

# The cradle of winter sports

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Colonel Haccius was born in 1883 in Lancy near Geneva, he was for a great number of years a member of the Federal Instruction Corps (Cavalry). He is one of the best horsemen in our country and his services to our army have been manifold.

The Federal Council has appointed M. Alexander Berner from Schafisheim to the post of Director of the 1st Customs District.

Dr. Ernst Delaquis has been appointed Professor of Law at the University of Berne. M. Delaquis has been general secretary of the "Internationale Gefängnis Kommission."

#### LUCERNE.

The death is reported from Hochdorf of Colonel Fritz Wyss, at the age of 53. The deceased was a partner in the well-known Brewery firm Hochdorf, he played a conspicuous part in the political sphere of the canton of Lucerne, and in the army reached the rank of a cavalry colonel.

#### GLARUS.

The late Mme. Catherine Zwicky in Mollis, has left an amount of 60,000 frs. to charitable institutions.

#### ZUG.

M. Xavier Schmid, for the last sixteen years Mayor of the town of Zug is retiring from his post shortly, he was for twenty-two years a Member of the Municipal Council.

#### ST. GALL.

Mme. Julia Herzog-Zobel, the widow of General Herzog, who died in the year of 1894 at the age of 74, has celebrated her 90th birthday. General Herzog was appointed head of the Federal Army during the Franco-Prussian war 1870-71.

#### TICINO.

The "Fiera di Lugano" closed its doors on Sunday last. Nearly 50,000 visitors attended the Fair, or about 10,000 more than last year.

#### GENEVA.

The States Council has appointed Dr. Ferdinand Morel to the post of Director of the Asylum Bel-Air, and at the same time to a Professorship at the medical Faculty of the University of Geneva.

### LA POLITIQUE. Défense spirituelle.

Il rentre en somme assez naturellement sous la rubrique politique, le sujet que les écrivains romands ont traité dimanche, dans leur réunion d'Estavayer. On avait donné pour titre à ce débat: "Entretien sur les problèmes touchant à la vie spirituelle du pays." Et il va de soi que la discussion, sur un pareil thème, risquait beaucoup de s'égarer. Elle n'a peut-être pas abouti à des conclusions très claires; mais elle a eu l'utilité de provoquer un échange de vues nécessaire, à un moment où cette "défense spirituelle" dont l'on parle sans cesse, et que l'on conçoit très diversement, suscite tant de commentaires contradictoires.

Des gens zélés ont pris les devants, paraît-il, en s'entourant, comme tous les magiciens, de quelque mystère, et ils ont préparé un "plan" sur lequel nous ne pouvons rien dire, sinon qu'on se propose de le présenter au Conseil fédéral pour qu'il en fasse la base de sa propre action. Car le Conseil fédéral veut agir pour la défense spirituelle du pays; il nous y faut prendre garde tout de suite, afin d'empêcher et des mesures bureaucratiques et centralisatrices, et des confusions de valeur dans lesquelles on tombe, au Palais fédéral, presque par instinct, et aussi une mainmise fédérale sur une activité qui, par définition, n'a de sens que si elle est libre.

Des rumeurs rassurantes circulent. On affirme, et nous aimons à le croire, que M. Etter est adversaire de toute mesure qui paraîtrait pour ainsi dire d'en haute, qui prétendrait régenter et réglementer le labeur de l'esprit, bref, qui, sous couleur de sauvegarder la liberté de l'écrivain, agirait à son égard comme les pays totalitaires, lesquels, on ne le sait que trop, font de l'homme de lettres comme du journaliste un serviteur du pouvoir.

Que l'on ne puisse même envisager chez nous, où les écrivains sont plus ombrageux peut-être que partout ailleurs — et c'est tant mieux — une domestication de cette gent essentiellement individualiste, cela va de soi. Mais nous ne voudrions rien qui ressemblât, fût-ce de loin, à cette "synchronisation." Il ne nous suffit pas de recevoir à ce sujet des assurances verbales. Tous les textes qui finiront bien par paraître, après la longue période de gestation qui est de rigueur en Suisse, tous ces textes devront être épluchés. Il faudra avoir notamment la certitude — je dis bien: la certitude — que les fonds mis à la disposition des lettres par la Confédération ne seront pas employés, selon des critères opportu-

nistes, à des fins politiques, et qu'ils serviront intégralement et exclusivement la cause de la littérature suisse, tant romande qu'alémanique et tessinoise.

Moins l'Etat interviendra lui-même, plus il laissera d'initiative aux associations compétentes, mieux cela vaudra. L'Etat est incapable, par lui-même, de protéger la culture de l'esprit. Je dis une chose qui semblera énorme et scandaleuse à certains; mais c'est, profondément, ma conviction. Dès qu'il se mêle de problèmes intellectuels, autrement que pour payer la facture quand c'est le moment, l'Etat déraile et fait des bêtises. Pourquoi? C'est une question qui mériterait d'être étudiée à part; mais le fait est là. L'influence officielle va fatalement au conformisme, à la banalité souriante, à la médiocrité dorée à peine, à la solennelle sottise. Qu'il soit donc et d'emblée bien entendu que nous n'aurons, sous aucun prétexte, de contrôle dans le domaine de l'esprit. C'est un postulat, non au sens absurde où l'on prend ce mot dans le langage parlementaire, mais au vrai sens du terme.

Il ressort à l'évidence aussi des échanges de vues d'Estavayer que le fédéralisme, l'autonomie cantonale et régionale, l'originalité et le particularisme doivent être respectés si l'on veut, en soutenant les œuvres littéraires du pays, défendre l'indépendance du pays lui-même. L'occasion nous sera fournie bientôt d'y revenir.

Léon Savary.

(Tribune de Genève).

### THE CRADLE OF WINTER SPORTS.

By LEWIS SPENCE.

The devotee of winter sports will learn with interest that four centuries have elapsed since the first literary reference was made to skiing, skating and those other pastimes which now occupy so much of the social round of "the inverted year." It is in the "History of the Goths" of Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, which saw the light in 1537, that we find the earliest mention of ski-running and one of the first allusions to skating, as practised by the ice-bound Swedes and Laplanders.

Those who glissade at one or other of the luxury resorts among the snows of Switzerland or the Austrian Tyrol will read with amusement the first naive description of the apparatus which contributes so much to their enjoyment. The Lapp skiers, says Olaus, "go on crooked stilts or long stakes fastened to the soles of their feet, moving with a winding and arbitrary motion" — phrases which will awake confirmatory echoes in the minds of countless novices in the craft of the skier.

But the Archbishop reveals that his knowledge of the sport was impersonal. He tells us that the Lapp performer "transported himself over mountains in a dangerous manner." If he did so frequently, the custom explains the sparseness of population in Lapland. Even the most daring modern skier gives mountains a decided miss nowadays. In the first decades of this century a handful of pioneers was rashly addicted to skiing on the Alpine slopes, but the attendant risks of a treacherous terrain and the possibility of starting an avalanche, to say nothing of a growing accident list, quickly brought the practice into disfavor.

The Lapp hunter, who used ski as a means of earning his living and chasing his dinner, unlike the modern winter sports fan, could not choose his ground, nor was he restricted to the comparatively gentle slopes environing a comfortable hotel. His leaps were not rehearsed, no map indicated his trail. If, as old Olaus assures us, he was able to shoot a deer or hare with bow and arrow when in full career, the ability to perform the feat must have cost him a life's apprenticeship.

The whirlwind international skater of to-day in fancy Alpine kit or abbreviated ballet skirts, will find equal amusement in the garrulous Archbishop's description of the primitive "instruments" by means of which the wild Goths and nimble Finns of Scandinavia skimmed across their iron-bound lakes and fjords. But the exciting pictures he draws of the great winter fairs and festivals at which multitudes thronged to witness the pirouettes of the heroes and heroines of the ancient "rink" in numbers vastly greater than to-day will fill them with envy. These fixtures appear to have been attended by tribes and "nations" en masse, indeed, the whole Scandinavian North seems to have poured out her "frozen loins" upon the selected lake or gulf. "Cold fires" glittered across the compact ice, raised high above it on hearths of soil and stone, inns and caravanserais were built across the estuaries for the accommodation of the thousands of visitors and merchants from distant Lübeck and Hamburg pitched their booths near the scene of the contest.

The nature of the prizes offered for races and exhibitions, romantic as they sound, would scarcely appeal to the up-to-date pot-hunter — cloaks made from the beautiful blue cloth which was the boast of industrious Lübeck, brought thence by those chapmen who became the prototypes of Santa Claus, silver spoons from the workshops of cunning Finnish jewellers who had derived their skill from the northern dwarfs, swift ponies, so shod that they could gallop across the ice and "ornaments for the insatiable women," cloak-clasps and bizarre adornments for intricate head-dresses.

The skates in use among these Gothic exhibitionists of four centuries ago would most certainly be barred from a modern rink if the manager had any respect for his surface. As well might one dance in sabots upon a polished floor. They were turned or carved from "the shanks of deer or bulls," so ground on the upper surface as to fit the foot and sharpened on the "business" side.

These primitive "instruments," as Olaus insists upon calling them, were smeared with the fat of hogs, "because so, they cannot be hindered by the drops of cold water, that in the most vehement cold weather will rise up, as it were, through the pores of the ice." If you do not grease your "instruments," the Archbishop warns you, you may come a cropper and, plunging through the surface, be neatly decapitated by the sharp edges of the hole you make! He hastens to add that "the inhabitants seldom perish by that or the like danger, only strangers that travel to desecr countries," a politely ecclesiastical manner of admonishing the greenhorn.

The bone skate, we are informed, "has a natural slipperiness," a statement which even those who have not essayed its treacheries will feel disinclined to question. For the well-to-do there was a variety of super-skate, "like wooden shoes with points of iron," which recalls those on which some veterans first fitted themselves out in the late 'eighties, at the expense and ruin of a perfectly good pair of boots.

But the modern winter sportsman in his luxurious Swiss or Norwegian hotel will shudder at the description of those "inns upon the ice" to which Olaus devotes an entire chapter and which were run up for the convenience of visitors from afar. Great beams, about two or three feet in thickness, were laid as foundations upon the frozen surface and upon these houses built of stout boards were erected. "And withal they have more security upon the ice than they would have in a palace. And in these inns they have feasting and wassail" and "could hearken to the pleasure to the whistling winds and the rattle of hail outside." Let the winter sportsman of to-day ponder the passage when he complains of a burst pipe in his *suite de luxe* or of the absence of some far-fetched delicacy from the hotel menu!

Scot. Educ.

### HUMORISTISCHES.

Der Tunichtgut. Lehrer: "Weisst du auch, Karl, dass du deinem Vater schlaflose Nächte bereitest?"

Karl: "Die hat er sowieso, Herr Lehrer; er ist Nachwächter."

Lehrer: "So? Dann wird er vor Kummer über dich graue Haare bekommen."

Karl: "Fein Herr Lehrer, da wird er sich bestimmt freuen. Er hat nämlich eine Glatze."

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