

Miss Jemima's swiss journal

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MISS JEMIMA'S SWISS JOURNAL

It was a stroke of luck for Thomas Cook & Son that a certain Mr. Williams wrote his piece on Income Tax a hundred years ago. On the strength of this he decided to take ten days' holiday in Norway. However, his friends drew his attention to the announcement of a 'preliminary tour in Switzerland with cheap tickets to Mont Blanc' by Mr. Cook of Excursion fame — and he changed his mind. Miss Jemima, artist, consented to join the tour if suitably accompanied. Two other gentlemen and three young ladies were persuaded to join them. Together they formed the Junior United Alpine Club, at whose last meeting Miss Jemima was requested to prepare the record of the wanderings of the club. The first meeting, held on the day before their departure, was largely concerned with reducing the members' baggage to an absolute minimum. The prize medal went to the member taking only a small bag containing one shirt, handkerchiefs, two collars, one pair of stockings, a toothbrush, writing materials, pocket comb, together with an umbrella, great-coat and a portmanteau from which to reclothe himself completely before arriving home.

And so on 26th June 1863 the travellers set out, young Victorian ladies, surprisingly unchaperoned, and seemingly enjoying themselves with zest and a freedom we would never have suspected in young people of that time. Traveling was by no means always a sinecure, there were no funiculars and few railways, and glaciers had to be negotiated — with top hats, crinolines, umbrellas and all. The journeys on foot were long and tiring. Yet the party was never discouraged, nor were their spirits daunted as they progressed. The journey took them via Paris and Lyons to Geneva. Some members walked every step from Chamonix to Martigny, though mules had been procured to carry most of them. Their next stop was at Leukerbad, whence they made an excursion to the Gemmi. They descended to Kandersteg, leaving again at 4.30 a.m. — the Junior United Alpine Club believed in early rising! From Spiez they sailed across the lake of Thun to Neuhaus. They visited Lauterbrunnen and the Staubbach falls and proceeded to Interlaken. With true feminine delight the ladies took charge of their luggage, which had been sent there in advance.

The Wengern Alp was crossed on foot and they not only heard their first Alphorn produce an impressive echo, but they saw an avalanche come crashing down from a buttress of the Jungfrau. Grindelwald's glaciers were explored the next day and in the afternoon they went to see the Giessbach Falls. Next day their route took them to Brienz and Lucerne, where they crammed a lightning tour of the town into four hours. They sailed to Weggis in the afternoon, climbed the Rigi, whose top they reached late at night. But at 3 a.m. they were up again to watch the magic sunrise. After descending, the party took the train to Neuchâtel and soon left for Paris, where they spent the remaining five days on concentrated sightseeing.

If they had set out with insular convention and eager anticipation as well as fear of what adventures might befall

them, they did return full of unforgettable memories of the happy time spent in Switzerland.

Miss Jemima Morrell (whose identity was discovered only a few weeks ago) was commissioned at the time to write an account of their adventures. This journal came to light in the rubble of a bombed East End warehouse of Thomas Cook and Son. The founder of the firm was himself a member of the party figuring in Miss Jemima's diary. On the occasion of the Centenary of this first conducted tour the interesting account has been published by Messrs. Putnam & Co. Ltd., at 15/-. It is a most attractive book lavishly illustrated with excellent photographs giving a good idea of travelling and mountaineering conditions at the time.

The book is written in a refreshing style, an intriguing mixture of humour, culture, shrewdness and naivety. Diaries are not always the most entertaining reading matter, but Miss Jemima Morrell certainly captures her readers and one cannot help wishing to have known her. She must have been a sparkling personality with beguiling charm. She looks at men and women with a lively curiosity and speculates on the probable antecedents of her fellow voyagers "as to what they might, could, would or should have been". She criticizes fairly — of the streets of Dieppe she says they, "though narrow, had the advantage of shade, but not of a local board of health, as their open gutters testified". In a few words she paints a picture of "a German gentleman of comfortable dimensions, with his Frau of ditto". With realism she describes their crossing of the Mer de Glace: "How strange, how intensely incongruous it felt on that hot summer's day to be crunching ice under our feet, and to be looking down yawning crevasses that showed eighty or a hundred feet of their blue and crystal-lined jaws. We step carefully in the track chipped out by the guide as we intersect the numerous pitfalls at our feet, spending about half an hour on its slippery surface". Her opinion of the sermon which they heard at Interlaken she expresses shrewdly: "it was pretty good, although the doctrines were slightly too much in harmony with human nature to arouse the hearers to severe self-scrutiny. It was rather religion presented walking in silver slippers". With the eyes of the artist she describes the beauties of nature: "Our route lay through the valley of Lauterbrunnen, which was again all loveliness, its verdure laden with heavy dew, and studded over with transparent crystals that in the sunlight were diamond prisms and in the shade, a carpet of pearls". And finally Miss Jemima sums up philosophically on her return, "We had acquired a wider knowledge of human nature, habits of self-reliance, and valuable lessons of our own ignorance that amply repaid us all for the fatigue and inevitable annoyance attendant on foreign travel."

A book well worth reading and excellent value for 15/-.

Mariann.

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