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and for the slightest reason. The bouquetin, on the other hand, will always reflect before doing anything, and move with ponderation, and will personify calmness the moment it concludes that the human-beings have no aggressive intentions. It will then content itself to keep politely but firmly to a certain distance, about 20 metres, giving one almost a cheeky look, but always regulating its tempo to that of the human being, without appearing to do so. I have not heard this myself, but I am told that the animal shows its bad humour by blowing three or four whistles through its large nose.

Another interesting and most intelligent animal to be found here is the marmotte. They live in colonies at an altitude between 1,500 and 3,000 metres, and as habitations they prefer slopes looking towards east or south, with sufficient reserves of vegetation and grass. It is here that they dig deep burrows, at the bottom of which they sleep in winter.

The marmottes build living quarters both for the bad winter season and for the more attractive summer season, consisting of various apartments with several exits, a lot of gangways, sleeping quarters, and even lavatories! They have a social life of their own; for instance, individual marmottes relieve each other to stand on guard and to warn the colony on the approach of danger. The alarm signal consists of a series of shrill whistles which also warns other animals. They mutually aid each other to make their holes and to lay in hay just as the farmers do it 1,000 metres lower down. They cut the grass with their sharp teeth, allow it to dry on the ground, and then take it inside their burrows in order to make hot and dry beds for their long winter sleep.

In the endless sky, eagles and falcons are spreading their large wings, remainder of an epoch which reminds us of the ice age.

There are also foxes, ermines, and snakes in this National Park, and if one is patient enough to wait, one can also see partridges and pheasants, while the rivers are full of trout.

The flora is immensely rich, and this area is also known for its magpies and other birds, and for its multicoloured butterflies.

We arrived in Aosta at about 12 o'clock, and had lunch at the Hotel Suisse. My guide arranged with the owner of the hotel to have a taxi ready to take us the same afternoon to Pont (1,960 metres), which is a holiday resort near the end of the Valsavaranche valley. It is 40 kilometres from Aosta, and the starting point for the climb of the Gran Paradiso, 4,061 metres, the highest peak completely Italian. The road leading to Pont is very narrow and rough, and the only way to reach this resort is either on foot or by car or taxi. Until the new road is constructed, there is no bus service. At the beginning, the Valsavaranche valley is very narrow, with mountains rising on each side, and severely alpine in character. After a 2½-hour ride in the taxi we reached Pont, in brilliant weather, and set out at once for the Refuge Victor Emmanuel, 2,732 metres.

Our path took us at first through pine forests, in which at least a thousand Italian troops were camping, apparently on manoeuvres. A military band was practising and playing martial tunes in the best Italian tradition. To reach the Refuge we had to walk up a record number of 150 zig-zags, which were mostly very short. We quickly gained height, and with each step the view became grander. High above us we saw eighteen other climbers proceeding in single file, and on catching up with them we found to our pleasant surprise that they were members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Albis section. The Refuge was reached in less than two hours; it has an enormous round steel roof, and can give shelter to as many as 150 tourists. We were surprised to be welcomed by a woman guardian; it soon became evident that the place was efficiently managed, and that the five girls working for her were well disciplined and efficient. The dinner was as good as in any hotel, and the price, which in any case is fixed by the Italian Alpine Club, is moderate.

The guardians of Alpine Huts (or Refuges) are normally appointed by the Alpine Clubs in the countries which own them. In Switzerland, all guardians are men, although their wives and children usually give them a hand. In Italy, both the Rifugio Vittorio Emanuele and the Rifugio Sella were in the charge of women. In Switzerland, either the job of a guardian runs in the family, i.e., son succeeds father, or guides who have reached the end of their active career are appointed.

It is extremely strenuous work, and, in view of the constant coming and going of tourists, a guardian is lucky if he gets four or five hours' sleep. He may have to get up as early as 2 a.m., to wake up guides and climbers, and to prepare a simple breakfast for them. Around 6 a.m., when the last climber has left the hut, he will go back for a few hours' sleep, but has to resume work around 11 a.m., when the first climbers will have returned and be in need of refreshments. From now on there will be fresh arrivals from the valley down below. From then until

9 p.m., he and his assistants will be engaged most of the time in cooking or making tea, cutting wood for fuel, washing up, and collecting water — which may have to be carried a long distance or, in the case of huts at a great altitude, even have to be melted from snow.

Dormitories, with their mattresses and blankets, also have to be kept in order. There are usually several dormitories; some are reserved for guides or for members of Alpine Clubs, while in others, members of both sexes and non-members and members of Alpine Clubs freely mix together.

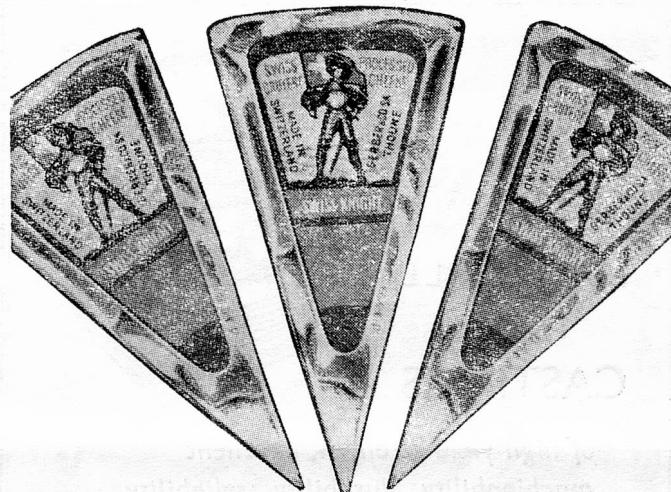
(To be concluded in next issue.)

COCKTAIL PARTY

The Counsellor of the Swiss Embassy and Madame Jean-Jacques de Tibolet gave a cocktail party to members of the Swiss Colony on Sunday, 6th November 1960, at The Dorchester, Park Lane, W.1, to meet Federal Councillor F. T. Wahlen, Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation.

GALA PRESENTATION

The Managers of the Regional and Local Tourist Offices and Railway Companies of the Bernese Oberland, and the Manager of the Swiss Dining Car Company, gave a Gala Presentation, "Under Swiss Skies", including a Winter Sports Fashion Show by Simpson of Piccadilly, on Wednesday, 2nd November 1960, at the Planetarium, Marylebone Road, N.W.1.



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