frequently to expose themselves to the danger of being swept away, we must be prepared for a succession of terrible accidents. Mountaineering—properly pursued—is, for the most part, a game of skill, and it ought not to be turned into mere gambling with fate. The Alpine Club, by encouraging 'new expeditions,' incurs some responsibility; and this seems the proper place to suggest a caution, the need of which is strongly felt by many of its members. It is better to offer a warning in season than to draw a moral from an irretrievable disaster.—ED.]

THE SION FESTIVAL OF THE SWISS ALPINE CLUB.

THE Alpine Club is perhaps a little oblivious of its duties towards the various societies which owe their existence to it. The foreign clubs have all been developed in a somewhat different form, and most of them on a larger scale; but there is a fundamental unity underlying all differences, and the very divergence from the original pattern makes the festivals of the Swiss Club more interesting than if they were mere reproductions of our monthly meetings and annual dinners, with the proceedings in another language. Our members have taken but little part in the Swiss meetings, possibly from not knowing that they will be made heartily welcome; and I venture to think that this is a misfortune. We not unnaturally tend, while in Switzerland, towards the society of one another. Old friends are pleasanter than strangers, our own language readier to our tongues than German or French. But the result is that we stand apart from the entire fraternity of mountaineers, much as England stands apart from the Continent; and the policy of non-intervention produces its usual results. Englishmen bent on pleasure possess too little of the spirit of subordination to make possible an English parallel to the Swiss fête, but there is something novel in finding oneself part of an organised crowd for forty-eight hours, and much that is profitable in even this brief experience of a society so unlike our own. And the friendliness with which the leaders of the Swiss Club greet a foreigner, renders it certain that even a solitary Englishman attending one of these fêtes will not find himself alone in a crowd, but will carry away the memory of many pleasant, if short-lived, acquaintances.

I confess that, arriving alone at Sion on Aug. 22, and going up alone in the evening to the 'réunion familière sur le Prélet à Valère,' with which the festival commenced, I was a little afraid that it might turn out a failure, so far as I personally was concerned. The whole population of Sion had gathered by the time it was dark on the grassy space lying east of the castle, which was faintly lighted up with coloured lamps, just enough to define the space. The crowd was obviously enjoying itself, listening to a most energetic band, partaking of the harmless refections which are always popular on such occasions, and doing a good deal of comfortable flirtation. But I looked in vain for a face that I knew, and wondered how my insular bashfulness would break the ice; consoling myself, however, with the thought that it was

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too dark to see or to be seen, and that things would alter to-morrow. Presently the signal was given for the evening's performance to begin. Bonfires were already blazing all over the southern slopes of the valley, but all was still dark to the northwards till, on the firing of a gun, green and red fires were kindled behind the ruined walls of the old castle of Tourbillon. The striking but rather theatrical effect of this illumination had hardly passed away, when rockets began to be discharged from the castle behind us; and soon Valère and Tourbillon were bombarding each other in a most determined manner. The artillery practice of the southern fort was certainly the best, and the fires that soon began to blaze within the ruins of Tourbillon seemed to mark the triumph of Valère, though resistance was maintained until—all the fireworks were exhausted. Then the garrison of *clubistes* evacuated Valère, and spread themselves as welcome conquerors through the streets of Sion. During what hours, if any, that usually domestic town enjoyed repose, the present chronicler at least cannot testify. He can only state that he dreamed considerably of drumming and singing, and that at eight o'clock next morning the casino adjoining the Hôtel de Ville looked as if it had been full all night.

It was nearly time for the business meeting when I heard a friendly voice hailing me. 'Where have you been? I was looking for you everywhere last night; I thought you had failed, like all the rest of my English friends.' No mountaineer needs to be informed that the voice was M. Loppé's, or that thenceforth I had no more solitude; for M. Loppé, besides giving me more than my share of his ever-entertaining company, introduced me to the lights of the Swiss Alpine Club, faster than my eyes could take in their features. I was deep in conversation with the stanchest veteran of them all, when our ubiquitous friend marched us into the café to drink a glass of Vermouth. 'You really must,' he said, in answer to my look of remonstrance against drinking so potent a liquid at 10 A.M.; 'it is *de rigueur*; you see on these occasions the great point is *la consommation*.'

Meetings at which the business of a society is transacted are not usually lively things; and this was no exception, the most interesting question, the selection of the place for the fête of 1875, being postponed. But it was over at last, and then the whole company, to the number of three or four hundred, adjourned to the theatre for the midday banquet. What the ordinary arrangement of the building may be I cannot tell; the only thing suggesting its regular use was a visibly theatrical rock at the corner of a high platform, which in daily, or rather nightly life, is the stage. Behind this rock, which represented a famous *bloc erratique*, was a practicable staircase, leading up to a rather rickety perch, which turned out to be the tribune; and a sufficiently trying ordeal it was for a modest speaker to rise from his place, and climb up first to the platform, and then behind the rock, after a stentorian individual had concentrated all eyes upon him by shouting '*La parole est à M —, de —*.' Imagination can easily picture the band perched up aloft, and deafening all ears with their music, the ladies in the gallery, the flags, national, foreign, and cantonal, the evergreens and flowers, and all the apparatus of decoration. Conspicuous

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in the middle of the building floated a splendid eagle with wings outspread, bearing a placard with the familiar 'S. A. C.' on one side, and on the other 'A. V.', which mysterious initials were maliciously interpreted by one of my neighbours to mean *à vendre*. The crowded tables were half covered with bottles of *vin de fête*, and the diners applied themselves ably to the apparently hopeless task of emptying them. Suddenly, to my dismay, a whole regiment of fresh bottles of *vin d'honneur*, of every variety which the Valais can produce, took the place of the dead men. Happily at this juncture the oratory began, and diverted my kind friends from their occupation of keeping my glass constantly full. There were many speeches, lively and solemn, long-winded and epigrammatic, in prose and verse, in French and German ; and the key note of them nearly all was patriotism. The Swiss Alpine Club is one aspect of the national organisation; its members love the mountains, but chiefly because they are Swiss, and only in a minor degree because they are beautiful, and afford pretty climbing. The love of nature, and the *solidarité* of all mountaineers, were not ignored; but the prevailing tone was so strong that when it came to my turn to speak, as being the only Englishman present, I almost forgot that I represented a Club which looks to watersheds and not to frontiers, which regards nothing mountainous as alien to it, and found myself talking Swiss patriotism like the rest. The only Englishman present I believed myself to be, fortunately, perhaps, for my first attempt at a speech in a foreign language; but at the end of the dinner I found that our Club was more worthily represented than I thought, a younger and more active member having arrived just in time for dinner, straight from the top of Mt. Collon.

With no longer delay than sufficed to exchange the black coat of civilisation for garments better suited to the mountains, the whole company started to carry out the second and more attractive half of the fête programme, by walking up to the *Mayens de Sion*, where we were to encamp for the night, and ascend a small mountain next morning. The heat was intense, the road dusty and shadeless, and a few *clubistes* seemed to find their feelings, and possibly reminiscences of *Malvoisie flétrie* and other potent wines of the Valais, too strong for their powers of locomotion. But the large majority pressed on warmly, in all the glory of alpenstocks and knapsacks, flasks and botanical boxes. On reaching Vex, nearly two hours from Sion, on the Evolena road, we found that the commune had proved more than equal to the occasion. The whole village was gay with flags and boughs, and in a convenient field, just where our route turned off the highroad, cans of wine and countless glasses were ready, to replace a little of the moisture which a hot walk had drained out, and to give an excuse for a few more patriotic speeches. On at last to the Mayens, an extensive shelf of pasture, at the top of the steep slopes which descend to the Rhone, and just below the pine woods, which extend some distance upwards at a gentle inclination, but have left many scattered outposts behind. Among these outlying trees, some of them of extraordinary size and age, are a few modest houses, built by inhabitants of Sion as summer retreats, some ordinary châlets, and a small chapel; and for this

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occasion only, a long double row of tables and a regular camp of some thirty military tents. The first point was to secure night quarters, by depositing our baggage on the hay wherever one could find an empty section of a tent, the second to watch the sunset light fade gradually off the Oberland mountains. And then, the sun having carried away most of the warmth with him, half the company found it very comfortable to wrap their martial blankets round their shoulders, which gave them, as the light waned, a more and more wild and Red-Indian aspect.

Time passed on: it grew quite dark, but there were no signs of supper. Fearful rumours were spread, that the horse carrying the spoons and forks had run away down to Sion, that the band had been *noyé* in the white wine of Vex. At length, however, after a long delay, a procession was formed, headed by the band, which had developed immense energy, possibly from contact with the vinous element at Vex, and marched off into the outer darkness. Many carried torches, which flared and smoked, and, to tell the truth, smelt anything but balmy, but threw a wild red light over the crowd, so that it looked rather like a wizards' Sabbath than an assembly of quiet Swiss citizens. The band and the leaders of the procession halted round a huge erratic block, which was then and there made over in all legal form, by its owner, to the S.A.C. Preparations had been made for illuminating the block with small lamps arranged in the shape of those three magic letters, but they obstinately refused all to burn at the same time, and the S. was burnt out and the A. expiring before C. could be induced to kindle properly. However, this little failure neither checked the flow of oratory nor dulled the energy of the band. Back again in procession to the camp—and now at last supper was ready, and was soon disposed of. Afterwards there was some dancing, for a number of the Sion ladies had accompanied their male relatives, or were previously domiciled in the various 'maisons de campagne;' but as we had not the honour of being acquainted with any of them, and further doubted our capability of dancing in heavy nailed boots, we soon betook ourselves to our tent. Happily for us, the other occupants of the tent also turned in early, instead of keeping it up, like many restless spirits, till one or two o'clock; so that when the *reveillé* sounded at dawn, we had enjoyed a reasonable amount of sleep.

Another cloudless day. If the Committee had known beforehand what the weather would be during the whole summer they could not have chosen better days for the fête. But at sunrise it was naturally a little chilly, and the total absence of any breakfast had a visible effect upon not a few tempers. People plodded silently, not to say sulkily, upwards through the woods; the first glimpse of the mountains in the direction of Zermatt gave rise to some slight discussion as to their identity, which seemed to assume rather an acrimonious tone. But at length the alp of Thion came in sight, where the programme announced a 'collation'; and sure enough there were huge loaves, and cheeses, and a large keg, a sufficient, if not a luxurious breakfast, even though the châlets proved to be deserted, and therefore incapable of

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supplying milk. A grievous disappointment, however, awaited the thirsty; and who was not included in that category? There was no tap to the keg, and it was speedily bruited abroad that the important personage who had it in his pocket had gone on to the Crête, which was our ultimate destination, regardless that he bore with him the happiness of two hundred or more fellow-creatures. There was a running stream close by, and those who carried drinking cups became at once persons of note, still more so the fortunate possessors of flasks not yet drained of their contents, for the water was not first rate, and obviously the better for a slight corrective. It is needless to say that M. Loppé produced a large well-filled flask, which was at everyone's disposal but his own. Ultimately gimlets were found, and the precious keg made to surrender its life blood through various irregular holes, and then the *clubistes* pushed on, like giants refreshed, to the Crête à Thion. It is a singular and interesting point of view, though none of the great peaks are sufficiently near to form specially grand features in the scene. Every mountaineer can, however, readily picture to himself what the view would be from a mountain-top 8,000 feet high, due south of Sion; how the whole range of Pennines is in sight, except where the line is broken by bare hills close at hand; how the Oberland is seen huddled together in the north-east, and the chain from the Gemmi to the Diablerets in its full extension—how one looks into the recesses of one or more secluded valleys, and thinks that the mountaineering world has done wisely in deserting them in favour of more attractive neighbours.

The long tables at the Mayens presented a very different appearance when we returned about mid-day from the Crête. Laden with fruit and bottles, besides the prosaic apparatus of plates, knives, and forks, and bread, they were so attractive to the eye, and so tempting to the appetite, that by common consent the whole party settled at once into their places, and trifled with radishes and grapes until the more solid viands appeared. Speech-making soon set in from a high green pulpit, which dominated the long tables sufficiently for the orators, by exerting the utmost power of their lungs, to make themselves generally heard. The speeches were rather less patriotic and more Alpine in tone than on the previous day; the toast of the '*sac*,' in particular, was received with unbounded applause, far more genuine than would probably greet it in a gathering of English mountaineers, who are not distinguished for their love of carrying their own traps. Then, with many a hearty shake of the hand from new friends, and hopes of meeting again on other like occasions, we quitted the hospitable Mayens, and took a 'bee line' down to Sion and the train.

Finally, lest it be supposed that the rosy hue which may seem to pervade this sketch of the Swiss Alpine Club fête of 1874 was in any measure derived from *vin d'honneur*, let me add that one of the English representatives travelled thence straight to the summit of the Schreckhorn, and the other over the Matterhorn to Zermatt.

H. B. G.

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