

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1926)

Heft: 231

Rubrik: Notes and gleanings

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Telegrams : FREPRINCO, LONDON.

PRICE 3d.

HOME NEWS

I think the above words contain all that is needed in the way of New Year resolutions; in other words, unless we strive with all our might

to bring forth good fruit during 1926, we shall merit to be cast into the fire. Amen.

Almost all the Gleanings from the British Press are about Winter Sports, the best article being found in *The Times* (30th Dec.) entitled—

Winter Sports.

"It's just an ordinary place"—such was the reply made by a schoolgirl who had been asked what sort of place Davos was; she had used two "topplings" and a "glorious" in one breathless sentence in description of her holiday there, and her elucidation of those adjectives was a set-back to the questioner.

Yet there was some sense in her disinclination to be more definite. It was not that it was the young lady's polite way of saying that you find in a place what you bring to it and that she had brought a capacity to enjoy sitting down abruptly; she was no "high-brow." What was at the back of her answer was that Davos does not proclaim its purpose to the first glance as do some places—Carcassonne, for instance, or Manchester. Sherlock Holmes would have known that it was both a sports centre and a health resort before Watson had staggered out of the railway carriage with the bags; but Watson would not, and there was a good deal of that stout fellow in the young lady, who, like all her breed, took steep places straight. There are snow-covered mountains, of course, but with the adaptability of youth she would have taken mountains for granted by the end of her holidays. People who know the Alps speak of Davos as a valley—leaving the mountains to be implied; it is not identified with some great peak, as are certain winter resorts in the Oberland that stand less high. One mountain is more impressive than many; and the long Davos valley is bounded by a succession of mountains so closely joined and so much of a height that their particularity is merged in the ridge in which they are set.

To appreciate them as mountains one must climb higher—say, to the Schatz Alp. From the floor of the valley they do not look as high as they are; and they do not look menacing—though they have given their proof by throwing an avalanche into the town below. And they look the tamer for the lines of defence drawn to prevent a repetition of the bombardment. Except for the Schiahorn, which stretches upwards into a crest as high as the base will allow, from below they do not profess themselves mountains by their bulk or structure. Deceived by the thin, clear air, a stranger from misty Devonshire might reckon to reach the crests 4,000 ft. and more above him in no more time than it would take him to reach the top of Great Hangman from the coast. The more so that travelling up, as he naturally would, from Landquart he would have seen cliffs and peaks and drops that made a lot more of themselves to the eye. So "ordinary" was not such a bad word.

Again, Davos, like the other winter sports centres, is a town—a real town. There are, it is true, shops which cater for the romantically minded with wooden bears, and with variants of a picture in which a richly moustachioed young man with a dead chamois on his shoulder is welcomed by a robust and handsomely caparisoned young woman; and with articles branded "souvenirs" which only a tourist buys and which no tourist can pack. And then there are shops, too, which serve the needs and fads of skirunners with knapsacks and caps and jumpers that make an agreeable splash of colour against snow. But shops which appeal to tourists and holiday makers are but a small proportion among ordinary shops—shops that expose for sale garments that could not by any stretch of the imagination be associated with sport or distraction; there are grocers grocing openly and unashamedly; there are shops which sell tinctures and dischloths and lard—ordinary things for which there is no demand among winter sportsmen. Certainly there are people on ski to be seen in the streets, but not many, for with Davosers ski-ing is not a progress towards a tea-room; most of the people to be met with look as if they were out on business, not pleasure—their clothes are subfusc.

The town is full of foreigners, but you may see soldiers in uniform, and you will certainly see swarms of Swiss children. Time was when the child encountered in the mountains was apt to put its finger in its mouth and gaze at the stranger with something in its expression that he might take for awe, or at any rate wonder or curiosity. There is nothing so flattering in the gaze of the Davos child of to-day. It looks at all at the stranger is to note something funny to pass on to its mate. It seldom has a glance for him as it goes about its business—with a satchel—or its pleasure—on ski. It is a town child; sure of itself like any other town child, especially—confound it—on ski.

Davos winter sports are not the pursuit of immigrants only, as they are on some of the mountain shelves. The language of the practice slopes is that of the country; and the crowds that make holiday on the great rink at Christmas are in colour much what they would be on the Round Pond if there were to be a frost in

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London, they are content with their ordinary clothes, whereas the visitors—and it is they who predominate elsewhere on mountain rinks—emphatically are not; for visitors half the fun of it is to sport hues that are not ordinary.

Yet Davos is no ordinary place: it is more a business town than a sports centre, but its business is not ordinary. The symmetrical buildings that climb up one above the other on the north side, contending like trees for sunlight, are too quiet for hotels, and they are equipped with covered balconies facing the sun too elaborate for amenity. These are hospitals for consumptives. The most careless of holiday makers cannot be unaware of their presence but they do not obtrude themselves on him. Indeed, whatever they may talk of among themselves, they talk sports with the sportsman, and condole sympathetically with the ski-runner when he is laid up for a week with a strain. Their interest in the sports is inherited, for it was their predecessors who brought them to Davos.

To make rinks at Davos demands little of the spade work necessary in the "shelf" resorts; the sides of the main valley are broken by lateral valleys suitable for ski tours and are steep enough to keep off all but an enflaming wind, but not so steep as seriously to curtail the hours of sunshine. These natural advantages have been developed by long experience and by the resources of a community engaged in the established industry of a health resort. At Davos there are organized facilities for practising all the sports, and, compared with other resorts, its distinction is that it offers the greatest common measure of the attractions for which the young—and old—and active come to the mountains. That is not to say that except as a centre for ski tours it is supreme among the resorts in any one quality desired by Englishmen.

The Englishman does not call the tune even among the visitors, who are mostly German. Not but that the Swiss make concessions to the disorderliness of the Englishman; the railway men acquiesce in his flinging his skis unregistered into the luggage van, and nod amazed but tolerant heads when he jumps into it at his destination—or elsewhere—and flings out other people's skis in his frenzied search for his own. Nothing develops clannishness like being in a minority, and in Davos the English have combined formally together as if they were Scottish. There is an English church and an English library, and an English ski club and a rink for "English" skating.

The chief sporting events of the season before the war were "The Bowl" (for English skating), toboggan races, and bob races. These races were run on a road, for it is among the natural of Davos to be near—or what the unspoiled veterans thought near—to a road descending in its lower part sharply to Klosters, where the obliging railway could be used for the return journey. But in Switzerland there is a class corresponding to pedestrians in England—a class which persists in using public thoroughfares for purposes unconnected with racing. Artificial race tracks became the mode, and Davos turned another natural advantage to account by making as curly a course as could be desired on the steep Schatz Alp—up which a funicular railway runs a thousand feet to a sanatorium; this railway takes up toboggans and bobs, and it also puts the ski-er on its way to the Strela Pass. At the top of the funicular railway there is a restaurant, all windows, and from it one realizes—what is not revealed below—the nature of mountainous country. As far as sight can reach there is a tumbled sea of crags and peaks and great waves—their broken tops flashing white in the Davos sun. . . .

Alas! My thoughts to-day are not of the most cheerful, because I have received the income-tax demand note, reminding me of the fact that, whereas the serfs of the old time had to yield up ten per cent. of their income to their masters, I have to give up some twenty per cent. In other words, and to be thoroughly pessimistic, as befits the occasion and as tending to make it easier to be optimistic again in the New Year, the more things change, the more they remain the same—only worse!

Let us turn to the more cheerful news—Swiss Budget—British Coal in the Swiss Market—Lower German Duty on Wool Textiles, etc.—to be found

among my Gleanings. Let us turn to them, I say, and let us turn them down, as of no interest just now, when my mind toys with to-night's New Year's Eve party! For, gentle reader, these Notes are written on New Year's Eve, before my New Year Resolutions become operative—oh, blessed interval, during which I may still indulge in all my numerous old errors and sins!—and so, as the printer's boy is waiting and clamouring for my copy, I will make my last bow of 1925 to you and wish you—not a Happy New Year, as I have done this already in our last issue, but an easy getting over the New Year's Resolutions.

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