

Thrills of a mountain railway

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AUTOUR D'UNE CRISE.

La publicité que M. Musy a donnée — ou laissé donner — à des divergences de vues avec ses collègues a produit dans tout le pays une impression de malaise que ne dissipera pas le communiqué publié vendredi à l'issue de la séance du Conseil fédéral.

"Seigneur, préservez-moi de mes amis!" a dû penser notre grand argentier en lisant certains articles où l'on parlait de "quasi ultimatum" posé par M. Musy à ses collègues, de "pression morale," etc. Cette façon de présenter les choses ne pouvait plaire aux autres membres du gouvernement qui ont nettement fait savoir que si M. Musy parlait en laissant s'accréditer cette version de la rupture entre eux et lui, ils ne se laisseraient pas faire. Et, à la onzième heure, M. Musy a compris...

Ce qui ne signifie pas que la crise gouvernementale ne se produira pas quand même plus tard — probablement en automne —, mais dans une atmosphère plus calme que celle qui règne en ce moment à Berne, au lendemain de l'échec d'une loi devant le peuple.

Pour s'être dénoué provisoirement sur la place publique et non dans le sein du Conseil fédéral lui-même, écrit fort justement M. Pierre Grellet, ce conflit politique a certainement eu pour effet d'ébranler l'autorité du gouvernement du pays. Cette fâcheuse extrémité aurait été évitée si M. Musy n'avait pas donné à ses intentions la publicité qu'elles ont eue et s'il n'avait pas tenu pendant près d'une semaine toute l'opinion publique en suspens."

Signalons en passant le bruit qui court dans les couloirs du Palais fédéral — et que nous enregistrons sous toutes réserves — selon lequel le fameux programme en huit points soumis par M. Musy au Conseil fédéral, aurait été élaboré par deux frontistes de la "Ligue pour le peuple et la patrie," dont on cite les noms, et qui passent pour être en quelque sorte les inspirateurs du chef du département des finances.

Quoi qu'il en soit, nous sommes certain d'être l'interprète de la très grande majorité de nos concitoyens en souhaitant que l'harmonie renaisse au sein du Conseil fédéral et que le gouvernement s'entende une fois pour toutes sur un programme net et précis, positif, constructif, qu'il s'engage

à soutenir sans tergiversations ni compromissions d'aucune sorte, de manière que le pays ait enfin l'impression qu'il est réellement gouverné et non le jouet de volontés divergentes tirant à hue et à dia, ce qui ne peut avoir pour conséquence que d'embourber le char de l'Etat, voire à le faire verser.

Or l'heure est trop grave pour que l'on puisse tolérer plus longtemps ce petit jeu.

Ed. J.
(Tribune de Genève.)

FONDS DE SECOURS.

Annual Meeting.

The Annual General Meeting of the "Fonds de Secours" took place on Monday, March 13th, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, Swiss Minister, being in the Chair.

The Chairman paid a warm tribute to the late Mr. A. Schupbach, who had rendered great services to the institution.

After the report of the Auditors was read, the meeting accepted the accounts for the fourth quarter, 1933, and those of the whole year.

Mr. F. M. Gamper, on behalf of the Finance Commission, stated that, in spite of the crisis, the financial position was satisfactory.

The Committee was then re-elected *en bloc* and consists of the following gentlemen:—

Honorary President:

Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, Swiss Minister.

President:

M. R. Dupraz.

Vice-Presidents:

Messieurs A. C. Baume, F. M. Gamper, O. Gambazzi.

Treasurer:

M. J. Oertli.

Vice-Treasurer:

M. M. Röthlisberger.

Secretary:

M. Th. Ritter.

Assistant Secretary:

M. P. Hilfiker.

Finance Committee:

Messieurs A. Th. Nussbaumer, F. M. Gamper, J. Oertli.

Auditors:

Messieurs O. Schneider, M. Weber.

SWISS NEWS FROM ABROAD.

Our readers may, no doubt, be interested to hear that Master Micky Paschoud, aged 10, son of Mr. M. Paschoud, a former President of the Swiss Mercantile Society in London, now resident in Paris, has won the first prize in the International Dancing Competition (classical), organised by the Archives Internationales de la Danse, on March 15th, in Paris.

By a strange coincidence, the winner of the first prize for girls is also Swiss. She is Petite Dansense Etoile du Théâtre du Chatelet, her stage name being Mlle. Luzia, whilst her real name is Louise Besançon. She hails, like Master Paschoud, from Lutry, so that both winners come from the same *commune*.

There were about sixty competitors of all nationalities; most of them were professionals, with a few amateurs amongst them like Master Micky Paschoud, and we wish to extend to him and his parents our heartiest congratulations.

PERSONAL.

We extend hearty congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Rohr, of 10, Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1, on becoming happy grandparents through the birth of a boy to their daughter, Mrs. Hewitt.

Für die zahlreichen Beweise herzlicher Anteilnahme beim Hinscheiden unseres lieben Gatten und Vaters Wilhelm Wydler, sprechen wir unsern tiefgefühlten Dank aus.

ANNA WYDLER UND KINDER.

ABSCHIED.

Ach dieses grosse Bange werden
Beim Abschied von den lieben Bergen,
Winterklar im schönsten Licht
Viel besser wär's, ich kennt sie nicht
Ich fühl mich arm und wein
So ganz in mich hinein,
Um mein Leid noch zu verstärken
Mags noch zum Aschiedsgruss auch sein,
Hüllen sich die Majestäten
In rosa, goldnem Mantel ein,
Und schauen aus dem Abendhimmel
Still fragend mir in's Herz hinab,
Warum für Glanz und Weltgetümmel
Ich jemals sie verlassen hab'

H. E.

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 loftily. Our speed fell to a crawl. The engine seemed to be gasping for breath.

My confidence collapsed—the Great Doubt overcame us. 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—baking 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, as 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 gradient 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 Nassau street corner at about five p.m.

J. P.