

# A thousan years of Swiss travel

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## A THOUSAND YEARS OF SWISS TRAVEL.

### "Travellers in Switzerland."

By G. R. DE BEER, F.R.S.

Oxford University Press, 25/-.

To Mary Tudor is attributed the remark that Calais would be found written on her heart. Much the same thing could be said of Professor G. R. de Beer if Switzerland were substituted for Calais. Mr. de Beer, indeed, belongs to the select circle of those cultured English writers who have found in Switzerland their *grande passion*, who vie with each other in singing her praises and who, on so many occasions, have offered her the tribute of their literary skill, their art and their learning.

In his "Travellers in Switzerland" Mr. de Beer has performed a remarkable feat. He has compiled a catalogue of many more or less notable, men and women from every part of the world who over a period of a thousand years have visited Switzerland, outlined their itineraries and recorded their impressions; a formidable task which, though in his Introduction, with becoming modesty, he makes light of it, must have involved much painstaking labour and scholarly research.

The long list of travellers includes people from every stratum of society. Royalty, soldiers, statesmen, Church dignitaries, writers, poets, artists, composers and ordinary folk — all these, many hundreds of them, jostle each other in Mr. de Beer's crowded pages or, to be more correct, follow each other in orderly procession. Of each, Mr. de Beer has unearthed a personal record or an anecdote bearing on the travellers visit to Switzerland.

There is great variety in the way these travellers re-acted to Swiss scenery and Swiss life. Some beheld the mountains with awe and almost terror, many felt deeply moved, some were lyrical — even the Empress Josephine broke out in verse — others soberly descriptive, few indifferent. Chateaubriand proved an exception. He jeers at the fuss made about the grandeur of the mountains and strikes a pose: "*J'ai vu le Simplon, . . . l'enfer et le ciel, et tout cela m'a été à peu près indifférent.*" Horace Walpole sounds more sincere: "Of the Alps," he writes, "I hope I shall never see them again." Whereas Mark Twain declares that he would as soon spend his life in Weggis as anywhere else.

The list of travellers abounds in famous names: Sir Henry Wotton, the celebrated diplomat whom a wit described as "An honest man sent abroad to lie for his country," Milton, Goethe, Lamartine, Dickens, Brahms, Tschaikovsky and a host of others; Edward Gibbon of whom the Marquise de la Tour du Pin writes: "*Sa figure grôtesque me donnait une envie de rire;*" garrulous Boswell on his visit to Rousseau and Voltaire; the 18th century is, in fact, well represented. The picaresque element appears in Rabelais, Benevenuto Cellini, Casanova the philanderer, Cagliostro the charlatan. There is Mussolini, three times arrested, Lenin, Trotsky; French, Italian and Russian refugees and émigrés, and many more well-known and otherwise; Louis-Philippe, who in 1793, became a schoolmaster at Reichenau in which capacity he gave every satisfaction except that he seduced the school cook. It is a pity that Laurence Sterne did not extend his "Sentimental Journey" to Switzerland and that Dr.

Johnson never crossed the Alps to visit Italy as he intended. What illuminating accounts they might have given!

The Swiss inns, naturally, come in for frequent comment, not always favourable. Jacques Cambry was unlucky. At Brienz, in 1788, the innkeeper seriously proposed that he should share a bed with a woman of eighty-three. Alfred Wills, in 1858, and Charles J. B. Williams, in 1862, found much wanting for their comfort and Robert Louis Stevenson wrote a doggerel to express his dissatisfaction with what he called "a damned Hotel." In more recent times Dorothy Pilley described a restaurant in the alps as a cross between a cowshed and the Trocadero. Robert Browning, who was no lightweight, complained that the only manner by which he could obtain sufficient nourishment was by attending two tables d'hôte, one after the other. Prince Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor fared better: The innkeeper at Martigny, having discovered Metternich's identity, served him a meal of twenty-nine courses. But on the whole the inns and hotels are highly spoken of. Here is the verdict of a 18th century tourist: "*Dans aucun pays que je connais les auberges ne sont tenues comme en Suisse. Propreté, honnêteté, abondance et délicatesse, tous s'y trouve au premier degré.*" And on page 56 is reproduced the menu of a meal served at Andermatt in which there is no stint of austerity.

Many of the travellers were impressed by the simple virtues of the Swiss. As far back as 1665 John Ray wrote: "So honest are the Swiss that one may travel in their country with a bag of gold in his hand . . ."

Mr. de Beer's list of travellers contains a large number of names unfamiliar to the average reader. Short biographical notices would have been helpful. Probably the book which, as it is, runs to 600 pages would have become unwieldy, had such data been added.

The work is constructed on an ingenious plan. It is divided into three sections, chronological, topographical and alphabetical. The last section indicates the sources from which the travellers' accounts are taken and gives cross-references to the first section. The English and French quotations are in the original, all others are translated into English. A number of full-page photographs of Swiss scenes embellish the book.

Professor de Beer is to be congratulated on a fine piece of work. He has handled his material with originality and method. His book is a literary curiosity, rich in detail and full of human interest. Whether regarded as a reference book or an anthology, it is above all a book to browse in and one that will provide entertainment and instruction to English and Swiss readers alike.

J.J.F.S.

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