

## The Opening of the Britannia Hut.

*From the "Tribune de Genève," August 21st, 1912.*

THE opening of a new hut in the Swiss Alps is always an important event in the climbing world. There are already 93 in Switzerland, nearly all belonging to the Swiss Alpine Club, and about 60 more are planned but not yet built.

But as yet not one has the importance of that about which we are to speak. English climbers, and they are as mighty as they are numerous, have until now used our Swiss huts, without being able to return the hospitality; this state of things was painful to them, and to solve the difficulty several members of the Alpine Club, with characteristic British generosity, decided to found a British Association of the Swiss Alpine Club, of which the members must first belong to one of our sections. This was done and about 500 joined the S.A.C., of these 150 were proposed for the Geneva Section.

They then opened a subscription among themselves, to meet the expenses of a hut to be presented to the S.A.C. Time and long study on the part of the Hut Committee of the Geneva Section were necessary, before, with the consent of the English members, the site of the hut could be chosen; that of the heights above Saas Fée, at the foot of the Allalinhorn overlooking a magnificent waste of glacier at a height of 3,077 metres. When the hut was finished and all its details carefully studied it was confided to M. M. Badel and Toso of Geneva on the 8th of February, 1912, on the 20th it was set up

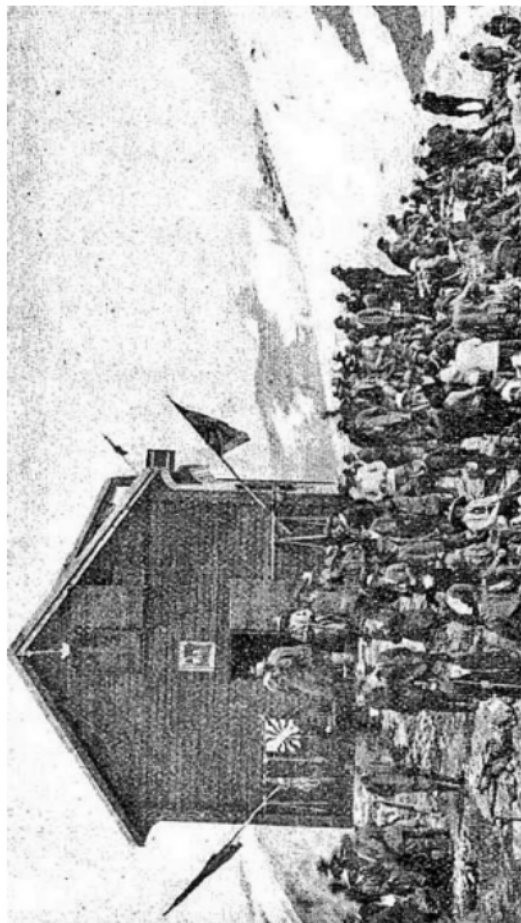
and verified, taken to pieces again on the 21st, and sent off to Viège on the 23rd addressed to M. Imseug.

There the difficulties of transport began, which were augmented by the lack of snow in winter and the prevalence of it in spring. But the Valaisian mountaineers have grit and endurance, and by 19th of June 449 loads, representing more than 18,000 kilos, were deposited on the spotless snow.

M. M. Imseug, father and son, then began to work on the foundations, which were finished on the 1st of July. M.M. Badel and Toso were then able to begin on the actual building, and this was finished by July 30th, and from the 26th to the 30th the "Hut Committee" of the Geneva Section was there, inspecting, controlling and finally approving the building.

All of which is quickly summed up in writing but when the numberless difficulties of this sort of enterprise are taken into account it becomes a mighty record of untiring work and of difficulties overcome.

With the consent of our English friends, the date of the opening was fixed for August 17th, whatever the weather. The English were in great numbers in and around Saas Fée, and the Latin Sections and those of Geneva, Neuchâtel, Monte Rosa, Diablerets, Jaman, Montreux, etc., were also represented. The Central Committee of the S.A.C. had sent several representatives on the evening of the 16th, and there was not a vacant bed, not a truss of hay to be had in Saas Fée. A guest on whom we had not dared to count, the fine weather, had also taken up his quarters in the snowy regions above; and the weather was set



LUNCH (AL FRESCO) BEFORE THE OPENING.

fair when on the 17th, as early as four in the morning parties began to start on the moraines above Saas Fee.

The official start was at 6 o'clock, but from 4 to 7 o'clock there were constant departures.

After climbing for 2 hours the rope was put on and two or three hours more followed according to the capacity of the mountaineers.

The sight was a most amusing one; numbers of caravans, and some of the most ardent climbers were ladies, crawling like ants on the steep snow slopes and glaciers.

The Installation Committee had done things well, the hut was decorated with Swiss and English colours and each party on its arrival was greeted with a salute.

About 11 o'clock more than 200 persons were assembled round the Hut, but only those who possessed the "ticket de fête" were entitled to the collation given by the Geneva Section. On a big cardboard plate slices of beef and ham were spread out, with a pile of "salade italienne" and a piece of cheese, and with the plate was given a great paper bag filled with chocolates, cigars, condensed milk, an aluminium cup, a tiny cow bell, etc., etc. All these last bore the names of Pernot, Peter, Cailler, Kohler, Suchard, Nestle, Tobler, etc., and it seems that these manufacturers were anxious that their best products should be sampled at such an altitude.

Also when you thought that you were laden with gifts, behold a friend who pressed a bottle of Fendant or of Muscat de Valais upon you, or if he took you for a teetotaler, one of lemonade, very welcome at such an altitude.

Then we arranged ourselves as well as might be, by the side of those who were either

not invited or not yet members, but who ate their own food with none the less enjoyment.

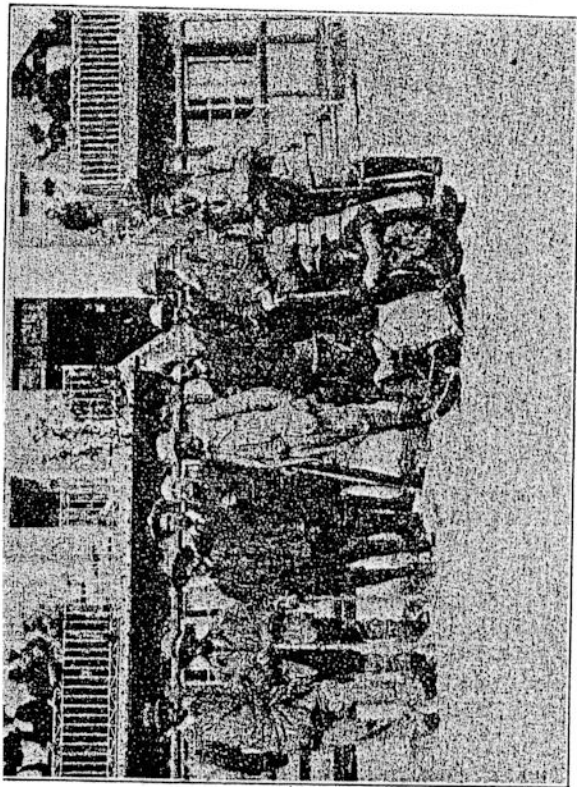
When the appetites were satisfied, and they had been sharpened by scrambling, toboggan parties were organised and nothing could be more gay than this noisy joyous crowd in the midst of the vast silence of the snows.

At 2 o'clock, Cheers! round M. Archinard, once president of the Geneva Section and master of the ceremonies of the Fête, a crowd formed, and after a speech of welcome from him "Aux monts indépendants" was sung in French, German and English.

Mr. E. Viollier, President of the Hut Committee gave a short but very complete history of the Hut, with all the details of interest, and ended with a speech in English which met with great success.

The members of the British Association then spoke in English, one of them had the good luck to have his admirable words translated by a charming young lady who was unruffled by the kodaks levelled at her. Then came the solemn handing over of the keys, which passed in turn from the Hut Committee to the British Association, who passed them to the Central Committee of the S.A.C., and finally to the Geneva Section. Fresh applause, and the Rev. J. Salwey then spoke a few solemn words on the importance of the opening of a refuge in the mountains.

M. le pasteur Muller followed and in a powerful speech placed the Hut under the Divine protection; hardly had he finished when an avalanche broke away from the Séracs near by and rolled with thundering echoes far below, producing an unlooked-for and impressive effect. M. Muller profited by this to speak of



GROUP OUTSIDE THE GRAND HOTEL, SAAS FEE.

Left to right—Ormond, W. Larden, J. Bruce, E. Harris, E. Foa, G. Ratford,  
C. King-Church, G. Wilson, W. Adams, W. S. Dixon.

Seated—F. N. Ellis and C. Wybergh.

the greatness of God's works and to exhort his hearers to be vigilant in all things and to continue neighbourly love, and ended by the Lord's Prayer, and the *Cantique Suisse*. The ceremony was very simple but had nevertheless a certain grandeur which was felt by all those who assisted.

M. le curé de Saas had been unavoidably detained and his absence was much regretted.

M. Archinard then declared the Hut open and then, and only then, it was allowed to be visited, in parties. Then the spacious kitchen with its sink and rack and aluminium utensils, the roomy dormitories for ladies, guides and climbers, could be fully admired.

Lady climbers of all nationalities are very grateful for the room which has been reserved for them, fitted with a noble mirror.

A small reading-room has been fitted up for wet days, and the "gardien" has also a room to himself.

When all had been fully seen and admired, the visitors were invited to write their names in the Hut register and to partake of free tea.

The visit was lengthy, especially as the mirror proved most attractive, though luckily none of the reflections were lasting, for some of the faces were freely smeared with grease to prevent sun-burn, while others despised such things as their variegated hues showed only too plainly.

The parties began to start about 4, some returning by the same way they had come and others going round by the Plattje and thereby enjoying a good rock scramble and a fine snow glissade.

At 8 o'clock all the climbers of the morning were assembled at the Dôme Hôtel to partake

of the banquet served there. The dining-room had been tastefully decorated by the members' orders and the menu carefully chosen. The wine list had been confided to Bouvier frères and Mauler et cie, and corks popped gaily for hours amidst the clouds of smoke proceeding from the cigars which were generously distributed by M. M. Ormond and F. Grundel.

Eloquence under such circumstances was inevitable and after the speech of welcome made by M. W. Muller, English, German and French were soon in full swing. There was a moment's interval to see the fireworks, after which the enjoyment re-doubled. M. Imboden, prefect of the district and representative of the Valaisian government proposed a hearty toast to the Swiss and English, which he followed up by the distribution of a special wine presented by the Conseil d'état of Valais. Nothing adds more to eloquence in any language.

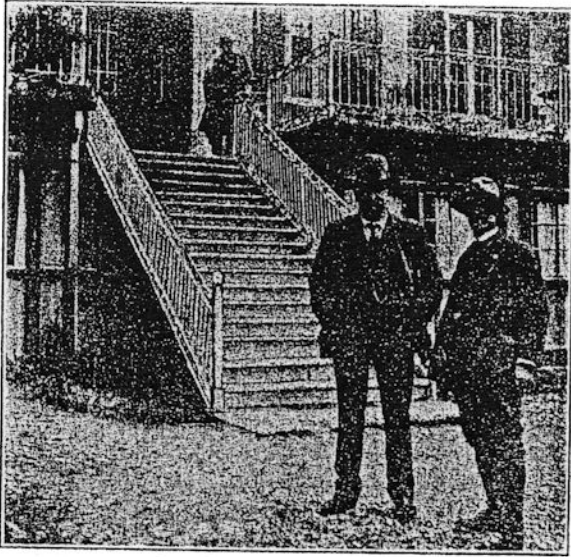
Doctor Dübi, the English M.Ps. Messrs. G. H. Radford and Noel Buxton, Bruce and Harris, secretaries, Kingchurch, treasurer, Williamson, and others made speeches which most understood and which all applauded.

The English sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" and the Swiss "Qu'ils vivent."

All the visitors at the hotel were at their open doors or in the passages, laughter and singing were heard from all the storeys.

M. le pasteur T. Muller then read a charming poem entitled "The Hut" and M. Bernoud amused his audience by a toast to the ladies in which he again made allusion to the mirror.

At midnight the approach of Sunday was the signal for the breaking up of the party. Everyone turned in, though whether everyone slept is another matter. As early as 6 o'clock



DR. DUBI, OUTSIDE GRAND HOTEL, SAAS FEE.

the next morning some started on climbs with rope and axe, while others went valley-wards.

The Britannia Hut is now open to all. Let us hope that those who visit it will have fair weather and welcome repose and that their love of our fair country of Switzerland may ever be increased.

*From Italian paper ("La Videtta").*

The Hut was opened on a wonderful day of sunshine and blue sky, in the presence of 225 climbers (of whom 30 were ladies) and guides, as well as 50 English climbers.

The inaugural ceremony was presided over by Mr. Frank Archinard, representing the president of the Geneva section.

Messrs. Edmond Viollier, chairman of the Building Committee; Williamson, vice-president of the British Association; and J. A. Bruce, secretary and moving spirit of the same Association, delivered the opening speeches; and a charming young English lady, representing the English Ladies' Alpine Club! also spoke of the ideal beauties of the Alps.

Then, amid the profound emotion of all present, followed the benediction of the Hut by the Rev. J. Salwey, the English chaplain, and Pastor Carl Muller, of Geneva.

The ceremony began with the slow and solemn strains of the National Anthem, and closed with the Swiss hymn and anthem to the Fatherland.

In the evening the official banquet took place at the Hôtel du Dom. Speeches were made by Messrs. C. Muller, vice-president of the Geneva section; Imboden, prefect of the Viège district;

Radford, member of the English Parliament; Dr. Dubi, editor of the C.A.S. Jahrbuch, and a great benefactor of the Saas Fée valley; Messrs. Fees, president of the Diablerets section; Couchepin, president of the Monte Rosa section; and Pariani, president of the Verbano (*i.e.*, Lago Maggiore) section, who brought the greeting of the C.A.I. to this meeting of brotherhood and common love of the mountains, and expressed the hope of one day seeing as large a company of climbers on the Italian side of our Alps. He returned thanks for the particularly cordial welcome extended to him by the representatives of the Geneva section, to which our Verbano section is united in so deep and unalterable a friendship.