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THEIR SWISS TOUR WAS A "DARING ADVENTURE" — 59 YEARS AGO.

By DEREK MEAKIN.

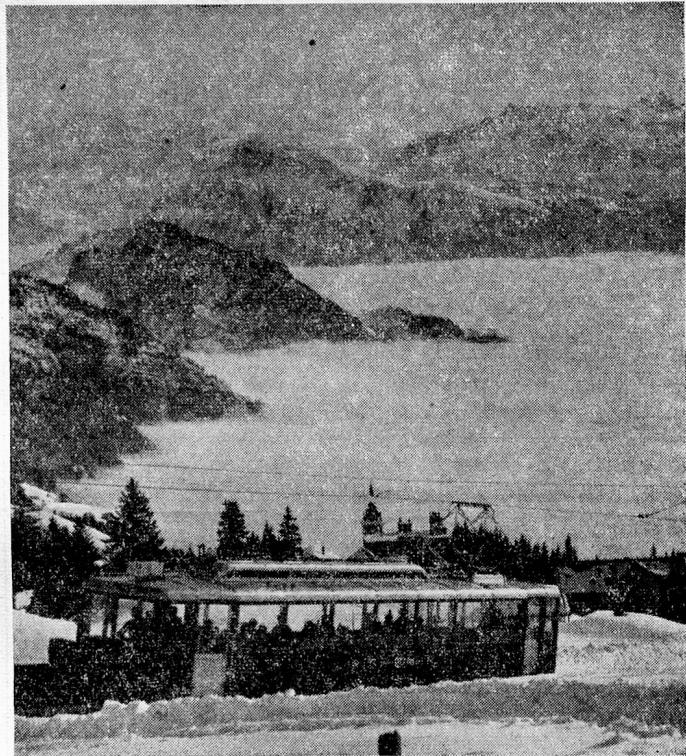
Exactly 59 years ago the first large party ever to leave Manchester on an organised tour to Switzerland steamed away from the city with a rush of excited cheers and whistles echoing in their ears.

There were 74 of them in the party, including 39 women wearing the flowing, voluminous skirts and wide-brimmed hats of the day. It was organised by the Manchester Touring Club, forerunner of the dozens of travel agencies that now send thousands of Mancunians on Swiss holidays every year.

An anonymous member of the M.T.C. who left behind a record of what happened on the trip said the decisions to make what many people then took to be a daring expedition was taken at an enthusiastic meeting held in the Religious Institute in Corporation Street.

Such were the hazards of travelling in the centre of Manchester even in those days that the writer of the narrative was late for the meeting. In his hurry he jumped on a tram and "as a natural consequence a horse fell down in Market Street, blocking the tram-lines."

When the great day arrived the six dozen adventurers, accompanied by relatives and well-wishers, arrived at the station for the first stage of their journey to Harwich. They travelled by three saloon carriages and the journey took six hours. To-day, British Railways cannot do it in less than 7 hours 10 minutes.



A scene just as common in 1892 as to-day — the Rigi railway overlooking a sea of mist in the Swiss Alps. Below the clouds, looking uncannily like the waters of a lake, lies a fertile valley with towns and villages.

Dawn was breaking as they set forth for the Continent. On the boat they were given the choice of either beef steak or mutton chop and coffee for breakfast. They all considered it "a fairly good meal" as well they ought for it only cost them two shillings each.

Continental Surprises.

If beef steaks were nothing unusual for the travellers they soon found more worldly surprises in store for them. The splendour that greeted them in their first continental hotel, for instance, brought gasps of amazement from the incredulous Mancunians.

"The dining room was an agreeable surprise", they recorded, "and the electric light shone around in a pleasant manner."

Lucerne, to-day's No. 1 Swiss attraction to British visitors, was their eventual destination. It was the time when Lucerne was first being opened up as a holiday centre. The ring of steep walls and turrets, built to keep out undesired neighbours in the 14th century, were now turning on all their mediaeval charm to welcome the visitors who were beginning to flock from all parts of Europe to see this fairy-tale city tucked away amid the Alps.

The party from Manchester was suitably impressed. In these days the English tourist goes to Switzerland for food first and scenery second, but in 1892 scenery came first every time.

They had their share of all the beauty-spots within reach. One day they climbed the 5,900-foot Rigi, which dominates Lucerne, by Switzerland's first mountain railway, built 20 years previously. It was this railway, incidentally, that was taken as a pattern when the Snowdon railway was built, and the first rolling stock to be used on the Welsh mountain was bought second-hand from the Swiss authorities.

They did plenty of sightseeing. But when the day's excursions were over, what then? Lucerne was only beginning to develop into the gay holiday centre it is to-day. All the luxurious hotels, the elegant Casino and numerous entertainments that vary according to the season were mostly still a dream.

The Mancunians' chronicler gives the answer in one long sentence :

"When you are tired out with the pleasure of the day, it is a great treat to hire a boat at eventide and gently push out into the bright clear lake, then lean back, light your cigar and meditate."

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Swiss Were "Serene".

These early English tourists, like the millions more who were to follow them later, revelled in showing the foreigners they were English and proud of it. The Swiss, they observed, used to watch their proceedings, as they dallied around, with an air of calm serenity.

And they touched on a prophetic note that was soon to become only too true when they remarked: "We were probably looked upon as the advance guard of a troop of English tourists who would, bye and bye, swarm down upon them from Europe and America."

Yet, although the Swiss tourist industry, destined to become the most highly-powerful in the world, was at that stage only in its infancy, they found that the Swiss were far from insular.

On their way down from the excursion to the Rigi they saw something that "well tickled the fancy of those who noticed it". It was an immense sign outside a picturesque and otherwise unspoilt mountain chalet proclaiming in English to all and sundry that "GRUB IS BALM!"

The tour was a huge success and was a topic of conversation for years. So successful was it, in fact, that people began to call the Manchester Touring Club the "Matrimonial Bureau".

The writer of the tour's log observed: "The title was fully justified. Can it be denied that opportunities for arriving at a closer intimacy with others of the party did not occur daily? And were not many of the 'unattached' ones on the lookout for whatever contingencies might occur? And as a result was not the Tour a success in many other ways? Oh yes."

EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

63, Cornwall Road,
Cheam, Surrey.
14th, July 1951.

To the Editor,
Swiss Observer,
London, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

Death Traps in Switzerland.

Mr. Berenger has all my sympathy but I cannot understand why he did not adopt the obvious course of bringing an action for damages against the Hotel Proprietor whom he accuses of negligence. (We understand that a claim has been made and duly met. Ed.)

His sweeping statements and his references to "Death traps", "deplorable state of affairs", "unsatisfactory situation" and to the "good many English visitors who had suffered similar accidents" would make it appear that the Swiss Hotels are most dangerous places to visit. I wonder what the Swiss Hotels Association have to say if Mr. Berenger's letter is brought to their notice.

Highly polished floors can, of course, be a source of danger anywhere. I myself, last winter, slipped on a by no means flimsy rug in a bedroom and suffered from bruising and shock. When later I thought the accident over I came to the conclusion that I alone was to blame, I should have been more careful.

Anyway, I wish Mr. Berenger a speedy and complete recovery.

Yours faithfully,
J. SCHAD.

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