

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Band: - (1932)
Heft: 555

Artikel: Reminiscences : how I got into the sergeant's good books [to be continued]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693277>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 17.11.2024

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

ST. GOTTHARD.

JUBILEE OF THE TUNNEL.

By GRAHAM SETON.

I have not been very keen to get out of bed at six in the morning on the wintry May days gone by, but the Alpine sun of June the 1st called me early. I leaped from bed, and from my window the laughing waters of the lake of Lucerne greeted me, while far away in the distance the towering mountains of the Alps waved white hands of welcome. The 1st of June has been a very wonderful day, the mind filled with interest, the heart gladdened with ever-changing grandeur and beauty. I attended the commemorative ceremonies of the St. Gotthard Jubilee.

We left Lucerne just after seven for Göschenen, lying at the foot of the St. Gotthard Pass, and above which mount the immense heights of the Bernese Oberland, and those which separate the German from the Italian-speaking cantons. Sixty years ago was begun at Göschenen the grim battle, lasting ten years, wherein engineers, armed with drills and dynamite, fought their way through nine and-a-quarter miles of rock. Here we were welcomed by M. Walther, the President of the Swiss Federal Railways.

The Great Tunnel.

After breakfast we made that wonderful journey through the mountains. I always find it awe-inspiring. I have been down some of the deepest mine-shafts in the world. The passage of the St. Gotthard gives the same impression of descending into the bowels of the earth; and the traveller must contemplate the loss of life and casualties which were demanded as the price of this safe highway which links South and Central Europe. We go from light to light. It takes but a quarter of an hour, but in the darkness of the tunnel it seems an age. Thousands of feet of rock lie between the traveller and the skies above. Across these, to the west, branch out the famous Furka and Grimsel Passes, and to the east the Oberalp Pass. Andermatt, the only halt, the attractive Alpine resort, lies at the foot of the three passes. The smooth-running train, drawn by two monster electric locomotives, re-enters the sunlight. We have arrived at Airolo; and here the scenery changes in a most marked way. The rugged mountains to whose sides miraculously cling pine forests, above Andermatt, give way to the more placid landscapes of Southern Europe. A riot of vegetation greets the eye, pointed cypress trees clad in the emerald green of their early summer robes, masses of blossom front the stuccoed houses, and everywhere are the flowers of early summer.

March of the Veterans.

We alighted at Airolo, and before our eyes there defiled the veteran workers of the railway, amid costumed groups representing the Swiss cantons through which the railway passes. The loveliness of the maidens in their national costumes did not arrest my eye as did these tough fighters, who made and have kept open civilisation's greatest highway. They marched with even, strong tread. The oldest, rising eighty years of age, with their immense, bowed shoulders, hands gnarled by their

craft, and faces scorched and wizened by the ferocity of the elements — blazing sun, and pitiless, iceladen winds — heroically testified to the dignity of labour. I thought that in our own industrial enterprises there is room for such celebrations. I would like to see a march of miners, a congress of shipbuilders, a festival of farmers and agricultural workers. While M. Motta, the many times re-elected President of the Swiss Confederation, discoursed in those homely terms, so suited to this family among nations, there was unveiled the new monument to the victims of labour. No memorial this to those who have lost their lives in the futility of destruction; but one which testifies to the sacrifices of human endeavour.

The hospitality of the Swiss is renowned throughout the world. There followed luncheon, which beggared hospitality, to the accompaniment of music and those essentially Swiss folk-songs, yodelling, with their quaint echoes and repercussions among the mountains.

We went to Lugano, romantic inland sea, which winds in and out of Switzerland and Italy, home of honeymoons, whose every vista opens a fresh delight.

But yet, held in reserve, remained one feast, so arresting and novel, so staggering in its grandeur that, during the return journey from Lugano to Lucerne, reached just after midnight, I was held breathless as I waited for each revelation.

Illumination Grandeur.

The Swiss have named the jubilee celebrations of the St. Gotthard "Illumination Week." The railways, in association with the cantons and municipalities, have inaugurated the most unique displays in their history. The view-points and objects of pronounced historic interest were flood-lit. Last year we, in this country, were familiarised with the possibilities of such lighting, when London's public buildings were illuminated. But no spectacle which I have witnessed, not the magnificence of the Coronation Durbar, not the Aldershot Tattoo, not the after-glow in the Pyramids of Egypt, not the Victoria Falls by moonlight, attained the sublime wonder of this series of amazing natural tableaux. The Rütli, for example, standing on a high eminence, above the lake of Uri, itself an out-water of Lucerne, stood out, etched in silver, against a background of deep blue mountains, their highest, snow-covered peaks faintly tinted rose with the last rays of the Alpine glow. While higher, to complete the natural amphitheatre, the dark canopy of the skies was illuminated with a myriad star lanterns. The Rütli tells for the Swiss the origin of their Independence, for it was here that in 1307 the small band of those who had the vision of Swiss freedom swore to rid themselves of Habsburg domination. Across the waters I could perceive a multitude of boats, whose lights were mirrored in the lake, and could hear the sounds of music and of revelry.

An Unforgettable Scene.

The immense viaducts, too, which span the gorges and rise dizzily above the river torrents, floodlit, stood out over the canyons, so that by

some optical illusion their height was intensified, and the yawning gulfs which lay beneath them appeared as bottomless pits. Looking from the window as the train curled like a wriggling serpent, it seemed as though this moving ribbon of light travelled upon some ethereal structure, miraculously encompassed out of black space, from which came the torrential roar of an inferno. The Gothic spires and carved façades of mediæval buildings were similarly illuminated, so that as one travelled through the heart of Switzerland all its history was set out in luminous glory. The journey yielded vista after vista of fresh wonder. As the train wound its way from a secretive pass suddenly there would appear the turrets of a castle, the spires of a village, gleaming silvery white against its background of great mountains; and ever beyond, there showed a bridge, a peak, a waterfall, a minster, lighted in that landscape of the night.

I returned to Lucerne at an hour well past midnight, while the streets were filled with returning revellers. But, as an inveterate diarist, I could not turn again to my bed until I had penned this impression of one of the most amazing scenes which I have ever witnessed.

The Jubilee of the St. Gotthard is a stepping-stone in the march of human progress. For all the world it has been marked in a fashion worthy of human enterprise, science, and the arts hand in hand.

BUCHBESPRECHUNG.

DAS WERK. — Zeitschrift für Architektur. Freie — u. angewandte Kunst. Verlag: Gebr. Fretz A.-G., Zürich.

Das ganze Mai-Heft des "Werk" ist den so aktuellen Fragen des Schulbaus gewidmet und zwar besonders der Primärschule. Die von den Direktionen der Gewerbeschule Basel und Zürich unter Mithilfe einer Gruppe fortschrittlich gesinnter Architekten zusammengestellte Ausstellung "Der neue Schulbau," die im April und Mai in Zürich gezeigt wurde und in der Folge noch andere Städte der Schweiz und des Auslandes besuchen wird, gab den Anlass dazu und zugleich den Grundstock der Abbildungen, sodass das Heft die wertvollen Materialien der Ausstellung dauernd festhält. "Schulpalast" oder "Flachbauschule" sind die beiden Pole um die sich das Interesse sammelt, eine Entscheidung die nicht nur den Architekten sondern ebenso sehr Lehrer, Schulbehörden und Baubehörden angeht. Die Ausstellung nimmt mit allem Nachdruck für die Flachbauschule Partei die den modernen Erziehungsgrundsätzen sehr viel mehr entspricht als der anmassliche Schulpalast, wobei angemerkt sei, dass "Flachbau" nichts mit Flachdach zu tun hat, sondern eine Bauart mit niederen womöglich nur ebenerdigen Trakten im Gegensatz zum mehrgeschossigen Schulpalast bedeutet. Das Heft ist mit über hundert Abbildungen ungewöhnlich reich ausgestattet und wird über den besondern Anlass hinaus seinen Wert als Aufklärungsschrift und reiche Materialsammlung über neuzeitlichen Schulbau behalten, weshalb es auch als Sonderdruck (Preis Fr.3.—) erscheint.

REMINISCENCES.

HOW I GOT INTO THE SERGEANT'S GOOD BOOKS.

By ST.

For some of the bitterest and most unhappy hours of my pilgrimage through this valley of sorrow, I have to blame my old sergeant Rösti. (This, of course, is not his real name). These distressing moments coincided with my *début* as a soldier, — well do I remember the day, when I wended my way to the barracks in order to say valet to my civilian life for a few weeks, or as it then turned out, a few months. Never before had I felt more patriotic; I was determined to become a good and faithful soldier of my beloved country, and if my life would have been demanded for the protection of its independence, I would have gladly given it there and then. Visions of Sempach and Moorgarten flicked through my head, dying for one's country is so sweet, — I was told, — but of course, being young, I preferred to live for it. — These, and many others were the feelings when I entered the portals which closed behind me with a loud crash.

I was then introduced to sergeant Rösti, or to be correct, he introduced himself to me, I held out my hand, and told him how very pleased I was to make his acquaintance, but my outstretched hand, was purposely ignored; I was rather a bit disappointed, but I argued to myself that some people have manners and others haven't.

It would lead too far to relate here, how I discarded garment after garment of my civilian outfit, but by about 5 o'clock that afternoon I looked as near a soldier as could be expected. I have forgotten now, whether my figure was already then an awkward one, but somehow I did not like the look of myself, neither did the

sergeant, he, *f.i.*, gave me such a blow on the top of my *képi*, that I nearly got stunned, and I attribute my slight flat footedness to this *adjusting* attention, he also pulled the collar of my tunic in such a violent fashion, that I nearly choked, using at the same time rather strong language, which I tried to overlook, as I was told before hand, that sergeants sometimes do swear. By this time, my enthusiasm for a soldier's life had received a bit of a damper; but worse was to come that evening, — I somehow had a feeling that my sergeant did not like me, I do not know whether it was my face or my manner of speech which upset him; I tried to be so very polite.

Not having been taught yet how to salute, we were not allowed to go outside the barracks that night, and our next job was to make our beds. Now I had never made a bed in my life before; some general instructions were given, and my comrades in arms set to work, I looked left and right trying to copy them, but somehow my bed showed various *outstanding* features, which were not noticeable with the others. Suddenly the sergeant's argus eye detected my intended resting place, he called the inmates of the whole room together to have a good look at my bed; was the tide turning after all, was I to be held up as an example of neatness and tidiness? my heart beat quicker, a word of praise then would have gone a long way to restore my waning enthusiasm.

It was not to be, with a sarcastic smile on his face the sergeant invited me, to demonstrate to the *audience* how I expected to enter my bed, and I must now confess, to my everlasting shame, that try as hard as I could, I was unable to find a convenient *opening*, oh, how I hated that night, the malicious smiles of my comrades, who courted favour by making fun of one of their comrades in distress.

I tried to put on a brave face, after all, I thought, greater people than I have been laughed at, and I set to work again and managed to make a fairly good job of it; but as it happened I had not yet emptied the "cup of sorrows" to the bitter end; on laying an aching heart to rest that night, I unfortunately covered it with a pair of pyjamas, which, in those days was quite a novelty, and I will spare my readers an account of the remarks which were hurled at my bewildered head, but early next morning the following letter was despatched:

Dearest Mother,

For heavens sake send me a night shirt,
Your disillusioned Son.

The following days somehow were not much more successful; gone were those visions of Sempach, Moorgarten, was this, I reasoned through sleepless nights, what was called the romance of a soldier's life, did not all the cheerful soldiers songs tell miserable lies, oh, how utterly unhappy I felt.

But it is so ordained that even the darkest hour has its glimmer of hope, and it so happened that one day Sergeant Rösti had to make a report to his C.O.; — now, I have not the slightest hesitation in admitting that he was an efficient soldier, he could swear and drink like a trooper, he was a bully of the first order, but he could not spell. I watched him trying to compose this report, which seemed to have unnerved his martial countenance. Here at last was a chance for me, — can I help you, sergeant? I asked timidly, — a growl answered me — but I was not to be put off, and how I succeeded I will tell my readers next week.

(To be continued.)