

# Notes and gleanings

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They were seen 50 feet below on a ledge of ice, battered, but alive. But when the ropes were lowered to them, they were found to be just a few feet too short.

Nothing remained to be done but to leave the prisoners and hurry back to Chamonix for a relief party. This was done. But when the relief party returned, there was no sign of the woman or her companions. The ice had engulfed them.

Reading the above, I was reminded of a novel called, I think, "La Mort Blanche," which I read when at college at Yverdon in my young days and which then made a very deep impression upon me, especially as soon afterwards our holiday trip took us across the Alps right into Italy, via Tosa-falls, and in traversing some glaciers, I then gained for the first time some faint idea of the dangers lurking there. Does any reader remember that novel and its author?

Now for some lighter reading: In *Answers* (July 11th) I find the following delightful description of—

#### Ambling Among the Alps.

The drawback to Switzerland is that it's too up and down to suit me. I hate walking on the sides of my feet, because it causes corns and what not. That's why I think Switzerland and Holland ought to amalgamate and strike an average.

All the same, I didn't have half a bad time in Switzerland.

I loved to go out in the mornings and hear the mountaineers yodelling to one another, though it used to bring tears to my eyes when I thought of the Shoreditch Empire, where the yodelling was done so much better.

Yodelling is easy—when you know how. Here's the tip. Get four or five dried or parched peas. Swallow them, and just as they are getting past the gullet, halt, and unswallow them until they rest evenly on the tonsils. Then make a noise like a man gargling.

The result is so close to the genuine Swiss article that the Alpine cows will come hopping down to the valleys to be milked when they hear it, and then get frightfully cross at being deceived.

The glaciers, too, were fine. By the way, did you ever hear of the job of glacier watching? It's one of the favourite professions in Switzerland. Well, I suppose it's as good an excuse for doing nothing as any other.

I seriously thought of getting a job watching a glacier, myself. It's not very difficult. A glacier moves so slowly that, even if you took a week and your eyes off, you'd soon catch up with it.

But I found that I was ineligible. The United Society of Glacier Watchers only admit a few apprentices each year, and then you have to be descended from glacier watchers for two generations on both sides.

I was barred out. The nearest I could come to this was a second cousin of my aunt, who was a clock-watcher. Still, it's a nice occupation, if rather apt to cause chilblains. It's the sort of job which would help you to grow old gracefully.

That reminds me of an interesting interview I had with a fascinating but frightfully aged lady, who said she'd occupied the same cottage, man and boy, for ninety years or so.

"You'll never guess who I am," said she.

"Too true," said I. "Who are you?"

"I'm the girl out of 'Excelsior'."

"What pub is that?"

"It's not a pub," said she, with a dash of hauteur. "You remember the poem 'Excelsior'?"

"A bit of it," said I.

"Well, you remember the maiden who spoke to the young man with the banner and asked him to stay and not to be such a silly ass as to do mountain climbing on a night like that. I'm the girl."

"Go on?"

"Yes, indeed. I was awfully sorry for the lad. A handsome fellow, too. Like you."

"Never."

"Yes, indeed. And I was a bit of a peache-rino myself at the time. But I couldn't get the young man to take good advice. I suppose he was doing it for a bet. I've kept one souvenir of the affair."

She went to an old oak chest and brought out a tiny box containing a little bit of cloth, with the letters 'EXC' on it.

"That's the first bit of 'Excelsior' that was on his banner, poor misguided boy!" said she. And the tears flowed like anything.

I withdrew softly. Things were getting too damp for my liking.

Would you believe it? The next day I came across another old girl, who told me the same tale and produced another bit of cloth with 'EXC' on it. She also was the maiden in 'Excelsior.' I thought to myself that, if her present-appearance was any guide to what she was like when the young man passed, I could understand his keeping on. I myself, in the circumstances, would have scaled Mont Blanc sooner than stop.

That was bad enough, but when three more old dames on different occasions claimed to be

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the self-same heroine, I lost interest and came to the conclusion that the youth was nothing more than a flirt.

Of course, I went on a mountain-climbing stunt. Fool that I was!

At three in the morning, just as I was getting into my stride with my beauty sleep, I was awakened by a battering on the door of my room, and some basso profundo shouted out that the party was starting.

I jumped out of bed, chucked my clothes on and wandered outside to where a bunch of sleepy, shivering people were being roped together like a daisy chain.

I was last but one, and after me came a battered-looking guide who claimed to have been present at more fatal accidents in the Alps than any other two men in Switzerland. Dismal-looking old bird he was, too.

Well, we started off climbing, and went on climbing. Then we continued climbing. After a couple of hours, just when I had got used to having all the skin off my knees and elbows, we stopped to see the sun rise.

It did, without anybody interfering, and we went on and on, and up and up, until we got to the top of the Unik Horn. Only on two occasions was the party in danger, and then I had my knife ready to cut the rope, so that one at least might be saved—I mean me.

The view from the summit would have been awe-inspiring only for the fact that you couldn't see anything owing to the clouds. So we came down again, and, after four hours, I arrived at the hotel, with my spinal column two inches out of true and every bone in my body aching.

Still, I was all right a week later, and, as I told the landlord, all they need to do is to instal a moving staircase, and I'll tackle Mont Blanc itself with one hand tied behind my back.

Next I wanted to go chamois-hunting, because I hadn't a decent pair of yellow gloves; but another resident told me that there was only one genuine chamois in the country, and he was trained to leap from crag to crag whenever English visitors appeared. He was a sort of Civil Servant, in fact, and there'd be a fine of a thousand pounds or so for the chap that shot him.

So I thought I wouldn't, and soon was making tracks for Italy.

And, the reading becoming lighter still and more appropriate, perhaps, for the holiday season, just read the following from the *Manchester Guardian* (9th July):—

The authorities of an old church in Switzerland decided to make some repairs to its interior furnishings, and employed an artist to touch up a large painting. When the artist presented his bill, the committee refused to pay it unless the details were specified. The next day the bill was presented itemised as follows:—

|   |    |
|---|----|
| For correcting the Ten Commandments, embellishing Pontius Pilate, and putting new ribbons in his hat .....                          | 8  |
| Putting tail on rooster of St. Peter and mending his comb .....   | 4  |
| Repluming and gilding left wing of Guardian Angel .....   | 6  |
| Washing High Priest's servant .....   | 5  |
| Renewing heaven, adjusting the stars, and cleaning up the moon .....  | 7  |
| Brightening up the flames of Hell, putting new tail on the Devil, mending his hoof, and doing several odd jobs for the damned ..... | 12 |
| Touching up purgatory and restoring lost souls .....  | 7  |
| Mending the shirt of the Prodigal Son .....   | 3  |
| Francs .....  | 52 |

#### A Peak Conquered.

*Daily Mail* (13th July):—

A Chamonix telegram says that the Doigt de Letala, which hitherto has resisted all efforts, has been scaled by a local guide, Couttet Champion. The Doigt de Letala is a peak nearly 10,000 feet high. The summit forms a perpendicular monolith of 150 feet, which overhangs in several places.

At eight o'clock on Saturday morning a party led by Couttet Champion and Couttet Moussoux

reached the foot of the couloir, where they left their equipment.

From a distance of 50 feet Champion landed a noose over the highest point. Assisted by his companions, Champion reached his goal at four in the afternoon, just in time to plant a small flag before a storm of hail and snow drove the intrepid party to shelter.

I daresay there are lots of peaks to be conquered still in Switzerland. Some are not very high, but extremely difficult. I have heard it said also that there are some such peaks in England, notably in Cumberland, peaks which have defied the climbers so far.

Meanwhile, our Geneva compatriots seem to have found a way out of the difficulty which arose when the Federal Law concerning gambling rooms came into force. The *Daily News* (20th July) says:—

#### A New Game.

A new game is being introduced into Swiss kursaals which may do something to make up for the loss occasioned by the suppression of gaming tables. As it is a game of skill, it does not fall under the new anti-gambling law.

It consists of a moving disc marked in sections. When a section marked with his number passes, a player presses an electric button, letting fall an arrow fixed above. The object is to strike exactly the line of the section. Any player succeeding in doing this receives seven times the amount—one franc—paid, but success is rare.

The rarer the success, the better for the purse! One soon gives it up if one has no luck, but when initial luck favours (?) the player, then he is apt to lose quite a lot. That, anyhow, is my own experience. Walking into the Interlaken Kursaal last year, on the occasion of the last ball of the season, I put a franc on the 40 chance of one of those funny gambling machines and got the 40 frs. by return. A bottle of fizz took half or more and more than half again was spent in trying to coax another winner out of that machine! On another occasion, Mrs. 'Kyburg' and self were very lucky one evening at roulette at Montreux, playing on a simple "system" we had discovered ourselves. Even the croupier began to know us! Next evening, during the half-hour's play, the winnings of the preceding night went and as much again of capital! A good lesson, and it would not have been so bad if the first evening's winnings had not meanwhile been invested in a costume for Mrs. 'Kyburg'! Therefore, ye readers and potential gamblers, take it from me: Initial luck is bad for the constitution of one's purse!

How they deal with the Speed-limit Question in Berne.

*Motor* (14th July):—

That it pays better at times to protest against injustice than to lie down to be kicked is strikingly shown in the case of the Canton of Berne, in Switzerland. Last year, as may be remembered, as a result of the constant persecution and prosecution of motorists, the Swiss Automobile Club called a boycott on the canton in question. This influenced the authorities to such an extent that they revised their methods, con-

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