

ALPINE SECTION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL EXHIBITION AT BERNE.

As might have been expected, the Alpine section formed a very prominent feature of the exhibition held in connection with the International Geographical Congress in Berne. Some sixteen rooms in the new Federal Palace were devoted to this section. Through the courtesy of Dr. H. Dübi, President of the section, and M. Charles Montaudon, the writer was enabled to see the various exhibits before they were thrown open to the public.

It was only natural that a large amount of space should be devoted to maps, which, indeed, were almost too numerous; owing, too, to the principle adopted of employing them in great part as mural decorations a thorough inspection was impossible. Many possessed a purely antiquarian interest. It seemed a pity that, so far as could be judged, little attempt had been made to arrange maps of Switzerland or of portions of the Alps in some chronological order, so that the student of cartography might have been enabled to trace the gradual evolution from the rough and fanciful, if graphic, diagrams that did duty as maps in old times, to the modern perfection of accuracy, clearness and detail shown so conspicuously in the Siegfried Atlas.

The promoters of the section had evidently worked hard to collect all that might be of interest, and some old views of the city of Berne, and towns such as Lausanne, were very curious, if only as illustrating the comparatively slow rate of growth in these places. Of still wider interest were some of the old panoramas exhibited by the Swiss Alpine Club, for the original drawings were shown. One remarkable panorama, dated 1755, and signed by Micheli Ducrest, was described as 'Prospect géométrique des Montagnes neigeées, dites Gletscher, telles qu'on les découvre en tems favorable, depuis le Chateau d'Arbourg, dans les territoires des Grisons du Canton d'Ivry, et de l'Oberland du Canton Berne.'

Another original drawing, bearing the same date, by Stouder (*sic*) the elder gave a view of the Oberland from the terrace of Berne. In addition there were two by G. Studer, dated respectively 1824 and 1829. The former showed the panorama from the Stockhorn, and was marvellously delicate in drawing. The second, the 'Aussicht vom Signal auf dem Vuilly,' not only displayed Herr Studer's accuracy as a draughtsman, but was, in addition, very beautiful in colour, and was evidently finished with the loving care of one who admired as he understood the mountains. Another sketch, dated July, 1826, showed a view from Mürren. Mürren itself was represented by a single chalet. A fair collection of water-colour drawings had been got together, the one perhaps of most general interest being a drawing of Zermatt, dated 1785. As might have been expected from the date, it was finished up to the corners with minute care, and was quite as successful a rendering of the Matterhorn as any work of more recent times, though it had not the questionable advantage, from the artistic point of view, of including a variety of hotels in the foreground.

Occupying the greater part of a room was the famous relief, modelled by Herr Simon, of the Oberland mountains. The accuracy of detail was remarkable, while the general features of the mountain range were well preserved. The relative heights of the mountains, too, were given with surprising fidelity. A sketch of the Rhône glacier showing the retrogressive movements since 1874, only made one regret that the accurate observations now systematically carried on had not been undertaken at a much earlier date. It really needed but a glance at such sketches as this and at Herr Simon's relief to convince the observer that, however the decay of the glaciers may be arrested from time to time, their slow progress towards extinction is inevitable. Photographs, of course, abounded, but the general level of excellence was not very high. A few of Mr. Donkin's well-known enlargements occupied a place of honour, and a selection from the familiar views of Signor Sella was displayed; but it was evident that, so far, no one has arisen who can challenge the supremacy of these two leaders in mountain photography. The absence of any attempt at composition, or of any effort to make pictures of the photographs, to reveal or to record the beauties of the sub-Alpine world, was especially noticeable.

The collection of objects of Alpine interest was not very remarkable. A number of medicine chests and cases containing a complete medical outfit, designed for use in huts, may have been intended primarily as a warning, but they seemed rather out of place in an exhibition of Alpine appliances. So complete was the store of drugs in some of the cases that it was quite distressing to imagine the condition to which a tourist might reduce himself who did not feel quite well and was turned loose among the contents, free to take any drug that he fancied might do him good. We still believe that the suggestion first made in the 'Alpine Journal' of providing automatic machines with a 'penny-in-the-slot' arrangement and a pill-delivering drawer at the other end would answer as well, and diminish the risk and discomfort consequent on amateur doctoring.

Some ice-axes exhibited by F. Jörg, of Zweilutschinen, seemed well made and practical, but the sticks were for the most part too long, and the point and edges of the axe head far too sharp. Some axes, fitted with moveable heads, showed that the problem of making instruments of this description which shall be of the least use to anybody still remains unsolved. Of the various mountain lanterns exhibited, the Italian 'Excelsior' pattern seemed on the whole the best. Crampons were exhibited in profusion, but as no member of the Alpine Club is supposed to know anything about these implements they must be passed by in silence, and it suffices to express a hope that they do not in practice, as in appearance, resemble ancient instruments of torture.

On the whole the Exhibition was decidedly interesting and varied, though in the matter of Alpine appliances it could not compare for a moment in completeness with those got together by the Committee of the Alpine Club at the winter dinner exhibitions a few years ago.

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