

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: - (1935)

Heft: 690

Artikel: "An alpine journey"

Autor: Suttre, P.S.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687352>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 21.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

SWITZERLAND AS THE WINTER STADIUM OF EUROPE.

A small country in the centre of Europe, but the Dreamland of the Winter Sportsman, the real "Playground" of Europe — that is Switzerland. A few hours' railway or aeroplane journey will take you away from fogs, smoke and dampness into the sunny Alps, where floods of light compel you to wear dark glasses to protect your eyesight. White powder-snow and glistening ice reflect the intense sunlight and the ultra-violet rays, which easily pass through the thin pure air of the Alps, have a most beneficial effect upon the visitor's health and outlook on life.

St. Moritz, the world-famous resort, has just staged the Anglo-Swiss Varsity Ski-Meet, (Jan. 3-4) and has scheduled the *European Figure and Fancy Skating Championships* for Jan. 24-26. Sonja Henie will defend her title against the wonder-children Collodge and Taylor and the experienced skaters Vivian Hulten, Landbeck, Karl Schäfer the Olympic and world Champion, while Baier and Erdős will not make things easier for him. The Hungarian Champion couple Rotter-Szollas will also be present.

A week later the International Academic Winter games will be held at St. Moritz also (Feb. 4-11). Every winter sport excepting curling and tobogganing will be included in these games. The entries include teams and single students of all nations who practise the snow and ice sports.

On Feb. 14 and 15 the *International Bob-sleigh Championships* will also be held here. The St. Moritz bob run has a length of 1610 metres and an aggregate drop of 120 metres, the leading teams of 4 men each are coming from France, Rumania, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and the United States.

The FIS races in Mürren.

The two great ski-ing specialities downhill racing and slalom have been chiefly cultivated by the English and the Swiss. Thus it is only natural that these two categories of this year's races of the Fédération Internationale de Ski will be held at Mürren, where the Kandahar Club and the Swiss Academic Ski Club first introduced downhill racing. They will be organised by the Ski Club of Great Britain on Feb. 22-25 and will attract a record number of first-class ski-runners of all countries. The entries include names from Great Britain, Canada, Norway, Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Holland, Japan, Australia, Lettland, Switzerland and Bulgaria.

"AN ALPINE JOURNEY."

By F. S. SMYTHE (Gollancz, 16/- net).

It is a charming and fascinating book, "An Alpine Journey" that Mr. F. S. Smythe has written. Mr. Smythe is so much more than a mountaineer — though doubtless he would protest that one couldn't be anything better. He has a little of the mystic in him, and the poet strain is in his prose at its best. Some of us recall his newspaper despatches on the Kanchenjunga expedition as accounts that thrilled by their simple unpretentious descriptions of a great endeavour, and the same quality, enlarged and embellished, invests the narrative of this Alpine journey, which he undertook alone, with a rucksack and a pair of ski, and a powerful dislike of all the manifestations of modern Switzerland — the power lines, motor roads, railways and fashionable hotels.

A Quietist.

The author is a quietist in all his journeys, and there is scarcely a page in this engrossing book which is not eloquent of a spirit in sympathy with Nature in all her moods. His narrative is often exciting, frequently amusing, and never dull.

Sometimes he takes us to the very heart of a mood or a moment in his wanderings, with a few telling words. Here, for example, he makes us feel the silence of the Alps:—

"During my climb up through the pine woods I had not felt alone, for pine trees are talkative company and streams ever companionable, but now I was above the level of the pines and the streams were stifled by a load of snow. There was silence. I heard nothing save the beating of my heart and the creak and switch of my ski. When I was moving the silence retreated to a remote distance, but when I stopped it closed in upon me greedily."

Again, there is this passage, written on a lonely height:—

"Presently I fell to day-dreaming. The hills spoke to me. They spoke of their slow fashioning and of a mystical universe on the borders of which they stand. They laughed at the follies and trivialities of men who swarm at their feet and on the plains beyond them. Their message was one of harmony and peace."

"The sun shone golden on the pastures. The little white and violet crocuses began imperceptibly to close their petals. The Ursenal Valley

The *Ice Hockey Championship* of the World is scheduled for Jan. 19-21 at Davos. Canada has taught us Europeans how to play the fastest game of the world. Ten years ago they still beat Continental teams by 30 or 33:0 goals. Now they are in a different position. Davos has built a new, splendid ice-rink pavilion. This tournament will be of the greatest interest.

The *Swiss National Ski Meeting*, which is fixed for Feb. 1-3, will take place at Grindelwald. France, Italy and Norway have already entered teams and it will be a great popular fete, as thousands of Swiss skiers regularly attend these annual events. The ladies will have their own downhill and slalom races, while the men will have to prove their proficiency also in the "Langlauf" and in ski-jumping.

PRO JUVENTUTE STAMPS.

The four 1934/1935 Pro Juventute postage stamps made their appearance on December 1st, and, as usual, they are a thing of beauty. As in 1933, so are the three lower values of the 1934/1935 stamps devoted to national costumes. The green 5 centimes stamp depicts a girl of Appenzell with her characteristic headgear and in the background appears a lovely landscape dominated by the Säntis. On the lavender 10 centimes stamp is featured a young woman in the quaint garb of Savoie in the Valais, with a château on a vineyard-clad slope rising in the distance. The red 20 centimes stamp shows an attractively dressed girl of the Engadine and to her left one of the typical Grisons stone houses. The blue 30 centimes stamp forms a continuation of the "famous men" series, and depicts the great poet and savant Albrecht von Haller. While the first three stamps were designed by the artist Jules Courvoisier of Geneva, the fourth is a creation of the painter Karl Bickel.

Pro Juventute is a child-welfare organization which promotes collaboration among the many welfare agencies of the country. Its program covers the welfare of mothers and of children, a special field being emphasized for the latter each year. It sends out a traveling child-welfare exhibit, distributes literature covering this field, maintains vacation homes for children in need of special health care, and plans holidays in Switzerland for needy children of Swiss families living in other European countries. Vocational guidance, homes for apprentices and young working girls, libraries, recreational work, and care

filled with shadows. It was eventide in the valley at my feet. I heard the barking of a dog, the throb of a motor car, the laugh of a child. Somewhere an avalanche thundered and set the still air quivering. The sun sank behind the distant peaks of the Oberland. A tide of chill shadow lapped over me. Rising to my feet, I strolled down the hill."

Sunshine.

Elsewhere the author apostrophises the sun and gives a memorable little word-picture:— "It was a perfect spring morning. Never had the sun shone more gallantly as the little electric train jolted its way up the Montafon Valley. He permeated the air with the scent of moist earth and moss and the fragrance of the pine forest. His rays revealed pearls of melted hoarfrost on the pastures or discovered bushels of diamonds in the streams veiling the precipices. He stole with a thousand shimmerings into the dark, green-laced pools and poured molten silver on the hurrying torrent. His glory was in the heatherbells, and the first of the buttercups lifted their golden heads to greet him."

Then there is this account of the strange effect of a sleepless night in a remote Alpine hut:—

"Somehow or other I had managed to catch a chill, and as a result slept badly in the stuffy little room which I shared with the hut keeper and the young Swiss. For hours I woed sleep by all the usual artifices, but there was no end to the sheep that passed through the gate and no summit to the mountain up which I climbed. It was not until the small hours that I dozed, only to waken again and listen to the breathing of my companions and the low groaning of the night wind. Finally, I sank into a curious half-comatose condition which divorced me from all sense of time. This curious condition enabled me to review God-like the events of a past that was no past and envisage a future that was no future. It was not the first occasion on which I have experienced this feeling of mental detachment and divorce from time; I have had it before on Everest, and it is more like death than sleep."

Mountaineering.

Mr. Smythe makes us believe that mountaineering, in the best sense of the word, is as much an attitude of mind as it is a capacity for endurance or skill in physical dexterity.

"Many people," he says, "Who have never climbed a mountain misapprehend the motives inherent in mountaineering; there are some even who imagine that the attainment of the summit

for young people who are ill, are also carried on. The funds to support this splendid work are obtained largely from the sale of special postage stamps, postal cards and greeting telegrams, a surcharge on which goes to the organization. Occasional public gifts and private donations are further sources of income.

SWISS MINISTER'S LETTER TO THE TIMES.

I have been approached by a number of Swiss citizens enjoying the hospitality of this country with the request to convey the congratulation of the Swiss colony in Great Britain to *The Times* on the occasion of its 150th anniversary. I am confident that of the 10,000 Swiss citizens over here none could be found who would not wish to associate himself with a message of this kind, and I am happy to transmit the expression of their best wishes to your paper.

In carrying out this pleasant task I would ask you at the same time to accept my warmest congratulations and my personal good wishes for the future of your great institution.

C. R. PARAVICINI.

JOHN S. WALTER †.

We deeply regret to inform our readers of the death which has occurred in London of Mr. John S. Walter, General Manager of the Ritz Hotel, London, after a short illness, at the age of 54.

The deceased occupied the position of General Manager for the last 13 years; he was Swiss by birth and came by his English name as a result of business expediency; his real name was Walter Guggisberg and he was a citizen from Berne.

Mr. Walter, who was the brother of Mr. Walter, formerly Manager of the Carlton Hotel in London, was a clever linguist who enjoyed a great reputation in the Hotel profession, he came of a family of hoteliers, who gave to the British Army a distinguished officer in the late Brigadier-General Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, who died in 1930.

Mr. Walter was second cousin to Sir Frederick. He leaves a widow, but no children. Mr. Walter was a honorary member of the Union Helvetia.

and the view therefrom is the *raison d'être* of the craft. The summit is not a reward in itself; it is a fitting culmination of endeavour. The true mountaineer does not tread it in any spirit of vainglory; he experiences nothing but a quiet satisfaction that the difficulties besetting his upward path have been surmounted. He will not yell and scream with unseemly triumph: he will respect that which has given him joy and be humbled by the prospect before his eyes.

"It is often difficult to enjoy to the full the precious minutes spent on a mountain summit. Sometimes Nature intervenes with her storms, her mists and her cold, sinking spiritual enjoyment in physical discomfort. At other times extreme tiredness, the threat of bad weather, the difficulty of return, or the shortness of the time available may cloud the mind with half-formed anxieties. Or others may be present whose noisy chatter renders quiet contemplation impossible. For the last reason, at least, the mountaineer should sometimes go alone upon the hills. He should not choose a mountain where the difficulties and dangers are such as to alloy or render uncertain his pleasure, but a mountain which is lofty enough to transmit a sense of detachment and remote enough to transmute physical loneliness into a spiritual blessing. He will recline peacefully; his mind released from physical considerations, seeks repose in the splendours about him; his vision sees, in the luminous breadths of far horizons, the delicate blending of colours, the bold pencilling of shadows, and the slow uprising and ordered march of the tall, deep-bosomed clouds, the artistry and craftsmanship of a divine hand; his ear is opened to a strange harmony; he treads exalted the mystical depths of the universe."

Feverish Spirit.

The author finds that a good deal of folly and callousness exist in mountaineering of the present day, and condemns them in no uncertain terms. "Life is cheap and bubble reputations are many. Mountaineering is no longer something that appeals exclusively to those who seek the adventure of the hills as an ideal contrast to ordinary life. There is a feverish spirit of competition abroad, not unlike that surrounding the making of motor and aeroplane records, a spirit of materialism inimical to the beauties of Nature. To appreciate Nature it is necessary to be in phase with her. This can only be accomplished by sympathy and understanding."

This book is delightfully illustrated by the author's photographs.