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REVIEWS.

A US DEN HOCHREGIONEN DES KAUKASUS. By GOTTFRIED MERZBACHER. Leipzig, 1901. 2 vols. 2000 pages, 250 illustrations, 3 maps.

COMPARISONS maybe invidious, but they are also tempting. The temptation in this case is, of course, Freshfield's book. But beyond the human weakness to which one may plead guilty, there is also a claim for established privilege. A judgment, which is not evolved entirely from the inner consciousness, must be based on standards, which are the means of balancing against each other the individual impressions and the *inertia* of the community. Standards, it is true, change, as does everything else in this universe, but they are chosen on account of their greater durability, which makes them invaluable for marking the stages of a swifter but also more erratic movement. Coupled with the use of a standard is the melancholy question whether it has been superseded. On this point I may allay the fears of the English reader, at least, as far as his own predilections are concerned.

Merzbacher is not an improvement on Freshfield, but the German incarnation thereof. Whether higher or lower depends upon the view. The abstract German will perhaps say better, but that is *his* view, and that will most probably be a view influenced by an insufficient enthusiasm for beauty in sport, and a still smaller appreciation of the more subtle elements of the English language. The Englishman is strong and hardy in action, but more human in his science. The "method" of the German is awe-inspiring. The reviewer who knows both nations from their own and opposite points of view must try his best to reduce the complicated equation to such a summary statement as will convey the clearest meaning to English readers. I am not sure if the comparison of the two books

has not called forth that hackneyed insinuation about English superficiality as opposed to German scholarship, which, in the mind of the average intelligent student, may be taken as representing the two extremes of "readable" and "unreadable." The terms are of course interchangeable, according to the standpoint. What may be readable to the eager searcher after general enlightenment may not be so for the learned individual who is born to think that he knows almost everything, and that the task of adding to his omniscience must necessarily be excessively difficult and laborious.

As a perfect and harmonious blending of ripe experience, sound knowledge, topographical acumen, and literary genius, Freshfield's "Caucasus" stands unrivalled, and it will be a mountaineering classic evermore. All this even a Merzbacher may not hope to outdistance. But he has done the next best, and that is a compliment with which he may well content himself. He has, moreover, received the laurels due to a most painstaking geographer from the University of Munich, which has made him a honorary Doctor of Science.

As a compiler, Merzbacher is beyond praise, and everybody must, in common justice, abstract the natural defects inherent to all compilation; that is to say, the absence or impossibility of verification by personal experience of all the facts collected. It seems almost as if Herr Merzbacher had aspired to that, at least unconsciously. He has naturally failed. The earlier and palmy days of exploration are past where a "raid" upon the "unknown interior" might win scientific fame for the pioneer. Now a long and patient siege has to be laid to all problems; the light brigade of adventurers was but the advance guard of the patient geological sapper and the zoological and botanical commissariat. A few seasons' work is too slender a nucleus about which to group information gathered from other quarters. I say this, not in condemnation, but with regret, because had our author kept separate his personal experiences from the heavier material of his own valuable scientific contributions, it would have been more to the advantage of both. The scientific and the personal

elements interfere with each other. Psychrometers and knapsacks full of stones, with terrible names, are bad enough when one has to use and carry them, but, fortunately, they can be kept apart when the experiences of the journey are precipitated into prose. Merzbacher has done well, both in description and extraction, but the two modes, the lively action of the present and the labelling and collecting of the past, do not taik kindly to each other.

To dispose at once of the adverse aspects of the criticism, let us turn to the maps and views, where a few errors in a particular district may be noted. The map, which represents the most modern surveys of the Russian Government, speaks of the Kwa Plateau and of the Kwisch Plateau, which are evidently mistaken interpretations of the Russian word "oorochenie," meaning "parting" ; that is to say, in this case, parting of the waters or ridge. Furthermore, I am not sure if the names have been correctly fixed in the panoramic tables A and D ; I am even fairly sure of the contrary. Slips such as these may arise from the too ambitious aspirations of the book towards a rich harvest of new orographical information.

The majority of the illustrations are sketches after photographs by men whose names alone are a sufficient guarantee that we get -good art. But I have not yet been able to convince myself of the topographical value of fine art, with the exception of rare instances. A photograph may be bad, but a good painting replacing it will never be judged by topographical or scientific or other practical accuracy. In the case of a work of information, especially when it treats of a country where detail is interesting and valuable, an inferior photograph is better than the artistic rendering of a good or maybe bad photo. If an artist visits the Caucasus in order to produce an artistic portfolio, well and good. I shall enjoy these sketches because they will recall impressions, odours, local colour, which it would be almost impossible to suggest by other means. But when I wish to *climb*, be it in anticipation or in recollection, and maybe for the guidance of others, then I call for a photograph. One cannot climb or find one's way

on a painting. For a text of travel, give me a Sella, Benesch, Donkin, or some other artist of the camera. Let them be supplemented by the painter, by all means, but not superseded by him. (As to the Alps, that is altogether a different question)

The pictures in Merzbacher strike a good average between the merely useful or interesting and the purely beautiful, and the artists have done what we are accustomed to expect from them. They have courageously undertaken a very thankless task, and made the best of it. But, of course, they have not had a chance to give us *their* impression of Caucasian beauty, not the plate's plus the painter's Alpine experience. But all this is possibly only a prejudice of my eye, added to the fact that I know many of the landscapes depicted, and ask for too much detail. Most readers will be charmed, and that ought to suffice.

The contents of the book are practically the contents of the entire literature worked into one organic whole and brought up to date, or improved where possible. No hidden source has escaped the author's searching eye and his indomitable patience. We now possess an Encyclopaedia of the Caucasian Chain which will enable one to obtain information with the greatest ease. Upon the index, Herr Merzbacher has wisely bestowed no small fraction of his energy. It more than trebles the value of the book, and it is a monumental work in itself.

Topography, history, geology, botany—in short, everything worth knowing to the mountaineer or pure scientist has been made use of and woven into its appointed place. I cannot say too much in praise of the painstaking conscientiousness which has produced this splendid mine of information.

But enriched as the book is by the work of others, the author's own contributions occupy a deservedly prominent position. His own expeditions and successes are given in vivid and picturesque narratives, which leave nothing to be desired in plasticity. Herr Merzbacher, though having more than a fair share of the vicissitudes which form the lot of every Caucasian traveller, has done very well indeed, and he

may be justly proud of his summits and passes. The second volume especially will be read with eagerness, for it introduces us into a district until now but imperfectly represented by reports and photographs, namely, the eastern part of the grand range, the Daghestan and its neighbourhood. We see new visions of untrodden glaciers and ridges rising before our eyes. No attempt is made here to give an abstract of those chapters; the merest hints would fill pages. Those who require particular details will turn to the original in any case.

In summing up the review, one feels entitled to say: A fine book; a good and valuable book; one deserving gratitude and admiration.

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