

House and Garden

Vol. XII

JULY, 1907

No. 1

The Swiss Chalet

THE IDEAL MOUNTAIN HOUSE

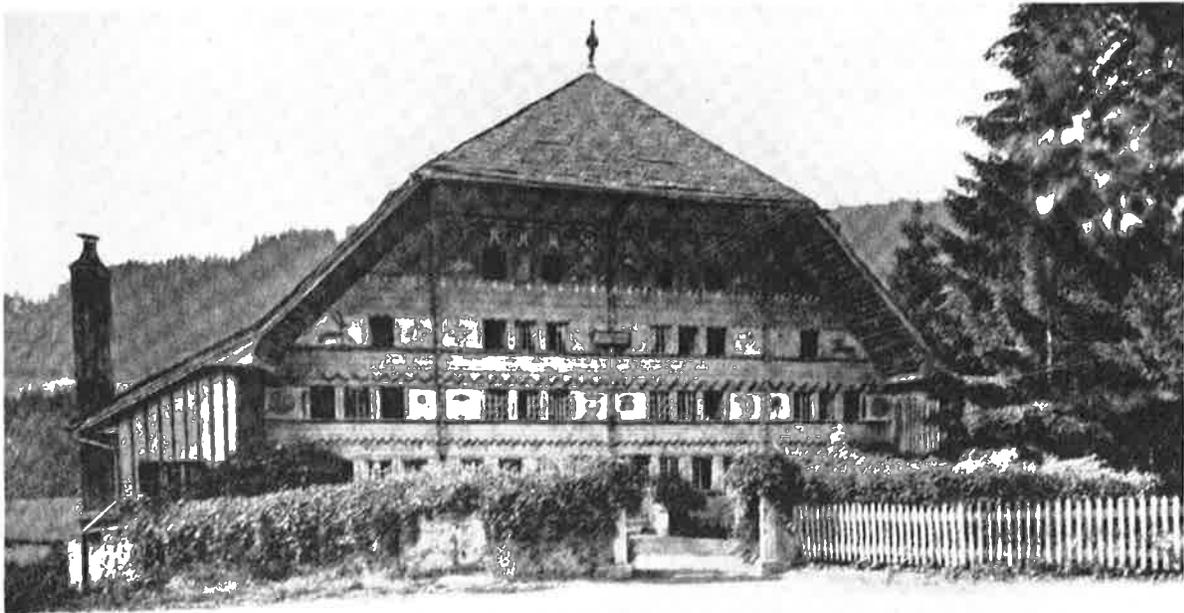
By WILLIAM ELLIS SCULL



THE Swiss peasant, born amidst the majestic surroundings of the Alps, has developed in his chalet a style of architecture quite unique in its design and most appropriate in its appearance to its very rugged surroundings; also, in its material and construction there is a sturdiness well suited for protection from the very severe forces of the elements. The chalets of Switzerland may be divided into three classes: First, those of the higher regions, called *mazots*; secondly, those of the medium levels; and, thirdly, those of the valleys. The solidity of the building of those of the upper region is the result of material easily procured in the neighborhood,

the wood used being yellow pine, hewn in the rough and unpainted, which time gradually changes to a rich reddish brown. The general construction is not unlike the log cabin of the frontier settler, with the difference that an artistic or architectural touch has been given to the appearance by good proportions, larger overhanging eaves, and here and there some rough bold carving, with frequently the date of construction, or a symbolic figure, cut in over the door.

Fire has destroyed almost all of the very ancient buildings; nevertheless enough remains of the old to show that Swiss architecture, pure and simple, has undergone no material change. There has been no Renaissance, unless that name be given to the



“LE GRAND CHALET”

Copyright, 1907, by The John C. Winston Co.

3

House and Garden



ISELTWALD

modern villas and the large hotels being erected at the present time to accommodate the great throng of summer travelers.

The primitive mountain abodes are constructed by, and for, a being, whose life is to work, and daily occupation during the open season is to lay up store for the closed season. The first floor of his dwelling is frequently given up to the beasts, and his storehouse must be lifted on heavy posts, capped by a broad flat stone, to keep his produce of the land safe from vermin. The side walls must be of heavy strong timbers to withstand the avalanche, and with but few window openings through which cold may enter. Over all is laid a heavy roof of shingles loaded down with large boulders, and all must stand as a buttress against severe wind storms and snow. Glorious as are the surroundings, equally dreary must be the long winters, and dull the life, for mortals cannot live on sublimity alone! The monotony of the long hours is sometimes broken by wood carving, modeling, or other artistic work, for which the inhabitants have fortunately inherited some talent, and although not of high artistic value, is a source of small revenue and a valuable occupation. The skill and patience of the Swiss for making fine watches, for which they are known the world over, probably was the result of the

condition of life referred to above. The dwellings of the valleys are of larger dimensions with more complicated ornamentation, and the jointing of the wood is made in many cases with almost the extreme care of the cabinet-maker. The different floors are sometimes shown on the exterior by carved friezes, indicating with correct architectural ideas the interior lines, and the windows are frequently divided into picturesque groupings, with boxes of geraniums and other flowers, which make a bright and pretty effect against the dark coloring of the wood. The large overhanging eaves are frequently supported at the corners of the buildings by enormous brackets rising from the foundations, causing deep irregular shadows, and taking

away from the stiffness of the vertical lines; also between these frequently run long galleries with open-work balustrades. Inscriptions are sometimes carved in several lines across the façade of the building, and now and then the letters are colored. On the lower levels and in the valleys the first floor walls are frequently built of stone, rough cast with mortar, but the stones are not used on the roof.

The display of flowers is particularly noticeable and very beautiful in the smiling valley of Chateaux d'Oex. In this valley, until recently so little visited, in the little town of Rossinières, is the largest chalet



A BERNER HOUSE

The Swiss Chalet

in Switzerland, called *le Grand Chalet*, beautiful in its coloring and elaborate in the carving of its façade; each main division of the interior clearly traceable on the exterior by the joining of the beams, and a vast roof covering all. Alpine architecture has always had a character peculiarly its own, and, notwithstanding the influence of the countries that surround it, in this little Republic the true national type maintains its identity very distinctly.

The grouping of the chalets in the small villages is often most picturesque, and continually supplies subjects for the pencil and brush of artists. By the absence of all systematic arrangement of the buildings artistic effects are produced such as no architect would be likely to originate. The dark colored walls, the broad gray roofs, and the bright green fields together form large bold masses of color which, with a few simple details, produce a pretty and very artistic picture.

A practical arrangement, followed in some parts, is to build all the chalets on the north side of the road, allowing the sun to enter freely, and the residents a view of their gardens, fields and cattle. In some neighborhoods the deep gables are all facing the street, and the roofs form long interesting wavy lines. In other districts the long slanting roof without openings is turned toward the north and south, to



WILDERSWYL

better receive the shock of the prevailing winds. Without making a study of the beautiful in architecture, this son of the Swiss mountains has in his effort to construct an abode best suited to his needs, and with the least expense, succeeded in drawing from Ruskin one of his greatest compliments. Finding himself for the first time in front of a Swiss chalet he considered it the most beautiful piece of architecture he had ever seen, "and at the most," said he, "it was nothing in itself. Nothing but some mossy trunks of trees, with one or two gray stones on the roof. The value of this modest human habitation

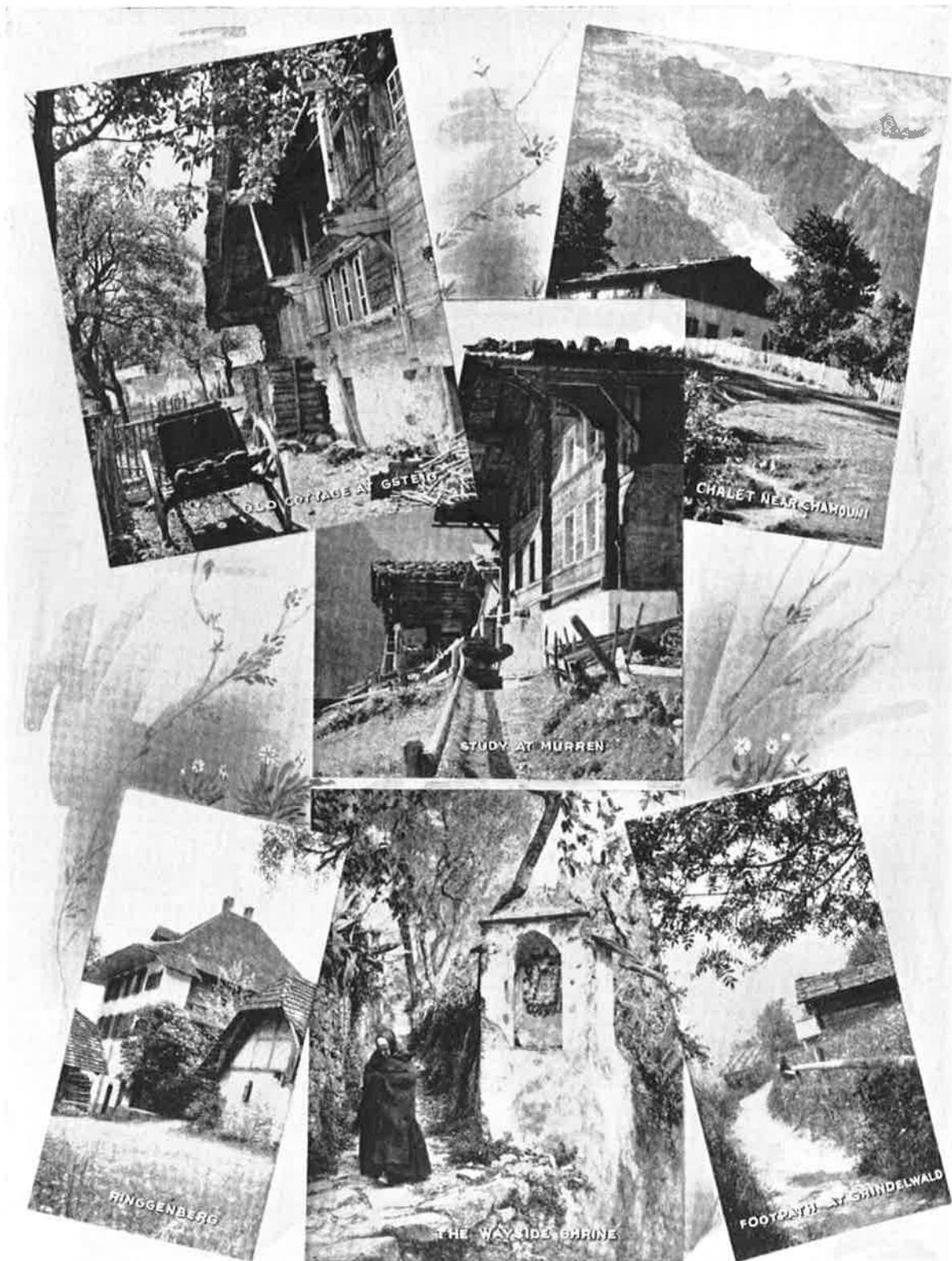
comes from its perfect harmony with its surroundings, and all its beauty consists in its perfect adaptation to its purpose, in its total absence from pretension."

The great "value" placed upon these "modest human habitations" by Ruskin was viewed entirely from the standpoint of an outsider, as it were by one, who, while standing at a distance, commented upon the beautiful landscape, and remarked that the chalets in color and lines blended in well with the natural surroundings, that they did not clash in any way, nor jar his susceptibilities. How different would be the report of the indweller from that of the critic! How the very dark interior would be brightened on the long dull days by a large glass window facing the sun and view!

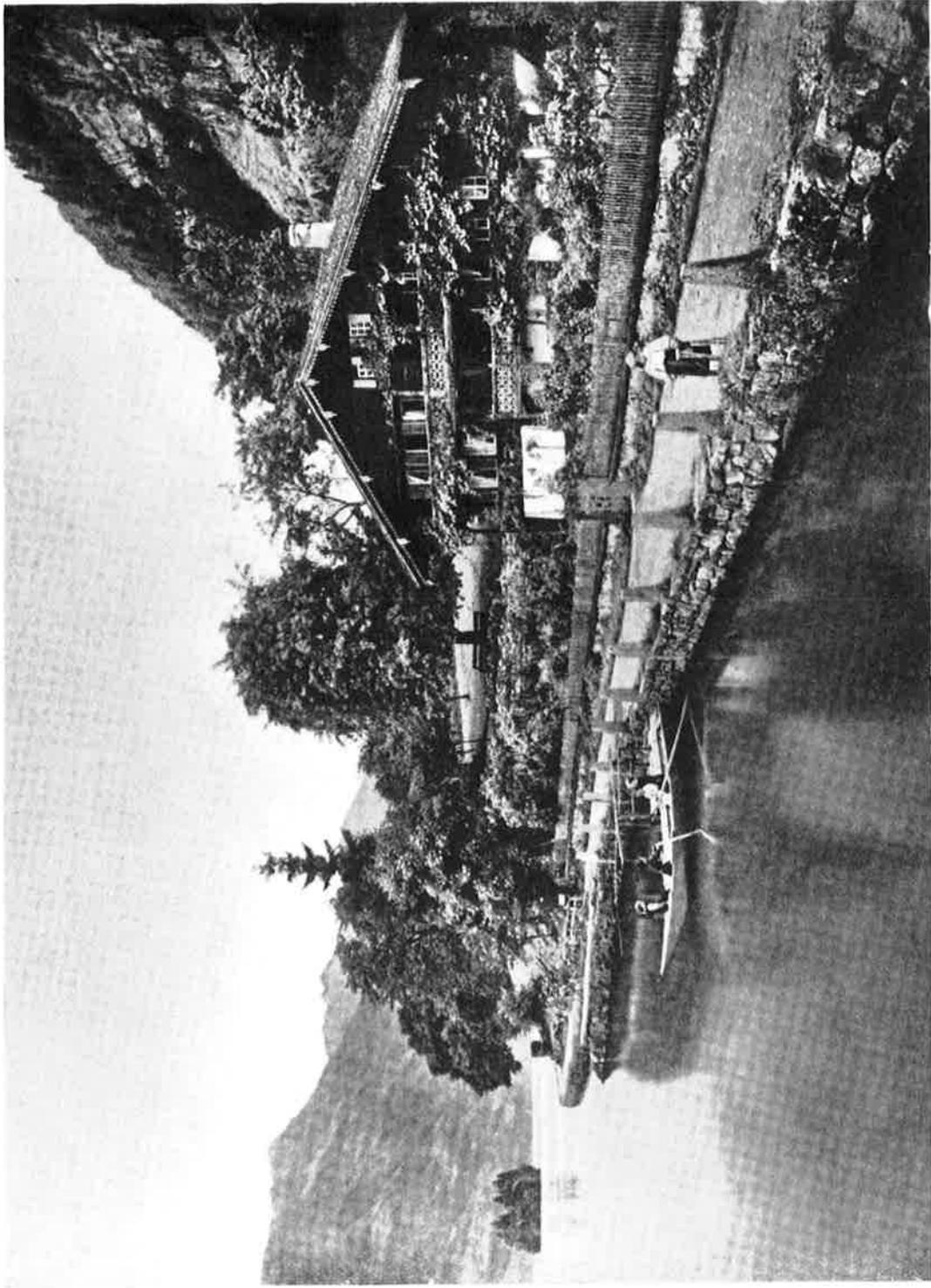


MEIRINGEN

House and Garden



SWISS CHALETS



CHALET ON LAKE BRIENZ