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UNDER SWISS SKIES

Just a hundred years ago Thomas Cook lost the privilege of issuing circular tickets on Scottish Railways which, in fifteen years, had been enjoyed by 40,000 people. Thwarted, he went to Paris and discussed his system of excursions with the French and Swiss railways. These negotiations led to the issue of a circular ticket to Mont Blanc, marking the beginning of continental travel for the common man. Then, at the beginning of June 1963, he made arrangements to take an exploratory party, the first-ever group tour to Switzerland.

To introduce the celebration of this centenary, the Swiss National Tourist Office organised a gala presentation "Under Swiss Skies" at the London Planetarium on 28th January. This was a most original get-together for travel agents and the press, though it was hardly a press conference since there was no opportunity for questions. But there was plenty to see and even to take away.

Following a selection of Swiss folk tunes, the audience was welcomed by Mr. Albert Kunz, Manager of the Swiss National Tourist Office in London. Next we were introduced to the hazards of the excursionist abroad. A first-hand account of the adventures of seven of the pioneers of tourism has come to light — the journal of Miss Jemima. Thanks to its contents it is possible to reconstruct the original tour, and it will be re-enacted this summer by a party of amateur actors and actresses in period costume. The members of this group, which calls itself Junior United Alpine Club, will be accompanied by the founder's great-great grandson Mr. Thomas Cook, his wife and sister.

On Monday evening, 28th January, we were able to meet the party, dressed up in their fascinating Victorian clothes, complete with a postillion sounding his horn and a St. Bernard dog. The latter's owner, Lieut. Colonel Sir Thomas Cook, J.P. (Old Thomas's great-grandson) and Lady Cook were present, as were the Swiss Ambassador and members of the Swiss Embassy.

After the "Victorian Tableau" presented by William

Cormack, we were taken on a journey along the original route by John Ebdon, F.R.A.S., who projected photographs, ancient and modern, on to the dome of the Planetarium. Extracts from Miss Jemima's revealing journal accompanied the slides.

Dr. H. C. King, M.Sc., F.R.A.S., then introduced the Planetarium presentation "Under Swiss Skies". At the touch of a switch we were taken to the Jungfraujoch. From this vantage point we followed the stars through a year's travel in barely a quarter of an hour.

Coming back to earth was something of a jolt. But our equilibrium was soon restored when we were each issued with the "traditional picnic" in the Foyer: a stout six-foot pole to which was tied a gay cotton bag containing not only rolls and a "cervelat", an apple, a box of cheese and a packet of chocolate, but also half a bottle of golden "Sire de Duin" 1961. Even an attractive paper serviette with Federal Railways sceneries was included, only one thing seemed to be missing — a cork screw. But seeing that the Vaudois wine was liberally served in glasses as well, we were able to take the bottle home intact. The party was a happy one, only the St. Bernard dog lying in his enclosure looked bored, inspite of being given a string of sausages and a veritable monster of a bone.

The actors mingled with the crowd in the Hall which was decorated with the Swiss cantonal flags. It was remarkable how Mr. Thomas Cook contrived to look like his famous forbear whose photograph was on show. How the actors will look once they are on tour — mule-back journeys, departures at crack-of-dawn, nerve-racking ascents in crinolines — remains to be seen. Good luck!

Mariann.

The London Planetarium will have as a special attraction "Under Swiss Skies" from 29th January to 21st March (Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays at 6.30 p.m., other days at 7 p.m.).



The "traditional picnic" being distributed.
(By courtesy S.N.T.O.)