

Our fatherland [continued]

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OUR FATHERLAND

(Continuation)

Graubunden:

We now come to a rather long, but certainly most interesting chapter, dealing with Switzerland's largest Canton. Together with the Bernese Oberland, the Graubunden—often called the Grisons—is the most familiar to the sport lovers of all nations. Here are located St. Moritz, Davos, Arosa, Klosters, and many others, all world famous. But it is not only for its sports or its beautiful mountains and many valleys that the Grisons is famous. It can also pride itself with rich cultural traditions and a vivid history.

Because of the mountainous nature of the country, it might be expected that this region would not have a particularly interesting history, which, however, is most dramatic. Existing records show that Rhaetus, Prince of the old Etruscan tribe, first invaded this district which he named "Rhaetia," as early as 600 B.C. In 15 B.C. this part of our country became a Roman province called Rhaetia Prima. The men fought in the Roman army and their graves have been discovered as far distant as Libya.

The history of the Grisons actually centres around its many mountain passes which have brought great advantages but also much trouble to the canton. It was over these passes that the German emperors travelled to be crowned in Rome, or to fight their enemies on Italian soil. And these passes were of such strategic importance during the thirty years war that the Grisons were invaded by the armies of Austria, Spain and France. But thanks largely to the energy and ability of Jurg Jenatsch (1598-1690), a most daring and colourful compatriot, the country finally rid itself of foreign influence. From the 15th century onwards the "Grey Confederates" as they were called (from whence the name of the canton Graubunden) were on good terms with the Swiss and in 1803 their territory was incorporated in Switzerland as the 18th Canton.

In addition to its passes the Grisons is famous also for its rivers which flow north, south and east, into the North Sea, the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The Rhine rises here to flow to the north, the river Inn joins the Danube for the Black Sea, while the rivers to the south join the Adda and the Po for the Adriatic.

Cattle raising in mountainous regions is always fraught with difficulties. On account of the severity of the climate, the cattle have to be kept in stables half the year, which means large quantities of hay. Yet the farmers of the Grisons are still using the same old-fashioned scythes their ancestors used. A great deal of time is also needed driving the cattle up in the mountains to

graze and then back down again into the valleys. The farmers here, as in the canton Valais, have a hard life which serves as a decided contrast to the fashionable cosmopolitan life led in the world famous hotels of this canton.

The people love their homes and one need only enter an Engadiner house to be conscious of its atmosphere, and the almost painful state of cleanliness which exists within. The simple but solid facade with its homely projections, its wonderful lattice and balcony always attracts the stranger. These charming gabled houses with their solid stone steps show that the people who live here spare nothing to make their houses practical and liveable. The deep windows are rich with flowers—geraniums, begonias, carnations—while flowering vines climb on the lattice work. In the winter before these same windows hang tiny bags of suet and nuts for the hungry birds.

Just as these people cling to their valley dialects, in the same way they cling to their various customs and festivals. One of these in St. Moritz is the "Chalanda marz." On the first of March, the village boys take cowbells and harness bells of all sorts and with a great noise "ring in the spring" in order to remind the gods that the countryside still lies deep beneath the snow. The boys receive gifts in money and kind and on the following Sunday there is a great feast for the young people and a ball for their elders.

The changing destiny, especially the thirty years war, brought many exiles into the country and these touches of foreign blood have given a certain subtlety to the character of the inhabitants. During the 17th and 18th century many of them emigrated, at first only for Venice, and then later for the whole of Europe where, because they are such steady and careful workers, they made their fortunes as successful restaurant keepers and confectioners. The danger of depopulation, which threatens so many of the higher valleys of Switzerland, is less felt in the Grisons, for here the flourishing tourist trade offers a steady employment.

In the Swiss National Park, situated in the Lower Engadine, no tree can be cut, no flowers plucked, no game shot. Herds of chamois climb over the rocks, roebuck graze under the larch trees and deer drink from the icy streams. The capricorn, historical emblem of the Grisons, has a reserve on Piz Albris near Pontresina, while only forty years ago the last bears in Switzerland were found in the dark forests that have since become the National Park.

The Park lies between the mountain ranges of Bernia, Ortler, Oetzaler, and Sivretta and the cleft of the Ofen Pass divides it in two parts. The largest south-west group consists of the massive mountain group of the Quaternals and Piz

d'Aint. The smaller northern part includes the Laschadu group and the Pisoc group. The Park is the richest district in the whole Alpine chain for flowers on account of its great differences in height, its different stony foundations and its position between the east and west Alpine flower boundary. Many rare plants are to be found only here, as well as the usual Alpenroses, dwarf wild roses, Alpine grasses, shrubs and meadow flowers. In the second half of June they are at their loveliest—violets of all hues, gentians, the fiery Leimkraut, the pure white Pyrenean ranunculus, the golden Bergbahnenfuss, the elegant grasses and sedges and, of course, the Edelweiss. Through all the Engadine there is an abundance of wild flowers. Hardly has the last snow melted before the meadows are carpeted with crocus and soldanella, pushing their blossoms through the snow itself. During the month of May, the valleys are covered with millions and millions of white and blue crocuses. Then comes the season of the hairy anemones in pastel shades found on the hillsides and almost before these are over, the blue gentians. Towards the end of June when the hay-making begins, the beauty of the lower meadows is somewhat spoiled, but the flowers of the high pasture land and the mountains remain beautiful through the summer with a colouring far more intense than anything seen in the lower altitudes. The canton of Grisons protects its flowers by forbidding many of them to be dug up by the roots or picked in large quantities.

(To be continued.)

E.M.

NO VOTE FOR SWISS WOMEN

A lot of people express surprise that Swiss women have not got the right to vote. They are all the more shocked as they consider Switzerland as one of the most developed countries as far as democratic rights are concerned.

It should not be forgotten that Swiss democracy is very different from that of other States. The people not only elect the members of Parliament, but are called several times yearly to give their advice on various laws; for instance, they have just been asked to vote on the question of the expense of Sfr.120 million to help the Swiss abroad who have been victims of the war. I choose this example because it is the most recent one. In last December the Swiss citizens had to vote on taxation. This is surprising, but it is a fact. In Switzerland the taxpayers themselves have to decide about the rate of taxation and about the various laws, which sometimes are most complicated. To be a simple citizen in Switzerland is almost equivalent to being a legislator. Public affairs must be followed closely,

new laws studied and opinions expressed in order for voting to be done intelligently. This task takes time if it is to be taken seriously, and most of the citizens do take it seriously. It is evident that all the important questions are decided by the people, whereas everywhere else in the world the feminine vote has been decided by the Governments and Parliaments. In Switzerland it can only be decided by the people themselves who up to now have always opposed it. More than twenty times since 1920, the question has been raised in the various Cantons and more than twenty times the vote has been negative. Men have refused to give the right to vote to the women. Does this mean that they have no confidence in the judgment of their female companions? I do not believe so. On the legal plane the Swiss women have rights that many women of other nations envy. The Swiss civil code practically makes the women the equal of men. Then why, will you ask, such a resistance. The answer is that outwardly the political life has a typically masculine character. Secondly, Switzerland is deeply traditional and modifies her institutions only when it is absolutely necessary. Thirdly, the Swiss women themselves do not show great enthusiasm to demand their political rights.

It does not mean that I do not understand the surprise which is expressed abroad and that I do not wish that my country should grant the right to vote to the womenfolk, all the more as there are no particular reasons for refusing them. As you see, the main reasons for such conditions are first of all subjective and even sentimental.

"Constant Reader."

NEW PROVISIONS IN THE SWISS LAW ON THE OLD AGE, WIDOWS' AND ORPHANS' INSURANCE

The local Consulate of Switzerland wishes to draw attention to certain new provisions as contained in the Decree of the Swiss Federal Council, dated April 9th, 1954, with respect to Swiss nationals residing abroad.

A woman who had lost her Swiss citizenship through marriage to an alien before 1953, but has since regained it by virtue of the new law on Swiss nationality, is at liberty to join the Swiss Old Age Insurance as a voluntary member. The adherence would have to be declared within one year from the date of the reintegration into Swiss citizenship. However, if the reintegration was granted before January 1st, 1954, the term for enrolment expires on December 31st, 1954. (Sec. 8.)