

## Der Vater von Virginia Woolf über Alexander Seiler den Älteren

Leslie Stephen, ein frühes Mitglied des Alpine Club und 1865-68 dessen Präsident, war in Zermatt seit den 1850er Jahren Stammgast im Hotel Monte Rosa.



Leslie Stephen und Alexander Seiler.



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### ALEXANDER SEILER: REMINISCENCES.

ALL Alpine travellers will hear with sincere regret of the death of Herr Alexander Seiler on July 10. I may say 'all' with scarcely an exception, for every Alpine traveller has visited Zermatt, and no one can have visited Zermatt during the last forty years without becoming familiar with the best of all landlords of Alpine hotels. On my last visit to Zermatt, I spent some ten days of perfect winter weather at the familiar Monte Rosa. Nothing could be more delightful. The hours of sunshine under the shadow of the Matterhorn are brief in January, and I did not care to attempt any long expeditions; but I strolled about, often recalling old days, and, therefore, constantly reminded of Seiler's hospitality. I had, indeed, daily reminders of his continued kindness, for he had opened the hotel expressly for myself and my friends, M. and Mme. Loppé, and every post brought up luxuries for our table, which were all the more welcome in the midst of Arctic scenery. I climbed to the old 'Riffel' inn, where Seiler had superintended the preparation for my first successful mountaineering expedition, and visited the monument which commemorates Hinchliff, always Seiler's most favoured guest, and lunched in the deserted *salon* of the 'Riffel-Alp Hotel,' which is a solid proof of the prosperity which Seiler had most deservedly won since our first acquaintance. That acquaintance began in 1858. Not many years earlier, if I recollect rightly, Professor Forbes, on his famous visit to Zermatt, had lodged with the village doctor.\* The stream of tourists had rapidly increased, and in 1858 Seiler occupied the 'Monte Rosa' and the 'Riffel' inn, while the 'Mont Cervin,' rather superior in appearance to the 'Monte Rosa,' was in the hands of a competitor. The 'Monte Rosa,' however, soon became the favourite resort of all mountaineers—not as in itself more attractive, but from the unaffected friendliness of M. and Mme. Seiler. Every traveller, especially every true lover of mountain expeditions, was attracted to them, and if by any unlucky accident his first stay had been at the 'Mont Cervin,' his second and all succeeding visits were certain to be paid to the 'Monte Rosa.' Pleasant gatherings we had in those days! The well-known picture in Mr. Whymper's book, in which he has brought together the most familiar figures of the time in the little open space fronting the 'Monte Rosa,' is not, of course, strictly historical, but it represents a combination of the scenes which, with incessant variation in the performers, were constantly repeated during the season. Long and sociable were the talks in that shifting 'tobacco parliament;' many were the expeditions arranged with famous guides and trusty companions; and Seiler was always at hand with

\* Dr. Lauber's house in course of time developed into an inn, and was sold by him to Herr Seiler in 1854. See Mr. Coolidge's *Swiss Travel and Swiss Guide Books* for a full account of the growth of Zermatt and its hotels. A well-informed writer in *Black and White* (July 25, 1891) says that Seiler had been a dealer in cheeses and cattle before buying the 'Monte Rosa' in 1854. He says that in later years he had often to provide for 1,800 or 2,000 guests daily.

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useful suggestions and hearty willingness to co-operate in carrying out the designs there discussed and decided upon. As time went on, Seiler's prosperity naturally increased. He obtained by degrees the monopoly of innkeeping in one of the two or three most famous Alpine centres. The task of organising the army of waiters and hangers-on, and of sending up supplies from a distant base to this remote village, was no slight one; and the fact that it was successfully carried on for so many years, in spite of many obstacles from the natural conservatism of the worthy peasants of the district, shows that Seiler possessed great administrative abilities. Other landlords rose and vanished, bankrupt, or glad just to escape bankruptcy; but Seiler steadily flourished, and one could hardly conceive of Zermatt without him, any more than one can conceive of Zermatt without the Matterhorn, or than Crambe could conceive of a Lord Mayor without his gold chain and official robes.

The relation between landlord and guest is seldom quite harmonious, any more than the relation between publisher and author; and the reasons are partly the same. Whether one man lives upon another's talents or upon his amusements, the other is apt to consider himself in the light of a victim. We Alpine travellers, indeed, are generally enthusiastic—perhaps, I may say, are foolishly enthusiastic—as to the merits of our guides; for the guide is generally a poor man, and has shared our dangers and our triumphs. But we regard the landlord—as the limbs in the familiar fable regarded the stomach—as the fat, useless, lazy organ which does nothing but thrive upon the exertions of its subordinates. We forget too often, in particular, that a Swiss innkeeper has to make his harvest in a period of two or three months, and is liable to lose his whole profits by a few weeks of bad weather. As great caravanserais have taken the place of the friendly little hostleries, and a guest is a mere No. 365, instead of a personal acquaintance, the relation has become less human than of old. Now, Seiler began as an innkeeper of the old type. He had not so many guests as to be unable to have some personal relation to each. Everybody chatted with him, and everybody found him cordial as well as courteous. When an old friend turned up, or left him at the end of a visit, there used to be pleasant little meetings, at which Seiler provided plentiful supplies of punch and acted the host in the most amiable and generous fashion. We were as much at home in his sitting-room as old Izaak Walton in the fishing-inns, the mere description of which causes one's mouth to water. Though I had considerable experience of the inns of the time, I do not remember one to which I returned with such a sense of returning to an old home. Guides, too, were always anxious to go to the 'Monte Rosa,' where they were made comfortable, although Seiler had no need to resort to those questionable means of attracting guides for which their employers feel no gratitude. Seiler lived to be an innkeeper on a very different scale, the proprietor of two or three great establishments, replete, as the advertisements say, with every modern convenience. But the remarkable thing was that he was never spoiled. To some of us, indeed, it was matter of regret, though we could not regret Seiler's

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prosperity, that the charming little inn of old had become only part of a large establishment, where the true mountaineer was elbowed and eclipsed by masses of tourists—no doubt excellent people in other respects, and not to be blamed for their sightseeing, but yet somehow incongruous with the old *genius loci*. Seiler, however, retained the kindly feelings of his old visitors. The change which has come over Zermatt is only part of a much wider change, of which it is useless, and would therefore be idle, to complain. It was no small merit that, in spite of that change, he preserved the qualities which had first gained for him the respect and friendship of a whole generation of travellers. Even Zermatt, great as are its charms, will have perceptibly less attraction for some of its old visitors now that they can no longer expect the cordial reception upon which they always counted when plodding up the long valley or descending from one of the mighty mountain ridges into the familiar little street. On looking back to the time when it was most familiar to me, I am really surprised to find how much the whole impression of the place seems to be permeated by the associations of Seiler's personal character. There are, I confess, one or two other mountain centres which I prefer upon their own merits; but when I think of Zermatt, I seem to be thinking of an old home—not a mere place of temporary sojourn—and chiefly, I believe, because I was there received almost as a member of the household of a thoroughly kindly, honest, friendly, and capable man. May Zermatt flourish, and may Seiler's example be followed by all his representatives! must be the wish of every member of the Alpine Club. It is a satisfaction to have known anyone for whom one has felt hearty respect and in whom one has recognised genuine and unobtrusive worth. It is rare enough to have such an experience in regard to members of a class to which one's relations are generally temporary and not always satisfactory. But I am sure that no one could have passed many days under Seiler's roof without becoming convinced that an innkeeper, without ceasing to be a thoroughly good man of business, might win the regard and confidence of his guests and establish a permanent claim on their affectionate memory.

L. S.

*Alpine Journal*, 1891, Nr. 113, S. 491 ff.



Zu den berühmten Mitgliedern des *Alpine Club* und regelmäßigen Gästen im Monte Rosa gehörte auch Edward Whymper, der Erstbesteiger des Matterhorns:

In 1854, the Lauber inn was acquired by Mons. Alexandre Seiler, who christened it Hotel du Mont Rose. M. Seiler understood the art of inn-keeping. He knew how to welcome the coming and to speed the parting guest; and admirably seconded by his estimable wife, he soon made a name for the Mont Rose. There was no need to advertise the house by the ordinary methods, for it was advertised sufficiently by its *clentèle*. If any-one enquired what is the best hotel in Zermatt? Or where shall we go? The answer was „Go to the Monte Rosa“, or „Go to Seiler’s.“ ... No one who knows the fact will dispute the capacity and tact with which he directed his affairs, the genialty with which he received his patrons, and the kindness which he and his esteemed wife extended to all who were in difficulty, had much to do with the development of the place, and that they occupy a very prominent position amongst the makers of Zermatt.

Edward Whymper: *A Guide to Zermatt*, London 1897, S. 15 und 17.

Zermatt um 1860. Rechts das Hotel Monte Rosa, Stammhaus der Familie Seiler.