

Notes and gleanings

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NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By J.H.B.

Alpine Guides Get Ready.

There have been a number of complimentary things in the papers about Switzerland. It is, indeed, very difficult to make a selection. By far the greater part of the contributions still deals with the Winter Sports. However, Mr. Geoffrey Stafford, in the *Oxford Mail* (Feb. 22), is already thinking of Spring and climbing, so he writes:—

Both the Jungfrau and the Matterhorn have been successfully ascended for the first time this year, which means that the Swiss winter season is nearing its end.

In a short time the snows will have receded from those long slopes about Murren, Adelboden and Wengen—to the infinite satisfaction of the mountain guides for whom the winter inaction is a time of chafing strain.

The winter work of the Alpine guide consists for the most part in carving toys and repairing damaged toboggans, varied by an occasional exhibition of yodelling for the benefit of winter sports visitors—unsatisfactory occupations for a man who is accustomed to view the world from its roof and daily pit his skill against all the natural forces of great mountain peaks.

But, with the arrival of April, Switzerland enters a new world. You cannot remain long in a Swiss village once spring has arrived without realising what an important part climbing plays in its life.

Little groups of rugged, hardy men may be seen gathered together, sitting outside the inn or balanced along the rough timber fences beside the road. Most of them wear a large silver badge showing in relief a large coil of rope, an ice-axe and an alpenstock.

This is the insignia of a guide who has passed his full examination and is qualified to ascend the most dangerous peaks with a climbing party.

The training of a successful guide begins in infancy. Each winter teaches him something more of snow conditions, each summer all through the school years finds him assimilating mountain lore.

Later, in his 'teens, he will fetch winter fuel from the forest-covered slopes, and long before he is 20 he has trodden glaciers and worked his way along galleries in the mountain sides where one false step means instant death.

The great climbing ground in Switzerland is the Bernese Oberland—the backbone of the Alps. Here, within a comparatively small area, lie such peaks as the Jungfrau, the Eiger, the Monch, the Wetterhorn, and the Schreckhorn.

The Oberland guides are the best in Switzerland, and in many a cottage there ropes and axes are now being taken from the corners where they have lain stored through the winter.

Switzerland's President.

Lady Drummond-Hay, in the "World Affairs" of *The Sphere* (March 2nd), devotes a few lines to the election of the Federal President. A well-reproduced photograph of the "Bourgeois President of a Bourgeois State," as the caption reads, illustrates the following paragraph:—

The ranks of simple-living Presidents in Europe have been swelled by the election of Mr. Robert Haab, a native of Zurich, to the presidency of Switzerland. Mr. Haab may not be a man who courts publicity, but that cannot alter the fact that as chief executive of his country his personality must suffer the limelight for the term of his office. To be President of Switzerland does not entail the same heavy responsibility as, for instance, burdens Mr. Hoover in America. A Swiss President is elected for one year, with the position of President of the Assembly, composed of a Council of States to which each one of the twenty-two Swiss Cantons nominate two representatives, and the National Council, or Lower House, of 189 members elected for three years' service by male voters over twenty years of age.

President Haab is happily not obliged to emulate the life of rigid economy practised by President Miklas of Austria, nor does he care to live in an atmosphere of formality like President von Hindenburg, the "Old Oak" of Germany. A widower with grown-up children, Mr. Haab lives as informally as possible in his own private residence at Berne. No official palace is provided for the Swiss President, nor has he any State uniform. An Army car, however, is placed at his disposal. He still retains the portfolio of Posts, Telegraphs and Railways, which he has held since 1922. The President entertains most hospitably within the limitations of his menage.

This is Mr. Haab's second term as President; he had already occupied the presidency in 1922.

Every Swiss should know, of course, that the Swiss Federal President presides only over the Federal Council and not, as stated above, the two Chambers. The latter have separate presidents, and the combined meeting of both chambers is, as far as I remember, usually presided over by the Father of the Chambers—the oldest member.

Low Foreign Competition.

Some papers are still trying to extol that ancient incident regarding a certain letter which was written about a year ago by a Swiss official. It is indeed very interesting to note that one particular London paper cannot stop its music about the low wages and taxes in foreign countries. The British reader who does not know anything about the peculiar circumstances, takes them for granted, and the writers in question, no doubt, intend to impress upon him that this is the case with Switzerland. It has already been proved with regard to the electrical industry, that Swiss wages for the same work are actually higher by more than ten per cent. than the wages paid in this country, and in the Embroidery section the difference—if there is a difference—is very small. With regard to the rates and taxes, the Cantonal and Communal taxes vary in the industrial Cantons from 10½ per cent. to 26½ per cent. on an income of 20,000 francs (£800). This on earned income! Then it has to be taken into account that the tax-free minimum is nowhere more than £100 for a family of four, but in most of the cantons considerably less. Incomes of more than £800 are taxed at increasing rates, so that an income of 50,000 francs has to pay another 2 to 5 per cent. more, bringing the total up to 12 per cent. in Bellinzona and 30 per cent. in Chur. Now the lowest rate of cantonal and communal tax on the unearned income on a fortune of £25,000 is about 15 per cent. as payable in Geneva, and the highest about 36 per cent. as payable in Herisau. Add to this the amounts of custom and excise dues of the Federal State, out of which the Federal Household has to maintain itself, and the rate of the combined rates and taxes will then range between something like 20 per cent. of the average income in the cheapest, and about 45 per cent. in the dearest place. Do we pay much more in this country? Too often it is also forgotten that the import duties of Switzerland are in most cases very low, as is seen from a cutting from the *Financial Times* (Feb. 20th) reading:—

Swiss Duties.

The President of the Board of Trade stated, in reply to Mr. P. J. Hannon (C., Mossley), that it was not proposed to take retaliatory measures in view of the duties now imposed by the Swiss Government upon handkerchiefs and certain kinds of linen and cotton goods imported into Switzerland from Great Britain. The Swiss duties were very low, and he wished other European countries had them equally low.

But there is also recognition of what our home country and its people are doing. A correspondent of the *Electrical Times and Lighting* (Feb. 14th) writes:—

Any tourist agency will tell you how fine a place is Switzerland—and more than a few of us know this from personal observation. But there is more than natural beauty to admire in the country in question—the handiwork of man also gives cause for admiration. Those who have received the British Brown-Boveri catalogue will see that this is so, for on each monthly date slip is a picture of some one or other of the feats of electrical engineering carried out by the B.B.B.: some of the mountain railway work is especially remarkable. The calendar is very nicely printed.

That it should be *The Scotsman* (22 Feb.) who reminds me of what I have missed since I have been living in this part of the world, is full of significance. It is true I would prefer a glass of Vin du Valais to a Scotch double, but otherwise I have always thought of the Scotsman as being a relative of ours. But let A.M.C. now describe the

Sunrise on the High Alps.

The Mönch—the gaunt, grim giant of the Bernese Oberland—will always remain sacrosanct in my memory, for it was whilst climbing the rugged crags of the north-west ridge that I saw, for the first time, one of the most wonderful sights that Nature can have to offer—the sunrise on Alpine heights, with full orchestral accompaniment.

I had left the hotel at the Jungfraujoch a couple of hours or so before dawn. We climbed—my guide and I—over the railing of the icicle-hung verandah of the hotel directly on to a snow trail above the Aletsch glacier. The path was only a few inches wide, and the frozen snow fell away—an icy slope—down to the glacier. Until our eyes became accustomed to the pale light shed by the waning moon, we had to walk very carefully. The giant peaks cast weird shadows around us, and altogether the stillness and the dim, ghostly forms of the snow mountains sent eerie shudders through us. It was intensely cold, and we shivered in spite of our warm clothing closely muffled up around us.

Dawn was breaking as we reached the base of the stern, bleak cliffs of the Mönch. We started our ascent of the steep, precipitous rocks—coated with ice in places—slowly and silently in the faint, grey light of the early morning. Not a sound broke the stillness; no life stirred on the mountain. Slowly we climbed, without a stop until we were far up on the dizzy crags, within sight of the summit, nearly 13,000 feet above the sea. Then we paused, perched upon a ledge of rock, and waited, overcome with awe

and wonder at the marvellous beauty of what we saw. For the sun was rising behind the mountain. The white, snow-clad peaks were tipped with pale, pale pink. Golden and purple mists were creeping along the valleys. Slowly the pink on the mountain tops spread and deepened. One crest after another caught the roseate glow. It was like a rose gradually unfolding as its petals shyly opened to the gentle caress of the morning sun.

The pinks on the snows deepened to red, then to crimson. The sky above was a blaze of colour. Away into the distance Alps upon Alps arose—a sea of golden red. The valleys were shrouded with quivering mists of purple and orange. Then gradually the colours began to fade, slowly disappearing, till once again the peaks shone out, pure white in the still, pearly air; when suddenly they blazed up with dazzling brilliance. For a moment we were dazzled by the sudden flash, then we started off again. The sun had appeared above the distant hill-tops, and the whole Alpine world had become a glittering fairyland of wonder. A new day of glorious summer had dawned.

SOUVENIRS.

Vous avez lu comme moi l'appel de notre ministre à Londres et vous avez, dans le dernier numéro de notre *Swiss Observer*, pris connaissance des destinées de ce journal. Je ne doute pas qu'en aussi bonnes mains il poursuive encore longtemps sa fructueuse et indispensable carrière.

Mais je ne puis laisser s'en aller mon ami Boehringer sans penser à ce que fut l'activité débordante et désintéressée de cet homme de bien. J'ai vécu de nombreuses années à Londres. Je n'ai peut-être pas suffisamment connu et fréquenté la colonie suisse fixée dans la grande capitale britannique. Un jour cependant, un soir devrais-je dire, car malgré l'heure encore matinale un "fog," épais rendait obscures les artères grouillantes, je suis allé voir notre ami Campard. C'est là que j'ai rencontré pour la première fois le directeur, le bienfaiteur devrais-je dire, du *Swiss Observer*. Nous avons parlé en cette matinée brumeuse du pays, des connaissances communes, des souvenirs aimés et respectés et tout naturellement, nous nous sommes liés d'amitié. Il a aimé en moi l'allant et l'optimisme, j'ai goûté en lui l'homme de coeur, ouvert dévoué et fonderement bon.

Je suis allé le revoir souvent dans son imprimerie blottie au fond d'une petite ruelle, dont j'ai oublié le nom, derrière Mansion House. On entrait en cette curieuse demeure un peu comme dans un écurie. La porte à deux larges battants, paraissait celle d'une remise. Mais, dès le seuil franchi c'était l'activité fiévreuse des linotypes et des machines. On poussait une petite porte à droite, on gravissait un escalier et Boehringer était là, affairé, aimable et gai.

Ce diable d'homme, plant un jour ses bagages, s'en vint à Leonard Street et avec ce goût paradoxal qu'il avait pour les demeures ayant un cachet particulier, il installa son monde et ses machines dans une église désaffectée. Vous avez franchi ce porche original, vous le franchirez peut-être encore. On tournait à droite, on s'installait dans le bureau directeur et l'on causait des choses du pays, encore et toujours, tandis que bourdonnaient, passés les vitres, les machines à imprimer. La dernière fois que je l'ai vu, c'était en mai de l'année dernière, il y avait autour de lui d'autres compatriotes. Ils allaient, venaient, affairés, puisant ses conseils, écoutant ses avis, heureux d'échanger avec lui un mot aimable. Nous étions à la veille de la conférence que René Gouzy allait faire sur son merveilleux raid aérien Zurich-Le Cap...

Et hier, dans un café de la place du Cirque, à Genève, j'ai rencontré mon aimable confrère. Nous avons parlé de la transformation du *Swiss Observer*. Nous avons cherché dans nos souvenirs les amis communs et tout naturellement le nom de Boehringer est revenu parmi les premiers. En connaissant du journalisme et de l'imprimerie, nous avons mesuré tout son dévouement, toute son abnégation et nous nous sommes rendus compte de ce que devait à cet homme désintéressé, non seulement la colonie suisse de Londres mais la Suisse toute entière pour l'effort formidable et constant qu'il avait accompli dès années durant afin de maintenir vivant l'idéal national, parmi les Suisses disséminés, et l'attraction des choses du pays, parmi ceux qu'attirent les événements propres à une résidence aussi tumultueuse.

Aujourd'hui, Boehringer s'en va. Sa tâche est accomplie, il a bien mérité et de vous et de la Patrie toute entière. C'est au nom de tous les Suisses qui passeront à Londres, qui le connaissent, l'estiment et l'aiment que je prends aujourd'hui la plume pour lui dire un chaleureux et vibrant merci. Nous ne l'oublierons pas! Il restera parmi nous comme une des plus belles, des plus actives et des plus dévouées personnalités de cette "quatrième" Suisse, qui est peut-être la plus vivante de ses sœurs jumelles.

Ami Boehringer, que votre retraite vous soit douce, que votre activité future, quelle qu'elle soit, comble vos vœux. C'est là le plus cher désir de celui qui fut et reste votre collaborateur dévoué.

Erik.