

**MY HOME IN THE  
ALPS.**

**BY  
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# PREFACE.



In this little volume, much of the matter in which first appeared in the *St. Moritz Post*, or, as it is now called, the *Alpine Post*, I have jotted down a few things of interest to the ordinary traveller in Switzerland. To climbers, my notes will be but a thrice-told tale, and one which, doubtless, many of them could tell far better, while not a few of them have already told it elsewhere. The idea of publishing these trifling papers came to me through the necessity of replying to many questions on the subjects to which I refer; for, living as I do in Switzerland, I naturally am supposed to be more familiar with the peculiarities of the country and people than is the ordinary tourist. It thus seems to me that a small book, dealing with some of the various objects of interest usually met with during a summer's tour in Switzerland, might find a corner in a traveller's portmanteau, and so, asking indulgence for the errors into which I am sure I have fallen from time to time, I commend the following pages to whoever does me the honour to glance at them.

E. MAIN.

ENGADINER KULM,  
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# **MY HOME IN THE ALPS.**



## CHAPTER I. *ON ALPINE GUIDES.*

Beyond the comparatively small circle of climbers, very few travellers in Switzerland seem to have a clear idea to what class of man a good Alpine guide belongs. Many persons picture to themselves a typical guide as an individual whose garments are in as shocking a state of disrepair as are the summits of most of his native peaks; who bears visible and invisible evidence of an entire ignorance of the use of soap in combination with water; to whom Truefitt is embodied twice a year in his wife, unless perchance his youngest born is allowed as a treat to wield the shears; whose manner is boorish, whose gait is too strong a mixture of a roll and a limp to be classified even as a slouch, and whose chief aim in life is the extraction of the largest possible number of francs from his employer's pocket in return for the smallest possible amount of work. Furthermore, these people have curious ideas as to "the whole duty of" a guide. They think that he is bound to obey, without remonstrance on his part, any orders, however unreasonable, that his employer may give him. They expect no common-sense, education, or knowledge of the world from him, so they treat him as if he were a clumsily constructed machine, capable of running in the groove of an oft-traversed track, and of nothing else.

Now, it is a pity that such ignorance should prevail on the subject, and I propose to do my humble share in dispelling some of it by pointing out the chief characteristics of a first-rate Alpine guide, and backing up my opinion by anecdotes of the behaviour of some

of the masters of mountain-craft when confronted with exceptionally strong calls on their capacity.

Before going further, I should like to say something of the early training of a guide. He usually makes acquaintance with climbing when very young, his first scrambles being often undertaken in the company of the goats. In time he gains confidence, steadiness of head and foot, and a knowledge of the limit of his powers. As years go on, he is perhaps taken out chamois-shooting by his father, and in summer he obtains an occasional engagement as porter on an ascent of more or less difficulty. If he has definitely resolved to be a guide, he will do his best to get work of this sort, and it often happens that an active young porter, who has carried one's rugs and firewood to a bivouac over-night, begs to join the expedition in the morning, "just to learn the way." In reality, his chief object is to secure a few lines of commendation in his book, which will help him to future engagements, and will also be so much to the good when he puts forward his claim to a certificate as guide. When ascending the Jungfrau some years ago, our porter, at his urgent request, came on with us to the top, and it was interesting to notice the careful teaching which my two veteran guides, old Peter Baumann and old Peter Kaufmann, bestowed on him. It was the youth's first mountain, and I could see that he strained every nerve to avoid a slip and to gain my good opinion, in which he certainly succeeded, for he went very well, though he was, not unnaturally, scared at the huge crevasses below the Bergli, the glacier being just then in a particularly bad state. Very different was the behaviour of another porter, chartered to carry my camera on any easy snow-ascent. He, too, had never before set foot on a mountain, and he commenced his antics at the snout of the Forno glacier, which he mounted on all-fours. Farther on he objected to the crevasses, and

when we reached the *arête*, he was so formidable an appendage on the rope that we untied, and went up the last rocks in two parties, on two ropes, another lady, an Eton boy, and I leading, and the porter and the two guides following!

A porter, if he shows good climbing capacity, will often be taken in the height of the season, when guides are scarce, to accompany a guide and a traveller in the less difficult ascents, in order that there may be three on the rope, an important matter on snow. He will probably undertake most of the carrying, for the simple reason that the guide leads and cuts the steps, and, in descending, comes down last, in both of which cases it is well for him not to be burdened with a knapsack, but to give his full powers to his work in ascending, and in coming down to be the more secure in his responsible position of “last man.”

Occasionally the boy becomes a guide without passing through the intermediate state of a porter. Here is an account of Joseph Imboden’s experiences. I had the details from the guide himself, but the account is also to be found in the biographical notice written by Mr. G. S. Barnes in “The Pioneers of the Alps.”<sup>[1]</sup> “When I was a boy,” Imboden began, “my father wished me to take up shoemaking as a trade, and at fifteen he apprenticed me to a man in the Rhonethal. But I hated the life, and as soon as I had saved twenty francs I ran away to the Riffel, where I stayed, and spent my time in asking people to let me take them up mountains. They, however, always said to me, ‘Young man, where is your book?’ I replied that my book was at home, but they would not believe me. At last, when my twenty francs were nearly gone, I contrived to persuade a young English gentleman to allow me to take him up the Cima di Jazzi. He was pleased with the way I guided him, and the day after we went up Monte Rosa alone. He

then offered to take me to Chamonix by the Col St. Théodule and the Col du Géant, and I was very glad to go; but first I told him the whole truth. I said, 'All I have told you up to now was lies; I had never been up a mountain till I went with you; but if you will trust me now, I am sure I can satisfy you.' He said he would, and we went to Chamonix and did some climbs there. I bought a book, and he wrote a good account of me in it. Since then I have never been in want of employment." Such is Joseph Imboden's early history, and his friends will admit that it is thoroughly characteristic of the since famous guide.

A porter desiring to become a guide must generally pass an examination in a variety of subjects which are not of the slightest importance to him in his future profession. The occasion is dignified by the presence of the *guide-chef* (or head of the Society of Guides) and other local magnates, before whom the *guides-aspirants*, as they are called, are put through their facings. After questions are asked in arithmetic, geography, history, &c., the examination at which I "assisted" went on to deal with mountain-craft, on which subject the porters' ideas were even more peculiar than on other matters. One young man asserted, in perfect good faith, that if his *Herr* did not obey him, he should consider it his duty to beat him, while another calmly said that if he met with an obstacle on an ascent, the right course to pursue was to return home! At the conclusion of the examination, which all contrived in one way or another to shuffle through, the *guide-chef* made a little speech, in which he exhorted the new guides to be an honour to their profession. I made notes at the time of the more amusing questions and answers, and these I have published in a former work.<sup>[2]</sup>

Having now considered the technical conditions which, combined, form a duly qualified guide, let us see what characteristics are required to place him in the front rank of his profession.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### ***THE CAUTION AND DETERMINATION OF GUIDES.***

Amongst the qualities required in a first-class guide, I am inclined to rank caution as the chief. Many other characteristics are also necessary, such as a strong will, enabling the guide to compel those in his care to obey him; dash and courage, by which he overcomes obstacles; skill in climbing, as well as in forming an opinion of the condition of snow; ability in finding his way up or down a mountain, whether he has ever previously ascended it or not; coolness in moments of danger, promptness of action in a sudden emergency, resource in difficulties of whatever nature that may arise; strength of muscle, sound health, good temper, unselfishness, honesty, and great experience. What a catalogue! And yet I do not know one guide of the first order who does not possess something of all, and a large amount of several, of the many qualities which I have enumerated above, to say nothing of others which I have doubtless overlooked.

I should like first to tell you of some instances where guides have displayed a praiseworthy caution under strong inducement to overstep the bounds of prudence. One example, which I extract from "The Pioneers of the Alps," that mine of information on guide-lore, is very characteristic of the great guide Melchior Anderegg. Mr. Mathews writes: "He knows when it is right to go on, and when it is the truest bravery to turn back. 'Es geht, Melchior,' said a fine climber once in my hearing when we came

to a dangerous spot. 'Ja,' replied Melchior, '*es geht, aber ich gehe nicht;*' or, in other words, 'It goes, but I do not go.'"

Edouard Cupelin of Chamonix, a guide with whom in former years I made many ascents, has frequently shown me that he possesses his right and proper share of this brave caution. Once in winter, when within an hour of the summit of Mont Blanc, he made us turn back, considering the danger of persisting in the face of a snow-storm unjustifiable, though the difficulties were all behind us. Once, too, I had hankerings after the Schreckhorn on a windy morning in October, but my guide reminded us of what the action of the storm on the friable rocks below the Saddle was likely to be, and refused to have anything to do with the peak, which showed up every now and then in a tantalising way against a patch of blue sky.

But the caution of a good guide does not need to be proved by any collection of anecdotes. It is seen every time he prods for the hidden crevasse in crossing a snow-field. It is noticeable whenever he begs his companions (probably for the tenth time at least that day) to keep the rope taut. It is shown when he refuses to take a self-opinionated amateur up a difficult mountain in bad weather, or to allow the amateur's friend, attired in tennis-flannels, to join the expedition at the last moment, because "'Pon my word, I must do the Matterhorn some time or another, you know!"

A guide who has not a strong will can never hope to be quite at the top of the tree in his profession. Some guides, however, are, of course, more determined than others.

I remember an amusing tale *à propos* of this characteristic, which a friend told me of Joseph Imboden. The incident occurred on the Breithorn, an easy though fatiguing snow-peak in the Zermatt

district. One cold day, Imboden had a leaden-footed, pig-headed Englishman in tow. This sagacious gentleman, when half-way up the mountain, observed that he was tired, and intended to refresh himself by a snooze on the snow. Imboden naturally objected to the proceeding, explaining that it was extremely dangerous, and drawing vivid word-pictures of ill-starred persons who had been frozen to death. However, the traveller persisted, and finally, in reply to Imboden's repeated refusals to allow him to carry out his wishes, exclaimed indignantly, "I pay you, and you are my servant, and I shall do as I please!" The situation had become critical. Imboden saw that the time for strong measures had arrived. He said to his *Herr*, "That is quite true. Now you do as you choose, and I shall do as I choose. You lie down and sleep, and as surely as you do so I shall give you a box on the ear that you won't easily forget!" "What!" cried the irate tourist; "no! you would not dare!" "Oh, yes," said Imboden quietly, "and a thoroughly good box on the ear too!" The *Herr*, in a furious temper, plodded on to the top, and made no further suggestions for repose, but the whole way down he sulked and growled and would not be coaxed into good-humour. However, after dinner at Zermatt and a chat with his friends, things began to look different, and the same evening he sought out his guide, and shaking him by the hand, thanked him warmly for his conduct.

This recalls to my mind another little scene which took place on the same mountain, the account of which I had from an eye-witness. A guide, unknown to fame, but evidently resolute and determined of spirit, was hauling a panting, expostulating German up the snow-slopes between the Col St. Théodule and the Breithorn. When my friend, who was descending, met them, the German was piteously entreating to be taken home, declaring that

he was nearly dead and had seen all that he wanted to see. “Why don’t you turn back?” my friend inquired of the guide. “Herr,” said that individual, “er *kann* gehen, er *muss* gehen—er hat schon bezahlt!” (Sir, he *can* go, he *must* go—he has paid in advance!)

Here is another little tale. Once upon a time a certain well-known guide was taking a traveller up the Weisshorn. The weather was abominable. In addition, the mountain was in very bad order, covered with ice and soft snow. The ascent had been long and tiring, and during the descent the gentleman (whose first season it was), worn-out with fatigue, completely lost his nerve. At last he exclaimed, “I cannot go on, I simply *cannot*.” “You must,” the guide said. “Indeed, I cannot go one step farther,” the traveller replied. “Sir,” the guide continued, “if we don’t go on we shall be benighted on this ridge and be frozen to death, and that must not happen.” Still the gentleman stood still as though turned to stone. The guide saw that his words had no effect; so making himself firm, he called out to the porter, “Pull down the *Herr* by his feet.” The wretched Herr feebly glared at the porter, who demurred, saying, “I dare not, he will be so angry; besides, if I did, we should all slip together.” “Very well, come up here, and I will take your place. See to yourself; I will be responsible for the rest,” answered the guide, and he and the porter changed places. Now came the tug of war. Standing near the gentleman, the guide seized him by the collar of his coat and dropped him down a step. This he repeated two or three times, till the traveller, reassured by the firmness of the grasp and the decision of the act, gradually recovered his mental as well as his bodily balance, and before long he was able to help himself.

### CHAPTER III.

#### *SOME MORE CHARACTERISTICS OF FIRST-RATE GUIDES.*

Though it is a platitude to say that all good guides are plucky, yet some are more noted for “dash” than others. The names which at once come to the minds of most persons in connection with this characteristic would probably be those of, in the past, Michel Croz, Jean-Antoine Carrel, Johann Petrus, and a few others, and, in the present, Alexander Burgener, Emile Rey, Christian Jossi, and to mine, Martin Schocher. The three last names but one in my list are well known; that of Martin Schocher is less so. I must here make a slight digression in order to undertake a pleasant duty. In a former work, referred to before, I made some uncomplimentary remarks concerning Engadine guides.[3] Since then, however, Martin Schocher has come to the front, and has gained an amount of experience which no other Pontresina man can pretend to. Few expeditions of first-rate difficulty in the district have been made which were not led by him. On the three first occasions when the formidable ridge between Piz Scerscen and Piz Bernina was traversed, Schocher headed the party. The only time that the central west *arête* of Piz Palü was taken, he again led; and on the single occasion when Piz Morteratsch was climbed from the saddle between that peak and Piz Prievlusa, the party consisted of Schocher and Mr. Garwood only. Of this ascent Schocher declares that it was the hardest piece of work he ever undertook, consisting as it did of smooth rocky slabs, steeply inclined, and narrowing very often to the merest knife-edge.

During the past autumn Schocher for the first time left his native district, and went to the chief climbing centres of the Alps (the Oberland and Dauphiné excepted). The party were fortunate in their weather, and ascended the Dent Blanche, the Aiguille de la Za, and several other first-class peaks. If Schocher were to travel for another season or two, he would gain enough experience to place him on a par with some of the best men in the Oberland.

A fine rock-climber, a marvellously good and rapid step-cutter (his steps being large, well shaped, and exactly in the right place), of powerful build, and very willing and cheerful, Schocher is an ideal guide, and a credit to Pontresina. There are one or two young guides in the place who show promise, and Klucker of Sils is a host in himself; so the Engadine may fairly be congratulated on its progress in this respect during the last six or eight years.

Though Chamonix guides have deservedly acquired a reputation for their skill on ice and snow, yet, oddly enough, it is a St. Nicholas man who is said to most excel in this branch of mountaineering. In the biography of Joseph Imboden in "The Pioneers of the Alps" Mr. Barnes writes: "His (Imboden's) judgment as to the state of the snow is excellent, and may be implicitly relied on." Sometimes, when climbing with this guide, I have expressed my fears of possible avalanches, and he has invariably, by a joke or one of those biting sarcasms which his soul loveth, banished my fears; for his wonderful quickness in noting exactly when and where the snow is safe, and when or where it begins to show a tendency to slip, would restore confidence to any one, however timid.

I have many times watched, with ever-increasing admiration, how a couple of first-class Chamonix guides will work their way

through a perfect maze of *séracs* and crevasses and other obstacles incident to the wild chaos of an ice-fall. I have twice been through the *séracs* of Géant at night, starting at 11 P.M. from Montanvert, and accompanied by Michel Savioz, then a porter. He threaded his way round crevasses, over snow-bridges, and up and down *séracs* as if he was accustomed to going backwards and forwards nightly over the pass; and, on many other occasions, it has been a real delight to me to watch from the rear of the caravan the perfect confidence and ease with which these masters of their art grapple with the difficulties of a broken glacier. I was particularly struck some years ago by the skill and “dash” displayed by two of my guides, Auguste Cupelin and Alphonse Payot, in forcing a passage across the upper plateau of the Glacier de la Brenva. We had mounted in the morning to a bivouac on the moraine of the glacier, where, under a large boulder, we hit upon the remains of an old encampment, which had probably been the sleeping quarters of the three or four parties who had made or attempted different excursions from this point. We deposited our knapsacks and rugs, lit a fire with the wood which we had collected lower down, and then, after despatching a hasty meal, the two guides set out to make tracks across this formidable glacier. Our object, on the morrow, was to attempt the ascent of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, but as some of the previous parties had spent hours in getting over the glacier which lay between our bivouac and the peak, my guides wisely decided to make a track over it that very afternoon, and thus, by having our way mapped out in advance, to save several hours in the morning. The reader may wonder why, in order to gain time, we did not shift our night-quarters to the other side of the glacier. This we should certainly have done if we could have found even the smallest piece of rock to take up our abode on, but snow was over everything, and therefore we had no choice but to remain on

the left bank of the glacier. As I sat on a huge stone overlooking the ice, armed with a telescope, I could watch all my guides' movements. One moment Auguste would make a rush at a great lurching *sérac*, the next he would have scrambled to the top, and be ready to step down the other side whilst Alphonse tightened the rope. Then I would see him clear, with a frantic spring, a yawning chasm, and turn and draw in the cord as Alphonse followed his example. Now both would disappear, soon to come into sight again, and seeming to rise out of the depths of the glacier, and Auguste would fall to work with his axe, hacking steps up a glassy wall until he conquered it. And so they worked on, ever progressing towards their goal, whilst I sat engrossed in watching such a brilliant display of ice-craft. It was dark before they returned, and I am sure my reader will sympathise when I tell him that, in spite of all this toil, we were unable to do the Aiguille (then an untrodden peak) the next day. We started about 1 A.M., traversed the glacier, and mounted the steep snow-slopes beyond; but the weather, which was slightly cloudy when we set out, grew gradually worse and worse, till at last heavily falling snow compelled us to abandon our attempt, and in terribly low spirits we retraced our steps to our bivouac, gathered together our baggage, and sulkily descended to the valley. We crossed the Col de la Seigne that afternoon, and next morning, in lovely weather, but through a sprinkling of lately fallen snow, went over the charming little snow-pass of Mont Tendu to St. Gervais, and thence by Chamonix home to Montanvert.

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