

IN AN ALPINE VALLEY.

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A WHITSUNTIDE WALK.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT IN SWITZERLAND.)

When we got to Kandersteg, late in the evening, the whole valley was swathed in a thick white blanket of mist. The great Lötschberg engine had hauled us high up into a sea of drifting clouds instead of to a world of summer-blue skies and sparkling sunshine. Everything was dripping and dismal; every one, except a few French prisoners whom we passed on the road, unutterably cold and depressed.

Once we were reassured by the sight of a band of Swiss youths and maidens, armed with ice-axes and girt with coils of rope and ruck-sacks. But that relief was short-lived. It was their Whitsun holiday, and nothing would have prevented them from attempting the first climb of the year. But even they—you could see it in their faces—had practically given up hope. In fact, except for the French soldiers, the only cheerful person we saw before we turned in was our landlord.

AWAY FROM WAR.

In the morning something, perhaps it was our joint faith, had removed the mist and brought the mountains into view, and we woke early to find the whole stage set in a flood of glorious sunshine. We were neither of us climbers. The high peaks, like the trenches, were beyond our powers. All we wanted and were physically fit for was to wander for a few hours where the rock walls spring from the short green turf, gathering flowers while we might.

Except once more for the wounded French prisoners, whom every now and then we met limping along the valley tracts with smiling, friendly faces, we were far away from the war. But there were many signs about us of the ceaseless war between man and nature. Every new railway and almost every time-worn path has claimed its victims. In the village cemetery and the little churchyard

...and the little churchyard we saw the graves of many Italian workmen whom accident had swept away during the building of the great tunnel, and here and there on the tombstones a sculptured ice-axe and climbing-rope, or the word *gestürzt* instead of the ordinary *gestorben*, marked the last resting-place of a strong and vigorous body which had fallen and been dashed to death from some grim unconquered height. One of these dumb eloquent inscriptions we found cut on a slab carved in the virgin rock, high up on the face of the cliff overhanging the entrance to the gorge leading from the upper valley of the Kander river, through which the rushing torrent leaps and thunders down from one gigantic boulder to another in a swirl of irresistible weight and never-ending force.

A HUNT FOR FLOWERS.

At the lower end of the gorge, close to the tiny archway, looking like a mousehole at the foot of a castle wall, where the Löt-schberg railway burrows into the base of the solid *massif* of the mountain, we began our hunt for flowers. In the wood at the lower end of the gorge the rocks and many of the tree-trunks were half hidden under deep soft cushions of endless varieties of mosses. Here we found chiefly fresh young fronds of oak and beech and bladder ferns, and in among them, starring the moss-cushions, thousands of violets, the tiny yellow violet of the Alps, which, once it has made its shy start under the damp shelter of an old tree-stump or a leaning rock, spreads very quickly. Higher up the gorge and in the clear sunlight of the level valley beyond it was difficult at first to keep one's eyes glued to the ground; the flowers were so infinitely small, the sheer rock walls, grey and brown and red, and the wide white expanse, beyond and between and above them, of billowy clouds and snowy peaks against a background of limitless blue, so infinitely grand and great.

Saxifrages, of course, we found in plenty, half-a-dozen different varieties, tiny star-shaped blossoms of pink and white and yellow on slender stalks, springing from low-growing tufts of incrustated leaves with delicate sawlike edges. Over the taller flowers—deep purple and yellowy-green orchids and golden globe-flowers and others that like plenty of rich soil—we spent little time. It was the hardy Alpine plants that filled our bag, the lightly-rooted delicate little fellows that have no time in their

short lives to grow long stalks and make up for it by the rich colour or abnormal size of their blossoms. Little gentians and big gentians, *verna* and *acaulis*, the spring and summer variety, were still flowering everywhere, though, except in one high pasture the whole of it one rich carpet of the two gorgeous blues, their time was nearly over. Another plant that still lingered here and there was the stubby little Winter Heather, which looks like a sprig of larch with a knot of little pink bells near its upper end.

PURPLE, WHITE, AND YELLOW.

Of varying shades of purple we found the little Purple Speedwell with its single flower, the Mealy Primrose, with three delicate blossoms on each stalk and a white underleaf, the Mossy Campion, single blossoms on a stalk barely half an inch long, a larger Alpine form of our English Red Rattle, the everlasting Mountain Cudweed, the Lanaria, a rich purple flower with tiny brownish yellow patches, growing freely on a heap of skree, and the *Erinus Alpina*. And then there were the whites and yellows—*Pyrola Uniflora*, with its solid little bunch of stamens and pistils, which loves the roots of fir-trees, the brown-sheathed Marsh Cinquefoil, the sweet-smelling plant with brown and yellow flowers something like a snapdragon in shape and long narrow leaves, which the Germans (perhaps with a longing for higher things) call *Männer Treue*, Mountain Bedstraw, the White Butterwort, Rock Cress, the White Buttercup (*Glacier Ranunculus*), the anemone-like Mountain Arens (*Dryas*), most graceful and commonest of all at this season, the Alpine Ladies' Mantle, with its beautifully silvered leaves, and a white daisy-like flower with a particularly long green calix whose name we did not know.

But even here among the flowers we did not, after all, get quite away from the war. For there fell upon us a Swiss cattle-farmer, who gets all the opinions he has from one notorious pro-German newspaper. Here was no neutral, but an ignorant all-knowing fellow who was able to tell us that the war was all the fault of England, that it was we who had begun it and we who were prolonging it, we who had induced France and Russia to join in it, and we who in the end would pay the heaviest penalty. And that is how the poison does its work, even in the upland valleys among the flowers and the ferns.
