Literature

J. A. Symonds in the Swiss Highlands *

'Our Life in the Swiss Highlands,' by Mr. John Addington Symonds and his daughter Margaret, is made up partly of sketches that have appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, and other periodicals, and partly of similar papers not before printed. It is largely devoted to the Engadine, especially in its winter aspects, though the Italian slope of the Alps and the orchards of Tyrol furnish material for portions of it. Delightful records of quiet days at Davos—of whose history in the olden time, before it became a haunt of tourists, much curious and entertaining information is given—mingle with thrilling stories of storm and avalanche. Of the avalanches Mr. Symonds made a special study, and tells us of their several sorts—the *Staub-Lawine*, or dust-avalanche, of dry and finely powdered sand, which comes 'attended with a whirlwind, which lifts the snow from a whole mountain-side and drives it onward through the air,' and which, on reaching the earth, hardens into ice, 'wrapping the objects which have been borne onward by its blast tightly round in a firm implacable clasp'; the *Schlag-Lawine*, or stroke-avalanche, of sodden snow, which 'slips along the ground, following the direction given by ravines and gullies, or finding a way forward through the forests by its sheer weight'; the *Grund-Lawine*, or ground-avalanche, which differs from the preceding in carrying a vast amount of earth and rubbish down with it, a 'filthy and disreputable' mass, 'the worst, the most wicked' of its kind; and the *Schnee-Rutsch*, or snow-slip, a small variety of the stroke-avalanche, liable to fall at any time and in nearly all kinds of weather, but very dangerous though small, 'for it rises as it goes, catches the legs of a man, lifts him off his feet, and winds itself around him in a quiet but inexorable embrace.' Mr. Symonds once saw from his hotel window at Davos-Platz a coal-cart with two horses swept away by 'a very insignificant Schnee-Rutsch.' The man and one horse kept their heads above the snow and were extricated; the other horse was dead before he could be dug out. There is a Davos proverb to the effect that 'a pan of snow may kill a man.' A special form of the snow-slip is known as the *Wind-Schild*. This is a mass of snow drifted by the wind on a slope until it becomes too heavy to sustain itself and 'slips downward like snow from a steep roof,' giving no warning of its approach. According to an official report of the damage done by avalanches in the canton in the winter of 1887–88, the buildings wrecked were 'four chapels, fifteen dwelling-houses, one hundred and seventeen large stables, eighteen hay-barns, thirteen huts upon the Alpine pastures, two flour-mills, two saw-mills, one distillery, and ten wooden bridges.' Only thirteen persons perished, other victims being extricated alive.

There are many graphic and charming descriptions of scenery and of natural phenomena—moonrise and moonset, cloud iridescence, autumn mists, night on high peaks and glaciers, etc.—with no less spirited pictures of Swiss athletic sports, such as 'tobogganning on a glacier,' 'hay-hauling on the Alpine snow,' feasts in cherry orchards, Bacchic festivals in winter, and much else of the local manners and customs. Graceful 'vignettes in verse' are interspersed, for, as the reader is aware, Mr. Symonds is a poet. His prose shows it no less than his verse. His daughter inherits her father's talent, though she writes only in prose.

* Our Life in the Swiss Highlands. By J. A. Symonds and his Daughter Margaret. $2.50. Macmillan & Co.