

Ernest Ansermet in London

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SWISS ALPINE CLUB

A hundred years ago, on 19th April 1863, the Swiss Alpine Club was formed by thirty-five men assembled in a room in the Buffet de la Gare at Olten. To-day the Club counts over 43,000 members, of whom upwards of 700 belong to the Association of British members. They are thus a tiny section of a great organisation, but linked to it by ties, historical, sentimental, and practical, that epitomize the rather curious relationship between British mountaineering and Switzerland.

The closeness of this relationship has given rise to one striking and perhaps even still prevalent misconception — that Switzerland was “discovered” by the English. In fact, it was not until after 1850 that British climbers began to make much impression on the Alps. Before then, a long line of Swiss *savants* had explored and mapped the mountains, studied their flora, geology, and glaciology, had painted them and written about them, and to those ends had climbed for the first time to many of their summits. But their aims were preponderantly scientific; and it was indeed the English who established mountaineering as a sport. Since early climbers did still feel the need to clothe their personal adventures with a show of scientific purpose; but not for long; and by the time Whymper climbed the Matterhorn in 1865, mountaineering could be regarded less as an incident in the pursuit of knowledge than as something worth doing for its own sake.

The next fifty years saw the growth of the *Corps des Guides*, the building of huts, and the opening up of the mountains to tourists. It was as a mark of recognition of all that the Swiss had done in furthering the development of the new sport that the British Association was formed in 1909. The initiative came from a group of British members of the S.A.C. and Professor Roget of the Geneva Section, who met at a dinner on the 23rd June 1909, and subsequently wrote to Colonel Répond, President of the S.A.C., proposing the formation of a section in London.

Colonel Répond was immediately sympathetic, and although there were difficulties later, the Association eventually took almost exactly the form suggested by him in his reply to the original letter. The inaugural dinner was held on 8th December 1909, and the Britannia Hut was opened on 12th August 1912.

This, then, is the background to the Exhibition held at the Alpine Club Gallery, 74 South Audley Street, London. Apart from the history of the S.A.C. and the British Association, the organisers tried to illustrate, even though fragmentarily, the growth of mountaineering from the exploratory climbing of the pioneers to the highly technical sport of the present day, and to suggest the complementary roles played by Swiss guides and their English clients in the golden age.

In the section on early mountaineering, prints and photographs, many of them unique, showed climbers from de Saussure to the pioneers of the classic routes, the guides who led them, and the primitive structures which in those days served them as huts. In the modern section a series of photographs of the chief climbing areas in Switzerland gave some idea of the range of present-day climbing — from the North Face of the Eiger to ordinary climbs for average climbers.

The Exhibition was opened by the Swiss Ambassador, accompanied by Madame Daeniker, on Monday, 25th November. The President of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Dr. A. W. Barton,

the Central President of the Swiss Alpine Club, Dr. Wyss-Dunant (leader of the Swiss Everest Expedition) and Sir John Hunt, who, incidentally had been made an Honorary Member of the S.A.C. at the Centenary Celebrations at Interlaken at the end of September, were present, as well as several members of the Swiss Embassy.

In Switzerland, the Centenary was celebrated in Basle and Berne, where individual groups had reached this venerable age. Near Kandersteg a jubilee camp for some three hundred youngsters was held. The main celebrations took place at Interlaken, where Federal Councillor Spuehler, the President of the Confederation last year, delivered the main speech. There was also a trip on the Lake of Thun and a religious service at the Schlosspark of Oberhofen.

At the moment, the Swiss Alpine Club have financial worries regarding their mountain huts. There are 151 huts in the Alps, forty of which in the Valais and the Vaudois Alps, thirty-three in the Bernese Alps and eighteen in Central Switzerland. Fourteen are in Glarus and St. Gall, thirty-five in the Grisons and eleven in the Ticino. The six largest huts have accommodation for between one hundred and one hundred and fifteen mountaineers, and eighteen huts have telephone connections.

ERNEST ANSERMET IN LONDON

On 11th November last the famous Conductor Ernest Ansermet celebrated his eightieth birthday. He was born in Vevey and studied at the University of Lausanne and later at the Sorbonne; his musical training, too, he had in Switzerland and in Paris. He was a teacher of mathematics in Lausanne, but in 1910 he began his musical career at Montreux. From 1915 to 1923 he was with Diaghilev's Russian Ballets. Then he conducted the “Association Symphonique” of Lausanne and later the “Orchestre de la Suisse Romande”. Many have been his tours abroad, and he enjoys fame in many countries.

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, he was made an Honorary Citizen of the town of Lausanne, and the President of the Confederation sent him a congratulatory telegram.

Ernest Ansermet was in London early in December, when he gave two talks at the Royal Institute of Great Britain, organised by the British Institute of Recorded Sound. One was on “Problems of Music” and the other on “The Stravinsky Case”. After the lectures “The Times” devoted considerable space to reviews.

In “Monsieur Ansermet Renews a Controversy” they said:

“It is tempting to turn an unresponsive shoulder to M. Ansermet's frank polemics, but there are two reasons for not doing so. One is his eminence. This is no provincial choirmaster pontificating from the organ-loft, but a man who has been in touch with new music all his long life, who worked with the Diaghilev Company in its greatest days, who gave the first performances of many Stravinsky works in the period between the wars. If now he has things to tell us about Stravinsky's music that those of us who love them would rather not hear, there is at least no one with a better right to do so.

“The other reason why we should listen to him is that there is always the possibility he may be right when he claims that young composers are in danger of being misled by a heresy propagated with all the fervour of political or religious ideology and all the financial resources of big business.”

In "Monsieur Ansermet on the Music he enjoys" "The Times" recorded an interview with the great man. He was asked:

"Is London still the centre it was in those days? 'Yes, of course, but in a different way. The musical world is more divided now than it was then. Formerly, an event in Berlin or Vienna had its repercussions in the other major capitals, like London or Paris. But now each city is isolated: the commercial organization of musical life has become more important than the cultural currents, and a major event in one city is of concern only there.'

"M. Ansermet pointed out that the case of his own country, Switzerland, being small and having fewer composers of its own, was rather different. 'We are more attentive to outside happenings. For us Benjamin Britten, for example, seems a more important composer than he does for the French.'

"It was M. Ansermet who conducted the first performance, in Geneva, of Britten's new *Cantata Misericordium* at the Red Cross centenary concert in September — 'a most beautiful work'. He reminded me that he had conducted *The Rape of Lucretia* at Glyndebourne shortly after the war, and he has always admired and sympathized with Britten — 'he is writing greater music than anyone else today'. The Swiss composer Frank Martin is another contemporary for whom he has especial sympathy.

"What other music does he enjoy conducting? 'Well, the classics, which I do more now than I used to: I've just recorded all Brahms's symphonies, as well as Beethoven's and six of Haydn's. Young audiences have got to build up this classical background. But Debussy, of course, is my great favourite. And all Stravinsky: that is, except for the more recent works; up to the Symphony in C and the Symphony in Three Movements. Of his later works, *Norwegian Moods* and the *Circus Polka* seem truly Stravinskian — and *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* is perhaps one of the finest of them.'

"How, I asked M. Ansermet, does he feel about the new music of today? 'Some of it — all this improvisation — isn't music at all; it's just like children at play. Of course, I had the reputation between the wars of being a pioneer of new works — Ravel, Bartok, Honegger and many others — and I was very active in the I.S.C.M. But I found myself unable to follow the modern movement after World War Two.'

The special report in "The Times" ends thus:

"At 80, M. Ansermet remains a figure to be reckoned with. This youthful octogenarian, though less familiar on our concert platforms than we might wish, occupies a prominent and secure place in our musical affections."

And with this nobody would disagree, and we wish our illustrious compatriot many happy years to come.

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The Editor would also like to thank the many readers who have sent her Christmas cards. Their good wishes and support give her encouragement in her work.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Direct connection to the ski-ing centres of the Grisons and Eastern Switzerland from Zurich is offered by a new highway inaugurated on 1st December. The long cherished project of a road along the Walensee to avoid the climb over the Kerenzerberg, often icy and sometimes dangerous in the winter, has thus been realised. Lovely ski-ing areas such as Pizol, Flumserberge, Klosters and Davos are now even nearer and more comfortably accessible for ski fans in and around Zurich.

Savognin, a new winter resort on the Julier route to St. Moritz, attracted attention already last winter thanks to ski and chair lifts built on private initiative. These facilities have now been doubled and the small village (3,900 feet) is ready to welcome skiers who prefer close-to-nature sport to fashionable resort life.

In the Canton of Valais, in which several alpine pastures are not easily accessible, the system of transporting milk pipe-line has been adopted on a large scale. In fact, at the present moment milk pipe-lines in the Valais total over 125 miles in length. These pipe-lines consist of plastic pipes buried under the ground. The satisfactory results experienced so far allow experts to estimate that the cost of transport by milk pipe-line varies between 1.5 and 3 centimes per litre, whereas transport by road amounts to nearer 5 to 6 centimes a litre, i.e. in some instances almost four times the figure for the new form of transport.

In the kitchen of the Zurich Central Station a giant gas stove has been installed on which can be used more than one hundred casseroles. It has a capacity for baking more than six hundred pieces of pastry per hour and for warming over one thousand plates at one time. Installation of this giant was difficult and had to be done with the utmost speed to avoid any interruption of the service. Thanks to a work team of thirty men, the new gas stove was ready for service hours ahead of schedule.

[O.S.E.C and S.N.T.O.]

Davos. — There are some one hundred and twenty-five winter resorts in Switzerland offering the skier a wide variety of slopes and runs, and today there is hardly a ski region access to which has not been facilitated by one or even several skilifts; the same is true of the nursery slopes. Such facilities do not strike the modern skier as being anything out of the ordinary, and yet their conception is not so very old. The first skilift in the world was built at the Bolgen in Davos in 1934, exactly thirty years ago. The originator, the Zurich engineer Ernst Costam, had the idea while on a ski excursion in the Bernese Oberland. As he was climbing up from Grindelwald to the Kleine Scheidegg inspiration came to him from the contact line of the electric railway: "How wonderful it would be, if one could get hold of that wire and be pulled uphill!"

[S.N.T.O.]

NIGHT TELEPHONE SYSTEM AT SWISSAIR

A new automatic telephone-answering system will be used by Swissair Reservations in London (REGent 7931) from 1st January to provide a twenty-four-hour service. The system, operating from 9 p.m. until 8.30 a.m., will record messages for the attention of its human "colleagues".