

been fixed so that the less competent can make the more dangerous pitches. There are similar ropes on the Swiss side and by them any normal person with sufficient money to pay for the guides can reach the top.

*It is surprising how many people wish to climb the Matterhorn. The great mountain fascinates people who are normally quite satisfied with good flat ground. Perhaps it is because most mountains are a part of a range—individual teeth in a great saw—whereas the Matterhorn stands absolutely alone, a great spearhead in itself. Unlike the other peaks it can be recognised from any angle and at any distance. The only New Zealand peak with similar individuality is Mt. Aspiring.*

With such mountains close at hand, there have always been some Italians who went to the Alps in summer and climbed for the fun of the game. They climb as they fight, less efficiently and less consistently than the Germans. But if there is any publicity, any honour and glory to be gained, they will climb with reckless abandon. The Hun, on the other hand, is always a systematic, iron-nerved mountaineer. He may take incredible risks but he first takes care to stack the cards as far as possible in his own favour. Just as he mechanised warfare, so he has mechanised climbing, introducing the mechanical aids—iron spikes or pitons, the steel rings or karabiners—familiar to those who went to the American School for Mountain Warfare.

German mountain huts are the best and cleanest in Europe. The Italian huts are the filthiest, and their guardians as rapacious as any Fascist. They had that unpleasant Italian system of two prices—one for the locals and another for the visitor. It was just like old times to see the same trick applied in a Bari shop.

The writer remembers being fleeced by the Italian keeper of the Queen Margarita Hut on the slopes of Monte Rosa. It is the highest in Europe, but that was no reason why he should lose on the exchange rate and be overcharged while waiting for a snow-storm to abate.

However, the Italians have produced some famous mountaineers. Their mountain peasantry are sound people, as many escaped prisoners of war found out. Their professional guides are not equal to the Swiss, although in the early days of mountaineering there was Antoine Carrel, who attempted to scale the Matterhorn before the Englishman, Whymper, ascended by the Swiss route. National honour came into the race, for Carrel had fought in the War of Liberation and wanted the first ascent to be by an Italian from the Italian side. It makes a good story and this explains the popularity of the film *Matterhorn*.



*Pope Pius XI, who died in 1939, was another type—the intellectual who is fascinated by mountains. He found some famous and severe routes up the face of Monte Rosa. The writer will always remember his surprise to find a bronze plate set in the rock at 13,500ft to record the fact that Achille Ratti (Pius XI) here reached the crest of the main ridge after two days' climbing from Macugnaga. Down through the wisps of cloud there was just one precipice after another, until 7,000ft below, the ridges sloped away into the high pastures of the valley.*

Mountain standards have improved since Pius XI was a young scholar-priest from Milan, but his climbs are still classed as *most severe*. To a sound Presbyterian, the old Pope, who had just been rating the Germans for their racial distinctions, appeared a still greater figure in the world. One story is that an Alpine Club notable from London, Lord Conway, asked for an