

BEAUTIFUL SWITZERLAND.



SWITZERLAND is an inland country of Europe, and is about 200 miles in length and 160 in breadth. It is a land of mountains, valleys, and lakes; within its limited borders there are about 2,500 streams. It is divided into twenty-two cantons,

or counties, each of which has an independent government, but the whole are united for mutual defence.

The Swiss are an active and busy people, honest, steadfast, and brave. In personal appearance they differ: those who live near to Italy have the tawny skin and general features of the people of that land; others who reside in the neighbourhood of the Rhine have the round and ruddy face of the Germans; and those who border on France have the lively black eyes and cast of face of the French. So also they differ in religion, nearly two-thirds being Protestants, and the others chiefly Roman Catholics. The former are the most thriving, and their cantons are in a superior state of order and cultivation compared with the latter.

There are likewise different styles of dress among the people; but generally the men wear round high hats, open waistcoats, and breeches of coarse linen. Women are dressed in jackets, often with a profusion of buttons, and short petticoats. Unmarried females are generally distinguished by their hair being in two plaits, tied at the ends with ribbons. After marriage the hair is twisted in a bunch on the crown of the head, and secured with long silver pins.

The peculiar feature in the condition of the Swiss—the great charm of Switzerland—next to its natural scenery, is the air of well-being, the neatness, the

sense of property imprinted on the people and their plots of land. They have a kind of Robinson Crusoe industry about their houses and grounds. Some cottages are adorned with long texts of Scripture, painted or burnt into the wood, in front, over the door. Others of the chalets, or cottages, have the pedigree of the builder or owner on the outside, and are otherwise singularly carved and ornamented. The little plots of land, each no bigger than a garden, show the daily care in fencing, digging, weeding, and watering. With basket, hoe, and spade, and quite unassisted by animal power, all the labour is done by hand.

With the money a peasant earns in the winter by weaving, and sometimes in summer as a guide to tourists, in addition to the humble produce of his garden, all his simple wants are supplied. Women spin hemp into a coarse kind of cloth, with which they make clothes for their families; and the children, in the long nights of winter, find employment in making wooden toys of animals, birds, and houses.

In the fine season the boys are engaged in taking charge of the cattle on the mountains, and are commonly seen with great horns, used in calling home their herds at night.

The highest village in Europe, inhabited all the year round, is the Swiss village of Mürren. It commands a more glorious prospect than tongue can describe, and well repays the toil of reaching it.

The Swiss Confederation comprises no less than three separate nationalities—the German, French, and Italian. The Government is Republican, and the administration of affairs is virtually in the hands of the inhabitants, who being in



A MOUNTAIN PASS, SWITZERLAND.

the possession of universal suffrage, elect their own authorities. In no other country in the world is property so equally divided amongst the people. More than a sixth of the entire population (nearly one person to every family) are landowners, so that full five-sixths of them may be said to have a direct interest in real property. One result of this is, that the Swiss are all on a footing of almost perfect equality, both socially and politically. Military service is by law obligatory on all citizens between the ages of twenty and forty-four, though the exceptions to this law are so varied and numerous that it is calculated full fifty-six per cent. of the male population is exempted from some cause or other.

With that practical genius which characterizes them, the Swiss long ago arrived at the conviction that the education of the masses is the only sound basis of a State with free institutions, and the most effective lever to raise the moral as well as the material condition of a nation.

In all the Cantons, save that of Geneva, attendance at the primary schools is compulsory by law, and the law is so well liked that the number of children who absent themselves, including cases of sickness, hardly reaches five per cent. As a rule, children attend school from the age of six or seven up to fifteen or sixteen, though after a certain age, or after the attainment of a certain progress in learning, the hours of study are reduced, in order that they may begin to earn a livelihood. In this the Swiss workman has the advantage over the workman of other lands, for, owing to the education he has received, he finds pastime in rational recreations, instead of seeking it in idleness or vicious indulgences.

There are various societies—not a few of them founded by the workmen themselves—the object of which is the pro-

fitable employment of the workmen's leisure, and which by means of free libraries, museums, lectures, discussions, drawing classes, athletic sports, music, and other attractions, save him from squandering his time and money in the public-house. Again, there are societies for taking care of orphans, for educating viciously-disposed children, and for preparing infants for the primary schools. There are also institutions which find work for the unemployed; which advance money on articles manufactured by them; which help apprentices forward on their travels; and which administer to the needs of the worker in various other ways.

The position of the Swiss workman is so far independent that he can scarcely be said to exist as a member of a distinct class, being, as he is, on a par with all around him as to social relations or political. In the workshop, the masters for the most part spend all their spare time among the men, mix with them freely, and take all possible care for their comfort. It is true the wages are small, but the working man is seldom entirely dependent on them. He dwells in his own cottage, cultivates his own patch of ground, pastures his cow or his goats on the communal lands, cuts his fuel in the communal forests, and, with these resources, fears not the vicissitudes of commerce. As the artisan will till the ground when other employment is not to be had, so the agriculturist will work at some trade when the winter drives him off the land. The husband will carve wood, or will make some part of a watch; and the wife, when not engaged in household affairs, will work at making lace or plaiting straw. Thus agriculture and manufactures are combined, and it is this combination of industry, coupled with a spirit of perseverance and economy, which has done as much as anything to make Switzerland so prosperous a country.