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AN APPRECIATION.

In 1900 I made my first visit to Switzerland. In 1950 I revisited it in the nature of a Jubilee with fifty years happy experience of Alpine scenery mainly under the auspices of the Polytechnic Touring Association. I chose the Grindelwald area as the venue as being in my long experience the most accessible and suitable part of Switzerland to give a prospective tourist the best insight into the charms of that beautiful country, with the Ice and Snow of its mountains and glaciers easily approached, the colour of the lakes at their best, the greenery of the valleys charming to a degree, the gaiety of modern towns like Interlaken to enliven matters, the old world aspect of Berne near enough to be thoroughly appreciated, the march of Swiss engineering to be seen everywhere in the railways, funiculars, aerial ropeways, chair lifts, easily accessible waterfalls and gorges to remind one of the stupendous powers of the Ice Age, plenty opportunity of hearing the national music, and observing the handsome national costume, of the cantons. In fact, the real Switzerland.

On my last Sunday afternoon there I was led by Providence to visit the village churchyard at Grindelwald. Here in the centre of an amphitheatre of majestic mountains and amidst the lovely green of the pastures I came across a blaze of colour in the churchyard. Multitudes of graves had been, with obvious care and reverence, beautified by masses of bright red flowers, the startling magnificence of colour being intensified by contrast with the green of the surroundings.

Quite a number of graves were marked "Bergführer" (mountain guide), an interesting point since the village has always had a good reputation for its guides. In one corner shaded by trees and the church I noticed a beautiful memorial in the form of a bronze effigy of a seated lady, looking up to the hills. In her hand was a bible and the serenity of her features left an impression I am never likely to forget. The inscription was :

MARGARITHA BOSS-BALMER
1848—1908

Who she was I may never know, but the impression led me to soliloquize on the situation and my thoughts of fifty years standing are recorded below :

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THE VILLAGE CHURCHYARD AT GRINDELWALD.

Some seek aloft the snowy mountain peaks
And by stern effort reach the final goal.
Some seek the safe and lowlier paths of earth
And find contentment in a leisureed stroll.

Some seek in haunts of fashionable style
In restless mood the gaieties of life.
Some in these alpine pastures walk serene
And in their dreams forget this age of strife.

Above, the realms of everlasting snows
Pure and unsullied in their glorious sheen.
Below, in nature's ever restful shades,
The pastures in their symphonies of green.

The snow peaks glistening in the blaze of noon
May later in the sunset or the dawn
Assume the crimson of an afterglow
Or don the rosy mantle of the morn.

The glaciers clinging to the mountain side
Can tell a story awesome yet sublime
They show to those who have the power to see
The grim omnipotence of relentless time.

Millions of years in nature's cavalcade
Are merely flashes in a darksome night,
What then is man with threescore years and ten?
A lonely atom in the Infinite?

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The goal of man's ambition is aloft
As mountains tower amid the pristine snow,
But all his efforts crumble into dust
The end of life's grim struggle is below.

Here in a hallowed acre rest serene
The last poor remnants of the village caste.
Some in the alpine story won their fame.
Some left no record from the years now past.

Here on the tombstones eloquent yet mute
We see a title "mountain guide" portrayed.
It tells of those who as their lot pursued
Mid snow and ice their honourable trade.

They in their prime sought evanescent fame
On pinnacles all pointing to the sky.
In chastened mood we see their graves below.
Their lot was humble yet their aim was high.

Here in a corner in the shade we see
In sombre contrast to the vivid scene
A brazen figure eloquent and chaste
Of some fair lady, once a village queen.

She did not reach her three-score years and ten
And gone was all the energy of youth.
At sixty years she reached the golden age
Of mellowed wisdom seeking nought but truth.

Her face looks upward to beloved hills
Bringing God's solace to a worthy soul.
What does she dream of in her calm repose?
What golden memory captivates the whole?

A scene so lovely, peaceful, and serene
Brings us to earth however high we trod.
We leave it in the sure and certain faith
The souls of the righteous are in the hand of GOD.

And when to busy mart and frenzied street
Our sluggish footsteps must perforce return
When we see nations wrangling in the heat
Of soulless passions that within them burn,

When reason is forgotten or despised
And grim dictators leave it all behind,
When our own petty troubles intervene
And leave us fretful, bitter, and unkind,

When all these evils seem to have no end
The wonders of creation never cease.
The benison of heaven still gently falls
And gilds our memory of this vale of peace.

So when our major worries press us sore
And lesser evils give their lesser bane
In retrospect we see those scenes once more
And in the beauty can forget the pain.

J. E. CHRISTOPHER.

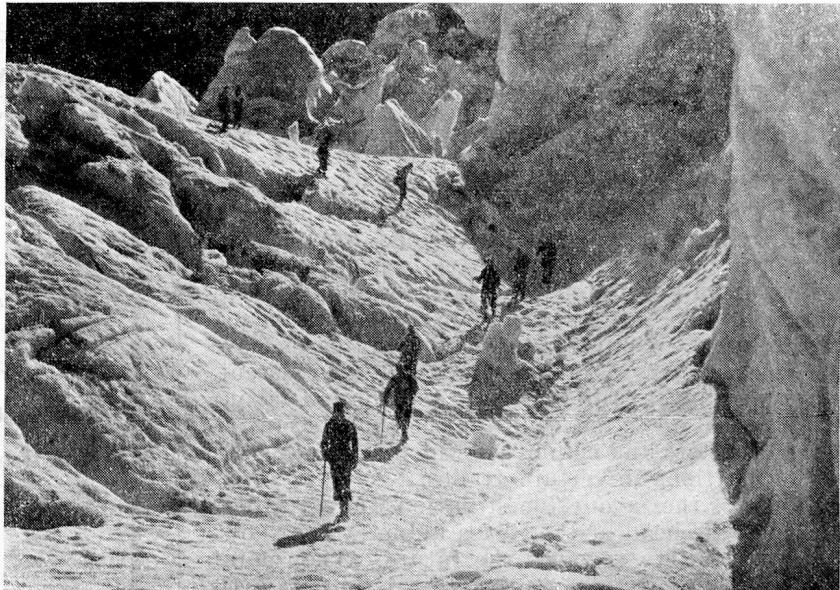
OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, August 17th, 1951. We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: J. Sieber, A. Hinderling, G. Engesser, J. F. J. Ammann, Mrs. J. Downing, A. C. Kaelin, Mrs. Th. Schaefer, A. Rueff.

Good News from Switzerland

To encourage Mountain Climbing, the Swiss Government has decided to reduce from 15th July to 30th September 1951 the Official Guides' Tariffs by 30%.

We invite you and your English friends to take full advantage of this concession.



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