

Association of British members of the Swiss Alpine Club

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - (1922)

Heft 78

PDF erstellt am: **08.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691616>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

these that I am quite sure that the Alpine Club's health could not be anything else but most satisfactory. During the last year or so the Alpine Club has burst out again into great activity in sending out under the aegis of the Geographical Society, the expedition to Mount Everest. This expedition, as you all know, has yielded results even better than we could possibly have expected. We all know now what horrible things the poor people whom we sent out there had to suffer. They are frozen, they are nearly blown inside out, they are burnt with the sun, and if it had not been, I think, for the enormous liberality and, I may say, lavish expenditure of money on the part of Captain Farrar, they might even have stopped in the places they went to. Perhaps one of the greatest indignities they had to undergo there from human beings, not from the weather, was the imposition of this oxygen which was sent out. (Laughter.) I have been told by many people that oxygen is probably a most poisonous substance, and that you were trying to dope the Alpine Club to try to get to the top of Mount Everest, that oxygen was certainly a thing that could not be used by any self-respecting mountaineer, and that they would rather see Mount Everest unclimbed than to see it climbed by the help of oxygen. It is no good pointing out to these people that oxygen is the air you breathe and that oxygen in a bottle is no different from the oxygen in the air. The only difference is that it is slightly condensed. I do not know if those people who object to oxygen would have objected to our using condensed milk on the mountain and condensed anything else. And if it is a departure to use oxygen, so it is an innovation to use boots, because our ancestors never climbed mountains in boots. Still, I do not think, after all is said and done, it will do any harm to use oxygen. Personally I believe that people will get to the top of Everest without oxygen as well as with it. The only thing is they can get on very much more easily with the oxygen, just the same way as they could get up more easily with a good breakfast and good food on the way up if they can digest it.

Mr. Foa has said that when people go to the Alpine Huts, and say they sleep there, they are liars. (Laughter.) It struck me rather, now that I am getting older and wiser, that possibly most of the people who came up to those huts early in the morning in starlight and indulged in such an amount of pleasure and excitement, were seeing stars. I think if these people said they had enjoyed that so much, they possibly might be also guilty of what one might call a terminological inexactitude. (Cheers and laughter.) I must say whenever I have got up early in the morning with the stars, I have felt cold and miserable, and I have not enjoyed those magnificent feelings Mr. Foa talks of. And also, as I am getting older and wiser, I am beginning to wonder almost why people ever go and climb mountains at all. You do not get on the tops of the mountains beautiful dinners, such as we have had to-night. Certainly you do not get any beds where you can go and sleep comfortably. You do not have fires to keep you warm, you feel extremely tired very often, and sometimes suffer from mountain sickness, and on the whole I am beginning to wonder why people do go and climb mountains. There are so many objections to it, and I have come to the conclusion it is possibly perhaps because it is thought good form. The objectionable things as a rule that one has to do are extremely good form, and the things that are nice and very easy are naughty, and therefore, the climbing of mountains can be looked at from two different points of view, and if it is really naughty to climb mountains, then it might be nice, but if it is very objectionable in many respects, I have no doubt it is extremely good form. I have heard a remark which perhaps I ought not to have heard from your Chairman when he said all the remaining speeches are going to be short. I thank you for having drunk the health of the Alpine Club, and sit down.

Mr. A. L. BILL said:—
Your Excellency, Mr. President, and Gentlemen.—I can assure you I rise with very mingled feelings. First of all, naturally, it is a great pleasure and privilege to be called upon to respond, for I suppose the youngest body of mountaineers in this country, the Midland Association of Mountaineers, which is an absolute infant barely a year old, and I take it a little brutal to expect so young a child to be able to speak at all, much less make a speech. Of that you will have ample opportunity of judging. I do thank you very much on their behalf, and I can assure Mr. Steel that his estimation of the opportunities of that club for climbing are very well justified. I know, as an old Rugbyan myself, the terrors of the Barby Hill. I also can assure you neither on the Wrekin nor the Malverns is there very much opportunity for rock climbing. We are speculative rather than operative. (Laughter.) On the other hand, I can assure you that much pleasure, as it is, to have this opportunity. I do rise with considerable trepidation in the field in which it is absolutely impossible for me to follow the high level of oratory which we have heard from previous speakers, and especially to come immediately after the President of the Alpine Club, of which by the help of good friends and much use of the microscope I have become a very humble member. I am rather reminded of a remark of one of the guests at the recent Alpine Club Dinner. We cannot all be climbers, and I am one of those, I am one of the "also rans," or possibly you might say "also crawls." I feel that, to plagiarise again the speech which was made at an Alpine Club dinner, that I might be expected with others to sing the grand old hymn:—
They climb the steep ascent to Heaven,
Mid peril, toil and pain,
O Lord, to us that grace be given
To follow in their train.

(Laughter.) That, I may say, is not original, but as no doubt many of those present know, it was part of a speech made deploring the increase of those means of communication into the sanctity of the high hills. Well, I have been told to be brief. At any rate, if I had not been told to be I should be. I thank you very much on behalf of the Midland Association in that in the first year of our existence you have honoured us with an invitation and especially you have honoured us with an opportunity of acknowledging that invitation, and I thank you very much for your honour and hospitality. I will not test your forbearance longer, but will sit down, again thanking you, and may I also add the thanks, as the Secretary has allowed me to do, on behalf both of the Midland Association and the French Alpine Club.

Mr. T. H. SOMERVELL said:—
Your Excellency, Mr. President, and Gentlemen.—My fellow Rugbyan has already told me that I am a member of a denomination, but I do not know which it is, because I am a member of very nearly all the societies which come under the ruling of the Act,

except the Midland Association. I think, having been at Rugby, I ought to join that too. (Laughter.) I am a member of the oldest of the Societies, the Alpine Club, and of the best of them, the Fell and Rock Club. I shall be brief and certainly not exceed five minutes. I have been in England a week, having come back from Everest. During that week I have made two speeches, one of them lasting an hour. Professor Collie has already challenged me to make a statement about oxygen. At any rate the tone of his remarks, if not by the remarks themselves, it seems to be rather a vexed question. I had forgotten all about it in India, but having come home I find everybody is talking about oxygen, and I feel something is expected upon the subject from me. Personally, when making the small attempt on Everest which I did make, I did not use it, but I have nothing against it, in the same way that I have nothing against the use of howitzers with which to shoot pheasants. (Laughter.) If you cannot shoot pheasants without using a howitzer by all means use it. If you cannot climb Everest without oxygen by all means use it. If I could not climb Everest without oxygen, I should certainly be a protagonist of that substance. As I am perfectly sure I could climb without, I feel it is better to try to do it without, but I have no theory on the subject whatever, so I cannot contribute to the discussion. I therefore in other words refuse to allow my leg to be pulled. (Laughter.)

Professor Collie also mentioned something about privations that we people on Everest underwent. As a matter of fact, the arrangements were so admirable one really had no privations to complain of, and most of the ones you have read about were the inventions, like so much of the elections here, of the Press. The only real hardship I personally underwent during that expedition was that six weeks before we got to Darjeeling my "baccy" ran out. That never got into the papers. It was much worse than all the unpleasants below zero that was written about.

As this is a gathering especially of the Swiss Alpine Club, of which I am proud to be a member, and therefore especially connected with the Alps, I feel in the rest of my five minutes I ought to just say a few words—if you will excuse a split infinitive—about the difference one has found between the Himalayas and the Alps. When I was trying to climb up Mount Everest I found myself envying those of my fellow men here on the real mountains, the Alps. I am only too pleased to find when I got here that they had a pretty bad year of it. (Laughter.) I would not have missed last year for anything, but I feel this year one really had almost as good a time on the Himalayas as they had on the Alps. But there is no comparison between the Everest group of mountains and the familiar groups in the Alps. The Alps have it every time. The Everest group, though they are so colossal in size, rise from a tremendous altitude, as you know. One goes up to a height of 21 or 22 thousand feet to reach the base of Everest, so that the actual mountain itself, considered from the mountaineer's point of view, is very little bigger than the average Alpine peak. I saw nothing on Everest to compare with the view of Monte Rosa nor the view of Mont Blanc and several other peaks and views in Switzerland which one could mention, and one must say that one was really disappointed in many ways with the Himalayas. Of course, we had with us Dr. Longstaff, the Himalayan climber of great experience, and he assured me that all the Himalayas except Everest were much more interesting. (Laughter.) Of course, Dr. Longstaff was one of those that went home early and was perhaps not afflicted with undue optimism at the time. Coming home I passed through Sikkim. The mountains of Sikkim surpassed altogether in beauty those of the Everest group. It would be invidious to compare them with the Alps, but one must own the extraordinary beauty of such mountains. These mountains are really, I think, unsurpassed even by the Alps. On the whole I have come to the conclusion that the Alps are so much finer than the Himalayas, and I think a gathering of the Swiss Alpine Club a very fitting occasion on which to compare the two. I congratulate your Excellency on being the Minister for the country which really has "the" mountains. May I also on behalf of all the miscellaneous societies, to some of which I belong and to some of which I don't, thank you very much for drinking our healths.

THE PRESIDENT, proposing "The Guests," said:—
Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—It now falls upon me to propose the toast of "The Guests." You might almost think it had been done, but it has not. We should have had here to-night the Lord Chief Justice, who, notwithstanding a very snappy and cold at the last moment, and sent us a note to say that he could not come. Well, gentlemen, we are so used to having at all events one judge at these annual dinners that all this evening I have been feeling as if I have been coming to dinner without my braces. (Laughter.) It is reasonable that this Club should have a judge at its dinner, because after all I think almost the greatest originator of Alpine exploration was a judge, Mr. Justice Wills. It was he and those of his day who broke through that tradition of the 18th and the early part of the 19th century which looked upon mountains as stupendous and terrible things, to be inspected by poets from the flat, but not to be assumed as they have assumed now, the less dignified, but more pleasant position of the playground of Europe, as Mr. Foa said. Well, we have here, in spite of his absence, a number of distinguished guests; some of whom have already replied to speeches, and I have a sort of regret that I did not propose, on the toast of the Alpine Club and Kindred Societies, because one of the gentlemen who replied to it, Mr. Bill, had at one time, I think, worked politically against me when I was a member for Coventry, and I might have had a chance of getting a little of my own back. (Laughter.) Amongst the guests we have here, apart from the Swiss Minister, M. Martin, Councillor to the Swiss Legation, and M. De Cintra, President of the City Swiss Club. You see, gentlemen, that lets me in to do again what has really been done, making remarks about the League of Nations, Lausanne, and all the rest of it, but I am not going to do it. I am just going to say I agree very much with the President of the Alpine Club and his remarks about the huts. It is extraordinary how the same thing will strike differently upon different minds, because it has always seemed to me that intense moment of relief that Mr. Foa experienced when he got out of the uncomfortable Alpine huts was the moment when I felt most intensely that the discomfort of huts had been greatly exaggerated. (Laughter.) We have had Mr. Somervell speaking. I got the most pessimistic opinions from his speech, because if ascending Mount Everest with the help of oxygen is comparable to shooting a pheasant with a howitzer it will never be ascended at all. I cannot imagine anything more difficult in the world than to go after pheasants with a howitzer. I have to couple with the toast the name

of Mr. Noel, who is the Secretary of Queen's Club, an expert of racquets and tennis and an authority on all ball games, and every kind of sport except mountaineering. So it is very fitting he should reply to the toast of the guests at a club of this kind, because he is just preparing everybody to go up on a mountain. It is like the headmaster of a preparatory school, if I may say so. He is just preparing people for Eton. I therefore have the greatest pleasure in calling upon Mr. Noel to reply to the toast of the Guests.

Mr. NOEL said:—
Your Excellency, Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen.—As several men of the Everest expedition will understand perfectly well, I am speaking as proxy. It has been an enormous pleasure to myself and I am sure everyone of the guests to be here to-night. I do know a little about climbing, not climbing the Alps. I always considered myself a grand expert in red brick climbing at Trinity College, Cambridge. (Laughter.) I have seen a lot of ball games, and whatever sport there is it is good as long as it is good amateur sport. May I thank you very much on behalf of the guests for this most delightful evening.

Mr. C. T. LEHMANN, proposing "The Chairman," said:—

Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—One of the minor amusements attendant upon public dinners is a live gamble with your nearest diner as to the opening that will be taken by various speakers. There is the deprecatory style, "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking," etc., there is the man who says, "The Secretary calls upon me at the last moment," there is the opening of the practised speaker, such as you have here to-night, knowing he is going to give you a good speech and does not mind the beating. I am, of course, an old member of the Club. I have the difficult task of proposing "The President," who is not only past but present. This diffidence is increased when I realise I have to make personal allusions which will necessarily be aversive to a naturally shy and sensitive nature. I am only the librarian, a simple compiler of catalogues. He is a writer of books. I ought to be the gentleman with the duster. Unfortunately, I am only a man with a brush. With that brush I must endeavour to paint a portrait to those of you who do not know him as well as we do. You have seen him standing up just now. You have noted the tall, elegant, athletic figure, the dark Napoleonic lock, the symmetrically chiselled features typical of a beau of a Regency period, and attired with a red coat, white buck-skin breeches and Wellingtons. I am sure you will agree with the suspicion that I have long entertained that he is the model that has been selected by the well-known firm of whiskies to advertise their mountain dew. (Laughter.) They describe him as born in 1820 and still going strong. In that they do him less than justice, because I am perfectly sure he was not born in 1820. However, from my personal knowledge, it is not going strong, it is going weaker than it used to be, while he is stronger and better than he ever was. I think he undoubtedly deserves compensation for that libel on his character. I hope he gets it continually and in kind. (Laughter.)

and as the contract must have been entered, many years ago, I hope it is carried out by them in pre-war spirit. (Laughter.) But this, gentlemen, is simply the outward characteristic. What about the man himself? To hundreds of thousands, nay, to millions throughout the world he is a wizard, but not with the old magician's carpet. He takes us clean away from the murky atmosphere of this country to all corners of the world, he takes us away from our dull, drab lives into others crowded with incident, with adventure, where we always get what it deserves, where vice meets with retribution, which it does not always meet here. To many he is the well-known sportsman whose affections are equally divided between the mountain and the sea, and in that he shows himself a clean-minded lover of nature, not a mere wooer of artificial games, not a selfish hunter or pursuer of those delights attendant on the fickle goddess. I have tried to paint a portrait. Time has not enabled me to do more than a mere thumbnail sketch, but those who know him and have known him for these many years realise and can fill in the details and know that there is much more. He has been our President since 1913. A short glance at our annual reports shows that the first two years he was described as A. E. W. Mason, Esq. Then it came to be Captain Mason, and then Major Mason. Now he is A. E. W. Mason, Esq. These few words give a history of these ten years. He was early taken away from the duties of the Club to the duties of the nation, which he fulfilled with ability. Mr. President, you have been to us more than an office. You have been a personality, a personality which has made an instant appeal. You will live with us always as a personality with a peculiar and particular charm. To many has been given the gift of words, but few have the power of thought and few have the ability as you have had to clothe with felicitous phrase thoughts both poetical and true. We all know your particularly delightful way of bringing to a joke what was at first a serious matter. I think on behalf of all our members for your ten years of Presidency—(cheers)—years which I think will be the happiest this Association has ever had. I do not mean to belittle the future by comparison with the past, but I am simply speaking from my own conviction. May you for many years yet to come delight us all with the memories we have of your Presidency, and may you bestow those gifts not only on us, but on that much larger and certainly not warmer circle of friends you must have, gentlemen, I give you the health of the retiring President, A. E. W. Mason.

THE PRESIDENT said:—
Your Excellency and Gentlemen.—I am a very shy man, and in replying to this toast for the last time I wish to thank you all very heartily for the consideration you have shown to your President during these ten years. It has been a time of great vicissitudes in the history of this country, and our activities as a Club, of course, did cease for four years. I am followed by Dr. Dent, who has done so much, and worked so hard for the British Association of the Swiss Alpine Club, and you know and I know that all that can be done to extend and strengthen and promote this Association will certainly be done by him. He will also have the privilege of replying at the end of all the annual dinners to the toast of the Chairman. He may find it is not so humorous as it is to the rest of the audience. (Ltr.) But he will get used to that. He has jolly well got to. Anyway, I thank you very much indeed for the kindly way in which you have received this toast, and in wishing you farewell as your President, I do not say farewell as a member. I am now Vice-President in perpetuity of this Club and shall hope to attend its dinners and its meetings as I have done in the past. (Cheers.)