

# May in the Alps

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**"RAPT."****A Swiss Picture.**

The *première* of the first Swiss talking film took place last Tuesday at the Curzon Cinema. A great number of well-known society people attended the performance, amongst them Mlle. Livia and M. Vincent Paravicini, daughter and son of the Swiss Minister.

The film, which is adapted from a novel by C. F. Ramuz called "La Séparation des Races," takes us away both from the lakeside towns and the huts on the heights, and gives us the real everyday Switzerland lived in by Swiss villagers. That is its first merit, and the second is that it is made by a man who can respond to that life. Ramuz's story is a help, for it belongs to the mountains. The events in "Rapt" could happen nowhere else, for the mountains influence not only circumstances but characters, and the peaks which shut in the peasants from the outside world separate them also from themselves.

We are shown two villages. Both are Swiss, but in one German is spoken, in the other French. A shepherd's dog is chasing goats belonging to a man from the other side of the mountains. He kills it. The shepherd broods over this. He goes over to obtain redress, but the other man's sweetheart arrives at that moment, and he has no time for his French-speaking visitor, who plans revenge. When the girl goes out in the moonlight he kidnaps her and takes her to his home, where he keeps her under lock and key. The girl's small brother slips when searching for her and is killed.

News of this is brought to her by a one-legged pedlar who alone is at home on both sides of the mountain. Through him the girl and her sweetheart make plans against her captor. They will wait in a wood while the village idiot, who is fond of matches, sets fire to the house during everyone's absence at church. The shepherd has gradually fallen in love with his captive, and she, to further her plans, pretends to encourage him.

The idiot sees this, but thinks that now she will not be taking him with her to her village. She had promised he would be more kindly treated there. When he sets fire to the house, he accordingly locks them both in a room. The shepherd is trapped with the locks he had used to imprison the girl. They die together.

It is a grim tale, grimly told. Set in the Valais Alps, it has no truck with conventional prettiness. Kirsanoff uses his camera with dramatic imagination; some of the scenery is overwhelmingly beautiful. The shepherd does not know that the girl's brother died, so he never realises the full reason for her revenge. She craves his forgiveness, but it is too late, and the

villagers who come running from church at the rumour of smoke are not in time to give the picture a happy ending.

It is inevitable that it should end as it does, for the mountain has made misunderstanding between the people. This is not sufficiently brought out in the film, which moves rather jerkily and with abrupt transitions. Nor does Dita Parlo, as the peasant girl, fully convince. It is an experience to watch Nadia Sibirskaja again, but, in spite of her spiritual gravity, her dead-white face and beaded eyelashes make it hard to accept her as the simple girl she plays. That this should be so weakens the film, but is part of Kirsanoff's outlook. In other directions it gives us a film made as it should be, and that is a sight too often denied us. The music, specially composed by Honegger, takes the place of dialogue in expressing the moods and drama, and is a decided asset to the film. We hope that many of our compatriots will pay a visit to see this interesting film.

**MAY IN THE ALPS.**

(From a Correspondent.)

Four thousand feet up on a Swiss mountain side in May is like the middle register in music; above is the treble of early spring running up into winter; below, late spring becoming ever deeper summer as one goes farther down. Along the 4,000 feet contour just now is a kind of half-way belt; summer may invade it from below, so that on a full south slope the grass may be already a foot high and the field flowers in bud. On the north side of a north-facing wood spring may still linger, with half-submerged crocuses and oxlips grown a foot long in the stalk; but for the most part there is nothing to see at 4,000 feet but an incredible greenness against which, in the neighbourhood of villages, isolated cherry trees and sheets of dandelion-clocks give a touch of white.

It is another matter if one goes down 2,000 feet or even 1,500 feet — there the villages are hidden from sight, smothered to the roofs in apple blossom and cow-parsley. It is worth while for the peasants to plant fruit trees down there because the summer is so much longer. In May "lush" is the word; the deep grass is still green and still vividly green. It has not begun to take on the character of hay, and the flowers that make it into a multi-coloured lace are the earlier field flowers — orchids and cranesbill, sainfoin, milkwort, and everywhere, even on dusty roadsides, that glory of Switzerland and the Lombard plain, as yet despised of English acclimatisers — the royal blue meadow sage, *Astrantia* and columbines and much else will follow, and on the ground-level, where the Rhone flows, the columbines are already out.

Above 4,000 feet the woods are all spruce, but below, even on the steep slopes, oak and beech and birch make enough leaf-mould to harbour lilies-of-the-valley. Where any torrent has hewn itself a ravine, the air is filled with their scent, as well as with the sound of waters and the coolness of tossed spray. But in the precipitous forests of the gorges flowers are safe, even from the skinny goat-like children whose homes are in the depth, where in winter the sun only comes for an hour a day.

Spring is elusive and lasts but for a moment here and there, but its friends know where to look for it; even as late as midsummer they will know of spongy hillsides starred with pink primulas and small gentians, and even with the large gentian, the only flower that the peasant of the mountains is at pains to pick. Everything else is common to him, as daisies and dandelions. There is a boggy tract of mountain-side at this moment as purple with butterwort — each little plant with its own flower on delicate stalk — as any English hedge with dog-violets. A little farther there are no purple butterworts, but many white. Some pastures of that isolated region, little cultivated, are as thick with tufts of the yellow housewort as if someone had dropped clots of cream wrapped in ferns. Elsewhere the Alpine flax casts a blue mist over the sterile pasturage. Globe-flowers are everywhere — strung by children into chains, they look like large amber beads.

With the odd contradictions of the Alpine sun, which can burn hotter on the bleak and wind-swept heights than in the sheltered valleys, one may be sure that all the brown patches one sees up above, where the snows are melting, are purple at this moment with the pansy, *viola calcarata*, growing so thick as almost to defeat the moss and the fine mountain turf. Up there, too, there will be soldanellas wherever there is grass.

This morning our village was roused at dawn by the tramping of the cows getting ready for the great migration. With collars and bells, they await the queen cow, who has gone to the high pastures most often and best knows the way. Crowned with a milking-stool and a bunch of lilac, she climbs proudly up the village street, the train of her younger sisters following. It is the sign that the peace and silence of the mountains have departed and the bustle of summer begun.

T.

**ANNUAL CONCERT.**

Swiss Choral and Orchestral Society.

A report about the Annual Concert of the two Societies will appear in our next issue.

**THE HISTORICAL RELATIONS OF ENGLAND AND SWITZERLAND.**

(Translation from a Pamphlet which appeared in the N.Z.Z. in March, 1919, and published in Oechsli's "History of Switzerland." — Cambridge University Press.)

(Continued from Previous Number.)

In the revolution that took place in our cantons in the thirties of the last century, the various personal rights which for the English, since their revolution, formed part of their inheritance, were for the first time adopted by the cantons — such as protection against arbitrary arrest, the inviolability of the home, freedom for trade and commerce, the liberty of belief and of worship, of speech and of the Press, of petition, of forming associations and of public meeting. The new Liberal Constitutions of the former aristocratic or plutocratic cantons could therefore not be a thorn in the flesh to England as they were to the more easterly Powers.

The July Revolution of 1830 in Paris had broken up the Five Great Powers into two groups — the Liberal western Powers, England and France, and the reactionary eastern Powers, Austria, Prussia and Russia. This split made itself especially felt in their relations to Switzerland. The western Powers did not hinder the free development of political life in the Confederation; France, indeed, even demanded this in the early days of the Monarchy of July. The eastern Powers, on the contrary, led by Austria, favoured the resistance of the Conservatives, and had only unfriendly warnings for the Liberal governments. The attempt in 1832 to reform the Federal Pact of 1815 finally decided the Austrian Chancellor, Metternich, to intervene. He had to admit that the Treaties of 1815 contained no guarantees for the Federal Pact, but got over this obstacle by the following theory — that the guarantee of its neutrality and of its territorial inviolability, which had been promised in 1815,

was forfeited when it gave up its character as a Federation of sovereign States (which was the leading idea of the eastern Powers) and became subject to a central authority, for this would be only a collection of puppets in the hands of a great neighbouring Power. A Memorial dated at Vienna on June 5th, 1832, recommended that the Great Powers should take preventive measures against any proposed revision of the Pact of 1815. Prussia and Russia were quite satisfied with all this.

At one moment it seemed as if in this question England would join the eastern Powers. Lord Palmerston had in 1830 entered the Cabinet of Lord Grey as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and was to direct the foreign policy of England for eleven years. He clearly feared that a centralised Switzerland would become again a vassal of France, as in the days of the Helvetic Republic and of the Act of Mediation. Hence, on June 9th, 1832, he directed the British envoy in Berne to make the following declaration in the proper quarter: that the British Government had not the slightest desire to interfere in the internal affairs of Switzerland, but that the existing guaranteed neutrality was indissolubly connected with the existing Federal system; hence, any change which should disturb the sovereignty of the several cantons and should put them under the arbitrary rule of a central government would, without doubt, give the guarantee Powers the right of opposing such an alteration; but the British Government trusted that the genuine expression of its opinion would be taken as a proof of friendship and interest.

The British envoy in Switzerland, David Richard Morier, who was accredited on June 21st, 1832, made representations in this sense to Lucerne, then the ruling canton, and sought to postpone a revision of the Pact of 1815 till the times were quieter; but the mayor, Edward Pfyster, declared this to be impossible. The Austrian envoy, Count Bombelles, proposed that the Five Great Powers should lay down the principle

that the guarantee of Swiss neutrality should be considered to depend on the continued existence of the Pact of 1815. But this proposal met with the absolute refusal of the French envoy, de Rumigny; the representative of England behaved also in such a manner that Bombelles complained that the despatches which Morier had received since his original instructions had greatly diminished his energy.

The so-called "Rossi" draft of a Federation, which Bombelles declared to be a "perfidious fabrication," meant to mask cleverly the death-blow aimed at the old Pact of 1815, completely calmed, by reasons of its moderate reforms, Palmerston's anxiety lest a unitary republic should be subject to French influence. When the Austrian envoy, Apponyi, in the spring of 1833, at a conference in Paris, laid before the Five Powers a note to the Confederation, which threatened it with the withdrawal of the guarantee of its neutrality, the French foreign minister, de Broglie, refused to sign it; and the British envoy, Lord Granville, agreed with him. Metternich's plan of frustrating the reform of the Pact of 1815 by a common protest of the Powers thus broke down before the refusal of the two western Powers. Therefore the voters of Lucerne did him the pleasure of laying aside all reform of the Pact by their vote of July 7th, 1833.

Morier, who was British envoy in Berne for some fifteen years, was well disposed towards Switzerland (the original home of his family), but he did not understand the profound agitation which, under his eyes, was preparing the transformation of the loosely knitted Confederation into a much closer Federation. According to his views, the Confederation should have enjoyed a peaceful existence, under the protection of the Great Powers which guaranteed its neutrality. Both his religious and his political opinions made him heartily opposed to the two parties, the Conservatives and the Radicals, which were disturbing this peaceful existence, but he took no active part in the party struggles.