

Cultural life in Switzerland

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CULTURAL LIFE IN SWITZERLAND.

By Dr. Huber-Renfer.

OBERHOFEN CASTLE.

If you leave the Swiss Federal Capital of Berne for a little trip and, travelling by train for about three-quarters of an hour, in a south-easterly direction, you arrive at the friendly little town of Thun, which is situated on the banks of a lake bearing the same name, and if you then go on board a steamer and sail along the eastern shore of the lake, you will soon become aware of a mighty tower rising in front of you. This tower is a landmark, and belongs to the Castle of Oberhofen, to which we are going to pay a short visit to-day.

This castle, which stands right by the lake, used to belong to the nobles of Oberhofen, who were the founders, in 1130, of the Monastery of Interlaken. Up to the middle of the last century this castle, with its ponderous, commanding main building, its living quarters and its deep moat, with a draw-bridge leading to the tower-gate, presented the picture of a true mediaeval nobleman's estate. It was only about 1850 that the people who owned the castle at that time, got the idea that they ought to adapt the ancient building to the taste of their times. So they started building, both inside and outside, made windows in the tower, and only then when, fortunately, their money gave out, was a stop put to this vandalism. However, in spite of all the disastrous liberties taken with the style, Oberhofen Castle still remains an imposing building. Its last owner, a well-to-do American citizen of the name of Measey, did a great deal to have it improved and put into order again, and then, a few years ago, in a generous gesture he donated it to the City of Berne. The latter, attached it as a kind of affiliated institution to the Bernese Historical Museum, the Curator of which, Dr. Michael Stettler thereupon proceeded to make accessible once more the numerous treasures, such as the furniture and interior decorations of the castle, which had been lying, put away for many a decade, and which can now be viewed and admired by visitors.

For instance, we find in a spacious Salon, with a door opening onto the garden, wainscoting made of oak, of which the delightful shell-like ornamentations in the Rococo style were carved by the Bernese cabinet-maker Funk, who was famous in his times, that is to say, about 1730. An ancient fire-place, a mirror with an exquisitely carved gilt frame, and some Louis the XVth furniture give a truly habitable aspect to the room.

From this "garden-room, one can attain a small tower which rises directly out of the lake. Here, there are artistically carved stools, which are grouped around an old table, on the walls are to be seen valuable hunting weapons from long-past centuries, and through the small window there comes a flood of soft light.

On our way back, we admire, in the passage, a fine old sideboard, with beautifully painted Bernese porcelain platters and then we enter the dining-room. What is remarkable here is the wood panelling of the walls, on which is represented the history of the castle. In a glass show-case we see a magnificent Frankenthaler dinner-service, richly painted in a

design of fruit, and bearing the arms of the old Bernese Patrician family of de Jenner.

Passing through the first floor, we come across a Louis XVth, as Louis XVIth and an Empire room, which charm us by their simple, but tasteful furnishing, by a valuable grand piano made by Shreicher, of Vienna, and by the numerous oil paintings, among which we discover the oldest existing pictorial representation of Oberhofen, which dates from the second half of the 17th century. In another room is to be found some wainscoting which is unique in its late-Renaissance carving and in laid work. One of the owners of the castle, Theobold von Erlach, had it made for him in the first half of the 17th century.

In one of the small, former bedrooms, a selected number of Heimberg delft-ware is exhibited; this black-brown pottery, painted in gleaming colours and possessing a marvellous glaze, cannot but bring joy to the heart of every lover of ceramics. The next room contains samples of genuine folk-art, such as painted cupboards and chests, graceful silhouettes cut out of paper with a pair of scissors, and jugs and household utensils decorated with chip-carving.

The private chapel is still awaiting the necessary repairs. Only a few of the frescos have been uncovered. On the other hand, the restoration of the sacristy is now completed. With its ribbed ceiling of tufaceous limestone, its silver-gilt chalices and venerable vestments, it forms one of the finest gems of the castle.

And when, in conclusion of our visit, we have wandered through the perfectly kept park, with its rare, ancient trees, we leave the Castle of Oberhofen with the feeling that we have dwelt for a moment in one of the loveliest spots of the Berne countryside.

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