

The World's Oldest Democracy Calling the World's Biggest

One Century of Railways in Switzerland by P. Ladame

The city of Basel, Switzerland's advanced post on the Rhine between Germany and the French Alsace ~~has~~ has recently celebrated a great day: one hundred years ago, the first railway was established in Switzerland, a line which formed also the first railway connection ^{in the world} between two countries ~~in the world~~.

This event took place very exactly on the 16th of June 1844. But as is always the case when humanity is to make another step forward, the final achievement had been preceded by many a hard fight and disagreeable discussion.

Today, Switzerland is proud to possess the most comfortable electric railways of the world, but at that time she did not want to hear of this devilish invention of the Scotchman George Stephenson which transported people from Manchester to Liverpool at a speed of 24 km per hour.

The opponents of this project categorically declared that travelling at such a terrific speed would be certain suicide, for the human organism would never be able to stand such strains. Other enemies of the plan pointed out the strategic dangers of such an enterprise and stated that to build a station would mean to break a hole into the city walls to let the rails ~~x~~ pass through, another deadly thing for it would undoubtedly invite some bloodthirsty aggressor ~~to~~ to invade the city.

But (finally) progress was not to be stopped in its victorious course and a station was built. The first train, two open carriages drawn by a coughing locomotive, made its triumphant entry into Switzerland, to the great delight of fair ladies in crinolines who threw flowers to the engineers and blew kisses to the passengers. These hardy travellers, as a contemporary witness describes the scene, had tears streaming down their faces, not from emotion, but because they had nothing to protect themselves ^{against} from the biting smoke of the locomotive.

That ~~was~~ ^{were} the good old times, the 16th of June 1844, just one hundred years ago. Switzerland had opened her gates to progress which nothing can stop in its march.

A few years later, Swiss railway engineers and constructors were among the most ^{adventurous} audacious in the United States.

Thus for instance, John J. Bernet, who entered the States poor as a church mouse, and first ~~worked as a~~ found a job as a work-hand in the construction of the railway line on the shores of Lake Erie. He worked well and was intelligent and enterprising. ~~After~~ ^{In} several years, ~~after~~ climbing higher, step by step, on the ladder of success, he rose right ~~from the very bottom~~ to the top post of a president of the Lake Erie Railroad Company.

Railroad Company. And not enough, after a few years, he even became president of the Cheapeake, Ohio and Père Marquette Railroad Trust, the socalled Ramified Chesapeake, Ohio and Père Marquette Railroad Combine. Quite a success for ~~him~~ John J. Bernet, the little ~~Swiss~~ immigrant from Switzerland, don't you think so?