

A Vaudois on the evolution of the Valais

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THE well known Swiss writer André Guex gave a talk in French at the Swiss Embassy recently. Although Vaudois, the speaker had made a special study of the Valais and he mastered the subject to no mean degree.

Born in Vevey in 1904, he graduated at the University of Lausanne in 1926. He lived in Greece for two years before going to Paris where he began to write.

After four years he returned to Switzerland to teach French literature in Lausanne. He spent much time sharing the life of workmen boring tunnels through the mountains or building causeways in the Alps, as well as with foresters, sailors and fishermen on lakes and the high seas.

His books reveal his keen interest not only in teaching but also in the life of his fellow-men. He is also a mountaineer, and some of his works reflect this interest.

He wrote about other countries, too, the Aegean Sea and the Atlantic and a summer and winter spent in Lapland.

He published three volumes about the changes in the Valais in the 50 years between 1913 and 1963, "Le demi-siècle de

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Maurice Troillet." And it is his great knowledge of that canton which was the basis of his lecture "L'évolution du Valais". He gave a picture of the valley of the Rhone with high walls on both sides, of the orchards and the vines, of tourism which exploded 100 years ago, and the British achievements in making the resorts popular.

He talked of the people who, he maintained, were different from other Swiss, fiercely patriotic and capable of nationalistic passions, men and women who had to combat nature, who went from the mountains to the valley, who knew the lack of money but who were determined to succeed.

He gave a picture of the Valaisan statesman, Maurice Troillet, who had perspicacity and extraordinary intelligence and who knew what the canton needed. He realised that new

problems needed new solutions, and he fought battles to get the agricultural college completed, first for farmers, then for agronomists and scientists.

Troillet knew his countrymen, who were in the service of nature, as it were, building barrages and causeways and making tunnels, and who constructed a road network joining nearly 40 villages. The lecturer also related how the construction of that network took 30 years to complete.

He told, too, of the aluminium industry at Chippis, which gave employment to so many.

André Guex also gave a picture of the Rhone which is such an important force in the Valais. Corrections to its flow were made, but the river asserted itself by flooding the narrower bed, and new measures had to be found to keep the river in check.

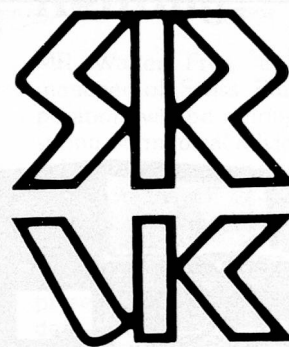
He mentioned the Mattmark catastrophe and the vastly expensive Grande Dixence hydro-electric power works. Yes, the Valais men had always been in close and intimate contact with the rock, and their work had been difficult and dangerous.

The changes in the canton of Valais have been great and not altogether always beneficial, especially with regard to tourism which had reached gigantic proportions. It was difficult to find silence and solitude with the crowded mountainsides and dozens of climbers on the Matterhorn at the same time. There was success, but the consequences were at times deplorable.

The Cultural Counsellor, Monsieur J.-J. Indermuehle, thanked André Guex for his comprehensive and brilliant picture of the Valais. He said it was extraordinary that a Vaudois could grasp the essential character of the Valaisan to such a fine degree.

Monsieur and Madame Indermuehle gave a reception afterwards and the audience had a chance of personal contact with the eminent speaker.

Mariann Meier



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