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A DOUBLE CENTENARY AT ZERMATT

BY CICELY WILLIAMS

«The mountaineer's true home»—that is how a famous alpinist of the nineteenth century described the Monte Rosa Hotel at Zermatt. Today mountaineers of all nations would re-echo the words.

It is just one hundred years since Dr. Lauber's little inn—the first ever opened in Zermatt—was taken over by Alexander Seiler, who christened it Hotel Monte Rosa. By that act the Seiler dynasty of hotel-keepers was founded and from that day the development of Zermatt as a first-class resort was assured. Materially Zermatt owes everything to Alexander Seiler and his excellent wife. No place, however grand its scenery, can flourish without a good hotel. Seiler was the hotelier "par excellence" who thoroughly understood the art of inn-keeping. He knew just how to welcome the arriving guest, thirsting for mountain conquests; how best to cater for the comfort of those engaged in such pursuits; and how to bid farewell to the successful and the disappointed.

And today, let it be said, the same spirit still obtains at the Monte Rosa where the house of Seiler still reigns. The bowl of fruit in the bedroom to welcome regular guests; the personal interest shown in alpine exploits however trivial; the little comforts awaiting the weary mountaineer; the so-called "farewell chocolate" when the moment comes to leave. All these are modern expressions of the customs introduced by Alexander Seiler in 1855 and the years that followed.

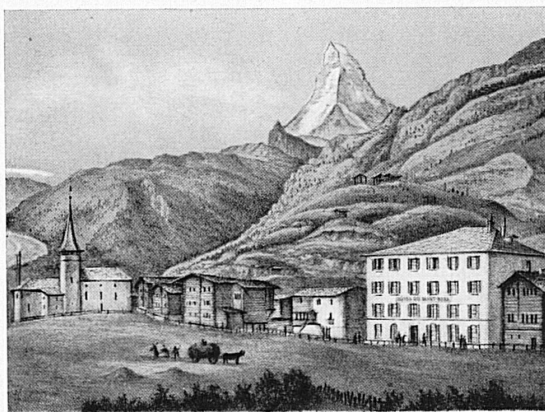
1855 was a remarkable year—it saw not only the opening of the Hotel Monte Rosa but also the first ascent of the great Monte Rosa itself. On July 31st the Dufourspitze was climbed by a British party consisting of the brothers G. and C. Smythe, Birkbeck and the Rev. Charles Hudson—who ten years later perished in the Matterhorn disaster—with the Guides Lauener and Zum Taugwald. It was a great event—the highest point in Switzerland had been scaled, the Golden Age of mountaineering, and of Zermatt, was ushered in.

This summer, therefore, Zermatt celebrates a double centenary and great festivities, fitting to such an occasion, have been organised. At the opening of the climbing season a "Mountaineering Week" has been arranged. There is to be a 30% reduction on the Guides' tariffs and also on the Zermatt-Gornergrat railway. The Hotels Seiler, meanwhile, will apply their minimum rates for all guests during that week.

Famous mountaineers of all nations will arrive in Zermatt during the week—Sir Arnold Lunn, Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Christian Rubi to mention only a few. If the weather is good there should be great alpine exploits among the Zermatt mountains and no doubt many climbers, for sentimental reasons will turn their steps towards the Dufourspitze. During the first week-end of September the season will end with a great re-union of the Seiler family together with friends of the family, business associates and faithful old employees. What a gathering of the clans there will be and what tales of olden times will be related.

How great have been the changes in the world between the placid, prosperous Victorian days of 1855 and the post-war, atomic age of 1955! But among the mountains there is something permanent and indestructible—yesterday, today and forever the Monte Rosa massif remains unchanged, and with it the Monte Rosa Hotel.

Climbers fighting their way up the snows and rocks of the Dufourspitze see the same stars gleaming in the sky overhead and the same indescribable beauty of the sunrise when they reach the summit. They will return, as did that first pioneer party, to the hospitable roof of the Monte Rosa Hotel. In the old salon, the scene of so many famous gatherings, they will talk over their adventures and the spirit of the pioneers and the kindly presence of Alexander Seiler will hover benevolently around them, for here in Zermatt past and present are forever one.



Zermatt im Anfang der Hotellerie. — Zermatt: L'hôtellerie prend son essor. — Zermatt agli inizi dell'industria alberghiera. — Zermatt en los comienzos de la hostelería. — Zermatt when the hotel trade was young.