

REVIEWS

Come What May. An Autobiography. By Arnold Lunn. Pp. 482. London : Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1940. Price 12s. 6d. net.

THIS is one of those pleasant expansive biographies, which is neither a chronological record of the writer's life, nor a portrait gallery of famous persons he has met, nor yet a mere peg on which to hang his opinions. All these elements are there, but they are blended, not on any conscious plan—perhaps there might have been more of this and a nicer sense of proportion—but in an almost naive outpouring, which passes from one subject to another as one might in conversation. This is the attraction of the book ; it leaves one with a real sense of intimacy that is never forced.

Historically it traces the author's progress through Harrow—which is dealt with very critically—to Oxford, where he came into his own milieu ; we see him as journalist, mountaineer, skier, tourist-agent, politician and lecturer in the States. There are sketches of Oxford friends, like Guedalla and Joad, of 'G.B.S.,' King Albert of the Belgians and Christian Almer. Discursively we trace his political development from the traditional Liberalism, which he inherited from his father, to the doctrinaire Radicalism of the undergraduate and back to Conservatism and 'Distributism.' We follow his religious evolution from Anglicanism tinged with his father's Methodism through an agnostic period to Catholicism. It is all good reading and there are few pages which do not 'give to think.'

Underneath this rather bewildering labyrinth there are two main strains, both of which entered Mr. Lunn's life after his boyhood, but have been ever since a sure foundation : Catholicism and the mountains. Each of them is given a chapter of its own, but neither of these chapters gives as good testimony as casual remarks elsewhere. In 'The Return to Reason' he explains at length what were not his grounds for entering the Church of Rome, but its positive explanations are not so convincing ; they read like the words of a man trying to rationalise an action which was taken on other grounds. 'Why Men Climb' is similarly unconvincing because it is over-written and has not the simplicity of sincerity.

From a fellow member of the Alpine Club we naturally expect to learn what the mountains have meant to him and what are the main-springs of his love for them. And if we do not find this in the chapter which sets out to give it, there is abundant evidence elsewhere, and evidence which links the mountaineer's experience with his philosophy of life. Mr. Lunn was one of the pioneers of ski-ing in the Alps, the originator of the Downhill Race and of the 'Slalom,' and in some striking chapters he shows how the great ski-ing contests were used by the Nazis as a 'Rehearsal for War.' Here he is uncomfortable, but turn to 'Despite of Wrinkles' and you find the true skier, to whom

the adventure on unknown ground is worth more than all the races. It was the Alps which cured the 'inferiority complex' of a public schoolboy who was no good at games (p. 50), the intimacy with the peasant mountaineers of Grindelwald which changed a doctrinaire Radicalism into a concrete understanding of the working classes (p. 49), and the Alps which taught him the beauty of English scenery (p. 69). Two sentences may be quoted to show how close the mountains are to his deepest beliefs: 'it would puzzle a materialist to explain how frequently the reward of beauty is associated with the discipline of toil, as if Nature consciously reserves her noblest effects for those who take some trouble to earn them' (p. 442); 'if I were a wishful thinker, I should be a convinced reincarnationist, for the only form of survival which appeals to me is the possibility of returning to the beloved Mountains of Youth' (p. 178).

Mr. Lunn will irritate his readers at times by prejudices which he is at no pains to conceal, but no member of the Club will put the book down without the feeling that its author has the root of the matter in him. We shall all humbly accept his tribute (p. 55) that 'in this irreverent age almost the one thing which has not been debunked is the tradition of the Alpine Club.'

Helvellyn to Himalaya. By F. Spencer Chapman. Pp. xv, 285, with 48 illustrations and sketch maps. Chatto & Windus, London, 1940. Price 18s.

THE long awaited account of Mr. Chapman's first ascent of Chomolhari is the kernel of this book and the reader who is a mountaineer will be strongly tempted to start at Chapter 9. But whether he begins to read in the middle or not—and there is much in the book which should not merely be skipped over as foothills on the way to Chomolhari—he will certainly finish with a feeling of genuine envy for Mr. Chapman's success, and of astonishment at his courage and singleness of aim.

The early chapters give many revealing hints, both about the author's character and his training as a mountaineer. They are all the more interesting to read, as the events they record must have been to experience, because Mr. Chapman is a trained observer of birds and plants, and really more interested in nature study than he is in mountaineering.

The author reveals himself as something of a lone horse ('to justify myself to myself I concentrated all my energies on my particular interests'—he writes of his school days), but his solitary methods and training have produced a man of great strength and endurance. This combination of self-reliance and endurance made the ascent of Chomolhari possible, in circumstances in which probably no other British climber would have persisted—and I even have a suspicion that Mr. Chapman would not have got to the top if he *hadn't* been practically alone and so thrown upon his own resourcefulness. The disadvantages which attach to these qualities of Mr. Chapman are that he gives a somewhat over-sensationalised view of mountaineering, and

that his memory of events is sometimes disturbingly inaccurate. On the first point, it should be remembered in fairness that this book is intended for a much wider public than climbers only, as witness the short explanation of rock-climbing method in Chapter 1, and perhaps also the absence of any really useful maps. Climbing readers have no right to grumble because the book is not primarily written for them, but they may rightly complain if other readers are led to suppose that mountaineering is a more perilous business than it really should be. I think it is that Mr. Chapman has other interests that are stronger than mountaineering (and I have mentioned that this is in general a great advantage to his readers), or perhaps more that because the author has not had to bother himself with long seasons of ordinary and safely accomplished climbs, he gives the impression of having survived a climbing career rather more than ordinarily full of alarming incidents.

The inaccuracies in memory are a bit more worrying, though they probably spring only from the exuberance and fluency that make Mr. Chapman so charming a raconteur among his friends. But even a few such inaccuracies, where they are detected by first-hand knowledge or corroborative evidence of the events described, have a bad effect on the reader in making him wonder whether imagination has come to the assistance of memory in other parts of the book as well. Minor examples of both these defects are 'A mile of knife-edge ridge lay between us and the next summit,' describing the arête of La Meije between the Grand Pic and the Doigt de Dieu, and the phrase 'How many times since then have I saved my own and others' lives by this means!' which ends a description of the ice-axe brake as a method of stopping a party sliding on a snow slope.

But these are only minor blemishes, some of them caused by the hurried and difficult circumstances under which the book must have been completed. The real success is the author's power of communicating his rare zest in adventure and in all the accompanying details of scenery, birds and beasts that are so often not observed at all, and his still rarer taste for exploration, preferably on his own. Gino Watkins himself would be proud of a pupil who writes:

'And I made another discovery, which is this: almost all difficulties can be overcome. Mere cold is a friend, not an enemy; the weather may get better if you wait long enough; distance is merely relative; man can exist for a long time on very little food; the human body is capable of immense privation; miracles still happen; it is the state of mind that is important.'

You realise that this is a real *credo*, resulting in action that is worthy of it, when you read the astonishing account of the ascent of Chomolhari, or of the almost equally astonishing journey on foot (in decaying gym-shoes) from Lachen to Gangtok in a single day.

Of the Chomolhari climb, there is little to add, except admiration, to General Bruce's remark that the author's safe return was 'the Eighth Wonder of the World.' No further demonstration is needed of the ability of a small and determined party to ascend a big Himalayan peak, and to triumph over bad weather, inexperience and bad luck in

doing it. The speed with which the top was reached after the departure from Phari is amazing, though I am sure that Mr. Chapman would admit that his own inexperience, as well as Pasang's natural incapacity for getting safely down steep ice and snow, contributed not a little to the mistakes and misfortunes of the descent. Nanga Parbat and Masherbrum have both tragically underlined the need for a strong party to lie in really close support of those returning from the assault of a high Himalayan peak, and though Mr. Chapman's splendid courage brought his party safely back, not all would agree with him that 'the evil that befell us . . . was caused by a series of misfortunes which might have happened to the strongest party'—while all must admit that a stronger party might very well not have had the determination to reach the summit at all!

I must not leave the impression that Chomolhari is the only thing in the book. The accounts of the Zemu Glacier and Lhonak explorations make excellent reading, particularly for readers familiar with Marco Pallis' *Peaks and Lamas* and prepared to be interested by the differences in temperament and outlook revealed by such widely differing accounts of the same experiences as the two books describe. And there is such a wealth of hints and practical observations about the business of high-level travelling and climbing that all those who have equally succumbed to the passion to revisit Tibet and the Himalaya will often find themselves taking Mr. Chapman's book down from their shelves.

J. L. LONGLAND.

Ten Great Mountains. By R. L. G. Irving. Pp. xii, 213, with illustrations and diagrams. J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London, 1940. Price 12s. 6d. net.

'A MOUNTAIN becomes great,' says Mr. Irving, 'as a human personality does, by extending its influence over the thoughts, words, and actions of mankind'; and in his new book he has set himself the task of interpreting some of the elusive elements which make up ten particular mountain personalities. If, as he goes on to say, these personalities are 'developed by contact with the spirit of man,' the mountaineer will naturally find them most strongly developed in the aspect in which his own contact with them has been closest. Mr. Irving is therefore particularly concerned with what the climbing of the mountains he has selected has meant both to the favoured few who make the great climbs and to those who can only follow them sympathetically from a distance. Much of the book is taken up with a simple, and extremely lucid, retelling of the story of some of the more recent classic climbs and expeditions, the details of which are probably already familiar to readers of the *ALPINE JOURNAL*. For the most part Mr. Irving lets his narrative speak for itself. He is not concerned with controversy, and passes judgment very seldom; his feeling for mountains is not only deep, but so well proportioned that he can appreciate the good elements in the most widely differing individual approaches. On the

one hand he delights in the story of a bold venture for its own sake—witness his account of Schulze's great climb on Ushba; on the other, he is interested, perhaps even more than in the big achievement or noble failure, in what the climb, great or ordinary, actually gives to the men who make it. The book therefore achieves a happy blend of the impersonal and the intimate. In the selection of his ten peaks, he allows two British hills to stand beside eight of the outstanding mountains of the world, and in a similar spirit he sometimes leaves history aside, and introduces a more personal and intimate account of a good day's climbing, either in Britain or in the Alps. He is thus able to contrast, or perhaps bring closer together, the great climb and the climb which an ordinary man might make; and in two of his chapters he does this very successfully—the first, that on the ascent of the S.E. ridge of Mont Maudit, where the reader has a delightful inside view of a great climb in the making; the second, that on the Matterhorn, in which an account of the ordinary traverse, following close on the story of the Schmidts' ascent of the N. face, manages, without any underlining, to express in their proper proportions the different satisfactions which two methods of approach can give.

I Bought a Mountain. By Thomas Firbank. Pp. 320, with two sketch-maps. George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., London, 1940. Price 8s. 6d. net.

YEARS ago, during a slight difference of opinion with a farmer about parking my car in a grassy recess beside the road over the Llanberis Pass, he waved his hand with a proud gesture towards the mountain side and declared: 'Look you, man, I own the whole of this land and the very top of Crib Goch also!' I was astonished that such high, desolate and apparently useless moorland could actually come under private ownership. To anyone under the same misapprehension *I Bought a Mountain* will come as a delightful awakening. The Canadian author tells how he bought a sheep farm on the south slopes of the Glyders in complete ignorance of farming and in a very short time found out the essentials by acquiring the confidence of his Welsh neighbours and employees. He writes of the hills as farm land—what they have been for centuries before the wearers of countless nailed boots roamed their ridges and faces in search of attractive rock problems. He describes how his territory runs upwards from the river to the very top of the Glyders, and how his two thousand odd stock of sheep would remain on this territory without walls or fences, solely on account of heredity. Their ancestors had grazed this land at a time when labour was cheap and men were employed to watch the boundaries, and the present generation of sheep would rarely move outside these limits except to seek shelter from winter storms on a lee slope. Sometimes a few unruly ones would stray perversely on to the grassy ledges of Tryfan, on a neighbour's farm, and require human help to get them down. The author gives us a clear insight into the many problems of sheep farming on the hills, the difficulty of

gathering the flock from such a large tract of land for lambing or shearing, sometimes in misty weather and always with a limited number of men and dogs. He takes us to the top of Glyder Fach before dawn, there to watch the sun rise from behind the Carneddls before he is off on the drive as a unit in his line of men. We go with him fox hunting on Moel Siabod in a party armed with terriers and guns, seeking its quarry in the dens that abound in the rocks below the summit ridge, and become aware of a new interest in these toilsome boulders. We learn of his digging hundreds of beasts out of the snow in winter blizzards with the aid of a few men helpers and his indefatigable wife, and of his sidelines in keeping pigs and poultry and running a snack bar for visiting tourists. But the whole theme of the book is sheep and hills, and the honest joy to be got out of open-air work with the flocks. We are made to feel that other folk besides mountaineers love the hills and may learn more of their ever changing moods by the perpetual struggle for a livelihood than by climbing on them at intervals for pleasure.

As a resident in the hills it was only natural that the author should turn to the pastimes of hill-walking and rock-climbing. Two of his chapters are entitled 'The Record Walk' and 'The Rock-Climbers.' In the former he describes how he broke the record time for ascending the fourteen peaks in North Wales over three thousand feet in height, with two friends, his wife and one of his farm men. For this feat he was criticised by the mountaineering fraternity, partly on the grounds of racing over the summits and partly on account of the publicity he received. I am inclined to think that the former criticism was unwarranted, after reading how he and his party worked out the details of their route. For weeks before the event they went over the ground in sections and timed different connecting links between the three separate groups of hills they would have to traverse. Such preparation is surely commendable. In great mountain ranges outside these islands, the span of time imposed by the hours of daylight and the complexities of the route demand the most careful planning and organisation. It is this need for detailed organisation that puts mountaineering on big ranges on a plane so much higher than that of rock gymnastics in North Wales. But what of the mountaineer who cannot get, say, to the Alps, whose instinct and inclinations are for the big type of expedition and who considers rock-climbing rather a petty end in itself? The only way he can improvise a great expedition is to ascend in one day all those hills in a district above a certain arbitrary height, and as others have made this expedition before him he increases its interest by trying to better their times, not entirely by walking faster but by better organisation. Mr. Firbank's description of the planning required, read intelligently with a map of the district, would serve as a lesson to any beginner wishing to learn some of the elements of route finding on mountains of any scale. There is more than one approach to the hills besides the orthodox, and perhaps a record walk is as good a way as ultra-severe rock-climbing. Of the publicity it received, the

less said the better. The author claims that it was unwanted, but it is significant that the newspaper men arrived on the scene at the start of the walk and others were stationed at different points on the route to note the walkers' progress—before the record had been broken!

The chapter on the rock-climbers who visit Snowdonia makes good reading for those who can enjoy a joke against themselves. We are told that the climber has long since mastered the use of understatement as a medium for exaggeration; that the accounts of climbs in his journals are always toned *diminuendo*, but that the reader sees the writing between the lines, as he is meant to. There follows in detail an imaginary account of a first ascent in satirical style which might have been reprinted untouched from any modern rock-climbing guide-book. Mr. Firbank wins the first round hands down. He then ceases to attack rock-climbers and explains fairly closely the technique of rope climbing, followed by an account of some of the more recent accidents in North Wales. These make rather distressing reading qualified by the author's generous appreciation of the rescue work, but one cannot help feeling that over-emphasis has been laid on the disasters.

I Bought a Mountain is well worth reading by those interested in the Welsh hills, sheep farming, or both. It touches the hard life of the farmer and his background, the hill, in a way that brings them to life. It breathes the spirit of the hills and of the wild creatures that inhabit them.

ANTHONY M. ROBINSON.

My Alpine Album. By Frank S. Smythe. Pp. 147, with 47 illustrations and 1 map. A. & C. Black, London, 1940. Price 12s. 6d.

MR. SMYTHE has fulfilled the wish of everyone in the mountaineering world by giving us another book illustrated with reproductions from his fine photographs, uniform with the series which began with *The Mountain Scene*, and was followed by *Peaks and Valleys* and, last year, *A Camera in the Hills*. This time the pictures are not the predominant feature of the book. There are not so many and none are quite so exciting as those in previous volumes. But considering this is the fourth volume, Mr. Smythe's collection seems almost inexhaustible.

My Alpine Album is a book to read rather than one in which to delve among pictures of Alpine scenes, which are an essential accompaniment. It is an epitome of Mr. Smythe's intimate knowledge of the Alps, enriched with personal experiences that bring vividly to life his description of the Seasons of the Alpine Year, the Eastern Alps, the Bernese Oberland, the Pennine Alps and finally the Range of Mont Blanc, on which Mr. Smythe contends that the mountaineering is second to none. The scenes depicted are characteristic of all seasons and weathers in the Alps and, this time, include typical Swiss towns as well as the High Alps. Reproduction and printing are again excellent.

Lakeland through the Lens. By W. A. Poucher. Pp. 152; 122 illustrations.
Chapman & Hall, London, 1940. Price 18s.

WITH every respect to the mountaineers and photographers who toiled up the hills in years gone by with large cameras and loads of plates, and made the hills of the country live for us in books, calendars and postcards, this book undoubtedly contains the finest collection of photographs of Lakeland ever published in one book. Nearly all of them have been made with the modern miniature camera, the ideal camera for the mountaineer, and their brilliance is revealed by the excellent reproduction in photogravure.

Even more than in *My Alpine Album*, which is of similar size and presentation, the pictures seize one's attention throughout. The description, which leaves one wishing the author had included more of his own personal experiences and contacts in the hills, deals with the technique of mountain photography, and to connect the photographs together they are reproduced in sequence with a description of a walk through the Lake District from Mardale and High Street, over Helvellyn and Saddleback, into Borrowdale and thence via the great hills and valleys to the Conistون Fells. In his tour Mr. Poucher deals with rock-climbing features of Great Gable, Pillar, Pike's Crag, Scafell and Dow Crag. Photographic data for each picture are given at the end.