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## THE ARTS IN SWITZERLAND.

(We reproduce herewith an article which appeared in the "TIMES" (Literary Supplement) on July 29th, 1949, by courtesy of the Editor.)

The Swiss were already beginning to take a greater interest in their country's architecture and art before the war began. Then for six years they found it difficult to travel beyond their frontiers, and so gave still closer attention to what their own country had to show. The result, therefore, has been the appearance of a number of books which open the eyes to something which even the Swiss have been too apt to miss, and which foreigners have often pretended was not there at all. And yet what marks Switzerland, as it marks the Italian lakes, is the taste with which a piece of architecture has been placed so as to reinforce and interpret the beauty of some selected view of mountain and water.

Such pieces cannot be dissociated from their setting. Inseparable, for instance, are the view from Montreux of the Château de Chillon and the Dent du Midi, the view of the Trinity Church and the roofs of Berne against the Jungfrau, and the surrounding range of snows which was so well described by Meredith in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, the view of the Bristenstock and the valley of the Reuss beyond the spire of Fluelen at the head of the Urner-See, the view of the Savoian Alps seen across the lake of Geneva with the Cathedral of Lausanne in the foreground, or that of the Madonna del Sasso at Locarno against the background of Camoghè and the other mountains which encompass the river Ticino. All these are reminders that the Swiss, far from being people incapable of creating masterpieces, have shared both taste and creative genius with their French, their German, and above all their Italian neighbours.

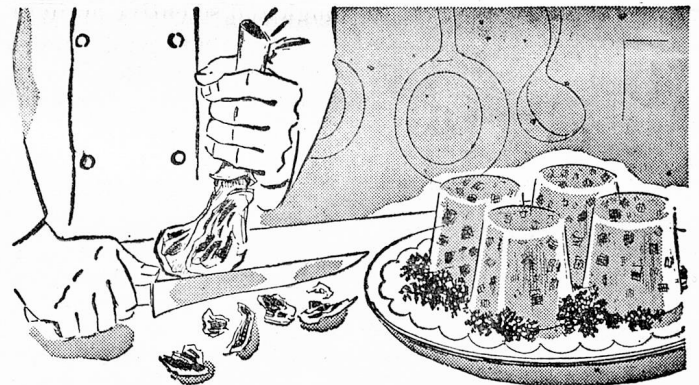
What the Swiss call the Ticino, and the world generally Italian Switzerland, shows how the culture of Italy met the Alps, and there is little difference in the atmosphere and the charm whether we are on the one side of the frontier or the other. On either there is what Wordsworth called "a serene accord of forms and colours," a combination of culture and amenity with grandeur of scale and wildness; the same yellowing villages mirrored in still water, the same recurrence of loggia, arcade, portico, or campanile, with the cypress and the vine. But it is not generally known what sumptuousness of taste is presented again and yet again by the parish churches — sometimes in their façades, more often in their campanili; most often in the noble proportions of their interiors, and not seldom in statue, fresco, relief or canvas. All combine to produce high excellence in the church of Carona, some miles above Lugano, from which the visitor looks down a steep hill-side to the bridge which carries the St. Gotthard railway to the Mendrisiotto, Como and Milan.

Scenes such as these are put before us with the style of an engaging writer in two neat little books which have just appeared: the first two of the five volumes which Ernst Schmid is devoting to Italian Switzerland. These *Tessiner Kunstführer* begin with Lugano and its environs, and are followed by the Mendrisiotto. Later volumes will deal with the remainder of Sottoceneri with Locarno and its environs, and a final one with the Leventina and Val Blenio.

The ground of all these had already been opened up fifteen years ago in the indispensable volume familiarly known as the "Jenny." It is Hans Jenny-Kapper's *Kunstführer* which catalogues not indeed the whole domain of Swiss art, but every building of interest in the country. It was of course impossible to bring so comprehensive a work to perfection in a single edition, especially as the author began this pioneer work without either means or leisure. He died in 1942, but the professor of Fine Art in Berne, Dr. Hans Hahnloser, has made himself responsible for a fourth edition which is now to hand; alike in the authoritative essays it contains, and in the precision and comprehensiveness of its detail, it rivals Baedeker and Murray; indeed it covers ground which these classic guide-books hardly touch.

In his new volumes on Lugano and the Mendrisiotto, Herr Ernst Schmid follows a different method. They are less scientific, more personal. They concentrate on the subjects which its author regards as the most arresting. He aims certainly at a thorough knowledge of what he handles, but his style is that of a good talker who owes his charm to the vividness of a personal experience.

The claims of Swiss architecture are evenly balanced between the Gothic tradition which makes Stein am Rhein a rival of Rothenburg in Bavaria, and the baroque, which presents more famous masterpieces in the abbatial churches of St. Gallen and Einsiedeln. The last are presented — with eight other imposing



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temples on the grand scale — all built between 1660 and 1760, in *Schweizer Barockkirchen*, in which the magnificent photography of Hans Seeger illustrates the theses of Herr Landolt. This work cannot be properly understood without a companion of the same scale and format: *Das Chorgestühl in der Schweiz*, where the same photographer provides the pictures for Herr Paul Leonhard Ganz. This book is an epitome of Swiss ecclesiastical art from the early Middle Ages to the close of the eighteenth century, and it shows the Swiss in a domain where their genius extends beyond its rivals — that of woodwork and wood-carving. No country in the world — not even Germany — can show a finer collection of carved choirs in abbey churches and cathedrals. Wood, as Ruskin points out, in *The Bible of Amiens*, can fold like silk, shine like metal, and recapture the subtle movements of flame itself. These two books, not only in their unrivalled collection of expert illustrations, but in the masterly essays with which Herr Landolt in the one case and Herr Ganz in the other have accompanied them, provide essential documents in the evolution of European art. *Die Kirchliche Baukunst in der Schweiz* covers the same ground in another attractive volume, while *La Sculpture Suisse*, with especial attention to Fribourg and Neuchâtel, shows the Swiss at work not on wood, but stone.

While Herr Landolt takes ten great churches to illustrate the spirit of baroque art, Professor Gantner in his authoritative volumes traces the detail of ecclesiastical art from the earliest periods to the Gothic culmination as it meets the Renaissance. He does not present the same array of imposing photographs, but provides rather the first thorough and scientific account of Swiss sculpture, frescoes, stained glass, and tapestries in their relation to the Catholic tradition from its origin to the Reformation. His first volume extends from Roman-Helvetian origins to the end of the Romanesque period: the second concentrates on Gothic. This field has not been fully explored hitherto, although Herr Peter Meyer has recently published two excellent sketches of the subject for the general reader. The single historian of the subject was Rudolf Rahn, whose *Geschichte der Bildenden Kunst in der Schweiz* is over seventy years old. Well

written and wide ranging as it was, this work can be compared neither in detail nor in presentation to that of Professor Gantner.

The nearest approach to a specialized study of the castles of Switzerland was made long since in the collection of *Die Burgen und Schlösser* of the various cantons which was begun nearly twenty years ago and which is now reaching its end with a fourth volume treating of the Grisons; this collection is decorative, however, not scientific. Its counterpart is the attractive volume by Herr Peter Meyer, *Das Schweizerische Bürgerhaus und Bauernhaus*. One of the traditional charms of the country is its domestic architecture; it dignifies Schaffhausen and Stein am Rhein and lends constant charm to the homely finish of the châlet. Fresco, woodwork, gables, mottoes, windows, and above all proportion combine to satisfy; at the least, they fit admirably into mountain scenery.

In the two monographs mentioned, Herr Meyer takes us over the whole field of Swiss art. *Art in Switzerland* is not meant to be more than a sketch; but *Schweizerische Stilkunde* is a subtle and penetrating essay; it anticipates not a few of the conclusions of Herr Landolt and of Professor Gantner. The combination of the arts can be admired in the manifold photographs of *Switzerland: The Traveler's Illustrated Guide*, which should open the eye of the most unsophisticated tourist to the taste and achievements of the Swiss.

#### CHURCH BAZAAR.

In order to help maintain our Church and continue with the work which is so vitally necessary, especially these days, a bazaar will be held, on Saturday, October 15th, 1949, at the Lecture Hall, Kingsway Hall, Kingsway, W.C.2.

Refreshments will be served during the afternoon and evening and any gifts to tea, sugar, cakes and other eatables will be greatly appreciated.

We thank you very much for all you are doing for our Church and we hope that you will support our Bazaar both by sending your gifts and by your attendance on October 15th.

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