

Winter sports

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et centralisant devenant de plus en plus puissant, on se persuadait que la Confédération serait mieux à même d'assurer l'exploitation et de développer le réseau (ce qui, en toute justice, n'était d'ailleurs pas complètement illusoire). On comptait aussi sur la nationalisation pour obtenir de meilleurs horaires, des correspondances plus satisfaisantes. Enfin, il n'était pas indifférent de soustraire à l'influence étrangère un moyen de communication aussi important: n'oublions pas, en effet, que la majorité des actions de certaines lignes étaient aux mains de nos voisins.

Ces arguments parurent péremptoires, en dépit de l'opposition véhémement des adversaires. La loi du 15 octobre 1897, concernant la nationalisation, fut acceptée par le peuple, à une forte majorité, le 20 février 1898. Les Chemins de fer fédéraux étaient créés; le rachat des lignes présentant une importance économique ou stratégique pour une partie considérable du pays, fut décidé. On y procéda progressivement: certaines étapes, comme la réunion aux C. F. F. du tronçon Genève-La Plaine, sont relativement récentes.

Le coût de l'opération fut excessif; et maints espoirs que l'on avait fait naître, non sans témérité, ne purent être réalisés. Dès le début, le service des intérêts constitua une lourde charge, dont l'on eut le tort de ne pas se préoccuper suffisamment. Ce que l'on ignorait, du reste, et que nul ne pouvait prévoir c'était que la voie ferrée cesserait, à bref délai, d'avoir une sorte de monopole du transport à longue distance.

La guerre et la période qui suivit aggravèrent la situation; mais on voulait croire à une crise passagère. On s'aperçut néanmoins, à l'expérience, que le réseau national avait une organisation rigide, qui lui rendait difficile tout travail d'adaptation aux circonstances. Le loi — encore en vigueur — du 1er février 1923, s'efforçait de corriger certains défauts dans l'organisation et l'administration des C. F. F., notamment l'hypertrophie de la direction et les lenteurs bureaucratiques. Les résultats ne furent pas négligeables, mais la plus large autonomie concédée à l'entreprise n'alla pas non plus sans inconvénients.

Toutefois, depuis quinze ans, les circonstances se sont encore modifiées; le régime des transports a si bien évolué que, comme le constate le Conseil fédéral dans son message, "il ne s'agit plus simplement de réorganiser, il faut bâtir à nouveau." Les rapports financiers entre les C. F. F. et la Confédération demandent en particulier une refonte complète.

Un premier projet vit le jour en 1934. Mais on préféra régler d'abord le conflit rail-route. Le projet de loi sur le partage du trafic fut repoussé par le peuple le 5 mai 1935. Dès lors, on dut renoncer à subordonner à cette question la mise en chantier de l'assainissement.

Sur le problème principal se greffe celui des chemins de fer privés, que nous avons traité séparément. Signalons également l'initiative destinée à soustraire les C. F. F. aux influences politiques. Bien qu'elle parte d'un louable dessein, il ne sera pas possible d'en retenir la suggestion principale: la transformation de la régie d'Etat en une simple entreprise d'intérêt général.

Léon Savary.
(Tribune de Genève.)

WINTER SPORTS.

There are many kinds of sports which man has practised in the course of time. Hunting wild animals was no doubt the first of them, and sledging, skating and ski-ing have been known in the cold countries of the world for many centuries. Ice skating on the frozen Thames is reported to us as far back as the 13th century.

However, Winter Sports as we now understand them, date back only some 40 years. Dr. Spengler, a well-known German doctor, startled the world by proclaiming that the dry, cold air of the Alpine winter was of the utmost benefit to sufferers from tuberculosis. Little did the good doctor realise that those who visited the Alps in search of sport would soon outnumber by ten to one the invalids who flocked to Switzerland in search of health. While grey skies, fog and rain cast gloom over most of Europe, the Alps pierce through the cloud rack and bask in radiant sunshine under the bluest of skies. Where overcoats and mufflers scarcely ward off the all pervading rawness of the lowland winter, a bathing suit will do for ski-ing in the glowing sunshine and dry air of the mountains. At no other season are the contrasts between Alpine and lowland climate so evident or so much to be appreciated. To take a Winter Sports holiday is to enter another world, whence one returns sunburnt.

There is no country in the world which provides better ski-ing than Switzerland, says the Oxford University Press. The smooth sloping pasture lands are ideally adapted to ski-ing. Steep slopes and dense forests are, of course, highly unsuitable, and many a ski-runner who has graduated in U.S.A. or Canada has hardly

been able to contain his astonishment and envy at his first sight of Alpine ski grounds. Thanks to her topographical features, Switzerland is particularly favoured as regards snow conditions. The main massifs of the Alpine chain are encompassed within her boundaries, and the sports centres lie at correspondingly high altitudes, thus ensuring good snow from mid-November until Easter. Visitors who come out between January and March, of course, have longer days to enjoy the outdoor sports. Ski-ing may be practised throughout the year in the glacier regions, while it has discovered new horizons for the mountaineer, whose activities in the past were restricted to the Summer months.

Winter is a season of contrasts. The thermometer in the shade may be recording an incredible number of degrees of frost, but a few yards off on the rink, a man is smoking a cigarette in his shirt sleeves.

Tobogganing is the oldest of winter sports, but it has suffered severely from the competition of ski-ing.

The Swiss ice-rinks are famous throughout the world; for the Swiss have learned the art of keeping an ice-rink in perfect condition. The Swiss ice-men have carried this craft to a high pitch of perfection. The ice is a popular rival of the snow for most ladies and middle-aged men.

Curling is as popular as ever, and has suffered far less than skating from the competition of ski-ing. There are, of course, very few young curlers, but even the most ardent of ski-runners, when he reaches the forties or the early fifties often prefers a game of curling after tea to the alternative of climbing another thousand feet or so for the run down before dinner.

Ice-hockey is also very popular. The Oxford and Cambridge Ice Hockey Match is an annual feature at St. Moritz. At most Swiss centres there are special rinks reserved for ice-hockey.

But, of course, by far the most popular of all winter sports, is ski-ing. This astounding craze for ski-ing, as a big London paper put it last January, "Skis were introduced into Switzerland in the eighties but the popularity of ski-ing in Switzerland only dates from the late nineties, and from the opening years of the present century. There were many who prophesied that ski-ing would prove to be a temporary boom, like roller-skating."

They were wrong. Once a ski-runner, always a ski-runner. Every year the number of those who ski increases. The Ski Club of Great Britain reports an annual increase of between four and seven hundred members.

It is not difficult to understand the popularity of ski-ing. The ski-runner is not confined to rinks or toboggan runs. His skis are the key to the winter Alps. He can wander through forests deep in snow and up to the final snow caps of the great Alpine peaks. A ski track has been cut to the actual crest of the Dom (14,942ft.) the highest peak in the whole of Switzerland.

Ski-ing therefore appeals to all those who enjoy exploration, wandering and the adventure of the hills. But skis are more than a means to an end, something more than a convenient mode of locomotion among the hills and mountains of winter. Skis are the simplest of all the servants of speed. The pioneers carved a plank from mountain ash and attached this to their feet by a rough leather thong. A man and his horse are two personalities, but an expert ski-runner and his skis form an indivisible unit. The motorist imposes his will through an elaborate mechanism of pedals and levers, but the ski seem to belong to their owner just as wings belong to the bird, so intimate is the connection, so instantaneous their response to the command of mind and body. No form of swift movement gives a sense of personal control so complete.

Ski-ing is at once simple and subtle. It is simple because the movement owes nothing to machinery; between the ski-runner and the hillside there is nothing by the sensitive ash which responds to every change of rhythm in the slope. It is subtle because the snow is subtle. The hills are never the same, and the snow is never the same. Every run is a new discovery, every snow-fall a new creation.

And then there is ski-jumping, the most dramatic and the most spectacular of all forms of athletic sport. The world record stands at over 82 metres, and this is equivalent to 270 feet measured in a straight line from the platform where the jumper launches himself into space, to the steep slope where his skis again strike the ground. Ski-ing is easy to learn. Young or middle-aged, it is never too early or too late to take up ski-ing, the pleasure of which may be enjoyed from the beginning — quite remarkably, in fact, after two or three days' proper instruction. This is why a fortnight of Winter Sports turns people into such enthusiasts.

There is a Ski School in each of the larger winter sports resorts and their pupils quickly become proficient in the grand sport. Some idea of the popularity of these schools may be gathered from the fact that in the 1936/37 winter season alone no fewer than 350,000 half-day lessons were

given. All schools teach the standardised Swiss ski technique, the secret of which is a thorough training in the elementary movements. Carefully elaborated exercises develop a natural, energy-saving sense of balance, so that when all the joints have been loosened and the whole body acts in unison with the movements of the individual limbs, ski-ing in all its phases is soon mastered. A short course at the Ski School in your resort, and you will soon be quite at home on your skis. The lessons are generally given in various languages and by instructors recruited from the elite of Swiss ski-ers.

Ch. B.

EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

5th January, 1938.

The Editor,

Swiss Observer,

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I should be glad if you would grant me the hospitality of your columns for discussing a matter which, I believe, is at present occupying the minds of a large section of the Swiss Colony in London.

On Friday, January 14th, a meeting will be held at the Foyer Suisse when members of the two Swiss Churches, the Eglise Suisse in Endell Street and St. Anne's in Gresham Street, will discuss the advisability of joining their administrations which have hitherto been carried on independently. I understand, however, that it is proposed to continue holding services in the two churches simultaneously as in the past.

I think this is a great pity. As a comparatively young member of the Colony I do not know the exact circumstances which brought about the present position, but I do know that in the distant past, although the Swiss Colony was numerically larger, there was but one Church. It seems to me that the present state of affairs is a particularly unhappy one, and in my opinion every effort should be made not only to join the two separate administrations but to join also the two congregations.

After all, we are all Swiss of the same faith and I cannot see any good reason why there should be two separate churches when one would normally be large enough to hold the members of both congregations. Surely this would make for a feeling of closer unity and friendship amongst the members of the Colony.

Admittedly, the services at Endell Street are conducted in French, while those at Gresham Street are held in the German language, but I do not think this represents an unsurmountable difficulty if the right amount of goodwill and friendly understanding is employed. Very few people go to church every Sunday and it could be arranged to hold a French service in the morning and a German service in the evening on one Sunday and in the reverse way the following Sunday. Besides, there are but few German-speaking Swiss who do not know French and most French-speaking Swiss understand German.

That the services would be held at the Eglise Suisse at Endell Street is only natural, because the church there belongs to the Swiss and, I believe, its origin goes back for a century and a half. The church in Gresham Street could be given up and this would result in a considerable saving of rent, which could be used to supplement the much-needed funds that are already devoted to charity.

Although I have discussed this problem with many who go to St. Anne's I have not so far met anyone who would object to such a change. In fact, there are many who are reluctant to go to the City on a Sunday when it presents such a dismal appearance.

No one, I am sure, would challenge the necessity of having two clergymen at the Eglise Suisse, as there are many duties to perform. Many members of the church live so far away from the centre of London that even two reverend gentlemen would find as much work as they can cope with. I have even heard it said, and I do not think it is an exaggeration, that the untimely death of Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme was precipitated by the enormous strain of work which he felt it his duty to take upon himself.

I believe that the complete amalgamation of the two churches would be a step in the right direction of bringing the members of the Swiss Colony into closer contact with each other. As far as I can see there are no obstacles large enough to prevent this, but should I have missed the whole point altogether, perhaps one of your readers will put me right.

Yours faithfully,

W. Meier.

