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THE CHEESE-MAKER.

By J. W. R.

AT five o'clock on a gray, still morning, we started out from Arolla to climb the Petite Dent de Veisivi. Other two, weather-wise, or more likely, bed-drawn, stayed behind. Low clouds and an oppressive warmth promised badly for the day's weather, and the hour's walk down to Gouille gave time for these evil promises to fulfil themselves in a light drizzle. Still, in Switzerland, and at early morning, no climber who means business is turned back by a little rain, and so we walked up the steep wooded and grass slopes towards the Col de Zarmine. The rain held off until we had reached the rocks leading to the south end of the ridge where the climbing begins, but at that point it suddenly descended in torrents. A flat boulder sheltered two of us from the rain, but not from streams of water which trickled at first, and soon poured over the boulder. Cold, wet and uncomfortable we lay on our backs for an hour, hoping for blue sky, or at least a return to light drizzle. But instead, the downpour increased, and—our patience exhausted—we ran, slithered, leapt down the track to the Alp Zarmine 1000 feet below.

Here the water ran through the soft pastures in a hundred directions, and everywhere the feet sank to the boot tops in watery ground. The clouds hung round us on the hill sides, and the rain beat pitilessly. We could hear the tinkling of the cow bells, but could not see either the cattle or the herdman. Wet to the skin, we reached a squalid looking structure, low, with sloping roof, and walled with piles of loose stones. Before the wicket door, the pigs, small, thin and active to an Englishman's eye, grunted and wallowed in the mire. The

heavy clouds again enveloped us, and the rain became tropical in volume. Shelter was imperative.

Entering the hovel—for it was neither chalet nor Sennhütte in build—we found an old man just rising from his sleeping place. This consisted of layers of brown sacking on a heap of flat stones. The light came through the upper portion of the doorway, but light, rain and wind also came freely between the wall stones. In the left hand corner were three stony looking pieces of black bread, apparently the only food in the place which was not supplied by the cows.

Over a wood fire there was suspended a huge caldron, three and a half feet deep, half filled with milk. Cheese-tasters, spoons, ladles and spits, all of wood, were hung on or rested above the rough timber beams supporting the roof. On the left was a wooden trough formed by a roughly hollowed out pine trunk. On the edge of the trough a closed wooden box eighteen inches high and about eight inches square stood, a green liquid trickling from its lower end into the half filled trough.

Our guide, who was acquainted with the old peasant, soon made what explanations were necessary for our intrusion, and we were invited to come to the fire. More fuel was added, and a log drawn near for a seat. Our provisions furnished a welcome meal, and the food and warmth soon removed our grumpiness. Conversation at length turned to the subject of cheese making. Our own Gruyere had by this time been eaten in deliciously toasted morsels; and the old man, when the milk in the cauldron was sufficiently hot, began to stir it with a wooden ladle. After a while, he drew some liquid from a small wooden cask, and threw it into the cauldron. Coagulation began immediately, and the beautiful seracs formed on the surface. These were skimmed off with one of the wooden spoons, and put into the square box, and left to drain. The cauldron was swung round on the rude wooden hook away from the fire, and the whey poured into the trough.

Of course, we tasted the curds, and found them delicious. After eating about half a pound, we were advised, for our own

sakes, to stop, The old man told us that his curding was done by a decoction known only to him, which was made from herbs. He did not volunteer further details, but it is probable that thistle tops or artichoke flowers enter into its composition. The English rennet is not used in the making of Gruyere on these mountain pastures.

Early in July, on the same day of the month in each year, the cattle are taken up to the higher pastures. Here, in the rough stone huts, the herdsmen live till the end of September, moving the cows over the pasture, milking them and making cheeses. These are the real "alps," and mountaineers coming down from their climbs love to hear the carolling of the herdboy on the hillside, knowing well that the chalets below will furnish them with draughts of rich milk, delicious but seductive. To the wise a little is sufficient.

Two cheeses a day of about 16 lbs. each, are the output of the Alp Zarmine. The number of cows is about 50. Swiss cheeses are either "gras" or "maigre;" the one is made from the milk with its animal fat, the other from skim milk.

The old cheese-maker was with difficulty persuaded to accept some of our white bread, and after a two hours' stay in the hut, during which time our clothes had dried a little, we took our leave. The weather was still bad, and the hillside had now become a mass of slippery mud.

Through the swirling cloud and the heavy rain came the song of the herdboy high up on the hillside. He was in the pouring rain, earning about 4d. a day, and still sang! We ran down to Arolla, discussing contentment, and certainly having profited something. As for the Petite Dent de Veisivi, we revisited it two days later, and having finished the climb in fine weather we descended the Alp Zarmine. Passing it, we waved a last good-bye to the old cheese-maker, and from far above on the hillside the clear shrill song of the herdboy was carried down to us, accompanied by the music of the cow bells, this time sounding the merrier because of the sunshine.