

The Chameleon that is Alsace

By GORDON S. TROUP

ALSACE-LORRAINE might almost be characterised as the flint from which sparks have flown in the past to set fire to the tinder of Europe. What has been might be again. Situated between France and Germany, it occupies a key position. In the present delicate state of international affairs, this position is of outstanding interest and moment, and the account given by Mr. Gordon S. Troup in his talk will illuminate the psychology of its inhabitants and the geographical importance of the country. Mr. Troup, a son of the former Mayor of Wellington, was stationed in Paris for some time in a responsible position.

BY whatever way you approach it, Alsace gives the impression of a natural entity, self-contained and self-sufficient, with clearly-marked frontiers. Coming from Switzerland, you career down the mountain barriers; coming from Germany you cross the "heroic stream of the Rhine" which rushes deep and turbulent, and till recent times changed its bed with disconcerting suddenness; coming from any region of France you have to clamber over the Vosges Mountains which form a natural boundary on the west.

As we are to-night travelling on that most easy and rapid medium known as an ether wave direct from 3YA, we can soar over all these barriers easily, and take in the lie of the land in a bird's-eye view. It will be well if we put an atlas open in front of us, however, so as to pick out the main features we see, for that region has not yet got the name-plates printed on it large enough for the convenience of Radio Broadcast Limited tourists.

What we now see is a broad plain stretching due north from the edge of Switzerland, for a hundred miles, flanked by the Rhine on the right and the Vosges mountains ranging from foothills to 3000 feet on the left, and watered down the centre by the Ill, a tributary of the Rhine.

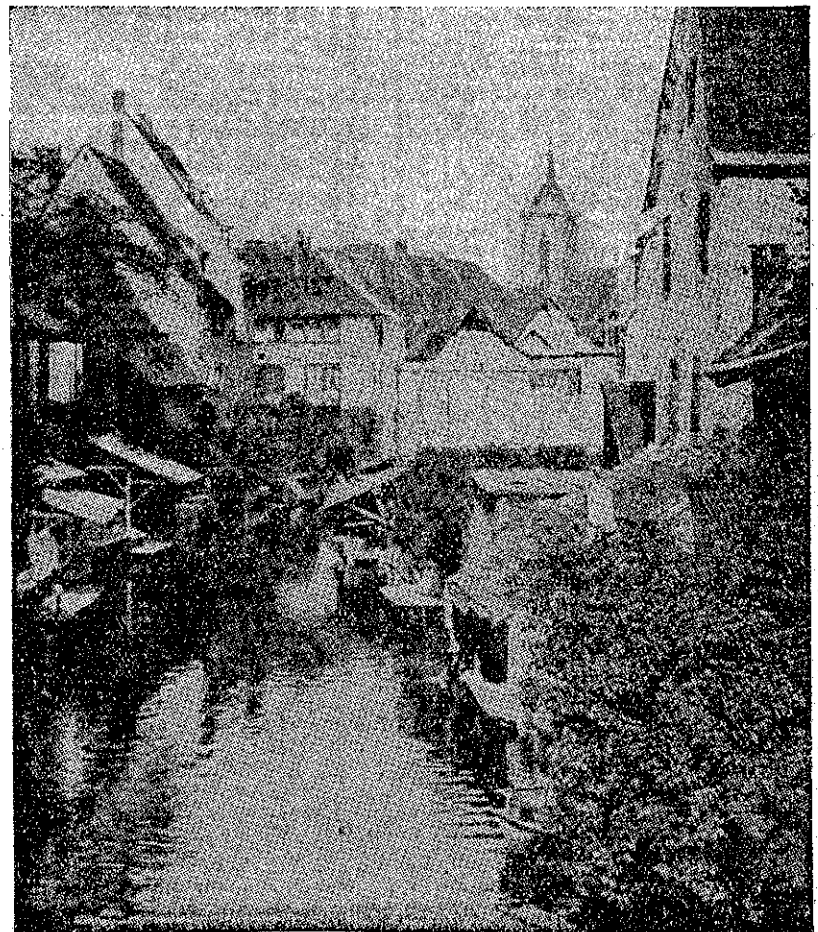
The plains and rolling hills are fertile; grain, grapes and hops keep the many mills, wine-presses and breweries working hard, and the mountain valleys are covered with forests, while the many streams supply abundant water-power. An abundant rainfall makes it good cow-country, though the winters are very severe; and altogether the first inspection of Alsace strengthens the first impression of a country able to live on itself and by itself, and accustomed to doing so.

WHEN we come nearer to earth, we get a glimpse of steep-roofed houses with wooden beams criss-crossed on their high gables, each having a strongly-marked individuality. If we could peep inside, we should see some wonderful rafters and furnishings in the central hall or "Stube," and the invariable porcelain stove on one side blinking at a grandfather clock opposite.

But from our airy viewpoint we shall have a better chance of seeing the stork's nest on the roof, and noticing how closely the houses group themselves together, in spite of their apparent independence. This is markedly different from the rest of France, where the houses are more

uniform, but, except in the towns, more widely scattered, as a rule. In Alsace you travel several miles without passing a house, then you meet a compact village, usually with a name ending in "-heim" or "-hause," meaning home, and thus keeping alive the old feudal practice of grouping the tenants round the lord or squire. Feudal days still live in the quaint streets, and architectural and artistic beauties of towns like Munster, Mulhouse and Colmar, but it is farther down the Ill River—or farther up on the map—that we find the queen of them all, Strasbourg.

President Poincare expresses his admiration for this city in these moving words: "A book is too short to describe her; a month is too short acquaintance with her; a lifetime is too (Concluded on page 8.)"



The old capital of Upper Alsace, Colmar, often called Little Venice, is a very characteristic Alsatian town, with irregular streets and painted timbered houses with high, sloping roofs. The Lanch and the branch of the Rhine, and the Rhine canal flow through it. Nearby are the Vosges. It is one of the towns in which many of the people are German-speaking.