

Zeitschrift: Die Schweiz = Suisse = Svizzera = Switzerland : offizielle Reisezeitschrift der Schweiz. Verkehrszentrale, der Schweizerischen Bundesbahnen, Privatbahnen ... [et al.]

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Verkehrszentrale

Band: - (1948)

Heft: 6

Artikel: Echoes of Berne

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-776309>

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ECHOES OF BERNE

The ban on foreign travel is to be lifted; the curtain rises once more and we peep out from our island home and wonder where we shall venture with our £ 35. For me the problem is solved; indeed it was already solved before I came home last year. As I stood at the window of the train that was to carry me back to England and watched the spires of Berne silhouetted against the moon as it rose behind the distant snow mountains, I knew that it was to Berne that I should return when the travel ban, announced a few days previously, would be repealed. Berne has not the "tourist" fame of Lucerne, Montreux or Lugano—to so many, and in fact to me, it has always been a stage on the journey to somewhere else. But in the few days I spent there last year I was completely captivated and now, much earlier than I had dared to hope, I am able to return.

Berne still stands as it was planned and laid out 750 years ago. Like all cities it has spread out into attractive suburbs but the heart of it remains a mediæval jewel—perhaps the best preserved relic of the Middle Ages in all Europe. It stands on a rocky peninsular formed by the River Aare across which are thrown five big bridges—the Kornhaus, Kirchenfeld, Lorraine, Nydeck and Railway bridges. The quaint, cobbled streets are flanked by arcades, called Lauben which are delightfully cool in summer and make an excellent protection against the rain and the winds of winter. The four main streets, Spitalgasse, Marktgasse, Kramgasse and Gerechtigkeitsgasse follow one another through the city, punctuated at intervals by the old city gates, such as the Käfigturm and the Zeitlockenturm. This last gateway is a most fascinating sight. As the clock strikes the hour the figure of an old man beats out the notes, a procession of bears—bears being the traditional emblem of Berne—marches solemnly by and a cock flaps its wings and crows three times. Needless to say, such a wonderful display gathers a crowd of young and old at all hours of the day.

Ten gaily painted fountains decorate the main streets of Berne; they

date from the sixteenth century and are really superb examples of renaissance art. They are mainly the work of the Trade Corporations and Guilds of the time and the figures are the emblems of these bodies.

On a terrace high above the river stands the Münster, the Cathedral of St. Vincent, with the old town clinging round it. It is a late gothic building with a remarkable porch decorated with hundreds of figures carved in gold.—The Rathaus, or Town Hall, is one of the city's treasures, with the magnificent covered staircase that decorates the front; and the Swiss are justifiably proud of their Parliament Buildings, the Bundeshaus, which, though of much later date, form an imposing group on a wide terrace above the river.

But it is not in the mediæval glories alone that the subtle, elusive charm of Berne lies—it is in something deeper, more ethereal, more undefinable; perhaps it is the melodious blending of greatly differing characteristics. In no capital in the world does money and position count for less and yet nowhere will more aristocratic names be found than among the old patrician families. The Bernese are famous for their characteristic caution, tenacity and perseverance, but with these rather dour qualities goes the gaiety of spirit that one finds in the lively open-air street markets where the peasants flock to sell their wares, and among the happy, hurrying crowds, burdened with rucksacks or skis, thronging the station on their way to a week-end in the mountains.

And it does not cost many francs to see some of the surroundings of Berne. Twenty minutes in the train will take us to the lovely old town of Thun with its deep-blue lake and a not-so-distant view of the Alps. And we could not resist a day-trip into the old world Emmental where one can see great cheeses actually being made and where, on Sundays, young men and maidens in national costume sing the old alpine songs and dance the gay, traditional dances.

Cicely Williams.

Die erste und die letzte Seite des Originals der Schweizerischen Bundesverfassung von 1848, die eine in der deutschen, die andere in der französischen Fassung.

Photo: Hagenbach.

La première et la dernière page de la Constitution fédérale de 1848, l'une en allemand, l'autre dans la version française. — The first and the last page of the Federal Constitution of 1848, the one in German and the other in French.

