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HOME NEWS

The letter from M. Spahlinger published in the *Daily Express* to-day, is a rather dramatic document. The bacteriologist around whom such a highly important medical controversy rages declares that if his achievements are to be "so easily discredited" he will burn his secrets and go back to the Bar. It is proper to make allowances for the nerves and the temperaments of scientists and research workers, strained and troubled as they must be in the task of discovery. But, making all such allowances, we would urge M. Spahlinger to recognise that burning his secrets and returning to the Bar would not make a fitting conclusion to the years he has devoted to investigation.

If M. Spahlinger has discovered a method of defeating the great white scourge, if he has found a means whereby hundreds of thousands of lives may be saved and a great weight of human anguish lifted, then, however tired and discouraged he may be, both his duty and his proud privilege must be to give his secrets to the world rather than to burn them.

A Winter Picture.

The following alluring account appeared in the *Evening Standard* (Jan. 10th) from the pen of Sir John Foster Fraser:—

I do not know how many thousands of Britons, Germans and folk from God's own country are in this little high-perched valley of the Alps. There is, however, a considerable mixed congregation of us.

Nobody within my earshot has gone into rhapsody over the beauty of the snow-sprayed mountains, the glorious sunshine, or even the startling green, blood-red and duck-egg blue opalesque sunsets, the neglect of the latter being probably because they come at an unfortunate hour—just when people have finished tea and are settling down to a couple of hours' bridge before dinner.

The chief worry of most people when they arrive is how they are going to get "sleepers" to return to Paris or Boulogne ten days or a fortnight hence. That is the problem. The sleek concierge shrugs his shoulders and promises to do his best. A crowd in the lounge is thrown into perturbation on the rumour there is a waiting list of at least fifty for the luxe train each evening. It seems only a few of us are content to be here without being in a perpetual fluster about getting home.

The hardest-worked men are the special photographers in St. Moritz and neighbourhood, stalking celebrities. The manner Lady Urlica Lightfeather will poise on her new skates—she is still rather wobbly on the ice—shows there is still a lot of graciousness in our aristocracy.

It does not matter who wrote that a pleasure is always enhanced by the knowledge somebody is without it. It is worth noting that most English people in the Engadine give a little wriggle of satisfaction when they read you are having murky weather in London. And it is perfectly true that dour, drab-garbed business men become as frivolous as undergraduates when they get out here. They blink with the glare of the sun on the snow, will not believe that there are ten degrees of frost, because they feel so warm in their ski-ing kit—peaked cap, special square-toed boots, with gaudy, overlapping socks—they allow themselves to be strapped to those slippery sticks, feeling that on their first attempt to glide like a bird down a hillside they will fall into a hole like a dead hen pitched into a crate! It is rare fun, all the same.

These high jinks in the Alps are wonderful levellers. Yesterday afternoon I encountered a noisy father and four noisy children luge-ing—bawling for way to be made as they slithered on their toboggans into the village. He is a very important City man, and the last time I saw him he was sedately presiding over a company meeting. At a fancy dress ball the other evening I came across a melancholy-visaged clown with a vermilion nose sitting on a window-sill. He is a peer of repute.

Everybody knows English people invented Switzerland. I've been wondering a little, however, what folk of other nationalities here think about the calm arrogance with which the English take the lead in nearly everything, whether it be arranging contests on the Cresta run, fixing up ski contests—allowing, rather contemptuously, Scotsmen to have some voice in curling matches—and on nights of high festival, junketting and late dancing, taking control of the whole business. I noticed that at a big party a night or two ago nice people of other lands sat on one side and just watched us. If, however, they had been reared in the idea that the British are a solemn, stand-offish, unimprudent lot we undecieved them before two o'clock in the morning.

A few Germans as well as many English are "just crazy" about ski-ing. A favourite afternoon sport is for some youth or girl to get mounted on a horse and scamper at full speed along the snow-covered roads, whilst one or two friends are ski-joring: trailing behind on their ski and with a rope fastened to the slim harness.

There are a lot of plump herrs and fraus and blossoming frauleins in this valley, and they all wear horn-rimmed goggles and wrap themselves up Arctic fashion, and, after lunch, recline in bedizened sleighs drawn by gaily caparisoned horses jangling bells, and so go for a drive. They all look very prosperous, and those I have encountered in the Maloja road rather somnolent. It seems to be the rule for the English and Germans to keep themselves to themselves.

Nearly everybody out here seems possessed of a double dose of vitality. They ski, skate, bob, luge, play ice hockey or curl most of the

day, and then devote part of the night to vigorous dancing with Charlestoning and the hectic sport. But why doesn't someone invent a Swiss dance, the Sils Slide, or the St. Moritz Medley?

Safety Rules for Ski-ers.

Many have been the comments on the recent disaster to a ski party reported from the Tyrol: Mr. E. C. Percy, the President of the Ski Club of Great Britain, publishes the following golden rules in the *Morning Post* (Jan. 5th):—

The ski-running novice leaves the practice slopes for the mountains as soon as he can, and sometimes without realising that a knowledge of the way does not qualify for leadership. It cannot, however, be too strongly emphasised that at least one member of every party should have some knowledge of the conditions affecting avalanches.

The Ski Club of Great Britain has issued warnings in the past, based on long experience, but a repetition of some simple rules for safety may encourage the avoidance of unnecessary risk without interfering with legitimate cross-country touring.

(a) All slopes steeper than 25deg. are liable to avalanche.

(b) When a Föhn (hot wind) is blowing avoid all steep slopes.

(c) Steep slopes are dangerous after a fall of new snow until the new layer has coagulated with the old. This usually requires 48 hours.

(d) Do not trust steep slopes facing south or south-west, and avoid overhanging snow cornices.

(e) If you have to traverse a dangerous slope, leave considerable distances between individuals.

The peeling away of quite a small area of snow—only worth calling a snow-slide—may cause an accident, and, therefore, in his own interests every skier should study the fascinating arts of snow-craft and mountain-craft.

Avoidance of risks from avalanches is such an easy matter in ordinary low-level cross-country ski-ing that it would be a thousand pities if ignorance of the simple rules given above endangered holiday parties.

Romansch Revival.

From the *Morning Post* (Jan. 7th):—

Switzerland may soon have a fourth official language if the plans of the General Assembly of Romansch Societies meet with success.

The official languages of Switzerland at present are French, German and Italian, but the Grisonites, and their scholars, such as the celebrated Dr. Nay, have decided to perfect, with all possible speed, an elaborate vocabulary of the complete Romansch language as it is now spoken.

After a period of instruction in the schools it is believed that their mother tongue will be so developed that it will be possible to assure its perpetuation by making it official. There is considerable opposition among Federal authorities to its inclusion, but there is no antagonism to the desires of the Romansch population to perpetuate their language as well as customs.

The Romansch language, which is an interesting survival of the Roman occupation of Rhetia during the later Empire, is spoken by about 35,000 people in the Canton of Grisons. It is divided into two dialects, Romansch and Ladin, spoken respectively in different districts, and is derived directly from the spoken Latin. Whilst quite a distinct language it is, of course, akin to French and Italian. The Romansch Societies have been very active in keeping it alive.

Illegal Marriages.

The technical irregularities at the local registry office of Zurzach lend themselves to humorous interpretation; here is what the *Evening Standard* (Jan. 11th) says about the matter:—

An extraordinary situation has arisen in the little Swiss town of Zurzach involving a large number of young couples.

The local marriage registrar was relieved of his post over two years ago for various misdemeanours and the post was entrusted to his son. The son, however, allowed the father to continue to officiate. In his unauthorised capacity he "married" a large number of couples.

Eventually the position was discovered and the authorities have now declared that all the marriages so solemnised are illegal and the couples concerned must go through another ceremony in order to legalise their position. In many cases there are children and a great deal of unhappiness has been caused by the tragic announcement.

In some instances, however, piquancy has been added to the situation by the refusal of one or other of the parties to go through a further ceremony, a union which has turned out unhappily being conveniently discovered to be null and void.

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