

The Matterhorn [continued]

Autor(en): **Bartopp, John**

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1935)**

Heft 725

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694660>

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.

SWISS LANDMARKS IN LONDON.

It has been said that the streets of London are paved with gold, and looking at them when the reflection of the street lights plays on their surface, one is indeed tempted to think so. For the polish of a London street is a thing apart, unique, unforgettable. But there is reason to believe that the Office of Works achieves that effect with nothing more expensive or valuable than Val-de-Travers asphalt, which is dug out of the earth somewhere in the Canton of Neuchâtel.

I mention this because it has occurred to me that a Swiss will find at every step he takes in London something to remind him of his native country. The truth of the matter was borne in on me as I quaffed a whiskey-and-soda with a Balèse friend I had met on Swiss soil — so to speak — as I wandered down that famous strip of Val-de-Travers asphalt called The Strand. In England a whiskey-and-soda is just called "a whiskey and Schwepps" because, although there are several good brands of whiskey, there is only one brand of soda-water — 'Schwepps.' Well, the original Mr. Jakob Schwepps, who came to England a century or so ago, was as Swiss as chocolate or canned milk. He came, indeed, from Geneva. If one excepts the few drops of whiskey that go to the making of it nowadays, the English national drink may therefore reasonably be said to have a Swiss origin.

Pondering on this matter, I took my Balèse friend to the Wallace Collection — a thing which is considered to be so utterly English that it is looked upon in London as the finest collection of its kind in the world. And yet, after all, it really contains remarkably little that is English. It is all French, Italian, Spanish — anything but English. Nor could one by any stretch of imagination call it Swiss. I pondered, although facing me on the wall hung a fine specimen of Leo Paul Robert. Leo Paul Robert! In Neuchâtel you will invariably be told that it is Leopold Robert — that is as long as you, the stranger, call him Leo Paul. But if you, by chance, have been to Neuchâtel before, and call him Leopold — why, then the good Neuchâtelois will smile at you with commiseration and ask if

you mean Leo Paul... They are like that, the Neuchâtelois.

But Robert is by no means the only exponent of Swiss art to be found at Hereford House. In the glass cases which house "the finest specimens of ancient weapons and armour in the world" is a little weapon which I have heard described by the casual loungers who make little round smudges with their noses on the glass cases of every free museum in London, as a dirk, a poignard, a stiletto and — inevitably — as a knife. I, who have looked up its number in the catalogue, know well that it is none of these things; but that it is a dagger, "an Indian dagger in gold and enamelled in London in the third quarter of the 18th century," that its hilt is one of the most beautiful things of its kind, and that it was wrought by one George Michael Moser, of Switzerland. He was once drawing-master to King George III, and became the first Keeper of the Royal Academy. The catalogue will tell you also that "the exposed gold parts are of very high workmanship, and show an exceptional refinement in the goldsmiths' art."

Here indeed is one of the most beautiful things in the most exclusive collection in the world, a thing to dream over, to write poetry about (if one is gifted that way), or just to fondle lovingly in one's imagination, with one's nose against the glass that holds it. Michael Moser! I have wandered in the streets of Berne, of Basle, of Interlaken, I have jodled in the Oberland and eaten fondue — well, everywhere. I have sat on wooden benches in the seats of learning of Basle, of Zurich, in Neuchâtel. I have been intimate, at home, in twenty-two cantons, and I have discussed politics, and pilsner, and other weighty matters in every nook and cranny of the Eidgenossenschaft; but never, never has the name of Michael Moser been framed by a Swiss mouth within my hearing. To my Balèse friend I said, as we quaffed our whiskey in the Strand, "Now you are in London you will no doubt pay a visit to Michael Mosey..." — "Don't know him," my friend answered callously, "no friend of mine... Let's have another drink."

In England the name of Michael Moser is possibly not a household word — but it is better

known than it is in Switzerland. Like Madame Tussaud, Moser has no honour in his own country. There are, I believe, many Swiss who have never heard the name of Madame Tussaud. To them I will say that Marie Grossholz, born in 1760 in the town of Berne, attained a fame which has never since been rivalled by any one of her compatriots. I may also add with equal truth that there are many people the world over, yea, even children in their teens, who know as much about Madame Tussaud as there is to know, to whom the name is a symbol of romance, the embodiment of a cherished desire, and to whom one might ask in vain the question: "Where and what is Switzerland?" Madame Tussaud's wax-works were burnt to the ground a few years ago, and from the four corners of the earth came echoes of the sorrow that was England's.

Then there is the sad case of Peter Mark Roget. Who in Switzerland has ever heard of that eminent physician Dr. Roget? He also was no prophet in his own country. In England, it is true, he was no prophet either, but he nevertheless did a remarkable thing. He compiled a dictionary that works backwards. Nothing of the kind had ever been attempted previously, nor has, to my knowledge, anything like it been accomplished since. In the ordinary dictionary one looks up a word to find its meaning. In Roget's Thesaurus one looks up the meaning, and lo! there is the word for it. A silly idea, you say. Then you have never tried to solve a cross-word puzzle! For nearly a century Roget's book was known only to the litterati, to the belletricians. To-day it is the most ubiquitous thing in the British Isles. It is on sale at every book-stall, in use in every library. To save the life of their copy, the authorities of the British Museum have had to turn the cross-word puzzlers from their doors.

Roget, incidentally, was one of the prime movers in the foundation of the University of London. Let his name not be forgotten.

There are many things in the British Museum besides Roget's Thesaurus to remind one of Switzerland. If one is not a crosspuzzler, one may still enter there, and I would advise the Swiss who does so to seek out before all things one of

THE MATTERHORN.

By JOHN. BARTROPP, Author of *Barbarian*.
(*Chambers's Journal*).

(Continued).

III.

Only a word need be said here as to the geological formation of the mountain. Seen from afar as a huge obelisk or monolith, it appears on closer inspection to be a gigantic ruin, especially on the Swiss side. Its composition is volcanic, and felspar, gneiss, and granitic rocks compose its bulk. The upper part is rough and drubable, but on the lower slopes vast stone avalanches crash down at frequent intervals, particularly on summer afternoons when the ice has thawed and loosened its hold on the separate flakes and boulders. The glaciers at its feet — as Signor Giordano, the Italian mountaineer and geologist, has pointed out — perform the useful function of carrying away yearly thousands of tons of rocky debris from its base, thereby helping to perpetuate its purity of outline.

Little is known with any certainty of the ancient history of the Matterhorn. It was entitled in Roman times *Mons Sylvaenus*, and it is possible that its French name of *Mont Cervin* is derived from that. The Italians used to know it as the *Becca*, or beak. The German-Swiss name, *Matterhorn*, means the peak over the village of Zermatt. Some persons, with an eye to the dramatic, have placed Hannibal's crossing of the Alps at the Théodule Pass close by its western side, and it is certainly a wonderful thought that the Carthaginian war-lord and his elephants may have passed under the great peak two thousand years before it again became known to the outside world. But truth compels it to be said that there is no conclusive proof of this fascinating theory.

The modern history of the Matterhorn commences with the decade 1855-65, known as the Golden Age of mountaineering, when the great peaks of the Alps were conquered by successive parties, almost entirely composed of English enthusiasts led by Alpine guides. The Matterhorn, though not actually more difficult than some of those previously climbed, for instance the Dent Blanche in the same range, or the Aiguille Verte and Mont Blanc by the Brenva route in the Savoy Alps, was in those days neglected by the majority of mountaineers and was rigidly shunned by the leading Valais guides. The reasons are not far to seek, for it certainly presents from its commonest view-point, Zermatt, a most uninviting appearance of dangerous steepness, and there was also in those days a definite feeling of awe towards it in the minds of the superstitious

Swiss and Italian peasants, which daunted all but the hardiest. It was supposed that its upper cliffs were haunted by demons and spirits, who dwelt in a city on the summit and hurled down death and destruction upon rash intruders.

The earliest attempts on the mountain were made by Italian and English parties, with a growing sense of international rivalry. The first recorded was made by some Italian hunters named Carrel, from Breuil in 1858. They reached a point just beyond the Tête du Lion, and got well on to the mountain proper. The chief of these men, Jean-Antoine Carrel, an ex-soldier who fought at Solferino, was one of the very few who never abandoned the conviction that the Matterhorn could be climbed, and he hoped to be the first to do so, and from the side of his native country. Later he became a great guide, especially on this, his own particular mountain.

In 1860 and 1861 bold attacks were made on the Swiss side by three Englishmen, the Sandbach Parker brothers, who without guides reached about 12,000 feet, a very gallant and creditable performance, and the only serious attempt on that side until the actual first ascent five years later, though another Englishman, T. S. Kennedy, in 1862, essayed the peak in winter, but as might be expected, did not get very far. In 1860 an English party, Vaughan Hawkins and Professor Tyndall, the well-known scientist and mountaineer, who had just made the first ascent of the lofty Weisshorn in the same range, made an attempt on the Matterhorn from Italy with Tyndall's favourite Swiss guide, Bennen, and one of the Carrels. They reached a height of about 13,000 feet, but beyond that Bennen could lead no farther.

IV.

In 1861 Edward Whymper, one of the most determined young English mountaineers of the day, arrived at Breuil and commenced his siege of the mountain, which made such an impression on him that for the next few years it became the great objective of his hopes and energies. In all he made seven or eight separate attempts. On this first occasion he failed to come to terms with the Carrels, and did not reach any great height. On the same day the two Carrels made an expedition on their own account. By this time Jean-Antoine Carrel had established himself as the one man amongst the guides of the day who, in Whymper's own words, "persistently refused to accept defeat and continued to believe, against all discouragements, that the mountain was not inaccessible and that it could be ascended from the side of his native valley. He looked on the Matterhorn," Whymper continues, "as a kind of preserve, and was determined that he and no other should lead the first successful ascent."

Between 1861 and 1864 Whymper made six attempts to conquer the mountain, on one expedition climbing alone to a greater height than anyone had previously reached, about 13,500 feet. On the descent he slipped near the Tête du Lion and fell two hundred feet, escaping miraculously with his life but sustaining severe injuries, in spite of which he managed to get safely off the mountain and back to Breuil. A few days afterwards, Tyndall made another attempt with his guide Bennen, and the two Carrels as porters. They reached about 14,000 feet, and Tyndall reported they had attained a point "only a stone's-throw from the summit." But as Whymper — who had remained an invalid in the valley, waiting jealously in dread of news of his rivals' success and the extinction of his own hopes — remarked, "he greatly deceived himself." The really serious difficulties were still to come on the final peak of the mountain. On this occasion, the Carrels, true to their real intentions, apparently did little to help, and the leading guide, Bennen, was unequal to the standard of cragsmanship required for the difficult final cliffs.

In 1863 the Italian Alpine Club was founded, and one of its members, Signor Giordano, was entrusted with the task of ensuring that the great peak should be first ascended from Italy by Italians. Naturally, he enlisted the services of J.-A. Carrel, who readily fell in with the plan, even though it meant deceiving Whymper, who in July of 1865 came to Breuil determined to succeed at all costs. Whymper endeavoured to obtain J.-A. Carrel as his guide, but the latter excused himself on the ground of his being engaged to travel with an Italian family. In reality he had been commissioned by Giordano to lead a party of Italian guides to the summit of the Matterhorn before Whymper, now without a guide, could make another attempt. When he discovered the trick, Whymper was justifiably angry. The Italians set out with high hopes, and once more Whymper, at Breuil, watched them start with mortification, expecting soon to hear of their success and the end of his own ambitions. The Italians, however, scenting no rivals, made only leisurely progress, and meanwhile events moved rapidly and dramatically below.

On 11th July Lord Francis Douglas, an enthusiastic young climber, arrived at Breuil with one of the most enterprising of the Zermatt guides, Peter Taugwalder. Douglas was, of course, overjoyed at the prospect of joining forces with such an experienced mountaineer as Whymper in an attack upon the mountain, and it was decided to leave the Italian side alone, recross at once by a pass to Zermatt, and try the peak from the Swiss side, this being the first really determined attempt with guides from that quarter.

(To be continued).