

A COUNTERBLAST COUNTERED.

MR. CECIL TORR, whose work 'Hannibal Crosses the Alps' was noticed in a preceding volume (xxxvi. p. 426), has, we regret to say, been very much put out by its treatment by both editors and critics. The editors, he complains, have handed it over to reviewers conspicuous for their *incompetence* and *effrontery*, and the latter have dealt with it as might have been expected of 'people of that kind.'

Mr. Torr has taken advantage of the issue of a second edition of his book to give a free expression to his annoyance. He has added to it an appendix which he terms 'A Counterblast against Critics.' Its concluding sentences run as follows :

'I certainly should not say silly in speaking of these critics. I should require a much stronger term to characterise their incompetence and their effrontery. It is astonishing that journals of repute should get reviewing done by people of that kind. But editors are usually good judges of what their readers want. *The Geographical Journal* is for the Royal Geographical Society, the *Alpine Journal* for the Alpine Club, and the *Journal of Roman Studies* for the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, and I suppose the editors of those journals know what kind of stuff their readers are prepared to swallow.'

We are content to ignore the breach of literary good manners that distinguishes this singular outburst, while we willingly accept our part of the responsibility we are called on to share with the editors of the two respectable periodicals mentioned above. Nor is Mr. Torr's disparagement likely, we imagine, to affect seriously the Societies he contemns. But it may be allowable to remind our readers that among the writers of the signed criticisms specially identified by Mr. Torr whose opinion he so much resents are to be counted several distinguished members of the University of Oxford, including the Professor of Military History and an Hon. D.C.L., who is also an Hon. Fellow of University College. It will be held by many a matter for regret that expressions of the violent character of those recorded above should have been allowed to issue from the Press of the Sister University!

We do not propose to tax either our space or our readers' patience by following Mr. Torr *seriatim* through the twenty-four pages of controversial and, in the main, controvertible

statements that make up his *Counterblast*. But lest strangers to the subject should take these for more than they are worth it seems expedient to select from them half a dozen choice specimens for critical examination.

1. Mr. Torr writes (p. 43): 'By just looking at Ptolemy's "*Geographia*," ii. 10, 2 (this critic) would have seen that Fos was not at the eastern mouth of the Rhône, but further along the coast.'

It is true that the position assigned to the Fossæ Marianæ in the text of Ptolemy is some distance west of the western mouth of the Rhône, somewhere, that is, near Montpellier, and a long way from the canal dug by Marius. But Mr. Torr would have been wise if in place of contenting himself with a single glance at Ptolemy he had looked up Fossæ Marianæ in that standard work, Smith's '*Dictionary of Classical Geography*.' He would have found there a lengthy discussion, signed G. Long, on the puzzle involved in the location of Fos. Either Ptolemy's text is in this instance corrupt or the Fossæ he refers to are not the Marianæ. Long, a good authority, inclines to the former view.

2. Mr. Torr writes (p. 52): 'One mountaineering critic who had never seen the Col de la Traversette.' In the particular instance this happens to be an excusable inaccuracy. The critic in question, however, if he had not crossed it, had closely approached and seen the pass from the Italian—the crucial side. But if Mr. Torr cares for the opinion of any Alpine critic here is Mr. Coolidge's: 'I have been at least a dozen times over the Traversette, and I know Torr is wrong.'

3. Mr. Torr has gone out of his way (pp. 52-3) to distort and obscure the remarks of one of his critics, an Ex-President of the Alpine Club, on the identification of the district between two rivers described and compared to the Nile delta by Polybius. This critic compared the general description of the natural features of the region in question given by the classical author with those of two definite districts: the district between the Rhône and the Isère and that between the Rhône and the Durance. He, on the strength of his own knowledge of the ground and on the reports of early travellers, concluded that Polybius's summary of the general features of the district he described was fairly applicable to the country between the Rhône and the Isère, but 'could not reasonably be forced into any correspondence whatever with that between the Rhône and the Durance.'

The meaning of this sentence Mr. Torr has completely mis-

understood. He quotes his critic as arguing that the description given by Polybius of the range forming one of the boundaries of the Island cannot reasonably be forced into correspondence with any of the mountains east of the Rhône except those between that river and the Isère. Such an assertion would obviously be absurd. There are, as we all know, many mountain ranges east of the Rhône which, from the classical point of view, might fairly be described as 'difficult of approach and access, and almost, so to speak, impassable.' The critic's argument was obviously based, not on any one particular feature, but on the combination of natural features indicated by the Greek historian. He pointed out that the expressions employed by Polybius—a populous and corn-bearing region encompassed by two rivers and a difficult mountain rampart—agreed better with the district lying between the Rhône and the Isère than with that between the former river and the Durance. Mr. Torr, on the other hand, contends that the mountains between the Rhône and the Isère, the range west of Chambéry, in no way correspond to the picture drawn by Polybius, but are easy of access. He even goes so far as to suggest that this range with the old tracks over it may fairly be compared to Dartmoor and the road between Exeter and Plymouth! Such a comparison indicates a sad lack of local knowledge or literary research! Let Mr. Torr turn not only to the current Guide-books but also to the works of early travellers. Let him study there the accounts of the old tracks and muleroads, the Col de Couz and the Mont du Chat, which for many centuries gave the only direct access from France to Savoy.

We will make him a present of two. Here is the account of his passage given by Lassels in his 'Voyage of Italy,' A.D. 1670, p. 66:

'Parting then from Lyons on horseback we passed through Vespillier, La Tour du Pin, Beauvoisin (whose bridge parts France and Savoy) and came in two days to Mount Aiguebellet, the threshold of the Alps. This is a pretty breathing hill and may be called the *Alpes foule over* [sic] or the Alps in a running hand and not in that fair text hand which I found Mount Cenis to be in. It hath all the lineaments and shapes of the great Alps, that is much winding and turning; deep precipices; Marons, or men with little open chairs to carry you up and down the hill for a crowne, and much stumbling worke. We find this hill resembles Mount Cenis as a proper man may do a giant. Having passed this hill and by it through the very clouds we fell as it were out of the skyes upon Chambéry.'

Next let Mr. Torr take up Brockedon's ' Passes of the Alps, 1827,' vol. i. p. 31, and note the following passages :

' The range of mountains which extends south of the Jura from the Rhône to the Isère presents a formidable barrier between France and Savoy which formerly rendered access to Chambéry from Lyons very difficult ' ; p. 32 : ' So great were the difficulties that we find from the records of early travellers that they arrived at Chambéry on their way to the Cenis by a considerable *détour* either by Geneva or by Grenoble.'

A detailed description of the old road follows, pp. 32-3 :

' From the plain the road ascends the mountain-side and then abruptly enters a ravine at a considerable height above a stream, which foams beneath in its narrow and often concealed bed. The route leads thence to Les Echelles, a little town which owes its name to the mode of passing a cavern in its vicinity through which formerly lay the only path to Chambéry. Those who travelled by the old road ascended ladders placed on the face of the rock to the height of one hundred feet ; they then entered a cavern and after climbing more than eighty feet through it regained the day in a deep cleft of the mountain ; and a path of which some vestiges remain, like a Roman pavement, enabled the traveller with comparative ease and freedom from danger to attain the summit of this extraordinary passage. This was an undertaking always dangerous to the unskillful and often impracticable, for the cavern was the embouchure of the waters from the ravine above ; and as the snow and torrents often interrupted the passage it was only in the most favourable seasons that the undertaking could be accomplished. When the policy of a more intimate intercourse with France suggested itself to the enterprising mind of Charles Emmanuel the Second, Duke of Savoy, he determined to make a road here practicable for carriages ; and the most celebrated act of his reign was the accomplishment of this great undertaking, which was called the *route of the Grotto*.'

If Mr. Torr wishes for further information he should refer to the *Notice Historique sur l'ancienne route de Charles Emmanuel II. et les grottes des Echelles* of Messrs. Franklin and Vaccarone, Chambéry 1887.

4. Mr. Torr (p. 42) is equally ill informed when he suggests that it may plausibly be argued that the Riviera route was in Hannibal's days among the *easiest* ways of getting past the Alps. In the time of the Roman Empire it was, we know, furnished with a military road. But before that date as well as after that date when the road had gone to ruin, the rugged and uneven

character of the coast rendered the track along it and over its many promontories extremely difficult, and most traffic went by water. Dante's reference to the 'ruina' between Lerici and Monaco is emphatic and well known. Brockedon in his 'Passes of the Alps' describes the narrow paths and 'giddy heights which overlook the sea,' and the unbridged torrents which up to 1828 made travel more or less dangerous even on mule-back. De Saussure's journal of 1780 fully confirms this account.

5. Mr. Torr's captious comment (p. 54) as to the Barricades on the route of the Col de l'Argentière hangs on his omission of the words 'on either side' which follow 'interrupted' in the review from which he is quoting.

These words make it clear that the reviewer was not making the absurd suggestion that Hannibal passed the Barricades 'on the way up on the west side.'

6. The treachery on the part of the tribesmen (p. 59) mentioned by Polybius consisted not in their misleading the Carthaginians but in their wearing peace-emblems. There is nothing said of their luring Hannibal into a gorge off the direct road. The narrative distinctly implies the opposite. The army went on next day *through* the gorge.

We might continue for several pages, but our readers will have had enough of Mr. Torr's querulous complaints and crude rejoinders. They can judge for themselves of the value to be attached to his *Counterblast*.

AN EARLY VISIT TO TONQUIN VALLEY.

By HOWARD PALMER.

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NOWADAYS the lovely alp-lands of Tonquin Valley, its glistening amethyst lakes, and the frowning walls of the ramparts are well known as one of the show-places of the Canadian Rockies in Jasper Park. As recently as 1919, however, despite the fact that an excellent map of its trails and peaks had already been published for several years, few tourists had gone there, and apparently no mountaineers at all. III. 8.

The locality seems to have been visited first by M. P. Bridgland in 1915, while conducting the governmental survey of the Park. Many of the peaks to the E. and N. of the valley were then occupied as photographic stations, but none on or to the