STREAMS OF HISTORY

THE MIDDLE AGES

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THE TEUTONIC CHILDREN OF THE WOODS, AND HOW THEY LIVED

DO you recall how we said Greece consisted of a peninsula which had extending out from it many smaller peninsulas, something like the palm of one's hand with the stubby fingers extending from it? If we look at the map of Europe, we see that in this respect Europe is a large pattern of Greece, for it is in fact only a large peninsula of Asia and, in turn, has many smaller peninsulas extending from it. Looking at the map of Europe as a whole, you see on the south, projecting into the calm, sunny Mediterranean Sea, Greece, Italy and Spain, of which we have already learned so much; extending out into the more stormy seas of the North are the Scandinavian peninsula and the peninsula of Denmark.

Europe is not large when compared with Asia and Africa, but it almost equals either one of them in the amount of seacoast it has. This is because there are so many arms of the sea extending far into the land and so many peninsulas running out into the sea. These help to break up the land into many divisions, and you have already seen, in earlier volumes of this

series, how one people lived in Greece, another in Italy, and still another in Spain, each of these very unlike the others until they learned to know their neighbor states.

Not far from the center of Europe are the Alps, the highest of all the European mountains. From these central highlands many smaller ranges run out in every direction, making a slope to every side. You have already seen how the Apennines, extending down through Italy, form the backbone of that country. The Pyrenees extend to the west and cut off the peninsula of Spain from the rest of Europe. Mountains also extend northward, dividing Germany into many parts. Others extend to the east, run down into Greece and break up that country into many separate little states. In fact, in thus being greatly cut up by mountains, Europe is much like Greece, just as she is in way of peninsulas.

Rising in the great mountain center of Europe are many rivers. The three most important ones are the Danube, the Rhine and the Rhone, all of which begin at no great distance from one another, but each flows in a different direction. The Danube, which is the largest, flows southeast and empties its waters into the Black Sea; the Rhine flows to the northwest, between cliffs, through mountain valleys, out over the plain, and reaches the North Sea; the Rhone flows southwest and, cutting the Pyrenees from the Alps, at last reaches the western Mediterranean. Many smaller rivers tumble down from the slopes into these larger streams, so that Europe is abundantly supplied with water for pasture and boats.

Thus you see, no doubt, that Europe, cut up by its mountains, with its many river valleys, is quite different, for example, from Egypt with its single river and its one fruitful plain. In Egypt all the people, since they lived in the same valley and used the same river for passing from one place to another and lived on the same kind of soil, acted and thought in very much the same way, thus making one united country which could easily be ruled by a single king.

Over in Greece, where the country was cut up into many valleys, shut off from one another by the mountains, we saw earlier how hard it was for the people to act and think and work together, even when there was great danger, as in the time when Darius and Xerxes were driven back from Marathon and Salamis. The mountains, too, made it easy for the people of one valley to defend themselves against those of another; so each little tribe became quite independent, and whenever it could take advantage of its neighbors, it would rarely fail to do so.

Now Europe, with its center occupied by so many great mountains and divided by many rivers, afforded just such a chance to the people scattered over it. We have already seen how hard it was for Hannibal to cross the Pyrenees, and to take his elephants over the Rhone, and at last, to climb the Alps to get into Italy. In the same way it was just as hard for the Romans to get out of Italy into France, or into any of the states north of the Alps,—yes, even harder, for the Roman side of the Alps was steeper than the other. Now all of these things helped to make Europe de-

velop into many states and governments instead of just one, as we, for example, in the United States have.

When Cæsar crossed the Alps and conquered the Gauls in France, he found in many places large fields of grain planted and carefully tended by the people who lived there. The country was quite level and open, so Cæsar and his Roman legions with little trouble succeeded in conquering the Gauls and in making them a part of the great nation of Rome.

Sometime later Drusus, another Roman, crossed the Rhine, aiming to conquer the people there as Cæsar had conquered the Gauls. He did not succeed so well, for he found a cold country hard to winter in and a people quite different from those which Cæsar found in Gaul.

North of the Alps are many smaller mountains. Near the North and the Baltic seas lies a large low plain. Between the mountains and the low plain are many hills. This whole country of mountains, hills, rivers and plain long ago was covered by vast forests filled with great marshes and only here and there an open meadow. Here, as already said, about two thousand years ago, came Drusus to conquer our ancestors, the Germans, or Teutons, as they are often called.

He found the Germans to be a large, fierce, powerful, white-skinned, blue-eyed, yellow-haired race living in this bleak, cold forest. They had no cities and few farms but spent their time in hunting the wild boar, elk, bear, wolf and buffalo for their food. In their struggles with these wild animals and in fighting

among themselves for the possession of this hunting ground, they became brave and fierce.

There were then no roads through the forests, no bridges over the streams, and for many months each year the rivers were frozen so deeply that whole armies could cross them on the ice. The winters were keen and long; swamps and forest made the climate far more severe than it is in that country now; there was then more ice and snow, more fog and rain.

As a country is, so to a large degree are its people. The bitter cold made the Germans hardy, fierce and brave. It made them restless, savage, passionate and daring. They loved the freedom of a life in the woods and by overcoming its difficulties learned to rely upon themselves.

This cold and wet climate of the forest home kept the Germans back at first. It kept them from making fine statues, from erecting beautiful buildings like the Parthenon, from writing beautiful poetry like the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," from being philosophers like Socrates and Plato, or great statesmen like Pericles and Cæsar; but by overcoming its hardships they gained a manly independence which their neighbors in the sunny southland never possessed, and finally became one of the finest, bravest peoples in the world.

Over their huge bodies, even in this cold country, they wore only a sort of short cloak made from the skin of some animal or from the wool plucked out of the sheep's back, for they had, in the early days when they wandered through the woods, not yet learned to

shear the sheep. They plaited it also into a kind of cloth, for they as yet knew nothing of weaving. On their heads they wore a cap of fur decorated with boars' tusks or horns of cattle. They too had also a kind of rude shoe made of skins. The women dressed much like the men, while the children often, in spite of the cold, wore very scant clothing.

The dwelling house—if there was one—was a rude hut made of logs, filled in with sticks and mud, and covered with a roof of straw, or maybe reeds from the neighboring marsh. In the roof a hole was left through which the smoke could escape.

In winter, to keep out the cold weather, they often lived in houses hollowed out of the ground. These were usually not very clean, so for the sake of health the people grew to be fond of baths. A hot bath especially delighted them, and in summer time they used the streams freely. A Roman historian tells an interesting story of a tribe who, as they were pursuing an enemy, accidentally came to a place where there were many hot springs. These so much delighted them that they stopped several days to bathe to their hearts' content.

In summer time their rude wagons were fitted into a kind of house, for to these they could easily hitch their oxen and move from place to place when pasture land, hunting and fishing gave out. They had not yet learned to use stone and mortar for building houses or for tiles for the roofs. But we need not wonder at this when we remember how restless they were, and how little they cared for settled homes.

The German men had quite a different feeling toward their families from any people we have thus far studied. Nowhere among Greeks or Romans do we find so much respect shown for women as here. Each man had but one wife, and he remained faithful to her as she to him. She supplied his wants and often when he went to battle would go with him. If he was killed she sometimes took his place in the fight, and usually chose to die rather than return without him. The Romans were astonished at the pure family life they found among the Germans, and no people we have studied thus far have done so much to beautify and ennoble the home as they.

The house had very little furniture. The German hunter slept stretched on a bench, or on a bed made of bearskin thrown on the floor in a corner, and it was often late on the following day when he arose, and, after taking his bath, if it was possible, went off to attend to the duties of the morning. Maybe it was some feast or hunt that claimed his attention; maybe some public assembly of the freemen of the tribe to which he belonged; but it was almost never manual labor, or care for farm or cattle.

Among some of the German tribes there were villages, but even then the houses were rude affairs and stood far apart, and the people had no land which they could call their own. All the land about the village belonged to the tribe and was called its mark. This was divided into three parts. First, there was a space where the houses were built. Next, there was a part where the ground was cleared and might be cultivated. Each year, if any farming was to be done, the village chief gave to

every free man a small piece of ground where he might raise what he wished for food. But these fierce Teutonic ancestors of ours loved mostly to hunt and to fight, and not to farm. They left that to the men too old to fight, to the women, the children and the slaves. These would raise the barley and wheat out of which the bread and beer were made. The slaves were prisoners taken in war and had iron collars tightly fitted round their necks, and as a sign that they had lost their freedom their hair was cut short. They were well treated and were never very numerous among the early Germans, for there was little work to be done.

Every village had also a third tract of land, which furnished pasture for the horses, cattle and hogs. Often this was woodland, where the hogs could live on the acorns and nuts. The German loved his forest life too well to care for land. Sometimes he owned large herds of cattle and droves of hogs, but these could easily be driven from place to place as his fancy suited.

With such an idea of life one can easily see that the Germans would not feel the need of belonging to a great state ruled by some strong power that could protect their property and their lives. Indeed, in the dense forest and mountainous region it would have been very difficult to make a large strong state, and especially so since every German felt that he himself was able to protect his own life and scanty possessions.

A number of families living near one another and using the same hunting ground, made up a tribe and for their chief they chose their best hunter or their

bravest warrior, just as when you play a game you select as leader the one who best understands it. After having made the choice, they placed him on a shield and raised him up over their heads. From that time on they followed him in war and on the hunt. Every warrior tried to win by loyalty and bravery the greatest love and respect of the chief; and every chief tried by his bravery to win the greatest number of followers. In the hour of danger it was shameful for the men to allow the chief to be braver than they, or for the chief not to equal the men in bravery. When plunder was captured, each soldier received as much as the chief himself,—all were regarded as equal.

The chief himself could not decide matters for the tribe. Every freeman had a right to help. Out in the forest, under a tree, or on top of a neighboring hill, all the freemen assembled bearing their arms. Sitting on the ground or on the logs and stumps, as the great ox-horn cups of liquor were passed from hand to hand, they discussed measures of grave importance and adopted them by a ringing clash of weapons, or rejected them with cries and groans until the very forest rang.

Here they decided questions of peace and war and righted wrongs. Here fathers brought their sons when they became of the proper age, and after giving them a spear and shield they too became members of the assembly, or moot, as they called it, and from that time on they were freemen. If in some future battle the spear and shield should be lost, the right to be a freeman, too, was lost, and this was the most disgraceful thing that could happen to any one.