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**Picturesque Tour through the Oberland in the Canton of Berne, in
Switzerland**

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MEYRINGEN, IN THE VALLEY OF OBER-HASLI.

MEYRINGEN is a large, handsome village, the capital of the country of Hasli. The torrent which, in the annexed plate, is seen falling on the right from a perpendicular rock, is called the Alpbach, and is formidable on account of the mass of its waters, and the impetuosity of its current, the inundations of which have frequently threatened the place with total destruction. One of the most remarkable of these inundations is commemorated by an inscription and a black mark near the organ in the church, eighteen feet above the floor, up to which height the building was filled with stones and sand by the furious torrent, on the 9th of July, 1762. Thirty years before, many houses were carried away, in consequence of the overflowing of the same stream; the rest were laid under water to the height of the windows, and the adjacent lands covered with stones, mud, and rubbish. A solid wall, from seven to eight feet thick, 12 high, and 1100 feet in length, was constructed in 1734 along the stream, for the purpose of keeping its waters within due bounds, and protecting the place from these ruinous visitations. The damage sustained in the districts of Grund and Meyringen only, on the last-mentioned occasion, when the Aar also overflowed its bed, was estimated at upwards of 150,000 crowns, a loss which the inhabitants have not to this day been able to retrieve.

The church of Meyringen is a spacious, massive stone building. Its appearance exhibits this striking peculiarity, that the body stands at some distance from the tower, which is lofty, strong, and seems to be of very great antiquity: originally, it may, perhaps, have been a watch-tower. An obscure tradition relates, that it was built by two brothers, who, from a mutual grudge, worked with their backs purposely turned towards one another.

The river, which is seen in the plate winding through the plain, is

the Aar, which receives the waters of a great number of tributary torrents, and falls three leagues lower down into the lake of Brienz, the eastern extremity of which may just be discerned.

The environs of Meyringen are not surpassed, in richness and variety of scenery, by any part of Switzerland. A temperate climate, a great number of picturesque objects, romantic waterfalls, the most fertile hills, glaciers that do not advance too forward, incomparably beautiful rocks, the lofty snow-clad mountains in the distance, and numberless hamlets and huts of the pastoral inhabitants, attract and delight the poet, the painter, and the lover of nature.

The hill behind the church is an advantageous point for overlooking the whole valley. The Reichenbach is one of the most magnificent waterfalls in Switzerland.—From the gallery in the rear of the inn, called the Wild Man, a small part of the upper fall may be perceived. The way from Meyringen to this fall, conducts the traveller back by the road which he came, past the ruins of the castle of Resti, across the Aar, to Schwendi, where it turns off to the right. It should be viewed in the forenoon, when, if the sun shines, three circular rainbows are formed. The descending column of water is from twenty to thirty feet in circumference, even when the stream is low, and falls 200 feet almost perpendicularly. The lower fall, which is extremely picturesque, and pleases many spectators much better than the upper, must be seen in the afternoon or evening, when only it is exposed to the sun's rays. It is not advisable to descend without a guide from the upper to the lower fall.

The inhabitants of the valley of Hasli are, perhaps, the most interesting race of all the mountaineers of the Alps. Their language, personal beauty, manners, and the ardent love of liberty by which they are distinguished from most of the people of Switzerland, tend to confirm an ancient tradition preserved in all the valleys lying between

the canton of Schwytz and the district of Gruyeres, but no where so circumstantially as in a kind of chronicle in verse, sung from time immemorial in the country of Ober-Hasli. It is called the *Song of the East Frieslanders*. This tradition represents their ancestors as having come from a northern country situated between Sweden and Friesland. A dearth, so it is related, befel this country. In this distress the commons assembled, and it was determined, by the majority of votes, that every tenth man should quit his native land. This decree every one on whom the lot fell was compelled to obey. "Thus it was," says the chronicle, "that our ancestors went forth from the land in the north, to the great lamentation of all their kindred and friends; and with sorrow did the mothers lead away their infant children. They departed in three bodies, under three leaders, six thousand fighting men, tall and robust as giants, with wives and children, goods and chattels. They swore never to forsake one another. They were rich in moveable property, and by their victorious arms, on the river Rhine, they defeated Count Peter of Franconia, who attempted to obstruct their passage. They prayed to God to give them a land like the land of their forefathers, where they might feed their cattle in peace, without annoyance from evil-disposed power; and God led them into the country of Brochenburg, where they founded Schwytz. The people increased in number, and there was not room for them in the valley, though they grudged not their labour to clear away the forest: part of the multitude removed into the country on the Black Mountain (Brünig, in Unterwalden), and into Weissland (Ober-Hasli, bordering on the glaciers). Hence the same race extended itself over other districts of the Oberland, from mountain to mountain, from valley to valley, in Frutigen, Obersiebenthal, Saanen, Afflentsch, and Jaun (Bellegarde); but beyond Jaun dwell tribes of a different race."

In *Müller's History of Switzerland*, the first of the leaders of these emigrants is called Switer, and from him Schwytz and the

whole of the confederated cantons are supposed to have derived their name. The two others are named Svey, or Sueno, and Hatis, Hagio, or Hasius, who is said to have been a native of the town of Hasle, or Hasius.

To this general tradition the people of Hasli, agreeably to the prose introduction to their chronicle, add the following particulars respecting their own valley: "The emigrant Swedes and East Frieslanders, after they had been some time settled in Switzerland, agreed to divide the country among them, and this they did in the following manner: To Schweizerus (Switer), born in the royal city of Sweden—such was the name of their chief captain—and his colleague Restius, was allotted the country of the Broken Mountain, or Frekmund*, on which is lake Pilatus, as it is commonly called, and they took possession of it as far as the Lampartian mountains with their people. But the third leader, named Wadislaus, a native of the city of Hasius—which city lies between the country of Sweden and East Friesland—took possession of the valley beyond the Black Mountain, now called the Brünig, at the source of the river Aar, which valley is at this day named Hasli, with some slight alteration, after the above-mentioned city of Hasius, where the said Wadislaus was born; and as the people thought that the land was good and fertile, because all kinds of fruit readily grew in it, they began to build, and to have habitations there."

The introduction to the *Song of the East Frieslanders* adds but little to these accounts. It states, that the people of Hasli, in the year of Christ 387, were summoned by Pope Anastasius and the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius to Rome, to their assistance against the rebel Eugenius. It then concludes with referring to a more ancient, and then no longer extant, original of the chronicle,

* Ebel informs us, that anciently Mount Pilatus was frequently called *Fracmont* (*Mons Fractus*), from its broken appearance towards the north and north-east.

“which,” it says, “describes how the people of Schwytz and Hasli went to Rome at this summons to the aid of the emperor, king, and pope, and assisted in taking the city, and expelling the pagans or Romans.”

The song goes but little farther. After describing the arduous but victorious contest for Rome, it relates, that the men of Schwytz and Hasli, at their solicitation, received from the emperor permission to wear those armorial distinctions which the canton and valley still retain. The country was in the sequel an immediate fief of the empire, and enjoyed considerable privileges, for which it paid only fifty pounds per annum. In the year 1308, it was pledged by the empire to the Count of Strassberg, and afterwards transferred to the Baron of Weissenberg. The latter attempted to increase the impost paid by the people of Hasli, but they forcibly resisted his demand; and at length in 1334, placed themselves under the supremacy of Berne, on the same conditions as they had been subject to the empire. They lost some of their ancient privileges by their violent opposition to the introduction of the reformed religion in 1528; but gradually recovered most of them, which they still retain, and among the rest, that of electing an *amtman*, or bailiff, from among themselves.

Whatever may be thought of the Swedish origin of the people of Hasli, it is certain that they exhibit the fine forms and superior stature which are universally attributed to the ancient Scandinavians. In their language occur many expressions not to be met with in other Swiss dialects, and the tone of their speech has many peculiarities. Travellers have frequently been puzzled by the similarity of their language to that of certain provinces of Sweden, and even some of the airs of the popular songs of Hasli are said to have a close resemblance to Danish and Swedish tunes. Müller, however, remarks, that the words supposed to be Swedish are not such, but

that the language spoken in these parts is merely a provincial German, not unlike that of the celebrated *Niebelungen Lied*. The derivation of the name of Hasli from the city of Hasius, mentioned in the tradition, is still more uncertain; for that name occurs frequently in Switzerland. The Latin translation, *regio Avellanorum*, seems to argue the probability that the country was anciently covered with hazel woods; and other names of places, such as *Birchi*, *Eichi*, from birches and oaks, seem by analogy to countenance this derivation. In fact, from the situation assigned in the chronicle to the city of *Hasius*, between Sweden and East Friesland, it appears not at all improbable, that the name, as originally written, was *Hafnia* (Copenhagen), and that it was altered, as above, by some illiterate transcriber.

Be this as it may, it is universally admitted that the inhabitants of Hasli are an uncommonly handsome race: both sexes are above the middle stature. As the females are seldom engaged in rustic occupations, and consequently not much exposed to the sun, they are in general very fair. Persons of both sexes are finely shaped, and many of them would furnish exquisite models to the painter or statuary. Cripples are very rare among them. The men in general are not so robust as those of the Emmenthal, rather slender than corpulent, and yet so strong, that some of them will not merely lift, but carry, seven hundred weight. They have a still higher reputation for agility, which frequently procures them the victory in the wrestling-matches held at Berne, or on the neighbouring Alps, over the men of Emmenthal, Grindelwald, Brientz, and Unterwalden.

In the valley of Hasli, every thing harmonizes with the majestic objects by which it is surrounded. The upper part of it, towards the desolate regions, through which the traveller passes in his way to the Grimsel, is frequented by the most formidable of the feathered tribes, the Eagle of the Alps, called by the natives *lämmer-geyer*,

or *culture of lambs*. It attains the dimensions of sixteen feet, measured to the extremities of the wings, and its ferocity is equal to its size. Rivalling man in the chase of the chamois, this bird pursues his victim till he finds an opportunity of precipitating it from the brink of the abyss to which he has driven it. Man, however, perhaps surpasses him in boldness and perseverance. He follows his game over almost inaccessible rocks: it is often the case that he cannot descend where he climbed them, and falls down precipices which he had more than once safely cleared; or he perishes with cold and hunger on the ice, when a thick fog suddenly covers him with an impenetrable veil, and deprives him of all the means of finding his way out of the labyrinth, in which the ardour of pursuit has involved him. In spite of these dangers, in spite of the number of hunters who thus perish every year, the man who has once enjoyed the pleasure of this diversion prefers it to every other: neither the most deplorable indigence, nor the most dreadful accidents, can induce him to renounce it. The obstacles which require extraordinary efforts, perhaps excite the human passions less powerfully than the hazards which diminish the probability of success; they seem to acquire increased energy with the number of the chances that augment their uncertainty. The mania of gaming combines with the charm of surmounted difficulties to inflame the cupidity of the chamois hunter, who, like the gambler, at length thinks every thing else uninteresting, and disdains every occupation which would merely procure him competence and ease.