

From here we climbed the snowy Swiss Peaks at the second shot, the first shot having been baulked by bad weather. We had started out hopefully but later found ourselves crouching under a rock whilst the storm grew steadily worse until, after the full hour which Ernest's persistence demanded, even he finally announced *ex cathedra*: 'I tell you what, she's a damn blissle,' a phrase which forthwith entered our family language.

The next day, however, we made our peak, despite the fact that my balance on the fresh snow not merely called for comment from Ernest but at one point for active rescue.

The best day of all from the hut was on Mount Sir Charles Tupper, which Ernest called Sir Tupper, in true North American style. You approach this lovely piece of rock over an easy glacier, and when dry, as it was, you put on your sneakers at the base of the climb and by the time you take them off again you have that feeling of intense elation and satisfaction which come only from a perfect form of activity with wonderful surroundings and companionship. The climb is nowhere very difficult, since the rock itself has those qualities of absolute soundness and perfect rectitude of form which somehow seldom seem to prevail in steep places. Moreover the view is magnificent; you are in the heart of this great chain stretching endlessly north and south, with any number of unclimbed peaks in sight. Ernest's calculation of the distance of one which seemed comparatively near was three weeks.

But as we watched a magnificent sunset from our hut that evening, after that all contenting day, there was no feeling of regret that those peaks are not yet a fully developed playground. I must confess to heresy in that I have no ambition that man should set foot on all the summits of the world. I had the inestimable good fortune of being introduced to mountains by Graham Irving and Hal Tyndale. In that party one learns not only that any joke, however atrocious, is permitted above 10,000 feet, one learns also that there is a reverence and respect that one may find in high places, which once learnt, one does ill ever to forget. This is, mercifully, a creed without dogma, and I am grateful to this Club, whose members continue to enshrine that creed, for giving me this chance of recalling to my mind an occasion when one learnt a little of the meaning of that creed, whose value, perhaps, we realise all the more clearly in 'bad seasons' such as these.

THE ASCENT OF JEBEL KASSALA

By R. A. HODGKIN

THE history of early attempts to climb Jebel Kassala is meagre. It is commonly related that a native once made an attempt to reach the top and obtain a leaf of the Tree of Life. Having failed to get up the last section of the peak, he is said to have

attempted to shoot off one of the branches of the elusive tree with a gun or bow and arrow. He succeeded in hitting a branch, but it was blown from his grasp and, according to some, he later lost his hold and was killed. The topography of the upper part of the mountain leads one to doubt some of the details of this legend, but it has not yet been proved that the trees at the top have not some miraculous powers.

The Italians during their occupation of Kassala from 1894-96 certainly made an attempt on the mountain. Here again details are not available of their route or of the measure of their success. It is, however, certain that they did not reach the summit. Since then various adventurous officials have made tentative ascents of the lower slopes, but usually returned with discouraging reports of extremely smooth slabs or of dark gullies barred by overhanging boulders.

The mountain itself stands 2800 feet above the town of Kassala, from which it is only two or three miles distant. The first 800 feet consist of fairly gradual slopes, strewn with boulders and large scree covered with bushes. Above this level, the rocks are, in general, bare smooth slabs of the 'boiler plate' variety. That is to say, they are never absolutely flat but bulge outwards or curve in towards dark gullies and chimneys. There is hardly a sharp corner or jagged peak anywhere on the whole profile of the Jebel; everywhere the basic geometrical figure is the parabola. This roundness of the mountain has been brought about by that type of desert erosion known as 'exfoliation' which consists of the gradual peeling off of those parts of a mountain which are most affected by temperature changes. As the surface of the peak, and particularly those parts which project, will be thus steadily eroded, the tendency is for spherical rock forms to develop. This gives rise to a rock formation which makes the ascent possible. Where a layer of rock is in process of peeling off, one sometimes finds the old 'skin' lying against the main body of the mountain, in the form of a series of huge slabs piled one on top of the other like a pile of flat child's bricks leaning against a wall. It was one such formation which provided the key to the ascent.

A hasty examination of the western side of the Jebel in 1939 and Mr. D. Newbold's description of the eastern side viewed from the air, suggested that a route was more likely to be found from the east than from the west, despite the deceptively promising line of approach visible from Kassala. L. W. Brown and I therefore spent the morning of December 21 in reconnoitring the eastern approaches. From almost any side the problem of the climb is a double one: how to get up the steep walls which rise for over a thousand feet out of the boulder slopes, and how to climb the smooth dome which rises some 900 feet further. Between the two is a tree covered terrace which was obviously the first objective and which we called the Hanging Garden. There seemed to be two possible ways of reaching this, either by a very black and awesome-looking gully or by the pile of broken slabs to which I have already referred. In any case it was obvious that we should do

best to sleep out at the foot of the steep rocks in order to have as much time as possible for climbing in the fairly cool morning air.

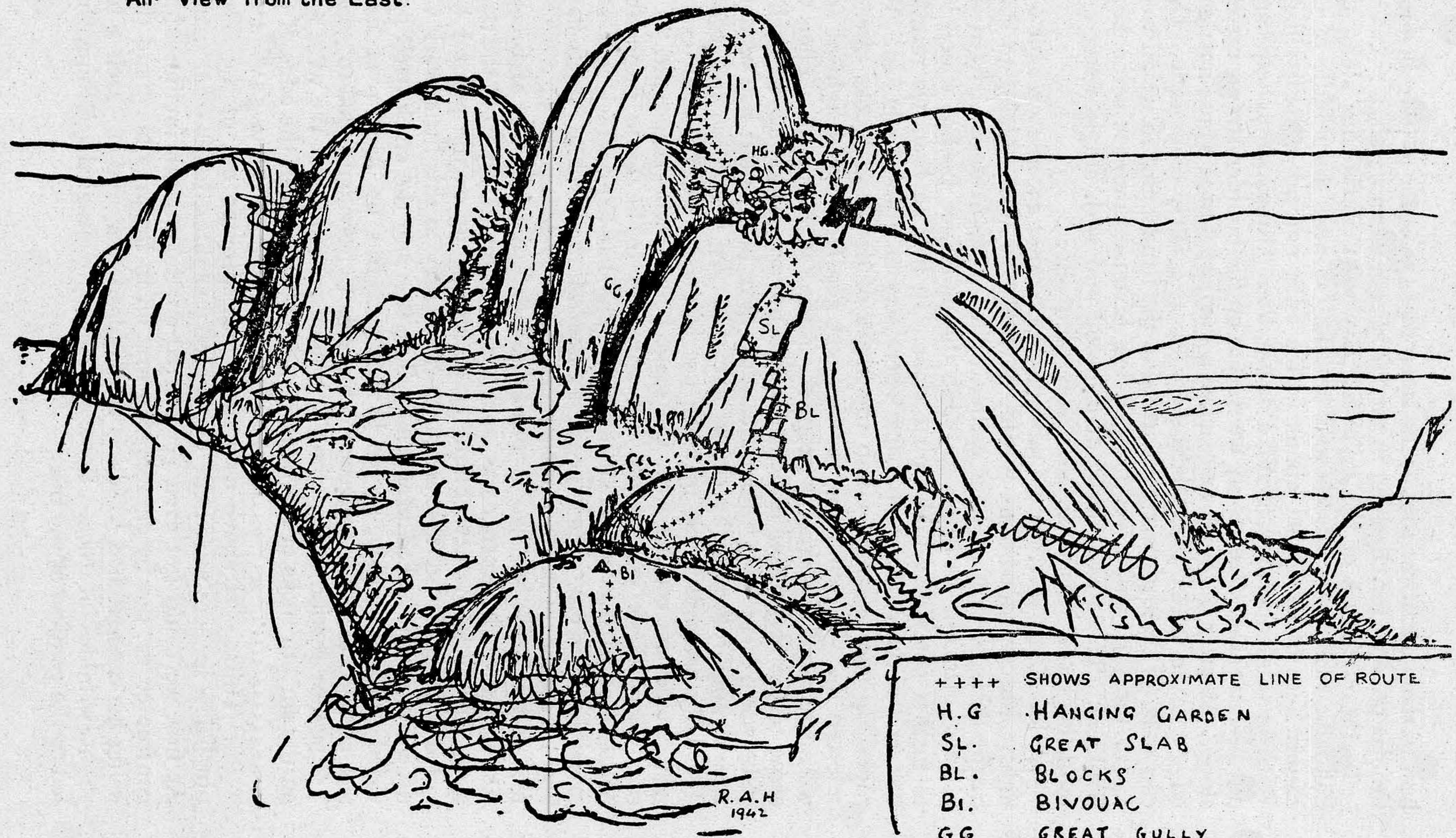
In the afternoon of the following day we motored out along the Sabdarat road from Kassala and left the car near the middle of the eastern foot of the Jebel about half a mile beyond a small village. With one Sudanese servant and a demobilised Abyssinian to help carry our bivouac and water supply we started up the boulder-strewn eastern slope. About 700 feet up we reached a small *maidan* at whose northern edge a set of boiler plate slabs slope up at a fairly easy angle. One can walk up these almost without using the hands, and so we all went up to the top where we dumped the bivouac amongst some large boulders. There was plenty of firewood and with ample water and food this terrace makes an admirable camp site.

We left camp at 5.45 next morning, December 23, as soon as it was light. Future expeditions would, however, be well advised to start in the darkness half an hour earlier. After a slight descent from the bivouac platform we began to climb through thick bushes which led to further fairly easy boiler plate slabs. In half an hour we reached the foot of the really steep slabs where serious climbing began. We roped up and began to climb the series of detached blocks already referred to. The climbing for the next 300 feet was delightful and we made rapid if strenuous progress up the rough granite. Then we came to the first major difficulty. The uppermost of these detached slabs was a huge thing whose area must have been about half an acre. It was not broken up by cracks like those up which we had come. The only possibility was to make use of one of the two thin cracks which mark its contact with the main body of the mountain. The right-hand crack was visible but appeared to be quite impossible because of an overhang halfway up. The left-hand crack was still invisible to the left. We edged along beneath the block to its left-hand bottom corner. I made a considerable effort to get up the first twenty feet of the crack but had to come back defeated and out of breath. As this bottom left corner was, as it were, cracking away from the main slab, there was another oblique crack leading up to the point I had failed to reach in my first attempt. The entry to this little crack was up a tree which looked promising. The tree and the crack itself provided solid handholds, so we hauled ourselves up hand over hand and climbed to a little terrace which my first effort had failed to attain.

The next section of the climb was the most difficult. We were now on the smooth rocks of the body of the mountain with the edge of the great detached slab forming a right angle, and in the angle was the crack. Thirty feet above us a small tree sprouted out of the crack, but below it there were none but the very slightest holds on the rock. At first we could not even get started on the smooth incline which confronted us, but by climbing up first on to Brown's head and then using his outstretched hands as footholds, I managed to reach a few slight wrinkles of rock. Some delicate spreadeagled climbing then led to the comfort of the tree.

SKETCH OF JEBEL KASSALA

Air View from the East.



- +++ SHOWS APPROXIMATE LINE OF ROUTE
- H.G. HANGING GARDEN
- SL. GREAT SLAB
- BL. BLOCKS
- Bi. BIVOUAC
- GG. GREAT GULLY

R.A.H.
1942

Then followed a severe thirty-foot pitch round a slight overhang. Having shinned up the crack for about fifteen feet I began to feel uncomfortably aware of the exposure and drove a small iron spike into a narrow crack. We had brought three of these spikes or pitons in anticipation of some such unprotected and exposed place. With this firm belay a few feet lower I felt safe to wriggle over the right-hand bounding wall of the corner and get on to the back of the main slab. On the corner we inserted another piton to serve as a belay. The next fifty feet to the top of the main slab were at an easier angle and we scrambled up to its top edge without further trouble. From here we walked under some huge overhanging boulders upwards into the Hanging Garden.

As we jumped over the large boulders and pushed our way through the trees of the garden we kept looking up to the final dome to see what it offered in the way of a route. The most prominent features on it are two clefts whose lips curve out to blend into the general roundness. They run upwards parallel to each other, the right-hand one being smaller and higher; both, however, peter out below the easy rocks of the top. From immediately below all the final slopes look deceptively easy and it was not till we began climbing up towards the big cleft that we realised how steep they were. By means of a few grassy grooves and numerous fingertip ledges we climbed fairly rapidly into the cleft. About three hundred feet up it became too steep, so we sidled to the right and got into the smaller cleft. This took us about a hundred feet higher to a small round hole in the rock which we called the Robin's Nest. With one man belayed securely in the nest, we made some determined efforts to climb up the rocks to the left. They seemed to lead almost directly to the easier angle of the upper dome, but there was an unclimbable space of about twenty feet which defeated every attempt we made. We gave up very unwillingly; it seemed that we, like the man in the legend, were to have success snatched from us at the last minute.

There still appeared to be another possibility even further to the right where the rocks were slightly broken. So we continued our crablike spiral traverse which eventually took us nearly a quarter of the way round the Jebel from the first cleft. The final crux of the climb was an extremely delicate bit about seventy feet long leading upwards to a detached block which lay like a reclining tombstone. All the climbing here was on the toes and finger tips. The exposure was extreme. Halfway up there was a seemingly vital hold in the form of a small decaying flake of rock which vibrated uncomfortably when any weight was put on it. However, we both reached the tombstone safely and skipped fairly quickly up the last few hundred feet of easy rock towards the summit, which we reached at 9.30 A.M.

The dome is so big that the highest part in the centre seems to be almost flat. There were a few loose flakes of stone lying about which we built into a pointed cairn. Then we started to walk round the edge where the angle was not too steep. The dome is cut from east to

west by a gash in which numerous trees are growing. One of the largest and most conspicuous of these was a fig, which we decided must be the Tree of Life. We selfconsciously munched a bit of leaf and stuffed some leaves into our pockets as presents for our porters. On the circuit round the top we looked down for other possible routes but no alternative was visible.

Even our own route looked uninviting enough as we started down the rapidly steepening rock in the direction of the tombstone. Descending these steep slabs is perhaps easier than ascending them, as by facing outwards it is possible to make use of one's seat as an additional source of friction. The feeling of exposure, however, is increased. Owing to the convex nature of the dome, the rock horizon always appears close to one's feet and below them one sees the distant tracks and buildings of Kassala nearly 3000 feet down. The crucial passage was safely passed and we made a fairly rapid descent of the dome. We had a short rest on the Hanging Garden, but as the rocks were getting uncomfortably hot we decided to hurry down. We were able to descend the severe passages by taking off our rope, doubling it round a piton and sliding down it, later pulling it down by tugging at one end. At the last severe pitch, where the great slab drops to the more broken rocks below, I fell into and through the tree which had originally given us access to the slab. I don't quite know what caused me to fall but it was probably my failure to test a brittle handhold properly before using it. We were both tired and extremely hot and thirsty and this probably contributed to the accident which, though not serious, proved later to have broken my wrist.

The rest of the descent passed off without incident. The broken blocks were harder than on the ascent because we could not touch them with bare hands owing to their great heat. We reached our cache at the bottom and revived ourselves with some lukewarm water and then scrambled down to our bivouac where we met the two porters and all walked down to the car together.

Judged as a rock climb, the ascent of Jebel Kassala is of a high standard. The several difficult pitches would in England be classed as 'severe' or, if the extreme exposure were taken into consideration, they might be 'very severe.' That is to say, the climb should not be attempted by a party containing beginners or without a leader of considerable rock climbing experience. Given these conditions, however, there is no reason why the Jebel should not be climbed often. It certainly deserves climbing, for it must be one of the finest rock climbs in Africa.

For future expeditions, a new route to the Hanging Garden could probably be made up the great gully which lies to the left of our slabs, immediately below the centre of the peak. This would be less exposed than our route, but would probably be rendered unpleasant by thorn bushes which appear to choke its recesses. A hundred-foot rope should be taken. The pitons at the severe pitch on the slabs should remain in position for years but should be tested before being used.

Crepe rubber boots are the best footwear. Knees and elbows should be covered by closely woven material which will not catch. The extra weight of a small water flask would be well justified. At least six hours should be allowed for the climb and return to the bivouac.

TWO NOTABLE OBERLANDERS

BY G. A. HASLER

I. CHRISTIAN JOSSI, SOHN

CHRIStIAN JOSSI was born in 1872, seventy years old this year as he reminded me the other day. He received his Guide's book in 1892, but he certainly did some porter's job with his great father before then. I know that he was with Christen and Dr. Burckhardt of Basel in 1890 on a traverse of Klein Fiescherhorn from Schwarzegg to Bergli, and with his father and myself on an ascent of Schreckhorn on April 22, 1891.

It must have been a big job to live up to his father's reputation, but there is no question that although the son of a famous father always has a hard row to hoe, Christian Jossi has made a distinctive reputation for himself. From the first entry in his book where, with his father and Peter Schlegel, he assisted 14 members of the Sektion Bern S.A.C., headed by the late Dr. Dübi, in an ascent of the Mettenberg (July 3, 1892) to the end of it, there passes in front of our eyes a marvellous kaleidoscope of well known names and widespread districts. I should say there is no district in the Alps where he has not done good work and much work. He was in the Caucasus too in 1904 and 1905 with von Meck (President of the Russian A.C.) and Andreas Fischer, went on a walking tour once with Amatter on Dartmoor, and with Amatter and the Osbornes did a lot in Skye. I have rarely seen a more interesting Guide's book.

His clients were mostly English, and later quite a few Dutch who first came along during the war 1914-18. They were about the only people who could come at that time. Among English names well known to me in younger days one finds H. J. Mothersill, C. A. V. Butler, C. W. Nettleton, the Crossley sisters, Miss Benham, Henry Speyer, G. A. Murray, Charles Murray, Durham and Bewes, Judge Osborne and Miss Osborne, Alan Greaves, T. F. Buxton, H. Rutledge and N. S. Finzi.

Christian jun. was with Nettleton in the Dolomites for some time, and I well remember old Christen and myself going there a year or perhaps later and taking each other up the Croda de Lago. The old gentleman generally made me do the work in Tyrol, which, after having had him tramping about on my head and shoulders once, I much preferred. We made on that occasion quite unawares a new variation