

# Notes and gleanings

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Switzerland undoubtedly is, to those who see it rightly, a constant demonstration of the extraordinary triumph of man over nature. It was no small thing when about 1230 the St. Gotthard Pass was opened to traffic. That event is of striking historic and international significance, but it is also a demonstration of man's determination to conquer even the eternal hills. There came a time, centuries afterwards, when the first wheeled vehicle went over the Pass, and a further stage was reached in the process of conquest. The progress of that "dominion" is vividly illustrated in the Grimsel Pass. The old road and the new road run side by side, divided by the river Aar, which goes rushing and roaring through the rocky defile. The old road on the left bank is but a crude bridle-track on the mountain side, dangerous in many parts. The new road on the right bank, tunnelled and galleried in the rock, presents no serious difficulties to the frequent motor traffic.

It is not in these mental and physical triumphs that man most of all reveals his likeness to God. How often the danger of the Alps has been the occasion of a greatness of soul before which we can only stand in awe and wonder. On one Sunday I was in Switzerland, and probably at the very time when I was gazing at the Mönch, a tragedy—but also a triumph—was taking place on the other side of the mountain. A lady was climbing on the southern side, when her guide fell into a crevasse, and hung there at the end of the rope. The lady mountaineer, prone on the ground, was just able to balance him, but unable to help him back to the surface. For hours they remained, until the guide realised that help was not likely to come, and demanded that the lady should cut the rope and secure her own safety. The lady refused, but he insisted, and as otherwise it meant both perishing, she finally consented. No, the guide was NOT lost. The rope had cut its way into the edge of the crevasse and frozen in, so that, even when severed above, it still held. After several hours help was secured and the guide saved, but the significance of it all remains. There is a quality of heart and spirit which stands unconquerable in the face of danger such as that. How often has it been illustrated in the stories of this mountain region.

Yet another way has this little country revealed man's true greatness. To dip into the history of Switzerland, especially as one visits the historic centres of the forest cantons, is to realise that Switzerland has a message to give to the world, and one never more needed than the present time. As no other country has she revealed the spirit of a true internationalism. With the people speaking four different languages, and with both Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches throughout her various cantons, she has yet found the way of harmony—the spirit of tolerance. She is crowned with glory and honour by reason of a unity in diversity. If the spirit of little Switzerland could become the spirit of Europe, what a change there would be!

#### The Woman's Point of View.

As a kind of footnote to our remarks in our issue of Sept. 28th, regarding "Switzerland's Sensible Lead," we append two paragraphs from a chatty article in the *Sunday School Chronicle* (Sept. 13th) with the hope that in comparison with what appears immediately above they will not be regarded as too sudden a descent to earth:—

Gruyère is certainly one of the quaintest places I have seen. Apparently each day of the week is a village washing day, for the women were washing their clothes at the fountain in the centre of the cobbled street. Less laborious ways of washing I have seen. They have a flat board, almost as tall as themselves, supported in a slanting position by wooden supports, and on these they bang their clothes incessantly. This seems to be the recognised method in all the villages; even at a lonely mountain station I noticed the inevitable fountain, and the wife of the 'chef de Gare' busily banging.

So far as their household arrangements are concerned, the Swiss beat us in many ways. Every morning the beds are not only stripped, but hauled out of the windows on to the veranda into the sun and air; floors are of polished wood, with occasional mats; and the way of serving up meals saves a fair amount of washing up—instead of having a dish for meat and two vegetable dishes, one large meat dish is used. The meat is cut into neat slices before being sent to the table, and placed down the centre of the dish, and the vegetables are arranged on either side. My fondness for carrots dates from the first time I had them in Switzerland. Cut into thin strips, steamed, and a little melted butter added, and then decorated with chopped parsley, they look so pretty one wants to eat them—doubtless with beneficial results, for few vegetables are more valuable. I like, too, the Swiss way of serving tomatoes. Instead of cutting them in halves or quarters, they slice them in "wheels," steam them and then decorate them with chopped parsley. I feel sure that if only our vegetables were served so attractively we should eat more. It was there, too, I first discovered how delicious steved pears could be when a little lemon-juice is added.

#### Cold Feet.

"When Winter Comes"—whether the common or garden winter of the revolving seasons or the winter of advancing age—it is certain that cold feet will be the affliction of many. We do not know if these unfortunates will be able to derive any comfort from the following note which appeared in *Engineering* (Sept. 14th):—

The electrical heating of the floors of dwelling-houses comes, like several other innovations in electrical heating, from Switzerland. The new heating system was introduced last year by the *Electra A.G.* of Wädenswil, and the heated floor will appeal to people of sedentary habits who have difficulty in keeping their feet warm.

#### The Swiss "Schwingerfest."

With the presence amongst us of Mr. Robert Roth, our Swiss Champion Wrestler, it may not be inappropriate to quote part of an article on this subject from the *Scottish Field* for September. The descriptions and comments may not be new to our readers, but they may recall thrilling memories of occasions on which they have "assisted" at this virile national sport:—

For generations past the healthy, sturdy Swiss have been wrestlers, spending their spare moments in practis-

ing cunningly-devised falls, holds, grips and trips, while the fleeting decades have witnessed many a Schwingerfest, as the wrestling tourney is termed. And the most important Schwingerfest of all is the annual summer contest which takes place at St. Moritz, the picturesque little capital of the Upper Engadine. Here the competitors develop thews and sinews in the pine-perfumed mountain air.

A month before the eventful day the wrestlers, though perfectly fit, tanks in great measure to their living some 6,000 feet above sea-level, go into training. The method, however, is simplicity itself, for it merely consists in the intending athletes going for a leisurely walk when the afternoon's work is over, or, if they can find the time, climbing the nearest mountain. Meanwhile, as soon as the eagerly-anticipated morning is well under way, sunburned herdsmen from the snow-capped Alps and the lusty agriculturists who farm the intervening valleys meet in friendly contest, also trying conclusions with the local cranks. Amongst the last-named are several sporting tradesmen, whose keenness is so great that they cheerfully sacrifice the chance of making money to unremunerative sport. Indeed, it is no uncommon thing for a lady who pines to have her tresses tinted, or washed, or frizzled overnight, to find that the independent Figaro has shut up shop and gone for a moonlit ramble.

At a recent contest one of the best displays of the afternoon was given by the proprietor of the principal barbering establishment. He arrived upon the ground with moustache carefully waxed, ambrosial whiskers brushed in an outward direction, and hair gracefully festooned about an alabaster brow. Twenty minutes later, a greatly fatigued, dishevelled and totally unrecognizable barber emerged from the fray, and lay panting on the restful grass. But he had vanquished the champion.

The Schwingerfest is held in a beflowered field, enclosed by a roughly knocked together wall of planks, above which the inquisitive urchins of the townlet peer till driven away by the watchful police. The last-named, wearing a bottle-green uniform picked out with scarlet braid, march up and down, ready at a moment's notice to preserve law and order with the butt-end of the short, heavy swords which they carry. One of their duties is to assist the gatekeeper, who, sitting at the receipt of custom, hands a blue badge to those who have paid two francs for a seat and a yellow one to the sportsman or sportswoman who expends only half this sum upon accommodation. The other officials are the judges, the referee, and the doctor, while the Schwingerfest cooks and waitresses are kept busy cutting enormous ham sandwiches, cooking "gipsy steaks" (which are sold for a frank apiece), and filling and refilling the glasses of the spectators with good Veltliner Festwein. The steaks, upon which the wrestlers regale themselves, are so-called because the cook, having skewered the delicacy, grills it in the leaping flames of a wood fire. Hungry Engadiners cluster around the open-air kitchen, and, on receiving the rapidly-cooked steak, eat it (gipsy fashion) with their fingers, wedges of bread completing the repast, a plank table and form constituting the alfresco dining-room furniture.

The wrestlers, few of whom are above middle height, some being under it, usually restrict their costume to an undervest and drawers, though some prefer trousers, which, as a rule, are tightly clipped above the ankle. Putting on a broad canvas belt furnished with a rope "handle" on either side, the athlete, nodding to the crowd, shakes hands amicably with his opponent and gets to work. Bending forward, he grasps his rival for the championship by the "handles," and, bringing every conceivable device to bear upon the business in hand, does all that is possible to carry off the prize. As nearly everyone who competes is a wrestler of the first order, he who succeeds in getting into the semi-finals is accounted a hero. The winner is acclaimed throughout the canton for days after the Schwingerfest has taken place.

#### Death for the Insane.

We claim to be sane and sensible folk. Are we to regard the following from the *Daily Express* (Sept. 17th) as one of the exceptions that prove the rule?

Dr. Hauswirth, a mental expert and deputy, created a sensation at a recent sitting of the Grand Council at Berne by declaring that incurable lunatics should be legally put to death. He demanded that his proposal should be seriously considered from the viewpoints of humanity and economy.

A majority of indignant deputies voted against the proposal, denouncing it as "a moral monstrosity," but Dr. Hauswirth pointed out that incurably insane people, although suffering, are maintained at great expense to the end of their lives.

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