

WAITING FOR THE NEW

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“ WIR müssen auf den Neuen warten ” (“ We must wait for the New ”). One might have thought, from the fervour of his tone, that he was speaking of a new Messiah, had he not, as he said the words, standing outside the leafy open window, jerked his head towards the green mountains, still striped at the summit with patches of shimmering snow.

Often in winter, after a great snowfall, the skier looks out of his window at night, and seeing a clear sky pictures to himself the virgin, untracked slopes that await him in the morning. And so great is his longing to see spread out below him the unspoiled slopes, to lay the first track, that a whole night, even though spent in unconsciousness, seems an intolerable time to wait. And what of the summer, when he must spend not a few unconscious hours but half a year of long-dayed months waiting for the New ?

But the truth is that for the skier time does not count. Waiting is waiting, whether it be for a night or for six months ; and inversely the prospect of a ski-run is as exciting, day after day, to the *rentier* or *pensioner* who spends Michaelmas to May Day on the snow, as to the bread-winner who snatches a fortnight at Christmas. Each, on waking, thrills at the thought “ to-day I am going to ski ” ; each has sat for hours in heavy and perhaps wet ski-ing boots, merely to put off the moment when he must confess to himself “ to-day’s ski-ing is over.” As for the great wrench, the loosening of the bindings, and stepping out of the skis for the last time, the holiday-skier’s great pang—the man of leisure will do all in his power to avoid it. He lingers where there are still streaks of white above the tree-line, or near glaciers that can still be skied upon at three in the morning or nine at night ; he will not oil his skis or pack them away. The season is not over ; there is

a ski meeting on the Glockner in June, at the Jungfrau in July.

Meanwhile thick grass and leisurely buttercups cover the slopes where in winter-time split seconds were disputed. Beyond these slopes were once mountains, cornices, avalanches, blizzards; now there are only dwarfish green hills, tinged here and there with a mist of blue or yellow flowers. And if the gentian, the primulas, the soldanella, the snow-anemones in all their glory were suddenly blotted out by a metre of powder snow, no skier, even though he were also a great lover of flowers, would for an instant mourn. It is an obsession, a madness. Can there be any other sport that has such a hold? Does the fisherman lay down his rod with such a pang? This at least the skier has in common with the fisherman, that he is never tired of talking about his sport, never grows weary indeed of going over and over again through all the familiar stages of the same conversation. "The Telemark turn still has its uses," "Funiculars have ruined ski-ing," "Steel edges are dangerous for beginners." And when there is no one to talk to, the skier does run in his head, holds triumphantly the "Schuss" he has never quite ventured, changes the snow at will from the pillows and billows of January powder to the day-dream pliancy of "Firn" or the glinting steel of early-morning glacier snow. Of the New, lying lightly on hummocks of shale and over the brown autumn grass, he banishes all thought. It is far away; not months only, but manifold contingencies—wars, sickness, penury lie between.

[From *The New Statesman and Nation*,
by courtesy of the Author.]

Selo F.G. Pan. Film, Zeiss G1 yellow filter, 1/100 sec., f11, sunny, noon, September. Side lighting; at this elevation (9,400 feet) little difference is apparent with different filters. All produce dark skies.



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JUNGFRAU AND CONCORDIA PLATZ

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