

125 years on wheels

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“Countryside Around Geneva”

One of the best known writers hailing from Geneva wrote “Trésors de mon Pays” a few years ago. Mr. Jacques Chenevière knows his native Canton as few of his compatriots do, and he produced a delightful book (published by Griffon). An English version has now appeared, by Mr. Edward B. Goodacre, called “Countryside Around Geneva”. The following is an extract from the book and is reproduced by courtesy of “Genève”, a journal published by the “Association des Intérêts de Genève”.

“On the right bank of the Rhône, perched high on the cliff, Russin peers across at the village of Dardagny. Between the two, a narrow stream, the Allondon, rushing to merge its simmering torrent in the majestic flow of the river, has bitten deep into the flank of the ridge. Let us follow this cleft as far as the castle of Dardagny. The pyramid roofs of its corner towers cut deep notches in the periwinkle blue of the Jura, stretched in this brilliant light like a silken backcloth, so diaphanous that a gust of wind could carry it away. Dardagny, protected on its north side by a dense mass of trees, is very much restored. A bit too much perhaps, but it had to be saved after decades of decay. Be that as it may, it has almost the grand style. In the eighteenth century its four towers were linked to the central block by the incorporation of some sixteenth century features. On the west side are three rows of fourteen closely spaced windows. On the east, the simple design of the front is broken by a triangular pediment. From the terrace the view ranges wide over the Alps, the Mont-de-Sion and the Salève. Geneva’s countryside frequently offers views like that when there is no glimpse of the lake to brighten it. They change continually as the distance recedes. At our feet, the springy ridges of ploughland, patches of brown and vivid green; a vineyard stretches down the slope, the hue of its trailing vines relieved by the rosy gleam of a peach tree. Further away stretch the hills linked by rails of sunlight and crowned with coppices or hamlets. Then these sharp tones and clear outlines become dimmer, less distinct; at first the blues of the far distance scarcely skim them, then more and more subtly, penetrate, sublimate, transmute them to grey, dove-lilac, till finally they blend with the mountain horizon, all transparency and purest white.

“Though it now houses the village school and municipal offices, the castle has not lost, at any rate the central part, the lordly proportions given by its owners to the entrance hall with its noble staircase and ornamental ironwork. The hall leads into a lofty music room, decorated right to the ceiling with slate and dull-ochre monochrome frescoes in the Italian style, with their accompanying emblems of rococo and trompe-l’œil. It seems as though it were vainly awaiting some torch-like fête and the rather wearisome graces of a pavan. But at Dardagny I have found another and much closer memory: Théophile Gautier, when he was staying near Geneva on the heights of Saint-Jean with Carlotta Grisi, the ballerina whom he loved so dearly, occasionally wandered round here. The jagged silhouette of Dardagny, its abandoned approaches, its cracked walls, its empty rooms steeped in the sadness of solitude — and perhaps a few ghosts which only “Théo” perceived — suggested to him what later was to become the Château de la Misère in his “Capitaine Fracasse”. So true it is that a slight momentary shock of emotion is sufficient to engender in a novelist, in an atmosphere and circumstances entirely different, a character or a setting.

“Gautier no doubt, with his trailing cloak and long unruly hair, occasionally strolled down from Saint-Jean to the Willow Path which seems as though it had been designed for Corot. And he would wander as far as the meeting of the waters. The sandy spit which there parts the Arve and the Rhône was in those days much wilder than now. But then, as always, the waters did not merge immediately but pursued for an instant their contrasting courses: the Arve glacial and grim, the Rhône, even at that short distance from the city, bereft of what Mistral called “its turquoise filched from Geneva’s lake”. Here its turquoise has changed to a sombre emerald. Pacified, the river seems almost asleep. It has patiently excavated a passage through the unresisting earth and thus shaped the cliffs whose dull hues — humus, rock and foliage — it is now content to reflect as they sprawl or swirl in the sinister sloth of its whirlpools. But the surface of the water is so smooth that the splash of a leaping trout or scratch of a fisherman’s line cast fractionally late will linger long — or the sudden plunge of a kite with out-thrust claws.”

TURF AND JUMPING HIGHLIGHTS IN AARAU AND GENEVA

6th October was the great day of horse racing in Switzerland with the 20,000 Francs “Grand Prix of Switzerland” held in Aarau. This was the last big event of the racing season in which the most successful Swiss steeplers were entered. Since horse racing and fashion seem to combine the world over, this outstanding autumn event gave Swiss fashion designers a good chance to present their models for the coming winter season.

Quite a different note will be struck by the International Horse Jumping Week in Geneva’s Palais des Expositions from 9th to 17th November. It will be the only event of its kind in Switzerland this year and therefore rates as C.H.I.O. (Concours Hippique International Officiel). This meeting is sure to offer excellent sport with riders from many different nations competing, the main event being the “Prix des Nations”, a challenge cup for teams. [S.N.T.O.]

125 YEARS ON WHEELS

Car Rental may be a modern term, but the idea as such is not new. This year, the reputed Zurich warehousing and removal firm of Welti Furrer, today an organization of world-wide connections, can celebrate its 125th anniversary. In 1838, Jakob Furrer, then Zurich mail-coach driver, started his own hackney firm. He let coaches, carriages and saddle horses for hire, driving clients anywhere between the North Sea and the Mediterranean. The business was expanded in 1870, when, together with his son-in-law Albert Welti-Furrer, he organized a moving and warehousing department which in the meantime and on international level has become one of the company’s main sectors of activity. At the turn of the century, there were 120 horses in the stables while with the first motor cab introduced in 1910 a new era was heralded. It is sad in a way to think that the management had to decide to pension the last horses this year because there is no help available who would know how to handle horses. The business is now in the hands of the fourth generation, has a staff of 460 and owns 500 cars, coaches and freight vehicles of all kinds. Car Rental with and without chauffeur has become an important business and the name of Welti Furrer travels far. [S.N.T.O.]