

The Engadine and its Winter Sports.

THE VALLEY of the upper Engadine lies in the southern portion of Switzerland some twenty-five miles from the Italian frontier. It begins at Maloja and extends as far as Samaden, lying among the Bernina Alps which rise high on either side. The Berninas are wooded on the lower slopes but the summits are bare and rounded differing greatly from the rugged and precipitous Juras. The valley is 1400 metres above sea-level and on this account the Engadine winters are consistently cold and excellently suited for tourists who seek a bracing climate.

The Engadine is one of the oldest of the Roman colonies. The people at present living here are said to be the descendants of the soldiers whom Caesar left in this valley at the close of his Gallic campaigns. The language spoken is neither German nor Italian but seems a mixture of both and is called Romanish. This is also the name of the people, who are a hardy and friendly race always good-tempered sometimes indolent. At first it is difficult for the stranger to understand how they make a living for no crops are grown, save hay. Neither are there any industries nor manufactures and yet all are well-to-do: many are rich and some are millionaires. But the tourist who finds that his purse has been depleted to twice the extent he had estimated and about four times the amount it would be in a country where conditions are normal is no longer ignorant of how the Romanish make a living. If he is a philosopher he may console himself by reasoning that his coming has made life possible for the Romanish—

if he is not a philosopher well he should not be a tourist.

Until quite recently, the Engadine was unknown as a winter resort and visitors who wished to enjoy a winter holiday among the Alps, went to Davos, Goindelwald or Wengen. But the building of a railroad from Chur to the Engadine enables the traveller to enter the valley with a fair degree of comfort. At the Engadine terminus is St. Moritz, a rather unique village as it contains 23 hotels. In fact the village is practically a collection of hotels and shops. These latter do a thriving business and charge most exorbitant prices. For instance to have a pair of skates sharpened costs 65 cents and if the skater wants them sharpened immediately he has to pay about \$1.00. Everything else is on the same extravagant schedule.

During the winter season St. Moritz is thronged with tourists from almost every country in Europe who come to enjoy the winter sports. Skating is very popular and every hotel has one or more open air rinks for the accomodation of its guests. Fast skating is discountenanced and sometimes those inclined to race or play games are asked to leave the ice. It seems to be the ambition of everyone to become a good figure skater and the instructor is highly paid for his instructions. The skates used are short-bladed and are much like the ordinary spring skate. The importance of having a short-bladed skate is apparent to anyone who has ever tried waltzing on the ice. But for fast skating such a blade is useless and when playing "bandy"—the Swiss or rather the Engadine substitute for hockey—the Swiss tourist always runs on his skates—never attempting a stride.

Bandy is played with a lacrosse ball and a round

stick shaped somewhat like a hockey stick but being shorter both in the handle and the blade. There is no off-side and each team has nine players. As the ice area is about two acres nine players are not too many. The goal nets are 12 feet wide. We Canadians played one game with the St Moritz Bandy Club and managed to secure a draw. Hockey is played in the other winter resorts of Switzerland.

For those who like novelty and excitement skiing has its charms but this is an exasperating sport for a beginner. Skis are very difficult to control and are always doing the most unexpected things. Just when the novice is about to congratulate himself on his success he suddenly finds that he is resting on the back of his head and his shoulder blades with his feet fastened to the skis three or four feet off the ground. If there is no one near to assist him he is liable to remain there indefinitely. All this is risky enough but it never daunts or teaches the beginner. Once on skis he is seized with an almost insane desire to come down the steepest slopes he can find and shows a special predilection for a wooded mountain side. Of course he comes to grief—he always does, and it is safe to assume that the person limping around the hotel vestibule with his face covered with scratches and his arm in a sling has been skiing much more than his ability or experience recommended. But, to the professional, skiing is a most inviting sport and parties on skis make long expeditions around the mountains. Ski-going races are sometimes held on St. Moritz lake.

But the greatest of all winter sports of the Engadine is tobogganing. The toboggan used is not the Canadian toboggan but resembles more the Canadian handsled. Every village has its toboggan run which is a long track down a steep slope. Walls

of snow are built up on either side and then the track is sprinkled with water to give a good icy surface. At the curves—for the track is scarcely ever straight—the outside wall is built firmly and high and is at an angle of about forty five degrees to the track. The coaster goes down the run lying face downwards on the toboggan and directs it by dragging the spiked toes of his great Alpine boots. Alarming spills and extraordinary somersaults are seen on a toboggan run but to the enthusiast these come as a matter of course and add greatly to the pleasure of the sport.

Undoubtedly the best known toboggan run in the Engadine and for that matter in Switzerland is the Cresta. It is a steep and winding track, from St. Moritz to Cellerina and is only opened in sections, the full course being opened about the last of February. It is in the interests of the hotel managers that this delay should be, for the tourist does not care to leave the Engadine without having come down the Cresta. Several fatal accidents have happened on this run and now any person wishing to go down it must qualify on the village run in St. Moritz. Speed contests are held each year on the Cresta and a cup is awarded for the fastest average in three runs. For the past few years a lady was well up among the prize winners.

Another run equally famous with the Cresta is the bobsleigh run which also comes down the slope from St. Moritz to Cellerina. It is a winding, tortuous course between trees and rocks turning in some places at right angles. At such angles the wall on the outside is 10 or 12 feet high and the bobsleigh takes the wall about half-way up. A steering gear is attached to a bobsleigh for four or five persons generally go down on one sleigh. The speed is very great and a nervous hand on the steering wheel would

mean death or terrible injury to the whole party. A Derby is held on this run each year and Danny Mahar, the jockey, won first place this year, his experience on the turf being, no doubt, of great assistance to him on the bobsleigh.

Those who do not wish to risk their reputations on skis or skates or their lives on toboggans can indulge in sleighing. But here again the love of novelty and excitement is shown and the tourist "tails." Now tailing is nothing more than sleighing on a little toboggan attached to a cutter much as the small boy does in Charlottetown to the great annoyance of the countrymen. To one cutter eight or ten sleighs are often attached and upon these everyone wishes to go. Even old people to whom years should have given wisdom prefer the novelty of tailing to the comforts of the cutter. When the party is at the hotel door and the morning sun shines brightly and warmly from a cloudless Alpine sky tailing appears the joy of joys, the consummation of Engadine happiness. But when the short winter day is drawing to a close and several miles of a bleak mountain road full of bumps and pitches are to be traversed ere the hotel is reached, the enthusiastic tailer of the morning is very glad to seek the warmth and shelter of the cutter.

A favorite drive is to Moloja by the lake of Sils at the beginning of the upper Engadine. Our poet—every party has a poet—said that a visit to Moloja would give us more genuine pleasure than all the other sports or amusements or scenery of Switzerland. Although none of us believed him yet one bright January morning we set out from Samaden to see this much-admired Moloja. In the party were about six cutters and twenty-five tailing sleighs. In our cutter there were two persons and two others tailing behind.

Everything promised well but the driver. As far as we could make out he spoke neither English, French, Latin nor German. Even under these circumstances it was possible to get along quite happily providing nothing unusual occurred. But something unusual did occur for, when the road became rough one of the tailers was left sprawling in the snow. To our cries the driver remained stoically indifferent and drove on quite calmly thinking perhaps that we were merely expressing our delight at the beauty of the scenery or our admiration of the excellence of his driving. There was but one thing to do and we did it. As he gathered himself from the snow he seemed to realize that it was possible something might be wrong. To start him again was another difficult matter but we succeeded in doing that also. Our subsequent conversation was more expressive than rhetorical but he soon learned to understand us. His parents must have sadly neglected his education for we found him an apt pupil and his case is a strong argument in favor of teaching languages in our elementary schools.

The road from Samaden to Moloja follows the Engadine valley throughout its course, running through the villages of Cellerina, St. Moritz, Chamfer, and Silvplana. Moloja itself is a small village, very beautifully situated on the southwest border of the lake of Sils, and is much frequented by visitors. One of the Moloja hotels has a motto to the effect, "whoever comes each year to Moloja shall live many years," which shows that there must be some poets in Moloja also, although we westerners would call them by a harsher name. The village is on the highest point of the Engadine. On the Northwest is the lake of Sils and on the southwest is the abrupt descent into the Val Bregaglia. Alone on the edge of the bluff

which commands the Val Bregaglia is the old Chateau Belvedere and we climbed to the top of this castle to get a better view. Directly beneath us, an almost perpendicular descent of 2500 feet lay the Val Bregaglia. Its lower slopes are covered with pine and fir and their dark green is a striking contrast to the snow clad summits. On the right of the Chateau huge rocks stand sentinels to the valley. On the left the road descends in twelve bends and then, glimmering in the sun follows the valley into the distance. Little cottages nestle in the valley looking very small against such a gigantic back-ground. We were gazing admiringly on the scene when the Poet deeming this was his hour of triumph broke out exultingly, "Now. Is it not grand? is it not magnificent as I told? Here is the dividing line between two countries and perhaps it was on this very spot that Hannibal stood and told his famished, frozen fretful followers—"This is the end of all toil and your struggles. Yonder is Italy." But the guide was not gifted with such an imagination and told us rather prosaically that we could not see Italy as it was about twenty miles farther on. The poet was crushed and during the remainder of our stay in the Engadine his remarks on scenery savored very much of Baedeker and he never mentioned Maloja. If, however, the Swiss and Italian authorities could arrange to have the frontier at Maloja it would add greatly to the interest of the view.

As it is but natural in a country so old and so secluded, many quaint and curious customs are still found among the Romanish. Perhaps the most charming is their observance of the passing of the old year. At a quarter to twelve on New Year's Eve every little village of the Engadine rings its church bell and continues to ring until the New Year has

entered. At Samaden we could not hear distinctly as the big bell of the Lutheran Church boomed out so loudly as to drown all other sounds. We walked to a spot about one mile from the village and could then distinguish the bells of seven villages. From Silvaplana to Praeda the sound reverberated through the valley and the mountains gave back the echo. The waning moon had just risen over the Bernias and shone down into the snow-clad valley. The little river Inn—alternately in the soft light and in the dark shadow of the mountains—flowed on its winding, murmuring course to the Danube. The tall white summits of the Bernias stood clearly out against the deep blue of the cloudless Alpine sky and the firs and spruce of the lower slopes looked very, very dark by contrast. The simple custom in its stupendous setting was the most impressive thing we had ever seen and one that we shall remember.

As we passed back through the village we found that all the villagers had remained up to exchange greetings and with the Romanish cordiality they wished us a Happy New Year.

Very few ever leave the Engadine without wishing to be able to revisit it. There is some indefinable charm about the place—some subtle attraction which all feel but cannot account for. It is a spot secluded and retired. A spot where dwell a happy, kindly people—where nature has been generous with her scenery and where she has been given an added grace—a charming sweet sounding name—The Engadine.

A TOURIST.