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THE REAL SWITZERLAND.**"Swiss Life and Landscape"**

by EMIL EGLI.

Published by PAUL ELEK, 38, Hatton Garden,
London, E.C.1. Price 12/6.

Yet another book on Switzerland has appeared, this time from the pen of a Swiss author, brilliantly rendered into flowing, colourful English by Eleanor Brockett. In Great Britain it enjoyed a good Press: it was highly praised by the literary critics. And deservedly so, for it is a work of outstanding beauty, at once informative and enchanting. The author provides the rare and happy combination of geological expert, philosopher, historian and poet and, if it is possible to judge by a translation, is also a talented, skilful writer.

The theme is old, the treatment new. Mr. Egli's book is not a travel book; Hotel life, mountaineering, and alpine sports are scarcely touched upon. Instead the reader is taken behind the scenes, as it were, away from the beaten track, and is shown Swiss life as it really is. The mighty natural forces which have fashioned the configuration of the land and the elements which have moulded the character of the people are explained in lucid, non-technical terms and the variety and contrasts of the geographical and human aspects described in a delightful manner.

There are eighteen chapters which are not inter-dependent; each one is a separate, self-contained study. They are interspersed with 94 beautiful photographs, some of them strikingly unusual.

The first — and longest — chapter is devoted to the St. Gotthard. Previously known as the Mons Tremulus, the mountains of terror, the St. Gotthard Massif was once the central buttress of the Alpine structure and probably the highest point, the apex, of Europe. Millions of years ago, the glaciers of the Ice Ages penetrated the two ranges which form the St. Gotthard and opened a way through. But it was only in the 13th century that the Reuss was bridged and the St. Gotthard became the main pass over the Alps, linking Northern and Southern Europe. For the Swiss, this development had the utmost importance and it is not by a mere chance that the Confederation was founded in 1291, soon after the pass had been opened. Mr. Egli gives a picturesque account of the times when mule-trains, caravans and pack-horses were carrying merchandise to and fro until, in 1880, the great tunnel was bored and Germanic and Latin Switzerland joined hands. An interesting and well-written study.

An equally absorbing chapter deals with the Valais which Poets have called a miniature Spain. In spite of an abnormal rainfall, the Valais is the driest place in Switzerland. The explanation is that all the moisture is dropped over the high mountains, so that Sierre, in the main valley, has no more rain than the Sahara. The balancing factor is produced by the glacier-streams which act as a substitute for the non-existent rainfall and irrigate the land. How the Valaisians have extended this arterial system by their so-called "*bisses*", is graphically described.

Subsequent chapters treat of the Lake of Geneva which reflects the heat rays on to the inclined shores

and so gives the adjoining countryside its temperate climate, a climate eminently suitable for the rich vineyards planted on the slopes; of the Jura with its extremes of temperature and its subterranean waters; of the rich and fertile Mittelland which breeds the hard-headed, stubborn peasants, strongly individualist, back-bone of the country; of Zurich where the Limmat breaks through the moraine curve, relic of the Ice Age; and of the Engadine with its long winter and the crystal clearness of the air. An entrancing chapter is that on the Ticino, the Southern garden of Switzerland and its vivacious, intelligent, population, Italianate in character yet fundamentally Swiss in their outlook and loyalties, whose heraldic motto is aptly "*Liberi a Swizzeri*."

There follows a series of well-informed dissertations on the geological upheavals which brought the Alps into being by the upward thrust of the vast masses of deposits and crystalline rocks from the bottom of the one-time oceans, how the pattern of the peaks was formed and what effect the continuous process of disintegration had on them; on the Glacier world, with its *firn*, or *névé*-snows, *Bergschrund*, crevasses and moraines; on the *Föhn*, that destructive yet helpful south wind which sweeps the Alpine valleys every spring; and on the avalanches, the scourge of the Alps. In all of which the author displays a considerable knowledge of the science of geology.

In the concluding chapters, the human factor is brought into relief. The reader is made to witness the life of the hard-working peasants in the remote valleys and their yearly migrations — in some districts many times repeated — when the cattle is driven to the higher grazing grounds, "*nomads of the Alps*" is the name Mr. Egli gives them. The author also shows how the Swiss towns fit into their natural settings; how the national economy was built up and is being maintained; and how the four languages, so far from being a source of discord, are in fact a harmonious blend, conducive to cultural unity.

Finally, he attempts an outline of the Swiss character. He sums it up as "*a disposition towards kindness in strange alliance with a great capacity for obduracy*."

Thus the manifold and sometimes startling diversities of the Swiss scene are surveyed with keen observation, the natural features and phenomena described and explained, the human element analyzed.

Altogether an admirable and fascinating book, written with charm and sincerity. There are passages where the author may have allowed himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm, but he does so in no spirit of boastfulness. To quote his own words: "*If here and there I may seem guilty of grandiloquence I beg the reader's indulgence. Switzerland is my homeland.*"

J.J.F.S.

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