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SWISS MOUNTAIN PASSES.

"The Alpine Highways of Switzerland."

by BRUNO WAGNER.

Edward Stanford Ltd., 7/6d. nett.

To the fortunate tourist able to travel through Switzerland by private car or motor coach, a descriptive account such as Bruno Wagner's "The Alpine Highways of Switzerland" cannot fail to be of absorbing personal interest. To those who have to stay at home, it offers a glimpse of some of nature's most magnificent scenery made accessible by the skill and industry of the Swiss road-builders.

Mr. Wagner's book, something of a classic in his own country, has not hitherto been available in an English edition. This omission has now been rectified and Edward Stanford Ltd., the publishers, have produced an English translation, profusely illustrated, in the shape of an attractive small, oblong volume of 125 pages. A road-map printed on the inside cover gives a general idea of location but is much too small and sketchy to be of practical use.

The mountain-passes described by Mr. Wagner — twenty-two in all — include names that are familiar to every tourist. Who has not heard of the St. Gotthard, the Furka and the Grimsel, the Splügen and the Great St. Bernard with their geological features and their historic associations? These passes were, in former times, the only routes by which the great mountain barriers could be crossed. They were used by the ancient Romans, and probably long before, they had a strategic importance from the middle ages to the Napoleonic wars and they were commercial life-arteries when pack-horses and baggage-trains afforded the only means of transport.

To-day, modern, well-built roads have taken the place of the old, steep mule-tracks. Crossing the Alps is no longer the formidable and often dangerous undertaking it used to be and a motor-car will convey the tourist in a few hours along well-surfaced roads to his destination in comfort and safety. The gradients have been overcome by the construction of winding zig-zag roads some of which, seen from a distance, have the appearance of a huge serpent coiled among the rocks.

As an engineering feat, these modern highways command one's pride and admiration. Human skill and perseverance have conquered terrific obstacles to their construction. The Susten Pass, for instance, completed in 1946, is an outstanding triumph of the road-builder's art. It took two-thousand men seven years to build the road and owing to weather conditions the work could not be carried on for more than six months yearly. It rises to a height of 7406 feet above sea level in a gradual climb with a maximum gradient of one in eleven. Twenty-five tunnels had to be blasted and twenty-six bridges were built. The cost of the road, some thirty miles in length, was thirty-two million Swiss francs.

Mr. Wagner's account is not merely technical. Apart from historical references and much factual detail, he offers his readers a glowing description of the breathtaking beauty of the Swiss landscape with its picturesque villages set in lovely valleys and the magnificence of the great mountains towering above and around the highways which are the subject of his interesting book.

J.J.F.S., July, 1950.

LES LIEUX SACRES: SACHSELN ET LE RANFT.

par GONZAGUE DE REYNOLD.

Unterwald ob dem Wald: le plus petit, le plus paisible des Etats suisses — et le plus éloigné du monde.

Vallée ovale qui descend vers le nord comme un escalier à trois marches: sur la première, le lac de Lungern, une goutte d'eau; sur la seconde, le lac de Sarnen, une flaque de pluie; au bas de la troisième, — bassin ou frémis toujours une onde grise et mauve, — le lac d'Alpnach, ce golfe du grand fiord des quatre-Cantons.

De Sachseln, je suis monté à la chapelle du Flueli, là-haut sur son rocher caché par la verdure et tout entouré de maisons. Car elle domine le pays, la chapelle: le lac de Sarnen qui, ce soir, a la teinte du lait caillé; la capitale, — des toits comme des coquilles de noix entassés par un écureuil sous une grosse motte; l'église de la capitale, immense au milieu des petits toits comme une cathédrale blanche.

Autour du lac, des pâturages d'abord plats et marécageux, ils se soulèvent en bosses inégales, ils rejoignent les forêts, ils les traversent, les dépassent, jusqu'aux roches. Et partout des demeures: villages, hameaux, fermes, et, dans la montagne, chalets. Et la montagne, a des formes pacifiques; pas de glaciers, pas de neige encore.

Mais les lignes de ce paysage fermé ne forcent point le regard à monter jusqu'à la montagne: sans cesse, doucement, elles le ramènent dans la vallée, autour du lac, sur les prés, parmi les arbres et les demeures. Il faut ici baisser la tête. Il faut ici regarder la terre.

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