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Spring time in Switzerland

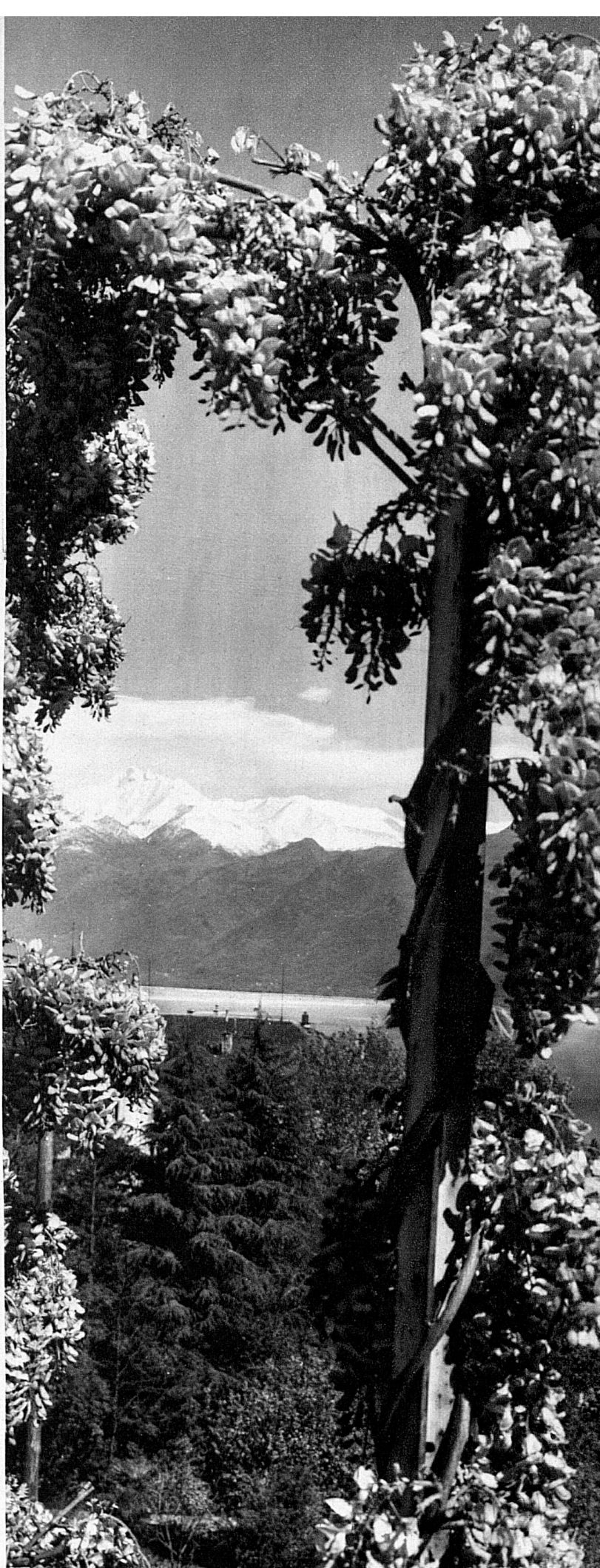
"Rise up, my love, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs. Arise and come away." Do not these words of the ancient, oriental love song strike the key note of Spring's appeal? For Spring is the season of youth and aspiration, of lengthening days and wakening life, of joy, of hope, of love. The sights and sounds and scents of nature proclaim the year's bridal morning. The richer crimson on the robin's breast and the brighter blue of the jay's wing, the cuckoo's call and the thrush's matin lay, the rich scent of the willow and the fragrance of the mimosa through eye and ear and nostril all echo the appeal. Rise up and come, share the year's new life, the winter is past!

The long days of summer, the ripe harvest and vintage of autumn, the gladsome sports of winter, each waken happy thoughts. But the pulse of Spring beats through all the ranks of nature and every race of man. In England Spring advances with a halting gait. The East wind will still bite amid the genial showers of April. In Switzerland the atmosphere is less humid and the sky is brighter. Spring will arrive sometimes with a bound so swift and strong we almost seem to see old Winter scuttling off in alarm before the audacious youth! Perhaps the snowy mountain tops reflect the sun's rays. We do not know just why, but it is a fact that in this favoured land the March sun sheds a glow and a radiance that would grace a midsummer day. But, of course, it rains in Switzerland as elsewhere, or vegetation would all be dried up. That fickle jade the weather does not change its character entirely on crossing the Jura.

This is the month of March. For weeks the sun has been flirting with the snow, "sometimes coming, sometimes coy!" Yet winter is still holding its own north of the Alps. But thanks to its many grades of altitudes and aspects Switzerland can boast a choice of climates. Sheltered by the central range of mountains and full fronting towards the balmy south lies the Tessin, the Riviera of Switzerland. Above the lakes of Maggiore and Lugano, snuggling amid the wooded cliffs are many a quaint village and the towns of Lugano and Locarno. This is the threshold where Spring first alights. Here she pours forth her gifts of beauty and fragrance in gorgeous profusion. The golden plumes of the mimosas and the long pendulous tassels of the wistaria mix with the pink cups of the magnolia, and around them gather azaleas with their sun-tinted blossoms, gay bushes of rhododendrons and the stately camelias. Birds sing on the trees and lizards sport on the warm stone walls, and lilies of the valley add their perfume to the air.

Somewhere about Easter the Tessinois celebrate their feast of Camelias; but long before this Spring has opened her carnival elsewhere. As the snow retreats out come in their armies the crocus tribes, and the graceful little

Locarno, amidst the fragrance and beauty of Wistaria
Phot. Feuerstein





Lugano

soldanella and the pink primula perched beside each little rill. Beneath the plums and appletrees in the orchards the snowdrops foregather; and presently the sloping meadows are dappled with the pale oxlips, all round the lakesides and along the valleys. Lent lilies grace the slopes of the Jura, and splashes of mauve hepatica shine under the pinewoods everywhere. Already one thrills on finding the first spring gentian with its incomparable blue that makes it perhaps the most prized of Switzerland's floral gems. And we cannot scorn the golden dandelions that blaze so brilliantly over the cultivated fields in central Switzerland.

And now Spring's welcome presence is felt in higher altitudes. The saffron anemones grace the slopes round Berisal, and in the Löttschental; and the golden globe buttercup and the white ranunculus and an innumerable host of favorites are in full blossom all around. We must pause to greet the exquisite little yellow violas, that peep up at us like the bright eyes of a mischievous child, and that delightful little rock "rose", the dryas octopetala. Orchids, purple and white shoot up their fragrant spikes in the damper ground, but May is advancing and we must hasten to the shores of Lake Lemman, for the narcissus will be out. You will gather them in abundance at Les Avants. There is a feast of Narcissus, too, every year at Montreux. But then June is on us, and that is a summer month.

For lovers of nature who have eyes and ears trained to observe the happenings, Spring in Switzerland has

another phase of attraction. The land is situated, as is well known, very much in the centre of Europe. There is Italy stretching away to the South towards Africa's sunny shores; and there is the great Central European Plain spreading North to Scandinavia and the British Isles. Switzerland is the junction for passengers from North to South and vice versa. So if ladies and gentlemen are foolish enough to postpone their visits when the land is looking its gayest and brightest, there are other travellers who only wait for Spring to return from their winter haunts.

One cannot say that the song and nesting of the birds is the same prominent feature of Spring in Switzerland that it is in England. The birds that winter on the Mediterranean have, many of them, an immemorial custom of nesting in England and other higher latitudes. But they will pass through Switzerland en route. That secluded pond in the Public Gardens of Berne is at times so thick with wild ducks that the water is lost to sight beneath their restless wings; and on a favoured tree near the River Aare bullfinches have been seen "thick as leaves in Vallombrosa!" And high over the pinetrees, like a passing cloudlet, will float by a flock of woodpigeons, at least three score in number.

But Switzerland can furnish no mean list of indigenous birds, all of which are to be seen in Spring busy with preparations for the generation to come. Chaffinches are as numerous and as tame as sparrows in many parts.



Locarno

The woods ring in the Spring with the varied call of the quaint nuthatches. The woodpeckers, spotted and green, are heard but not easily seen tapping on many a hoary trunk. Cole tits and blue tits will visit the window baskets, and the dear little pink tits will waggle their long tails as they peck up the seeds on the window sills. In the wilder districts buzzards, jackdaws, magpies and the cruel crows are plentiful; but it is long since the traditional eagle was seen in Lauterbrunnen above its eyry on the Black Monk. Jays and thrushes abound, but not larks and nightingales.

A Swiss Spring differs from an English one in several respects. Perhaps it lacks the impression of repose. The carolling of the lark, the hedges bright with blossom and the soft glades full of pale primroses are not in the picture. Nor must we expect the bleating of lambs gambolling on the meadows, or look for foals nestling at their mothers' side. The cattle are still in their stalls, and flocks of sheep are rare indeed. Perhaps the first to take the air may be the swine. We have seen some acres of scrub, divided off in sections each plot the nursery of a bonny litter of a dozen or more pink fleshed youngsters littered by the "lordly" lady that lies in her immensity in one corner, ready to nourish the greedy offspring that scamper round.

And Spring is a busy time in Switzerland. The bulk of the land is in the hands of peasant proprietors, and late snows will retard the farm work. Switzerland is noted for its intense culture, and the too familiar

and odoriferous carts will be seen bearing the "gold of the mountains" in the shape of manure, liquid or otherwise, up the hills and across the fields. In many a village throughout Switzerland the size of the dung heap before his door is the witness to the greater or less wealth of the proprietor! These small plots hardly allow of hired labour, so all the family must turn to and share the work. The quaint and penetrating music of the peasants yodelling at their work ring up the hillside with a cheerful but somewhat uncanny effect. There is a strain of earnestness about the refrains in keeping with the gravity of the folk themselves.

And in conclusion, when you picture Spring in Switzerland, place in the foreground of your pleasant memories the Swiss orchards. Fruit-trees and flowering shrubs are everywhere. Along the roadside, on the hills and across the plains are cherries and apples, apricots and pears and walnuts. The plum orchards along the Sarner See may recall the beauty of the Vale of Evesham. Forsythia and Lilac and the exquisite pink double cherry, and innumerable other beautiful and graceful blossoms whose Latin names perplex the memory, crowd the gardens from April onwards till June. Those who know Switzerland best would likely agree that of all the months in the year the land is never more beautiful than in early June.

A. B. Winter.