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GLETSCHERTISCHE

«Außer den eigentlichen Moränen begegnen wir auf dem sanftgewölbten Rücken des Gletschers noch separirten Steinblöcken, gleichsam sich abschließenden Sonderlingen oder Einsiedlern, die, weil sie rundum vom verwandten Gesteins-Material entblößt sind, den Atmosphärlilien Gelegenheit zu höchst auffallenden, mit dem Entstehen und der Gestalt der Gletscher-Nadeln verwandten Eisbildungen geben; es sind die „Gletschertische“. ... Fast wie riesige Pilze aussehend, finden sie sich nicht auf allen Gletschern, doch aber auf den meisten großen. Die schönsten findet man auf dem Unteraar-Gletscher, wo Agassiz Fußgestelle bis zu acht Fuß Höhe maß.»

Hermann Alexander Berlepsch, 1862

Links: Gletschertische auf dem Unteraar-gletscher, Aquatinta von Gabriel Lory Sohn, 1784-1846

A gauche: Tables de glaciers sur le glacier de l'Aar inférieure. Aquarelle de Gabriel Lory fils, 1784-1846.

TABLES DE GLACIERS

Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Albert von Haller furent les grands promoteurs du retour à la nature au 18e siècle. De nombreux peintres suivirent leurs traces et contribuèrent à révéler les beautés des Alpes, tels que Gabriel Lory père et fils. C'est à ce dernier que nous devons une peinture de tables de glaciers sur le glacier de l'Aar inférieure.

Rechts: Gletschertisch auf dem Morteratschgletscher, dem größten Eisstrom Graubündens. Der gewaltige Felsblock schützt die Unterlage vor dem Abschmelzen, und so bildet das Eis die Tischbeine. Im Bildhintergrund links der Biancograt, rechts der Piz Morteratsch.

Photo: F. Engesser, Zürich

A droite: Sur le glacier du Morteratsch, un rocher en forme de table empêche la glace de fondre et permet que s'élève un socle caractéristique. A gauche, à l'arrière-plan, le Biancograt, à droite, le Piz Morteratsch.

“YOU, TOO, COULD CLIMB”

“I suppose”, said my friend Paul, “you can hardly remember a time when you had no mountaineering ambitions.”

“That’s correct. The first books I read were mountaineering books, and at a time of life when other boys wanted to be engine drivers or victorious generals I wanted to be a mountaineer.”

“I first saw the Alps”, said Paul, “on my way through to Italy. I was an undergraduate at the time. They seemed to me fantastically lovely and still more fantastically remote. I admired mountaineers such as I admired North Pole explorers, and it seemed to me equally unlikely that I would climb the Matterhorn or cross Spitzbergen.”

“I know what you mean”, said I, “I’ve always felt that I’d love to sail a boat round the world or across the Atlantic, but I never even entertained for one moment the dim possibility of becoming a yachtsman. I wouldn’t know how to set about it.”

“An exact parallel!” said Paul, “but I was lucky. I made great friends at Oxford with a Don who was a mountaineer, not anything very expert but he loved mountains and his usual companion in the Alps died suddenly, and then one day he suggested that I should join him in the Alps.

I demurred, said I knew nothing about climbing. ‘I know’, he said, ‘but you too could climb.’ That short sentence had more influence on my life than any printed or spoken words in my experience. A barrier dissolved between me and what I had, without knowing it, wanted to do ever since I first saw the Alps. Could I really become a climber? Why not? Anyhow I decided to accept his invitation.”

“Well my friend was not a great mountaineer, more of a mountain hiker. We started at Kandersteg and made the mistake of crossing the Wildstrubel to Montana before I’d been in the Alps a week. I was exhausted before we reached the top and had no conscious pleasure in the view. It was very hot and you know that interminable snow plain, the Plaine morte. My face was not properly protected against the sun, and I got badly burnt before we left the glacier, and I had a splitting headache and there had been nothing on the whole expedition of the slightest technical interest, not a point where I had to use my hands, nothing but a long walk up snowslopes and a long trudge across a snowy plain through clinging damp snow, and yet as I tumbled into bed I knew beyond all need of argument that I had stumbled on an experience which would change

my whole outlook. From that moment there was no looking back and no hope of a cure for mountain fever.”

There must be hundreds of potential mountaineers to whom no climber addresses the barrier-dissolving words, “you too can climb”. Even vertigo is not a final deterrent, for there are scores of fine snow peaks and glacier passes which even the victims of vertigo can climb without a moment of anxiety. Mountaineering is a general term which covers everything from the most desperate of adventures to the easiest of snow peaks and snow passes. The majesty and loveliness of the High Alps are not the monopoly of the athlete and the acrobat.

In these days of currency restrictions and high taxes it is not, perhaps, as easy to become a mountaineer as in the century when the Alpine Club was founded, but the Swiss are making every effort to help the beginner. The Government pays 30% of the guide’s tariff, and for easy mountains one guide can look after two or even three active young men. Such a party would soon learn to find their way about the lesser peaks, the Wildstrubel for instance, without a guide, saving their francs for difficult expeditions.

Arnold Lunn

