

To the Arctic [the end]

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LETTER OF THE SWISS FOREIGN MINISTER
(Federal Councillor G. Motta.)

to the

"SWISS OBSERVER."

Bern, den 18. Nov. 1936.

Eidgenössisches Politisches
Departement.

Abteilung für Auswärtiges

Herrn A. Stauffer,

Redaktor des "Swiss Observer"

London.

Sehr geehrter Herr,

Wie wir durch die schweizerische Gesandtschaft in London erfahren, haben Sie im Kreise der Schweizerkolonie in England eine Sammlung zugunsten der schweizerischen Flüchtlinge aus Spanien veranstaltet, deren ausserordentlich schöner Erfolg Ihnen gestattet, dem Auslandsschweizersekretariat der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft in Bern einen Scheck im Betrage von Fr. 11.032.40 zu übermitteln.

Ihre hochherzige Initiative und das überaus warme Echo das dieselbe in der England Schweizerkolonie gefunden hat, verdient den aufrichtigen Dank der Bundesbehörden. Wir beglückwünschen Sie zum erfreulichen Ergebnis der veranstalteten Sammlung und versichern Sie, sowie alle Landsleute in England, die zu ihrem Erfolg beigetragen haben, unserer herzlichen Erkenntlichkeit.

Genehmigen Sie, sehr geehrter Herr, die Versicherung unserer vorzüglichsten Hochachtung.

EIDGENÖSSISCHES POLITISCHES DEPARTEMENT

sig. Motta.

TO THE ARCTIC.

By M. E.

(Continuation).

Helsinki is a strongly built town nearly all of Finnish granite substantial and solid. The Railway Station is a fine example of modern architecture but the finest of all are the Government Buildings which are magnificent. The city has several large squares.

We left Helsinki on the 7th July, at 9.30 a.m. and went on board the "Ariadne." We had a delightful crossing. It still amazes me to think where some people put away all the food they seem to be able to eat on these trips.

We found the officials very pleasant and were favourably impressed with Estonia.

The town of Reval has quite a few old buildings and a finely preserved town wall. The place looks clean and the people are friendly. I drove about the town in a Russian Trodski.

Parnu was our next stop. We had lunch there. It poured with rain all day, the roads were steeped in mud, and caused one or two very nasty skids. Estonia is very flat and monotonous country. We tried to cross the frontier at Moiskasaila but being Sunday it was closed, so we went to the next frontier. The roads were now just like swamps and we had to drive over what appeared to be a farm track to get to the frontier. When we arrived we discovered the reason why we had had to make a detour. The poor official was laid up with a bad leg, so he made the traffic go past his house — quite simple!

At last we got back to a better road, but Latvia is a land of shying horses. Later we got on an excellent road and arrived in Riga long before we ever dared hoped to reach it. We next had a stroll round what looked like a very decent town, and saw "H.M.S. Neptune" in port. She looked grand there, standing out against the sunset. The sailors on board were having a sing-song. It was very amusing to hear English songs in Riga. Still in the land of shying horses, we were lucky enough to drive through the whole country on market day, and although we seemed to meet every horse and cart in the place, got away without an accident.

We then crossed the Meilve frontier and reached Lithuania. The Latvian Official there had been in England for 28 years. He lost his passport when he had been torpedoed during the War and could not get out of England. To make things worse, Latvia left Russia during his absence and he found he was no longer a Russian.

The roads are flat for stretches of twenty miles on end, the scenery much like in Estonia except that you meet more shying horses and lots of storks who build their nests in the most impossible places. We saw some of them on the tops of telegraph poles. How we laughed to see

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It is very difficult for many of use to realise what hardships, poor lodgings, scanty food and clothing mean and how they humiliate many of our countrymen. It is true that a few have themselves to blame for their poverty, but for most of them it is the result of circumstances, which if known could not leave anyone unmoved.

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THE COMMITTEE.



one of those ridiculously large nests on those slender poles and the little baby storks looking out!

We were glad to get into Germany and find people who could understand us. Everyone was very nice at the Tilsit frontier, the customs people could not do enough for us when they realised we were English and not "Let's of Latts." We spent the night at Konigsberg. Next morning we tried to change £7. 0. 0. of Latvian money. Nobody would have it, not even the Latvian Consul showed any interest in it. The countryside in Germany looked lovely, well-kept and clean, but, Oh, when you got over the frontier into Poland what a change there was! We were shocked to discover within a distance of a few yards the whole aspect of the place change from a well cared for country with clean pleasant-looking people into a mass of dirty villages, begging surly and disagreeable people who looked as though they had never seen a bath, and the neglected and ill-kept roads were a disgrace. The drive to Warsaw was awful, and we had to run nearly all the time in second and third gear. At last we reached Warsaw and were lucky in being taken on to the Bristol Hotel in another car. Good things are expensive here. Both our rooms not very special ones either cost us £2. 0. 0. Food was just as expensive but we dared not go anywhere else because everything looked so dirty. The women in Warsaw, nearly all Jewish were very handsome and street-corner beauty parlours were a lively industry. We left Warsaw without any regret and drove over the most awful roads to Krakow. The potholes were terrible, the car shook until it made one's ribs ache. We travelled through the most dirty and wretched little towns I have ever seen full of Jews dressed in black, wearing long ringlets and beards. I have never seen anything so miserable in life. I felt I would rather have a Greek village to a Polish one any day. All this filth seemed out of place in the most wonderfully fertile country through which we were passing, where on all sides acres upon acres of wheat were ripening. On the roads were a succession of very derelict carts drawn by miserably thin horses. The scenery changed soon, becoming more hilly and the glimpses we got of it as we sped along was very attractive. Arrived at Krakow, we went to the Grand Hotel. The town was full of historical interest. Old buildings all helped to give it an air of distinction. The people were not very interesting. We witnessed a very old custom which they have kept up for years. Every hour a bugle is blown in memory of a brave soldier who was killed while warning the inhabitants of the approaching enemy.

To drive over Tartary on a fine day was a very enjoyable occupation but we were glad to turn our backs at last on Poland.

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We had a lovely run through Czechoslovakia; — one of the prettiest we have had! The women looked so charming in their national costumes. It was getting very late when we crossed into Hungary, but in the twilight it looked fine. All the men and women were in national costume; — the men wearing wide white bloomers. They made a very attractive picture. Hungary is one of the countries really worth a visit. It was dark when we got to Budapest, but the town was floodlit. We had dinner on the "terraces" of the "Hungaria." This was our first meal of the day. How we enjoyed it: — sitting there by the banks of the Danube and sipping Hungarian wine, listening to Hungarian music, which is the most dreadful fiddle-scraping I ever heard. The same few notes were played over and over again for about one hour and a half without a break.

Next day we visited Budapest. I feel sure it is the most beautiful city in the world; — just like a dream. We walked to the Palace to see the view of Budapest over the Danube. It was glorious, my brother and I were half dead with the heat, so we took an open taxi and drove around the town, a wonderful drive in which we came upon one beautiful thing after another. Then we went to Elizabeth Island in the middle of the Danube. This island is just an enormous garden with open-air restaurants. In the cool of the evening we walked along the banks of the Danube in front of the Cafés where all the people congregate. It was a real side-show. I have never seen so many well-dressed (chic) women in one place before! For dinner that evening we indulged in lots of "foie gras" which is excellent in Budapest.

We left on July 14th and drove towards Lake Balaton, one of Budapest's holiday resorts. The scenery became more beautiful at every mile. We crossed into Austria at 4 p.m., and stopped at a country inn for some refreshments, and when we left an Austrian lady gave me the most beautiful roses. The Austrians are really the most amiable of people. Here, there seem to be more smiles to the square yard than in any other country. We stopped the night at Leoben, and proceeded thence to Salzburg and Innsbruck. Being Sunday we saw quite a lot of Tyrolese costumes; — people either going to Church or to a "Fest." Innsbruck is still my favourite town. I visited the usual places and listened to the Yodlers in the evening. I noticed everywhere exactly the same people, the same shows as they had there two years ago. It is a pity that they always raise their prices for English visitors. It spoils all one's pleasure in the place.

After our long travels to all these distant lands we were glad to settle down at Interlaken for a few days, where in the most beautiful surroundings one always finds peace, comfort and happiness.

THE END.