BOOK REVIEWS

The Romance of Mountaineering, by R. L. G. Irving. 8 vo.; ix + 320 pages, with 41 illustrations, maps and diagrams. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935. Price 18s.

Contemplation of mountains—of their climbers and of their effects upon men (and particularly upon the author in the course of a long experience), is the general theme of this book. The style is philosophical, subjective and occasionally critical, or, perhaps we should say, provocative. At all events, the book has evoked lengthy reviews in most of the mountaineering journals, where its obvious merits have received due recognition.

We propose to limit ourselves here to comment on the author's strictures against Americans and American mountaineering, which must seriously mar the book for readers on this side of the Atlantic. Had the attack not been so deliberate, we would have preferred to ignore it, but the author expects "a cry of protest from any American who reads it," and we hereby register such a cry, though in all friendliness.

We protest not because any shafts have found a weakness in our armor, but in sorrow that a fellow craftsman, cradled in the land of "sweetness and light" could find so little of either in our make-up. In his tilting with the windmills of our present-day alpinism (which intelligent people know differs from that practiced in the Alps) one senses his suspicion that Indians may still be prowling around the streets of Chicago after dark, or at least that their tomahawks constitute a real menace to the frontiersman. Space will not permit a detailed refutation of his sallies which, after all, involve mainly a question of taste, but we may observe in passing that without any personal acquaintance with our mountains, he presumes to assay the essence of our climbing and pronounce it dross.

[The author's standard of good taste may be judged by the reference to the loss of a brave mountaineer (page 93), *not* while he was climbing for sport, but while he was camping for a week in a dangerous place for the sole purpose of securing observations on cosmic rays. Even personal experience with an Alpine tragedy seems not to have liberalized the author's disposition towards such occurrences.]

As regards his slur on "the American records of big mountaineering adventure" we can only express our conviction that the author has never participated in a serious enterprise of this kind, such as Logan, Fairweather, McKinley or Foraker.[1] He seems to forget that no time record is sought to be made on virgin peaks of this type. We can picture him, while climbing one of them, calling a halt with the words: "Well, boys, let's rest and enjoy the sunset. We may not reach the camp, but if we freeze here, at least our obituaries will record that we died true mountaineers—we will have done our quota of contemplation." And he might aptly continue with a quotation from his book, page 221. "We have halted longer on the summit and on the way down than any party in America has been known to do, and I think that the era of new adventure in American mountaineering has begun." Frankly, at this point in his reading, the reviewer's hands raised themselves automatically in supplication.

Later, upon resuming perusal of the text, we discovered a warm eulogy of John Muir and a lively ridicule of Clarence King, based on passages in his book of essays, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada,* written and published about 1870 when he was in his late twenties. We welcome this citation, if only as refutation of our author's fiat that Americans are venal creatures, sadly deficient in romantic tendencies and that their mountain literature is of the same description. In King we find romance galore—romantic adventure, romantically portrayed, and done, too, in the pioneer era when our author pictures us as wallowing in intensive acquisition under the motto "Time is money." King climbed Mt. Tyndall in 1864, a dozen years before there was any organized mountaineering club in America. No one nowadays treats his youthful exuberance from a serious mountaineering standpoint. He was primarily an able geologist; also a noted *raconteur,* much sought after in cultured circles in New York. We Americans know that it is the rare literary charm of his *stories* that keeps his work alive and in demand down to the present day. One wonders how any reader who has perused the later portions of King's book, could

[1] That such a mountaineer as T. Graham Brown does not dismiss Alaskan peaks or American companions lightly will be seen by his enthusiastic papers in *A. J., 47* (Nos. 250, 251). We venture to add Minya Konka to the list of recent American ascents in which "Hollywood" has played no part.—Ed.

withhold tribute to the masterly passages of prose description which grace it. The author's commendation of John Muir stands out in these rather acrid pages as an agreeable oasis. We are not convinced, however, that Muir, great and admirable as he was, will, or should, be adopted as the prototype for American climbers.

Mr. Irving's entire discussion of American mountaineering literature gives strong ground for suspecting that he has but dabbled in it to find fodder for his intransigency. His appears to be a bad case that only a stiff dose of further reading, preferably in our later books, will cure and we venture to prescribe Wilcox's *Rocky Mountains of Canada* and Thorington's *Glittering Mountains of Canada.*[2] These we can assure him from personal knowledge were not written in Hollywood (mentioned in the text) where many of his notions about us seem to have arisen.

In conclusion we venture the prediction that American mountaineering will continue to follow evolutionary principles normal to our land and that the lessons of the hills will continue to be salutary, regenerative and wholesome. We hope and believe that they have broadened our horizons and inculcated a sound and benign spirit of international comity (particularly towards fellow mountaineers of other countries) which will preclude any American from sponsoring literary disparagements of his brethren wherever they may live.

H. P.

[The editor is in full accord with the present reviewer, and feels it desirable to conclude with opinion from a British source (G. W. Y. in *Lonsdale* "Mountaineering")—"We have enough to do to play out the game safely and fairly against our own chosen mountain difficulties; and, if we have not, we should seek out harder climbs. . . We can only make the perilous game more dangerous, as well as vulgar, if we add to our hazards that of climbing competitively against other nations or climbers, or of hearkening to distracting public comparisons."]

Climbing Days, by Dorothy Pilley (Mrs. I. A. Richards). 340 pages, 69 illustrations, and index. London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1935. Price 16s.

Mrs. Richards says she started writing this book in China, far from her beloved Alps and homesick for them; she wanted to recapture the "feel" of all that makes up Alpine climbing, and to pass it on to her readers. In this aim she has succeeded admirably.

[2] Howard Palmer's *Mountaineering and Exploration in the Selkirks* should certainly be added to this tonic.—Ed.