

Notes & gleanings

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NOTES & GLEANINGS.

The holiday season is responsible for a number of enticing articles in the English press which, whilst simply recording individual impressions, go a long way to advertise a vacation in Switzerland. In the *Schoolmistress* (July 6th) a fair contributor gives the itinerary of a fortnight's tour in Switzerland which can be done in all comfort for £25, including return fare from London; she praises the health-giving factors of the English seaside places, "but one fails" to return with the mental stimulus which a vacation "should give, and there is no store of new impressions" to dwell upon in the winter months, whereas the gorgeous "scenery, the different habits, costumes, shops, etc., being" part of a cosmopolitan throng, create new and lasting "sensations which really should form part of an education." A motor-cyclist in the *Birmingham Post* (July 11th) has a way of his own in describing his first impressions of our country. On passing the frontier he was struck by the difference in the French and Swiss Customs locations, the latter a suite of offices like a bank, and the former a wooden hut; having been handed a volume of regulations anent the usage of Swiss roads, he cycles over the border and describes—

"the entrance to Geneva as open and tame, but the town is large, clean, buoyant. A Teutonic solidity and outer cleanliness have been noticeable from the first house across the border. I soon left the city. First one gaily-uniformed policeman, then another, had held me up, warning me, as a motor-cyclist, off various squares and streets. Alongside the Lake of Geneva the broad road runs smoothly superb, overlooked by hotels and pensions. It was a relief to see at length a woman and child who looked poor and a man whose face seemed to know the meaning of trouble. Everybody else was wealthy and prosperous, and I found unrelieved opulence boring."

Taking his lunch on one of the terraces along the lake, he was nearly thunderstruck on being informed that the cloud in front of him was Mont Blanc:—

"You could have felled me. Several times that morning I had seen what looked like an apron of snow bleaching on a peak. It looked now, in the far distance, like a dust-sheet thrown over a lumber of furniture. That was Mont Blanc, which, since schooldays, had dwelt in my mind unapproachably as deity. Yet, over the cornflower blue of the wide lake, over the tumbled line of hills, there was in that peak, now I knew, a majestic tenderness—the soft majesty of maternity. It was the mother of the mountains. Lausanne was another Geneva, and the lake-side thereafter less foliaged. But the mountains on my right grew nearer and larger. Imagine across the lake a long line of rough ramparts blocked solid out of dull precious stone—both the soft fire and the faceted hardness were there. Delicate in the sun the mountains fumed; and still the houses of man, in comparison, were fragile and minute. The hills were Nature pure and their only art was Nature's art. Yet, as I reached Vevey, sat on the balustraded lake, and hobnobbed with the Dent du Midi and other giants, I was forced to make the admission that had been hovering at my heart all day. I had expected, from my first entry into Switzerland, to be switch-backed perilously over vales loftily poised, between grim and glacial pyramids. Instead, I had raced over a tarred road beside, seemingly, a hill-range. Watching the double lines of telegraph wires, the trams, the trains, the motor-cars, the bicycles, the conviction had grown which now came to a head. Civilisation and traffic had been spun round these mountains in a caging mesh. The Alps were tamed, tethered to the stakes of the Swiss Federal Tribunal. They looked, in this mood, almost pathetic, like camels or elephants in a zoo.

I thought I would get away into secondary and even third-rate roads over the hills to Yverdon. At first I was enchanted. I saw marvellous dells of beauty, I saw farms like those hybrid balconied houses that they use for lovers' meetings in pantomime scenes—even the fuel faggots were stacked like a pretty wainscoting under broad-brimmed eaves; I saw cross-roads villages, whose houses, in a communal cluster, resembled the donated public hall of a garden village. I went into a town that seemed to exist for no other reason than to be admired in

passing—you couldn't tell the cheese factory from the church till you went inside."

He wonders at the regulated gaiety and the scrupulous cleanliness of the villages with rows of garden-city houses, but some of the following concluding remarks are perhaps more original than to the point:—

"There is little serious industry save the agricultural, sawing wood, making ribbons and embroideries, watches, and tinned milk and cheese—and catering for visitors to the wide reticulation of picturesque hotels. Tending the Alps so long for Europe has naturally made the custodians a trifle self-conscious. This and the infusion of German temperament have produced intense culture of the picturesque, maintained by elaborate sets of rules, which the park-keepers are always politely enforcing. There is a lot to be said for the procedure. Sunday, with motor traffic suspended, is like a sacrament to the mind chafed by memories of the English orgy of petrol travel on the Sabbath. It is better to have roads over-valued than roads under-valued. The Swiss have carried out only what city reformers have been urging in England for years. They have every right to be proud, as they are, of their impeccable guardianship of the inheritance of beauty which has been confided to them as trustees for Europe. Only, such is the perversity of human nature, I am wondering if I do not prefer the open and spontaneous gesture, the careless naturalness in town and country, of the French whom I have left behind."

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The *Yorkshire Post* (July 12th) reminds us that Yorkshiremen, like Swiss, are famous for their part-singing and claims with just pride kinship with Philipp Nabholz, who composed the festival play for the Schweizer. Sängersfest recently held in Lucerne:—

"It will be of interest to Yorkshiremen, and to natives of Farsley, near Leeds, in particular, to know that Philipp Nabholz is the grandson of an old Farsley worthy, and the son of an old Farsley lady now living in Switzerland. Thomas Hollings was a prosperous grocer who lived at Commercial House, on the site on which the Farsley Council Offices now stand. His eldest daughter, Clara, married a Swiss gentleman named Nabholz, and is now living (a widow of over 70) at Berne with her daughter. She was always passionately fond of music and a very good pianist. It is on her youngest son, Philipp, who has inherited her musical gifts, that this high honour has been bestowed. He was commissioned to write the music for the play in the new year, and has composed this great work within the short space of six months.

The reception of the play, which Nabholz himself conducted, has been wonderfully enthusiastic. The play, which lasts two hours, commences with three singers, and traces the growth of the cantons and their development into a united Swiss nation, until finally there was a combined chorus of 1,200 men singing to the accompaniment of an orchestra numbering 100. Those taking part were dressed in old national costumes, and presented a magnificent spectacle. On the first day some 10,000 people witnessed the performance, and all through the festival week the theatre was crowded. Many of the audience were moved to tears.

Nabholz was presented with a gold and green laurel wreath with two long streamers of blue and white (the colours of Lucerne) and two streamers of red and white (the festival colours) by his chorus. He conducted this great choir for two hours every day for a week, and on the last day he received a great ovation, shouts of "Nabholz! Nabholz!" and bouquets of flowers and other laurel wreaths with streamers. It must have been a great day for his mother, and we are glad to learn that she was able to be present to listen to the beautiful music and share in her son's honour."

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The following appreciation of Othmar Schoeck appeared in *Musical Standard* (July 1st):—

"Amongst the most striking items produced in May at the Zurich International Festival was the opera "Venus," by Othmar Schoeck.

This Swiss composer, who is only thirty-six years of age, has already succeeded in attracting the attention not merely of his Swiss and German admirers, but also of music lovers in England. He is indeed remarkable, both for the great number of his compositions and—what is probably the essential—for the very pronounced style he has acquired.

Othmar Schoeck is a disciple of Max Reger, but his music has none of the intellectual aridity which some people dislike in the German master. Everything in it expresses colour and passion. He is a great romantic, and has a power of expression which has hitherto never been attained by any Swiss composer.

Although he has had to act as conductor to different Swiss choral societies and choirs, he is really, above everything, a composer. There is nothing he likes more, nothing he is better fitted for. His first—and perhaps still his best—medium of expression was the song. He published a first set of fifty 'Lieder' in 1909, which were characterised by a certain mild melancholy. A second was printed in 1917, followed in 1922 by four other collections, all of which were published by Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig. The first of these collections contained music to twelve of Eichendorff's songs; the third was written to Goethe's poem 'Der Gott und die Bajadere.' The fourth, called 'Hafislieder,' is of an Oriental character.

In the course of the last twelve or fifteen years Schoeck has gone through a remarkable development. Whereas he began by composing somewhat in the vein of Schubert—with whom many compare both his music and his personality, others seeing a resemblance in him to Hugo Wolf—giving the voice the melody and allowing the piano to take a very secondary place, in his later songs the piano plays a more and more important part, depicting all the shades of meaning in the text which the voice closely follows. The spell of his most recent songs lies just in the particular blending of voice and piano by which expression is given to all the different sensations evoked by the words.

Schoeck has not, however, only kept to the composition of songs, he has also written a good deal of music for choirs, one of the most important of these works being the music written to Walt Whitman's 'Beat, Beat, Drums' which was produced with great success at the annual meeting of Swiss composers in Zurich in 1920. Another famous choral work is his 'Postillion,' composed for a male choir and orchestra. He has also written several compositions for violin and string quartets.

During the last few years Schoeck has attempted the opera. He wrote the music for Goethe's singspiel 'Erwin und Elmire,' which was very well received when it was produced at one of the last meetings of the Goethe Association in Weimar. His comic opera 'Don Ranudo,' which was produced in Zurich in 1920 for the first time, was considered in Germany to be quite a revival of the old comic opera form. 'Don Ranudo' is written on a comedy by Holberg, which was arranged as a libretto by Schoeck's Swiss friend, Armin Rueger. It is a comedy which makes fun of the vanity of the pedigree. Schoeck's next opera was 'Das Wandbild,' which was produced in the Stadtheater of Halle. His last opera, 'Venus,' the performance of which at the Zurich International Festival was considered an event in the history of Swiss music, has already been commented upon in this paper. There seems to be no doubt that the world will yet hear great things about this native of a country hitherto not specially famous for its composers, though noted for other good things. British music-lovers will certainly be anxious to have an opportunity of enjoying his music before long."

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We are at all times open to correction, all the more when it emanates from such a distinguished contemporary as the *Anglo-Swiss Review* (July). Anent some correspondence in one of the London dailies, we recently stated (see *S.O.* June 24th) that the highest peak in Switzerland was the Dufourspitze (Monte Rosa massive). For this our Swiss friend has hauled us over the coals by remarking that "Monte Rosa is not only Italian in name, but is to "a large extent in Italian territory." We are much obliged for this interesting information, but at the same time wish to point out that the *Daily News*, in testing the knowledge of its readers, asked for the highest "peak," and not mountain. Peak, according to Nuttall's, is defined as the top of a hill ending in a point, and this would seem to dispose of the first part of the argument. The second part is not put so forcefully when our contemporary states that "Monte Rosa has eleven peaks, and the Swiss-Italian "frontier runs across them; but, after examining various "maps of the group, we have failed to find the line marked "with such clearness as would enable any individual mem-

"ber of the group to be claimed as wholly Swiss." We will not challenge the accuracy of these particular maps, and we have no grudge against the other giant, the "Dom," but we refuse to doubt the wisdom of the powers-that-were in naming the highest Swiss peak after the greatest Swiss general. However, we are quite open to conviction if, for the benefit of future generations, the editor of the *Anglo-Swiss Review* wishes further to establish the fact by motor-ing us in his Rolls-Royce to the place in dispute; in the meantime we would refer him to Attinger's Dictionnaire Géographique de La Suisse, which gives the position of the Dufourspitze as "District Viège, Canton de Valais."

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If all the international conferences being held now could realize the objects for which they are convened, the millennium would be here. Some instructive and startling opinions were voiced last week at the International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference at which Switzerland was represented by Prof. R. Michels. As war will cease to be a remedy against over-population, birth control will have to be adopted. Apart from alleviating the lot of the poor and suffering, it is claimed that this would abolish mobs and crowds from the world, and all the waste, weariness, cruelty and disaster that mobs and crowds entail. It seems to us, we are emulating in a modern form the very effective practice of the Old Spartans.

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According to statistics just published the foreign population of London (registered as residing in the Metropolitan Police district) has slightly increased during last year, the Swiss quota being 876 (Americans 883, French 707, Japanese 252).

HERE AND THERE.

By J. H. Cortesey.

Now the holidays are on the question of the weather becomes of primary importance to holiday-makers, and as F. W. Thomas humorously says in the *Star*: "There is a certain quality, a sort of sheer cussedness about our climate, which it shares in common with cats, mules, dress bows and collar studs. None of these things will do what you want them to do, except when you don't want them to do it. . . . At divers times I have laid myself out to write encouraging remarks about our weather, to boost the stuff, and give it a leg up. On every occasion it has gone back on me and let me down. . . . Starting as late as possible on Friday night in order to lessen the risk, I turn out a couple of columns about sunshine and May-blossom, with hairy tramps sitting on stilees, and butterflies, and long white roads. . . . So sure as I do that, in the small hours before Saturday a large and ferocious cyclone comes sailing across the Bantry Bay, where the depressions are made, bumps into the Chiltern Hills, and bursts all over my scenario. . . . Or, encouraged by a falling glass, I write about rain. I get soaked through and through in the execution of my duty, stand under railway arches, talking to ice-cream merchants and baked-potato men. And then get up in the morning to find a couple of heat waves sitting on the lawn, and somebody starting an anti-washing campaign to save water. . . . It is all very discouraging. . . ."

A state of the weather which is further emphasized by the remark of the conductor as a dark gentleman got off his omnibus in the Strand: "What sort of a chap was that?" An inspector answers: "What they call a Parsee, I expect; they worship the sun, them fellows." "Coo!"