

Opposite this prism is a flat glass, in which the reversed object is reflected in its natural position, and the shifting of this prism, easily accomplished by a string or wire, directs the eye of

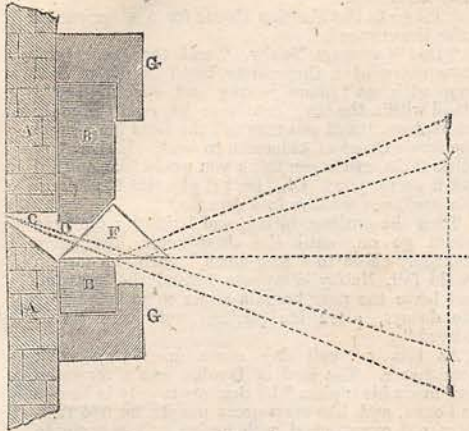


FIG. 4.

the spectator from the real object—as, for instance, the operator himself in the chair—to the reflected image of the reversed object on the ceiling. It will be seen from this that the whole “mystery” is a mere conjuring trick, the effect of which, upon the credulous or ignorant, would be to fill them with an awful sense of the supernatural; but it is a trick so simple, that a schoolboy would laugh at it when once explained.

Such applications of natural science by the magicians, &c. &c., of old, easily account for the singular effects they are said to have produced; they were cunning fellows, deluding their ignorant dupes by optical or other philosophical experiments, and they were nothing more.

LES LANDES.

SOME of the finest scenery in France is to be found among the Pyrenees. In the warm glow of the sunny atmosphere the loftiest heights are clothed with verdure to the very top, and even the precipitous rocks are covered with brushwood; the eye wanders over a vast sea of undulating foliage; the meadows on the slopes resemble English lawns; irrigation and sunshine prolong the beautiful freshness of the spring into the summer and autumn; “hill, dale, wood, inclosure, streams, lakes, and scattered farms, are mingled into a thousand delicious landscapes.”

The extreme beauty of Limousin and the Pyrenees offers a singular contrast to the desert of Languedoc, Provence, and Gascony, and especially to that portion of the country known as Les Landes.

The department of Les Landes is one of the largest and poorest in France. Its chief feature is the extensive tract of waste land, which occupies about four-fifths of its entire area. Excepting on the margin of the Garonne, where there are some of the finest vineyards in the world, Les Landes apparently produce nothing but heath, furze, and pines, with a few patches of barley, and a little maize. Water is scarce, and the surface of the ground is covered with a dull, ash-coloured sand. Les Landes are bounded, towards the sea, by a chain of sandy downs, called *dunes*. These are formed by the loose, shifting sand thrown up by the sea, and extend to the height of more than 100 feet for about 150 miles along the coast. The shifting nature of these sand hills is the cause of the poverty of the inhabitants of the district, and is highly injurious to ordinary vegetation. According to the prevailing winds, they are continually changing in form and position, and, occasionally, immense masses of sand, as in the deserts of Africa, are whirled over the country, sometimes producing the most serious consequences. By a sandy inundation of this description, the town and church of Mimizan were completely overwhelmed. The formation of the *dunes* has also stopped up the outlets of several small rivulets, and formed, in consequence, a number of lagoons, the largest of which is about six or seven miles in length. The soil, thus deprived of ordinary irrigation, is dependent on the moisture of the rainy season. This lasts about four months, and during that time the depressed portions of Les Landes are flooded with



A SHEPHERD OF LES LANDES ON HIS STILTS.

water, which, as soon as the dry season sets in, are covered with slime and sand, making so many pitfalls for those who have to cross the country. These are called *blouses*, and are exceedingly dangerous to strangers.

Man, however, adapts himself, and is so constituted that he is enabled to do so, to whatever country he may inhabit. He makes himself at home in the tropics or in the arctic regions; and while the lower animals are adapted to particular localities and climates, man adapts himself to all. In Les Landes, for example, the treacherous *blouses* and the loose sand make it necessary for those who would travel securely to walk upon stilts! For individuals to pass all their out-door life on such contrivances appears singular enough to us; but use is second nature, and to those accustomed to them, the stilts of Les Landes are no more eccentric than walking-sticks, or high-heeled boots. By the aid of stilts, the shepherds of Les Landes are enabled to look after their ill-conditioned flocks with ease and safety. The elevation thus attained gives them, of course, a wider view of their sandy pasture, and prevents their losing sight of their lean and hungry charge. It renders their progress, also, far more rapid, as, with very little exertion on their part, they can walk faster on their wooden supports than a horse at a hard trot! They walk over the prickly bushes, carefully avoid the *blouses*, and save their shoes from filling with the warm, dry sand. They carry with them a long pole, which serves them as a seat, the end being easily stuck into the ground, and the shepherd, crowning the odd tripod, comfortably knitting stockings all day long!

The peasants of Les Landes are early accustomed to the use of these stilts, and are very expert in their use. They endure many privations in accommodating themselves to the barren country in which they live, the want of water being the most severe. Their clothing is of the roughest, their food of the coarsest, and their lodgings of the humblest description. The shepherd in the accompanying sketch is a well-dressed fellow in comparison with the appearance of the people generally. A sheepskin is the common attire, and a sheepskin, with a little straw, forms the ordinary bed at night. They are said to be grossly ignorant, and physically and mentally degraded, but nothing better could be expected from the secluded condition in which they have so long remained.

The physical character of Les Landes renders the old mode of travelling by coach and post horses next to impossible; but the railway is effecting a revolution in the country, and establishing direct communication between this locality and other parts of the empire. Civilisation, heralded by the shriek of the railway whistle, will rapidly bring about an entire change in Les Landes; new systems of agriculture will be introduced, improvements in all descriptions of industry will take place, the most formidable natural difficulties will be overcome, and the whole condition of the people ameliorated. The conquest of this vast country, the subjugation of the *dunes* and *blouses*, which occupy a thirty-sixth part of the whole French empire, is an “idea” for which French economists would do well to go to war with the sterility of the soil and the ignorance of its peasants.