

# The heroic age of English alpinism

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mountain tops covered with perpetual snow. Wherever it is — in the Alps or the Pyrenees, he must catch his breath — there they are! It is not a question of mere beauty — that is a matter of fashion. For centuries men saw no beauty in the mountains. It is something far profounder, more primitive, more inexpressible, something which sent Moses to the top of Sinai to speak to God face to face, which set the Greek gods on Olympus, which made the Psalmist cry: "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord," and again "His foundation is in the holy mountains."

This exaltation may be submerged for a time in the shifting forms of civilization, but it is of its nature ineradicable, and modern writers have expressed it in their own way. "I saw between the branches of the trees in front of me," writes Hilaire Belloc in *The Path to Rome*, "a sight that made me stop breathing, just as a great danger at sea, or great surprise in love, or a great deliverance will make a man stop breathing. I saw something I had known in the West as a boy, something I had never seen so grandly discovered as this. In between the branches of the trees was a great promise of unexpected lights beyond ... Here were those magnificent creatures of God, I mean the Alps, which now for the first time I saw from the height of the Jura." That first sight of the snow-mountains is a moment of purely spiritual revelation, something not to be got at by the mind, and something whose full force can only be felt by those whose lives have been passed in the wide horizons of the lowlands.

The Romantic poets had been content to contemplate the mountains. Those who were to conquer them were no poets, though often the most prosaic of their pens is tipped with unconscious poetry as they write. The majority of the Alpine pioneers were ordinary, middle-class Englishmen. It is significant that several of them were clergymen. We must not forget that the 19th century was the age of the struggle between science and religion, when religion, appalled by the attack delivered by its triumphant rival in men's thoughts, made the fatal mistake of deserting its spiritual stronghold and descending into the arid plains of argument.

This is no place to go into the history of Alpinism, nor into the technical detail of the conquest of the High Alps. We may smile for a moment at the early mountaineer who recom-

### SWISS SUMMER.

by

CHARLES GRAVES.

(Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 10/6.)

Through the courtesy of the "Schweizerische Verkehrszentrale" I have received Charles Graves' latest book entitled "Swiss Summer."

Seldom, have I read a travel book with such interest and delight, not only because it deals with a journey to our country, nor because I have made the acquaintance of its author at one of the famous Banquets of the City Swiss Club; but principally for the amusing way in which he describes his trip by motor-car, which he calls Lady Godiva "who was born in Coventry and had nothing to hide."

To all those who have, like the writer, spent motoring holidays in Switzerland, this book will bring back a host of delightful memories; the only regret I can voice is, that Charles Graves, as not written this book earlier, it would have made motoring in Switzerland even more popular than it already is; anyone who desires to make the best of such a trip should carry this book as a companion; but not only those who travel by car will find this book helpful, but any ordinary tourist.

Charles Graves is a very keen observer and he has "summed" up the Swiss not only very accurately but very "mercifully," which is, of course, very flattering. The book contains a large number of very fine photographs which adds greatly to its attractiveness.

The author started the journey through Switzerland from Basle, and of his sojourn in this old town he gives a very good description and history of the world-famed "Drei Koenige Hotel," of the town hall, the minster, the art gallery, etc., etc. Those who have found hitherto the "Baedeker" guide indispensable, will gladly "switch over" to Charles Graves' book, with its witty and very useful information, even night clubs, which to many have been quite unknown are very amusingly mentioned.

After leaving Basle we follow the author to Zurich where he made his headquarters at the "Dolder Grand," he writes, "the view is magnificent, there are the Lake of Zurich, the distant hills and vineyards, the spires of various

mended a light parasol and a bottle of scent for the top of Mont Blanc; at the equipment of another, "some linen, a volume of Shakespeare, slippers, Scotch plaid and umbrella, two thermometers, a clinometer, a compass, a notebook and sketchbook, a bottle of cold tea, a tin box for plants and a geological hammer." We may hear the rustle of crinolines in that souvenir programme of a lecture on the first ascent of Mont Blanc, which advertises the "Mont Blanc Quadrilles, which have produced a perfect *fuore* of delight this season." We may smile, too, at the passionate indignation of a "Times" leader writer of the sixties, who accused the climbers of disgusting immorality, since they risked making widows of their wives in pursuit of arrant folly. Yet these things belong to the great, the epic age of Alpinism.

Reading the records of the heroic age, which culminated in the years 1854 to 1865, from the first ascent of the Wetterhorn to the tragedy of the Matterhorn, one cannot fail to be struck by a curious two-sidedness in the whole phenomenon. If we were to take the essence out of all these accounts, making a kind of composite photograph of them, it might read something like this: "We reached the summit at 11.17. We then measured the altitude by boiling water. It was 11,000 feet. We noted the temperature, and the geological formation, taking specimens. We then sat down to enjoy the view. Another peak conquered! There, between heaven and earth, utterly severed from our fellow-men, a strange feeling of awe overcame us. Truly God dwelleth upon the mountain-tops." This odd mingling of the severely practical and purely spiritual has met us before in more vital form, in Drake, pirate, gentleman and unparalleled explorer. It may be a fundamental element of the English mind; it belongs to all great adventure. Certain it is that though the English Alpinists satisfied their Victorian consciences in some mysterious way with their thermometers, their geological hammers and their boiling water, it was not for that that they performed great feats of endurance, and risked their lives on virgin summits. No records of temperature can explain the obsession which drew them year after year to these dangers, an obsession men have felt for the desert or the sea, for the tropical jungle or the desolate Poles.

Many communed with themselves as to what they sought. Some, the more simple-minded, called it frankly God. Others called it the ecstasy of achievement. Dodson analyses it: "In the Alpine world, innate or acquired ideas

churches, the twin towers and the thousands of red-tiled roofs."

He gives a very vivid description of the "Bahnhofstrasse" with its famous Restaurants, such as Huguenin, etc., its palatial Bank buildings; we visit with him the Lindt Chocolate Factory at Kilchberg and learn of the latest invention in the art of making chocolate.

A trip to the "Schloss" Rapperswil, which is actually a part of Poland, makes interesting reading, and so does an excursion to Baden, once the diplomatic capital of Switzerland, with its famous radio — active salt springs containing a high percentage of sulphate of hydrogen.

We next follow him to Coire and Klosters via Wallenstadt and Ragaz. At Ragaz we visit together some of the famous establishments where people from all the corners of the world gather to seek health from the calcium sulphate springs.

On reaching Coire, we are taken around the town, which was in the times of the Romans a place of great importance.

Innumerable passes we cross with "Lady Godiva," such as the Flüela, Bernina, Albula, San Bernardino, Splügen, St. Gotthard, Brünig, Furka, Grimsel, etc., which are vividly described in their unforgettable splendour.

We stay with the author in towns like Locarno, Lugano, Lucerne, Interlaken, Fribourg, Berne, Lausanne, Montreux, Geneva, and where we learn not only a great deal of history, customs of the people but of the fine and ancient buildings which adorn these towns.

Of the Swiss capital, Berne, Charles Graves writes in enthusiastic terms. He says: "Berne is the prettiest capital I have ever visited, and I know most of them."

The trip through Switzerland, which forms the main part of the book, took the author altogether 2,743 miles, and I for one, as a Swiss, could not wish for a better or more interesting guide to show me the wonders of this heaven blessed country.

I have read this book with the greatest delight and I heartily recommend it to my readers, and I feel sure, they will enjoy every page of it, it is not only a useful, but also a very welcome addition to every library, as small as same may be.

of space and time are totally revolutionised." But men can conquer and achieve in other, more strictly useful ways. What these men sought was a specific experience — the peculiar spiritual release which comes of setting foot where no man has ever trod, and being stripped, by physical necessity, of all "chaff of custom."

It is easy to understand that it should just be England which should succumb to such a passion, and particularly the England of the middle 19th century, in the full grip of a squalid industrialism. We must not forget for how many centuries England was literally the end of the world, her islands Ultima Thule. Once England had but to look West to feel the thrill of the unknown. Here in the Alps Englishmen found it again, felt again in their blood that longing they will perhaps never lose — that longing to touch again those physical confines of the world on which they once lived. They state it oddly enough at times, for no tall know what they are about. Perhaps Sir Claud Schuster has best grasped the inherent mystery of it all: "It all sounds aimless. I cannot tell what has made of those prosaic happenings an adventure of surpassing value. Browning's musician claimed for his are that:

Here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,

But I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,

That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

So it is with us. The glorious heat of noon-day, the majesty of the night, the wide vision, the suggestion of peril, the rhythmic movement of the body, the fellowship, the toil, the attainment — all these together make some new and precious thing which lives in us and with us till thought and feeling die."

Let us make no mistake — the conquest of the Alps was a spiritual far more than a physical adventure, the quest of a vision by men who saw civilization slowly squeezing vision out of life, and it is to the everlasting glory of Switzerland that she never grudged the English Alpinist their achievement, that she rejoiced in it with them, and that she generously lent her very soil for the spiritual quest of another race, a band of strangers who came from their lowlands to seek their vision on the mountains.

### SCHWYZERDUETSCH.

Mit Schwyzerdütsch reist me fryli  
Nit grüsi wyt, uf dere Wält,  
Doch isch's es heiligs Füerli,  
D'starch Band, das us zäme hält.  
Wuchtig tönts', wie we d'Lawine,  
J. de Bärge risst und chracht,  
Oder wie es grosses Gwitter  
Ringsum alls z'erschütterte macht.  
De wieder klingt's so heimelig  
Mit liebvoll, tiefem G'fühl,  
E Gab vom blaue Himmel  
Sunnig Matte, Waldesgruen.  
Es chunt vo stille Seen  
Tusig Blüemeli Farbetön,  
Es wachst us nem Bode  
So lang mer zäme stöhn.

H.E.

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