

THE LEGEND OF BERCHTESGADEN

And How Two Pests Came to New Zealand From the Same Place

WHEN Charlemagne first made Austria, he did not know that many centuries later the country would inflict two pests upon far-away New Zealand.

The first, the chamois, has for years kept men busy culling to save the mountain plant life threatened by their multiplying ravages in the South Island. The second, by name Adolf, bids fair to be an even greater nuisance.

By a coincidence, Herr Hitler has built his alpine retreat in a place where previously only the chamois had ventured, and close to the mountain strongholds from which, for centuries before, the Habsburgs (who gave the chamois to New Zealand), and their Babenberg predecessors, held back all who threatened to take Austria from the Germans.

The Red-Headed Emperor

The Bavarian Alps are old in the time scale, well weathered and worn, well settled in the slow routine of sunshine, snow, and frost. Around their bases they have built forest glades, with peasants gardening good soil, and they raise their clear rock faces out of many pleasanter places than we in New Zealand can dream of, with our young, crumbling hills and moraine scarred valleys. The rock of Salzburg, in these magnificent Bavarian Alps, rises out of a green plain. It is cleft for the glen and lake of Berchtesgaden by a long defile breaking in from the open country outside. Over the defile frowns the mass of Untersberg, and among its limestone crags, once only accessible to the cragsman or the goat, looms the black mouth of a cavern.

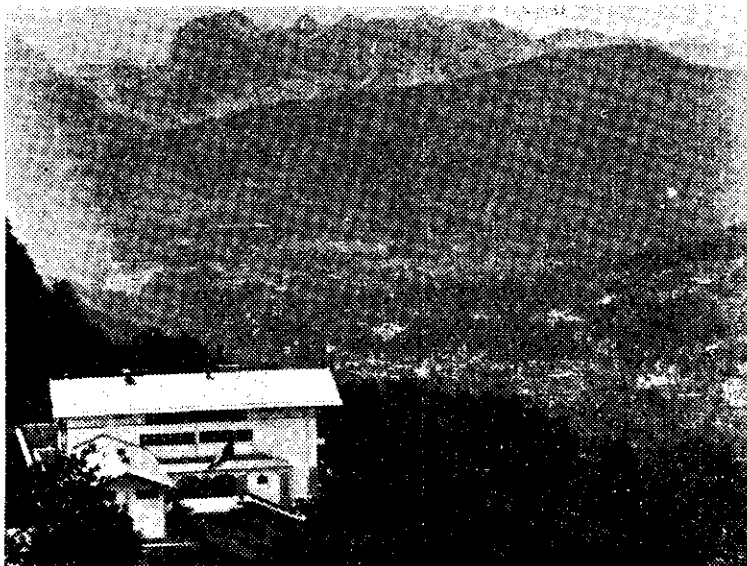
In this cavern, according to local legend, lies the red-headed Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, sleeping in enchanted sleep with all his knights, waiting the day when "ravens shall cease to hover round the peak, and pear trees blossom in the valley, to descend with his crusaders and bring back to Germany the golden age of peace and strength and unity."

Nora Waln, Quaker-author, who thus quotes from Lord Bryce's "Holy Roman Empire" in her "Reaching for the Stars" (Angus and Robertson, Sydney and London, 8/6, now re-issued), asked the burly Bavarians if they thought that the present occupant of Berchtesgaden was the blonde knight in brunette disguise. "Time will tell," they answered, and exchanged quick glances.

Hitler's Mountain Home

The master of Berchtesgaden may be following the legend or he may not. He has

certainly chosen a wonderful site for his mountain retreat. Blasted out of the solid rock, his home is huge, spacious, marbled, tiled, glassed, with a wide road leading up to it, and a funicular railway. When H. R. Knickerbocker, at the end of September, listed the overseas fortunes of prominent Nazis, the Propaganda Minister, Dr. Goebbels, waited until he thought Knickerbocker was on ship en route for his native U.S., and offered to pay ten per cent. of any sum Knickerbocker could prove had been sent



THE HIGHER IT GETS THE FUEHRER! : Berchtesgaden, where Hitler was wont to relax when European skies were sunnier. With the outlook now decidedly stormy, he forsakes the "Berghof" for his new and more impregnable eyrie on the neighbouring mountain-top

abroad by Nazi officials able to make money out of their jobs.

Knickerbocker was not at sea. He was back in Paris from Southampton, where he had been seeing his family off, and he was right on the spot to earn his commission. It has not been paid, but Knickerbocker started a fashion, and news-correspondents throughout Europe took up the tale of the "Cooks' perks" extracted from the German stew.

Cut from Solid Rock

Marvel of them all was Adolf Hitler's Berchtesgaden estate. It was cut at immense cost out of the solid rock of the Hohe Goell Mountain. Building materials had to be carried up from the valley, near the Fuehrer's country house at Obersalzburg. The eyrie itself is an expensive composition of timber, concrete, steel, and glass. The few foreigners who have seen it tell of the hall-like entrance cave, with marble walls, and of the lift to the summit of the mountain, lined with burnished copper, illuminated by massive bronze lamps.

Yet Hitler, once penurious, accepts no official salary for his job of work.

Back to Charlemagne

If he does notice the legend — and it is of the sort about which he weaves his dreams — Adolf Hitler goes back to the time of Charlemagne, when Ostmark was created as a military frontier for the protection of Bavaria. With Charlemagne dead, the frontier failed to hold the warring Magyars who came again and again out of the Hungarian plain to drive the Germans back over the mountains. They occupied the land until the tenth century, when Otto of Saxony, Otto II. and Henry III., pushed them back again, and again, and again. With spirit still unbroken, the Magyars each time countered until Leopold began the reign of the Babenburgs in Ostmark.

The Origin of Vienna

The Babenberg Margraves held what they conquered. Finally, they commanded the last spur of the alps before the Hungarian Plain. They built a great stronghold above the cliff of Leopoldsburg. It held the position and came to be known as Vindomina, or Vienna, or Wien, as the German has it.

It was Frederick Barbarossa, sitting tight in Leopoldsburg, who raised Austria to the dignity of a duchy and called the Ostmark (Eastern March) the Osterreich (Eastern Government).

Its capital developed as a place of music and poetry, a centre of civilisation instead of an outpost.

Mightier than the Sword

The Babenburgs all died, Ottocar of Bohemia held Osterreich for 26 years, and in the election for Emperor at that period a minor nobleman, considered safe, was successful.

But Rudolf Habsburg was unexpectedly and inconveniently ambitious. He founded a famous family, one to which Austrians still looked until two years ago for a lead in return to popular government, in spite of the absolutism of the Schusnigg regime.

The Habsburgs ruled by guile and avoided battle, made treaties by marriage rather than the threat of arms. Before Rudolf died, every secular electoral German prince, including the son of the defeated Ottocar, was one of his sons-in-law. What great military force had not achieved, Rudolf did with his plentiful daughters. From this achievement came the motto "Bella gerant alii; tu, felix Austria, nube" ("Let others wage war; you, happy Austria, marry").

It was his family which gave New Zealand one of our greatest pests, the chamois, which have multiplied to many thousands from the small herd presented by the Emperor Franz Josef, whose name was given to the great West Coast glacier, with the name of the Crown Prince Rudolf, for the ice flow immediately opposite, on the Eastern slopes of the Southern Alps.

So Austria was made, by strong men ruling in absolutism. And so Austria has been destroyed, by an absolute ruler, who retreats occasionally with his thoughts to commune, perhaps, with the dormant spirit of one of his great predecessors, among the rocks above Berchtesgaden.