ENGELBERG, THE LAKE, AND WILLIAM TELL

Andermatt and Engelberg are the two really Alpine villages which one usually connects with Lucerne. Andermatt is rather remote, being away up in the mountains beyond Göeschenen; but the journey to Engelberg is no more than that to the summit of Pilatus. From Stansstad, with its sturdy, grey old tower upon the water's edge—a tower built soon after the banding together of the Forest Cantons, and last used in the desperate struggle against the French in 1798—there is an electric railway. The line passes over the orchard-covered plain to Stans, the capital of Nidwalden and the birthplace of Arnold von Winkelried, whose monument is in the marketplace, and whose ancient farmstead still exists amid flowery fields beyond the town; then on past Wolfenschiessen, known to history in connection with the Austrian Governor of that name killed hereabouts by the woodman Baumgartner for insulting his wife—a deed which appears to have done much to mature the defensive alliance of 1307 between the three Cantons; and so on to Grafenort, where the engine is changed and the line commences its steep

ascent to Engelberg. Through a forest, wherein the hart's-tongue fern luxuriates, the train advances, crossing and re-crossing the winding carriage-road. Here and there through the trees to the right of the line are glimpses of towering cliffs with waterfalls tumbling wildly over the rugged sides and falling into the gorge below, where foams and froths the Engelberger Aa on its way to the Lake at Buochs. The ascent is not a long one. Soon the forest is replaced by rapid flower-strewn slopes, and the near presence of impressive mountains. Then the valley somewhat broadens; and through almost flat pastures the train quickly reaches the village, its big hotels and spick-and-span prosperity.

Engelberg has all the airs and graces which two crowded seasons can give. It is as popular in winter as in summer, and is organized accordingly. But with the exception of its famous monastery, there is little that is old and picturesque about it. As the local guidebook says—and says seemingly with pride and glee—: "Favoured by a great fire in the autumn of 1887, the witnesses of modern civilization have become predominant"—an expression of sentiment which is apt to make one think of Thoreau's caustic remark about man placing his hoof among the stars. However, although "the splendid hotel buildings tower gigantically above the country cottages of former

times", and the fine old timbered dwelling of the tailor stands an heroic interval in the midst of shop-fronts decorated in the best art shades of paint, yet something has been spared of the peasants' old-time costumes—the women's quaint silver hair-shields and bejewelled silver-gilt necklaces, and the men's elaborately embroidered blouses. Nor have the blessings of fire and civilization suppressed the lovely mountain flowers which carpet the pastures outside the hotel-zone. Here, from the early spring crocus and soldanella to the late autumn crocus and willow-gentian, there is a rich round of floral delight. Rock, Alp, and forest are alike gay with colour, and many a botanical treasure haunts the district. Perhaps the best season for appreciating this side of Engelberg's charm is spring and early summer. The near fields and slopes are then wearing their finest dress. Where, erstwhile, the *sportsleute* revelled on ski, the vernal gentian and yellow violet are in radiant masses, and where the luge ran merrily but a few weeks previously, the geranium and globe-flower are ablaze. And for this bright and wild abundance there is a wonderfully effective background of stately mountains. The rugged Engelberg, the fretted Spannorts, and the giant Titlis of such distinctive form, all abundantly clothed in snow at this season, make as admirable a setting for these slopes and fields of

THE ENGELBERG AT ENGELBERG—SPRING

early flowers as could be well desired. Later on, when the Surenen Pass, the Trübsee, the Joch Pass, and the Engstlenalp can be comfortably reached, the wealth of Alpine anemone, deep-blue monkshood, blue-and-white columbine, steel-blue thistle, and a host of other treasures carry the Feast of Flora to the very verge of the eternal snows.

It was the pastures of the Surenen which gave birth to the legend of the famous Bull of Uri—the bull whose head figures on Uri's armorial shield. A shepherd becoming inordinately attached to a lamb, baptized it into the Christian Church; whereupon the lamb developed into a monster and slew the shepherd. The monster continued to be such a scourge upon these pastures that the inhabitants of Uri trained a pure white bull especially to do battle with it. In the combat which ensued, the monster was slain, but the bull was so grievously wounded that it died soon after. One of the bull's horns became the famous battlehorn of the men of Uri, striking panic into the hearts of their enemies whenever it was sounded.

Legend also hangs about the Engelberg; for it was upon those rocky heights that Conrad von Seldenbüren heard angels singing; St. Cecilia with her lute being amongst the number. This so impressed the good man that he there and then (in the year 1120) founded the monastery which stands to this day,

and, until 1798, ruled the valley. Great for centuries as a centre of literature and science, it still retains its prestige as an educational institution. The building contains much of high interest—the great library of over 20,000 books and manuscripts, and the Sacristy full of precious relics of the past—but access to these is difficult for visitors. As for the natives of Engelberg, for the most part they practise the breeding of cattle and the weaving of silk, both industries being fostered by the Monastery, itself owning a herd of mouse-coloured cows with tuneful silver bells. The natives have retained much of their engaging individuality. Sturdy children of a sturdy race, many of them are quite typical descendants of what one imagines Tell's strong, strenuous age to have been.

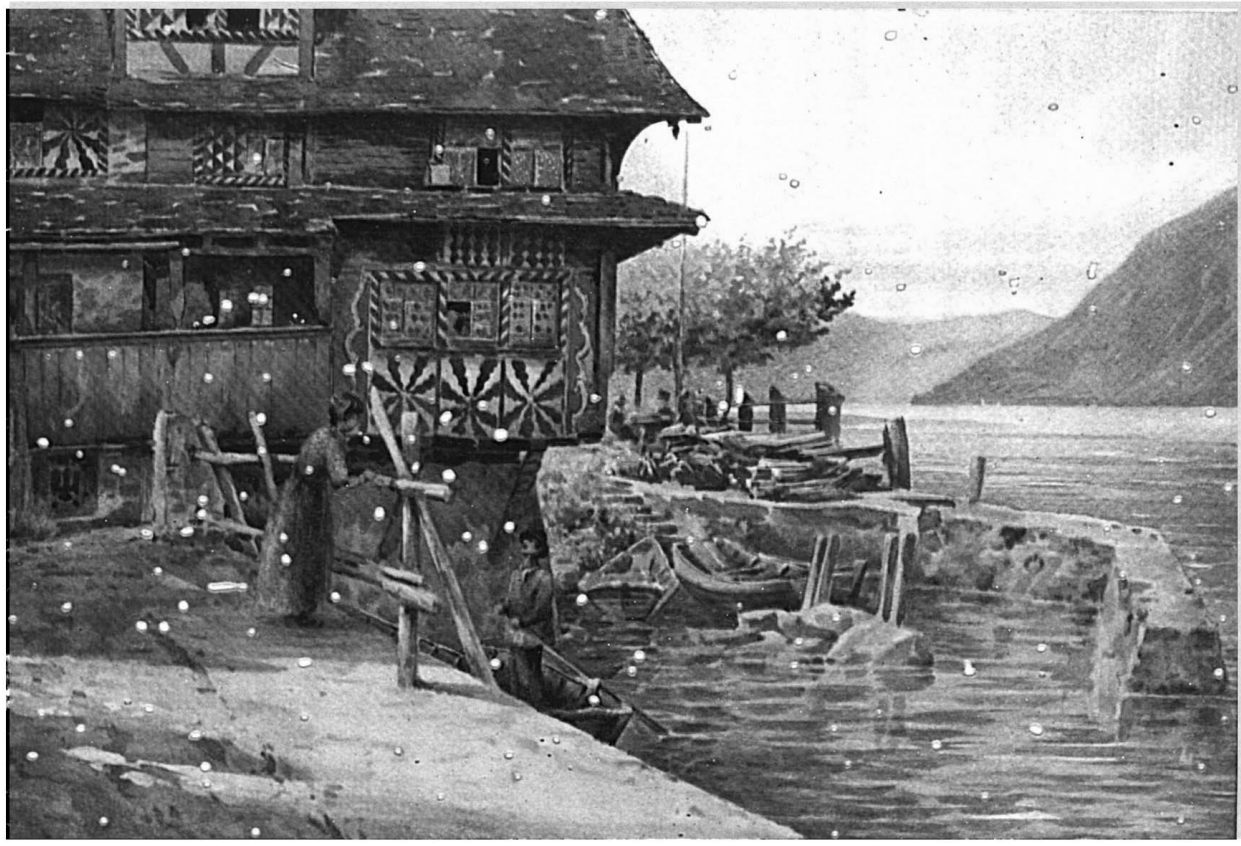
In leaving Engelberg, unless the Surenen Pass be crossed into Uri, and so down to the Lake near Flüelen, the best way is to branch off at Stans and touch the Lake at Buochs. From Buochs, where farms and orchards form the prevailing note, the steamboat passes, by way of Beckenried and its big old walnut tree, to Gersau at the southern foot of the Rigi. Until the end of the eighteenth century this village, prosperous-looking nowadays with its big hotels along the quay-side promenade, was a full-blown republic on its own account; but to-day its independence is merged in that of the Canton Schwyz.

There is a lovely walk from here to Brunnen; loveliest perhaps in spring when the rosy, black-pointed heather (*Erica carnea*) decks the rocks through which in part the road is cut. Not far along this road is the chapel of Kindlimord nestling among pines on the steep and rocky shore of a tiny deep-green bay. It is said that here a strolling fiddler murdered his child who cried to him for food, and that this romantically situated little chapel was built in expiation of the deed.

On the farther shore of the Lake, almost opposite Kindlimord, and below the woods of Seelisberg, is Treib, the most ancient and picturesque of houses in all this district. Rich in colour and quaint design, and possessing its own little harbour, it stands quite alone amid the beech woods which here sweep down to the water. It is a perfect bijou picture from the distant past: something for a showcase in some sheltering museum, rather than for such buffeting storm-winds and waves as recently overthrew its stone breakwater. Built in 1243, it did service as the first Federal Palace, the Assembly of the three Cantons, Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden, having been held here in 1291. It then became the Guild House of the boatmen of the Four Cantons. At that time roads were scarce, communication was mostly by water, and Treib was correspondingly important. The interior

of the house is redolent of old-world associations: the small bottle-glass windows, the massive old stoves, the fine wooden ceilings, the quaintly carved chairs, the aged pewter plates, the genealogical tree dating from 1360, and the fourteenth-century clocks, one of which is entirely of wood—but absolutely unheeding of Greenwich time. Treib is indeed a refreshing place to linger in after the almost omnipresence of the great hotels. But the past is impossible as a permanency. Modern hoteldom holds its own—and more than its own. At Brunnen, whither the boat transports us, Treib is just a sideshow—something to patronize in fine weather as a poor and utterly antiquated relation.

Brunnen owes the spoiling of its site to the magnificent prospect to be enjoyed from thence of the Bay of Uri. Hotels innumerable, to the right and to the left, crowding upon quay, perching upon cliff and soaring above forest; but the prospect of the Bay of Uri remains—at once Brunnen's making and undoing. From the very nature of things this invasion was inevitable. It was inevitable that the touring world and his wife should wish for ample accommodation at such a view-point. Nor is forgiveness difficult if one but turns one's face towards the Urirotstock. Brushes and pens without number have essayed to depict this prospect, to translate its beauty and magnificence, to catch its ceaseless, changeful charm; and brushes and



TREIB

pens without number have necessarily failed in the attempt. Something only of its fascinating phases and *ensemble* can at most be given. As a whole it is too elusive, too consummate: too surely out of reach of human dexterity in either paint or words. Even if it had but one mood, one fixed mood upon which contemplation could feed indefinitely, a description of it must needs be inadequate; but as it is—well, description falls far short of what is *felt*. Seen through the soft-gold haze of spring, or through actinic summer sunshine, or through the warm mists of autumn, or through winter's steely breath, there is such ever-shifting light and shade, such incessant recomposing of the picture, and always such mystery in parts and such subtlety over all, that here, at any rate, one knows that one's inner consciousness is more than a match for one's powers of formal expression. A restless repose suffuses the whole landscape; its moods are unified though everchanging. The Lake reflects the mountains, and the mountains reflect the Lake; for the Lake—to use Canon Rawnsley's simile—"is as many-minded as a beautiful woman", and so, also, are the mountains.

And this elusive yet striking quality of beauty is no particular possession of the mere distant view from Brunnen; it is just as evident upon near inspection. From Tellsplatte or from Flüelen, from Isleten or from

the Rütli, or from any open spot upon the whole length of the wonderful Axenstrasse, "this temple of wild harmony" has all the charming variety and mystery of lovely woman. The close intimacy of severe and towering crags (as at Sisikon and Isleton) does nothing to dispel it; rather is it accentuated by the presence of something so rudely definite. Whether it be where the bare precipice plunges headlong to the Lake (as at the Teufelsmünster, near Flüelen), or whether it be where the beech woods run down to meet the waters (as at the Rütli and round about the Schillerstein), sublimity, which in part is mystery, is never wanting. Always there are heights, or snows, or distances over which the thin air plays in endless moods of light and shade. The Bay of Uri is indeed a wonder-spot in which to roam and float and dream. Well might the water-sprite in Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell* have drawn his inspiration from men and women to be found wandering here entranced; well might these scenes by Uri's waters have given him the insight to exclaim:—

"Man's a thing that, so to say,
Among the fairy-folk has lost his way.
Akin to us and yet not native here;
Half of our world, and half—ah, who knows where?"

For amid scenes like these man knows that he is more than mortal; amid scenes like these he discerns that

elusiveness in himself which is akin to the elusiveness around him; amid scenes like these his own inexpressible subtleties are alive to the inexpressible subtleties of Nature, and his fairy self goes out in intimate communion with the fairy world.

Men may well continue to write of the Bay of Uri; just as they may well continue to write of beautiful woman. Will they ever have finished writing about either? will they ever have said all that can be said? It is one of the extraordinary things about the Bay of Uri that romance should be doubled in its every corner. Much in history has had a most prosaic background, but here, in Uri, Nature and History have combined to lift events into the very forefront of romantic fascination. No story of the heroic past is more universally known than that of William Tell and the founding of the Swiss Confederation; and it is probably safe to say that this universality is due in no small measure to the magnificent natural setting for that story. One indeed wonders if Goethe, had he never visited these waters and been enthralled by their surroundings, would have been moved to recommend his friend Schiller to dramatize this story. One, moreover, wonders if Schiller ever would have achieved the famous thing he did if he had not been able to place his drama amid the scenery of this Bay. One's questioning may go further still, and one may even

wonder if the superb scenery has not played an important part in welding the story with the very religion of the Swiss people. History and Nature seem here to be made for each other, and it does not necessarily require a Swiss to feel the thrill which each lends to the other.

Here, briefly, is the story. Around the year 1240 the Austrian Empire was the dominant power in these parts. The Canton of Unterwalden was governed by the Empire; whereas the Cantons of Uri and of Schwyz governed themselves, but were under the protection of, and owed service to the Empire. Little by little the Hapsburg dynasty endeavoured to absorb the whole country surrounding the Lake. Governors were set up in the three Cantons, tyranny developed, and to meet this process of absorption, Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden, in 1307, entered into a solemn alliance (the original document, drawn up afterwards, still exists in the archives of Schwyz). This, then, broadly stated, was the setting of the stage upon which William Tell and his companions played their famous parts. These actors emerge, so to speak, from the wings to the dull mutterings of popular exasperation. The Governors are treating the people as the merest serfs. Wolfenschiessen, Governor of Unterwalden, has been killed by the outraged Baumgartner of Altzellen; a dungeon-castle is being built at Altdorf, in Uri, to

overawe the people; Arnold of Melchthal's old father has had his eyes put out and his estate confiscated because his son has chastised one of the Governor's impudent servants; and Governor Gessler has vowed vengeance upon Werner Stauffacher of Steinen in Schwyz, because the latter is a landed proprietor, and has built himself too fine a house. Walter Fürst (Tell's father-in-law) of Canton Uri, Werner Stauffacher of Canton Schwyz, and Arnold von Melchtal of Canton Unterwalden, each bringing with them ten men, meet at night on the Rütli—a steep, grass-covered clearing made in the beech woods almost opposite Brunnen—and pledge themselves, in the name of their respective Cantons, to resist all attempts at annexation by Austria. Governor Gessler, hearing rumours of this revolt, sets his hat upon a pole at Altdorf and orders all and sundry to bow down to it.

"The Hat's a perfect scarecrow to the People."

William Tell, among others, refuses to bow the knee, and is condemned by Gessler to shoot an apple from off his (Tell's) son's head:—

"Thou shalt shoot or perish—
Ay, instantly—and thy Son perish with thee!".

Tell comes successfully through the ordeal, but has a second arrow hidden in his tunic. The Governor sees it and forces Tell to confess—

"If with the first I'd chanc'd to slay my Child—
This second shaft would I have shot at thee"

Gessler thereupon has Tell seized and bound, and declares:—

"Some Dungeon's depth must be thy habitation.
. . . . . .
—Convey him to the Bark! I'll follow quickly.
I will myself conduct him o'er to Küssnacht."

A violent storm springs up; the bark is likely to be wrecked. Gessler, in fear and trembling for his own safety, and knowing Tell to be an adept steersman, has him released and orders him to take the helm. Tell directs the bark to the Axenberg, springs upon a little shelf of rock and,

"sending back
The stagger'd Boat into the whirl of waters,"

escapes up the wooded cliff. Making for Küssnacht, Tell awaits the Governor in the Hollow Way and shoots him through the heart.

'Whilst Austria's Tyrant sinks forlorn,
The Parent's curse, the Infant's scorn,
'The Hate of Human-kind;
Blest with the meed, which Virtue gives,
Lo! Tell's pure name to ages lives,
In every nobler heart enshrin'd."

Of course, critics have arisen, who attempt the destruction of this story. Some would not account themselves progressive if they did not try to annihilate the

THE URI-ROTHSTOCK SEEN FROM BRUNNEN

past, or turn it upside down, or inside out. Bacon was Shakespeare; Homer was a crowd of at least twenty scribes; a Welshman, and not Columbus, discovered America; and Bonivard, the Prisoner of Chillon, was an out-and-out scamp. So would some deal with Tell. They would treat him as the lake on Mount Pilatus was treated—they would throw stones at him, scoff at his simple, heroic virtue, and drain him even of his existence. Listen to what Baedeker, in his guide to Switzerland, has to say of "the romantic but unfounded tradition of William Tell":

"The legend of the national hero of Switzerland, as well as the story of the expulsion of the Austrian bailiffs in 1308, is destitute of historical foundation. No trace of such a person is to be found in the work of John of Winterthur (Vitoduranus, 1349), or that of Conrad Justinger of Bern (1420), the earliest Swiss historians. Mention is made of him for the first time in the Sarner Chronik of 1470, and the myth was subsequently embellished by Ægidius Tschudi of Glarus (d. 1542), and still more by Johann von Müller (d. 1809), while Schiller's famous play has finally secured to the hero a world-wide celebrity. Similar traditions are met with among various northern nations, such as the Danes and Icelanders."

Does not such reading as this appear to damage the scenery of Uri's Bay? It seems at least but poor service to render to the tourist—this killing of half of the district's wild romance. Those who cling to the stout, red little volume as to a dear and trusted friend, must nevertheless feel something like a pang of regret as they climb up through the beech wood

to the green slope and the old chalet of the Rütli and drink water from the three famous springs; nor can they be unconscious of a certain feeling of loss as they walk by the bushes of mountain-honeysuckle along the path to the little chapel on the Tellsplatte and gaze through the ironwork screen at the fine mural pictures of this outrageous but glorious myth. Tradition is a hard thing to kick against.

Sentiment, however, is of no use for confounding the critics. But let the Baedeker-beridden tourist take heart; there is evidence, after all, not only that Tell may have lived, but that he may have done something to earn his reputation. William Peter, in the Appendix to his English translation of Schiller's play, voices this evidence. Among other points in favour of the substantial veracity of tradition, he gives two facts of special hopefulness:—

"The many old German Songs and Romances in which he (Tell) is celebrated, and which are so remarkable for their ancient dialect and simplicity as to leave little doubt either of their own authenticity or of the truth of the deeds which they commemorate";

and

"The creation of three Chapels (one of them—viz. at the Tell's plat—in 1388, only 24 years after Tell's death, and when there were 114 persons present in the Landsgemeinde of Uri who had personally known him)".

He further states that

"The last of Tell's posterity—a female named Verena—died

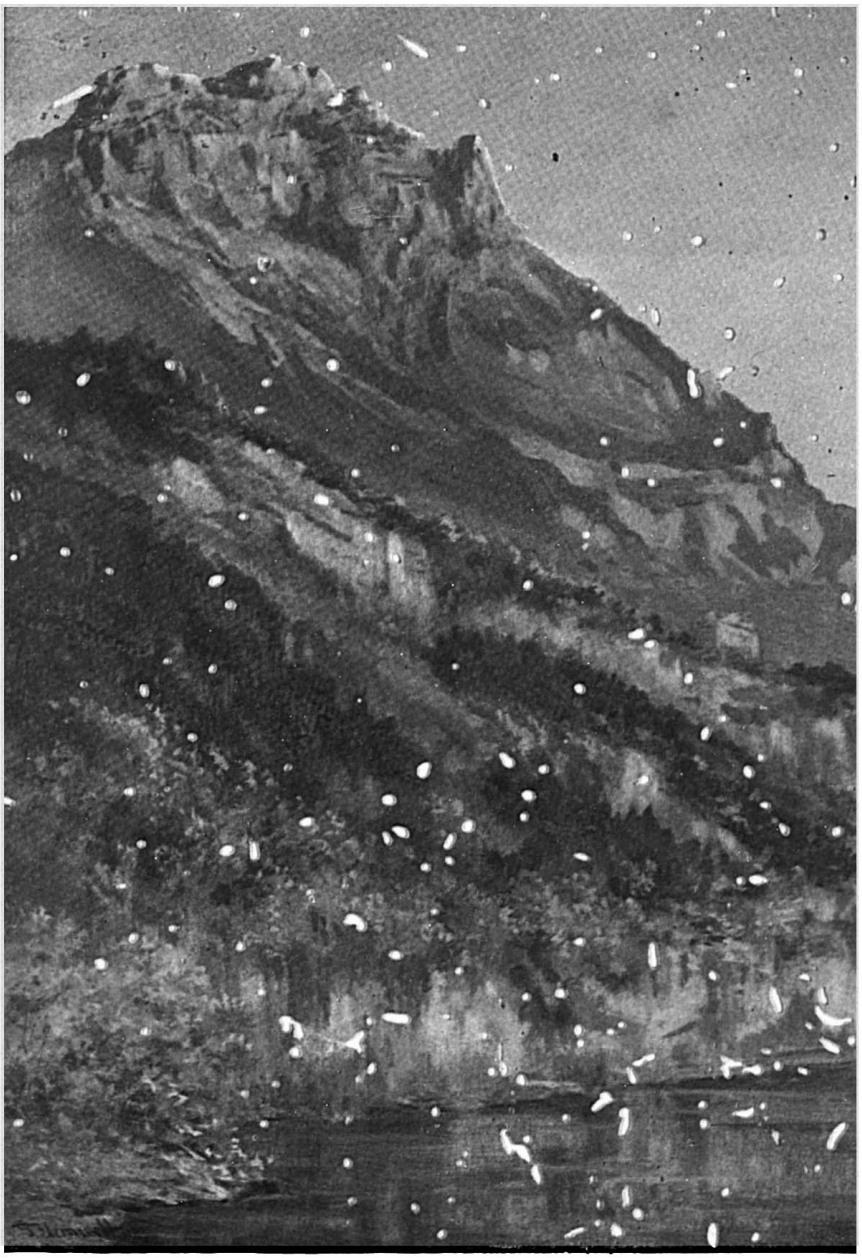
in 1720. The male branch had become extinct in 1684, by the Death of John Martin Tell of Attinghausen. Tell (the famous Tell) resided at, and was Mayor of Bürglen, which is not half an hour's walk from the village of Attinghausen. He lived for many years after the events celebrated in Schiller's Play, performed his part at the battles of Morgarten and Laupen in 1315 and 1339, and perished, in 1354, in his generous attempt to rescue a child from the overflowing waters of the Schächen (the mountain torrent which flows through Bürglen and into the Reuss at Attinghausen)."

Moreover, there is the proved importance of tradition, as such. Something can and must be said for it. That certain episodes, accepted as fact, do not appear in written contemporary history, is not in itself safe proof of the falsity of those episodes. Just because no mention is made of Tell in the White Book of Sarnen, this is small reason for denouncing the hero as a mere replica of Toko, principal actor in an old Danish legend. The truthfulness of traditions handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth has frequently startled those who have set out to refute them. The tradition of the Flood, current among many widely separated and obscure peoples, has been proved by geology to be quite worthy of credence. A rolling stone may gather much moss; but the essential thing, the stone, is beneath the richly-tinted covering.

So, let critic and historian do their worst to damage William Tell; he will escape them as surely as he

escaped Gessler. His name and deeds, be they fact or be they fiction, are so much part and parcel of the scenery, that nothing save a devastating convulsion of Nature can possibly bring them to naught. Landmarks must be obliterated, the whole landscape must be radically changed, if Tell is to sink into oblivion. As things are, go where you will around the Lake, he and his age are bound to assert themselves. Even the elements will combine to bring him to your mind. Walk from Brunnen along the magnificent Axenstrasse hewn by the Government from the rock-cliffs of the Axenberg as a strategic route; stroll on amid the red-barked pines, the rocks aglow with tufts of rosy *Erinus alpinus*, or with the rosy springtime heather, or the blood-red summer cranesbill; while Orange Tip or White Admiral and Purple Emperor butterflies flit from flower to flower or from sun-patch to sun-patch along the road; stroll on to the wayside clearing where stands a stone memorial to the artist, Henry Tellin, who fell from this spot whilst sketching in 1860; sit here amongst the bright wild sunflowers[1] and gaze down the sheer rocks to the sparkling blue-green waters partly flooded in golden light, and take note of how calm and peaceful all is as the gay-awninged row-boats and the curiously ungainly steam cargo-barges steal about the surface. Now mark that

[1] *Buphthalmum spiciforme*, an herbaceous plant abundant around this Lake.



THE AXENBERG FROM BRUNNEN—AN AUTUMN EVENING

faint distant rumbling, and look up towards the snows of the Uri-Rothstock. A storm is brewing beyond Gleschenen and among the Bernese Alps. You say that it is nothing; that it is a very long way off? Wait awhile! Mark that filmy wisp of cloud, sprung suddenly from nowhere, wreathing itself slowly about the Teufelsmünster's cliff; mark, too, how the blue sky has changed to grey behind the snows, and how the snows themselves have turned a sullen white. Cat's-paws are playing erratically upon the water; the mountains are growing harder in colour; heavy vapours are filling the gorges, and the pines about you are whispering mysteriously among themselves. Do you notice how all the row-boats are hastening towards Brunnen, and how the gulls are screaming? Black clouds are rolling up over the Seelisberg hotels; white horses are visible upon the Lake, and the Uri-Rothstock now looks quite forbidding. Do you hear that distant roaring? No, it is not thunder; it is the wind as it approaches. The pines above you are warning you. The snows have disappeared in darkness; Isleten is blotted out, and the Kuli can scarcely be seen through drifting cloud-bursts. The scene is now one of cold indigo steeped in greyness. The storm pounces on you with a whistling howl and a long nail at you. Forked lightning, piercing the murk, stabs at the seething waters, and the thunder rattles and bombs

and rolls interminably. Where all but a brief while ago was crystal-bright and tranquil at present is dull-grey pandemonium.

And as the electric tongues flash zigzag across the gloom, you fancy that you catch sight of a storm-tossed barque of ancient form, and that you hear above the screeching wind the scream of fear-struck Gessler, imploring Tell to take the helm. For it was some such storm as this to which Tell owed his freedom and his life! Critics point to the convenient suddenness of the two storms which find a place in Schiller's play; they call them specimens of poetic licence. But this is not necessarily the case. From the very configuration of the Bay of Uri it is a deadly storm-trap. Ah, it can smile and look winsome enough when it pleases—and this, to our great good, is more than often; but it is subject to surprisingly sudden fits of rage when it is as fearsome as, and perhaps more treacherous than, many a hurricane-ridden ocean.

The storm has passed as quickly as it came, and butterflies and flowers are in their element once more. [illegible] the Bay [illegible] the lovelier for its rude half-hour [illegible]. It can be grand in tempest and foul [illegible] that which fits it best is the rule and [illegible] Thus, with hard-won peace and grimly conceived beauty, may we appropriately take leave of the [illegible] of the Forest Cantons.