

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

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"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."—Isa. 40:8.

The Benefits of Walking



Dr. Machen

HAVING the great joy of three weeks of climbing in the Canadian Rockies, I am writing this little article to see whether I cannot help even those readers who cannot climb and cannot go to the Canadian Rockies to get some of the benefits which I am getting here.

Climbing mountains is good, in the first place for the body, and, in the second place, for the soul.

It is good for the body because of the wholesome buffeting of the body which it brings. To get such buffeting the "tired American business man" is wont, I believe, to place himself under the despotic control of some ex-prize fighter until he comes out of the ex-prize-fighter's (very expensive) establishment feeling fit. There are, I suppose, cruel and unusual punchings of the bag and pulling of the chest weights most severe. I shudder when I think of it. Such drudgery will people submit to in order to harden their bodies and make them a little better able to undertake the duties of life. I admire people who thus recognize the fact that a soft body will not do hard work.

But there are even better ways of hardening the body, and one of these is to learn to climb. Let that tired business man get a good Swiss guide, like the one that I have here; let him be initiated into the mysteries of rock-climbing, and he will find that his softness of body will soon disappear. What a thoroughgoing twisting and pulling and bumping the body gets, at every conceivable angle and in every conceivable way, on a rock climb even of moderate difficulty! It is glorious exercise indeed.

Now I know that it is only a few people who can climb. Climbing without expert guides, unless one is oneself a real expert, is highly dangerous; and there are now, I believe, only four mountaineering guides in all of Canada. Since the Canadian Pacific Railway speaks of western Canada as "fifty Switzerlands in one," that makes just about one guide for every dozen Switzerlands—hardly enough to go around!

But the point that I am making is that many of the same benefits as those that are obtained in climbing may be obtained also without climbing and without the expense of guides. They may be secured through that cheapest and simplest of all forms of exercise—the exercise of walking.

I can testify to that from personal experience; for I have been a walker all my life. I do not, indeed, underestimate those comparatively rare occasions when I have been able to climb. They would hardly have justified the expense involved in them if they had brought to me merely the pleasure of the moment, but as a matter of fact when the climbs have been over the benefit of them has just begun. During a period of nineteen years, when I did no climbing at all, how I used to live over again in memory those glorious days in the Eastern Alps in 1913! How eagerly did I read countless descriptions, in books and Alpine journals, of precipitous mountains of South Tirol! Then in 1932 and 1935 came the crowning joy of standing on the great Zermatt peaks. When I get discouraged I love to think of that unbelievable half hour when, after having climbed the Matterhorn by the Zmutt Ridge, we sat on the Italian summit, with our feet over Italy and our backs to a little wall of summit snow, and let our eyes drink in the marvelous beauty of the scene. What a wonder-

ful help it is in all discouragements, what a blessed gift of God, to be able to bring before the mind's eye such a vision as that.

But, do you know, my friends, a man can have very much that same joy in much simpler ways.

The more I see of the high mountains, the more I love the simple beauty of the woods and hills, and the more I love to walk.

What a very simple amusement walking is! You do not need any elaborate equipment; you can just "up and do it" any time you like.

But perhaps you say that as a matter of fact you do *not* like it. All right, I say; but will you not learn to like it?

There are many things that a man does not like at first, and yet that he comes to like. A man says, for example, that he cannot see anything at all in golf. It seems to him a very silly game. But then a friend persuades him one day to go out and have a try. He has "beginner's luck." He manages just once to hit the ball instead of the earth. To his amazement he watches that ball go. How amazingly far that little pellet will sail when you happen to hit it right! Well, the man understands the fascination at last. He plays golf and talks golf all the rest of his life. He is a hopeless victim of the well-known "hoof and mouth disease."

So when you say you do not love to walk, I do wish I could just get you to try. I do wish I could persuade you to use the old Ford this summer just to get to the edge of the woods. If you did choose that kind of a holiday it would not cost you much, shoe-leather being much cheaper than gasoline and rubber tires. And the wholesome exercise you would get, and the close contact with the beauties of nature, would be a wonderful thing "as well for the body as the soul."