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A Flight to Europe's Highest Airport

By ST.

II.

The graceful Douglas D.C.2 machine, which had safely and comfortably carried us over hundreds of silvery peaks in glorious sunshine, came to a standstill.

Our Air Hostess unlocked the door, and we descended on to crisp powdery snow. Behind a wooden barrier were assembled Samaden's youth frantically waving little Union Jacks and Swiss flags; it was an exciting day for these youngsters, was it not the first time that a large Air liner had landed near their homes on a non-stop flight from one of the big centres of the world?

We were then officially received by the Mayors of Samaden and St. Moritz, by Mr. Risch, Manager of the Airport, by Directors Groh and Pillichody of the SWISSAIR, Colonel Hans Bon of the Suvretta Haus, St. Moritz, and others.

Two little girls very shyly approached us and asked whether we would sign their autograph books, on doing so, a stampede followed. It seemed to me that hundreds of little ones suddenly produced autograph books seemingly from nowhere, some only produced little bits of paper, so we were glad when we could escape from these pleading "hordes" into the interior of the Aerodrome, where we were presented with an official badge and a souvenir of the village of Samaden in the form of an etching.

Mr. Risch showed us quickly round the new building, which was finished within two months. The shed will hold a Douglas machine, besides several smaller craft. The reception offices for passengers look very neat and clean.

On emerging, we had to undergo a new ordeal, a number of photographers took pictures of us from every conceivable angle, in fact I saw one who was lying flat on his "tummy," surely not a very enviable position considering that even at 6,000 feet altitude the snow is still wet.

We were then ushered into a very comfortable coach belonging to the Post Office of the "Suvretta Haus" the latter became our headquarters during our stay.

And then the "dance" began; I am somewhat hardened by now, having, during the year to attend a good many festivities and functions in the Swiss Colony, but never in my life have I had such a strenuous two days; we were simply overwhelmed with hospitality, in fact we were rushed from "pillar to post."

No sooner had we finished a sumptuous Luncheon at the "Suvretta Haus" at which Colonel Hans Bon acted as host, when we were taken again by coach to the centre of the town. From there we went by railway and "Fimibahn" (sleigh funicular) to Piz Nair where we enjoyed a wonderful view, on the Piz Schlattain (9,858 ft.), Piz Grisch (10,164 ft.), Piz Corviglia (9,943 ft.), and many others.

In spite of the high altitude (nearly 9,000 ft.) it was very warm as long as we were in the sun, and one was tempted to discard such cumbersome garments as overcoats, but no sooner one came into the shade a keen and icy wind assailed one.

The view from Piz Nair on St. Moritz is very beautiful, so far I had only twice stayed for a very short while at St. Moritz, and on each occasion in the summer time, but now for the first time I have seen this lovely spot dressed in its winter garb, and I must confess it appeared to me quite different, and I found it even lovelier than in summer.

In the distance we could see various skiing parties, and I felt quite envious, but my "Grossstadt" figure would hardly allow me to venture again on ski's; with regret we said good-bye to those lofty heights, it was one of those days when the snow-slopes looked not white but silvery.

Having overstayed the allotted time on the Piz Nair (we simply could not tear ourselves away from this splendour) we missed the Tea which was offered at the Kulm Hotel, and went straight on to the Palace Hotel where cocktails were offered, the party was officially welcomed by Mr. Badrutt jun., on behalf of his father, who was laid up; there in the spacious cocktail bars one could hear almost every language spoken, sun-tanned faces everywhere; Ladies in most bewitching sports attire were nibbling nuts and drinking "Martini's" and "Manhattan's" whilst an orchestra played the latest dance tunes;

we looked more like a crowd of undertakers amongst this mirth and gaiety.

After having partaken of a few glasses of these rather treacherous concoctions the party was invited to a second edition of cocktails at the famous "Chesa Veslia," but here I went on strike; before the party set off, I gave them, together with one of my colleagues from the English Press the "slip," and together we walked through the gaily lit town of St. Moritz to the Suvretta House. We reached our destination just as the other party arrived from their last "lubrication," and this time they were actually singing, now this would be nothing surprising with Swiss, because we Swiss think we must always sing, even if we can't, but when the English Press begins to sing, then something has, or is going to happen; I noticed also that some of my colleagues greeted me rather more profusely than earlier that morning, was it the rarefied air, I wonder?

Then, we had to make a quick change for the official Banquet offered by the town of St. Moritz to the party, and a large number of other guests, which was timed for 8.30 p.m.

The Banquet started punctually at 8.30 p.m. and included about 70 *couverts*. Mr. C. Nater, Mayor of St. Moritz was in the Chair, with him were the Mayors and representatives of Bevers, Samaden, Pontresina, Celerina and Madulain; amongst the general company one noticed Directors H. Groh and Pillichody of the Swissair, Colonel H. Bon, Dr. Bierbaum, editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," Anthony Fokker, etc., etc., altogether a very representative gathering.

The *cuisine* of the Suvretta Haus is world famous and I need hardly mention that the *Menu* lived up to this reputation, and vintages such as Johannisberg Mont d'Or, Château du Glana 1929 and Piper Heidsieck Brut, added to the glamour of this feast.

That on such an occasion speeches should be made goes without saying, they were all very excellent and short, some were given in German but the majority were delivered in English, and very good English at that.

The first speaker of the evening was Mr. C. Nater, Mayor of St. Moritz, who heartily welcomed the guests expressing the wish that before long a regular non-stop service between London-Samaden would be initiated.

Captain Norman Mc. Millan (Daily Mail) congratulated the Engadine communities on their enterprise, wishing them every success in their new venture, he also paid a high tribute to the efficiency of the SWISSAIR coupling with it the names of Directors Groh and Pillichody; he expressed the thanks of his colleagues to Mr. Nater and Colonel Bon for their unstinted hospitality.

Colonel Hans Bon mentioned the names of the late Balz Zimmermann and Walter Mittelholzer, both old friends of his and pioneers in the venture which had just been accomplished.

He thanked Great Britain for having discovered St. Moritz and SWISSAIR for pioneering the way to it.

Dr. Bierbaum, Editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," extended to his colleagues of the British Press warm greetings on behalf of the Swiss Press. This speech, which was given in German was translated into English by the Editor of the "Swiss Observer." Dr. Bierbaum in his excellent speech praised the calm and truthfulness of the British Press in troubled times, he said he was glad to see this new rapid link between Great Britain and "that little paradise" established, and mentioned how beautiful the world could be if only humanity would appreciate the blessings of peace.

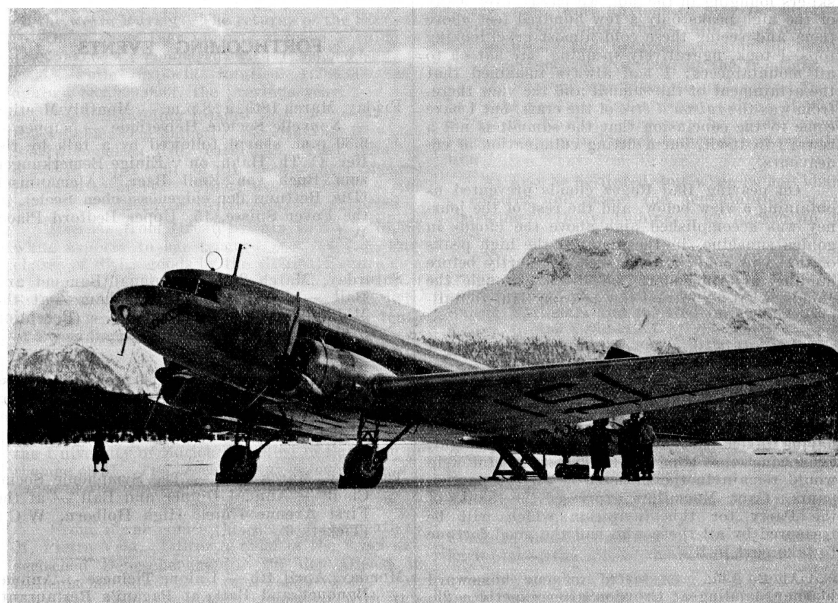
Mr. Charles Brown, the well-known Air photographer (Tatler, Sketch, Country Life, Bystander, etc.), thanked Flight-Captain E. Nyffenegger and his small crew for the efficient way in which he had piloted the Air Liner over "these towering heights," he especially mentioned the excellent landing performance.

Mr. Anthony Fokker, the famous Dutch aircraft designer, applauded the magnificent achievement of connecting St. Moritz with the "British Isles."

"It is due to men like Colonel Bon and Carl Nater, who not only talk, but get things done that this service will be run in future." He said that the communities around Samaden owe a great debt of gratitude to the late W. Mittelholzer and B. Zimmermann for their spade work, and deplored their passing not only as a loss to their country but as a grievous loss to aviation in general. He warmly greeted their "youthful successors" Directors Groh and Pillichody. "The 'Non-stop' flight from London to Samaden" he continued, "is only a start." He predicted that in five years time there would come a non-stop flight from New York, "so that any darned Americans who wanted a week-end's skiing could come and get it." Mr. Fokker also expressed the wish that aviation would bring the people on this earth in closer contact and would thus bring world peace nearer to all of us.

After some more speeches by members of the various communities present, the official part was concluded.

The company then adjourned to one of the spacious and beautiful rooms of the "Suvretta Haus," where they were able to watch the dancing and entertainments provided for the Hotel guests, not a few of my colleagues joined in the dancing, especially when our pretty Air Hostess,



DOUGLAS D.C.2 AIR LINER AFTER LANDING AT SAMADEN.

Mlle. Trudi Staub, appeared, in a "très chic" evening frock.

There were wonderful toilettes to be seen and glorious jewellery exhibited. Colonel Bon, our untiring host, in turn conducted the large and fine orchestra or played the accordion, he was the life and soul of the company. Wine flowed almost in streams and champagne corks sounded like an incessant bombardment.

At three o'clock a.m. a cold supper consisting of cold meats and "Bündnerfleisch" was served. I left the company soon after, as I was anxious to snatch a few hours sleep, but I was told that the last revellers went to their rooms shortly after 6 a.m.

I was able to start with two of my colleagues of the "Times" and "Evening Standard" the same morning soon after 8 o'clock on a swift and lovely walk towards Silvaplana, it was a wonderful morning the peaks of the surrounding mountains were bathed in golden sunshine. Sledge on sledge passed us, the bells on the horses gaily tingling, they brought the people from around to the polls, as on that Sunday the population voted on Romantsch becoming an official language of our country.

One of my companions, much to my surprise, suddenly started to eat snow, excusing himself with being "most damnable thirsty." I only hope that the visitors of St. Moritz will not imitate him, or this famous winter resort will come to a sad end.

At 10 o'clock a.m. we left our luxurious abode, as I thought to go direct to the Air Port in Samaden, but no such luck, we had to empty the cup to the bitter end.

A cocktail party was arranged for 11 o'clock at the Grand Hotel, on arriving the orchestra started the tune "It's a long way to Tipperary," a tune which on all our "wanderings" accompanied us, as a sort of signature tune, it was really most amusing.

After very appetising refreshments were served both "liquid and solid" the Director of the Hotel made a little speech giving the toast to H. M. the King and Switzerland, whilst the band struck up the respective National Anthems. On departing from these hospitable quarters the band came outside the Hotel, and would you believe it, played again "It's a long way to Tipperary."

Then at last off to Samaden, more drinks, more handshakings and after having said "thank you very much" for this overwhelming hospitality we boarded the Douglas machine which stood outside the hangar to take us back to Zurich, where an official Luncheon offered by the Management of the SWISSAIR awaited us.

Once again we beheld a glorious view of the mountains, not a breath of wind stirred, there was not a cloud in the sky. As a special treat Flight-Captain Nyffenegger took us over the peaks of the Bernina, peaks on peaks and shining glaciers passed us.

Deep below we saw Davos when passing over the Parsenn, — the Parsenn Derby, which was held on that Sunday, provided a pleasant interlude, — the cable railway which connects Davos to the Parsenn snowfields and the Weissfluh was clearly visible.

In the distance both Chur and Klosters could be seen, some of the slopes were crowded with skiers lounging in the sun, we passed over many of the high peaks only a few hundred feet above them and seeing these cold almost cruel-looking tops, I took, figuratively speaking, my hat off to all mountaineers; I had always imagined that the attainment of the summit and the view therefrom was the *raison d'être* of the craft, but I have come to the conclusion that the summit is not a reward in itself, but a fitting culmination of endeavours.

On nearing Bad Ragaz clouds prevented us obtaining a view below, and the rest of the journey was accomplished high above the clouds in golden sunshine, in the distance the high peaks of the Alps could still be seen. Shortly before landing at Dübendorf we dived through the clouds, what a contrast it was from light to dullness.

An "apéritif" was served at the Restaurant of the Aerodrome followed by a Luncheon.

Mr. H. Pillichody, joint managing director with Mr. E. Groh, in a speech given in perfect English, thanked the members of the party for having taken part in this first Non-stop flight, expressing the hope that this successful trip would remain in the memory of all the participants. Capt. Macmillan expressed the thanks of the Party for this invitation which will be treasured by all those who had the good fortune to take part in it.

At 2 p.m. we started on our homeward journey, landing at Croydon after exactly a 2h. 55m. flight.

Mr. Oliver K. Whiting of the B.B.C., who took part in this flight, gave a vivid description in the Regional programme, saying that this flight will prove to be a mile stone which will link two friendly nations together.

Of one thing I am perfectly sure, and that is, that my English colleagues have not only been deeply impressed with the hospitality of our countrymen, but with the grandeur and beauty of our homeland, they will, as everyone told me, never forget this flight over the giants in their Alpine splendour.

To me, as a Swiss it has made me love my country still deeper, may God preserve it and watch over it, and may I close this narrative with Gottfried Keller's unforgettable words:

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Nieder auf mein irdisch Vaterland."

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Friday, March 18th, at 8 p.m. — Monthly Meeting — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — (supper at 6.30 p.m. sharp) followed by a talk by the Rev. C. Th. Hahn, on "Einige Bemerkungen zum Buch von Emil Baer," Alemannisch (Die Rettung der eidgenössischen Seele), at the Foyer Suisse, 15, Upper Bedford Place, W.1.

Saturday, March 26th — Annual Banquet and Ball — Swiss Club Birmingham — at the Midland Hotel, Birmingham. (Reception 6.30, Dinner 7 o'clock.

Tuesday, March 29th, at 8.30 p.m. — Swiss Orchestral Society — Annual Concert, at Conway Hall (large Hall) Red Lion Square, W.C.1.

Thursday, March 31st — The Symphonic Social Choir — Annual Dinner and Ball — at the First Avenue Hotel, High Holborn, W.C.1 (Tickets 6/- each.)

Monday, April 4th — Unione Ticinese — Annual Banquet and Ball, at Pagani's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W.

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Sonntag, den 13. März 1938.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst und Sonntag-
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7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

Anfragen wegen Religions-bezw. Confirmanden-
stunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten
an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde : C. Th. Hahn,
43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W. 4 (Tele-
phon : Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden :
Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche.

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