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THE REAL SWITZERLAND (CONTINUED)

Mr. Egli gives a picturesque account of the times when mule-trains, caravans and pack-horses were carrying merchandise to and from until, in 1880, the great tunnel was bored and Germanic and Latin Switzerland joined hands. An interesting and well-written study.

An equally absorbing chapter deals with the Valais which Poets have called a miniature Spain. In spite of an abnormal rainfall, the Valais is the driest place in Switzerland. The explanation is that all the moisture is dropped over the high mountains, so that Sierre, in the main valley, has no more rain than the Sahara. The balancing factor is produced by the glacier-streams which act as a substitute for the non-existent rainfall and irrigate the land. How the Valaisians have extended this arterial system by their so-called "bisses" is graphically described.

Subsequent chapters treat of the Lake of Geneva which reflects the heat rays on to the inclined shores and so gives the adjoining countryside its temperate climate, a climate eminently suitable for the rich vine-yards planted on the slopes; of the Jura with its extremes of temperature and its subterranean waters; of the rich and fertile Mittelland which breeds the hard-headed, stubborn peasants, strongly individualist, back-bone of the country; of Zurich where the Limmat breaks through the moraine curve, relic of the Ice Age; and of the Engadine with its long winter and the crystal clearness of the air. An entrancing chapter is that on the Ticino, the Southern garden of Switzerland and its vivacious, intelligent, Italianate in character yet fundamentally Swiss in their outlook and loyalties, whose heraldic motto is aptly "Liberi a Swizzeri".

There follows a series of well-informed dissertations on the geographical upheavals which brought the Alps into being by the upward thrust of the vast masses of deposits and crystalline rocks from the bottom of the one-time oceans, how the pattern of the peaks was formed and what effect the continuous process of disintegration had on them; on the Glacier world, with its firm ir névé-snows, Bergschlund, crevasses and moraines; on the Föhn, that destructive yet helpful south wind which sweeps the Alpine valleys every spring and on the avalanches, the scourge of the Alps. In all of which the author displays a considerable knowledge of the science of geology.

In the concluding chapters, the human factor is brought into relief. The reader is made to witness the life of the hard-working peasants in the remote valleys and their yearly migrations - in some districts many times repeated - when the cattle is driven to the higher grazing grounds, "nomads of the Alps" is the name Mr Egli gives them. The author also shows how the Swiss towns fit into their natural settings; how the national economy was built up and is being maintained; and how the four languages so far from being a source of discord, are in fact a harmonious blend, conducive to cultural unity.

Finally, he attempts an outline of the Swiss character. He sums it up as "a disposition towards kindness in strange alliance with a great capacity for obduracy."

Thus the manifold and sometimes startling diversities of the Swiss scene are surveyed with keen observation, the natural features and phenomena described and explained, the human element analyzed.

Altogether an admirable and fascinating book, written with charm and sincerity. There are passages where the author may have allowed himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm, but he does so in no spirit of boastfulness. To quote his own words "If here and there I may seem guilty of grandiloquence I beg the reader's indulgence. Switzerland is my homeland".