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imagination. Mr. Chambers is even freer with his bludgeonings than Mr. Saxton: the hero can scarcely turn a corner without being slugged on the head—and that is nothing compared with what happens to most of the other characters. Here, again, we are concerned with loyal Americans versus Nazi agents: but the effort of discovering which are which in a plot that resembles a ball of wool after a dozen kittens have been playing with it will give the reader a worse headache than all Mr. Chambers' blunt instruments. *The Man Who Murdered Goliath* is very mild by comparison. A straight detection novel, set in an agreeable Californian town, it is pleasantly less sensational than its title would suggest. A millionaire helpfully rings up the local editor, saying that he is about to shoot himself: a shot is heard; and the scene, needless to say, is set for murder.

NICHOLAS BLAKE.

A Mountain Farm

I Bought a Mountain. By Thomas Firbank. (Harrap. 8s. 6d.)

THE author of this book, tired of two years' imprisonment in a Canadian fruit cannery, drove in a wild November gale to look at a sheep farm at Capel Curig, in North Wales; fell at once for its elemental solitude, the gloomy and cavernous farmhouse and the view of Snowdon; and a few days later bought the 2,400 acres of mountainside, lake and river for just under £5,000. The great permanent flock of sheep, which knows no fences in the open mountain and yet "stays at home by a mass heredity which is rather like the intuitive cleverness of birds," was taken at valuation. The grim Welsh manor house, with its huge chestnut beams and "heavy roof of clumsy slates quarried off surface rock," against which mountain storms hurled with destructive force at sixty or seventy miles an hour, was altered a little and redecorated. To the flock of sheep were added fowls, pigs, a caravan, and wayside snack-bar for hikers, and a wife to whose resource and beauty the book owes a great deal of its attraction. Out of these strangely mixed materials, compounded with infinite enthusiasm, Mr. Firbank has made a book remarkable for its energy of style, its feeling for atmosphere, its receptivity to the moods of wild places and its extremely keen observation of wild life. It would be hard to praise too highly the spirited chapters on lambing, on the gathering, shearing and dipping of sheep, the wool sale, the great blizzard, the buying of the caravan, the walking race across the famous fourteen peaks known as the "Three Thousand." These accounts give the impression of having written themselves in moods of warm eagerness; they convey a sense of authenticity, a feeling of exuberance and muscle, too rarely found in books of countryside reminiscence. The book of which they are part is completely remote from the category of week-end chatter-idylls in which the townee plays at farming; it belongs instead to the class of Mr. Crichton Porteous's *Teamsman* and Miss Margaret Leigh's *Highland Homespun*, of *The Wheelwright's Shop*, and *The Village Carpenter*. As these books smelled of the land, the moor, and the workshop, this one has about it the rare tang

of the mountain side. From the fact that it ends with an account of Mr. Firbank renting another 1,000 acres of "heather and whin," and "sweet short mountain grass," and with them another flock of sheep, I judge that it may be followed by other books of its kind. Those who seek an interpretation of the countryside based on real and permanent values could ask for nothing better.

H. E. BATES.

Holiday by Proxy

Mountaineering Holiday. By Frank Smythe. (Hodder and Stoughton. 12s. 6d.)

THIS lively and agreeable record of three weeks' climbing in the Dauphiné and the Mont Blanc district last summer is the best piece of writing Mr. Smythe has done since *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*, and it shows that the Himalayan climber can still find excitement and enjoyment on familiar Alpine peaks. There is not too much philosophising; there is plenty of good observation, including a passage on the exhilaration of descending to the first trees and flowers after a long spell among snow and ice; and there are some pleasant anecdotes, including an hotel-sketch of two elderly Englishmen glowering at one another over their copies of *The Times* and refusing to speak because each considered himself more of an habitué than the other.

Mr. Smythe and his companion, Jim Gavin, were newcomers to the Dauphiné; they found the huts crowded and they disliked the stony, treeless valleys; but they had a good climb on Les Bans and did a strenuous traverse of Les Ecrins before bad weather drove them to Chamonix. From there they went up to the Pavillon de Trelatète and did that very pleasant and somewhat neglected excursion, the traverse of the Domes de Miage and the Aiguille de Bionnassay to Mont Blanc, and then descended Courmayeur by the Brenva. The Rochefort ridge and the Innominata route completed their holiday: the weather had broken, and a few days later Europe was at war.

Here and there a slight inaccuracy creeps into Mr. Smythe's narratives. Some of the French Alpine roads were *not* built at the request of the military authorities, but at the instigation of the P.L.M. and the T.C.F. As a French general said to the reviewer five or six years ago: "In France, the tourist industry is stronger than the army." Again, Mr. Smythe seems to have confused the Vallot observatory with the old observation-post on the summit: the observatory proper is still in use (or was until very recently) and has not been replaced by the new hut. Similarly, the Refuge Durier is surely on the Col de Miage itself, and not, as Mr. Smythe seems to suggest, on the rocks some distance below.

These are small points, and there is no need to argue whether Mr. Smythe's route up the Aiguille de Bionnassay really was unorthodox (it sounds like the one usually taken by the St. Gervais guides on a cold, sunny morning). The important thing is that the book comes as near as any to communicating the exhilaration and strenuous enjoyment of ordinary climbing, and in present circumstances it is the next best thing to an Alpine holiday. Mr. Smythe has always been as skilful with his camera as with his typewriter, and the illustrations to this book are at least the equals of his best.

MICHAEL ROBERTS.