

Europe's biggest stage in Montreux Festival

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THE CRADLE OF SWITZERLAND.

It was with an anticipation of delight that we opened Sir Arnold Lunn's latest book "The Cradle of Switzerland" (published by Hollis & Carter, price 12/6 net). And we were not disappointed. The old magic is there: a flexible, flowing prose, clarity of thought and style, orderly marshalling of facts, flashes of humour and a background of vast learning, all so characteristic of Sir Arnold's writing.

The book is divided into two parts; the first historical, the second mainly descriptive, both dealing with the inner cantons adjoining the lake of Lucerne which form the nucleus from which the Swiss confederation was evolved, the cradle of a free people.

In the historical section Sir Arnold displays a knowledge of Swiss history, not only in the broad outline but also in its lesser detail, that would reflect credit on an educated Swiss; for an Englishman it is unusual and remarkable.

He introduces the lake of the Forest cantons, describes the rise of the Imperial house of Habsburg which from modest beginnings came to furnish sixteen kings to Germany, twenty-two to Austria, three to Portugal, eleven to Bohemia and Hungary, six to Spain and but for Mary Tudor's sterility, might have given England another, and gives a reasoned account of the events and circumstances that created the Ruetli legend. Of the William Tell episode he asks: "Is it history or legend?" Modern research, he writes, strengthens the belief that the Tell story is not wholly mythical. The Landvogt of Altdorf was not Gessler, his name was Tillendorf and as the years passed Tillendorf became Tellendorf and finally Tell, a confusion which is cleared up by a new assessment of recorded facts.

Marignano, the religious wars, foreign alliances, the birth of Swiss neutrality, the Napoleonic interlude and the working of Swiss democracy are discussed. There is a chapter on the Sonderbund which Sir Arnold calls "a very civil war", another on "Kantone-ligeist", and one to dispel the erroneous notion that Swiss prosperity is due to the war. Swiss prosperity, he writes, is due to the fact that the Swiss believe in the dignity of work and that their democracy finds a place for duty as well as for rights.

Altogether a very able and fascinating survey of the birth and development of the Swiss confederation.

The second part of the book describes the "cradle" as it appears today. It might serve as a guidebook to Lucerne, the adjoining localities and the lesser known townships of the inner cantons to which the tourist rarely penetrates, the tranquil seclusion of Zug, the historic treasures of Schwyz, the baroque splendours of Einsiedeln, Brunnen, Altdorf, Andermatt as the approaches to the St. Gotthard. A chapter is devoted to Bruder Klaus, recently canonized, who in 1448 effected a conciliation between the opposing cantons and thus saved the country from a civil war. By the way Liestal where Bruder Klaus turned back is near Bâle and not near Berne as stated on page 90.

Talking of Brunnen and the inscription on the Mythenstein in homage to Schiller, Sir Arnold slyly refers to it as a cheap tribute to a very indifferent play.

Throughout the book runs the warm sympathy and deep understanding Sir Arnold has always harboured for the Swiss, their way of life and their institutions. The book is sure to provide pleasure and instruction to all those whose interest in Switzerland is not limited

to winter sports and the conventional tourist's attractions. For the Switzerland of which he writes is not the "Playground of Europe" as Leslie Stephen has labelled it, but a land rich in cultural and artistic associations and with a great historical past.

J.J.F.S.

EUROPE'S BIGGEST STAGE IN MONTREUX FESTIVAL.

FROM DEREK MEAKIN.

Claimed to be the biggest in Europe, a stage measuring 84 feet by 104 feet has been erected in the market square of this lakeside town to celebrate the 55th anniversary of a festival first started by a group of English visitors as a treat for local schoolchildren.

The Montreux Narcissus Festival, the celebrated Fête des Narcisses, is now one of the Continent's most colourful spectacles.

Yet when it made its humble début in 1897 the highlight of the celebrations was nothing more ambitious than a children's ballet.

Thousands of people from all parts of the world, including hundreds from Britain, visited Montreux this year to see the biggest festival of them all.

Confetti Battles.

They saw the famous company of the Rome Opera House perform on a stage far bigger than any in Rome, watched an hour-long Carnival of Flowers, took part in moonlight confetti battles, saw skiing on the lake, an international "concours d'élégance automobile," and heard the famous Banda dei Carabinieri di Roma.

But the open-air theatre constructed in the centre of this Swiss Riviera resort was the main attraction.

A special train was needed to bring the company, as well as tons of scenery and costumes, from Rome. It carried 300 players, an orchestra of 95, a choir of 90, and a corps de ballet. A further 100 non-singing players were recruited from among the local population.

On a giant stage, under more than 100 floodlights, they presented two of Verdi's operas — "Aida" and "La Force du Destin". At times 400 artists were on the stage at the same moment.

The "Fête des Narcisses" is named after the millions of wild narcissi that carpet the mountain sides above the town in the spring.

But although few of the wild flowers could be seen as late as June there was no shortage of other blooms.

Spivs Out.

The Carnival of Flowers, which opened the celebrations, consisted of many floral tableaux which cost the organisers £10,000 in flowers alone.

All the gaiety, the fun, thrills and the excitement cost money for the visitors too, and in Montreux silver francs were flowing like water. The local spivs were doing well selling confetti at 1s. 8d. a bag and found no shortage of buyers.

But they counted few of the English among their customers. Although one in every three of the visitors to Montreux carried a British passport he was forced to take a more passive part in the festivities. With only £25 in his pocket, he is the poorest holidaymaker in Switzerland this year.

"Manchester Evening News."