

*Le Centenaire des Postes Alpestres Suisses.* 4 to. Geneva: "L'Art en Suisse," 1932. Price Fr. 6.

This attractive volume, also issued with English text, has been published by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs of Switzerland. It is well illustrated, with color-plates by such artists as d'Elzingre and F. Gos, and reproductions of old prints and interesting documents, tracing the evolution of Swiss postal services across the Alps during the past century. One reads the diverting story of Greville, the Englishman, who conquered the St. Gothard in a fiacre in the good old days of the eighteenth century when the passes were first coming into use as routes of despatch. The history of the federal diligences is traced from 1850 to 1920, following which the thesis is maintained that "the postal-motors are brutes created and nourished by the mountains." A chapter is devoted to the perennial struggle with snow, and full statistical tables are witnesses of progress in the opening of routes.

J. M. T.

*Sous l'oeil des choucas . . . ou les plaisirs de l'Alpinisme.* Eighty plates by Samivel, with foreword by Guido Rey. 4 to. Paris: Delagrave, 1933. Price Fr. 25.

The pleasures of Alpinism depicted by Samivel, with a foreword by Guido Rey, makes a book that should not be read in hospital after an abdominal operation, unless the patient's incision has been properly reenforced by pitons and crafty girdings of the rope. For side-splitting it is, and may this serve as due warning.

Two zones of elevation are recognized—the inferior, or that of the telescope; and the superior, that of the jack-daw—in each of which epochal events transpire; possibly, one should say, perspire.

From the lower zone no specimen of humanity is barred, for even a pathetic little old gentleman with an umbrella may gaze upon the Matterhorn. Picnic parties risk their lives for edelweiss, and aerial passengers of the *téléférique* thumb their noses at the burdened climber on so-called *terra-firma* below.

But, in the zone of the jack-daw, the cragsman is supreme. Free he is to ponder on the doubtful delights of moraines, and to

contemplate in crowded huts the paradox of pressure increasing with elevation. The climbing technique exhibited is as fantastic as was ever condemned by the solons of an Alpine Club, but hazards appear which even gymnasts of the death-defying school have scarcely considered. Who, for instance, has previously recorded being caught on a glacier whose advance was equal to climber's progress, trapping one on an icy treadmill?

True, there are experiences which smack of reality and rouse poignant memories. There is the vertiginous peak on which those hairbreath pals, Samovar and Baculot, lose their way because a page of their guidebook is missing; and the slender spire with a sardine-tin poised upon the topmost block as they take the last step of a supposed first-ascent. It keeps one jittering.

Following all this, more intimate portraits present typical specimens of Alpine fauna—the "North-Face Alpinist," with impressive, nay, monumental (they are proportionately the size of Grant's tomb) climbing-irons; the "Alpinist Nearly-Exhausted," who, for twenty years, has threatened to spend next season at the seashore; the "Alpinist La-La-Itou," who almost displaces the gravity centres of adjacent aiguilles by the resounding echoes; and, last but not least, that lightning type, never seen—known only by widely spaced tracks in the snow—the "Chronometric Alpinist," who receives no impressions save through his time-piece.

Finally, we are given a survey of Alpinism through the ages: from the glacial period to Noah and Ararat, with excerpts from mythology and the medieval, down to the romantic days when "sublime horrors" set the note. But Samivel crosses present time, with television offering a celebrated virtuoso interpreting the first movement of the fissure-in-Z, and explores realms of the future, with a single note of sadness: when all that is left of Alpinism is a row of lonely, deserted needles, with here and there a broken iron or a can protruding from the desolation.

A dangerous book for a dollar, my boys!

J. M. T.