

Venezuela to receive a setback through the spirit of adventure over-reaching itself as it has in some European countries.

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A FEW CLIMBS WITH CHRISTEN JOSSI.

By G. A. HASLER

LIKE the Piper of Hamelin, the Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL would charm us back to the land of youth and yesterday, to that land of innocence where no one dreamt that brigandage on the grand scale could arise, that one would again see slave trading revive. In those days, one lived roughly, and went on short commons just to please oneself, spent winter nights in icy huts, had chilly bivouacs in the open in summer time, froze or sweated through arduous days, and thought it all grand.

It should be equally grand to write about, but for that foul miasma that lies across the world and overclouds those bright days. Look at the filth with which they are overlaid ! And when one has pushed the filth to one side, one is brought up short by the thought of a gallant civil population facing death and mutilation, day in, day out, of that multitude of men mounting guard on land, on sea, in the air.

And then, through the mirk, one sees our mountains, lovely, calm and aloof as ever, but one knows that on their high frontier ridges, bad weather or good, through the long cold winter nights, men are standing guard. They have their troubles too. Worries about wives and children, business, rising prices, dwindling stocks which cannot be replaced, hardly any fuel, shortage of everything. The mountain men know that their centres are empty. The townsmen know that their towns are deadly still. In fact it looks as if we should soon be taking in each other's washing, if we have anything left to wash, or any soap to wash it with. Both of which seem doubtful.

However, what once was, will return again some day, though I doubt

that we older people will see it. So we must not let the Switzerland we knew be forgotten. To that end, and to 'step out of these dreary dumps,' I will try once more to 'call back yesterday, bid time return,' and write about my old friend Christen Jossi.¹

When I first met him at the Bear hotel in 1898, I looked on him as quite an elderly gentleman, though he was but 51. How quickly one's ideas of elderliness change! But he soon taught me that he was 'in the May-morn of his youth.' No day was ever too long for him, in fact there was nothing he liked better than to walk all day, all night, and all the next day again. For he preferred taking on long jobs in out of the season times, when the going was even more of a fight than in winter. I rarely climbed with him in full summer; for one thing, he had his regular summer clientèle; but what great times we had together in winter, spring, and autumn. The most technically difficult things I have done were done with other men, but I never enjoyed anything as much as those Marathons with Jossi.

In January 1902 we had done an ascent of Eiger, a long job in those days when it meant foot slogging from Grindelwald to summit; the railway line, the Scheidegg, its hotel and station well tucked up and snowed under for the winter, the only shelter available was at the barracks built for the men who were tunnelling that enormity, the Jungfrau railway. I believe one of the tiffies there offered me the use of his bed, but I have no memory of having found rest and peace in it. Other things perhaps. This expedition roused our appetites for more, and we proposed to reach the real solitudes. We agreed we wanted to have several days away and chose the old Bergli hut as our base. The old gentleman then assumed command, laid down his plan of campaign, ordered two of his sons-in-law, Peter Bernet and Rudolf Burgener, to gather together wood and food, and to start breaking track. As the old gentleman and I had been roaming on the upper reaches of the Mettenberg a day or two before, taking an interest in the fauna if I remember right, and had broken track to the Bäregg, the porters started in the early hours of January 17 and had easy going till they reached the Kalli and the Fiescherfirn. From there on, there were almighty masses of snow, and going was heavy. We followed about midday, also well laden. I had tried to interest Jossi in ski at one time, in fact we had spent several days on the Faulhorn, for the house used to be open in winter then, and I had tried to teach him the use of the treacherous boards—not that I was too experienced myself at it. It must have been a truly joyous show to poor old Frau Bohren and her household, who had so to speak front row stalls for it. But what Jossi had to say about ski, and about whoever invented the—to him—pestiferous things, I wouldn't dare to repeat. For some days there was even a chilly atmosphere, so these aids to locomotion were never mentioned again. *Schneereifen* were the only wear when out in winter with him.

¹ For a portrait of Christen Jossi in 1894, see illustration A.ŷ. 32, facing p. 368.

In spite of the gallantly laid track by the advance party, the further we got, the worse was the snow and the heavier our sacks. We reached the Bergli at 1.30 A.M. on January 18, very little after the two porters, who had only just had time to get the fire started and some soup cooking. This was one of the occasions when Jossi made use of a favourite slogan of his, which was 'we shall have plenty of time to sleep when we are dead.' By 4.30 A.M. we had stacked wood, gone over stores, cooked, eaten, and then he sent those luckless sons-in-law back to fetch more wood and rations, which, profiting by the trodden down track, they did in good time. As they left, we started up the glazed knobbles which represented the Bergli rocks, with that little wind which always blows down from the pass on our faces (the 'heiter Luft' Jossi called it), the lanterns between our teeth, and the familiar smell of tallow in our nostrils.

A lovely still dawn was coming up as we reached the upper Mönchjoch; there we saw that old but ever new spreading of the glory, the golden eastern sky, the sudden firing of the western peaks, and, ahead of us, the blue shadowed, unbroken snow. Quiet, complete solitude. One might well have said that day,

' Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
Here grow no damned grudges; here are no storms,
No noise, but silent and eternal sleep.'

In the shadows of the Jungfraufrirn, as yet untouched by any direct light, the going was good enough, but after sun-up it soon got heavy. I cannot remember if we roped or not; I suppose we did *pro forma*, but the old man had such an uncanny sense of where covered crevasses might lie that it was hardly necessary. I never saw him go near such a thing in all our time together. Uneventfully, we waded to the Rottalsattel, and the day grew even more glorious. Arrived there, Jossi disapproved. The traverse was long and of hard unflawed ice. He did not like it. From the Sattel, that rib leading straight up to the summit was also lovely blue ice. In summer, if there is good snow, that way is jam. It seems as if one can romp up or down in a few minutes. Not so in winter, but up the old man went. It took him from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. to cut up it, but as we gained an oversight of the approach from the other side of the traverse, it showed how right his generalship had been, for the whole of that slope was one appalling sheet of glaze. It would have taken hours longer to get up, and the descent would have been a problem. The temperature on the summit was -10° C. We only stopped fifteen minutes, mostly spent in vigorous beating of our feet, for that long ice staircase had been severe on our pedal circulation. The old man was inclined to worry about frost-bitten feet, and he had good reason. For that affair in January 1885, when old Christian Almer and he took W. W. Graham up Jungfrau and did not get home to the Bergli till morning, was a narrow shave for him. He was entirely laid up for a long time, and never got any compensation into the bargain. It must have left his feet easily upset,



Photo, G. A. Hasler.]

JOSSI ON SCHRECKHORN, APRIL 22, 1901.



Photo, G. A. Hasler.]

JOSSI ON PIZ BERNINA, MARCH 3, 1903.

[To face p. 134.]



Photo, E. Gyger.

EBNEFLUH, N. FACE.

and painful when upset. I remember once that we were ambling about on the Grands Mulets route up Mont Blanc in early May. I had nearly reached the Vallot hut when I heard most bloodcurdling yells. My old friend was lying on his back on the plateau, waving his legs in the air, and emitting loud warbling sounds. I never hear our 'alerte' sirens now without thinking of that day. I shot off down the snow as if the 'blitz' was above me, thinking something awful had happened, but it was only his feet gone wrong.

But to return to the Jungfrau. We descended our glittering staircase demurely in fifty minutes to Rottalsattel, and from there, taking it as easy as the softened conditions allowed, reached Bergli at 6.55 P.M. Hot supper, a small warm area very close to the stove; as usual, frozen behind and scorched in front, some reminiscences by the old man in a happy mood, his funny little chuckle—he! he! he!—at both our little jokes, and so to bed. And how the old man could snore! At last sleep.

By 5 A.M. on the 19th Jossi was on the warpath again; by 5.45 we were on our way up our track to the lower Mönchjoch. A lovely day again, but colder than the day before. On the summit of Mönch the temperature was -- 15° C. Complete isolation. No one, nothing was in sight or hearing. I do not suppose it occurred to us to wonder what those human moles down at the foot of Eiger would eventually do to the noble snowfields at our feet. The tunnellers were still very far off, and I am sure it did not occur to me that the day would come when, twice a day at least, a multitude would be vomited from that molerun, and spread about all over the snowscape, bringing a Bank Holiday atmosphere with them. Nor did I foresee that the day would come when I should find it helpful to use the molerun myself.

It was an uneventful and even lazy day. When we got back, we found a good fire going, a meal nearly ready. After eating, our industrious porters went down and left us finally to our own devices. We tidied up the hut thoroughly and put all ready for an early start. Somehow we did not get off till 6.40 on the 20th, a good hour too late at least. I think that Jossi had one of his attacks of fiddling, turning out his pockets and sack to make sure that he had left nothing behind. He used to be taken that way sometimes, and it made young blood boil. At last we got away and headed for Fiescherhörner. I seem to remember a rather go-as-you-please business, with none of those queer hindrances with which Gross Fiescherhorn can drape itself in summer-time, but heavy snow. We reached the top at 2.40 P.M., started down the S. ridge, crossed the plateau, and went up Klein Fiescherhorn by W. ridge, summit 4.45 P.M., and down by the S. ridge to the Ochsenjoch. By this time it was getting a bit misty and dark. However, we started eastward down from the pass gaily enough, hoping that our marvellous luck would continue, and that nothing abnormal would hold us up. There was going to be a moon part of the time at least, but as usual when one reckons on a moon, it did not happen to shine when most wanted. The glacier descending from the Ochsen-

joch is not the simplest, and as it became darker we got into the steepest and most broken part of it, dropping in terraces which took time to find a way down. We could have traversed S. from the start and kept above the icefall until past the séracs, but that way meant a descent over steep, slabby rocks, probably glazed, which would not have been a joyride in the dark. Backwards and forwards we went, and by degrees we got to a point where we were sure we should reach less awkward ground soon. And then we came to the ultimate chasm. Backwards and forwards we went looking for a way out. With our little lanterns we must indeed have looked like a pair of Diogenes searching for truth. Something faintly nearer than the apparently bottomless pit caught our eye, which we found to be a mass of avalanche débris piled against the cliff. It looked a long way down to it. The old gentleman decided that we would jump for it, and over he sailed, landing well. I do not think I liked the look of it, but he was down below, and it was too cold to idle about. On that account I did not wait to take off the crampons I was wearing, and landed on the edge of an avalanche lump with a wrench; I thought that I had a Potts fracture at least, and there we were, in the middle of nowhere and a winter's night and a long way from everywhere. We pulled my boot as tight as it would go, and bandaged over it with a puttee, and I prepared to limp or crawl; the Schwarzeggen hut was the nearest if it really would not go. Just at the point where the Enge way to the Zäsenberg branches off, we stopped, and I dug out a small bottle of champagne which I had been carrying in case of need. It had lots of ice floating in it, and I should have thought it detestable at any other time. But after we had finished it between us, I made up my mind that I would get down to Grindelwald under my own steam, and nothing should stop me. The Enge in winter conditions was awkward for a game foot, but we saw daylight and the ruined Zäsenberg huts much about the same time. Also when we reached the glacier, we saw a party of five going up over Kalli on our porters' well tramped highroad. Jossi gave them a hail; they saw us, but were not interested. By 4 P.M. on the 21st we were back at the Bear.

The chief interest of this expedition is in the amount of work, and the number of hours on his feet done between midday on January 17 and 4 P.M. on January 21, the greater part over heavy unbroken snow, by this fifty-five year old Jossi. We took turns in breaking track, but I am sure he did the lion's share. He revelled in expeditions of this sort. He said to me once, 'I like earning money by guiding, but going to the mountains means much more to me than money.' And he meant it.

What he loved best at the time I knew him was any expedition which meant tramping over long distances, or cutting up long ice walls, such as the Ebnefluh N. face,² traversing over something into valleys which he had not visited before.

Once, at the end of February 1903, he met me on the platform of

² A. J. 18. 45, 22. 322.

Goeschenen station. I was on my way back from India, an evil memory of dust, dirt, horrible meals, sanitary arrangements which shocked me, bad hotels labelled as the 'best' (I was once shown to a room with eight beds in it and told I could not have anything more private). Jossi and I went up to the range above Hospental, and literally wallowed in nice clean snow. We did Pizzo Centrale and its neighbours, and finally, from Andermatt, we crossed some unidentifiable pass. It was misty all day and while going down it snowed. We could not see far ahead, but at last reached the head of a gorge and climbed on down through it, which was quite a tricky business. It must have been that through Val Cornera because we eventually came to Sedrun. We could not find much in the way of aids to locomotion there, but reached Thusis and Tiefencastel, where we got a couple of sledges which were very like the back-street soapbox, only on runners instead of wheels, and about as cramped. We crossed the Albula in them, and so reached Pontresina and the Kronenhof. The Kronenhof was not very pleased to see us. They had a few rooms open for commercial 'gents,' unheated and roughly fitted up, but I liked it better than my eight bedder at Calcutta. But as we were not commercial gents, the Kronenhof hardly knew what to make of us, so we soon went off to the Boval hut. We wandered about there to our hearts' content, but most of all we looked for a way to reach Bernina without going through the Labyrinth. It was no good, there were huge bergschrunds on every line of approach which gave no chance of getting a footing on the rocks. In the end we started very early on March 5, and went through the icefall which really was precarious. But we could slip along quickly on the hard snow at that hour. It was a fine day with a grand view. We did other things, but finally an ermine (otherwise stoat in winter dress) took up its home with us, and literally hounded Jossi out of the hut. He had an absolute horror of it, was firmly convinced that its bite was poisonous, and nothing would induce him to stay any longer. Perhaps the cold helped a bit, for outside the hut door it was -16° C. in the morning. I must say that the idea of being bitten on the nose by a stoat in the night—for the only other thing it could have tried to feed on was the remains of a tinned tongue which it had already sampled—was not attractive. Perhaps too the outlook from Bernina had unsettled us, for we had seen the Mont Blanc range, and I had said I would like to have a look at the Verte at this time of the year. So we left the Boval and our ermine, and travelled back in our sledges till we reached a railway line, whence I went to Bern while Jossi went to Chamonix. In no time I got a telegram: 'Come quickly.' I caught the night (13th-14th) train to Geneva, jogged on from the Eaux-Vives, took a carriage at Le Fayet, and about halfway to Chamonix, a gendarme flagged it, and without a 'by your leave' or 'might I beg a lift,' installed himself. I thought this very rude and said so. He nearly blew his fuses out with sheer rage, and said he would run me in when we got to Chamonix; the driver groaned and wrung his hands and his unfortunate nag's jaw. A jolly drive!

When I saw Couttet—the gendarme, still boiling, having gone off to get his authority, or call reinforcements—I told him what had happened. Couttet said the man was a several kinds of fool and would surely try it on. Jossi said ‘No, no, if we were delayed, the weather might turn bad, and we might miss our peak!’ And between them I was hustled off up the track which Jossi and a young porter (one Henri Dévouassoud) had laid as far as Pierre à Béranger. Dévouassoud came too. We thought he should go back from Montenvers or Les Ponts, but that did not suit him. He wanted to come to Pierre à Béranger, and wait for us. We told him he might have to wait some time if the snow was bad. But he would have his own way.

We reached Pierre à Béranger at 10 P.M. There was plenty of broken wood lying around from the wrecked shanty, and in the shelter of a big rock, we built a big fire, cooked, ate, and at 12.55 A.M. left our porter to his watch, steering off ourselves to the north end of the Jardin. It was at that time a little too mild for our liking.

There is little to say about the climb. It is very long in winter, has all its summer awkwardness, with the complications which winter always adds. Where rocks stuck out or just showed above the snow, they were glazed, and in the couloir we had to look out a good deal. We had deep snow, thin snow lying on ice, or ice according as we were able to use sheltered ground or were pushed out and obliged to cross runnels which were plain chutes.

We had crossed the upper bergschrund about 7 A.M., and reached the saddle to the N.W. of the Grande Rocheuse about 12.45 P.M. through an unpleasant iced gully which was right down bad and almost unbearably cold. From the saddle, where the weather began to look doubtful, to the summit was plain sailing, but there was no view, and after the usual libation, it began to snow, so we started down at 1.55 expecting all sorts of trouble. To our astonishment even the worst places went better than we had thought possible, and we reached Pierre à Béranger at 6.30 P.M., where we found our Henri had boiling hot tea ready. After the comparative warmth of the early morning, we had great luck in that the weather turned cold. In the really steep couloir, our steps had frozen so firmly that we had no trouble. It is certainly not the place for an involuntary glissade, though I believe it has been done once in summer (according to information from Mlle Loulou Boulaz) and without much ill effect.

Although in the early morning and during part of the day the snow was bad, I think I have rarely enjoyed a climb more—at least so my very scanty notes say. But from Pierre à Béranger, which we left after our hot tea and a half frozen meal of sorts, came the worst of the expedition. It was a long way to Chamonix and cruelly cold. We had to stop and make more hot tea in a shed at Montenvers, and arrived at Chamonix at 1.30 A.M. on the 16th. I think Couttet was on the lookout for us with hot soup, but am a bit hazy. I had not had a sleep since the night before I got Jossi’s wire. Dévouassoud swore that both Jossi and I had been walking in our sleep for the last hour.

In the morning, it had snowed right down to the valley, and we left at 8.50 for Geneva and Bern without meeting my friend Bombastes Furioso the gendarme again. That was an expedition after Jossi's heart.

Life was worth living in those days, certainly old Christen and I found it so. We did not always see eye to eye, and I used to get annoyed with him when he would suddenly disappear just as one wanted to start for something interesting. And on those occasions he was undiscoverable. Poor old chap, he couldn't help it, it seemed as if the call of the—shall we call it—wild, was too much for him. But he was a grand mountaineer. I do not know whether it was knowledge or instinct or a combination of both that made him always choose the right way, do the right thing. He was not a great rock climber as it is reckoned these days, but a very good one for his day. And he was a good teacher. He taught me to like wading in heavy winter snow and to like breaking track in such conditions, to like walking for any length of time; and he always preached the necessity of keeping time in hand, though as aforesaid he did not stick to it himself. He drew on his long experience of conditions and weather to illustrate where one could take what looked like a big risk with impunity, and why under just slightly different circumstances one should throw in one's hand and scram. I have known him drive a rebellious party down when the summit was no distance off, and he turned out to be quite right. He had an uncanny mountain sense.

If I were to write about half the quaint expeditions Jossi and I made together, I could fill a volume of the JOURNAL and it would pall. But I cannot help thinking of a comic traverse of Lyskamm one May when we were accompanied by a young son of a very famous local guide, who disliked the unusual conditions so much that he delayed us to the point of sitting out all night on the Felik Glacier in cold weather. What with his stopping to say his prayers and for other purposes just where the séracs were most threatening, it got darkish. Jossi was in a hurry to get on to safer ground, so we just shoved our prayerful third over a steep ice face—it was a surprise to him—I slid down the rope after him, and Christen drove in his axe, and came down the doubled rope to us. We found a more sheltered place, at any rate from séracs, and I tried to sleep on a yard-square waterproof which was supposed to be a camera cover. But to leave his axe up above irked Jossi, and, as whatever part of my anatomy touching the camera cover felt like getting chilblains, we two went off to try and retrieve that axe. It took time but kept us, I won't say exactly warm, but less cold—there was a wind—and we brought it down. Our young third, once warmed by morning sun, pointed out Macugnaga in the valley to which we were descending, but when we got there, it was very naturally Gressoney la Trinité. But in later years this sprig of local nobility, though never reaching his father's almost royal rank, learnt his way about, and followed in his father's footsteps so far that he survived a ghastly accident and continued to take his chances as a good Swiss should.

I have memories of great days on the Macugnaga face and Dent d'Hérens, in the Mont Blanc district and in the Dolomites with Jossi, and of the day when Amatter and I, sending the old gentleman down first over our spare ropes on the Mittellegi,³ were given lectures on proper respect due to our elders and betters whenever we got within speaking distance. But there was never anything like those winter tramps.

Once, early in my career, we made our first acquaintance with *Schneereifen*. Peter Bernet was with us, and not one of us knew the first thing about fastening them on except that they must not be too tight. We meant to go from Grindelwald over Strahlegg to Grimsel, but soon after we got into untrodden snow the fun began and I really do not know which of us cut the funniest capers. Respectable, no doubt, but a bit wild for all that. At one moment, misjudging the enlarged size of our feet, we would step on our own toes, and after a while one or other *Schneereifen* would cast its moorings, and one would plunge into that deep soft snow in every sort of ridiculous contorted position imaginable. What with the snow, what with fishing each other out of it, and retrieving half buried *Schneereifen*, what with trying new ways of fastening them—it turned out that the back straps were defective—we got no further that night than the old decrepit Stieregg hut, a shepherd's shelter halfway between Bäregg and Bänisegg. There, with the hut half full of snow and quite full of damp wood smoke, my ribs aching with laughter, for seeing the others' troubles helped at times though not entirely compensating for one's own, I reclined on a pile of old sheep skins—I never smelt anything like it before or since. Some of you may remember the story from the last war about the goat which caused the officers' mess to faint? And what was brought in next which caused the goat to faint? It was like that, only more so. We reached Schwarzegg next day, cooked, ate and, Jossi hounding us on, got to Grimsel Hospice early on Christmas morning. There was a dour caretaker there, with innumerable cats, a nasty dog, and a not quite 100 per cent. witted boy, all in some underground lairs, which were all that was open. All the grub which we could get to help out our own, which looked like being overstrained, was some peculiar alleged coffee and condensed milk, and 'Berner rösti' (potatoes) fried in American lard out of a huge barrel. Jossi, who was conservative about his food, would not look at that, and went off to break track up the Nägelisgrätli. He wanted to go up Galenstock, and the next morning he led us to it. Much more interesting in winter than one would have thought.

Christen Jossi is sleeping the sound sleep he so often went without in his busy lifetime. He saw his village through a grim time before he took his rest, but he never saw it recover from the creeping paralysis which overshadowed it in the last war, for it never did recover entirely.

It can hardly have been quite so grim a time as that which the village is passing through now, for it is three parts dead. It cannot trade, for

³ A. J. 34. 167.

there are no buyers for anything but sheer necessities, and those are strictly rationed. It cannot guide, for the men are in military service and there are few climbers about for the same reason. The few hotels open stand empty. It does its best in the poor agricultural line of mountain valleys, women, children and patriarchs taking up the hoe and scythe, but the weather is the worst that I can ever remember, and as it is general, there will be acute shortage of absolute necessities this winter and next year.

Of course Grindelwald is no worse off than any other mountain village or other Swiss place, for we are really a beleaguered country, but it has had its own special blow.

Jossi saw the old Bear hotel burn down one summer evening. Now the big Bear, the landmark of the valley, the meeting place of many a club member, has gone the way of the old one. Filled with convalescent Swiss soldiers, nursing sisters, and a few sick Polish interneers, it must have been smouldering in the cellarage for some time before it burst into uncontrollable flames in the middle of a winter night that was registering, they tell me, — 18° C. All the several hundred inmates were saved, though some Poles and a charge sister on the top floor had very narrow shaves, being cut off from the stairways, and having to be lowered from balcony to balcony, a regular rope throwing and *Abseil* affair. It is a little thing compared to the horrors happening elsewhere, but to Grindelwald, in a mental and moral sense, a terrible blow on the top of all their other troubles. Poor Grindelwald! Would old Jossi recognise his village now?

In writing this, I have for the moment got back to those blessed years of innocence, and found it a fact that 'quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem Testa diu.'

I only hope that for a moment this paper may remind old climbers of those much better days, and cause a reminiscent smile in these dreary ones.

EARLY MEMORIES

By LAWRENCE PILKINGTON

WHEN I was only seventeen I went alone to meet my mother and my brother Charles at Lucerne. I had never been abroad before. At Lucerne I found my brother was taking my mother home and I was to go on to Grindelwald and wait for him there. But when I reached Interlaken I was told that my portmanteau had not arrived, though I was sure I had seen it on the way and also at the Interlaken post office. I waited a couple of days at Interlaken and while there I heard that a party of climbers had been