



THE FAIR OF BRIENTZ, SWITZERLAND.

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THE Swiss have had no greater fairs than those of Basle and Zurich, both of which have, however, lost their old importance. Their cities are so small—little better than villages—that they have not the means of holding an annual fair. Most of them are obliged to be satisfied with a market, attended by the people in the immediate neighbourhood. These markets generally possess some specific character—cattle, horses, or cheese.

In a land like Switzerland, where the nature of the common employments of the people, and where the physical features of the country, separate them, to a great extent, and enforce much solitude, the old-fashioned customs maintain a firm hold, and practices given up half a century or more ago by other nations, are still kept up. In many parts of Switzerland the Sunday meeting at church is the only friendly intercourse which the scattered mountaineers have with one another; and thus it is that market-day is anticipated with pleasure, and, if it comes but once a-year, it is all the more welcome on that account.

If one wishes to see a thoroughly good specimen of the national fair or market of Switzerland—to observe the people in their picturesque costumes, simply transacting business, or enjoying themselves after its transaction without regard to lookers-on—a visit should be made to Brienz in the month of November. Brienz at that time is not the Brienz which English and German tourists are accustomed to in July and August, when cicerones are doing the honours of the country, and innkeepers and *char-a-banc* drivers and guides of all sorts are ready to be, "for a consideration," the very obedient servants of the distinguished foreigners who may deign to bestow on them the honour of their patronage. No: Brienz asserts its own natural character, throws off its diplomatic habits; the Oberland is itself again, for the snows have descended and chased

home the tourists. It is fair-day, and the fair has begun. Who can match these vendors at praising the wares they have for sale? What English Cheapjack can hope to rival a Swiss mountebank? What bait can be more seductive to the shoals of fish that have come to Brienz this day than that which the sellers have spread for them? And what crowd can be more good-humoured, more interested, more bent on making the best of everything, than the crowd which is now gathered in the streets of Brienz?

Here is a mercer with silken laces and gay ribbons, challenging, in his rude patois, the fair to match the goods he has to sell. Here is an old woman expatiating on the merits of her cheese. Cheese! sure such cheese was never seen before, since churns were made or cheese presses invented! What a noise there is—what a clattering of cups and plates which the girl has to sell, and means to dispose of, if strength of lungs can effect the sale. As an accompaniment to the orators we hear the strains of an accordion, harsh, shrill, discordant, for the fingers of the youthful performer have not grown used to their work; but the music may yet serve to wake up the echoes pleasantly in the solitude of the Alps. What is that ear-piercing sound? No accordion—not the worst ever made—could give forth such a note; it came from a swinish throat, for here are some pigs come to market, causing great confusion in the fair, and terrible consternation to the girl in her *al fresco* crockery shop. A singular-looking fellow is the pig-driver, carrying a young porker in his arms, urging on the drove—very gently—with a decayed branch, and being provided against a rainy day by having an umbrella slung at his back.

Observe those two peasants, one smoking a pipe, the other with a goat beside him, how earnestly they are conversing; what can it be about?—Italian independence, and the late elections, universal suffrage and vote by ballot, or the result of the harvest and the price of corn?

Beyond these are some farmers' wives and daughters choosing stuff for dresses, and conversing on questions of taste and fashion with the draper. To be sure, they live up in the mountains, or else in some solitary valley, and all the world will not criticise their appearance, if they fail to be dressed *à-la-mode*. What of that? They like to be well dressed as well as other people, and display as much taste as many dowagers or belles of London or Paris; and as to giving trouble, and looking at a number of things which they do not want to buy, and taking up a great amount of unnecessary time, they can fairly equal the best of folks who go a-shopping.

As we go wandering through the fair, fresh sights and sounds greet us on every side. More Cheapjacks, more pigs, more peasants smoking, more girls buying haberdashery and nic-nacs, more glaring white canvas booths, more flaunting flags, more streamers fluttering in the wind. We may notice—and, indeed, cannot help noticing—the picturesque attire of the women; their charming little hats, coquettishly set on one side of the head, and permitting long curls to fall on a corsage of black and gold; their velvet collars and smart chains; their sleeves as white as the Jungfrau, and gaily tied with carnation ribbons: and then what quiet blue eyes these women have—large, honest eyes, that speak much for the simplicity and sincerity of the owners.

In the evening there is a dance; clarinet and tambourine set the feet in motion to a lively measure. Nothing stiff or formal, or ball-roomish about it; a dance as graceful, however, as it is exhilarating, and suggestive only of the simple pleasures of rustic life.

A visit to the fair at Brienz is not readily forgotten, and gives a better idea of the Swiss than a stately tourist, who looks at life from the balcony of his hotel or through his carriage window, could derive in a half year's sojourn in the country.