

A Woman's Ascent of the Matterhorn

By Dora Keen

With Drawings by Leon V. Solon

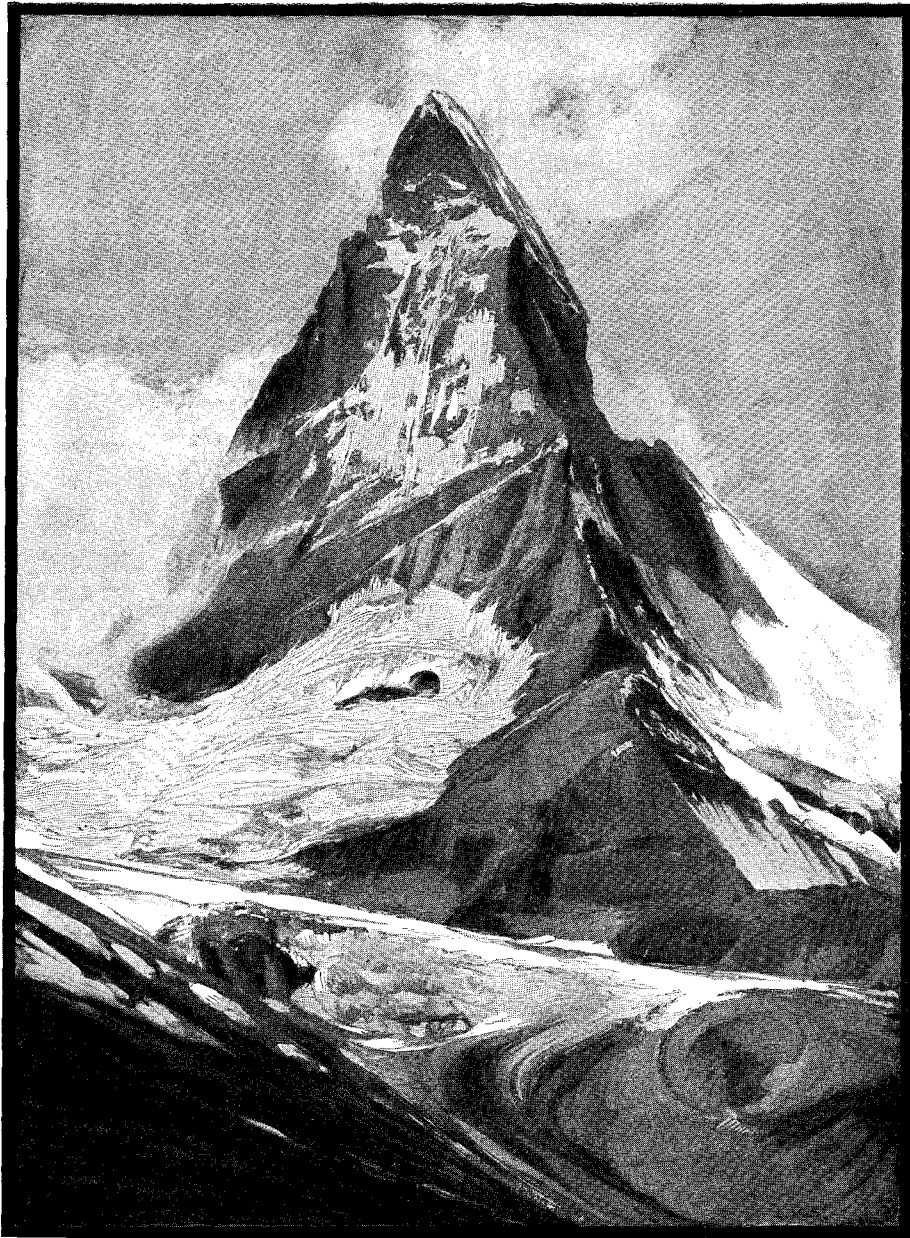
IT was a still, cold, moonlight night, and the white peaks across the surrounding valleys seemed even more majestic and imposing than by day in their silent grandeur, as, with my two guides, I left the little Schwarzsee Hotel, on the plateau two hours above Zermatt, at two o'clock on the morning of September 7, 1909. For three weeks the lofty Matterhorn, for whose summit we were bound, had been almost completely white with fresh snow every third day, even on its steepest sides, and the mountain climbers at Zermatt had been obliged to content themselves with other peaks whose snow slopes or less steep rocks made the fresh snow less to be reckoned with than on the Matterhorn. There the added difficulty and time make it dangerous to go until a few days of hot sun have melted some of the snow.

One other tourist had decided to attempt it that day, the second day after the last heavy snow, but he turned back exhausted within an hour and a half of the top. He had started with his guides at three in the morning from the miserable hut, one hour and fifty minutes above the little hotel where my experienced guides had advised me to spend the night.

Called at 12:30 A.M., after a breakfast of hot milk and bread, our first two hours' walk was up a comparatively level path by which mules could go, so that, as I walked ahead of my guides, I could enjoy the full beauty of the distant spectral glaciers and the snow and rock peaks that formed a complete circle about me. Rising higher, the few lights in the valley below became mere specks. The great isolated Matterhorn, towards whose base we were fast coming, seemed to rise directly above us, and gradually we saw signs of the beautiful dawn. Reaching the hut, we stopped to rope. From then

until our return to the hut at 8 P.M., I was to walk between the guides, the rope tied securely around each of our waists. A length of thirty feet of rope between each two of us gave leeway to climb, and when less was needed the slack was coiled around the shoulders or in one hand of the guides. At once, a few steps from the hut, our rock work began, and from this hour, 4 A.M., until 8 P.M., when we got back to the hut, the only rests from hard work were a total of three hours—just the briefest stops necessary to eat, to photograph, and to take momentary looks at the view. At six, sunrise, we overtook and passed the other "caravan," as these insignificant parties on the mountains are called, in the similarity to the silent desert wilderness of the vast, pitiless, impressive masses of rocks, ice, and snow. Only with a telescope can the progress of a party climbing be watched, and as our success was thus watched all day from many points below, our return found the base hut overflowing with seven parties who had resolved to profit by our tracks on the next day.

Three and a half hours of hard rock climbing from the upper, now useless, hut where we had breakfasted brought us at 10 A.M. only to the "shoulder," as the long, steep ice slope is called. Under normal conditions—that is, without snow—we should have been on top at this hour. Thus far it had been a steady pull up snow-covered, precipitous rocks, with care and difficulty, but no continuous anxiety. We were following the ridge, but enough at one side not to be in the full north wind. The first beautiful rose hues of the dawn, about 5:15, had given place to the deep lights and shades of a cloudless day in which the green valley, black rocks, and masses of snow and ice against a deep-



THE GREAT ISOLATED MATTERHORN, 14,780 FEET HIGH

The mountain base hut lies just above the tiny snow path on the bare left side of the ridge whose base is in the foreground. The ascent is up this ridge; it takes seven hours from hut to summit, and almost as long to return

blue sky made the panorama more wonderful every hour as we got higher and higher. At six we had had our first scanty breakfast. The shoulder attained, we now had a second, perched insecurely on widely separated snow-free rocks, while we gazed at the marvelous beauty of the scene.

From here on was to begin our difficult work. Stanchions have been put into the rocks at long intervals, and one or two inch-ropes or iron cables run from one to another across the shoulder and again up the perpendicular rocks to the summit, but for quite a third of our three-quarters of an hour on the shoulder we

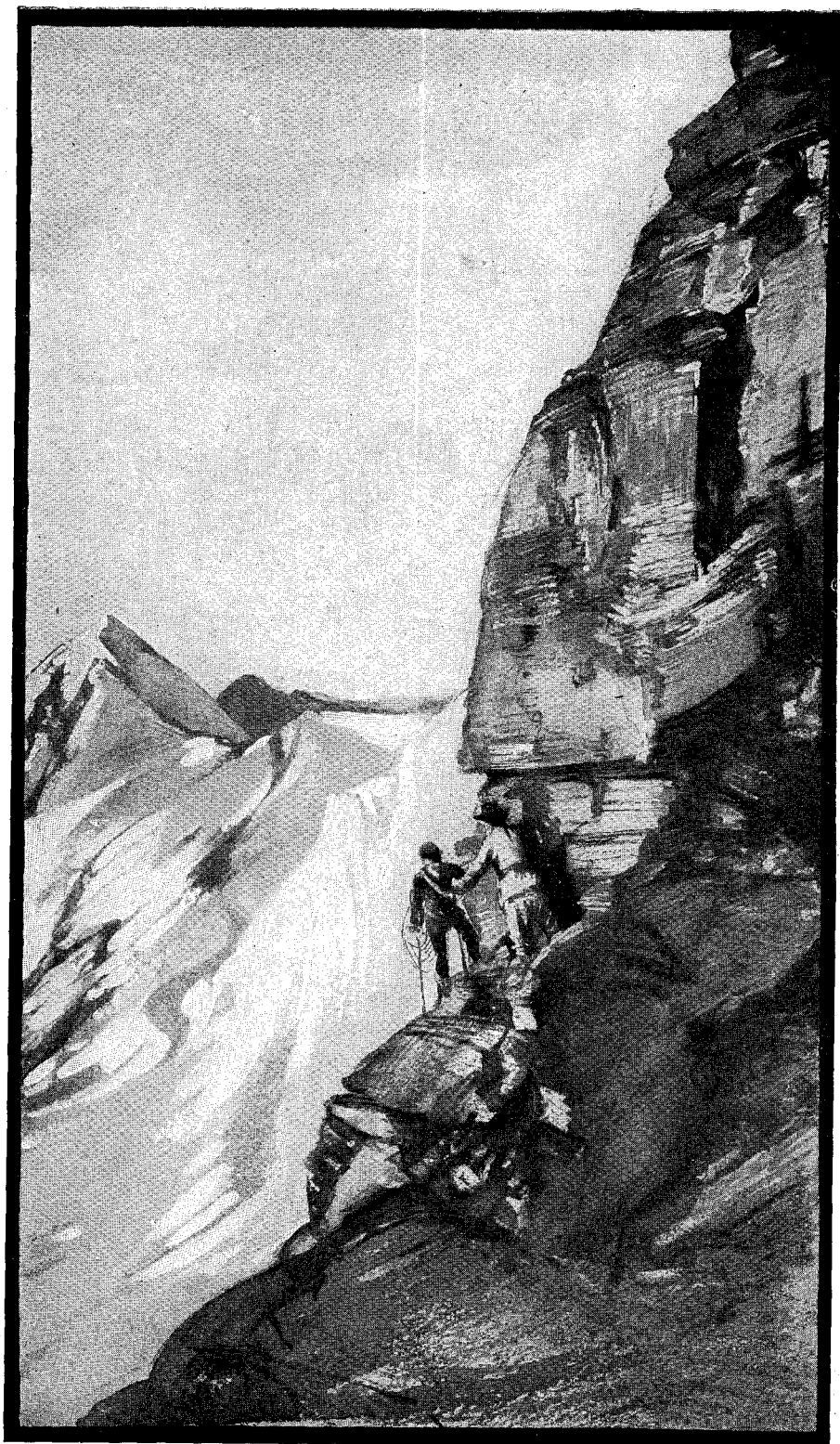
had to trust to step-cutting and care, since the ropes lay buried beneath two feet of snow. Here, also, we had become fully exposed to the icy north wind. At last we reached our final test, the perpendicular pull of an hour and a quarter up the ropes to the snow-covered rocks and overhanging shelf of snow with which the summit ridge was covered. In spite of the aid of the ropes, the Matterhorn is "*immer anstrengend*," as the Germans say—a great test of endurance. If one is tall enough to reach them, there are foot and hand holds in various projecting ledges and points. Up the face of this wall goes the first or head guide, aiding himself by pulling on the friendly rope. When he has reached the limit of the rope, thirty feet, he tries to find secure footing and braces himself, while I follow. As I measure but five feet, he has to pull me up once or twice where I cannot reach. But, even so, it is the hardest kind of work, and, contrary to my custom, I have to stop for breath now and again. It pulls limb from limb.

A short half-hour above the ropes brought us to the highest point above sea level, 14,780 feet. On the steep path to the Weisshorn hut, five days before, I had risen 4,800 feet in three and a half hours of easy ascent. Here it had taken us nine hours, exclusive of stops, to come up the 6,300 feet from the Schwarzsee Hotel. Such are the difficulties of the Matterhorn and of fresh snow on precipitous rocks. We were the first party that had attempted the mountain for two weeks.

Spellbound by the view, hungry, tired, we could remain but ten minutes; for it was one o'clock, the descent would be nearly as long as the ascent (because requiring just the same constant care and attention to footing), and the wind was coming in furious icy gusts that made photography useless and its positions dangerous. It was too cold to stop to eat. With difficulty I took a few photographs, and with regret turned to go down. To go down is easier than to go up, because it makes no such demand on the breathing powers as does the steady upward pull, but it requires more care, and on this descent from the summit and on the steep snow slope of the "shoulder" below it we seemed as iso-

lated and as much in need of self-possession as if we were descending a church spire. Not until we had again traversed the shoulder at 3 P.M. did we find a point at which it was warm enough and safe enough to stop for a few minutes to eat. Two hours below we again passed the other party descending, unsuccessful and half exhausted. At 5:30 P.M. we ate again, at the same point where we had breakfasted at 6 A.M., at the old ice-filled hut. It was growing colder. I put on a heavy sweater. By seven the light began to fail. By 7:30 we had to go more slowly, in the dusk, and all but lighted our lamp, and at eight, in almost complete darkness, we finally got off the rocks and back to the hut. Here the next day's climbers, who had long been answering our shouts, received us with enthusiastic congratulations, tea, and many questions. After a half-hour's stop, another hour by lantern down the path brought us back to the Schwarzsee Hotel for the night at 9:30 P.M. I was not even tired now, except a little in the knees, because of the seven and a half hours of continuous descent, after a day of nineteen and a half hours. Half-past six next morning saw us off down to Zermatt, looking back ever and again at the clouds that were rising about our wonderful mountain.

"Where does the pleasure come in?" I am constantly asked. It comes in the wonderful, awe-inspiring views, in the sense of grandeur, of isolation, of harmony, of mighty forces dominating our littleness, above all in an inspiration that is not to be gained elsewhere, and that is worth all that it costs. The physical strength developed also pays; if I was not tired, it was because in my one month at Zermatt I had already climbed the Riffelhorn, Untergabelhorn, Wellenkuppe, Zinal Rothorn, Rimpfischhorn, Monte Rosa, Breithorn, and Weisshorn, three of which rank as first-class peaks. The moral and spiritual uplift seems to be as great as the physical elevation. To see the panorama unfold hour by hour is as if one got a new realization of the universe, a new perception of how great and how beautiful is nature, a stimulation to rise above the small things of life, and a glimpse of the sublime. It is as if our earthly longings



A DANGEROUS POSITION AT THE BASE OF THE MATTERHORN

The ascent is hard, steep, and troublesome, and the same difficulties are met with in the descent because of the caution that must be used every moment. The constant physical and mental strain make this one of the most difficult peaks in the Alps

had been rewarded, as if we had actually attained the heavens by our long effort, and as if we were being shown a new vision of life, inspired to new resolves of service, of worth, and of high-mindedness. And this sense comes only as a reward for the struggle. The *funiculaire* by which a part of this wonderful panorama above

real difficulty, to be surmounted on a long, hard climb. The way is far, nature is immovable, rocks are pitiless, and there is no help at hand. But that, again, is one of the pleasures: to feel that we have attained to where few can come, and are undisturbed in our possession and contemplation.



INTERIOR OF A MOUNTAIN HUT

Zermatt may be seen at 10,290 feet, from the Gornergrat in its center, arouses no such thoughts. The exhilaration of rising to such heights comes when they have been attained by effort, when it has cost something in time and strength and courage. Again, there is the excitement, the entering into new worlds, the anticipation of the adventures, of difficulties that must be foreseen and prepared for. One must think well and quickly. All one's resources are taxed, the whole man is developed. And is it not worth something to learn to overcome obstacles, to develop endurance, courage, prudence, perseverance, to learn the relative unimportance of bodily comfort? Just as truly as with football does mountain climbing develop moral character. There is nearly always some element of anxiety, some

Accidents are relatively few, and nearly always occur only with those who go without guides. They may lose their way, may slip, or fail to recognize the signs of bad weather in an unfamiliar locality. For those who go with carefully selected guides there is practically no real danger, for the guides will not start unless conditions are safe, and will turn if they become unsafe. They are legally responsible for the safety of the party. They obtain their books of recommendation and licenses from the Government, through the Swiss Alpine Club, only after a certain age, a certain experience as porters accompanying experienced guides, and an examination as to elementary knowledge of topography, geography, and weather conditions. Their book states the loads they may be required to carry, the tariff for each mountain, and other regulations, and has leaves for the written recommendations of previous parties whom

the guide has served. The license or book can be taken away for any misconduct, and the license must be renewed annually. As a class the Swiss guides are a stalwart, reliable, intelligent set of men to whom one may trust one's self without hesitation. To be good guides, they must, in addition, have good judgment, be sure and swift climbers, and be courageous as well as prudent; and in these qualities there are differences among them. They almost never slip, and while climbing they keep taut the rope that attaches them to the tourist, prepared at any moment to protect him from any serious slip. In difficult places the head guide makes the tourist wait until he himself can reach a secure foothold, when he stops, braces himself, and directs the movements of the tourist by

calling from above. In descending the head guide goes last, bracing himself and with a tight hold on the rope, prepared for the tourist to slip or to be lowered by the rope at any difficult point.

An experienced guide must also be a good organizer and something of a cook; for on the more difficult mountains, where few climbers go, even a small base hotel would not pay. On many of these mountains there are, however, small huts, built and kept up by the Swiss Alpine Club. No one lives in them, but their doors are kept unlocked and they may be used by any one without other charge than for the wood used. These huts are usually as far above the valley as a mule can go and as water can be found, namely, from two to five hours' walk up a path, and as near as possible to the beginning of the real hard work of the mountain, whether glacier or rocks. They must be near water, whether from a glacier or mountain snows; a sign and arrows indicate which way it lies from the hut, and a large can, shaped for the back, is at hand, to be filled by the first comers of the evening. The huts are protected by their position or by retaining walls above from avalanches, which, however, occur only in winter and spring. They have a stone base which serves as a wood-house. Each spring a boy and mules are sent up with ample supplies of wood for the summer, and each tourist leaves in the iron box attached to the wall in the hut twenty cents for each bundle

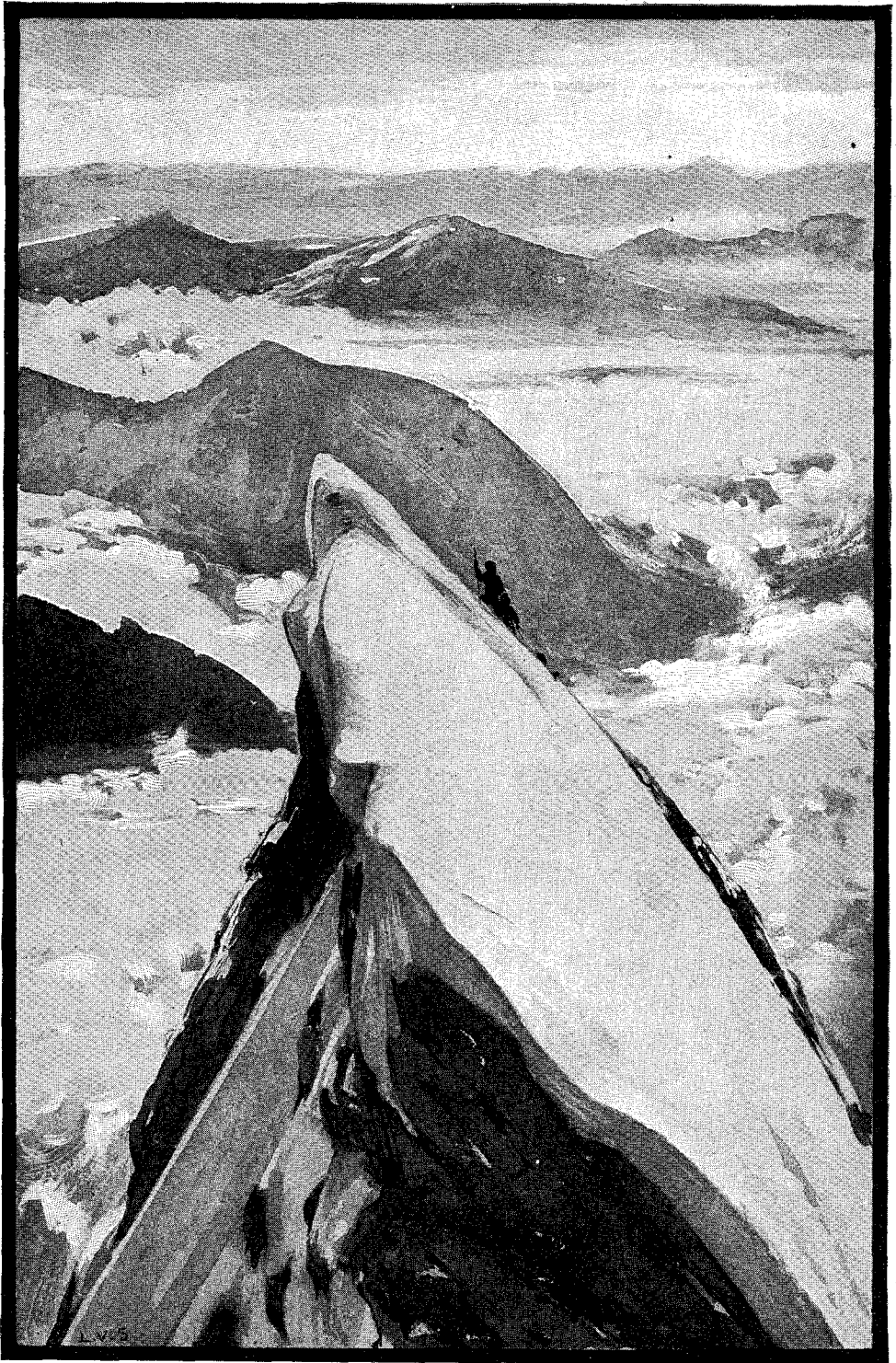


A FREQUENT METHOD OF DESCENT

Certain parts of the Alps are accessible only by climbing in the rock cracks. The guide in that case acts as an anchor, braces himself at the top of the cliff, and gradually slackens the rope which is swung under the shoulders of the climber. Some of these cracks which are very long and narrow are termed "chimneys" by the mountaineers



used. The building is of wood, about fifteen feet square, with a ladder to the loft, in which the guides sleep. Its one room usually contains a small stove, cooking utensils, a table, and a straw-covered shelf which serves instead of beds. One corner of this shelf is curtained off for ladies. An ample supply of blankets hangs from the rafters, as also a coiled rope for rescue work. There is a Red Cross chest, a stretcher, a red light to signal with, and instructions on the wall what to do in case of accidents. A visitors' book, pen, ink, and barometer complete the furnishings—all that is necessary; for the guides bring in their packs on their backs the small amount of food necessary for each party. The hut is usually reached about five o'clock in the afternoon, supper is cooked and eaten by each party in turn,



A CLIMBING PARTY ON THE SUMMIT OF A PEAK

To the right and left of this peak and in the distance, between the other peaks, a rolling sea of clouds hides the valleys from sight

and by 8 P.M. all is quiet. The early start, usually by 2 A.M., is in order to have the snow still hard all the way to the top; for after nine in the morning the sun begins to make it soft, and progress then becomes much slower and much more fatiguing.

Food for the six to twenty hours of climbing from the hut to the summit and back must be reduced to a minimum of weight, must be nourishing, and must not be dry enough to produce thirst; but this will vary with the person. My own choice is always a small can of some fish, not salty, a half-pound of sweet chocolate, a few fresh pears, a quart bottle of water, and sometimes an egg, but never bread nor meat, because too dry. These last can be eaten at the hut only, and may be supplemented by soup and cheese.

In America, especially in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, Selkirks, and the High Sierras, are peaks as wonderful as those of the Alps, but guides are few and huts practically none, so that ascents must be made all the way from the few valley hotels up and back in one day, or else costly camping expeditions must be arranged. The American Alpine Club is only about five years old, with sixty-four active members, the Canadian Alpine Club but two years old. With the increase of the sport in this country, huts and guides will no doubt be provided. Meantime, as in the early days in the Alps, a few hardy and courageous pioneers are making first ascents and guideless ascents, in comparison with which a present-day ascent of the Matterhorn may not rank as presenting difficulties other than endurance.

KING ARTHUR'S MEN HAVE COME AGAIN

BY NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY

FIELD WORKER IN THE ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE OF ILLINOIS

King Arthur's men have come again.
They challenge everywhere
The foes of Christ's Eternal Church.
Her incense crowns the air.
The heathen knighthood cower and curse
To hear the bugles ring,
*But spears are set, the charge is on,
Wise Arthur shall be king!*

And Cromwell's men have come again,
I meet them in the street.
Stern but in this—no way of thorns
Shall snare the children's feet.
The reveling foemen wreak but waste,
A sodden, poisonous band.
*Fierce Cromwell builds the flower-bright towns,
And a more sunlit land!*

And Lincoln's men have come again!
Up from the South he flayed,
The grandsons of his foes arise
In his own cause arrayed.
They rise for freedom and clean laws,
High laws that shall endure.
*Our God establishes his arm
And makes the battle sure!*