

## IN THE HILLS OF THE BLACK FOREST.

BY "VASS."

A FORTNIGHT'S walking in the Black Forest was the scheme, but when Angus and I had decided on, and worked out the means and cost of getting to, Baden-Baden we felt we had done enough planning. It was strenuous planning, too, an affair of letter-writing, tearoom conferences, and tours of tourist agencies. Besides this I was engaged in de-odorising a certain quantity of decayed school German, in readiness for a brush with the natives, toughening my feet and making cross-country tramps. If a holiday is to be enjoyable there is a limit to preparation: our limit was in planning, and after Baden-Baden we would go just where the day inspired.

Even as far as our planning went it was inadequate for we had overlooked the fact that we would cross Belgium. We would need at least one meal in Belgium, and there was an exhibition in Brussels. We were able to attend to both with the help of a few words, smiles, and Belgian money, and caught the late afternoon train to Cologne. The stifling heat and the flat, monotonous landscape made the journey an ordeal until we came, in the cool of the evening, to the Ardennes, whose grassy slopes had that jaded look one sees in a Scottish mining district.

Then came the frontier, which meant an impressive howdy-do for all passengers. We had to queue up at the custom office and show all our money to an officer who entered the amounts in our passports. Then green uniformed customs officers searched the train. Into our compartment came a young officer with a zest for the business. He soon looked into the baggage and turned to reading matter. With the first newspaper came his first joy-whoop, "Verboten!" and the paper was whisked under his arm. With the others came "Verboten" crescendo until, in a lull, came the complaint of a Frenchman, saying that he had not read his

*In the Hills of the Black Forest.*

paper yet. That set off a wave of laughter in which the customs man joined too. When he saw my paper he produced a wistful "Nicht verboten" pianissimo! These political germ precautions induced such a friendliness in the compartment that we had to join a fellow-passenger in a beer. The beer was "Dortmünder Export Hell," but we drank it up although it was not yet quite cool.

At Cologne we had our first quick look at Germany. When we came out of the station we were confronted with a big board—Welcome to Cologne—it was a permanent erection, but we decided to overlook that! We were still accompanied by the fellow-passenger mentioned above, so we let him get quarters for the night. He did it quite simply. He handed his enormous case to a hotel porter who at once trotted away with us as retinue. After four or five repetitions, we had learned by heart the German version of the hotel motto "full up"—"alles besetzt"—but in the end we got into a venerable room. As we were travelling in the morning, we went out for a look-see, in spite of the late hour, and accustomed our eyes to the innumerable hooked crosses and brown storm troopers.

Next day found us on the last lap of the train journey, up the Rhine to Baden-Baden. The day was hot, dusty, and tiring, but we cheerfully stood, the better to see the Rhine gorge with its almost vertical vineyards and its ruined robber castles. Powerful tugs dragged their strings of long, deeply laden barges slowly but steadily upstream. Of these, most were German, while others were Dutch, French, and Swiss, the latter being smaller in build. On their hatches several carried groups of sun-bathing canoeists with their canoes and gear. Some even had their tents up. And up and down slid the white passenger steamers, adorned with ultra-German names like Vaterland, and Swastika flags galore. Above the Rhine gorge the country was as flat as a table, and we lost interest until we noticed wooded hill country rising abruptly from the level. It was the Black Forest; we were at our starting-point.

Soon after being dumped in Baden-Baden we got rooms and were on the point of sallying forth to view the expensive

scene when we heard an arresting sound. It was a penetrating, aggressive song, sung with a fierce precision in the rhythm of a bugle march. On looking out we saw a military-like column of young fellows stumping along stiffly in military-like uniform and big, black knee-boots. On their shoulders were not rifles, but spades whose blades glinted in the bright sun. Here Angus, with memories of the O.T.C., was moved to say, "Speak about spit and polish! Gosh, won't these fellows be mad when they have to stick their spades into the muck!" Presently we trailed up the street in the direction taken by the perspiring column, and looked at the shops. Every second shop, as in other towns, had a diamond-shaped badge on the window on which were the words "German business," and on a news-stall was a placard with "Selling to Jews not wanted." Baden was to be honoured with our patronage only for one night. All visitors, however, have to take a cure-card, which is a pass to the spa and other amenities. To make some use of ours, we wandered in our about-town flannels towards the spa with its well-dressed crowd, and presently heard the efforts of an orchestra. To hear that, we agreed, would give us a little for our financial contribution. We strolled in quite nonchalantly, selected good seats well in front, and just settled to enjoy the performance when the tune finished, the musicians packed up and the curtain went down.

Bright, and not too early next morning, we began our self-conducted tour. For this we had bought a truly remarkable walking map, across which straggle processions of blue diamonds, red diamonds, red-yellow diamonds, blue-red zeds, and so on, with a Hogmanay disregard for directness. These are paths marked by sign-plates with the corresponding signs. We picked an objective and noted the path sign: next we tackled a well-nourished policeman, showed him the map and asked where the path began. He told us in many words that it started from the "allée" he pointed to. We settled our packs and moved off in the direction indicated. No sign yet. Still no sign. And still no sign. Then we saw one, but it was not the right sign so



CARVED SIGNPOST—BLACK FOREST

*Chr. Franz*

we came to the conclusion that nothing short of Scotland Yard, helped by Holmes himself, could find that path, and we followed our more Aryan nose. There was a sufficiency of paths and tracks through the forest and we reckoned on hitting the right one by edging eastwards.

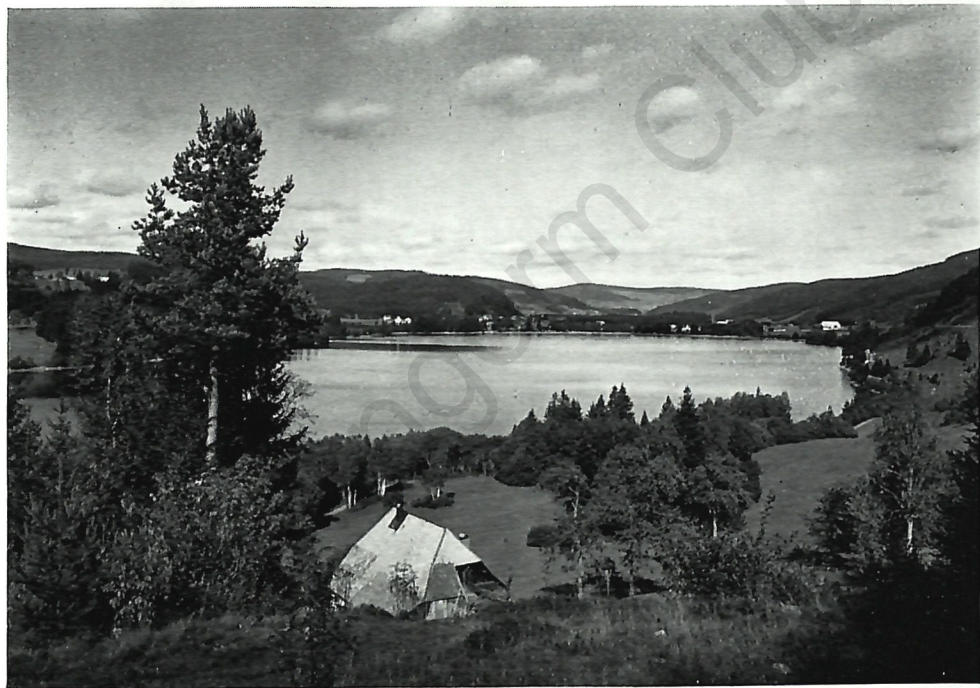
Contentedly we padded along in the coolness under the trees and sure enough came to a place where four or five paths met. There we found our sign and became lordly in our self-conceit. Lightly we went ahead, at first calling each other's attention to the adjective sign and then discussing various matters, including a notice forbidding smoking in the forest. Now we saw a steep ascent before us, and in the valley a village, and hence, by simple logic, an inn. No time was lost, and soon we were at a table under the trees. The hostess said in her dialect, "What will you booze?" answered the question herself, and came out and talked to us while we drank. At the second mug, to keep the conversation going, we asked the name of the village. Did we look foolish? At a bend in our marked path we must have gone straight on, for the village lay at a much inclined mile from our path. We laughed it off, saying that, as we had no plans, no harm was done. But we had to push hard to get somewhere to spend the night, and the going was uphill and strenuous for we had left the ridge way. It had been dark for some time when we got into a lonely hotel.

Next day, a little wiser, we walked a few miles along a motor road to a tiny lake flanked by the inevitable hotel. After a swim we picked out a village from the map as our night quarters, leaving no margin for "alles besetzt." That was how we planned—a half-day ahead, a day, on occasion two days. In this small village, at the head of a valley, even our untrained ears told us that we had moved into a new dialect. It was Bavarian. The previous one had been the one of Baden. As it was raining next morning we took the chance to try the first open-air swimming pool we had seen. It was built on the same lines as many we afterwards saw: across the middle stretched a wire rope about a foot above the water, and on one side it was one metre

deep and on the other three metres. No one was there besides the attendant, and we soon discovered why by jumping in. I do not remember who got out first, but there was certainly not much in it. We were not cheated of our swim; a sprint seven times round the pond in the rain gave me enough heat to swim across once.

With the cautious mood still on us, we went leisurely by roads and marked paths towards a town with the fine name of Freudenstadt (Joytown) to get another map for the middle part of the Black Forest. On the way we took lunch in a small inn in which was a party of Britishers. It was a conducted party under two German guides, a man and a woman. The first indication of the kind of party was given us when the male attendant shouted, "Hands up those who want soup!" We could not help overhearing bits of the conversation which showed us that their tour was arranged as strictly as a railway time-table. One young lady declared assertively that she intended to get drunk that night, so there must have been a little left to individual initiative.

Although Freudenstadt was a pleasant place, I preferred spending the night in a village, so Angus yielded and we went on, rain or no rain. Late at night we came to Lossburg, for me the typical Black Forest village. We looked it over in the morning as we shaved. Our inn, the "Oxen," looked on the village square. The name is as frequent as "Grand Hotel" in towns; other inn names almost as frequently met with are "Sun," "Eagle," "Lion," and "Horse." Three imposing piles of manure, strategically placed, graced the square. Across the square trailed the long, narrow Black Forest carts, each dwarfed by its massive ox. On the other side of the square was the village smithy, where a small boy had brought an ox for shoeing. The smith shunted the huge beast into a frame, like gymnasium parallel bars, and chained him fast. He then attached a tackle to one leg and cranked it up. Meanwhile the small boy was tap-tapping on the ox's horn with his stick with the apparent intention of preventing the ox of being too critical of Mr Barrett's story that the shoe fitted well and



TITISEE—BLACK FOREST

*Chr. Franz*

was also really smart. Yes, although on the edge of the Black Forest it was a typical village, surrounded by wooded hills, and with manure and timber as its business interests.

Leisurely walking took us by easy stages to Triberg, the centre of the third Black Forest industry, clock-making. The way there showed us the same scenery as we had become accustomed to—steep-sided, wooded hills, making the horizon always serrated and dark; deep valleys also largely wooded, unless the valley was large and covered with rich green grass, growing luxuriantly because of the artificial water runnels traversing the slopes; the farm-house with its overwhelming shingle roof and its byre on the ground floor. A young German with whom we walked for a day showed us how to walk in this country. When going uphill he plodded a shade less slowly than the tortoise, when on the level or going downhill he bundled along a shade less quickly than the hare. It was the same technique, he told us, as in the Alps. This fellow had the idea that formic acid was good for the blood, and occasionally he would plunge his arm to the elbow into an ant heap to bring it out just crawling with ants.

Triberg is also a spa, and again we had to pay the tax. Again we went to hear an orchestra, and again it packed up just after we sat down. But we went to the clock museum and saw enough clocks and enough kinds of clocks to make a leisurely holiday-maker get up early for a morning or two. At Triberg is the largest waterfall in Germany; you are told that incessantly in large print and small, but as we saw it, it had a struggle to beat Rouken Glen.

Rain suggested a rail journey, and Freiburg was decided on. Through the Black Forest section of the railway half the running time was in tunnels. When not in a tunnel the train was clawing along the top of precipitous slopes and we looked down on villages far below. But for the rain we might have missed this experience.

Freiburg was a lively town compared to the villages which we had visited, but after a day and a half we became restive and were moving whether the rainy weather cleared off or not. Titisee, the show lake of the Black Forest, was



our objective. It lay off our walking map, but we intended to rely on that for part of the way and on our noses for the remainder. We did most of it on our noses. The wayside calvaries were more common here, and villages had names like St Peter and St Margen, so we supposed we had come into a very Catholic district. The supposition seemed correct, for at the village where we spent the night was a monastery. In this village we heard another dialect, sharp and incisive as French, called Allemann. After hearing so many dialects, Angus philosophised, "It does not matter what kind of German you speak, they believe it." The country here was in the highest part of the Black Forest. The land was more cleared than elsewhere, and we now saw parts of the sky-line free from trees. Titisee, when we came to it, turned out to be quite small, in a setting like that of Loch Tay. The only buildings were a few private houses and a few hotels, and with luck we got into one of those: my suite was a bathroom, where I slept on a folding-bed which folded in unexpected places during the night. There was nothing to keep us here, and back we went to Freiburg as fast as our legs would take us, with a panoramic post card serving as map. We kept to the bottom of a deep, narrow valley, just wide enough for the burn, road, and railway, and a path for walkers, which gave us cool, soft going. At one point the valley became a narrow slot, with vertical rock walls: the railway burrowed in a tunnel, the road and the burn squeezed together, and the path became a platform suspended over tumbling waters and dark pools.

Freiburg again, then northwards a little by train. We were going to try a long march off the main paths, and in grilling heat we set out hopefully. The lie of the ground, as far as I could see from the difficult map, was like a many-pronged fork pointing eastwards, and our best route was up one prong and down another distant one. Angus, however, said that as we were going north there was no sense in going west: it was his turn to have his way, so north it was. We scrambled along through tangled undergrowth and battled up through bramble brakes. Almost worn out, we crawled to the top of a ridge to see another arduous descent and a

more arduous ascent ahead: we threw up and turned west. Right on the neck of the fork was a poor inn, where we were glad to rest and try to eat uneatable bread and fat bacon. Evening was come when we started again, and there was nothing for it but to go down to the valley we had left in the morning. We arrived at a small village to find that after about eight hours' walking we were nine kilometres from where we had started. Anyway, walking was what we had come for.

The miserable inn we reached provided a surprise. On most German beds is an enormous quilt as thick as the usual pillow, a suffocating cover which we invariably dumped on the floor. As usual, we heaved off the infliction. On turning to inspect the bed, we saw no more bedding than an under sheet. Fortunately, the innkeeper looked in just then and we asked him for blankets. His story, which he stuck to, was that the people in this district had heard of blankets, but they had not yet taken up the new-fangled innovation. Thus, for the first and only time, we had to sleep under this relic of the inquisition and felt lucky to be awake in the morning.

Next day we walked more humbly to the town planned as the previous day's destination. There, because of the long, forced marches and a damaged foot of mine, we called a halt to our walk and took the next train northwards. The journey down the Rhine took us to Rotterdam, from which we sailed for home.