

A mountain miscellany

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A MOUNTAIN MISCELLANY.

In the little museum of the town of Yverdon there are to be seen the slippers, spectacles and pen of Queen Victoria. They were given to a servant of the Queen's household, Mlle Tschumi, who took them home and deposited them there.

This is one of the many discoveries Professor G. R. De Beer has made in his unceasing quest for Anglo-Swiss links and to which he refers in his latest book "Speaking of Switzerland", published by Eyre & Spottiswoode, price 21/-, for the New Alpine Library, the Editor of which is Arnold Lunn, another Swiss enthusiast. The book, an attractive volume of twenty-two chapters, is beautifully produced with four coloured plates, an extensive bibliography and an index.

Numerous other discoveries are mentioned, some new, some already touched upon in the Professor's previous writings, notably in his "Escape to Switzerland", now out of print and in his monumental "Travellers in Switzerland". We learn, for instance, that the present Duke of Kent is not the first of his name to complete his education in Switzerland. His ancestor the Duke of Kent who was to be the father of Queen Victoria came to Switzerland, in 1787, for the same purpose. The Queen herself visited Switzerland more than once. It is pleasing to read how a dairy farmer whose establishment near Lucerne her Majesty had inspected, said to her: "Sind Sie wirklich die Frau Koenigin von England?" and told people afterwards he was sorry his hands were so dirty as he should have liked to shake hands with her. The Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, also toured Switzerland and in 1857 presented the Monastery of the Great St. Bernard with a piano as a memento of his passage.

The Professor thus reviews men and women, mostly of distinction, who through the centuries have made their pilgrimage to the Swiss mountains. Many of them have left records of their impressions and reactions, in the main favourable but with here and there a grunt of indifference or even loathing. He describes the metaphors and analogies used by various writers to illustrate the Alpine scene, he quotes classical Greek and Latin authors and even Chinese and Korean poets and demonstrates the effect that mountains have exerted on their minds.

In the 8th chapter he advances, as he did in the "Escape to Switzerland", the theory that the great modern composers, Weber, Mendelsohn, Liszt, Wagner,

Brahms and, remotely, Beethoven, derived inspiration for their music from the Alps. Granted the inspiration, many readers will be sceptical as to the "panorama-music" in which the melody is supposed to follow the outline of the Alpine peaks on the horizon.

Not so much the scenic beauty of the land as its effect on the human mind form the general theme of Professor De Beer's work; literature, art, music and history are his main considerations. He writes with relish and makes good use of his vast learning, the result of an enormous amount of literary and historical research, assisted by a prodigious memory. His style is distinguished by clarity and simplicity, a style which, like so many things well done, looks effortless and easy enough but is most difficult to achieve. The only time he is obscure — deliberately to be sure — is when he coins for his third and fourth chapters the headings "Oromancy" and "Orophemy". The startled reader, if he consults his dictionary, will find that "Oros" is the Greek word for mountain.

But it is an engrossing and enjoyable book. The author, pleasantly rambling from one subject to another, is astonishingly versatile. Little-known facts, interesting episodes, a wealth of detail, all presented with warmth and feeling and, as Arnold Lunn writes in his preface, with an almost inhuman accuracy, invest the book with a charm that will appeal to every lover of Switzerland.

On a previous occasion we ventured to say that Professor De Beer had Switzerland written on his heart. The present volume, clearly a labour of love, testifies to the truth of that assertion.

J.J.F.S.

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