

An Irish poet remembers Switzerland

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AN IRISH POET REMEMBERS SWITZERLAND

The author of this nostalgic salute, Dr. Monk Gibbon, has skied for years and was at one time resident as a schoolmaster in Switzerland. Poet, autobiographer and travel writer, he is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Besides several novels, some years ago he wrote "Swiss Enchantment" and now has published "In Search of Winter Sport" (Evans Bros. Ltd., London). This book is packed with sound advice and information on skiing and, in many cases, highlighted by delightful anecdotes and reminiscences.

"Make yourselves nests of pleasant thoughts", said Ruskin. "None of us yet know, for none of us have been taught in early youth what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thought—*proof against all adversity.*"

In my own experience, some of our best nests are those which we owe to the fact that we have been abroad. Of all memories, travel memories are amongst the most vivid, and the easiest to summon when we need them to solace us.

In pre-atomic ages, old soldiers were said to find pleasure in fighting their battles over again. Today, as always, a traveller may still delight in going over every detail of a journey taken perhaps years before.

I am far from Switzerland, at the moment, but I have hundreds of memories to make me happy when I turn my thoughts in that direction. Though it may seem a strange place and a strange hour in which to rediscover happiness, I translate myself to the railway station of Basel at six o'clock in the morning, and there, in the warmth of the great buffet, I taste again a cup of steaming café-au-lait and realise how pleasant it can be after a whole night in the train.

Or—since it is winter as I write—my thoughts go back to the Swiss winter, and I am able even to point my skis downhill at a particular spot on a particular ski-tour, and to taste again the swift exultation of that moment. Indeed, so accommodating is memory, there is nothing to prevent me, if I so wish, doing a sitzmark in imagination.

I remember—a strange nest, but one still dear to me—standing upright and swaying about in a flat, open truck, into which I and my companions had managed to fling ourselves as well as our skis (contrary to all the regulations of the MOB) in order to descending by moonlight from Schönried to Gstaad after a long day's skiing. The train swung round corners and we sang in exultation. It was twenty-five years ago, but the impression is as vivid as ever.

This is the great argument for travel that, unlike some investments, it continues to pay dividends so long as we choose to draw them. One returns to Switzerland again and again—I was there less than a year ago—but no memory effaces any other memory. They succeed one another; but all are precious, all remain at our disposal. As the poet Wordsworth said of one of his own memories,

They flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude.

I remember once exploring the shores of the lake of Thun in early summer. I stayed in a farmhouse high above the lake, a farmhouse which I have never been able to rediscover. But though it seems to have vanished, I can still hear the sound of a slender stream of water running into the great hollowed tree-trunk in front of the chalet. I can still reach up and gather cherries from the trees in its steep green fields.

Nothing is lost. Our memories are safe. They are all there, "to have and to hold", *proof*, as Ruskin said, *against all adversity.*

MONK GIBBON

Unsere Triebfahrzeuge sind gegen Jeden Einfluß von Eis und Schnee so gesichert, daß keine Störungen im Mechanismus entstehen. Links in der Photographie der Aufstieg zum Führerstand, darunter der Zugsicherungsapparat (Signum).

Nos automotrices sont protégées contre toute influence de la glace, de façon à ce qu'aucun dérangement ne survienne dans le mécanisme. A gauche, l'escalier conduisant au poste du conducteur, dessous, l'appareil d'arrêt automatique des trains (Signum).

I nostri locomotori sono premuniti contro gli inconvenienti che potrebbero derivare al meccanismo per effetto del ghiaccio e della neve. A sinistra della fotografia: l'accesso alla cabina di comando e, sotto, il dispositivo di sicurezza Signum.

Switzerland's locomotives are thoroughly protected against ice and snow. Winter causes no mechanical troubles. The steps to the engineer's cab may be seen on the left.

Nuestras locomotoras están aseguradas contra toda influencia del hielo y de la nieve, para evitar cualquier perturbación del mecanismo. A la izquierda de la fotografía, la subida al puesto del maquinista y, debajo, el aparato de seguridad del tren (Signum).

Vollbeladene Post- und Gepäckwagen warten auf das Verladen der Güter in die Nachtzüge.

Des wagons pleinement chargés de colis postaux et de bagages attendent le transfert des marchandises dans les trains de nuit.

Bagagliai e carrozze postali in attesa di affidare il loro carico ai treni notturni.

Fully loaded mail and baggage cars will move with the night freight as soon as the goods vans are loaded.

Carritos postales y de equipajes, enteramente repletos, esperando la llegada de los trenes nocturnos en los cuales han de cargarse los bultos.