

Art treasures in Berne and Soleure

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ART TREASURES IN BERNE AND SOLEURE.

by HANS JENNY.

Berne is more homogeneously planned than any other town in Switzerland. In the ancient quarter along the banks of the River Aare, the houses have been arranged in long rows with continuous ground-floor arcades between parallel streets. The Bernese Minster is without any doubt the most important of all Late Gothic buildings in Switzerland (the spire was completed between 1889 and 1893). Noteworthy features of this Minster are the "Last Judgment," depicted with numerous figures on the portico, and the splendid stained-glass windows in the choir dating from the Late Gothic era; further the choir pews in early Renaissance style. Near the Station there is the Church of the Holy Ghost, the most beautiful Protestant baroque church in Switzerland. The first city fortifications included the well-known Zeitglocken Tower, which was originally the upper city gate, while the Käfig Tower belonged to the second outer city wall; both towers were subsequently altered. The bourgeois houses in the ancient parts of the town show a remarkable uniformity. Among the most important of these is the large Burgerspital (Citizens' Hospital) near the Station, the Tschanner House and the Cloister School near the Münsterplatz, besides the Erlacherhof, the Hôtel de Musique and the nearby Hauptwache, which all date from the 18th century. The dainty rococo façade of the former Library Gallery has recently been reconstructed as back wall to the fountain of the Thunplatz. Berne is also famous for its quaint old fountains. The National Federal and Parliamentary Building, beautifully situated overlooking the River Aare and the Bernese Alps, bears the hallmark of the New Renaissance era (particularly in the central structure); the Casino, the National Bank, the offices of Bernese electricity works and others are typical of the Bernese new baroque style, while the National Library, the modern portion of the University, the Lory Hospital and the Trades and Crafts School are outstanding examples of present-day architecture. In the Historical Museum the visitor will be surprised at the beauty of the private altar of Andreas III of Hungary, once in Königsfelden Monastery and dating from the 14th century (it was formerly considered to be among the booty taken in the Burgundian wars),

the handworked tapestries and the Oriental collection; in the Art Gallery Hodler's and other famous paintings await inspection.

The most important monuments of art in the Bernese Oberland are to be found in the neighbourhood of the lake of Thoune — at Thoune, Oberhofen, and Spiez with their medieval castles and the three Romanesque churches of Spiez (Castle Church), Einigen, and in particular, at Amsoldingen. There is an interesting old church at Meiringen whose Late Romanesque portions, once destroyed by floods, have been excavated and made accessible beneath the new church erected in 1684. After inspection of the valuable stained-glass windows in the choir of the former Knights of Jerusalem Cloister Church at Münchenbuchsee, which date from the 14th century, the rural Parish Church of Jegenstorf with its unique treasure of 43 stained-glass windows from the 14th to the 18th centuries should be visited. It used to be customary for official bodies and private persons to present stained-glass windows to Protestant churches and Council Halls, and many a church in the Cantons of Berne and Argovie still owns such windows from those times. (The Castle of Jegenstorf is open to the public). The following charming little towns are also well worth a visit: Erlach, on the shores of the Lake of Bienne, with its picturesque "Schlossgasse," Büren and Wangen, on the River Aare, and Wiedlisbach.

One of the most important castles in the Bernese country-side is that of Burgdorf, in the Emmental, situated above the town of the same name and with

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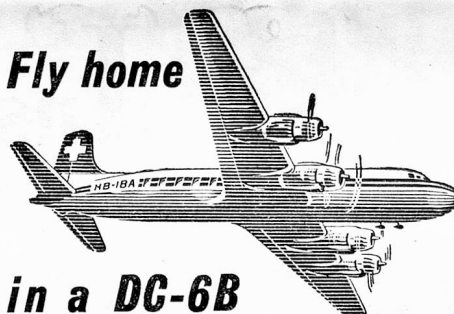
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partly preserved Romanesque structures. Around the village of Summiswald there are some very beautiful timbered farm-houses in the ancient style typical of the Bernese Oberland.

A very different aspect is offered by Soleure, once the residence of the French Ambassadors to the ancient Swiss Confederation. Considerable portions of the original town fortifications are still preserved (Ursenbastion). The main street runs from West to East towards the Ursen Cathedral, dating from the end of the 18th century and distinguished by its monumental façade and broad frontal stairway. (Costly collection of sacred vessels). Not far from here is the "Professors" or Jesuit Church, originating from early baroque times and perhaps even more interesting architecturally. The Council Hall contains a stairway where formerly the official receptions of the Mayors and Ambassadors were held. On both sides there are fine architectural features in Renaissance style and, in addition, a highly artistic spiral stair in a special turret staircase. Other striking buildings are the imposing arsenal (collection of weapons) and numerous patrician houses in the town and its immediate surroundings. Among these Castle Waldegg, built in the 17th century, is perhaps the most interesting. Outside the city walls, not far from the Protestant church with its fine façades, is the town museum with its "Soleure Madonna" by Hans Holbein the Younger.

In the direction of Olten we find Schönenwerd Abbey, Bechburg Castle near Oensingen and the romantic ruins at Alt- and Neu-Falkenstein.



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