

MY SISTER AND I IN EUROPE

By
MISS ELSIE GOLDSTEIN

ON July 1 of 1914, my sister and I set sail on a German vessel, *The Bremen*, from Hoboken, New Jersey. Our voyage over was unusually pleasant, the weather was ideal and the waters were tranquil during the trip of ten days. On the first day out at sea we sighted the *Vaterland* on its maiden journey, which since then has been dubbed by Uncle Sam, *The Leviathan*. July 14, we arrived at Bremen, one of Germany's largest commercial ports, and were duly impressed, upon landing, with the calm, unconcerned yet industrious manner in which the population in general conducted itself. The further our journey led us towards the interior the more impressive did the mechanical and systematized industrial thrift of the Germans become. Any American tourist might have been overwhelmed with the proficient exactness of the kaiserland.

But within a few weeks this apparent calm of Germany was unbelievably altered. War had been declared.

My sister and I were in Nürnberg, the quaintest of all German cities. It is known by everyone that Germany and kaiserism are synonymous with militarism. A military guard is maintained at every German depot and in front of all public buildings. Most of the German cities are enclosed by almost impregnable stone walls. These walls are "manned" by colossal towers where also a guard is maintained. War or no war, any movements antagonistic to Prussianism can be accurately observed from such positions. And so we continued inland. It was evident, in every way, that war had been anticipated or rather forced on the people by the German war-lord and his machinery, who controlled, clandestinely, the minutest affairs of a people, educated to despotism, and too subjugated to be aggressive enough to assert the right of personal freedom, which we Americans feel is the divine heritage of mankind.

Simultaneously with the heralding of the ultimatums, the mobilization of troops began. Overnight it seemed that like a huge snake, curled, poised, ready to spring at any moment at an unsuspecting prey, Germany, the cold, austere nation had disclosed its destructive fangs. The German world seemed in a turmoil. The food rations were immediately lessened and substitutes for wheat flour were ordered by the government. The menage of the citizenship was

terribly reduced. We, in America, who at one time complained because of the lesser quality of edibles and food stuffs cannot know what privations every belligerent country of Europe endured. Even the bread which formed the main diet of the middle and peasant classes was of the blackest and most unappetizing variety and limited in amount at that. Every housewife was compelled under threat of imprisonment to report weekly at the magistrate's office the supply of bread remaining, so that her next week's baking could be regulated accordingly.



Elsie
Goldstein

These were among our first observations of war, but after leaving Germany we toured Austria-Hungary and Switzerland. In the dual monarchy the state of affairs was not unlike that of Germany but in Switzerland every thing was normal but for the multitude of tourists crowding the neutral country on their way out of the mobilizing territory.

After two months of touring we returned to Germany and with much difficulty reached Budapest, the Hungarian capital. Our journey to that city was one of unpleasantness. It seemed that everywhere we were suspected of being French, English—in fact anything at all that might be opposed to the central powers. Most of the time we traveled under surveillance or with a military escort of two guards shouldering arms—at that time we were too confused and uneasy to have noticed other than the two rifles.

For one year we remained in Hungary. Miskolc was our destination. It was perhaps the most important and largest ammunition supply depot nearest the Russian battlefield. On the personal maps of the Russian soldiers, this city was heavily underscored, we afterward learned from Russian prisoners who surrendered en masse until the tide of the war turned. We must remember this was in 1914 and 1915, before America had entered the war. At all times we were prepared for any emergency and our trunks were always packed ready to be sent to Vienna at a moment's notice from one of the railway officials who promised to notify us upon the slightest disturbance or alarm of invasion by the troops.

In Germany we tourists could not but feel that a slight degree of envy was manifested for the Americans, but in Austria-Hungary sentiment towards America was one of deep respect and admiration even when rumors of American

antagonism were current. These could not help but admire the independent and self-certain carriage of our people, they said.

During our stay in Hungary we traveled and saw much of the country and its people. Our journey took us to the Tyrolian Alps—the Carpathian Mountains, Budapest, Pressburg, Vienna, Salzburg, the birthplace of Mozart, the prodigy of the piano-forte, and we visited countless other interesting points. It seemed that the nation was subdivided for a different class of population existed in the various sections, German, Magyar, Slavish, French, Italian, and even Russian being spoken in the border states, but the old aristocracy is of the native Magyar and Austrian, as of the Andrassy and Windisgratz ancestry who are descendant from the Hapsburg royal house which held sway until it succumbed in 1919 to the Czecho-Slavs who have over-run most of Hungary and separated Austria from the former monarchy.

During our prolonged visit in Europe we nursed the wounded in the St. Elizabeth base hospital in Miskolc, rolled thousands of cigarettes which were sent weekly to the soldiers in the trenches, made a round of visits every Thursday at the hospitals in Miskolc distributing home-made dainties, cigarettes, wine, and whatever necessities such as writing paper, stamps, handkerchiefs, reading matter and so on, that the sick soldiers had requested. Among them were many who spoke English limitedly, and they were eager to practice their knowledge of our language. To them the English seemed more an accomplished tongue than either French or German.

After having our passports signed by the consul-general of Austria Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, and Holland, we started on our return trip. At Mendheim on the border line between Germany and Holland our trunks were "gone through" by the customs officers or Zoll Revision, as it was called there. Everything was thoroughly searched and no printed matter was permitted to leave the country. A woman customs inspector examined the heels of our shoes, every stitch of clothing, our hair was loosened, undoubtedly to reveal any concealed information, even the bag of sweets which we carried was taken away for further inspection. There were many that day waiting to cross the border and so by the time our inspection was over we had barely time to make the last train at 11 o'clock that evening. Our purses were sealed by plasters and no personal effects could be opened until the Holland side had been reached.

We boarded the train and in about forty-five minutes we arrived across the boundary. My sister, Irene, had induced

a porter to remove a trunk and had left me in charge of the valises and other luggage. Just as the porter was about to return for these the train without so much as giving a warning whistle to the passengers dashed forward. I learned that I was on a "Sonderzug" or special military train which would make no further stops until a certain military depot was reached. It was already midnight and there was I without a cent of money, rather without a pfennig, unacquainted with the language of the country, without passport or any papers of identification. I rode on through half the night towards the interior of Germany.

At about four o'clock, near dawn, we made our first stop. I leaped to the ground and was met by two guards shouldering arms and a mob of curious Germans. I was already overcome with fright but this was unbearable. Just then the station master who spoke a bit of English explained to me that the officials had telegraphed from the depot where Irene was detained. The earliest train to return there was at eight o'clock the next morning. I was locked in the waiting room of the depot and there on a chair with my almost shattered nerves fell asleep, but was awakened at intervals by the footsteps of the two armed guards tramping back and forth in front of the door.

After that nothing could hold me in Germany and when Irene and I were once more together we were both quite ready without any urging, to leave Germany behind us. And so we made our way into Holland.

We embarked on the *Noordam* at Rotterdam, Netherlands. The voyage homeward was uneventful but for the change of our steamer course at various times because of the nearing of submarines, one whole day being spent approximately six miles off the English coast during an under-sea raid. A submarine was sighted by passengers on deck and fortunately for us the steamer was of Dutch ownership although two days before several German men above the military age and women were transferred from our vessel.

We landed in New York harbor, September 1, 1915, with exactly \$4.06 between us but happier than ever at sight of the Goddess of Liberty. We had started on our voyage supplied with funds which we thought would be more than sufficient but after visiting the consulates of so many countries and being charged exorbitant fees for the privilege of having our passes signed we were left almost without money.

Once more in the U. S. A., what else mattered? We had had enough after witnessing, for fourteen months, unspeakable human wretchedness wrought by the war.