

ease of communication with the Mediterranean partly accounts for that thorough occupation of France by the Romans, which has left such a marked influence on the language of the country, and may even perhaps have some bearing on the fact that the religion of the majority of the inhabitants, both here and in Belgium, is, as in Italy and the Iberian Peninsula, Roman Catholic, whereas in the rest of North-West Europe it is Protestant (see p. 25).

The mass of ridged mountains which constitutes *Alpineland* must always prove a barrier between the Romance and Teutonic peoples inhabiting Italy and Germany respectively, though in recent years the construction of railways and Alpine tunnels has reduced its influence. In a region like the Alps population is gathered together in the fertile but isolated valleys, and this distribution naturally tends to the creation of small separate States, some of which now form part of the Austrian Empire; while others, enabled by the mountain fortresses to win and retain independence, are now knit together to form the republic of Switzerland—another Buffer State. To Austria also belongs the well-defined diamond-shaped plateau of Bohemia.

The diversified nature of the central highlands between the Rhine and Bohemia conduced to the formation of various petty kingdoms, principalities, and duchies, which are now united with the plain to the north, the seat of the master kingdom of Prussia, and constitute the present German Empire.

The small peninsula of Jutland and the large one of Scandinavia have served to form natural political units, though the latter at times has tended to divide along the watershed into separate political powers, Norway and Sweden. Since 1905 these have been distinct kingdoms.

Thus we see that, though the precise frontiers between the countries of Central and North-Western Europe are at present to a great extent artificial, and have been of a very fluctuating nature, there are certain features in the configuration of the land which have had a marked influence in the gradual development of these nations, and must also have their bearing on the politics of the present and the history of the future.

#### SUGGESTION AND QUESTION.

1. Write a description of the North Sea and the shores that it washes.
2. By what different routes could a steamer go from Liverpool to Stockholm, and which would it probably select?