

# THE BROCHURE SERIES

OF ARCHITECTURAL ILLUSTRATION

1901

APRIL

NO. 4

## ✓ SWISS CHÂLETS

**A**T FIRST glance the typical qualities of the Swiss chalet seem picturesqueness, harmony with the surrounding features, and a certain fanciful and toy-like aspect. To compare it with the bare, rectangular, white-painted and green-blinded wooden dwelling that has grown up indigenous in these United States seems a far cry; and yet the fundamental principle which gave birth to the two is identical, — namely, the logical attempt to meet in wooden architecture the needs of climatic conditions as simply as possible. Indeed the most direct way to examine the typical features of the chalet is, perhaps, to take up the successive conditions which the Swiss builders were forced to meet, and to observe how they have met them.

Wood, as a material, was almost forced upon them, both by its plenteousness and by the difficulty of transporting stone to the inaccessible heights where the dwellings were required to be niched. But wood once accepted by

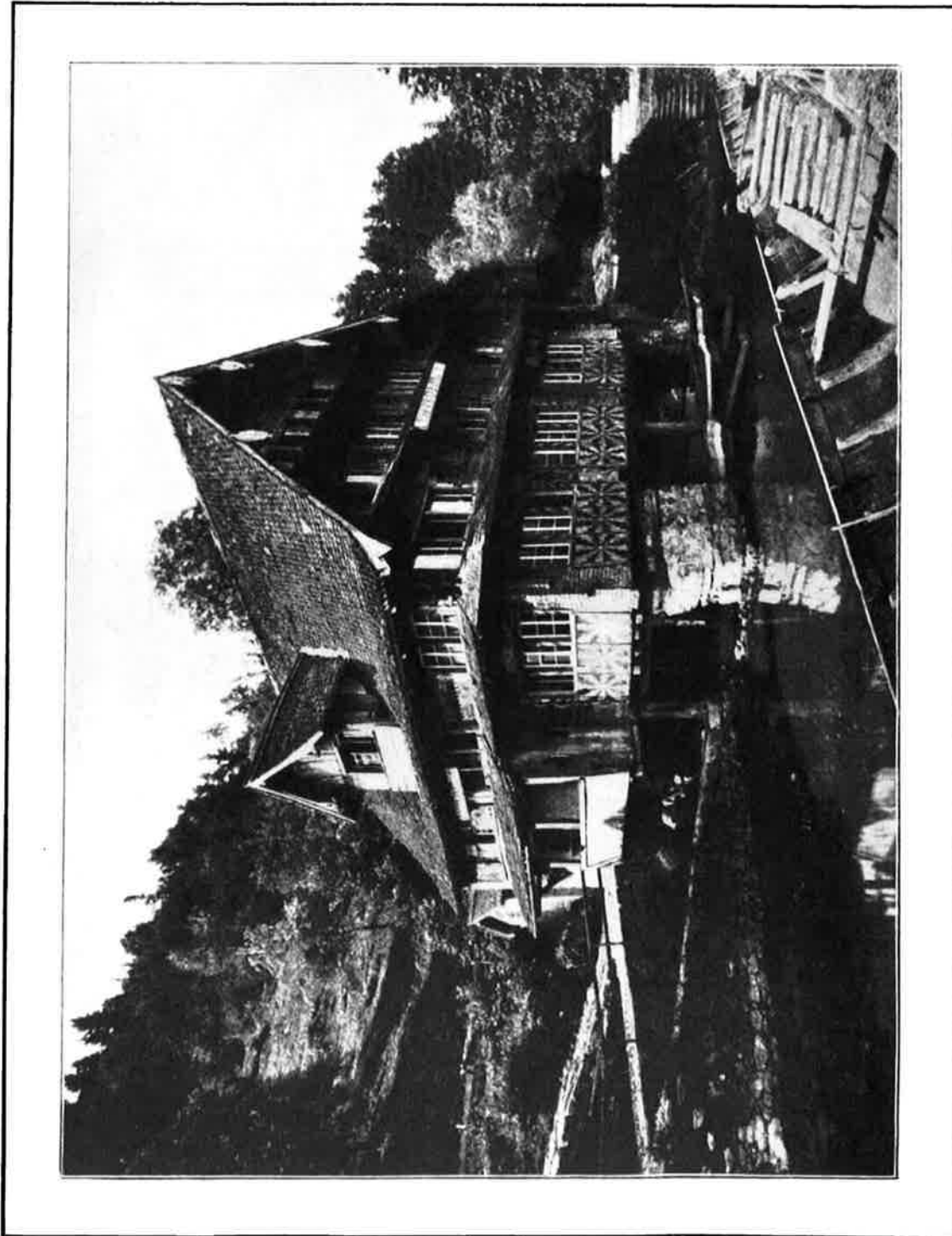
them as a material, they did not, like our New England builders, strive to conceal the constructive features which it necessitated, by an uninteresting veil of clapboards and by a further coating of paint, but on the contrary emphasized



MOUNTAIN VILLAGE SWITZERLAND

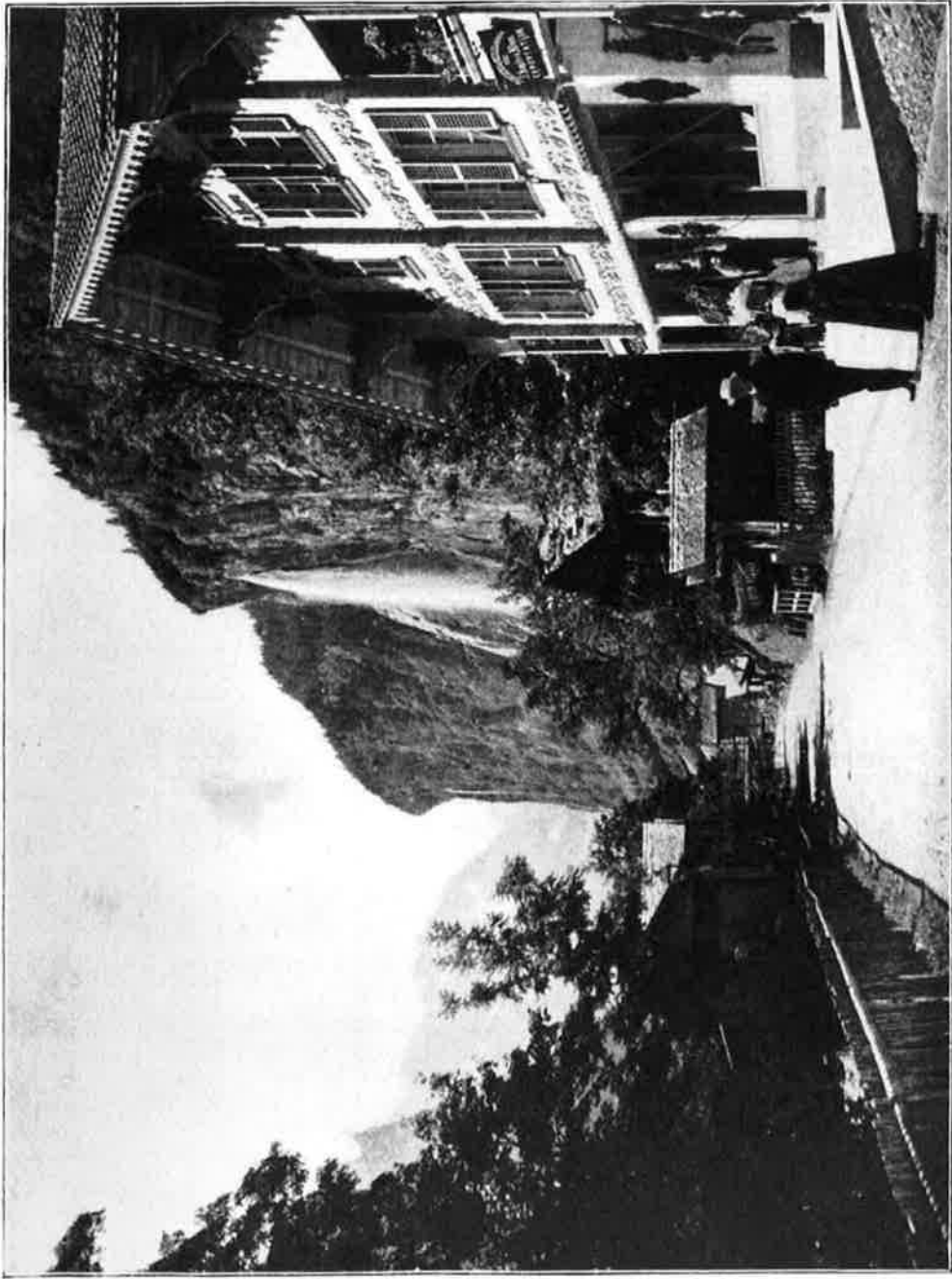
the constructive skeleton to its utmost. The brackets which support the roof are enormous; the floor-beams, the division into stories, show from the front, and nothing of the framing of windows is hidden. The wood itself too, instead of being painted, is left in its natural color, merely being treated with a preservative coating of linseed oil, and thus the exteriors of these chalets have acquired with age an exquisite tone which makes the habitation a thing in natural harmony with its surroundings.

The climate of such a mountainous country as Switzerland, where both rain and snow are abundant and the winter is very cold, induced other marked peculiarities in the chalet. It was necessary to protect the wooden walls against moisture, and this necessity



SWITZERLAND

CHÂLETT

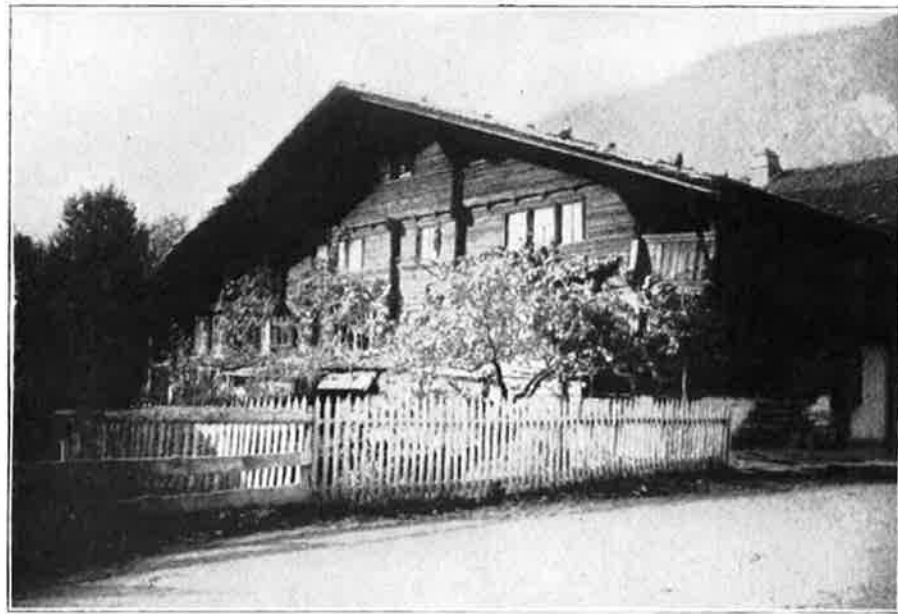


SWITZERLAND

STREET IN LAUTERBRUNNEN

variously modified the shapes of the roofs according to the climate and altitude of the situation. In the ch<sup>â</sup>let of the plain, the roof is very steep and high, built to allow the rain water to run off rapidly. The eaves are brought forward to shelter the front, and the steep slope causes the rain to run immediately into the gutters instead of remaining on the thatch-planks. This type of roof is extremely graceful, and not only very picturesque in its outline, but it is the sole logical and rational form under the conditions.

In both types of roof, the extension of the eaves, originally intended merely as a protection for the walls, was exaggerated by the Swiss builders, until the roof often projects from four to ten feet on the front, and on the sides sometimes it is so widely extended as to come down within three or four feet of the ground, where it is supported by posts. The sides being thus amply sheltered galleries and balconies are placed there, and an exterior stair-case is not an unusual feature. There are also occasionally small balconies on the front, but

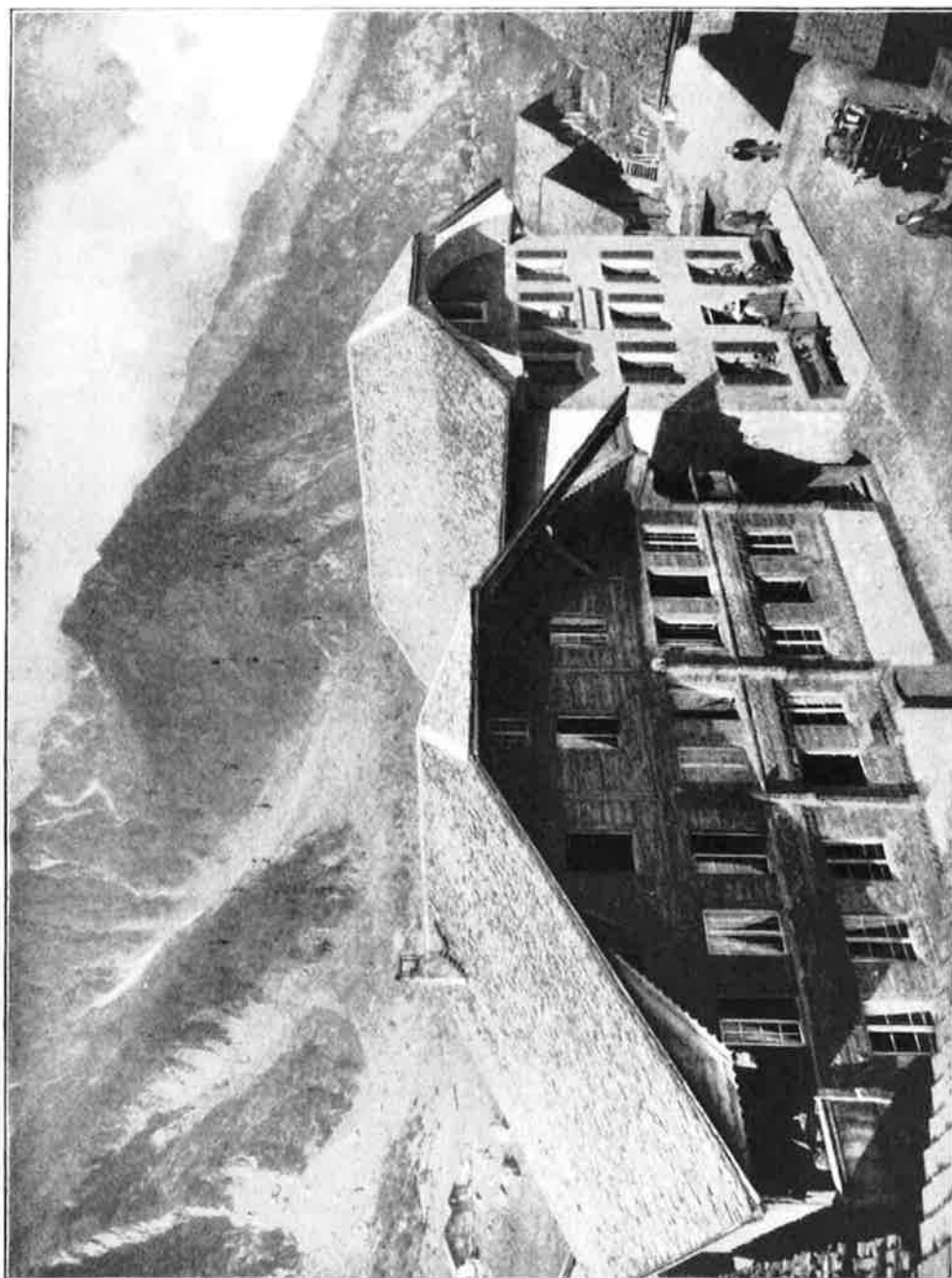
CH<sup>Â</sup>LET

SWITZERLAND

On the other hand, in the ch<sup>â</sup>lets built for the mountain sides where snow is heavy and abundant, roofs instead of being built so as to throw off the snow, are flattened that the snow may accumulate upon them and by its covering protect the dwelling from the extreme cold. These flat roofs are accordingly usually crossed by long, horizontal beams projecting beyond the house and forming ledges against which the snow may rest, though in some cases, large stones laid at intervals not only serve the same purpose, but weight the roof against the mountain gales.

only on the upper story where they may be sheltered by the roof.

The dormer windows are typical of the exaggeration of the constructive elements in Swiss architecture. The shape of the covering of the dormer suggests the entire roof. It has its brackets and pendentives, and indeed is in itself a complete piece of architecture. Out of a necessary opening in the roof the ch<sup>â</sup>let architect has, by merely emphasizing the constructional motives, had the skill to make an important element of architectural decoration. A similar feature, not only useful but decorative,



SWITZERLAND

CHÂLETS



CHÂLET

SWITZERLAND

which is observable in the Swiss chalet is the pent-house which often runs along the front above the windows on small brackets, following the horizontal framework and emphasizing the division of the building into stories, and at the same time protecting the upper part of the windows from the rain. Indeed so logical has been the development of even the most picturesque constructional features of the Swiss chalet that in only one of them, the grouping of the windows, do we find the builder freely exercising his fancy and personal taste. Here the designers have produced some charming varieties in grouping and form. The windows are sometimes double, sometimes triple, and very often quadruple and in a single frame, but even here it is possible to find a logical reason for their disposition, for the chalet has usually only two stories with



CHÂLET

SWITZERLAND

low ceilings, and whereas high and wide bays are not admissible under these circumstances, a series of small connected windows gives better light and has a more pleasing effect from the inside.

We see, therefore, that on the whole, Swiss chalet architecture is constructional,—the thoroughly logical outgrowth of conditions. Symmetry is absolutely subordinated to usefulness, and all organic parts of the construction are emphasized, sometimes even to grotesqueness.

The decoration of the exterior by carving, painting and panelling only emphasizes the organic members. It accentuates the lines, adds force to the



CHÂLET

SWITZERLAND

shadows and brightens the light parts. In the plain and empty spaces of the front and on the flat sides of the consoles it expands into carving of the most decorative character.

"The ingenious fancy of the Swiss carpenter-architects has been pleased to infinitely vary the types of chalet," writes M. Jean Schopfer, "but they have always remained faithful to the spirit and requirements of the art of building in wood. They have not attempted to apply to wood the law of stone architecture, and it is to this fact that we owe the beauty, the elegance and the originality of the Swiss chalet, which holds a place quite apart in the history of architecture."



STREET IN ADELBODEN

SWITZERLAND