

REVIEWS

Mountain Paths. By H. E. G. Tyndale. Pp. x, 208, with photographs. Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd., London, 1948, Price 16s. net.

THIS is an uncommonly charming book. When I took it up I had doubts whether it would prove to be more than a set of pleasant essays. Tyndale's literary ability can be taken for granted; the high level he has maintained in the JOURNAL stands solid witness to that. His papers to the Club are models of sensitive and delightful prose; his editorial comments reveal his delicate feeling for the *mot juste*, the apt turn of phrase, even the sly but erudite dig. All this was to be anticipated, but an outlook so intrinsically modest and a style so carefully cultured might be expected to involve a certain lack of staying power incapable of lasting the full course of a book, however brilliant over the short distance of essay or ephemeral paper.

Such doubts were short lived. Even though each chapter is complete in itself and self-sufficient, the book does not lack unity. The separate parts are held together as firmly as beads on a string and are as carefully graded.

The unifying threads are several. The form of the book in the first place. It is a chronological account of a mountaineering Odyssey. *Mountain Paths* is well named. We follow the track of Tyndale's development as a mountaineer, tentative at first but soon becoming arduous as we ascend through youth, though not so pressed that we have no time to wander now and again from the set path to look at the view round the corner, until we reach the Upper Alps of maturity, not so strenuous may be, but warm with friendship and the years that bring the philosophic mind, whence with the poetry of emotion recollected in tranquillity we can survey alike the high snows of mountain endeavour and the well tended, flower-flecked meadows of a full and cultured life.

We start with his introduction to the hills through Irving and Winchester, first in Wales, then at Arolla and Chamonix, leading on to those astonishingly fruitful years up to 1914 which brought Tyndale, though he would not dream of mentioning it of course, to his election to the Club when only twenty-one with a record of ascents which for quantity and quality combined remains and, as long as travel restrictions are with us alas, is likely to remain unequalled. There follow accounts of these great seasons when that remarkable guideless party of Wykehamists, the three musketeers of Mallory, Bullock and Tyndale in the wake of Irving's d'Artagnan, surely one of the strongest this country has ever produced, swept through the Alps—Zermatt, Zinal, the Oberland, Breuil, the Paradiso—taking any and every great route, and some new ones too, in its stride, to reach its climax in a splendid ascent of the frontier ridge of Mont Maudit. Now and then we pause and stray from the main track for a moment to wander through the Peloponnese or solitary over a Ticino ridge walk in spring.

The war brings a break. Up to this point all has been crescendo, a tale of mounting adventure. But a 'leg which had had a little misunderstanding with a Württemberger' proved not too reliable, and as far as great climbs are concerned the last half of the book is decrescendo. We return to the Alps to wander across the Valais to Zermatt and meditate on Monte Rosa. An ascent of the Aiguille de Zallion with all the charm if not the glory of a new route¹; wanderings round Saas Fee; climbs in the Graubünden on the Platta and Palü; an Easter walk above Val Maggia and we have moved imperceptibly eastwards to find ourselves at last with Kugy, comfortably ensconced in the Julians. And here we spend, with one unfortunate exception, the remainder of the book, climbing here, stalking (alas how unsuccessfully) the capercailzie there, but always returning of an evening to Kugy for a yarn or to hear a tale of that inimitable character from Albert Bois de Chesne.

For some, the earlier part with its more dramatic stories of great ascents will be the more attractive, but for me these last few chapters are the cream of the book. The titbit has been kept to the end as it should be. Kugy in all his lovable eccentricity and his no less endearing entourage of Carinthian originals of every kind, spring astonishingly alive from the page. More so even than do Graham Irving and his teams of Wykehamists in the earlier chapters.

And here we find another unifying thread. Tyndale effaces himself assiduously from his narrative, making only periodic personal appearances, usually, as with the capercailzie, in the role of dunce, butt or dupe, never in that of hero. The book, however, has heroes, two of them, Irving and Kugy, and each part of the book centres quite definitely about one of them. Each is stamped with the character of its central figure and each in its way is a tribute both to a notable man and a remarkable friendship.

Other threads weave their way constantly through the narrative. Winchester and Oxford are never far away even from Carinthia; there is always time to botanise even on the steepest moraine; and through the book the great choruses of Beethoven or Bach sound their praise to the loveliness of nature.

But above all it is the style that holds it all together. I have already mentioned how carefully Tyndale keeps himself out of his narrative. But a man can be seen in his writing if he but write well, and so, self-deprecatory, retiring, Tyndale yet reveals himself in every word he writes. Easily, charmingly, his prose runs its cultured way, so infused with allusion that it is hard to tell where quotation begins or ends.

' "Infirm of purpose, give me the ice-axe!" and I slunk back into inglorious ease.'

¹ Dübi has a suspicious passage: 'Siehe *A. J.* 34. 477, wo die gleiche Route als neu angegeben ist und wo man behauptet, der Grat sei 2 km. lang . . . während die Länge kaum 700 m. erreicht!' but he adds, 'Empfehlenswerte Tour.'

And the quotations themselves ! They are always apt, sometimes deliciously so—

‘the host of pinnacles and towers above the Pellarini hollow catch the fire of sunset,

Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow,’

or of the attitude of the Club to taking guideless parties of schoolboys to the Alps,

‘I, demens, et curre per Alpes,
Ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias,’

—spattering the pages with literary delights in more languages, unfortunately, than your reviewer has at his command.

Good stories abound, especially of course round and about Kugy. Here and there, even, Tyndale like Leslie Stephen has found ‘the pain of dismissing some poor old joke’ too much for him and ‘some intolerable specimens’ remain, like Irving to a companion cleaning a Graübunden summit of the remnants of past feasts ; ‘Hullo ! Cleansing the outside of the Platta.’ But it is all in excellent taste, every word the right one and not one too much. It may be a little donnish at times perhaps, but that is only proper in a schoolmaster.

Only once does Tyndale’s normally impeccable sense of fitness falter. It was a mistake, I feel, to include the chapter on Willy Merkl. It adds little to our knowledge of Merkl, nothing to our understanding of Tyndale and breaks the thread of the book.

This is probably too self-effacing a book to achieve wide popularity. It is essentially a book for mountaineers rather than the general public, for it assumes, it is true, only a small part of Tyndale’s own encyclopaedic knowledge of the Alps and Alpine literature, but this is still much more than the ordinary mortal is likely to possess. Drama for its own sake is sedulously avoided. There are no bleeding chunks of rough cut emotion or well larded cakes of half-baked sentimental ‘philosophy.’ Tyndale does not wear his heart on his sleeve. He belongs to the classic, eighteenth century tradition. The elements of popular appeal are simply not there.

But to those who love the Alps, and above all to those with an eye for charming and elegant writing, this book can be confidently commended. It will give lasting as well as immediate pleasure. There are a number of excellent photographs. Particularly good is a portrait of Kugy which shows him as one has always imagined him to be.

This is the second volume in Eyre and Spottiswoode’s excellently produced ‘New Alpine Library,’ a new series edited by Arnold Lunn, whose own anthology *Switzerland in English Prose and Poetry* was the first. If it continues as it has begun, this series is likely to make a notable addition to Alpine literature.¹

G. A. DUMMETT.

¹ This review was written before Tyndale’s death.

The Unknown Mountain. By Don Munday. Pp. 262, with 37 illustrations, 2 sketch maps. Hodder & Stoughton, London. Price 21s.

FEW mountaineers in recent years can have had the good fortune to explore year after year the most important Group of a practically unknown Range containing hundreds of virgin peaks of over 10,000 ft., culminating in a great peak 13,260 ft. high, and immense glaciers, some of which are more than twenty miles in length.

But this is what the Canadians Don Munday and his wife were able to do between the years 1925 and 1936 in the Waddington Group of the Coast Range of British Columbia. On several occasions they were accompanied by the well-known American climber Henry Hall, and sometimes by other Canadian companions—among whom one must not forget the splendid packers, headed by the late Pete McCormick, to whom a great deal of the credit is due for having forced a way into the Range through the dense Homathko valley. Their adventures and achievements are now described in picturesque detail in *The Unknown Mountain*.

The country which Munday writes about is extremely beautiful and at the same time exceedingly tough, and all that he and his wife achieved required a great deal of courage and determination. For in this region one meets not only the normal hazards and difficulties of mountain exploration, but at the approaches to the peaks there are such unusual dangers and obstacles as quicksands, whirlpools, floods, dense jungle of bush, devils club and giant fallen trees—not to mention the grizzlies which abound in these valleys. Their parties had frequent meetings at close quarters with these beasts, and it was lucky that some of the brushes they had with them did not have more serious consequences than they did. It also meant endless back-packing with heart-breaking loads in untrailed forests and through precipitous ravines before any of the high camps could be established successfully. Under these conditions it is perhaps not unnatural that descriptions of the approaches are inclined to outweigh accounts of the actual climbs.

But it will be seen that the Mundays did make a number of first ascents, including that of Mt. Munday and some of the lower summits of Mystery Mountain, itself which 'is composed of about twenty peaks of over 10,500 ft. and for a length of about 5 miles nowhere drops below that elevation.' In addition they explored several unknown glaciers. But it was unlucky for them that they did not reach the highest point of Mt. Waddington (13,260 ft.). Consequently the story of the exceptional feat of making the first of only two ascents of this important peak in 1936 by two Americans, W. White and F. Weissner, is here dismissed in one short paragraph.

Ski-mountaineers will be pleased to learn that ski were often used to advantage in traversing these great snowfields. Although snow conditions are seldom ideal in the Coastal belt they were found to be of great help in saving time and energy in this difficult terrain where some of the glaciers descend almost to the Pacific Ocean. In this connection it seems a pity that the book should include a number of

ungenerous and often inaccurate remarks about the only British party to visit the Range—the ski expedition which in the Spring of 1934 made the first crossing of the Range, which was crossed completely by way of Scimitar Glacier, Fury Gap (from the East) and down the Franklin Glacier to Knight Inlet (see the excellent sketch map at the end of the book). For the real facts about this expedition reference should be made to the first book on this district, *Round Mystery Mountain*, published in 1935.¹

There are some lively tales of the trappers who live and trek on the outskirts of the Range, which give an interesting sidelight on their lonely but active lives.

There are several excellent illustrations—particularly that of the summit of Mt. Waddington taken from one of the lower points and the picture of the ponies on the ice of Scimitar Glacier.

In conclusion I think that mountaineers of the Old World may well give a welcome to this unusual book which relates the fascinating story of the romantic peaks and glaciers of another Continent.

E. B. BEAUMAN.

Again Switzerland. By Frank S. Smythe. Pp. 248, with 32 photographs, frontispiece in colour and sketch map. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1947. Price 20s.

FEW, very few of us have been as fortunate as Mr. Smythe in his return to the Alps; two weeks rather than two months is all that most have been able to manage at a stretch and one of the pleasures of this book is that for the ski-mountaineer in particular it brings back a series of happy and nostalgic reminiscences. Those, however, who have yet to venture into the High Alps on ski or who confine their associations with mountains to the precincts of ski-lifts and funiculars may perhaps come to realise from this volume the delights which glacier ski-ing affords.

It was fortunate for Mr. Smythe that he had so long at his disposal, for the weather in the early spring of 1947 was stormy and unsettled with heavy snowfalls leading to inconclusive efforts at Adelboden and Kippel in the Lötschental. At Verbiers in the Val de Bagnes there was some improvement and the two chapters describing the tours done from this centre are well worth reading and studying; the Verbiers district is not so well known as it should be and there are some fine expeditions to be done here from the Cabane de Mont Fort, with the Rosa Blanche, 10,985 ft., as the queen of a region, well worth a visit.

At Zermatt the foul weather continued most discouragingly, but Mr. Smythe is a good traveller and knows how to compensate for time lost by the pleasant discoveries and wanderings to be made in the valley on off-days. But settled weather came at last and with it a splendid traverse of the Breithorn from the Bétemps Hut via the Schwarztor,

¹ See also *A.J.* 47. 75-86.

ending with a run down from the plateau over the Furgg Glacier in the shadow of the Matterhorn to the Schwarzsee and Staffelalp in perfect snow conditions. For sheer magnificence of surroundings and scenery there can hardly be a finer ski-tour in all the High Alps than this and Mr. Smythe's description of it does full justice.

There follows a good account of the Haute Route from the Schönbühl over to Arolla and thence via the Pas de Chèvres to the Val des Dix hut, recently reconstructed. Here again the author describes an area ideally suited for high level ski-touring with a variety of excellent huts, but in early spring the problem of access to them and of provisioning is liable to be difficult.

Not everyone will endorse Mr. Smythe's apologia for his final tour, a solo traverse of the Oberland from Munster in Goms and the Galmihorn Hut, taking in the Finsteraarhorn itself on the way. Notwithstanding good weather and very safe glacier conditions, we do not hesitate to say that such enterprises must be roundly condemned; certainly every Englishman still has the right to risk his neck if he wishes, but accidents may happen to the most experienced of us and they are not always fatal. Search parties are not likely to be sympathetic to risking their own necks to rescue an 'Alleingänger' from the consequences of his own rashness. While not advising others to emulate it, we must nevertheless admit that this solo expedition, ending up in the Lötschental, was, as it turned out, a fine conclusion to a noteworthy sequence of tours.

This is a valuable book, for we can recollect few others devoted almost wholly to ski-mountaineering and it is a most useful contribution to the subject without being over-technical. Needless to say the photographs are fully up to the standard we are accustomed to expect from this author and do much to enhance the pleasure of reading this book.

K. C. S.

Tour on the Continent, 1765. By Thomas Pennant. Edited by G. R. de Beer. Ray Society and Bernard Quaritch, 17s. 6d.

'A Whig, Sir; a sad dog' but 'the best traveller I ever read' was Dr. Johnson's description; and indeed Pennant's *Tour in Scotland* still holds its place as an admirable book of travel. The manuscript *Tour on the Continent* (No. 12707 in the National Library of Wales) lacks the polish of the books which Pennant himself prepared for publication, but the Ray Society must nevertheless be congratulated on their decision to print it. The text has been carefully and unobtrusively edited by Colonel de Beer; and it emerges as a very readable narrative of six months' travel in France, Savoy, Switzerland, Germany and the Low Countries. In 1765, Pennant was completing his *British Zoology*, and as a traveller he was more eager to meet Buffon, Haller, Pallas and the De Lucs than to leave the beaten track of the Grand Tour in search of striking scenery and unfrequented routes. His narrative, 'Passed by la Caille; ascended a very high mountain; my chaise was assisted

by a pair of Oxen,' reveals more of the history of Alpine terminology than of mountaineering. From Geneva, he admired the 'glistening masses of ice of a mountainous height'; and at Grindelwald he paid the usual visit to the 'lower glaciere': 'It had exactly the appearance of a tempestuous sea caught by the frost in its utmost rage and froze up. We armed our heels with iron pegs made expressly for walking on the ice and got on some of these solid waves.'

On May 27, a visit on horseback to the Scheidegg involved wading through deep snow. Avalanches were falling from the Wetterhorn: 'the smaller ones . . . fall in clouds without any noise.' Primarily a naturalist with a good eye for landscape, Pennant exemplifies the beginning of that scientific curiosity about Alpine phenomena which culminated in Saussure, Hugi and Tyndall. The *Tour* is not a great or startling book, but it is pleasant reading to anyone interested in the gradual evolution of our attitude to mountain landscape.

MICHAEL ROBERTS.

Over Lakeland Fells. By W. A. Poucher. Chapman and Hall, 1948.

PROLIFIC authors are always suspect and so rapidly does one of Mr. Poucher's volumes follow its predecessor that I sometimes wonder how Messrs. Harrison manage to print the Government Postage Stamps as well. At least eleven picture books have appeared so far, whilst three more are 'in preparation.' The most alarming aspect of all this is the fact that the latest is a record of a holiday in 1943: if Mr. Poucher has only reached that point the spate can hardly yet be in full flood.

Those of Mr. Poucher's previous books which I have read have sometimes suffered from the fault of monotony, particularly in the text. I have nothing to say of him as a writer: he is a neutral quantity, but if you wish to know that 'overhead the gentle breeze whispers strange tales of the fairies who dance in this enchanting dell after the stranger has wandered through it' read it all. If you don't, don't.

This particular Lakeland tour has, apart from the text, surpassing merits, in particular these: the author keeps to the ridges and tops, he covers some of the neglected Eastern fells and his weather was ideal throughout. The peaks round the Buttermere-Crummock valley are given the most generous treatment and well they deserve it; some of the views are quite breath-taking, e.g. 54 and 67, and the superb double-page spreads 52, 64 and 79.

As one born and bred on a Box Brownie I can add no technical criticism. Like the good conjuror he is Mr. Poucher shows you how it is all done in an Appendix and very easy it sounds, until you try to do it yourself.

As soon as I finished the book I wrote to Mr. Poucher asking him for prints of one or two of the pictures. These came by return with a little note to say he was just off for a trip to the hills and would be away for a month or two. So our children should be provided for too.

ELLIOTT VINEY.