

MONTREUX

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649177110

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1908

CHAPTER I

THE SWISS RIVIERA

MONTREUX, strictly speaking, is a small village, the exact limits of which are only known to the parochial authorities, the land surveyors, and the map-makers. In practice the name is used to designate the district commonly called the Swiss Riviera, though Switzerland has, it must be remembered, another and a warmer Riviera south of the Alps, with head-quarters at Lugano and Locarno. How far this Lake Lemman Riviera extends is a matter of opinion. Perhaps we may take it that it stretches from Villeneuve to Vevey; but, if those are the boundaries that we assign, we must proceed to hedge and qualify. Vevey is exposed to the 'bise' from which Montreux is sheltered; Villeneuve is little more than a malodorous Swiss slum, with nothing in it to attract the stranger. The Montreux of the traveller in search of a genial winter climate begins at Clarens and ends at Chillon, the one

place famous for its modern villas, and the other for its ancient castle.

Between these extremes—through Montreux, Territet, and Veytaux—runs an almost continuous street, clean enough, but far too narrow for comfort, and, thanks to the clanging of the bells of the electric cars, somewhat too noisy for complete repose. It is one of the world's beauty-spots, but it is overcrowded and overbuilt. In every direction hotels, huddled together in the narrow space between the mountains and the lake, obstruct the view. They are very good hotels—at all events, the best of them are very good—but their charm is in their internal economy, not in their architectural appearance. It is necessary to climb the hill a little way and overlook the barrier which they present in order to realize the fascination of the landscape which has caused them to spring up.

Even so, one is driven to utter a mild protest against the superabundance of vineyards. A vineyard, it is true, is more gratifying to the eye than a hotel; but poets have made too much of vineyards, perhaps because they have been too fond of wine. They have their brief hour of glory when they perish in the splendour of rich autumnal tints; but at other seasons they are monotonously green.


being all of them of the same shade of green, and the irritating uniformity is enhanced by the grey stone walls which curve them into geometrical shapes. Moreover, trespassing in vineyards—even to the mild extent of walking on the tops of the walls—being forbidden under penalty of a fine, or of aggression by some savage dog, the course of the pedestrian is apt to be confined by walls, which are a sorry substitute for hedges. We must mount beyond the vineyards to the woods if we are really to enjoy Montreux.

Up there, however, we have such views and experiences as would be well worth a longer journey and a stiffer climb. The blue floor of the lake—it is really as blue as the sky—lies immediately beneath our feet, stretching almost as far as we can see. The hills to our right decline into green meadows. Opposite to us are the darker and steeper hills of the Valais and Savoy. To our left, closing our view up the sombre valley of the Rhone, is the solid, snow-crowned mass of the Dent du Midi, which Ruskin classed with Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, the Weisshorn, and the Stockhorn, as one of the few mountains which impress the imagination as a mountain should. Just here—wherever it may be—one feels, must Mendelssohn

have been standing when he sang that hymn of praise of the scenery which the guide-books quote.

‘How beautiful are these paths!’ he wrote. ‘This Canton de Vaud is the most beautiful of the countries that I know. If God should grant me a long old age, this is where I should wish to spend it. What excellent people! What bright expressions on their faces! What charming views! When one returns from Italy one almost melts into tears at the sight of this corner of the world, in which so many good and honest people are still to be met. There are no beggars here, no surly functionaries—nothing but smiling countenances! I thank God for having let me see so many beautiful sights.’

So he spoke, and he may speak for all of us. Since his day, indeed, the hotel-keeper and the railway engineer have laid their hands even upon the heights. It is a pity, but there is more room for their handiwork than on the lake shore, and they have hardly vulgarized the sites as yet. No doubt there are too many huge caravanserais at Glion, at Les Avants, at Caux, and on the summit of the Rochers de Naye; but a short walk from any one of them may still bring us to a place of peace, where there is no sound except the song of



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