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Autor: E.M.
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RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

(Continued from last issue.)

As I have already mentioned, the battle against the forces of nature, the efforts to guard against them and the cost of safety installations are greatest where we have to deal with high mountain railways. The same applies to motor traffic over the alpine passes. I would, therefore, now like to give you an idea how and at what cost in effort and money some of these undertakings manage to keep open to traffic under the most adverse conditions.

The only normal gauge international main line in Switzerland which is not nationalised is the Berne-Lotschberg-Simplon Railway. It links Northern France and the Swiss capital with the Rhone Valley and Italy. Operating conditions are similar to those on the Gotthard Line. The Lotschberg is a typical alpine railway. It was built between 1906 and 1930 at the cost of about nine million pounds. The passenger who travels through this enchanting and often awe-inspiring mountain fastness hardly realises that an additional half million pounds were spent on special safety measures and constructions to protect the line against rock falls, avalanches and damage by mountain streams which in early summer when the snow and ice melt turn into raging torrents. There is, above Goppenstein at the northern exit of the main tunnel, a section of the line especially exposed to danger by avalanches. Its length is 443 metres, and the amount spent on constructional work was 650,000 francs, or 1470 francs per metre. Almost for the whole distance of 23 miles from the southern exit of the main tunnel of Brigue, the line is carried high up on the rocky walls of the Lonza and Rhone valleys, where avalanches are frequent. As a result, the train passes through a succession of avalanche galleries. I am almost certain that their number is a record for so short a distance. Curiously enough they hardly interfere with the magnificent view, as most of them are open towards the valleys. Many of these constructions all along this railway are models of their kind and often visited by interested experts from abroad.

(Concluded.)

“OUR FATHERLAND”

Your editors are often confronted with difficulty in publishing interesting articles; either news from home is stale, or when factual subject matters such as Trade, Statistics, Economics,

etc., are printed, many of our compatriots might find it “dry reading.”

After due consideration, it has been decided to give you a series of articles entitled “Our Fatherland.” We shall describe our cities and customs, our schools and castles, our magnificent alps and lakes; in fact anything typical of Switzerland. There is ample scope describing our lovely land of Peace and Prosperity and we hope that there will be something for every taste. And speaking of “taste,” we shall also give details of typical dishes from various parts of Switzerland.

“BERNE AND THE OBERLAND”

It seems fitting to commence our chapter with Switzerland’s Capital City and its splendid background the Oberland. Berne, the Capital of Switzerland and of a Canton extending from the French frontier to the crest of the Oberland range, is a city of many endearing charms. Quaint square towers, straight from an old-fashioned fairy book, stand astride its main street, flanked by deep arcades wherein are found fine shops. The old city is surrounded on three sides by the river Aar, flowing at the foot of steep, high banks and crossed by half a dozen high-level bridges, which are ornaments to their attractive surroundings. Everything is so neat and bright and spotless, as are the beautiful buildings, old and new.

The Baroque style arose in the time of the greatest glory of the town, in that aristocratic Berne whose gracious lords ruled the Republic with patriarchal despotism and whose vast territory resembled a proud realm. In the time of Louis XIV and Frederic the Great, Berne took over the vigour and movement of baroque architecture and the elaborate ornaments of the rococo style, yet combined the Gallic elegance of forms with its traditional comfortable solidity and honesty. Out of this arose that German-French character which belongs to the Berne of the seventeenth centuries. We owe to that time not only fine houses of noble families, as for instance the Frischinghaus, the Erlacherhof, the houses of the von Diessbachs and von Tscharners as well the houses of the guilds, but also the Kornhaus (granary), the church of the Holy Ghost, the Burgerspital, the Hotel de Musique and the Corps de Garde. Berne was rich and mighty.

Along the main streets are a series of handsome fountains, mostly built during the sixteenth century. The most famous, the “Kindlifresser,” shows a beast devouring a child while several other infants are held in readiness in his pockets. Owing to the fact that the ogre wears a Jew’s cap, it has been said that this fountain is a public reminder of the awful practices attributed to the Jews in the olden days. The other more likely story relates that so many children had fallen

into the town moat that this figure was built to frighten them away. Other picturesque fountains are the Zahringerbrunnen, showing a bear with its young; the Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen, showing "Justice" with an upright sword moving between Emperor, Sultan, Pope and Magistrate; the Dudelsackpfeifer, representing the free company of minstrels, full of exquisite details, like dancing children led by a fool, and the clever and wistful piper with his goose listening entranced at his feet.

At the lower end of the main street is the famous bear-pit, where the animals delight visitors with their quaint ways. Bears have always been associated with our Capital's history. It appears that centuries ago, Berchtold of Zahringen once organised a great chase in the town's neighbourhood, declaring that the town would be given the name of the first animal he should slay. As it was a bear, our capital was duly called Berne. Symbols, figures, paintings of bears are everywhere, one even sits eating grapes in the choir-stalls. The town became a free city in 1218.

A famous landmark of Berne always attracting visitors, is the Clock Tower. Watching carefully you see a rather unusual miniature pageantry: each time an hour strikes, a troupe of little bears go round in a little circle, a cock crows three times before, and once after the clock strikes. A sitting man with a staff in one hand and an hour-glass in the other counts the strokes by opening his mouth and smiting with his stick. Another wooden manikin rings two little bells when the hour is about to strike. In the belfry at the top of the Tower are the bells, and beside them stands a figure of the Duke of Zahringen in armour, who strikes the hours on the bells with a hammer.

A vigorous visitor may venture to climb the 250-odd steps up to the top of the beautiful Cathedral. The view of the city and the Jungfrau and Blumlisalp chains is magnificent. Neither should an inspection of the Rathaus, an impressive building in Gothic style, where the Great Council of the Canton of Berne meets, be missed. Berne's University is one of the largest in Switzerland, and has over 200 professors and lecturers. Founded in 1528, it now comprises seven faculties and lectures are held in the three Swiss languages as well as English.

The Federal Palace, with the houses of Parliament and Government Offices, are among the buildings a visitor should not overlook. The long imposing buildings are splendidly situated above the high banks of the river, affording a full view of the Bernese Alpine chains.

E.M.

(To be continued.)

JOHANN CASPAR LAVATER,

1741-1801

A SWISS CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

Johann Caspar Lavater, one of the most brilliant figures of Zurich's most brilliant age, the middle of the 18th century, was pastor of St. Peter's Church at Zurich. He was the author of the famous work on physiognomics and a most prolific writer in prose and verse. By his enormous popularity, both at home and abroad, he came to stand for all that was Swiss in his time.

Many of his contemporaries whose letters we still read today called him, with a smile: "A Swiss of the Swiss," thinking of the deep ties of affection which bound him to his family, his friends and his work. They were hardly aware of the higher, more truly patriotic sense in which Lavater was indeed a "Swiss of the Swiss."

After meeting Lavater for the first time, a prominent German wrote in his diary: "If only he were not so bound up with that provincial circle of his" . . . but he goes on: "And yet he has an understanding powerful enough to realise that everything there is is human."

Without realising it, the writer here gave a perfect description of Lavater in a few words. Deeply rooted as he was in his home, he yet had a mind which surmounted with ease all national, social and religious barriers.

By the time he was twenty, Lavater was already taking an active part in public affairs in Switzerland, but it was a particular act of courage which carried him to a leading position in the intellectual life of Europe. The peasant population of the canton of Zurich had been suffering deeply from the tyranny of their bailiff, Grebel, a notorious oppressor of the poor. By the vigour of his protest, Lavater induced the authorities to banish Grebel and compensate the peasants for his wrongdoings. True, Lavater had done no more by this than restore order to a small bailiwick in the canton of Zurich, a tiny spot unknown to the world at large, but the boldness of his humanitarianism, the stand he made against an extremely powerful government, acted as the spark which fired young minds all over Europe, then seething with the hatred of tyranny.

The clear connection thus established between a characteristically Swiss act of liberation and current European ideas of freedom made a profound impression, among others, on Goethe, then a youth of fifteen. His first ideas of the primacy of national feeling took their rise in his admiration of the Swiss hero. He was obsessed by the "Grebel case," and begged Lavater to write an account of it "after the manner of Plutarch."

National feeling stocked low enough among the governments of the eighteenth century, but