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A Travers La Suisse.

Once again the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London Group, has invited its members and friends to a film exhibition, and we are delighted to report that St. George's Hall, Tottenham Court Road was packed to its fullest capacity on Saturday, March 7th, not a seat was vacant, when the popular President of the Society, M. A. F. Suter greeted the audience with the following words:

"In the name of the London Group of the N. S.H., it gives me the keenest pleasure possible to welcome you in such large numbers. To-day we are going together on another of our film excursions through Switzerland, and I have no doubt that we shall again enjoy the little tour.

On these places and scenes which stir our hearts with pride that they are of our country and which probably most of you know more or less intimately I will not comment in the manner of a Cook's guide or a Baedeker. Let the artist, the photographer, tell us the story in his own graphic way.

But there is one film among them, that of the St. Gotthard Railway, which I consider requires more comment. Here we have not a wonder of nature, but a veritable marvel of human enterprise, ingenuity and achievement; a monument of the imposition of man's will over the wild forces of nature.

But, before we start, let me sound a little word of warning. In these days of ultra-rapid scientific advance; in these days of great Film Stars, like Charlie, Douglas and Mary; and of films in which whole armies are employed, we are by way of becoming very spoilt and intolerant. We are apt to grumble at the slightest imperfection and to think in millions where, not so long ago, ten thousand was a mighty figure.

In our machine-made age in which one factory will make more boots in one month than the whole of the country can wear out in a year, things have turned somewhat topsy-turvy. To the purveyor of entertainment it is nothing to spend as much on the construction of a film town at Hollywood in three months, as was absorbed by the piercing of the St. Gotthard massif in 8 years.

Is it to be wondered at that we are just a little frightened at times as to what the future will bring us? Whether in a few years we shall belong to the unemployed? It all means that it becomes increasingly difficult to remain in harmony with life, the true art of living, and to recognise the true meaning of life and the true purpose of things.

This is where our simple pictures come in. The mighty serenity and aloofness of our Alps, the brooding heat over the Southern Lakes, the green countryside with contented cows in the rich meadows, these are balm to our work tired eyes, a healing medicine, to our unquiet minds. If these pictures, in their simplicity, have the power to detach you for an hour from the everlasting worry of modern town life; and if, through their impressive sobriety, we shall be more able to judge the morality of the ultimate purpose of a St. Gotthard line as compared to a Hollywood Film town, then they will have fulfilled their purpose and they will have made us better patriots."

The lights were then lowered and a series of views of the town of Zurich were shown. All around one could hear exclamations: "Do you remember that? Have you seen this? Look! there's Charley's house, and oh, have a look, that's where I went to school," etc., etc., and when the picturesque little town of Rapperswil, with its imposing castle was shown, my wife gave me such a dig in my ribs that it nearly knocked me out, saying: "Look! there is the place where we had lunch, and back to my mind came sweet memories of happy times spent in that part of the world only last September."

Many more pictures of Eastern Switzerland and the Swiss Italian Lakes followed, accompanied by the oh's and ah's of a delighted audience, and let me tell you the young ones were by no means the only ones who gave vent to their admiration. To many of us who watched those pictures they have brought back untold tender memories of our youth, when we were able to roam about amongst the beauties of our home land, oh those were care free happy times, and how many of us would give a fortune to get a glimpse of it again.

Before the film of the St. Gotthard Railway was shown, Mr. A. F. Suter, gave a most vivid and interesting exposé about this marvellous monument of human enterprise, which we think is of general interest to all our readers, and we therefore publish it in extenso.

THE ST. GOTTHARD LINE.

The St. Gotthard was habitually crossed by Pilgrims as far back as the thirteenth century. A hospice was erected on the summit for their comfort and safety.

Later, the packtrains of the merchants from Lucerne, Zurich and Basle followed, in search of trade with the rich cities of Lombardy, Milano, Bergamo and Como.



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Before 1700 a definite courier service was organised by a private family; the courier took, on horseback, four days for the journey from Zurich to Milano. In 1799 this service was transferred to the Helvetic Republic, but four years later the Republic was dissolved; the Cantons again assumed sovereignty and made their own postal arrangements.

In 1834 the road across the pass was complete, and by 1842 a daily service with a post wagon accommodating eight passengers was in regular operation and in due course was taken over by the Federal Post Office.

The great development of railway engineering about the middle of last century then made possible the project of tunnelling the mountain barrier for a railway line, but it was not until 1872 that such a project was ready for execution.

Actual Construction.

The construction of the TUNNEL was started at both ends simultaneously in the summer of 1872; on February 29th, 1880, the two tunnelling parties met in the centre of the mountain without the slightest deviation from their calculated course.

An average of 2,500 workmen had been employed per day and the average rate of progress was first 18 feet and later 24 feet per 24 hour day.

Tremendous difficulties had to be overcome and it looked at times as if the project would have to be abandoned. But the contractor, Louis Favre of Geneva, carried on with indomitable courage; in fact, he sacrificed his life to the task. Eight months before the completion of the tunnel he fell a victim to the close and heavy air and died of heart failure in the arms of his companions. The cost of the work, estimated at £2,000,000, amounted finally to £2,700,000.

Running almost due North to South, from Goeschenen to Airolo, the St. Gotthard tunnel is slightly more than 9½ miles in length and was the longest tunnel in the world until the opening in 1906 of the Simplon tunnel, over 12 miles long. The Goeschenen entrance lies 3640 ft. and the Airolo entrance 3735 ft. above sea level. The tunnel passes through the mountain at a level no less than 6076 ft. below the summit of the Castelnhorn, the highest peak immediately above it. The dimensions of the tunnel are 28 ft. wide, 21 ft. high; it is thickly lined with masonry throughout and laid with a double line of tracks.

Ten years after the beginning, on May the 27th, 1882, the new line was opened; the total cost of construction was nearly five million Pounds, a good deal beyond the original estimates. The completion of the work was recognised universally as an epoch-making achievement, in view of the magnitude of the scheme and the enormous difficulties which had been successfully and ingeniously overcome.

The St. Gotthard line immediately took its place as one of the great traffic arteries of Europe, both for passengers and goods. It soon gained a deservedly high reputation for the thoroughness of its organisation, the excellence of its services and the comfort it offered to the travelling public, while no other line in the world could compare with it for grandeur of scenery.

It was, of course, run by steam. The innovation of electric traction had in the meantime been tested and applied to some smaller, new, lines in Switzerland, so that by 1913 the decision was taken to convert the St. Gotthard Line also. The Swiss Federal Railway authorities were anxious to render themselves independent of coal which had to be imported as far as possible. Exactly a year later, the outbreak of the great European War, during which Switzerland was completely surrounded by belligerents and thus

cut off from the world, strikingly vindicated the wisdom of this viewpoint. Incidentally, the cost of the construction co-incided with that of famine and high prices of raw materials.

Electrification.

Since 1924 the whole line from Basle to Chiasso, together with the branch line from Zurich, has been exclusively operated by electricity derived from water power which is so abundant in Switzerland. Utilisation of water power, however, necessitates costly machinery and the erection of huge works for the storage, transport and conversion of the natural power into electricity. The magnitude of such schemes is scarcely inferior to that of tunnelling a tremendous mountain barrier.

Two large Power Stations have been erected to supply the current to the St. Gotthard Railway, one at Amsteg near the Northern entrance, and the other at Piotta, about five miles from the Southern mouth of the tunnel. The two together form a complementary unit in this way that Amsteg, being a river station, supplies the greater current during the summer when the river is in flow, whereas Piotta draws its water from an "accumulation lake" situated about 3,000 ft. above the line and is therefore in the position to generate supplementary power during the period of water scarcity, in winter. These two stations, together with a smaller, auxiliary one at Goeschenen which supplies the current for the ventilation of the tunnel, generate throughout the year a constant daily force of 34,000 H.P. equivalent to 190 Mill. Kilowatts in round figures.

We hardly need to mention that these wonderful and most interesting views were universally admired and heartily cheered. It was truly a field day for all the little ones, with glowing eyes they followed the trains through valleys, tunnels, over bridges and hills, and how they all longed to be taken by Daddy and Mummy one day to see their beautiful country of which they have heard so much and seen so little until now. On leaving the Hall I overheard a conversation between two small boys, apparently one English and the other one Swiss, the latter saying in a rather superior tone, "that belongs all to my Dad." Yes, God, bless you little one, it still belongs to all our Dads. And we are going to keep it, are we not?

The pictures depicting Winter Sports in the Grisons created much hilarity, and peels of laughter greeted some of the extraordinary clever performances. Much admired were the various scenes of the different festivals such as the Narcissus Fête at Montreux, the Fête des roses at Geneva, and the Landsgemeinde in the Canton of Appenzel.

All too soon it came to an end, but nobody grudged to make room for the "second house" which I hear was just as well attended. No small part of the success of the afternoon, is due to the musical programme which was provided for by Mr. Newman, who seems to have an unexhausting stock of Swiss gramophone records. Unfortunately, Monsieur R. C. Paravicini, Swiss Minister, was unable to attend, on account of illness, but the Legation was adequately represented by Monsieur de Bourg, 1st Secretary of Legation.

I feel certain, that I speak in the name of all those who attended this beautiful film exhibition, when I tell the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London Group, how very much everyone enjoyed it, how very much we love our dear country, and how very much we wish to say to you, thank you Gentlemen, from the bottom of our hearts and please do let us soon have another show please.

St.