

Travel Notes.

(From Helen's Diary.)

Geneva, June 21, '16.

Among the numerous charitable organizations in Switzerland engaged in relief work for the victims of the war, there is one which is especially appreciated by the unfortunate British prisoners interned in German camps, this is the Bread Branch of the Red Cross Agency for prisoners of war. The original purpose of this section was to send clothing, and food of various kinds to the English prisoners in Germany, but gradually the work has narrowed down to the sending of one thing—bread, as good bread was what the soldiers were most in need of.

Berne is the headquarters for this work, as the transportation facilities there are especially good, and the communication with Germany rapid and direct. Even when the frontier is closed the bread-cars are allowed to pass through. There are more than twenty bakers in Berne engaged in making this bread, which is baked twenty minutes longer than the usual time. The loaves are a foot long, and good and thick, and they are packed for transportation in paste-board boxes. This work is done gratuitously by the young ladies, Swiss and English, of Berne. Some of them of course, as at the Agency in Geneva, receive pay for their services. Every afternoon the bread is shipped to Frankfurt, Germany, and from there distributed to the different camps in Germany, reaching the most remote within five days. In this way fifteen thousand English prisoners are kept supplied with good wholesome bread. A very small proportion of the packages fail to reach their destination.

July 7th.

A mid-summer night!
Sounds warm and mosquitoey, but it isn't.

We are not sitting out under the spreading chestnut trees in the pale moonlight, fanned by gentle zephyrs from the south. No. We are muffled in sweaters, and rolled in furs, and huddled in the salon. Hail-stones are ricocheting on the windows, and an angry *Bise* is threshing the trees and howling like a thousand demons.

Such a babble of tongues!

I know now just how those un-

fortunate people at the Tower of Babel felt when that historic linguistic difficulty arose, and made things so uncomfortable for them; for a Swiss pension in war-time, packed to the roof with refugees from all corners of the earth, is a modern Tower of Babel.

If one could only talk to these people in their native tongue, how interesting it would be!

And that brings me to the Dutch lady. She can. At least, she can speak seven or eight languages fluently, and one can acquire considerable information (also misinformation), if able to jabber in eight tongues. In addition to her remarkable linguistic attainments, the Dutch lady has a nose for news. She has all the instincts of a society newspaper reporter, and, being of a cordial disposition, and not troubled with timidity, she butts in everywhere and talks to everybody.

She sat down beside me to-night for awhile and regaled me with spicy items concerning the pensionaires.

Owing to the arctic atmosphere outdoors the salon was crowded. It is a huge, square room, large enough for a concert hall. The various groups of people have the habit of always sitting in the same place, and for that reason all the appropriated sections have acquired descriptive names. The most desirable spot in the salon (the only place where there isn't a draft) is called Paradise. It is monopolized nightly by a large group of Alsations and Belgians. Next to it is Paris. And on the other side of it is Monte Carlo. Each of the four big, square pillars in the salon has a name. One is called the Polish Pillar, because it is the regular rendezvous of a group of Poles. For the same social reason the three other pillars bear geographical names—the British Post the Greek Column, and the Russian Pillar.

The Dutch lady is a tremendous talker. She never stops. Sometimes I wonder if her protruding teeth are the result of the incessant activity of her tongue. A tongue that wags in eight languages needs a good deal of room.

"Terrible weather!" said she, as she sat down beside me. "Most unusual. They say it's the result of all this heavy cannonading. I have just been talking to a man who has come from Bâle. Bâle, you know is right on the German frontier. He says that during that fearful bombardment last week the booming of the cannon could be distinctly heard in Bâle. And they

could see the aeroplanes fighting. Yes, they could even see the flashes from the mitrailleuses. Think of that! This man said the entire population was out in the street, or up on the roofs of buildings watching the battle in the air. And one night he said they could see three aeroplanes flying at a great height, flashing searchlights on German territory, and immediately afterward there was heavy cannonading. Think of all that terrible fighting going on so near us, almost at our doors. It seems incredible."

The grumpy old man who had been smoking next to us, made a noise as if he were gargling, dumped his cigar stubb into the ash tray and hobbled off towards the door.

The Dutch lady smiled knowingly, "says he's a Belgian" said she, "but his name is German, his habits are German his French is German, and I think he's nothing more or less than a Prussian Jew. Did you ever notice the way he eats jam? Typically German."

Just then there was a silvery tinkle of little bells, and a little brown dog came frisking into the salon followed by its stately mistress—a tall, handsome woman, gowned in black.

"What a cute little dog!" said I. The Dutch lady did not enthuse.

"Don't you like dogs?" I asked.

"Yes, but not these miserable little lap dogs. It disgusts me to see a woman devote as much time to a dog as that woman does. It is always in her lap. *Toujours*."

"But she can knit socks for the soldiers and hold the dog at the same time, and she knits all day, and evenings too."

Silence—for one minute.

"Did you hear about the Countess?" asked the Dutch lady abruptly.

"Which one? There are such a lot of them here."

"The one with the little, black dog. She always sits out in the hall smoking cigarettes, with the dog under her arm. They say she is seventy, but she doesn't look it. And you didn't hear about the row she made a few days ago?"

"No."

"She made a terrible scene in the office. I happened to be there when she came in." (Someway the D. L. is always on the spot when anything happens). "She went on like a crazy woman. The language she used! Terrible! She's an Italian, you know, and when they get angry the sparks fly."

"What was the trouble?"

"Oh, it was all about the dog. She thinks she can take it wherever she goes. She takes it into the dining-room with her. *Oui, c'est vraie*. Feeds it butter in a spoon. *Oui, oui*. A lot of people complained, and three families threatened to leave. So the manager told the Countess she could not take the dog into the *salle a manger* again. She hasn't been down stairs since. Takes all her meals in her room. She always takes the dog to the theatre with her. *Oui, toujours*. And to concerts. Carries it in that black silk bag with the gorgeous gold embroidery. That dog has been at every symphony concert this winter—in that bag. She says she never takes it to Wagner concerts, because Wagner excites it too much."

"There seem to be a great many dogs in this house."

"Yes. Fifteen. I counted them one day. That French actress who just went away, had two Japanese poodles. And that queer-looking Russian Countess has three dogs. One of them, that ugly bull-dog that looks like a seal, is twelve years old. The Spaniel, that always wears the coat even on hot days, is fifteen, and the Fox-terrier is a stray dog she picked up. And she keeps all three in her room *tout le temps*. Disgusting, I think. And so unhealthy."

There was a loud explosion in Paris. It sounded something like a delirious trombone. It was the "Count" laughing. He has these spasms at the most inopportune times. One night when the orchestra was playing soft and low, he had an awful spasm, and the result was the orchestra had to stop playing.

"They say he can't help it," said the Dutch lady, shrugging her shoulders. "but I think he does it on purpose. I don't believe he's a count. I'd like to see his papers. If he is French and of noble birth, as he says, he ought to be fighting for his country instead of idling here. My private opinion is he is a gambler out of a job. It's a wonder to me the women talk to him, but some women will talk to anything with trousers on."

There seemed to be a good deal of loud talking at the Polish Pillar. But it was nothing serious, just a dispute about cards.

"Madame Osuchowska looks very pretty to-night," I remarked.

She was one of the Polish Pillarites.

"Pretty?" blurted the Dutch lady.

"All made up. Nothing but paint and powder. Look at her lips—like cherries."

"But her eyes—don't you think her eyes are beautiful?"

"Regular Jewish type. She knows how to use them. But I haven't any patience with that kind of a woman. Her husband is in Warsaw, and she is here with her three children, and she can't find anything better to do than play cards, and wear fine clothes, and flirt with that big lazy Pole."

(The Dutch lady being happily married has no sympathy with flirtatious widows of the kind called "grass.")

"She's just a bit of vanity, and she can't live without admiration. That's the reason she keeps Puzewski dangling after her. He waits on her like a slave. They say he's a deserter."

"And the other man?"

"A deserter too. He's an Austrian, but doesn't admit it. Supposed to have a weak heart. So many of these deserters have weak hearts. In my opinion it's their heads that are weak and not their hearts."

"I heard the other day," she continued, in a very confidential tone, "that the Swiss are going to intern a lot of these troublesome deserters. Yes, really. It was a Swiss gentleman who told me. He said Switzerland was tired of supporting a lot of cowardly loafers. Switzerland is ready to help the needy, but she doesn't propose to feed shirkers. And half of these deserters are spies. So they are considering interning them in Central Switzerland. They are going to be examined, he said, and if they can't give a satisfactory account of themselves—tell why they are here and what they are doing they will be given the choice of either going back to their own country at once, or being interned in a little Swiss town in the canton of Berne. They are not to be allowed anywhere near the frontier. I hope they will carry out this plan. And I think it would be an excellent idea to intern the undesirable women too. Geneva is filled with the scum of



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