

VILLAGE LIFE IN SWITZERLAND.

BY EWAN MACPIERSON.



SWISS PEASANT.

The Swiss are not a people that dwell in cities. Although for three centuries they have been reckoned among the most skilful artificers in Europe, still the old love of free mountain atmosphere, as well as the fact that the Swiss are still mainly a pastoral people, has kept them from crowding into large towns. Besides the few great centres of population at Geneva, Basel, Berne, Zurich, and Neuchatel, there are here and there, as at Chaux-de-Fonds, with its houses almost all windows, where busy, delicate fingers keep working at hairspring and flywheel as long as daylight lasts, or at

Saint Gall, where the exquisite Swiss muslins and embroideries are wrought in the homes of the people, communities large enough to be called important cities; but these are exceptions. Large factories of any kind are hardly to be found outside of Basel and Zurich.

But neither are the Swiss dwellers in isolated homesteads. Mutual protection was, most probably, the original reason for the existence of the thousands of villages that lie scattered over the slopes and along the valleys of the Alps. The village scheme of life, moreover, corresponds to two strong tendencies of the Swiss nature. The Switzer is economical to a marvel, and he loves the companionship of his fellow-men.

Those vast glittering ice-monsters creeping so deliberately, but so irresistibly, down from the giant mountain tops have left but little space for tillage or for grazing, so that the people who would win a subsistence from the soil of the Glacier Land can do so only by bestowing upon it infinite labour and infinite care.

Within an area of barely 15,500 square miles, Switzerland holds a population of nearly 3,000,000, made up from three distinct races, speaking three living languages with numerous dialectic variations, professing Catholicism and three different forms of Protestantism. Much diversity in manners and customs is only to be expected. Yet a strongly-marked character there is, common to life in all Swiss villages. The air of sober, though cheery, content, of quiet, unpretentious, democratic dignity, of studious thrift, belongs to the nature of the people; the signs of