

# Effusion of the "Silly Season"

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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 icy-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 bisse*," 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 Saviez 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, i' de Hundstage.

Mi liebi Trudle!

Du wirscht nüt dagege ha, wenn ich Dir min Brief dasmol druck schicke, Du chunnscht jo de "*Swiss Observer*" sowieso regelmässig vo mir über nachdem ich en verhaent, ich meine verdaent ha, also schpahr ich mer erschterns 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 an Rueder sitzed 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 Schweizer, das heisst d'Schwizer z'England inne, usegschiltet werde muessid und zwar zu widerholte Mahle um z'probieren obs denn nid mögli ischt an aschtändige Leserschreis z'konstruieren, aschtändig in nummerische Sinn; nid in moerale, s'erscht schpielt a wichtigeri Rolle für's Exischiere von ere Ziefing, s'zweit überloht me am gschiedschte üserne Herre Kolonie-Gesichtliche, die sich gwüss au kei Mueh spared ihres beschte z'tue, wenn's au manchmol schwer fällt.

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

And last but not least, me cha dem Herr Begründer und Usegeber vom "Swiss Observer" au nid verneble, wenn em de Geduldsfude efrage riechsst, schliessli unemuscht ischt nime de Tod und de choscht s'Lebe und mit dem isch es bald us, 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, zwoelf Frenkli abluftscht und da übere schickscht und das möcht ich nid ha, denn mer müsstet denn no a Wuche länger spahre für üsi Ussetzführ und so lang chan ich nümme warte!

Also los emol, letzschti han i d'Regent Schtreet abgloffe (lies mer jo keis "S" wo's "P" "schoht") und bi denn i die neu Undergrund-Vorhalle vo der Piccadilly-Tube (kein Vogel) abgescht. Trudeli, Du häschst kei Ahug was üserein da für Fahre usgsetzt ischt, zum guete Glück isch sie z'lang vor eme Schaufenster gschtaude wo Dame-Badkostümli usgscheltt sind, und wie sie denn umegluget hät, isch Din Seppeli 'd'Eskaletiere' abgruntscht, wil er uf emol Angsch überho 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 gloekt worden ischt, wo ihm en Huufe Chlamotte söll abhande cho si bei Weib, Wein und Kartenspiel, nid Gang, S'dümmscht bi dere Gschicht isch natürlil das, dass de Jüngling gemeint hät d'Stühzähler vo Stocknington mached ihr Abgabe zum Zweck vo Liebesreisi für verblendeti Gmeindsagscheltli. Es isch dem Schprössling guet cho, dass er en griseene Rechtsawalt verwürsch hät, de hät kniffig s'meischt 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'Bestrafig 'bedingt' erlasse.

Was üs fuxe mues bi dere Affaire isch das, dass a Vertreterin vo üsem holde Damefloh i so neschiefs Liecht gscheltt worden isch, ohni dass sie Glegeheit gha hät umezmuehe, und ich sege ebe grad wie der Engländer au: "Right or wrong, it's my country," und us dem Grund han ich Dir de Schmarre nid privatbrieflich brichtet, sondern dur d'Mordsufflag vom "*Swiss Observer*" damit au viel anderi a chli "Pläsier chöi ha" und e Lehr drus ziend dass: "What's sauce for the Gander, is not sauce for the Goose," das isch d'Uflassig 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 us "bedingt" en gentleman i silim Brief.

So, mi liebs *Karlinski*, de nöchschti Brief schrib ich d'r wieder mit em Bleischfitt und direkt denn chan ich nim Schnörli friere Lauf lah; was ich denn wider z'brichte ha, golt 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 SEPPOLI.