

# HANNIBAL ONCE PASSED ALONG SAVOY HIGHWAY

## Land of Permission, on One of Two Main Roads to Rome and Close to Roof of Europe, Has Had Absorbing History

When you go down to Savoy to spend your first regular seven days of "permission" since you came to France you will probably wake up in the morning to find that your train is passing through a narrow valley between granite hills.

Down the narrow valley will run a tiny river (which you will probably call a creek) of chalky water, going at a speed which makes up for its lack of depth and breadth. The knobby hillsides will be planted with scrubby oaks and chestnuts; or, around the villages, they will have been cleared of trees by the painful effort of generations of hardy Savoyards, and lines of grapevines on trellises will run in layers across the steep slopes wherever the sun shines on them at noon.

Rugged little groups of houses will from time to time appear, clustering about the confluence of two of the tiny streams of chalky water; houses of stucco, tall and red-roofed, and strung along the glaring white mountain road which leads to the station, also of stucco and red-roofed, and marked with a blue sign bearing the name of some saint or other.

The hills will be like all hills, except for the line of grapevines which mark them out, but the roads will be different. There will be mountain roads of course, muddy or rocky, with ox teams patiently hauling sledges or huge-wheeled carts up to the hill-top barnhouses; but there will also be the highways, the solid *routes nationales*, paralleling the road in places, and then winding off and up over rocky passes.

### Where Hannibal's Elephants Passed

There will not be much traffic on these roads now, aside from the few patient ox teams which have come down from the hills, but there has been a 250 in the past, and that of the most interesting. The main road through Savoy is the road to Italy over the Mont Cenis; and this needs a chapter to itself. There are only two main roads to Italy from France, this road and the road along the *Mont-Terranean* through Nice.

The first time Napoleon descended into the Italian plain and swept it clean of Austrian troops he went by way of Nice; later, he swept into Italy by way of Switzerland and the St. Bernard Pass; and when he came back from Elba for the last Hundred Days of his imperial rule he came through Nice, crossed the end of the Alps, due north from Nice over the pass of the Col du Lautaret, where the road runs 6,000 feet in the air, to Grenoble, in the next county to Savoy.

It was he who built the mountain highway which parallels the Savoy railway line to Italy over the Mont Cenis; built it to keep his communications with the Italian kingdom which he constructed flimsily, like a house of cards, to add to his empire over half of Europe. But the pass was always there, whether the road were good or bad, and Crusaders, and Roman legions, and Hannibal's elephants, before that, passed over it on their way to pillage the rich cities of Italy, or going north, to conquer the barbarian.

**The Road to Rome**  
The main Savoy road is, in other words, the road to Rome which all western Europe has traveled; and Savoy is the Alpine wall which separates the valley of the Rhone from the valley of the Po, as Switzerland is the Alpine wall which separated Roman civilization from the barbarism of the north.

Whatever part Savoy has played in the past relationship of France and Italy, of Gaul and Rome, it is of particular interest in the very recent history of those countries, and particularly of Italy. When one remembers that a united Italy exists only since 1870, and that the royal house which unified Italy was, only a little more than a hundred years ago, supreme over only the mountain Duchy of Savoy and the mountain islands of Corsica and Sardinia, then one realizes that even in Europe, the home of settled things, the destinies of lands and peoples change as greatly overnight as it were, as in the swiftly changing new countries on the other side of the Atlantic.

### Savoy Becomes French

The dual house of Savoy became the royal house of the Sardinian islands; extended to include the Piedmont plain at the Italian foot of the Alpine wall; wrested from Austria, with France's help and England's approval, the whole northern end of the Italian peninsula—Milan and Venice—in 1859; consolidated the petty kingdoms and grand duchies

of central Italy; employed the potent hand of Garibaldi to snatch Naples and the south of Italy from their Spanish king; and entered Rome, its final capital, in 1870, to found the Italian kingdom. From Chambéry, its little Savoyard capital, to Turin, at the upper end of the plain of the Po, to Rome, is a long cry. Small wonder is it then that the royal house, come into the rich possession of Roman civilization, turned its back on the little mountain duchy whence it had sprung, and signed away to France, in return for the help of France against the Austrians, the Savoy country and the county of Nice.

### Mountains By the Dozen

Savoy, on the map, is heavily shaded with contour lines, cut by narrow valleys which mean that it is simply the country of the Alps. One can stop off at any little village, and find a dozen mountains in the neighborhood. There will not be much in the village itself; an Hotel de la Gare, or an Hotel des Postes, a store or two, and perhaps a market place; perhaps, too, a ruined convent, or a mountain fort, or a church of the twelfth century perched on an inconvenient peak. Most

tourists prefer to go, however, where the common or garden variety of tourist goes, and plants hotels behind him. These places are Aix-les-Bains, Chambéry, Chamonix, and Annecy. Chambéry can be easily dismissed. As Baedeker says, it is "not very lively"; but it is the ancient capital of Savoy, and it possesses a fine hill-top chateau. Tourists go there in search of the fact that one can buy in the shops all kinds of curios except local ones; and that one can hire a team and a guide and go off, in regular tourist style, to visit chateaux, or the sulphur springs of Challes, or climb a convenient little peak of 5,000 feet. Chambéry is, moreover, the gate of Italy, as the streets built in arabesque show.

### Climbing Mount Blanc

Chamonix is a little village cuddled in a hollow at the foot of Mont Blanc, which the tourist calls the king of the Alps. Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe outside of one peak in the Caucasus, boasting something like 15,000 feet, and it has probably been more thoroughly "touristified" than any other peak in the world. The ascent takes 12 hours. Six hours from the start there is a hotel, and five hours beyond that there is a refuge. Moreover, one does not stir a foot without three guides, and it is even planned to build a switch-back up to the very top of the 15,000 feet.

Baedeker must have seen the top in a snowstorm, for he is very doubtful. In spite of his German thoroughness, of the results attained by so much labor, "The view from the top," he says, "is not always such as to justify the pains

taken to get there, inasmuch as the view sometimes fails to materialize because of the great distances. When the weather is too good, it is possible to distinguish only the general outlines of the view, the Alps, the Jura Mountains, and the Apennines. As in the case of all long-distance panoramas, the view is complete only in case light clouds serve as a filter for the dazzling sun."

### About Those Snow Storms

Baedeker, in other words, thinks Mont Blanc not worth while; and there are many tourists who have scattered their 250 francs over the two or three days in which the trip is made who agree with him. The chances of hitting a snowstorm at the top are too overpowering to permit any but the most fortunate of travelers to disprove Baedeker's pessimism; but, after all, one goes to Chamonix for the purpose of climbing Mont Blanc, and one lets oneself be persuaded by eager guides. Then one runs into the aforesaid snowstorm, and talks for the rest of one's life to admiring friends of the perils of Alpine mountain climbing. Thus fixed in the conquering mood, one scorns the petty five-thousand-foot foothills of Mont Blanc, and goes out carelessly on the Mer de Glace, or Ice Sea, under the hotel windows, and breaks a leg. All this to point a moral. One ought to "do" Mont Blanc, to be sure; but the only way to see anything is to knock about on the smaller peaks in the hope of finding a clear day when one can get a view.

### Some Tips for Tourists

One can do this, as I have said, anywhere in Savoy; and after a while one mountain is as good as another. The really wise person may like to drop himself down—or up, rather—into the encircled hollow of Chamonix; but he would do as well to make for one or other of the two towns of Savoy of which I have spoken—Aix-les-Bains and Annecy.

At both these towns the mountain streams have widened out, to form lakes of deep blue water; about them stretch the only rolling country in Savoy, framed in distantly by the ever-present mountains. Aix-les-Bains is a "fashionable" watering place of the most fashionable, with casinos, and mineral springs, and clubs, and promenades, and countless hotels; and, as Baedeker says, "very fine" excursions are made to a picturesque twelfth-century abbey, and to smaller mineral-spring villages, all modeled on Aix.

It is a far cry from the dusty little hill villages, where the ox teams trail along the roads, or from the jagged granite peaks of the Mont Blanc range on the horizon, to the "elegant" resort of Aix with its casinos and villas. But it is all swept by the Southern sun. It is the gateway to the South.

### STAFF OFFICER WAS JUST TRYING IT OUT

#### Soldiers Take Gas Mask Experiment for Real Thing

It was a nice night, as nights at the front go. The staff officer who had been up to the front on an inspection tour all about the first line and everywhere thought it was a nice night, too. In fact, he thought it was nice enough, and just about dark enough, for him to get a little practice, on his walk back to brigade headquarters, in wearing that confounded gas mask.

He slipped it up, over and on. Then, wheezing and choking merrily into his cavernous maw, he strode on his way.

He hadn't gone far when he met a column of four mule teams, the first commanded by Private Paddy Whack. Paddy took one look at the officer, then made a dive for the mask on the seat beside him.

### Carling for the Canaries

"Gas!" he gurgled, once he had the anti-chlorine contrivance adjusted. "All you back there—get on mask—dubl-quick! There's—staff officer—wearin' one—Must be—invisible gas! Get busy!"

Al, in the second mule team, needed no second warning. His mask was clamped down before Paddy was through talking.

Dinny, on the third mule coach-and-four, saw his two predecessors bind up

their heads thus in leather and rubber. Reaching for his own mask, he shouted ahead to them:

"Ye're fine muleskinners, so ye are! Protectin' yerselves and forgittin' the poor canaries!" With that, all three drivers got down and adjusted the nose-bag contraptions to their wondering steeds.

But George, the fourth driver, didn't stop for that. He pulled his team around so fast they thought they were doing the chariot race in "Ben Hur." Off they went at a gallop to the rear.

"Gas!" hollered George, to a passing sentry who tried to hold him up. "Gas, comin' down the pike hell bent for election! Get your mask on!"

"Corpl" of the gun-a-a-a-a-a-arr-r-r-rud!" yelled the sentry. "Corpl of the gun-a-a-a-a-a-arr-r-r-rud! GAS!"

### Everybody Following Suit

Well within the required six seconds every man in that section of the support had his face muffled out and on, the gong had sounded, and everyone was on the alert.

From the interior of his cage the staff officer gradually became aware of the havoc he had wrought by his innocent little practice-promenade. Guiltily, he whipped off his mask and sneaked around to headquarters by a devious route.

Pretty soon, in stumped a young aide, just taking off his own protector. "Whew!" he exclaimed. "That was a funny one. Some boob pulled a fake gas alarm when there wasn't a whiff of it anywhere, and got the whole brigade up on its ear!"

The staff officer said never a word.

Billy Sunday is coming over here in the near future. Watch France go dry.

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