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THE BEAUTY OF MOUNTAIN FLOWERS

Alpine flowers are a gift of nature. The Alps without flowers — would they not be like unmusical tunes? Of course, the grandeur of the landscape would remain, but the delicate charm, the colourful harmony of nature, that is to say, the chief factor increasing the spell of our heights, would be missing. It was not without reason that the Grisons had become, at an early period, the pre-dilected territory of foreign visitors. Everything has real causes. Surely, not the "good" hotels were then attracting the stream of visitors to this part of Switzerland, because, then, "excl." hotels did not exist and only a few small hostelrys could afford shelter to the wanderer. The "good" roads were not facilitating things, nor was the geographical situation of this part of Switzerland, which is far from being a central one. Nor, surely, was it the "sympathetic" character of the Grisons inhabitants — of a rather taciturn and sullen nature, not charming and entertaining. So that all merit to have made the Grisons an attractive country for foreign visitors belongs to nature, so lavish and wealthy here. No art and no science in the world can obtain finer results than nature.

* * *

Since, about two centuries ago, the beauty of the alpine landscape was "discovered", and travelling became an experience that no one would miss, man has become interested in alpine flowers. For holidays, one chooses a spot where one expects to see, to experience, but beautiful things. But does there exist something more beautiful than those alpine flowers, blossoming, expanding, in marvellous alpine surroundings? Certainly, one sometimes chooses the wrong resort for one's holidays; but it is inconceivable that a wild-growing plant could be found in the wrong place. The alpine flower has no definite period for its blossoming; it will smile at those beholding it, from the time of snow-melting until the first snow-fall of the approaching new winter. Along with the rise and fall of the year, spring is climbing up the mountains. When grass has already become hay in the valleys, the mountain flower in the vicinity of the summits only begins blooming.

The inhabitant of the city, spending the whole year his life between stones artificially heaped on each other, and to whom, in his everyday life, nature has become a "stranger", drives to the mountains with a view to feel, at last, the beauties of nature. Does there exist, then, something more beautiful for him than the sensation of spring during the whole of summer, something more touching than absorbing, taking up, the marvellous beauty of the plants?

Alpine flowers are blooming for all those travelling up to see them, they are blooming for the joy of all those with an open heart. Science, or the lack of it, has nothing to do with the pleasure derived from contemplating them.

Every plant — just like every other living thing — has its special conditions of life. Wherever concentration of favourable conditions is greatest, the greatest wealth of alpine plants exists. This is the reason why the Grisons, and on their vast territory especially the Engadine, with its



(Photo: Swiss National Tourist Office)

flat bottom of the valley showing also several lakes, and with its steep rocky and sunny sides and glaciers, is the ideal ground for the development of alpine flowers.

* * *

To this region, sometimes called the "Paradise of flower lovers", every year thousands of guests are coming. Whoever has seen, in spring or summer, or autumn, the marvels and the colours of our alpine flowers, and "lived" with them, will time and again be attracted, since all the beauty and glory of this earth are nothing in comparison to mountain flourishing.

One side of the question, however, must not be forgotten. Foreign visitors can become the enemies of alpine plants when every passer-by is plucking the flowers — thus preventing their propagation — instead of letting them stand. The beauty of the alpine flowers once plucked is also suffering. Are we, then, ready to face this loss? Let us, on the contrary, enjoy their unsurpassable charm and leave for those coming after us the opportunity to look into these "eyes full of beauty".

The great Architect of the universe has meant especially well with us, when He created the Grisons country. He has lavished natural beauty upon it. It is our task to take care of it and to hand this beauty over, untouched and unrestricted, to future generations.

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