

AN IDEAL WINTER.

THE DELIGHTS OF ALPINE SPORT.

(From an occasional correspondent.)

Kandersteg, January.

"And the young gentlemen are in the Halps" quoth the pompous butler in *Punch*, in answer to an enquiry as to the whereabouts of his employer and family at Christmas time. Probably many an English butler could have made a similar remark this winter, for never has the fashion of spending the Christmas holidays amid the glorious scenery of the Swiss Alps found more devotees than this season. From Montreux to St. Moritz, Grindelwald to Montana come the same reports of hotels crowded with visitors who have come in hundreds, for the most part from England, to enjoy "le winter sport" in all its branches; skating, tobogganing, skiing, tailing, bob-sleighting, etc.

To visit one of these sport resorts is to wish to make an annual pilgrimage thither. For myself, I had but vague ideas of what Switzerland was like in winter; much the same as summer, I supposed, only more so. Of a truth there was not much opportunity for gaining new impressions on the journey, for picturesque old Basle was already wrapped in a white mantle when we left it, and all day the big snow-flakes kept stealing down, blotting out all view of the landscape we traversed. Twilight had come ere we exchanged the comparative comfort of a railway carriage for the chill welcome of a sleigh; for, muffled up to the eyes, a couple of hours' drive in the darkness was necessary before we could reach Kandersteg, which nestles at the foot of the Gemmi pass beneath which yet another of the vast tunnels which honeycomb the Alps is boring its way southward. Our longish drive over the soft snow had not prepared us for the glories of our surroundings when we awoke next morning. We found ourselves at the entrance of a long spoon-shaped valley, shut in on all sides by vast Alpine summits, all dazzling white. To the left tower above us the three peaks of the Blümlis Alp, further on the Doldenhorn rears its mighty bulk into the heavens and is faced by another range of snow-clad giants.

The intense cold of the early morning disappears when the sun peeps over the crest of the Doldenhorn, and the various hotels pour out their inmates for the sports which are the be-all and end-all of existence in Kandersteg. Three large ice-rinks are daily crowded with skaters of all degrees of skill, from the tyro whose head is always painfully askew as he tries to master the mysteries of the outside edge, to the expert who performs his rockers and brackets and loops with the ease of an old hand. One rink is reserved for the devotees of that curious pastime known as the "roaring game," otherwise curling. No game, with the exception perhaps of chess, seems to demand such complete concentration on the part of the players as curling. The tense, drawn looks of the curler, as he poises his stone before sending it gliding along the icy floor, is a thing to wonder at, as is the frenzied eagerness with which his comrades, in response to weird cries of "soop, soop!" ply their brooms in order to expedite the progress of this prince of rolling stones.

Hard by is the toboggan run, from which all day one hears the monotonous long-drawn out cry of "Achtung!"—for your Swiss tobogganer, no matter what his or her age, would scorn to give notice of his approach in any other tongue but German, though rumour has it that the knowledge of the Teuton tongue stops at this one word "Achtung!" in the majority of cases—as the toboggans swish across the road and hurtle down the slope beyond. The exact pleasure to be found in tobogganing is perhaps a trifle difficult to understand. Certainly the delight of rushing down the icy slope is counterbalanced by the long climb up again, dragging the toboggan. But the game is evidently worth the candle, since many there be who spend laborious days in doing nothing but climbing up hills and rushing down again. Another even less attractive form of sport is that known as "tailing," some twenty people on toboggans in two parallel lines being drawn by a sleigh to some more or less distant spot, where they have lunch; but there again the glorious wine-like air makes doing anything a pure joy.

But the sport *par excellence* is ski-ing. No matter how cold the day, a few glides down a ski-run and a ski-er feels a delicious glow stealing over him and realises that life has still a joy for him. Snow is so delightfully soft to fall upon, and luckily so, for the novice on skis can have no idea how many different ways of falling there can be till he has tried the game. When one first dons the long, clumsy-looking footgear, one seems to have lost all control of one's feet; the skis seem to want to box the compass, but in a very short time walking on the flat is accomplished with ease. To reach the summit of a hill is a matter of more difficulty; at first the tyro tries walking up in the ordinary way, but after several times falling flat in the snow, he realises that other methods must be adopted, and with a sort of crab-like, sideways, and appallingly awkward gait he reaches the top

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of the hill. But his troubles are only beginning. It looks so easy, to put your feet together and glide down the smooth snow slope. But the beastly skis won't keep parallel; one darts to the right, the other to the left; the novice tries to straighten them, and plump! there he is, his face buried in the snow, the skis performing daring contortions in the air. If he is wise, when after infinite struggling he has regained his upright position, he selects a short and easy slope to practise on, and then perhaps in a week or so he has sufficiently mastered the difficult balance to be able to come swinging down the longer run, with only one fall out of three attempts. The first time he really completes the descent and is still upright at its foot he wants to raise a flag, or scream, or in some equally exuberant way to express his supreme delight. He is probably so satisfied with himself that next time he determines to turn at the foot of the hill as he sees the experts do with such consummate ease, but his is the pride that goes before a fall, and such a fall! for never has he displayed such a bewildering confusion of skis and legs and arms and clouds of powdery snow as when he first tries turning. But as it is only rarely that any serious injury is caused, nothing daunted he toils up the hill again, after wiping the snow out of his eyes, and is soon rushing down unconscious of all save the exhilarating intoxication of ski-ing.

When evening falls, and the hotels are a blaze of light, are there not dances, theatricals, concerts etc. to charm him? Though not a few are always ready to abjure these delights and to spend their evenings round the green-covered table, waiting in vain for those 100 aces which so seldom come.

CHURCH SERVICES: DRESDEN.

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WEATHER FORECAST FOR TODAY of the Royal Saxon Meteorological Institute. South-westerly winds, more cloudy, but no heavy showers at first, nor any great change of temperature.