

Basle : Once a "Cinderella" - Now a town to be enjoyed

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BASLE.
Once a "Cinderella" —
Now a town to be enjoyed.

Not so long ago the average holiday-maker considered Basle to be something of a Cinderella among Swiss cities; indeed, there were those to whom it was no more than an enormous international junction where fortunately, since one had to change trains, everyone appeared able to speak English.

The Second World War changed all this; for some time after the war ended the only means of entry into Switzerland for the ordinary tourist was by Basle and one visitor, at least, will never forget the thrill of black cherry jam for breakfast at the station buffet, nor the generosity of the entirely unknown Basle business man who handed over his whole month's ration of sweet coupons with the words, "You are English — you need these more than I do."

Since then Basle has come into its own as a place to be explored and enjoyed and its treasures far exceed the expectations of most visitors.

In the Middle Ages Basle was already a place of international repute. The university, the oldest in Switzerland and one of the oldest in Europe, was founded in 1460, and in 1471 when the Basle merchant fairs were instituted much of the most exquisite medieval craftsmanship found its way to the city.

The Münsterplatz must be one of the loveliest squares in Europe — dominated by the red sandstone Münster with its glittering roof of coloured glass, flanked by the quiet, restrained façades of eighteenth-century buildings and shaded by wide-spreading chestnut trees. In the days when Paracelsus, Konrad Witz, Hans Holbein the Younger, and Erasmus lived and worked in Basle the city's history was unfolded in the arena of the Münsterplatz. Johannes Froben, one of the first master printers of Europe, lived near by and Thomas Platter, the famous humanist, had his school there.

Behind the Münster is the Pfalz, a terrace running high above the Rhine with views across the river extending to the Vosges and the Black Forest. Close by is the *Drei Königen* Hotel, famous as a hostelry since 1026; rulers, statesmen, and other world-famous figures have stayed — among them Napoleon and Dickens.

The market square for the past 200 years has succeeded the Münsterplatz as the centre of the city's life; brooding over it is the Town Hall, a most satisfying sandstone building whose walls are decorated with magnificent frescoes. Where the narrow streets of old Basle merge with the wide thoroughfares of the modern city stands the Spalentor — one of the very few surviving gates of the old city.

To-day Basle, while retaining much of its fifteenth-century charm and culture, ranks high among prosperous modern cities. The Swiss Industries Fair, the successor of the old merchant fairs, has been held at Basle every year in April since 1917. It was always one of the biggest events of its kind and was the only European trade fair which continued during the last war, since when its international status has greatly increased.

Basle, largely through the characteristic tenacity of the Swiss, has become in the course of time Europe's largest inland port. Ships of all nations load and unload in the harbour and the size of Switzerland's



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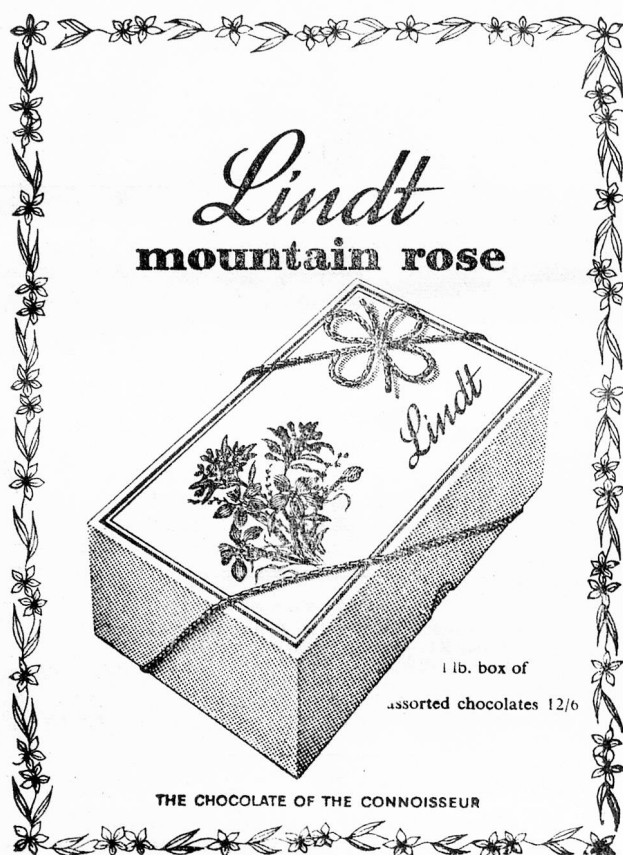
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merchant fleet can be judged by the number of boats passing up the Rhine flying the Swiss flag. Speaking of boats, no visitor should fail to take a trip on one of the little ferry boats which ply between Klein Basle and the landing-stage below the Münsterplatz. These tiny craft are propelled entirely by the current and travel, in mid-stream, at a remarkable speed.

The people of Basle are friendly and gay but where local rivalries are concerned they can become supremely conscious of their status as *Bâlois*. The greatest rival, needless to say, is the neighbouring city of Zürich.

No one, however, can really understand the true *stimmung* of Basle who has not witnessed the Fastnacht Carnival, which takes place at Shrovetide on the middle Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of February. The most important members of the carnival are the drummers and for weeks before Fastnacht the sound of drumming can be heard all over the city. The festivities continue for three days with balls, masquerades, and lantern processions over the Rhine bridges and around the town. And then, as suddenly as it began, the deafening revelry ceases and the *Bâlois* continue on their peaceful, prosperous ways for another year.

[The train and sea journey from London to Basle takes about 15 hours and costs £22 10s. (first return), or £15 2s. (second return). The air journey costs £37 16s. return, or £30 5s. (tourist return).]

The Times.

N.S.H. ANNUAL FILM SHOW.

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique organisers of the Annual Film Show could not have picked on a worse day. It was remarkable that anyone ventured out to Westminster to look at films on such a day. Yet the attendance must be called fair. It is true that a large proportion consisted of the younger strata of the Colony.

When welcoming the members and friends present, the President, Mr. Renz, had to inform us that the "high spot" of the advertised programme could not be shown — the film, "Sentés et roc", was still on its way. It appeared that someone at home had, to express it mildly, not given the matter of despatch the necessary attention.

However, the organisers did their best, and with the help of the National Tourist Office were able to fill the gap with a propaganda film about winter tourism in Switzerland. The film, "Passport", features Richard Dimbleby finding out just what one did in and around Grindelwald in winter — and what it costs. There is also a shot with Lord Montgomery as one of the visitors of long standing. Dick Dimbleby did cheat a bit; we would have enjoyed it immensely had he shown us skiing in action instead of merely talking about the sport with a film instructor. However, one cannot have everything! Let me add that "Passport" is an excellent bit of propaganda.

As usual in this annual event, "La vie du pays" brought us some interesting shots about happenings in Switzerland during the past year. For the young folk there were three short, rather fantastic, fantasias in colour: "Jack and the Beanstalk", "Mary's Little Lamb" and "Aladdin's Lamp".

J.H.B.

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