

GEOGRAPHY OF NORTHERN EUROPE

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Geography of Northern Europe by C. E. Moberly

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C. E. MOBERLY

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CHAPTER I.

EUROPE.

EUROPE, the smallest of the continents of the Old World, is 2,550 miles long, from Cape Matapan, in latitude 35°, to the North Cape, in latitude 72°; and 1,900 in breadth, from Cape Clear, in Ireland, longitude 10° W., to the Ural Mountains, longitude about 60° E. It is bounded on the North by the Arctic Ocean and its gulfs; on the West by the Atlantic; and on the South by the Mediterranean and its dependent seas. Its eastern limits have been variously laid down by different authorities on Russian geography; it is enough here to state that from the Bosphorus it follows the shore of the Euxine, crosses from the Crimea to about the middle point of the west shore of the Caspian, and then turns north, and reaches the White Sea by a line roughly coinciding, first with the Ural river, and then with the mountains of the same name.

This mode of demarcation is, on several grounds, somewhat arbitrary; for, in the first place, there seems to be no very decisive reason why Russia, with its vast plains so much resembling those of Asia, should be considered as part of a different section of the

earth; indeed, much of her European dominions belonged almost recently to Asiatic tribes, and was currently considered as forming part of that continent. In the second place, all that constitutes the characteristic unity of Europe would come much more clearly into view if we considered it to begin at the points of attachment of two great peninsulas—that of SCANDINAVIA on the north, containing Norway and Sweden, which is connected with Russian Lapland by an isthmus only 200 miles wide, from Tornea to the White Sea; and the much larger and more important peninsula, if it may so be called, the isthmus of which lies between Königsberg and Kherson at the mouth of the Dnieper, and is therefore about 700 miles across. This latter contains (besides some of western Russia) Poland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, with Turkey in Europe and the provinces recently detached from it; also Greece, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, and Holland, with part of Denmark; and it may, for distinctness' sake, be called the Continental Peninsula of Europe.

The Scandinavian peninsula is made by the great chain whose middle part is called the Dovre, which is nearer the west or Norwegian side, but constantly sends out spurs into Sweden. The Continental Peninsula contains the principal mountain axis of Europe, which begins with the Pyrenees and the parallel ranges of Spain (considered as one), and continues from thence, with interruptions, through the Alps and the mountains of Dalmatia, Albania, and Greece; after which it crosses into Asia Minor, and

is carried on through the Armenian mountains, the Persian Elburz,* and the Hindoo Khosh, up to the north-west frontier of India.

The Western Alps are the boundary of two great basins, which together constitute the greater part of Western Europe. The first of these lies between the principal chain of the Alps and the Atlas range in North-west Africa; it contains the western or Tyrrhene section of the Mediterranean, and appears to have been closed in early times by an isthmus joining Cape Carthage with Sicily and Italy. Its depression may be conjectured from the fact that some parts of the Western Mediterranean have been sounded to a depth of 13,000 feet. North of the Alps a much smaller and shallower basin, not covered with water, is formed by a continuous line of lower mountains which leaves the Alps near Geneva, and, after a long northward and eastward sweep, under the names of the Jura, Vosges, Thuringerwald, Erzgebirge, Riesengebirge, and Carpathians, comes back in a loop to meet the outliers of the Alpine chain on the Danube, near Widin.

These two basins together constitute the chief mountain region of Europe; north of them lies a plain 600 miles long, the lowest depression of which is occupied by the shallow and dangerous Baltic. The flatness of the plain of North Germany (except at a few points) is almost unimaginable without seeing it.

* The name Elburz means in Persian 'shining mountain,' (that is, 'snow mountain,') and is applied to the Caucasus and to one of its chief peaks, as well as to the Persian chain.

Hour after hour the train moves on through districts resembling, on a vast scale, the bleak and bare tablelands which separate English river-basins in Derbyshire and elsewhere. It seems constantly as if the line *must* now at last descend into some river channel, and the eye find rest from its weariness; but all rivers cross it nearly at right angles, and the rest never comes. Indeed, after Berlin the monotony becomes still greater; the road to Moscow passing through miles upon miles first of bare plain or pine forest, and then of marshes. We are therefore not surprised when told that there have been vast and recurring astronomical cycles, during which all these low grounds were far below the waters of the sea—the northern ocean extending to the flanks of the Erzgebirge and Riesengebirge, the spurs of which then formed a host of northward capes and peninsulas; and that the thousands of small lakes in North Germany, Sweden, and Finland, as well as the deposits of salt in the same countries, are reminders that the sea was once there.

The direction of the European mountain-chains of course governs that of its great international rivers. None of them lie south of the Alps; the distance of these from the Mediterranean being too small to allow streams of the first magnitude to collect.* It is on

* It has been recently stated that the Tiber passes through a single bridge at Rome a body of water equal to twice that of the Thames. It is, however, far from being as considerable a river as the Thames, as nine-tenths of the annual outfall comes down in great and transient floods; the river being in its