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CULTURAL CROSSROADS.

by OLIVIER REVERDIN.

It must be about a year ago that I spoke to you on the subject of the Swiss expedition to Mount Everest. Its remarkable performances are well known, and the world press has spoken about it a great deal. As you are aware, the Genevese guide, Raymond Lambert, almost succeeded in reaching the highest summit in the world. And, even if he did not quite get to the top, he is, at the present moment, the man who has climbed to the highest spot: "the highest man in the world" to use the language of our times, which are so crazy about records.

What, however, is not generally known abroad, is the fact that the group of Swiss mountain climbers which attempted to reach the summit of Mount Everest, was accompanied by a scientific expedition. This expedition, which was financed by the city and Canton of Geneva, as well as by private initiative, was composed of a doctor of medicine, a botanist, a geologist and an ethnologist. The mission of the first two was to observe the behaviour of the human organism in the high altitude and to study vegetable life. The geologist's task was to explore a high valley and to bring back samples. As for the ethnologist, this lady remained, of course in the inhabited zones of Nepal. There, she studied the customs of the population and collected a great number of interesting objects, destined for the Ethnographical Museum, in Geneva.

The observations made by the medical man of the party. Dr. Wyss-Dunant, are valuable in more ways than one. They will, more especially, facilitate the preparation of future expeditions. They have already been of use to the Englishmen who are going to attempt the conquest of Mount Everest.

The geologist, M. Augustin Lombard, has only drawn up a preliminary report. He is now busily at work on the samples which he has brought back with him, and the notes which he has made in regard to the soil. This is a work which will take a long time, but the results, judging from the preliminary report, promise to be very interesting.

And, now let us come to the botanist, M. Albert Zimmerman. He was able to pursue his investigations up to an altitude of 7,000 metres. One of his most interesting discoveries is in respect of two phanerogams, that is to say, flowering plants, the one being a cluster of androsace and the other a small saxifrage, which he gathered at a height of 6,350 metres. There is something very moving about the struggle for existence waged by these last tufts of plants, clinging to the highest rocks. Violent winds, snow and ice assail them or cover them for the greater part of the year. They avail themselves of a few days, or, at the most, of a few weeks of respite in order to form a flower, and then a seed, and thus perpetuate their species on these desolate heights.

The flora of the the Himalayas has already formed the object of a number of studies. Nevertheless, there still exists only a very fragmentary knowledge regarding this flora. Thanks to the Genevese expedition, this knowledge can be supplemented. In this way, a Swiss scientist and a Swiss scientific institution will have contributed, in this particular branch, to the progress

of science and to the exploration of the globe, which is still far from being complete.

The work in connection with all the material brought back by M. Zimmermann — there are several cases containing dried plants and also a large number of living plants obtained from the sub-tropical valleys which lie at the foot of the high mountain summits and which are going to be cultivated in the hot-houses and the rockeries of the Botanical Garden — the work, I repeat, will spread over a number of years. It will be necessary, in a laboratory, to examine each sample with the aid of tweezers, magnifying glasses and microscopes, in order to determine the species, and describe those that are still unknown. All this work is being done in the city of the Candolles, the Boissiers, the Mullers and the Briquets, where for a hundred and fifty years botany has occupied an honoured place, to such an extent that, after those of the Kew Gardens, near London, the Genevese herbariums are the finest in the world.

And, now a word or two about ethnography. The collections brought back from the Nepal, among which are to be found some very fine specimens, are to be exhibited and then form the subject of publications. They will certainly enrich the collections in the Ethnographical Museum, in Geneva. Among the most striking objects, we would draw attention to a sculptured reel for winding thread, probably dating back to the 10th century, a large vessel made of baked earth, used for religious ceremonies and adorned with the head of the god Bairab, a splendid lamp made of cast brass and richly chased, a work in which the Nepalese have excelled for centuries past. Donations in cash, on the part of some patrons of art, as well as the funds placed at the disposal of the expedition by the public authorities, made such purchases possible, as well as many others.

From all this you will realise that the work of the scientists who accompanied the Swiss alpinists to the Himalayas, was far from negligible. In fact, it represents a very interesting and very important contribution to exploration and the knowledge of the world. A contribution, — among many others. Switzerland, a tiny, little country — don't forget that she possesses less than five million inhabitants — maintains her rank; side by side with the other countries, she participates in that vast effort made by civilised humanity, the aim of which is to obtain a better knowledge of Man and of the riches of our planet.

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