

REVIEWS

Ten Years under the Earth. By Norbert Casteret. Translated by Barrows Mussey. Pp. 240, with illustrations. J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London, 1939. Price 12s. 6d. net.

THIS translation puts into one volume nearly the whole of *Dix ans sous terre* and part of *Au fond des gouffres*.

Pot-holing, or the sport of exploring caves and underground passages, may be called the negative of mountaineering in that a mountaineer goes up, whereas a pot-holer goes down. But there must be something which is common to the two sports as so many pot-holers are mountaineers. Norbert Casteret, the author of this book, is himself one of these, for his account of a discovery that the Garonne does not really rise, as it appears to do, in a certain valley, but in the next, and that it gets from one valley to the other by flowing in a rocky channel right under a high ridge, ends with the casual remark that he finished the expedition by climbing Maladetta. The ALPINE JOURNAL itself has recognized this affinity in the past by an article on the first descent of Gaping Gill¹ by the greatest of all pot-holers, E. A. Martel,² and many of our northern members belong to the Yorkshire Ramblers—the pioneer club of pot-holing.

Casteret's book is one which cannot be too highly recommended; it is not too long, and it does not give one account after another of the same sort of thing. Each of the expeditions described has its own characteristic or its own purpose. There are chapters on pre-history and ancient magic, on the story of a rain-drop and the action of underground water generally, as well as one on the solution of the problem of the source of the Garonne referred to above. All these topics are cleverly arranged and the very first chapter is masterly: it describes the discovery of the 'oldest statues in the world,' but in this chapter, incidentally and very modestly, the author sketches his own character. One wonders which to admire most: his intrepidity, his tenacity of purpose, or his athletic powers. In this particular cave, he dived into a stream as the only way of passing a rock curtain which blocked it, having first made up his mind that it was in fact a curtain. He was quite right, and he did not crack his skull but emerged safely in a continuation of his cave. All this was in pitch darkness and he was quite alone. It surprises one, indeed, that he so often conducted his explorations by himself. His strength must be quite outstanding, for in his solitary wanderings he let himself down shafts on his rope on many occasions, which implies that he must have climbed back up the rope; and anyone who has ever done any pot-holing can only admire the strength and agility of a man who can do that.

¹ A.J. 18. 120 sqq.

² See *In Memoriam* notice, A.J. 50. 289.

There is a good account of the Gouffre Martel, discovered and named by Casteret. This is the deepest hole in France and goes down 1500 ft., much deeper than anything else in that country, but not so deep as one of the Italian chasms which in various stages goes as deep as 2000 ft. below the surface. The Gouffre Martel consists of two series of passages, and apparently a short connecting link has not yet been penetrated—only a matter of a few feet.

The chapters on pre-history and the fauna whose bones are found in some of the caves are well done and just sufficient to whet the appetite for more. What a fearful foe had our ancestors in the cave-bear, five feet high at the shoulder and ten feet long!

The translation is well done. The only point that slightly offends a pot-holer is the use of the word 'resurgence' for what we should call a 'rising,' but that is a minor matter.

Space prevents mention of many other interesting topics, and in conclusion the reviewer can only say that it is one of the most interesting books of adventure he has ever read.

The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal. Edited by J. H. B. Bell. Jubilee Number, April 1939.

A JUBILEE is perhaps the most satisfactory of all celebrations, because, while less impressive than a centenary, it can command living memories going back over the whole of its fifty years. The Editor of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, J. H. B. Bell, has wisely and cleverly made full use of this and filled his Jubilee number with extremely interesting, historical and entertaining first-hand accounts of the whole life of the Club from the pens of eminent members of riper years. A. E. Maylard, Prof. Gilbert Thomson, L. Pilkington and G. A. Solly, among others, tell us of the early days, the first meets and the rapid development of the institution. F. S. Goggs ably records the history of the Journal. At its inception the objection was raised that Scotland was too small to provide material for more than a few numbers. The mere fact that this issue is No. 127 and that the whole series is full of most interesting accounts of Scottish mountaineering, is proof in itself what an almost unlimited field Scotland offers to lovers of the craft. Harry MacRobert writes a really masterly Short History of Scottish Climbing, giving to Prof. J. D. Forbes the honour of being the first real Scottish mountaineer thanks to his climb of Sgurr nan Gilleann in 1836, and showing how from the earlier ambitions of hill walkers to ascend as many as possible of the 538 3000-ft. mountain tops in Scotland (known to every Scottish climber as 'Munroes' from the famous Sir Hugh Munro who tabulated them), the sport was developed by the men who pioneered the many famous winter and summer routes on the more difficult mountains.

What is so skilfully brought out in this Jubilee number is the fact that Scotland has not been merely the training ground on which many famous mountaineers have begun to learn their craft, but the ground to which they have returned year after year, especially in the early spring,

when climbing is of a truly Alpine character. Among a galaxy of names it is almost invidious to make a choice, but men like the Pilkingtons, Raeburn, Ling, Solly, Collie, Naismith, Harry Walker and Unna are typical of those who have found endless adventure and delight up north.³ Rock climbing of the hardest description is not the only attraction: severe ice and snow work is there in plenty.

Another vital factor in the activities of the Club is very properly brought out, namely the delightful friendliness of the meets and the way in which old hands take young climbers on their ropes and train them up in the way they should go. Many a fine climber today thanks in his heart Solly, Raeburn, Ling and Sang for early lessons; and indeed it is this fusion of old and young, the entire freedom from that rather formidable attitude of aloofness which used to make the Alpine Club table at the Monte Rosa hotel at Zermatt such an ordeal to young climbers in the old days, that gives to the Scottish Mountaineering Club its immense vitality—a vitality now exemplified by the formation of a lusty and active Junior Club.

Like the Alpine Club, the S.M.C. demands a qualification and quite a stiff one: it is no mere *Verein*, and competition to qualify is keen.

Lord Tweedsmuir contributes an intriguing and subtly eerie little article called 'Pan' which will touch a chord in the heart of any mountaineer of experience and imagination. A walk through the Larig on a wild March day is enough to make one realise why the Greeks with their exquisite power of symbolising emotions 'invented' Pan.

The only criticism one can pass on this historic number is that the account of the Jubilee dinner is too short. What? No word of the original member present who had created the superlative record of not having, in fifty years, attended a single meet or dinner? Fifty years of subscriptions, and nothing for it! Where's your 'canny Scot' the noo? Ah! One forgets. He has had the Journal. What a tribute to its excellence! Indeed, to anyone familiar with the traditions and activities of the S.M.C., this Jubilee number gives a true and lively picture of an institution which must claim affectionate respect from all mountaineers. Pride in their own mountains, a spirit of adventure and a keen pleasure in spreading to others the delights they themselves experience have always been and still are the keynotes of the Club.

Whence sprang the legend that the Scots have no sense of humour? Actually, it is doubtful whether anywhere else one can enjoy a greater flow of subtle and often brilliant wit than at a S.M.C. meet or dinner. The Scots excel in the gentle art of laughing at themselves and woe betide the Sassanach who tries to beat them at their own game! And this is none of that hearty, obvious, so-called 'Alpine Humour' immortalised by C. D. Robertson⁴: it is the real stuff which one stores away and chuckles over.

³ It is recorded in this number that the New Year's meet of last January toasted Mr. W. N. Ling in honour of his eightieth attendance.

⁴ *A.J.* 25. 127 sqq.

Sinister Crag. By Newton Gayle. Pp. 288. Gollancz, London, 1939.
Price 7s. 6d.

THE ALPINE JOURNAL seldom finds place for a review of a work of fiction. Perhaps that is because novelists seldom lay their plots in the Alps, or, at least, in those parts of the mountainous regions which are of special interest to climbers; and, in a hasty retrospect, one recalls only one successful climbing novel—*Running Water*. Mr. Gayle, however, has a nice choice in settings for detective stories. Crime-fans will remember his ingenuity in the use of the tropics for this purpose. Here he takes the Lakes. He has planted 'a fictitious crag on a non-existent mountain in the heart of the most sacred territory'; and he has the grace to feel that such a trespass requires some sort of apology. But he need not be too deeply repentant. It is all very good fun, and, on the whole, good mountaineering. Mr. Gayle knows his stuff, both the technical business of English rock climbing and the equally technical business of creating suspense in a plausible atmosphere. The different parties brought together by chance in the inn at Wannerdale have the oddities of most such casual assemblies, though they are perhaps more than usually unpleasant and certainly more than usually provided with pasts with a capital P. And, if anyone wishes to commit murder for such reasons as actuated this criminal, this is as good a way of doing it as any. The author deals as fairly with his readers as a crime novelist may be expected to do. The climbing incidents are exciting; and the reader, whether climber or not, has a puzzle to work out, which will keep him guessing to the end, or nearly so.

The Alps. By R. L. G. Irving. 8½" by 5½". Pp. 116, with coloured frontispiece and numerous illustrations. B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1939.
Price 8s. 6d. net.

THIS book is designed not for experienced climbers but for those who may contemplate a visit to the Alps, whether for purposes of walking or for more adventurous ends. Difficult as it must always be for an author who knows his subject intimately to write in more popular fashion for a less expert public, the task here of covering briefly the Alps from end to end must have been rendered more difficult by the need of catering for a wide variety of tastes. Mr. Irving has succeeded in giving us an admirable bird's-eye view of every main district without overloading the brain with a multiplicity of names. To convey the reader from Tinée to Triglav, from Grivola to Glockner, and yet give him pause to distinguish the characteristic features of each group, Mr. Irving skilfully links each chapter with its precursor by a few introductory words before coming down to detail; and if it is not long before the author is tempted to forsake the valleys for the snows, we feel that readers will welcome Mr. Irving's ascent from pastoral grace and that after reading his book a new vision of the heights may rise before them.

The first chapter occupies nearly one-third of the book. It is

brimful of wisdom, and makes clear the responsibilities which await all who may nourish more ambitious thoughts than mere pasture rambles. The subjects covered in this chapter are so wide that it might with advantage have been divided into at least three sections. Thereafter we are taken to individual districts, and as we travel further to the east we bear with us a standard which, fixed in Mont Blanc as the ideal, finds fresh development from group to group. It is no mad run through the Alps to please the boys ; it is a sober stepping eastward to catch new pleasures in each chapter. And we believe that many will follow this pied piper of the Alps, with his descriptive gift and light recurrent humour, to visit the mountains—even the motorist has his place among them—where those who come to walk remain to climb.

This review is written from a study of the page proofs, with their many admirable illustrations, chosen skilfully from a wide field. We understand that owing to the present difficult circumstances a final revision of proofs for this edition has not proved practicable, and refrain therefore from noting certain minor mistakes which will call for correction in later issues. We welcome, however, the misprint which on two occasions gives brevet rank to an honoured Alpine lexicographer, and trust that the title of Professor will rest lightly where this rude forefather of our JOURNAL sleeps.