

It was the new village called Kamaroffka, formed by the General of that name. We now parted with our men and horses too, who had behaved remarkably well, willing servants at all times to carry or help us across the streams, never once during the short campaign had we the least trouble with the packhorses.

When it came to leave the mountain we passed into quite a subtropical vegetation, at first fruit trees, then majestic plane and chestnut trees of extraordinary girth, while bunches of purple grapes hung side by side with walnuts and chestnuts, and from the topmost boughs of the poplar dropped, in sweeping festoons, the same graceful tendrils of the vine, waving softly above our heads their luscious burdens. I examined a primitive rice mill by the side of a stream with its pounders and mortars, all constructed of wood—a shoot or turbine set the wooden cylinders in motion.

We put up for the night in a very large caravanserai, a building of stone, surrounding a quadrangle with exception of a large gateway. A gallery overlooking the quadrangle communicated with rooms, each used for travellers. We occupied one and slept on the divan, using our kit. In the centre of the quadrangle was a big basin of water for the horses, mules and camels. I noticed in the next early morning, and also the previous evening, the faithful Mohammedan true to his religion, going through his prayers, each one using in turn the prayer rug of the guardian of the caravanserai, which eventually I acquired and still possess.

A phyton took us to the railway by way of Noukha. From Tiflis we journeyed through the Dariel pass to the railway on the N. side of the main chain of the Caucasus and then by train to Moscow, where we parted; Yeld, taking all the money I could spare, returned to London via Poland, whilst I went to Odessa with only one and a half roubles in my pocket. With the help of an old acquaintance of my youth I was provided with funds to carry me to Constantinople.

(To be continued.)

MOUNTAIN INNS

BY G. M. BELL

FROM the majority of English parish churches you may walk but a step to the village inn. Their proximity is not fortuitous: they represent (in different aspects) what Scott Holland in a sermon calls 'the solidarity of salvation.' For we owe everything, good and evil, to the associations of the past, and we cannot get anywhere without association in the present. Chesterton perhaps would go further and reduce salvation to terms of beer, so that for him the independent Puritan must be seated cheek by jowl with the Knights of a very jolly Round Table. The heat of the Rhone valley and a

heavy pack would make me believe him there. But, however that may be, it is obvious how much is owed by the climber, be he never so bent on guideless or solitary ascents, not only to the pioneers of the past but to the providers of the present. There is no need for him to be any more a Crusoe selfsufficient in the size of his rucksack, nor a Cortez silent upon a peak without returning to his base. It would be absurd to pretend that he is not grateful for the comfort of the place of entertainment to which he comes back after exertion; he may even welcome the English Church which has followed him to the Alps. Both provide recuperation from the past and insurance for the future.

It is no doubt possible, if time or expense are urgent motives, to be one's own slave, and to carry x miles uphill, under a blazing sun, a sack of 50 lb. weight, containing food and all the tin cans and other paraphernalia required to cook it; and to live thus the good life without sleeping in bed for a week. But we are not all detailed for Everest, or even for such a camping expedition as spent five days in climbing Mont Blanc in various phases of peril and exhaustion. It is amusing to be independent for a time—in fine weather; and we may at least admire the courage of those who pass a night hanging from a peg and a clothes line on the N. face of the Matterhorn or Grandes Jorasses. But I shall not forget the delight of two young hikers, who had passed some drenching days in a high Swiss valley under inadequate canvas, when they received invitations to share the hotel meal and become once more human beings. For many it makes all the difference in the world, whether they are staying in an Alpine resort or passing from one valley to another, to know that after an early start and a strenuous day, with a minimum of food and drink and rest, there awaits them the ordered table and the baked meats, food that has not been carried and that does not have to be cooked up on arrival, and a bed in which a neighbour's bones do not squeeze, or his snores steal away a much needed slumber.

But these are days of Lucullan luxury. The pioneers who climbed the first peaks, passes and glaciers had to be content with much colder comfort. When they were not shivering under the stars, they must pass half the night in some draughty cavernous *gîte*, where water soaked drop by drop upon their heads, and the obtrusive malevolence of stones prevented sleep. Yet tempers seem seldom to have suffered, any more than those of the modern climber far from his base who camps in a crevasse or an igloo. Inns were not then sufficiently near to the mountain; a hay hut or chalet might serve, if one could stomach its smaller visitors; but the Alpine huts with their advantages for rest and an early start were few and far between; and there was no middle course between a night out and a base, comfortable indeed, but so low down that half the day would be wasted in reaching the bottom of the peak.

On the other side of the picture in these days are the modern mountain super-hotels, open summer and winter: six storeys of carpeted stairs and corridors, bedrooms luxurious—on the first floor, perhaps

a lift (justifiable enough for the climber on his return), bathrooms usable by millionaires, and a lounge in which an obsequious servant will expect you to order a cocktail at any hour of the day or night. You may be lucky if the wireless is not audible somewhere during most of the day ; and a band at night relieves all possible monotony. Twice a week a dance may also relieve you of your sleep until the small hours. Outside there is a hard tennis court with a professional in attendance ; and not far off the café or *Biergarten* of a neighbouring establishment does a roaring trade. The general idea is not so much 'home from home' as Brighton from Brighton and Nice from Nice ; and it will be quite annoying to some if their names do not appear in the *Continental Daily Mail* or the *New York Herald*.

In such hotels the climber, with his disregard of midday meals and his general lack of knowledge of correct etiquette, is looked upon as a curious creature from some outlandish zoo. To appear incorrectly dressed at dinner is to commit a *faux pas* of the first order. The feeling of the victim is akin to that in certain sartorial nightmares peculiar to my profession, where in the presence of an archbishop seated in the lofty sanctuary of his cathedral, and of an enormous congregation, I am standing at the lectern without a surplice trying for untold ages to discover the book of Jonah in the Bible lectionary. Such situations could only be drawn with justice by a Bateman or a Fougasse ; but some of them, acute in their agony, are not so far from real life as may be imagined. It will be remembered, anyhow, that in the Everest expedition of 1933 the ambassador to one of the officials in the Rongbuk valley was fain to clothe himself in the rich and flowing robes of a Tibetan nobleman (the travesty included an opera hat) to avoid 'losing face' in his visit to so important a functionary. Still in the Alps the mountaineer who does not wish to conform to fashion avoids the luxury and the conventions of society, and chooses, if he can, a humbler abode.

Of these modest hostelries there were, and still are in places, various grades. Some, like the Cantine de Proz on the St. Bernard Pass or the Mattmark inn on the way to the Monte Moro, were originally necessary stages for pedestrians, accompanied perhaps by mules or baggage, on through routes where a night's lodging must be provided, and not only in the summer. The fury of the elements counselled the protection of thick stone walls and the narrowest of windows. They are not all as miserable as the inn at La Bélarde in 1867, of which the following description is given by A. W. Moore : 'The accommodation provided by Rodier is not extensive ; nothing more substantial than an omelette was forthcoming for supper, and I passed a most wretched night in a sort of underground stable, in company with almost every known domestic animal, and, as I believe, every known insect in the habit of preying on the human body.' Such places one enters with misgiving, and leaves with little regret. Some larger establishments, with a claim to attract residents, were not much better. Readers of *The Playground of Europe* may remember a description of

the hotel at the Baths of Santa Caterina in 1869: 'a long low building of rough stone, resembling a barrack: . . . an unorganised crowd of persons, male and female, who appear more or less to discharge the duties of waiters and chambermaids: . . . an overwearied woman, a stumbling-block on the stairs, fallen asleep while accidentally blacking a miscellaneous boot. If you want a dish, the best plan is to go into the kitchen, where among a crowd of smokers and idlers you may be able to enter into conversation with the cook. The landlord is round the corner with a cigar in his mouth talking to a friend. If the head waiter were not a man of genius, the whole management would be in danger of collapse.' Yet here in Italy 'the food is of unimpeachable quality' and the servants are civil enough.

This was not always so. Some inns in remote valleys were in those days suspicious of strangers, at a time when climbing as a sport was as unintelligible as it is now to the Nepalese or Tibetans of the Himalaya. It could not be supposed that a well-to-do person should travel over difficult country without ulterior motives, political or commercial. There was not quite the suspicion which in Russia prevents the visitor from seeing anything by himself unaccompanied by the official 'guide' appointed by the Soviet Government. But the host of an inn regarded himself as responsible to the village and neighbourhood for the character of his guests, and readers of *The Italian Alps* may recall some of the curious situations which this attitude brought about. Passports were indispensable, but in the absence of an interpreter even these did not always save their holders from rudeness. Instances were not unknown in which the commercial instinct prevailed over honesty, and the account presented was unduly long. But these were rare. If the landlord was greedy, he was no more so than some of the proprietors of the modern palace; and if he was uncivil, it may be that he suspected the possibility of loss to himself or to his business. The three Army Surgeons of Grimm's fairy tale were wonderful fellows, but it will be remembered that their anatomical skill resulted in serious trouble for the landlord; and readers of war literature may recall how often the arrival of an Intelligence officer or escaping prisoner was apt to embarrass the host whose goodwill was otherwise beyond question. It is indeed a tribute to mountain innkeepers equally with climbers of early days that relations between them were as a rule those of mutual trust. One amusing explanation of a serious overcharge after a stay in the Graian Alps occurs to me. On my expostulation the host referred to his wife and returned with apologies. She had, he said, been 'a leetle ensusiastique.'

On the other hand, how delightful are those simple houses where the innkeeper has preserved in his family for generations the traditions of simple hospitality. The courtesy of some of the pioneers was well repaid by the kindly feeling generated between host and guest; and there grew up between them a comradeship which ensured at every fresh season the warmest of welcomes. Some of these places remained, however, primitive enough. Several years after the beginning of this

century the little inn by the Findelen Glacier, famous for its cherry jam, remained a place of the utmost goodwill, but was lacking in the first elements of order. The goats attached to the establishment (whom one would find at times mingled with equally black sheep upon the glacier) would wander inside the place in the daytime in search of food, or for mere devilry. Up the steep steps they sprang to the one chamber which was dining and sitting room combined, and overturned the tables before one of the indignant maidens, bursting from the kitchen, could send them clattering down again. For the sake of the butter at breakfast it was imperative to inquire whether one of these raids had recently occurred. The same goats, who ranged at large, had an extreme contempt for the mule who fetched the luggage from the Riffelalp station and was every night led to shelter, and kept up a continuous feud with him in which prodigies of capering were to be seen on both sides. It was just as well to be of the inner circle. We privileged pensionnaires knew where to find our letters in the soup tureen in the bottom drawer of the oak chest, and no trouble was too much when we arrived from an expedition wet through, and the stoves were required to produce a blaze. But the casual passer by was fair game. An inquiry as to the purity of the water of the stream met with a decided negative, and resulted satisfactorily in the popping of corks and a large consumption of beer. But no sooner were the Germans departed than the girls rushed out to fill our dinner carafes with this same perfectly good spring water.

On another occasion my wife and I happened on a thunderstorm while crossing the Col du Mont from the Val d'Isère to the Val Grisanche, and descended to Fornet soaking wet. The innkeeper received us with kindness and took us into his kitchen, where, while our clothes were drying, we sat before a big wood fire clothed respectively, myself in a blanket and she in the best green baize tablecloth. There was a rush to kill a chicken, which, after a sojourn in a pot, insufficiently feathered, appeared as the *pièce de résistance* on the dinner table. It had its revenge by defeating all the efforts of the available cutlery, and only yielded to the penknife of mine host, produced from his trouser pocket. To crown his hospitality he brought out some old Samian wine, the acrid flavour of which I seem to remember still.

The next day we descended the Val Grisanche to the sunny valley of the Dora Baltea, and on a perfect evening passed through Liverogne to enter Villeneuve as the bells were ringing for the Eve of the Assumption. How different from our last experience it seemed to enter an inn built in Latin fashion with an upper gallery round a large patio, and to sleep in a four-poster in a bedroom scented by a magnificent sandalwood inlaid cabinet. Pictures of the Blessed Virgin's life adorned the walls; and lying in bed we looked up at a high domed ceiling painted skyblue and spangled with stars. What a change from the straw palliasses and the box compartments of the night before!

It was at this inn at Fornet, another year, when I had crossed by

myself the Finestra del Torrent from Rhêmes, that there appeared suddenly in the lunch room two gendarmes, herding before them three English public school masters whom they had caught redhanded with cameras on the frontier. The soldiers at the fort on the Col du Mont seem to have been particularly active, or were anticipating without orders the present Italian frontier strictness; for on a previous crossing an attempt to eat my modest sandwiches on the pass and to look at a map had been frustrated by the unpleasant proximity of two bullets fired at me without warning. As I was going back into France the next day, not only was I led to pretend that I had no sympathy with my countrymen who were being haled to judgment lower down the valley, but I thought it politic to offer the gendarmes on their return some civility in the shape of wine and tobacco. The scheme worked perfectly: when I crossed the pass next morning, not a soldier was to be seen.

Some of the traveller's difficulties are due to insufficient repairs of ancient buildings. Melting snow has a special power of penetration through a leaky roof. One may have to be prepared to move one's bed once, or more than once, to avoid the drip, of which one is only aware when the solitary candle has burnt to its socket and there are no more matches. But in Switzerland there will hardly arise the comical situation of two of our party in Spain. Heavy rain, unknown for years, penetrated copiously a roof designed only as a protection from the sun; and after vainly striving to find a dry spot, they sat finally in bed under a mosquito net with two umbrellas up, reading by the light of a candle till the storm and the floods abated.

As to beds, it was not uncommon in Norway at the end of last century to find insufficient provision for the length of a tall man. I found it a problem to decide whether to curl up like the man who descended Niagara Falls in a barrel, arriving somewhat stereotyped, or to let my feet protrude in chilliness on to a casual chair or box. But in the Alps, though latitude is often denied in the huts, longitude is seldom lacking in the hotels. The beds range from a straw mattress (which may be exceedingly comfortable) to the feather bed with its mountainous duvet, or the new spring mattress, the rounded convex character of which forms a kind of arête requiring a delicate quality of balance to prevent the body being shot in a careless and unguarded moment on to the floor on either side. It is a little unkind of the innkeeper thus to prolong at night the mountaineering experiences of the previous day, which may have been sufficiently strenuous to deserve the mercy of untrammelled rest. This may be the reason why dreams sometimes suggest a sensation of falling. Unsympathetic friends, however, are more inclined to refer such hallucinations to overindulgence in a savoury meal.

The desire of the Englishman to wash is a bar which, almost as much as colour, divides him from the natives of the British Empire; and the overcoming of it may be regarded as one of the triumphs of the Anglo-Saxon character. But the wearing down of European prejudice is a more delicate matter, a subject perhaps for the League of Nations.

However, the Swiss mountain inn is gradually, under protest, beginning to understand the repeated requests for washing conveniences, backed up by the sage advice of their neighbours in the Touring-Club de France. Larger vessels have replaced the slop basin and milk jug once designed for the morning toilet. But only the big hotel has yielded to the craze for a morning douche or a hot bath before dinner after the climb. Even here three such baths on the same afternoon in a house of a hundred bedrooms will disarrange the hot water system; and the prices demanded for cleanliness are such as to put it above godliness in the pecuniary sacrifice demanded for a stay of a month. Another difficulty in the smaller hotel with one bathroom is that in the height of the season it is invariably a bedroom. That may be convenient if you are the occupant (though a bath is seldom long enough for me to sleep in, supposing that other accommodation is lacking). At least one may disregard, for a time, the trying of the handle of the door by someone requiring water at the indecent hour of six; and there are no twinges of conscience such as may be evoked on the discovery in an English bathroom of the lines:

‘The lease of this well-watered spot
Is short: extension can’t be got.
Be quick, for in ten minutes more
The next will thunder at the door.
Yet prudently: your soul to save
You know how close must be the shave.’

Obstacles to sleep are not to be found only in huts of the Alpine clubs. There overcrowding is general, and good humour must sometimes be called upon to stifle resentment caused by the occupation of places by non-climbers, or the needlessly late arrival of a party containing ladies to whom one’s place, secured early in the afternoon, must be surrendered. Windows cannot be opened without creating an international incident, though I remember guarding successfully a tiny opening at the head of an upper shelf by lying with my head almost out of it. There was some justification for needing air. It was, I think, the old Mountet hut; and the place was so full that we lay like a pack of cards on end. If one turned over, the rest must follow suit simultaneously to avoid bursting the walls. Snoring is another problem, probably insoluble short of heaven; for international etiquette at present forbids the schoolboy dormitory practice of ordeal by soap placed in the snorer’s open mouth. In the hotel these difficulties do not occur. If rooms are full, one is lodged in the basement, in the bathroom, in the salon, on the billiard table, or in a neighbouring chalet. But a house of several floors, divided into wooden boxes without plaster ceilings, cannot be noiseless. Late at night the maidservants hold joyful conversations with the chef outside your door; in the room above yours (or is it the next one?) someone is (or is not) taking off nailed boots several times. And where in thunder is that bed which creaks and creaks till all is blue? . . .

A few hours pass and the problem recurs. The passages are

uncarpeted, and some people fail to grasp the meaning of the famous notice intended for our countrymen: 'It is defended to circulate in the corridors in boots of ascension before seven hours of the morning.' The circulation, starting with the first expedition at 2 A.M., continues intermittently (but always just as you are dropping off again) till six, when the servants' breakfast bell rings and a gay troop descends to its labours. It is indeed a joy to stay where the guests have learnt by their own bitter experience to pussyfoot on the landings, and where the porter pads up discreetly in slippers to your door, knocking to say that it is a fine morning and the guides think it will go. Rarely indeed this overworked official may oversleep himself: and then, myself wakeful owing to strivings with my neighbours, I have penetrated to the infernal regions of the basement, where in the kitchen there remained the relics of last night's feast, cut for myself a hunk of bread, speared pats of butter floating in a bowl of water, gulped down some dregs of the guides' last night's coffee, and let myself out—I was starting alone—into the starlight by the bolted door with the guilty conscience of a house-breaker.

But perhaps the climber, once almost the only denizen of the high mountain inn, is too apt to resent the progress of time which has made it easy for the active fraternity from the Swiss towns, as well as for holiday makers of all nationalities, to reach by road or rail his jealously guarded sanctuary. There may of course be many reasons for a stay in mountain country besides the urge to reach every summit by lawful or unlawful routes. There are many who find extreme pleasure in reaching passes below the snowline. There are the inveterate and insatiable travellers who, as Baudelaire says, are driven by the whim of wind or destiny,

' qui partent pour partir . . . semblables aux ballons,
et sans savoir pourquoi disent toujours, Allons ! '

Or there may be the old stager, hungering each summer for the views which his lowland place of work denies him, and seeking still to dream of and to discuss the expeditions which were once his aloft; or again the young generation, as yet unblooded and eager for the fray.

To most of these the view from the hotel is of some importance, and these differ very greatly. Some places, such as Interlaken or Cogne, are set well back with a long valley foreground, so that the great summits in front have their full height. Others are set in a narrow glen with the charm of woods and pasture bordering a tumbling stream. Some again, perched halfway up the flank, command such famous sights of glacier and peak as those of the Brévent, Belalp, or Mürren. An inn, strangely non-existent, similarly placed on the S. side of Val Veni, would have the finest view of all of the complete southern face and aiguilles of Mont Blanc.

A few hotels are built on the very tops. Materialists may regard them as the goal of the thirsty who arrive on foot or by train. But the crowd will depart as evening draws in, and you may remain, as at

Monte Brè above Lugano, to see the purple shadows darken and the moon rise to compete with the twinkling rim of lights round the lake shining far below. Solitude in such and higher resting places suggests to the mountaineer the instinct of worship. 'Levavi oculos meos ad montes, unde veniet auxilium meum.' Best of all it is to reach alone before sunrise a summit high enough to be beyond the reach of human habitation, and to see there the daily miracle which is never the same: the vast expanse of landscape awaiting its resurrection: the gradual increase of shimmering light before the dawn: the reddening of the distant and then the nearer peaks of snow: the travelling of the shadows and then the lifting of the darkness from the valleys: the growth of colour in the foreground: all enhanced, it may be, by the fiery red of cloud wisps and the greenish sky of doubtful weather. Finally the sun, 'coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber and rising as a giant to run his course,' floods with his brilliance the rivers of shattered ice, the widespread fields of snow, and the family of rock peaks which surround them.

Distance and difficulty, however, rarely permit a sunrise or a sunset to be seen from the highest peaks. Readers of *On High Hills* may remember some brilliant exceptions which prove the rule. But there are many mountain inns set on some rise in a high valley, or on the way to a club hut, which have their artistic compensations. Here the foreground, as in a photograph, makes the picture. The colour of trees and grass and flowers is set against the rock and the ice beyond, the true height of the giants can be appreciated, and, if the view is restricted, contrasts are more effective. Each morning and evening, as the shadows fall or rise, the battle between night and day is obviously set and swiftly decided; and the passage of clouds up the valleys or across the face of the range affords an infinite variety.

Into other characteristics of mountain inns, the qualities of the famous company of guides which gathers outside them after dinner, or the habitual presence of some guest of outstanding personality, this is not the place to enter. But this may be added in conclusion.

Looking back many years, one feels that the increase of huts, while shortening climbs, has somewhat spoiled the hotels: the stay is shorter and the camaraderie less easily established. In the days when the Nadelgrat must be done from Saas Fee, and a stay there would make possible the next day the Weissmies on the other side of the valley, with 600 ft. of ascent at the end on the return, there was a spice in such expeditions comparable to that of some of the climbs involving a descent (and ascent on the reverse) of 1000 ft. from Belalp to cross the Aletsch Glacier: there was length and variety besides the skill and effort of the climb. Nowadays perhaps a thrill is sought by a traverse or trek from hut to hut, by a ridge climb, or by seeking to do half the Pennine chain in twenty-four hours, if it be not a preference for hanging by a peg to a rock face all night. For myself I would still foregather at one of those few hotels in the Alps from which, apart from a few exceptional expeditions, one may leave one's

bed in the early morning and return later with eager anticipation to the comfort and company of the inn. But perhaps that is to admit that one is getting older every day.

NIGHT LIFE ON HIGH HILLS

By A. C. PIGOU

THIS is not, despite its title, a paper about brown owls or bats or moths. It tells of some late returns and nights out—distinguished from late returns by ending after sunrise—experienced by the writer and various friends who on occasion travelled with him. There is nothing sensational in it and no word of Alpine philosophy. In America it would be called a fireside chat. As the writer did not start climbing till he was over 30, naturally enough he never emerged from the second class. But a preference, after a short time, for dispensing with guides opened the way for some episodes—they cannot be called adventures—of a kind that neither guided parties nor really good guideless ones are likely often to encounter. Since late returns are an embryo form of nights out I shall begin with them; for despite some specious arguments to the contrary, the egg *did* come before the hen.

It may be well to approach my theme, as many approach the Alps, with a prelude on the homeland. For, while I have never committed the enormity of a night out here, I have to my credit a number of late returns. Here are four examples, two from Pillar and two from Scafell. First, in very early days a highly incompetent party emerged from the North Climb just as darkness fell. In tentative gropings for the High Level route we found ourselves on the verge of a precipitate descent down Walker's Gully. We fled to the top of Pillar Fell, resolved to feel our way along the fence to Black Sail. The side-supports of this fence are spread with a maddening irregularity; on that single night more shins were barked than in all the long stretch of recorded time! None the less, 'by sheer grit' we did at last reach Gatesgarth; memory whispers 3 o'clock! Back once more to the Pillar several years later and distinctly less incompetent. Philip Baker and I were escorting three ladies up the New West Climb when heavy snow set in. Under these conditions escort work over the traverse above the chimney was arduous—and lengthy. Standing for æon after æon tethered below the whitening final slab, I ruminated ruefully on what the rocks and, more important still, my fingers would be like after another century had passed. But once the party was reassembled, 'nothing could stop that astonishing infantry.' It raced up the slab, down to the Ennerdale valley and back over Scarth Gap to Gatesgarth. There at 9.30 the gallant males plunged by starlight into the icy waters of Buttermere, so that their no less gallant colleagues might