

Travel Notes.

(FROM HELEN'S DIARY.)

Bern, Switzerland, Sept. 26, 1914.

Bern is alive—very much alive. After the silent streets of Interlaken it is positively thrilling to elbow one's way along the crowded streets of Bern. The town is humming with life and activity, and fairly swarming with soldiers. One can hardly step outside the door without running into a uniform. Bern being the capital of the country is also the military headquarters. On the outskirts of the city are huge barracks and parade grounds, but just now there are so many thousands of extra soldiers here that they are quartered all over town; every school-house seems to be a barracks.

It's quite exciting to see so much military life. Troops are continually marching through the streets; military automobiles and motor-cycles are dashing around town at break-neck speed, leaving clouds of dust behind them; aeroplanes are flying over our heads with a deafening roar; drums are beating and bugles are sounding; all the hotels, public buildings, bridges, and stations are guarded by sentries with fixed bayonette.

The Swiss soldiers have not the spick-and-span, factory-made appearance of the German soldiers, but they look sturdy and vigorous, and the officers are a particularly fine-looking set of men.

In Switzerland every man is a soldier. Between the ages of twenty and thirty-five military service is compulsory, twenty-six days of active service being required every year. From this time up to the age of forty-five the time limit is reduced, but every man is obliged to practice target shooting a certain number of days every year.

The Swiss are wonderful marksmen, as clever with their rifles as their national hero, William Tell, was with his bow and arrow.

Every man keeps his military equipment in his own house, and, as at any time it is liable to be inspected, it is kept in perfect condition. When a sudden call to arms comes he dons his uniform, shoulders his rifle, says good-bye to his family, and is ready to march. This is the reason the Swiss army was able to mobilize last August so quickly in twenty-four hours.

Some one remarked that the Swiss soldiers all marched as if they were climbing up a mountain. But that is quite the natural gait in Switzerland.

With so much of the war spirit abroad it is no wonder that the boys of Bern have caught the sword-and-cocked-hat fever, and are drilling daily in the streets with such furious energy. Go where you will, you will find all the small boys playing soldier. Wherever two or three boys are gathered together one is sure to be a fierce-looking, loud-voiced general; one a captain, not quite so stern in appearance; and the third boy is the company. The unprovided uniforms are killingly funny. Usually the hat is of newspaper, the knapsack a cigar box, and the gun and sword made from bits of wood. The fife and drum band is usually represented by a mouth-organ and a dish-pan. Even the girls are not exempt from the military epidemic; sometimes they even drill with the boys. That is something that would never happen in Germany where man rules supreme.

The other day I was walking peacefully along the sidewalk and stopped a minute in front of a yard to watch some little girls drilling. One of them who was carrying a toy gun saw me. Quick as a flash she dropped the toy gun to the ground full length, levelled her gun at me, and fired. I suppose I was killed, but I didn't feel any different.

When I look at the map of Europe and see what a little flyspeck of a place Switzerland is, and what a dangerous position it occupies—war drums beating and cannons roaring all around it—it seems to me as if we could not possibly escape the deadly bullets and bursting bombs of the fighting nations; but when I see that gigantic barrier of snow-peaks towering into the sky, and when I think of the myriads of other mountains that ring the country round—I feel pretty safe in this little Swiss Republic.

Bern is certainly a surprise. It is a city tourists usually skip, or give but a

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few hours—just enough time to see the bears. Before I came here all I knew about Bern was that it was the capital of Switzerland, and had a famous view of the Bernese Alps, and an equally famous bear-pit.

We were obliged to come to Bern to get our passports to England; we expected to move on in three days—that was six weeks ago.

We were here two weeks before we caught even a glimpse of the world-renowned view of the Alps. A dense ball of haze concealed the mountains completely. Once in awhile the haze would thin a little, and the spectral Alps would dimly show behind the veil. Then one glorious day the mists cleared

the hottest place in Bern; on a cold day it is the coldest; and on a windy day it is the windiest; but in spite of these drawbacks it has one glorious feature—the view—the marvellous view of the Bernese Oberland.

The fountains are one of the unique features of Bern. The main street, which is long and straight and which changes its name as often as an American divorce, is punctuated with fountains its entire length. They are curious and interesting rather than beautiful, but they make a gay bit of color on the street, as they are all highly colored and bespattered with gilt and banked up with masses of brilliant flowers. Even the plainest fountains in

the family washing is done on the street, and hung up to dry on the public squares and along the banks of the river. Judging by the amount of scrubbing done, every day in the week is a Monday.

And now about the bears.

The bears of Bern are celebrated in song and verse and history. The bear is the heraldic emblem of the city. He is omnipresent; he guards the portals of doorways, swings in the breeze on flags, and is found in almost every shop window in town in some form or other. He is a very popular wood-carving, he is used by the jewellers in decorative forms, and also by the booksellers and leather merchants. I have even seen him done in pink sugar on a cake in a baker's window.

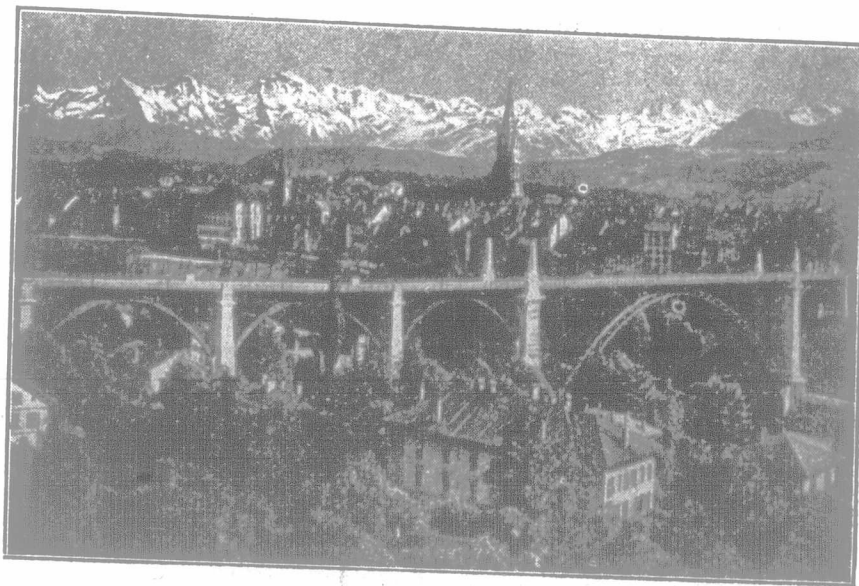
The origin of the Bern bear goes away back to 1513, when some victorious Swiss warriors returned from a war. In the procession was a little bear on a chain—one of the trophies of the war. From that day to this the bear-pit has been one of the "sights" of Bern, and the bears of to-day are the descendants of that little bear that was led through the city gates four hundred years ago.

The present bear-pit is just on the edge of the town, and from dewy (I should say foggy) morn till eve is surrounded by a giggling crowd of children, some of them as old as seventy. All day long those bears eat carrots. Why carrots I know not, but carrots it is. Perhaps because they are cheap. A prodigiously fat, red-faced, thin-haired old dame has a carrot stand just inside the pit. She looks as if she had been sitting in the same chair selling carrots for a hundred years or so. For a few centimes one can buy a bunch of carrots and have dead loads of fun. The bears perform all sorts of funny antics; they dance, jump, roll, walk on their hind legs, and by their ridiculous actions keep the onlookers in shrieks of laughter. Each bear has a little specialty of its own, by which it hopes to win carrots. The most amusing one of the lot danced a jig on its hind legs, then bowed its head and folded its front paws together in the attitude of prayer, and grunted out a sound that seemed to bear a striking resemblance to Amen. That bear was the champion carrot winner.

One of the special features of Bern is the Lauben (arcades). One can walk all around the inner town dryshod and umbrellalass on the wettest and stormiest of days. Wet weather is no bar to pedestrianism in Bern. Under the Lauben are cellars where the market people keep their belongings, such as stands, awnings, etc., and very early in the morning on market days the things are dragged out and erected along the side of the street, so that the town becomes one continuous mart.

Market day is the time to see the dogs at work, for in Bern, dogs are beasts of burden as well as horses. They are used for pulling small carts around, although some of the small carts have enormously big and heavy loads. The man or woman piloting the cart works as hard as the dogs. Usually there are two dogs harnessed to each cart, but sometimes only one. As Bern is a very hilly place the poor dogs have to strain every muscle in pulling their loads up hill, but they seem to understand the art of relaxation, for, just as soon as the order is given to halt, they throw themselves down on the road and go sound asleep. Sometimes they sleep a long time while their owner is going from house to house delivering milk—or whatever else his load happens to be. The dogs seem to like their work and take it quite seriously, ignoring all wayside distractions during business hours. But once in awhile racial instinct interferes with routine work and acquired intelligence. One day I saw it in operation. The cause was—a cat.

At the time of the fatal encounter the dog was going down a steep, curving hill. He went a good deal faster after he saw the cat. He tore over those cobble stones with murder in his heart, and the milk cans rattled behind him like artillery wagons. The owner raced after the cart, waving his arms wildly, and yelling like a Comanche Indian; the children tagged along at his heels, also yelling; the people in all the houses along the street rushed to the windows



Bern and the Alps.

away. It was just as if a vast stage curtain had rolled up and revealed a new world. There they stood—the white-crested giants of the Bernese Oberland. Miles and miles distant they were, but so dazzling white, and so colossal, that they dwarfed all the intervening world.

And then the Alpine glow! That wonderful coloring that tips the mountain peaks at sunset time, when, above a shadowy world, the pink peaks soar into a dim sky, gleam like brilliant jewels for a brief time, then quickly fade and disappear in the blackness of night.

The river Aare whirls round Bern in the shape of the letter V; the old part of Bern is inside the V, and is called the inner town; the modern city spreads

the poorest districts are dreams of floral beauty. But the figures which ornament them and give them their names are sometimes horribly grotesque. For instance, the Ogre fountain. This is topped by a big-headed, repulsive man-creature who is engaged in the pleasing act of eating a little child. Dangling from his belt are a number of other little children, evidently destined for a like fate. Charming subject! Saints and Madonnas seem to be conspicuous for their absence as decorative additions to the fountains of Bern. Biblical characters are also scarce. Moses and Samson being the only two honored with pedestals. But there is a Bagpiper fountain, a Ropemaker fountain, a Post-



Swiss Soldiers Transporting Heavy Guns Over the Snow Mountains.

out like a fan over the neighboring hills. The banks of the Aare are very high and steep, and the different parts of the city connected by enormous bridges. In fact, one is seldom out of sight of a bridge in Bern, and never out of sight of a fountain.

The Kornhaus bridge, over which we passed many times a day, is the newest and biggest of them all. It is tremendously high—157 feet above the river, (a fine place for suicides), and very long—388 yards across. It is one of the busiest spots in Bern; street-cars and wagons rumble over it all day long, and there is a never-ending procession of people crossing it. On a hot day it is

runner fountain, and, of course, a Bear fountain. And, speaking about bears—but I must finish about the fountains first.

In olden times they were the newspapers of the town—a sort of gossip exchange. In the morning the maids went with their pails for water and dallied to hear the latest news; in the afternoon every fountain was a public laundry, as all the household washing was done on the street; in the evenings the fountains were the favorite gathering places of the young people—a sort of courting and love-making center for the Romeos and Juliets of the village. Even now in the old part of the town