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Queer Mixture of Aristocrats, Profiteers, Sheep and Wolves at the Hotels in Switzerland

Les Avants, Switzerland.—Switzerland is a small, steep country, much more up-and-down than sideways, and is all stuck over with large brown hotels built on the cuckoo-clock style of architecture. Every place that the land goes sufficiently sideways a hotel is planted, and all the hotels look as though they had been cut out by the same man with the same scroll saw.

You walk along a wild-looking road through a sweep of dark forest that spreads over the side of a mountain. There are deer tracks in the snow and a big raven teeters back and forth on the high branch of a pine tree, watching you examine the tracks. Down below there is a snow-softened valley that climbs into white, jagged peaks with more splashes of pine forest on their peaks. It is as wild as the Canadian Rockies. Then you round a bend in the road and see four monstrous hotels looking like mammoth children's playhouses of the iron-dog-on-the-front-lawn period of Canadian architecture squatting on the side of the mountain. It does something to you.

The fashionable hotels of Switzerland are scattered over the country, like billboards along the right of way of a railroad and in winter are filled with the utterly charming young men, with rolling white sweaters and smoothly brushed hair, who make a living playing bridge. These young men do not play bridge with each other, not in working hours at least. They are usually playing with women who are old enough to be their mothers and who deal with a flashing of platinum rings on plump fingers. I do not know just how it all is worked, but the young men look quite contented and the women can evidently afford to lose.

Then there are the French aristocracy. These are not the splendid aristocracy of toothless old women and white-mustached old men that are making a final stand in the Faubourg St. Honoré in Paris against ever-increasing prices. The French aristocracy that comes to Switzerland consists of very young men who wear very old names and very-tight-in-the-knees riding breeches with equal grace. They are the few that have the great names of France who, through some holdings or other in iron or coal, were enriched by the war and are able to stop at the same hotels with the men who sold blankets and wine to the army. When the young men with the old names come into a room full of profiteers, sitting with their pre-money wives and post-money daughters, it is like seeing a slim wolf walk into a pen of fat sheep. It seems to puncture the value of the profiteers' titles. No matter what their nationality, they have a heavy, ill-at-ease look.

Besides the bridge men who were the dancing men and will be again, and the old and the new aristocracy, the big hotels house ruddy English families who are out all day on the ski slopes and bobsled runs; pale-faced men who are living in the hotel because they know when they leave it they will be a long time in the sanitarium, elderly women who fill a loneliness with the movement of the hotel life, and a good sprinkling of Americans and Canadians who are traveling for pleasure.

The Swiss make no difference between Canadians and citizens of the United States. I wondered about this, and asked a hotelkeeper if he didn't notice any difference between the people from the two countries.

“Monsieur,” he said, “Canadians speak English and always stay two days longer at any place than Americans do.” So there you are.

Hotelkeepers, they say, are very wise. But all the Americans I have seen so far were very busy learning to talk English. Harvard was founded for that purpose, it is sometimes rumored, so if the people from the States ever slow up, the hotelkeepers may have to find some new tests.