ebe blamaschig für üsi Landschaft, Manndli und Wiebli, dass sie nid schenerös guog chönd si, jöhrli öppe vier halbi Chlönni am Bier-Rauch-oder Gamble- und andere Vergnügigs-Budget abzwacke.

And last but not least, me cha dem Herr Begründer und Usegeber vom "Swiss Observer" an nid verneble, wenn em de Geduldsfude efange riechst, schliessli unmesucht ischt nume de Tod und de choscht s'Lebe und mit dem isch es bald uis, wenn eine nur vom Luftschnappe lebe sött.

So, jetzt will ich aber vo öppis anderem plappere, suscht wird's Dir am End so truhrig z'Muet, dass Du vo Dihm Erschaarte, zwöelf Frenkli abluftscht und da übere schickschid und das möcht ich nid ha, denn mer müsstet denn no a Wuche länger spahre für üsi Usschtüür und so lang chan ich nümme warte!

Also los emol, letzschti han i d'Regent Schtreet abgloffe (lies mer jo kei "S" wo's "P" "schtoht") und bi denn i die neu Undergrund-Vorhalle vo der Piccadilly-Tube (kein Vogel) abgescigt. Trudeli, Du häschst kei Ahnig was üserin da für Fahre usgsetzt ischt, zum guete Glück isch sie z'lang vor eme Schaufenster gschtande wo Dame-Badkoscstümmli usgschellt sind, und wie sie denn umegluget hät, isch Din Seppeli 'd'Eskaleitere' abgruntscht, wil er uf emol Angst übercho hät und g'fürchtet hät, es chönnt em goh wie chürzli emene junge Sohn Albion's de vonere holde Schwizer-Maid bis i'd Schwiz glockt worden ischt, wo ihm en Huufe Chlamotte söllde abhande cho si bei Weib, Wein und Kartenspiel, nid Gang. S'dümmst bi dere Gschicht isch natürlil das, dass de Jüngling gemeint hät d'Stühzähler vo Stocknington mached ihr Abgabe zum Zweck vo Liebesreise für verblendeti Gmeindsagscheltli. Es isch dem Schprössling guet cho, dass er en griseene Rechtsawalt verwürsch hät, de hät kniffig s'meisch vo d'r Schuld uf üseri verfuhrerische, abwesendi Landschaft abgshobe, und de Herr Magischtrat (nid z'verwechle mit eme Magischer) hät wohlwollend eis vo sine beide Auge zuedruckt und das galante aber wenig mutige Biibli, uf Probation gescheltt, mit andere Worte d'Bestrafing 'bedingt' erlasse.

Was üs fuxe mues bi dere Affaire isch das, dass a Vertreterin vo üsem holde Dameflohr i so nes schiefs Liecht gscheltt worden isch, ohni dass sie Glegeheit gha hät umeznuehe, und ich sege ebe grad wie der Engländer au: "Right or wrong, its my country," und us dem Grund han ich Dir de Schmarre nid privatbrieflich brichtet, sondern dur d'Mordsuffag vom "Swiss Observer" damit au viel anderi a chli "Plasier chöi ha" und e Lehr drus ziend dass: "What's sauce for the Gander, is not sauce for the Goose," das isch d'Ufassig vo dem Herr Rechtsgelehrte de ebe i dem Fall sin Klient hät muesse us der Suppe lufpe, dafür wird er zahlt worde si, (wenn nid isch es mer grad wurscht) aber was mer weniger wurscht ischt, ischt Tatsach," dass er's uf Choste vonere abwesende Schwizer-Maid gmacht hät und somit ischt er ebe au nu "bedingt" en gentleman i sihm Bruef.

So, mi liebs Karlineli, de nöchsch Brief schrieb ich d'r wieder mit em Bleischiff und direkt denn chan ich nim Schnürli friere Lauf lah; was ich denn wider z'brichte ha, goht anderi nüt a, suscht wirscht mer am End untren und liescht mer au so en unstable Galöri uf. Also, bis mer 'careful' und vertrau.

DIHM SEPPELI.