

TRY BÜRGLEN :

THE HOME OF THE WILLIAM TELL LEGEND.



SOME three years ago I wrote a paper in this MAGAZINE, entitled "Try San Marcello." It was a description of a little town in the Apennines, some few miles off the line of railway from Bologna to Florence, and

therefore off the beaten track of the ordinary tourist. I felt that I had made a discovery. The place was cheap, accessible, clean, and civilised, and situated in the midst of scenery which may be described as Scotland under an Italian sky. The result of that discovery was remarkable. As I have since learned, it opened the door to something like a rush of tourists. The place had been written about, and this alone was enough for the roving Englishman to resolve to give San Marcello a trial. I am now naturally anxious to do the same good turn by another Swiss hamlet which I lighted on accidentally last summer, and which has precisely the same recommendations as San Marcello—that it is just off the main stream of travel. Half a note in a singer, we know, will make all the difference between fame and mediocrity. It is hard it should be so, but such is the way of the world, who will have all or nothing. It is the

"One touch of nature which makes the whole world kin,
That all with one consent praise new-born gauds."

Never did the wise Ulysses utter a wiser saying than this ; and we may add, to borrow another sentiment in the same speech of that much-misquoted text—

"Take the instant way,
For honour travels in a strait so narrow,
Where one but goes abreast."

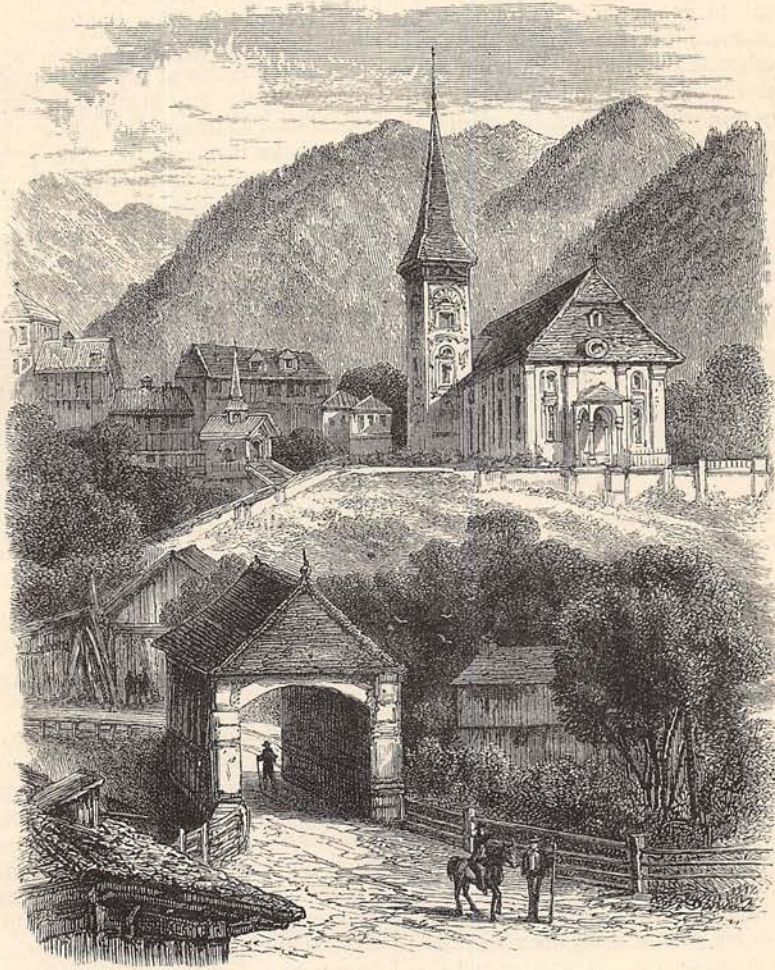
It is so with the stream of Swiss travel. The troops of British tourists, as a rule, move in a kind of Indian file from hotel to hotel, and from one show-place to another. What is called "making tracks"—striking out for oneself, and discovering "fresh fields and pastures new"—is rather the exception than the rule. And yet off the high road only a lady's mile up the glen, here and there, Switzerland abounds with *pensions* where the old four francs a day scale of bed and board may be had. Good wholesome food and no stint, coffee, bread, butter, eggs—all in abundance—superb mountain strawberries, and *kalbs-fleish*—not more veally and tasteless than in the pretentious hotels at the great places of resort—are still to be had for four

francs a day. My belief is that Switzerland is not used up even yet, or the Englishman's playground played out. I am thinking of those who want quarters easily accessible amid the mountains, yet not too far from the haunts of men—a mile at most from a telegraph station, and yet with the eternal snows immediately above them. It is not everywhere, even in Switzerland, that you can sit under a trellis of vines hanging in purple clusters overhead, and look up at the awful rose of dawn or sunset and the glory of a mountain like the Roth-Stock, sometimes red as burnished copper, and then wrapped in clouds like a beauty jealous of her own charms.

If any one would taste delights of this kind at twenty-seven hours' journey from London, and less than a mile from the post and telegraph station of Altdorf, the old town, or village-capital, as we should say, of Canton Uri, let him "try Bürklen." The Schächenthal, or gorge of the Schächen torrent, here falls rather than flows by a series of rapid descents into the valley of the Reuss, just before the Reuss loses itself in the Uri end of the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons. In the last dip of the Schächen valley, where a crest of rising ground marks the ascent from the plain of Altdorf to the high ground on the left, stands Bürklen, or the little burg or fort on the hill. It is well called so, for if crowned by a fort it would completely block the two valleys, and make either the St. Gothard road or that to the Pantenbrücke impassable to armies. Happily the day has gone by for defences of this kind ; and when Russian and French armies fought as they did under Massena and Suwarrow for the last time eighty years ago, long-range artillery was unknown. At present the only *schloss* in Bürklen is the "Wilhelm Tell" *pension*, a modest, old-fashioned inn of the type that is fast being superseded by those great joint-stock *caravanserais* springing up everywhere in Switzerland. Let us hope that nothing we may write may set that nation of hotel-keepers, the Swiss, on the plan of starting one of these joint-stock hotels at Bürklen. For the present, at least, the place is unspoiled ; the ruck of tourists have not found it out, and the dust of the diligences sweeping along the St. Gothard road, a few hundred feet below, has not risen as yet to disturb the retreat of those who are here like Wordsworth's solitary among the mountains, retired as noontide dew. A church—disfigured, it is true, in the interior with some *rococo* gilding and flaring pictures in the Jesuit style, but as to its exterior not unworthy of its grand surroundings—a steam saw-mill, a sprinkling of cottages, a Tell chapel, and a small graveyard—this is all Bürklen. Its lions are so soon seen, that any remaining interest it may have must be left to the stranger's own imagination. This is, indeed, the very charm of the place. It is so remote, yet so accessible—so much in the world, yet out of it, that it

would be a thousand pities if desecrated by being found out. Against this we should protest as loudly as the Thirlmere folk do against their lovely little lake being dammed in one direction, tapped in another, and run off as a water-supply for thirsty Manchester. But we are not afraid of this in the case of Bürglen; it is safe for some time. The fact that it is only a short mile from Altdorf is its best security. The ruck of tourists will continue to sweep by it as before; either

which gathers around Bürglen. It is said to be the birthplace of Tell; it is also the scene of his latest exploit, since he was drowned, according to tradition, in the torrent of the Schächen, in the attempt to save a child who was being swept down the stream. The end of the hero was so in keeping with the whole of his self-sacrificing life, that in his case "unfaith in aught is unfaith in all." We must take the legend or leave it: it is a question of Tell or no Tell; there is



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they are Alpine club men faring on to high latitudes, or they are of those to whom Interlaken and Lucerne, with their noisier attractions, are all-powerful. They are only a minority, after all, who care for a four-franc *pension* amid sublime scenery—who can rest and be thankful at a half-way house of this kind, neither far up among the glaciers nor down among the Palais Royal attractions of Interlaken. For those, however, who want rest and retirement, endless walks amid enchanting scenery, and such sunsets and sunrises among snow-capped mountains as only Switzerland can give, let them try Bürglen, and we can promise they will not be disappointed.

But we have reserved to the last the chief interest

no way of whittling down some of his exploits and retaining the rest. We may at once say, before we discuss the matter further, that the tourist who visits Bürglen had better keep his scepticism to himself, if he entertains doubts as to the historical truth of the Tell legend. His fate will be that of the daring Swiss critic, Freudenberger, whose book was burned by the public hangman, at the base of the Tell statue, at Altdorf in 1760. To rob the Uri people of their Tell would be like the old story of denouncing Manlius in sight of the Capitol. Legend dies hard anywhere, particularly when it is not only recorded in annals, but also when there are pretended relics to vouch for these annals. Had not the Romans the original

sow preserved in pickle at Lavinium? There was the thatched cottage, and the augural staff of Romulus, and the Ruminal fig-tree that caught with its basket the twins, and the tree that had grown out of Romulus' spear, which he had hurled against the Palatine Hill, and similar relics. Imagination, like the hop-bine, must have a pole of this kind around which to twine its tendrils.

Much in the same way, the Tell legend has its relics, and its sacred spots, which, as nature changes not, are supposed to vouch for the truth of the story. The two chapels, it is true—one on the Tell's-platte, and the other at Bürglen—which tradition, as rendered by Swiss guides and guide-books, represents as raised by men who witnessed the events, are evidently trumpety works in the *rococo* and plaster-cast style of fashionable art a century ago. But the scene of Gessler's slaughter so exactly answered the description of the spot in the legend, that either it had remained unchanged by the growth and decay of trees or otherwise for six centuries and a half, or it had been in recent times either selected as a suitable scene of the act, or artificially adapted to it like a theatrical property. Voltaire, as we might expect, swept away the legend in his usual sarcastic manner with the expression—"Il faut convenir que l'histoire de la pomme est bien suspecte. Il semble qu'on ait cru devoir orner d'une fable le berceau de la liberté helvétique."

It was already suspected before Voltaire's time. The curé Freudenberger of Berne, in 1760, wrote a book, "Guillaume Tell: Fable Danoise," in which he pointed out the singular correspondences between the Tell legend and that of a certain Tauo, a Danish hero, found in all Norse Sagas. The more sedate history of Saxo Grammaticus, finished about the year 1186, gives the details of the arrow and the apple with close resemblance to the later Swiss story; though it has a far less dignified origin. A certain Toke, or Tauo—for the story reappears several times in the Norse Sagas—who had risen to high rank in the Court of Denmark, and made enemies, had in his cups boasted of his skill in archery, offering as a test of it to pass an arrow through the smallest apple at a long range. To test his skill, the king resolved that the apple should be placed on his child's head, when the apple was cloven in two in due course. It was noticed that the archer had taken two arrows from his quiver, and when questioned what the second arrow was destined for, made precisely the answer which Schiller's hero makes in the play—if he had injured his child, he would have avenged himself on the tyrant, the formidable Harold the Blue-toothed.

Such is the Tell legend. We must now leave it to our readers to judge for themselves what residuum of fact is left after the apple, and the arrow, hat, and the other picturesque surroundings of the story have been taken away. Is the Tell of history worth retaining after we have been compelled to surrender the Tell of romance? Much turns on this. Many of Scott's characters, for instance, are historical. Sir

Henry Lee of Ditchley, Peveril of the Peak, Robin Hood himself, are all historical; but it must be admitted that when taken out of the page of romance, and set down in the sober page of history, they become so small that it is almost beneath the dignity of history to notice them at all. To apply this test to Tell, would he deserve to be regarded as an historical character, apart from the romantic element which makes the prominent element in a play-writer like Schiller as in a romancer like Scott? We think so. The rise of the Swiss Confederation is an event of such European importance, and has such large bearings on the course of popular liberty elsewhere, that if there were no hero like Tell the popular imagination would have to invent one, just as the Romans, unfortunately for them and for us, after the burning of the true annals of Rome by the Gauls, had to invent an eponymic hero named Romulus from Roma, much in the same way as a hive has to make a queen bee when the true queen is destroyed. It is fortunate for Switzerland that the story of her heroic struggle for independence in the early years of the fourteenth century, though embellished by fiction, is not wholly fictitious as that of Rome. At Bürglen, which is undoubtedly Tell's birthplace, unless the whole story is a fiction, we stand at the very cradle of Swiss liberty. We see why the men of Uri were the fathers and founders of the Swiss Confederation rather than the men of other cantons, less remote from the centres of civilisation. The last stand made by an oppressed people is always amid the mountains or by the seashore. Byron has finely seized this thought—

"The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And standing there an hour alone,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free."

The Isle of Ely was in the same way the last retreat of the vanquished Saxons; and when resistance could no longer be carried on in the open, the Forest of Sherwood sheltered outlaws like the bold archer Hood. Thus the last stand of the oppressed is the first starting-place of the new order. The geography of Switzerland explains how its liberties, artichoke-like, have grown outward leaf on leaf, till the Confederation took in not only German elements, but also Burgundian, French, and even Romance and Italian cantons, like the Graubunden and the Tessin. If we might speak of Altdorf as the Thermopylae, and of Morgarten as the Marathon, then Bürglen is the Delphi or centre of Swiss liberty—where its hero was born, and where he retired to die. History, it is said, can best be studied *in situ*, and without the aid of physical geography its record is at best a dull chronicle. If for no other reason, we should recommend our readers to try Bürglen; and as the Lake of Lucerne is now only twenty-four hours' distance from London, it is strange if even the busiest cannot snatch a week in the year to visit one of the classic spots of liberty, placed as it is in the very heart of what is now known as the playground of Europe.

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