

The Bernese Is A Loyal Dog Of The Swiss Alps

By MRS. L. EGG LEACH



Questa vom Sumiswald is an excellent specimen of the Bernese Mountain Dog. She is exceedingly fond of Children, as are all members of the breed

the small wagons, filled with baskets, to the market place, in Berne.

NEVERTHELESS, they were passed by unnoticed for many years. Their brave deeds were never brought to the notice of the public, at home or abroad. Still these dogs did their duty, year in and year out, often under the greatest hardships, and without the kindly and loving care that are bestowed on the St. Bernards by the monks at the Hospice.

HERE are four species of Swiss mountain dogs, or "Sennenhunde," as they are called in Switzerland. They are: the Appenzeller Sennenhunde from the Canton of Appenzell, the smallest of the four species; the Entlibucher Sennenhunde, from Entlibuch in the Canton of Lucerne; the Grosse Schweizer Sennenhunde—large Swiss—the largest, and the draught-dogs of Switzerland; and the Berner Sennenhunde, the only long-coated one, and the acknowledged aristocrat of them all.

All are tricolor, black, white, tan. But in this breed, the light tan markings are never encouraged — they can best be described as a rich, russet-brown.

At one time, there were many with whole white collars and fore-legs. But of late years, the fanciers have preferred more black, and the white is now confined to chest, feet, tip of tail, and in most cases, to a white stripe, or blaze up the foreface.

It is the Bernese, the long-coated species, which I have chosen for my subject. It may not seem quite fair to the fanciers of the other three species,

but it is the one with which I am most familiar, having always had the good fortune to have some in my near neighborhood, which I could watch and study individually.

I am not a fancier of this breed, but I have watched it closely, without taking any active part, for very many years, and my admiration has never waned. These mountain dogs, although a very old Swiss breed, do not share the world-wide fame of their near relatives, the St. Bernards, from the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard. In fact, until a few years before the great war, they even were not very well known in their own country, Switzerland. For a great many years, they seemed to have been quite forgotten. The old people in the Canton of Berne knew them well, but in time, they were seldom seen.

THE three other species were used to herd the cattle on the Alps. But the Bernese species, of which I am writing, belonged mostly to the basket weavers in and around the Canton of Berne. These dogs were used to draw

Their masters—the basket weavers — were reared in a hard school. Work and poverty was often their lot. They lived miles from anywhere, in some lonely mountain valley or hamlet, and their only recreation was the long tramp, beside their wagons, on market-day.

Theirs was no easy life, and the dogs shared it.

It was in the market place that the dogs were noticed. One man related he remembered his parents speaking about the dogs. Yet it was a long time before they were brought out of exile." No one really cared about them, and they were often crossed with all sorts of breeds, often choosing their own mates, until the time came when they were almost an extinct breed.

Then it was, in the year 1892, that this one man went in search of some good specimen.

I will mention no names, as there are many that may not be left out, and names would convey nothing to my readers. Suffice it to say, that, in a short time, others followed his good example, and a few good specimens were unearthed to try and build up a

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breed that had been sadly neglected.

Why such lovely dogs should have remained unnoticed for so long a time, no one seems to know. Some put this down to the craze for foreign breeds, especially British ones. Personally, I do not think this could make any difference. These dogs were simply passed by.

IT is all very mysterious when you consider the age of the breed. Some declare that the dog can be traced back as far as the Romans. Others say it originated from the dogs of Tibet. No one seemed to have seen their value in the past, as a pure-bred, national breed.

Let me relate how and when I first made the acquaintance of these Bernese dogs, many years ago, before they were brought to the notice of the public and before their club was formed. My interest in them at first was purely a sentimental one. I had only just arrived in Switzerland, where I have resided now for more than 30 years.

One day, I saw from afar, what I thought was a tricolor collie, harnessed to a small wagon, filled with milk-cans, taking the milk from house to house. I had read much about sled-dogs and had seen many photographs of them, but T had never seen a dog in harness before; above all, one of my lifelong favorites. It was too much for me. A dog was a companion and friend to me, not something to be used as a beast of burden.

I think I lost my head at the time. I forgot, for the moment that I was in a strange land, and that strange lands had strange customs, I had still much to learn. Not only was my interest awakened, but my indignation was aroused at such a sight. When the dog came nearer, I saw that it was a totally different breed. But to me it was a four-footed friend. I had never read nor heard of this breed before, and my interest soon developed into admiration.

The dog was well cared for, and his master seemed kind to him. Certainly the master did not deserve the bitter reproaches I gave him. I am thankful to this day

The Bernese does not make friends easily with strangers. Here is Ajax vom Bucheggberg, a dog that is very well known

that he could not understand the few words I could—or thought I could—speak of his language, for they were not compli-

mentary at all. I have since learned much about the draught-dogs, and am fully convinced that they are happier at work than when idle.

THE man told me later on that he was from the Canton of Berne, and his dog was a "Dürbächler," the name by which they were then known.

Since I have learned more about the breed, I now know that this was not a well-bred specimen. It was many years after that, before I saw a really good dog.

The Bernese species are seldom to be seen in harness now. They soon found favor with the richer classes, and are valued very much as housedogs and companions, especially where there are children.

They are passionately fond of children. It is no unusual sight to see them pulling along a wagon full of children, for the fun of the thing.

As I am writing, I can see one of my neighbor's Bernese dogs, pulling some children along the road in a sled.



He has no harness on. The children have attached a piece of rope to his collar, and he is rushing up and down the road, barking for all he is worth.

And one, belonging to another neighbor, I can see rolling in the snow with the children, letting them snowball him to their hearts' content. It is a pretty sight.

Love of children, faithfulness to their master and his family seem to be very strongly developed in this breed, there is no treachery in their nature. Their owners do not like to see them leading a lazy life. One authority on Swiss breeds once said of them, as well as of the St. Bernards: "they are trained when born."

One would really think there was some truth in this statement, for they love work of any sort.

THEY were used to hardships in the old days, and I do not think they will ever lose their working qualities. They can be trained to anything within reason.

Of the four species of the Swiss mountain Dog, the long-coated ones are the aristocrats





During the great war, they were trained, by the Red Cross, in Germany. One dog was sent from Switzerland to be trained for that work. The result was splendid, and proved their ability for such work, in time of war.

Within the last few years, they have made great strides, both in quality and quantity. I think I may say that some of the champions of to-day are as perfect as they can be bred.

I will now relate how the Bernese species of Swiss mountain dogs were brought to the fore, and saved from becoming an extinct breed.

It was not an easy task these Swiss patriots set themselves when they first tried to find some pure-bred specimens for the foundation of their breeding stock. Outside of the Canton of Berne, there were few, if any, that could answer this purpose.

The first was unearthed, as I mentioned before, in 1892, at a place called Dürbach, in the Canton of Berne. For many years they were called "Dürbächler" after this place.

Then other pioneers set to work, determined to save what was left. Soon more breeding stock was found, and the breeding of the pure-bred Dürbächler began in earnest.

IN 1907, a club was formed, called the Dürbächler Club. About a year later, on finding these dogs all over the Canton, the pioneers decided to change their name to "Bernese Sennenhunde," the name they are now known by. The old name was dropped, except in some cases where the owners are loathe to drop it altogether, and the club was renamed the Bernese Sennenhund Club. From then on, the breed never looked back. The pioneers worked hard to achieve what they had determined to do. Soon the dogs were to be seen all over the country,

Bernese puppies are adorable. They soon grow into excellent house dogs and splendid companions

and the number of exhibits at the Swiss shows increased from year to year. It took many years before the pioneers succeeded.

BUT they did not give in. And in the end, they had the satisfaction of having good results. Faults were rapidly bred out, and the public began to admire them. They were now an established national Swiss breed, of which the country is proud.

A year or two ago, they were mentioned in the doggy press in England. But the quarantine law of that country has, up to the present time, spoilt all efforts to get some imported into the British Isles.

The quarantine kennels are very expensive, and no one cares to take the plunge with a new breed.

Rea vom Durrbach is another outstanding specimen of the Bernese dog, a breed still natural and unfaked



I have been told that one or more have been exported to America, but I do not know to which part of that continent.

STILL I believe they have not yet been brought to the notice of the American public, neither have they been recognized by the American Kennel Club.

At the special shows, held for Swiss breeds from time to time, in Switzerland, some splendid specimens are to be seen. It is here the novice can learn much by watching the placings of the best dogs and bitches. Their judges are mostly very thorough with the Swiss breeds, and carefully overhaul the exhibits. A cow-hocked and badly balanced dog has no chance with them, and movement is one of their greatest "fads" if I may call it so. It is time well spent to watch them sorting out the weedy specimens.

Faking is not done, and this breed has not been ruined by too drastic inbreeding. Neither is there any question of changing their type to suit some whim, which has so often spelt disaster.

The Bernese dogs are still what nature meant them to be; unfaked, useful and good all around dogs. When well cared for, a dog anyone can be proud of.

If my readers will kindly look at the photographs of Ajax vom Buchegg-berg and Rea vom Diirrbach they will see one of the best braces in the country. Ajax is a well-known stud-dog, and in great demand for good bitches.

If they picture to themselves a well-balanced dog, standing from 25 to 27 inches at shoulder, bitches up to 25 inches; with jet black, silky, and slightly wavy coat of medium length; white markings on chest, feet, tip of tail, and on foreface; rich russet-brown markings distributed over muzzle, thighs, under body, and tail; with a brown spot over each eye, which may never be missing; dark brown eyes,

which seem to invite trust; ears V-shaped and set on high, hanging close to head; flat, broad, well-developed skull; medium stop and short, broad muzzle; level mouth; long bushy tail or brush, carried low, slight upward swirl permissible; compact, not

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too long body; straight, muscular fore-legs and well-developed stifles; and an all around sound, robust dog. They will have formed a picture of a really good specimen of the Bernese species of Swiss mountain dogs.

They are very active, alert dogs. Not boisterous in a rough way. Also not quarrelsome, unless attacked, and then they know how to take care of themselves. They are very hardy. An outside kennel, free from draughts; filled with good straw in winter; good, wholesome, doggy food; and a few minutes grooming daily are all they need to keep them in the pink of condition.

They are extremely faithful; a real one man's dog. They do not make friends with strangers. It is always hard for them to get used to a new home, and for that reason they should be bought young. Outside of their master's domains they have no interests; in fact, this trait has often been their undoing. To show what I mean, I will relate something which happened not so very long ago:

A neighbor bought one of these dogs as a puppy, and as the dog grew older, he tired of him for some reason unknown. He then sold the dog, when about 2 years old, to a good home, some miles away.

After a few days, the dog was to be seen, lying out in the road in front of his old home. He was returned to his new owner again and again. But he always returned. He never went inside his old home, because a rival of his own breed had taken his place.

He would follow the children to and from school, as he had done in the old days, but they were forbidden to encourage him. In despair, they took to chasing him away, even stoning him, but he stuck to his post in front of the gate. Neighbors fed him out of pity, but he ate scarcely enough to keep him alive, until one day, lying in front of his old home, he was run over and died in the arms of his old master.

The man told me that he would never forget that dying look. No reproach, only a

deep love and adoration for the only master he had ever acknowledged.

There is one of these dogs on each side of my house. We are friends, as far as they make friends, a friendly wag of their tails. Here our friendship ends. If I put out my hand to touch them, they walk away. I have never touched them since they were puppies, and they are old dogs now.

I think this is a lovely trait in any breed, and I have never noticed a bad one in these dogs.

The best recommendation for any breed is that of the non-fancier. We are all too apt to be blind to the faults of our favorite breeds, but not so with the faults of others. I only hope I have done these dogs the justice they deserve. I have tried to give you my opinion of the breed, and that opinion has never altered in all these years.

I am sure if some of the American citizens, who visit Switzerland, could see the best strains, the Bernese species of Swiss mountain dogs would soon take its place at the side of the St. Bernards in America. The dog well deserves it.

I would never advise anyone to buy haphazard. As in all breeds, there are good and bad strains. In the best strains the faults have been, for the most part, well bred out. Only two remain which give the breeders some trouble. They are: too gaily carried tails and curly coats. But in some strains, even this has disappeared. The coat must be wavy, but it should never curl.

Beside the Berner Sennenhund Club there is an Association for Swiss breeds, called the Zuchtverband. This Association guards the interests of all Swiss breeds and their breeders, helping them with breeding and other problems.

The Swiss breeders have also not been spoilt, and their prices are not fancy ones. I have never heard of a fancy price being charged for a Swiss breed yet,

I hope the time will come when the Bernese mountain clogs may be called "a coming breed" on the other side of the Atlantic.

The article presented
here is a recreation of

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- Please note -

Certain advertisements and other article text segments have been removed as they do not pertain to this article. Additionally, some minor adjustments in the original layout and formatting have been made.

This historical article is presented for educational purposes. We would like to thank the AKC for supporting the Sport of Pure-bred Dogs and the Bernese Mountain Dog fancy.