

THE INCOMPLETE CONTINENT

MODERN German books of travel keep on a high level. The number of representative authors belonging to this branch of literature is a mere handful. Yet their quality carries weight. Their writings represent the latest way of acquainting the reader with countries far off.

It may be worth while, says the Bookman, to cast a glance at the essential traits of the contemporary literature of travel. Gone are the times when the lover of such books, cosily nestled in his armchair by the fireplace, was concerned mainly with getting his daily excitement from horrible tales about the fearless author's astounding adventures with Red Indians, bloodthirsty cannibals, and queer Chinamen. The globe has shrunk too much, readers have become too critical, and last, but not least, the destinies even of the remotest countries are today too closely knitted with our own. Thus the purely romantic story of travel can hardly expect to raise the full enthusiasm of the educated twentieth century person. Besides, cinema films are so much more efficient in this respect.

When turning to the literature of travel, however, information, enrichment of our knowledge, acquaintance with figures, facts, dates, and items are sought for. By no means, though, must those books bring exhaustive statistics, or even take the place of encyclopaedias. Written dryly, they simply would not be read. They are, on the contrary—or, at least, try to be—as vivid as the journey itself. The author does not strive to be an expert who comes home with a clear exposition, treating the various points in due turn and according to their carefully estimated importance. He leaves that to ourselves, and rather makes us accompany him, as it were. Progressing from one impression to another, just as it happens in the vicissitudes of a voyage, the problems and questions of a country and its population become obvious enough.

We have a chat with the barber, a visit to a factory, a talk with the workmen, a look into an administrative office. And now, indeed, we are able to gauge the meaning of newspaper headlines that were before mere words and more or less abstract

phases to us. Life is a better teacher than books. Therefore, if writers succeed in bringing pieces of this abundant yet elusive material faithfully on to paper, they have achieved much.

Australia As Seen By Authors

One of the best known of these German travellers is Dr. Collin Ross. His books describe the biggest and cer-

tainly the most interesting portion of the world. This time he has visited "the incomplete continent," as he terms Australia, and his observations make an attractive reading. They are laid down in "Der Unvollendete Kontinent," illustrated with many significant snapshots. The greatest part of our globe is highly developed, populated, overpopulated, complete as it were. Everywhere we have the cry for emigration. Nowhere we find a State willing to open its gates for the immigration of great masses. And yet, says the author, there is one vast continent with a population as diminutive as its natural resources are immense.

Intruders are barred. The people of Australia want to enjoy the exclusive use of the extraordinary economic potentialities of their country. For a long time it was a stronghold of prosperity, safe against and independent of international complications, and thus it shall remain for ever. However, the question arises how, in view of the high pressure within the intolerably overcrowded south and east of Asia, this strict exclusiveness of Australia can be maintained.

Of particular interest, he remarks, are the unparalleled social conditions of this State.

The ordinary working man's standard of life is not very much inferior to that of the big mine owner. A charwoman may have her car. Servants are difficult to be had. They cannot be expected to do "dirty work," such as polishing shoes. The trade unions guarantee amazingly high wages. The system of scholarships has been developed to the utmost perfection. Indeed, an extraordinarily democratic society. In Dr. Ross's opinion we find here the social structure the Western World must assume sooner or later. Yet again the last months have made it evident enough that nowadays no "happy island" can exist. Unemployment has not spared even Australia. It is therefore particularly interesting

It is therefore particularly interesting to see whether and how, under these circumstances the standard of living, once established, can be maintained.