

Thrills of a mountain railway

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Malgré l'insistance de son avocat, du président de la Cour et du procureur général, Vollet refuse de faire connaître ce qu'est devenue la plus grande partie des sommes détournées, soit 200,000 francs.

De nombreux témoins ont été entendus dans cette première audience. A tour de rôle, les administrateurs de la Caisse ont déclaré qu'ils avaient la plus entière confiance en Vollet et que jusqu'au jour de son arrestation ils le considéraient comme un parfait honnête homme.

Les débats prendront probablement fin mercredi après-midi.

ON DÉCOUVRE DES RESTES HUMAINS.

La gendarmerie de Saignelégier a découvert sur les rochers de la Haute-Côte, au nord-est de Vautenaivre, un squelette auquel il manquait le crâne et la mâchoire. Ces ossements ont été découverts grâce aux soliers qui dépassaient les débris de la forêt, feuilles et mousses, accumulés depuis des années sur le corps de l'inconnu. On sait qu'une mâchoire fut trouvée, il y a quelques jours, au pied des mêmes rochers. L'enquête dira s'il s'agit du corps de Fédicien Gaufrond, disparu il y a une quinzaine d'années. On a ramassé à côté du squelette un couteau de poche et un porte-monnaie contenant 70 centimes.

LA JOURNÉE DES FEMMES DE GENEVE.

L'Union des femmes de Genève, suivant en cela l'exemple déjà donné par Berne, Zurich et Vaud, a pris cette année la très heureuse initiative d'organiser une rencontre de toutes les femmes habitant la ville et le canton de Genève, quelles que soient leur nationalité, leur profession, leurs opinions, pour s'entendre en commun de questions qui les préoccupent et apprendre, par un échange d'idées familières, à mieux se connaître et à mieux s'apprécier. Cette rencontre a été fixée au dimanche 2 juin, à 14h., au Palais Eynard, aimablement mis à la disposition des organisatrices par le Conseil administratif, et dont le jardin ombragé formera à cette époque de l'année le cadre le plus attrayant que l'on puisse rêver à cette réunion.

DISPENSIRE ANTIALCOOLIQUE GENEVOIS.

Ce dispensaire a été créé par la Société genevoise d'utilité publique avec l'aide financière du Conseil d'Etat. Il a commencé son activité en novembre 1928 et il lui a été signalé 80 cas d'alcooliques, dont 61 hommes et 19 femmes. Un certain nombre d'engagements d'abstinence ont été signés et le directeur a accompagné les malades dans quatre sociétés genevoises qui s'occupent du relèvement des buveurs. On peut comparer ces sociétés à des cliniques, et elles méritent la reconnaissance de la collectivité pour les sauvetages qu'elles accomplissent.

HOMMAGE AU "VAINQUEUR DE LA POUSSIERE."

Le Dr. Guglielminetti, de Brigue, promoteur du goudronnage des routes, ce qui a valu le surnom populaire de "Dr. Gourdon," vient de recevoir de l'Automobile-Club de Nice une plaque d'argent portant l'inscription suivante: "Au vainqueur de la poussière. Au Dr. Guglielminetti, promoteur du goudronnage des routes, en témoignage de reconnaissance, le 27 avril 1929."

VALAIS.

M. Gustave Loretan a donné sa démission de membre du tribunal cantonal valaisan dont il a fait partie pendant plusieurs décades. M. Loretan appartient pendant longtemps au Conseil national et au Conseil des Etats, comme représentant du Haut-Valais. Il est l'auteur de la loi valaisanne d'introduction au Code civil suisse. En novembre de l'année passée il a fêté son 80e anniversaire, en pleine possession de ses forces.

CE QUE LA ROUTE CÔTE AU CANTON DE NEUCHÂTEL.

Le Grand Conseil neuchâtelois, qui se réunira lundi 20 mai au Château de Neuchâtel, aura à discuter un rapport du Conseil d'Etat qui réclame l'allocation d'un crédit de 4 millions 200,000 francs pour couvrir les frais d'amélioration et de réfection des routes cantonales. Cette somme doit être fournie à l'Etat par voie d'emprunt.

On peut se demander comment il se fait qu'un canton qui n'est pas exclusivement montagnard ait à sacrifier d'une coup une si grosse somme en faveur de la circulation routière.

Il y a beaucoup de causes à l'origine de cette dépense. Tout d'abord, un localisme et un régionalisme parfois excessifs qui ont provoqué des tracés défectueux et qui, aujourd'hui, doivent être modernisés. D'autre part, la carence de C.F.F., qui a fait du réseau neuchâtelois un véritable réseau-fantôme, où les trains circulent avec une lenteur désespérante, a augmenté considérablement la circulation automobile. Si bien qu'aujourd'hui, la route de la Vue des Alpes ne souffre pas seulement des dégâts causés par le gros temps et par neige,—tous les cols de montagne sont logés à la même enseigne—mais de la circulation très dense qu'on y constate. Le matin, c'est parfois un véritable cortège d'auto-camions qui montent la Vue ou le Tourne, transportant dans les cités montagnardes les premiers ou d'autres marchandises. Quant à la circulation du dimanche, elle rappelle à certaines heures la fameuse "Voie sacrée" de Verdun. On a compté en un seul jour, au mois d'août de l'année dernière, 1600 machines.

AN INTERESTING BROADCAST.

Next Wednesday, May 29th, our compatriot Sophie Wyss will broadcast a recital from the London station which will largely include the works of the Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck. She herself has sung two of these songs at a recital she gave in 1927, but otherwise they have not yet been heard in this country.

Most of our readers will be glad to hear of the steady success which Madame Wyss is making. Following Sir Henry Wood's engagement to sing the solo soprano parts of "The Messiah" for the Leicester Philharmonic Choir of 400 voices, the B.B.C. have been giving her frequent engagements—four in the course of three months—to sing important programmes. These have included Handel's "Judas Maccabeus," Bach's "Pflingsteantate," the first performance in England of the songs of Lennox Berkeley with the London Chamber Orchestra under Anthony Bernard, from Savoy Hill, and the famous Air from Weber's "Der Freischütz," from Daventry. She will also sing in Birmingham under the direction of Adrian Boult, and has been booked for as far ahead as next January for Sir Henry Wood's Philharmonic Orchestra at Hull.

THRILLS OF A MOUNTAIN RAILWAY.

"Good Heavens! I hope nothing slips!"

The speaker was an American lady, and, on looking out of the carriage window, one could not but share her aspirations. We had just left Caux station, on the *funiculaire*, or mountain railway, from Territet on Lake Geneva to the Rochers de Naye, 2,045 metres above the lake. Caux itself is some 1,100 metres up, which is not a great height as heights go, but virtually every metre of that distance is sheer and toppling down to the lake shore. As one looks upwards from Montreux or Territet, the Caux Palace Hotel gives one a "stand from under" feeling, as if at any moment it might come down on one's head. Looking downwards from our eminence—well, one began to wonder if everything was tightly fastened!

The American lady turned with a slight shudder, and looked steadily upwards. She was, of course, missing one of the world's finest views. Clear-cut, glassy calm, blue, the lake lay beneath us. Along its nearer shore shone the pleasure towns of Clarens, Montreux, Territet—spotlessly clean, toylike in the distance. From out these towns, upwards after us came climbing the neat Swiss countryside—woods and fields, chalets and spires, ravines and mountain torrents. Over all towered the mountains—Dent du Midi, snow-capped and aloof, Savoy Alps, darker and more forbidding. It was a wonderful view in truth—a view to take one's breath away; but the American lady's breath had been shortened by a less pleasant sensation, and no view, however grand, was going to tempt her to look down again.

She had experienced one of the thrills of a mountain railway, and she just happened to be one of those who did not like it. With me, I confess it is a weakness. With eyes strictly averted from the unfolding leagues beneath, I wait in patience until the little engine has panted up to some dizzy eminence. Then comes that sudden glance back, and down—down sheer, with a feeling that firm earth will no longer bear us up, and that we must drop like a plummet into the dizzy depths. It is a distinct thrill, believe me, and a pleasurable one for all but the very nervous minority.

After some experience of mountain railways, no doubt this sort of thing may begin to pall slightly, and the *blasé* passenger will smoke contentedly, with eyes enjoying the panorama beneath him. Another type of thrill awaits, however, and its superiority lies in this—that, however often he travels on the steeper *funiculaires*, he will never achieve complete freedom from the doubt which gives rise to this thrill, and which I might express as loss of confidence in the engine. To illustrate, hear of my friend Henry and me.

Henry was feeling amazed, grateful and humble, this being his first trip on a mountain line. I was correspondingly bored, nonchalant and patronising, as became my "umpteenth" such experience, and one of the few sacred occasions on which I could impress Henry. The engine panted steadily upwards! Henry was risking occasional nervous glances down at Lake Lucerne, and, in short, everything was going swimmingly.

Then we struck a sharp turn, followed by an extra stiff rise. The engine's rhythmic panting became jerky and laboured; our speed decreased. Henry and I looked at one another. Henry said: "She won't do it." Anxiety dwelt in his eye. "She'll do it all right," I replied lolly. Our speed fell to acrawl. The engine seemed to be gasping for breath.

My confidence collapsed—the Great Doubt overcame me. True, I had heard this same engine gasp thus before at this very spot, but was this not months past? The engine was older now! She could not last for ever, and this might easily be the moment ordained for the final collapse of her efforts. Would we run back, fall over into

that ravine or simply stick fast? So ran my thoughts; so they will always run when a mountain train begins to feel the pull; and so fell my pride. Its fall was carefully noted and subsequently referred to by Henry.

Of course, we reached the summit safely, but do not condemn us as nerve-ridden wrecks. You will experience the Great Doubt yourself—not once, but every time you hear that pounding of hard-pressed steam.

"We reached the summit safely." Simple words, behind which lies the final thrill! Down on the lake shore it was hot—bakingly hot. Up here we step out, it may be, into a world of snow, and raise our coat collars against a fresh, cold breeze. Like great frozen waves the Alps lie around us, tier piled upon tier, far as the eye can reach. Glittering in the sun, cold and dead in the shade, they guard the plains in mighty silence. Afar off, perhaps, through the inevitable telescope, we sight a pure white, rounded peak. It is Mont Blanc, miles away, looking on three nations. The air is thin and keen, the silence profound. We feel the strangeness of this wild, primeval world which spreads before us, and it is with reluctant backward glances that we finally retrace our steps to the little train which will bear us back to the cheerful, prosaic lowlands.

Once again amid familiar surroundings, we might profitably spare a thought for the immense amount of ingenuity, labour and expense which has been put into the work of providing us with our thrills. The building of a railway over comparatively level country is no mean feat. How much more difficult must it be, what efforts of brain and sinew, of courage and perseverance must it demand, to stick a railway, so to speak, on the face of a mountain, involving the running of bridges at dangerous grades over deep ravines, the selection of ground suitably free from impossible gradients, avalanches, and the undermining influences of heavy rains and thaws, and the providing against the thousand and one emergencies to which the perilous nature of the ground gives rise.

The railway engineer will tell you that a mountain railway can be defined as one in which the gradients exceed three per cent.—that is to say, in which the ground at the gradients rises more than three feet in every hundred feet travelled. Up to six per cent., however, we have a very modest mountain line, but above that figure an engine would be unable to haul a train by means of the ordinary system of rails. A "rack rail" is, therefore, laid between the side rails, cogs on the engine engaging with this rack and enabling the locomotive literally to claw its way up the mountain. During moments spent under the shadow of the Great Doubt, the thought of those cogs suddenly "stripping" has often occurred to me.

At over twenty-five per cent. gradient the rack system surrenders, and we reach the *dernier cri* in mountain transport—to wit, the cable line. One gets the best thrill in this case by looking at the thing before starting. What presents itself is a wire (which looks very frail indeed) suspended between lattice poles (which are much too far apart). These poles probably carry the wire across a vast chasm, and up an almost vertical cliff. Suspended from the wire, and swaying suggestively as it travels, comes the whole train, an affair like a small packing case with windows. The mountain end of this giddy system is wreathed in menacing clouds, and a cold draught creeps gradually down one's spine!

It is not so terrible as it looks. The thrills and doubts of mountain railway travel exist, but lest, perhaps, they may be exaggerated, let us remember that every care and precaution which human forethought can provide, have been, and are, taken in the construction of these systems and in the proper maintenance of their rolling stocks. In short, one might say that the risk of such travel is about one quarter of that incurred in crossing at Nassau street corner at about five p.m.

(Reprinted from *The Irish Times*.)

Another Motoring Success with "Scintilla" Magneto.

Our readers will undoubtedly be interested to know that the engines of the two Bugatti cars which conquered the first and second places in the great international Targa Florio race in Sicily were equipped with SCINTILLA MAGNETOS. This success, in the above strenuous race, proves once more the reliability of these magnetos.

HOLIDAYS IN SWITZERLAND.

The Council of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique announce with regret that the scheme to organise a holiday party of Anglo-Swiss children has not found the anticipated response in the Colony.

As it is now too late for further applications the scheme has been abandoned for this year, but the intention is to revive it early next year in such a form as to make it more attractive.