

Switzerland in English prose and poetry

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SWITZERLAND IN ENGLISH PROSE AND POETRY.

By ARNOLD LUNN.

Eyre & Spottiswoode 16/-.

The publication of a book by Arnold Lunn, that consistent friend of Switzerland, is always a welcome event. His culture, his extensive knowledge and practical experience of the Swiss and his sympathetic understanding of their ways make him admirably fitted to write about them. The Swiss residing in Great Britain are fortunate indeed to possess so able and gifted an exponent of the Anglo-Swiss scene.

The book just published is the first to be written for *The New Alpine Library*. It is an anthology but with this difference that the reader is not left to fend for himself as in most collections of this kind. From the academic heights of his previous publication (*Switzerland and the English*) with its severe classical line of approach, Mr. Lunn descends to the level of the less informed, those who lack the advantages of a University education and who are apt to be bewildered by so much learning. He takes them by the hand, as it were, and guides them gently through the labyrinth of unfamiliar names and quotations. This he does by means of short notes and essays, some of them exquisitely drawn vignettes, placed at the head of the chapters. The book is thereby made extremely readable. The illustrations also, photographic reproductions of great beauty, are an improvement on the previous book.

The work opens with a beautifully written introduction which adds greatly to the value and the charm of the book. In it, Mr. Lunn traces the outlines of Anglo-Swiss relations through the ages. He points out that Switzerland enjoys the distinction of being the only continental country which has never been at war with England and that the English and the Swiss have always held each other in mutual respect. Pope's vituperations and Byron's outbursts need not be taken too seriously.

One of the first British visitors to Switzerland was, surprisingly, St. Gallus, born in West Leinster in the year 543. Thousands of English pilgrims must have crossed the Swiss Alps on their way to Rome, but it is only from the sixteenth century onward that regular contacts between the two peoples were established. The Ambassador of King Henry VIII found the Swiss shrewd, hard-headed and exacting. The jingle about the Dutch giving too little and asking too much might apply to them. But once a bargain had been struck, the Swiss could be depended upon to keep their word.

In the course of the introduction the author reproduces one of the finest tributes to and most convincing justifications of Swiss neutrality ever published, not by a Swiss, but by an Englishman, the Editor of the *Nineteenth Century*. Also, inevitably, the reader is initiated in the mysteries of ski-running, that esoteric cult of which Mr. Lunn is the high priest.

The anthology proper ranges from the sixteenth century to 1945. It is an impressive literary pageant. It includes a passage from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* which shows that this great man held but a poor opinion of the Swiss; a description by John Evelyn of his adventures on the Simplon Pass and how he fell sick of the small-pox after he had caused his

hostess's daughter to be removed out of her bed so that he could get in it while it was yet warm; an amusing account of Berne and its womenfolk by Bishop Burnet, pages from Addison, William Windham and Archdeacon Cox. The contribution dealing with Edward Gibbon reveals the great historian's smug complacency, his pusillanimity in the face of the peril to which he feared his precious person might be exposed at the time of the French revolution and his fatuous, unconvincing comments on the jilting of Mademoiselle Churchod. There is Wordsworth and his sister, the curious *ménage-à-quatre* of the Shelley-Byron couples, an insight in Byron's reaction to Swiss scenery, and how he had an eye for a pretty face, a character study of Shelley, his taint of insanity and his tragic end.

Another Swiss traveller introduced is the disgruntled Thomas Jefferson Hogg whose caustic "Kantönligeist" will amuse all Swiss readers. It is Hogg who, passing through a mountain village, was given a good clean bedroom and a good bottle of wine, but complained of the service, only to find that he was not at the local inn, as he thought, but in the house of the parson. A good story, well told.

The Alpine literature of the nineteenth century and that of recent times occupy the largest part of the book: Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Sir Leslie Stephen, Edward Whymper, (famous for his conquest of the Matterhorn and the tragedy that followed it), A. F. Mummery, Martin Conway, Geoffrey Winthrop Young and others; an imposing array of Alpine writers.

Many of the contributions have appeared in the British Ski Year Books or have been selected from present-day literature. Their authors are well-known to Swiss readers and to those who love the mountains. Lord Schuster, G. R. de Beer, A. H. d'Egville, Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, but to mention a few, and last but not least, Arnold Lunn himself are amongst them.

The poetical quotations include Wordsworth's famous sonnet on "The Subjugation of Switzerland," Byron's immortal "Prisoner of Chillon," Thomas Hardy's "Schreckhorn," verses by Matthew Arnold and G. W. Young, and a little gem on the atmosphere of Murten by Eveline Amstutz.

Throughout the book one is aware of the author's nostalgia for the mountains. Every aspect of mountain literature is touched upon; Mr. Lunn has, in fact, produced another Golden Treasury of its kind. His anthology is a rich mosaic of impeccable prose and inspired verse. There is humour in it and pathos, glimpses of history, descriptions of places and people, tales of mountaineering and alpine sport, some quaint and whimsical, all fascinating.

A delightful book that will afford enjoyment to all who take an interest in Switzerland.

J. J. F. S.

