

Ticinese architects and sculptors in past centuries [continued]

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good-night, I asked his permission to use our conversation in an article. "I have had much experience of climbing with every nationality. I would rather climb with an Englishman or Englishwoman than with anyone else. I am not speaking of technique but of the great lore of the mountains which you alone, with us, the guides, understand."

In order to make up for the rather depressing fare I have felt constrained to put before my readers this week I will improve the menu with an amusing quotation from *The Graphic*, 18th Jan.:

Sporting Folk

There is no envy more bitter to my spirit in the gloomy month of January than that stirred up by the pictures of winter-sporting peers and peeresses who, having taken the Calais-châlet route, are caught by the camera in the act of skiing over sweeps of Alpine snow.

Here is the fair young Countess of Corduroy, looking her smartest in a pair of dark glasses as she emerges, splendidly accoutred, from the opulent Schweizerhof in which she occupies the most opulent suite. Here is the adorable Duchess of Dungere, exquisitely erect as she glissades over the candid slopes like a pinnace over calm waters in a favouring breeze.

Here is the Hon. John Herringbone, arrayed like Solomon in all the glory of the Faroes, discussing a knotty point in snowcraft with some Scandinavian champion outside a syndicated Kurhaus. And here is the Duc de Luges, actually peeling an orange in the dazzling sun outside a lonely log-cabin six thousand feet above sea-level.

Really, it is all too tantalising.

I can just bear not being aristocratic.

I can just bear not being on snow.

But not being aristocratic on snow would surely try the temper of a lamb.

Meanwhile, just as there is a dearth of skiing stories, so there is a dearth of skiing limericks. But let us remedy this. There's no resort without a rhyme. If you will do Mürren and Davos and Arosa, I will do Lenzerheide and Klosters and St. Moritz. Let me see. . . .

Said a skier in high Lenzerheide,

"I fear that I look like a spider!

As soon as I start

My legs fly apart

And get wider and wider and wider!"

Said a skimpy young lady at Klosters,

"This is better than basking with coasters!"

But when she sat down,

She remarked with a frown,

"They said nothing of that on the posters!"

Said a sporting young man at St. Moritz,

"Although it is risky, I'm sure it's

Decidedly classier

To ski on a glacier

So now I am one of the 'for its.'"

And another humorous effort on the same theme culled from the *Royal Magazine*, January issue:

The Winter Sportings

One of the most amusing characteristics of those quaint folk who comprise the Upmost

Ticinese Architects and Sculptors in Past Centuries.

By Dr. A. Janner, translated from "Deine Heimat" by one of our readers.

(Continued. Commenced Jan. 18.)

The artists so far mentioned are merely the greatest. If we desired to take into consideration artists who have also been renowned at their time, but who to-day enjoy less fame, we would never come to the end. Wyss, who studied the condition of the Ticino in the 18th century, refers to over 70 in that century alone and all architects, sculptors or decorators of great fame. And then no longer in Italy alone—Italy having become an insufficient field for their activities the Ticinesi were emigrating, to bring their artistic creations to other cities, to all the reigning families of Europe. Even in the German speaking part of Switzerland we find some of them—like the brothers Pisoni, from Ascona, who built the fine and classical cathedral of Soleure. A number of them went to Germany and were among the foremost architects. In Austria we find, among others, Ricca building churches and palaces and in Copenhagen Trezzini. A special field of activity for the Ticinese architects was then provided by Russia. When Peter the Great decided on founding Petersburg he called as his engineer just that Trezzini who, up to then, had been architect to the Royal family of Copenhagen. When Trezzini died other Ticinese artists followed him like Rusca, who erected the Tauris palace and Gilardi who built the great palace of the Bourse. Another Gilardi was allotted by Czar Alexander the stupendous task of rebuilding Moscow, which

Ten—an elastic term applicable not only to the Great, but also to the Notorious, the Merely Opulent, and the Dashed Lucky—is their reluctance to remain in any one spot for more than a few weeks at a time.

Thus, in the spring they swarm thick as bees along the Riviera, alternately contracting pneumonia and achieving insolvency at the tables; in the summer they are to be found strewn along the shores of Deauville and the Lido, only a yard or so above high-water mark; in the autumn they are ten a penny in Scotland; and at this time of the year their unanimous migration to Switzerland is the signal for a sharp rise in the cost of Swiss living.

The popularity of Switzerland as a winter stamping-ground for what are humorously known as the Best People is due to the exceptional facilities it offers for the practice of Winter Sports. As every schoolboy knows, it is a surprisingly knobby country, thickly studded with mountains and almost entirely covered with snow and expensive hotels; and the astute natives long ago realised that this combination of attractions forms an irresistible allurements for the type of Briton who regards it as an offence against decency to remain in England now that winter's here.

Although I have a weakness for condensed milk, and hold that there is no more beautiful noise than a yodel, or Swiss national yelp, I myself have never set foot in Switzerland. But one of these days, when I have been acquitted on a murder charge and sold my life-story to a Sunday paper, I intend to invest my gains in the essential outfit, make a ski-line for the nearest Alp, and join my betters at their play.

Fortunately, the necessary equipment for such an expedition is comparatively cheap, if not particularly becoming. Unlike the polo-player, who must acquire a flock of ponies, a large open space, seven confederates and a considerable fortune before he can pursue his hobby, the winter sportsman needs only a woolly sweater, a woollier muffler, a toothy grin, a comic hat, a pair of incredible trousers, a brace of skis, and a return ticket to the field of play. Thus armed at all points, he can go blithely forth to the revels, ready to cope with anything from an avalanche to a Press photographer.

People with less sense than money, of course, need not content themselves with so modest an outfit. At the moment of writing, the advertisement pages of our glossier weekly journals are congested with photographs of persons in Winter Sports Wear—improbably comely youths in clothes such as might be worn by an American engine-driver with a leaning towards deep-sea diving, and impossibly fair maidens in garments that appear to have started life as plus fours and repented too late.

By these tokens we may know that the snow-lovers of Mayfair are feverishly preparing for the Great Trek, and that those who cannot afford to make the trip this year are busily explaining to their friends that Switzerland is simply too terribly tripperish nowadays, and that London is ever so much more amusing, really, don't you think?

The embryo skier who wishes to escape ridicule and/or a broken neck, would be well

had been destroyed by fire during the Napoleonic campaign, and Gilardi built some of the finest monumental structures of that city. Another Ticinese, Adamini, was also architect in Petrograd and designed the great pronaos of 24 columns for the church of St. Isaac. Later, in 1834, emulating Fontana, he erected the great column in honour of Czar Alexander and he also accomplished a prodigy of engineering. According to Francini, who had been able to know direct from Adamini, there were present 10,000 soldiers and 30,000 spectators and there were used 62 capstans set in motion by 2,332 workmen. The brothers Fossati, from Morcote, architects, restored the greatest Byzantine temple, viz. the church of St. Sofia in Constantinople.

We come now to the 19th century in which stands out, among all others, the name of a great sculptor, Vincenzo Vela. Of Vela it is well to speak somewhat at length, because both as a man as well as an artist his personality is attractive and typical of the Ticinese soul. Vela was born in Ligornetto in 1820 and as a young boy was set to learn the work of stone-cutter in the near-by quarries of Arzo and Besazio, but as he showed at once a decided artistic taste his elder brother, Lorenzo, who was marmorial worker in Milan took him there, at his own expense, and sent him to the Academy. Young Vincenzo made rapid strides and even during the period of studies one of his sculptures was allotted a prize of about 70 crowns, which was a real fortune for the poor stone-cutter.

With that money he decided to go to Rome, to continue his studies, and he was in Rome when he hears that civil war, that of the Sonderbund, is imminent in Switzerland. As he was a member of the Carabiniers Corps of the Ticino he immediately leaves art and friends, to go and do his

advised to rehearse the motions privily behind locked doors before mingling with those who were born, so to speak, with silver skis in their infant mouths. And if—as is more than likely—his opportunities for ski-practice are limited by the terms of his lease, he would do well to abandon the project and turn his attention to tobogganing instead.

Tobogganing, it always seems to me, is unskilled labour of the easiest description. I mean to say, any man with an elementary knowledge of the law of gravity can recline on his stomach on a slab of wood and slide briskly down a mountain-side. After all, given the slab of wood, the mountain, and the inclination, the rest automatically follows. In other words, it strikes me as a pastime calling for resilience of the abdomen rather than for acuteness of intellect.

I admit that I do not quite see how, having once begun to slide, the tobogganist contrives to stop himself before he shoots over the edge of Switzerland and becomes involved in passport difficulties with Signor Mussolini. But I dare say there is some perfectly simple method of arresting his mad career; and in the last resort, I take it, he can always adopt the crude but effective expedient of falling off.

There is a larger and more alarming variety of toboggan which will accommodate half a dozen persons and is usually manned—if we may judge by the pictures in the illustrated Press—by a crew recruited from the younger and livelier section of the aristocracy. I am told—and I can well believe it—that there is no more exhilarating sight than one of these vehicles in full cry down some chamois-dotted slope, rebounding gracefully from Alp to Alp, jettisoning now a marquis and now a baronet, hurling an occasional viscount into the next cantonment, and finally, amid the plaudits of the onlookers, bringing the merry frolic to a close by wrapping itself round a tree or impinging against Mont Blanc. An enthralling spectacle, I should think, and one demonstrating beyond question that there is no accounting for tastes.

So rich is Switzerland in natural resources that even for those visitors who have no skill on skis and no stomach for tobogganing there is diversion in plenty. For retired colonels, Members of Parliament, and others whose activities are restricted by their shape, there is the curious, old-world game called "curling." This form of amusement, which enjoys great popularity among winter sportsmen of the globular or static sort, is played—I understand—with a long-handled broom and a sizable fragment of rock, so that in its essentials it resembles a cross between housework and bowls. To me, I confess, this does not sound unendurably exciting; but from the fact that quite eminent civil servants go all the way to Switzerland to play it, I deduce that there is more in curling than meets the untutored eye.

If I have so far made no mention of skating, of which there is a good deal going on in Switzerland just now, it is because I happen to be a skater of the horizontal school, and am consequently prejudiced. But those happy folk who can retain their balance with a couple of knife-blades glued to the soles of their feet will

duty as a citizen. The brief campaign over, Vincenzo Vela, who felt enthusiastic about the strategic genius of Dufour, desired to make him a bust and, with a few sittings, he fashioned one of the best portraits of the great general. Later, in Milan, inspired by the movement of rebellion of the people against foreign oppression, with which he made common cause, he sculptured "Spartaco," the slave who breaks his own chains, and his fame as an artist leaps forward. The Austrian authorities, hoping with favours and enticements to subdue the rebellious soul ask him for the stone portrait of the Austrian governor in Lombardy, but Vela disdainfully refuses to accept an order which would have made him a rich man and well favoured by the rulers, but which grates against his conscience. Two days later he receives notice of his immediate expulsion from Lombardy. He bids his friends good-bye and, proud of his coeurance, returns to Ligornetto. These particulars of his life make one feel the man of integrity and loyalty, the one-piece man. He is the type of the old Ticinese artist, modest, straight, clever, jovial, without finesses of culture, but full of genius, of commonsense and of fine sentiments.

The success of his works steadily increased and he has been considered the greatest Italian sculptor of his time. To-day certain of his sculptures are no longer admired, but others will remain so, like the "Desolation," which is in Lugano, "Spartaco," which is in Geneva, "Springtime," "Napoleon Dying" (which is in Paris), and the "Victims of Work," which was sculptured while the Gottthard was being pierced. The collection of his plaster-casts can be seen in his ateliers at Ligornetto, of which he made a gift to the Confederation, as a museum.

(To be continued.)