

It happened in the Canton of Baselland

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E A S T E R

What does Easter mean to the individual man, woman and child? We get as many answers as we ask people. Chocolate eggs and sweet bunny rabbits to the child, end of term to the schoolboy, a new Easter bonnet, an engagement perhaps, to the young girl, a busy bank holiday to the innkeeper, a rest to the hard working man and the end of spring-cleaning to the busy housewife. To the old, Easter is synonymous with spring and release from winter hardship. For the farmer and the gardener it signifies the re-awakening of nature.

How many are there, I wonder, for whom Easter still means the end of Lent and the realisation of eternal hope through the resurrection of Christ?

It is strange that the two most important festivals of the Christian Church, Christmas and Easter, should be shrouded in pagan customs. The message of the Gospel let Easter fall into early spring, a season which has since time immemorial stirred mankind as no other period of the year. Many are the rites and customs concerned with thanksgiving for getting through winter unscathed, burning or chasing away the demon winter, hailing the resurgence of nature, celebrating fertility.

The Easter festivities are derived from the Jewish Passover — still discernible in the French word "Pâques". The English "Easter" has its source in the Middle English "ester" and/or the Anglo-Saxon word "eastor". In Anglo-Saxon times "Eastre" was a goddess whose festivities were at the vernal equinox (20th March). In Lithuanian, "auszra" stands for dawn, and in Sanscrit, "usra" means a ray. There is also the Old German word "ôstrâ" meaning the light rising in the East, the bright light which has conquered darkness, which is probably the origin of "Ostern".

It is not only spring which has replaced winter and nature which is re-awakening. Through the miracle of Easter hope replaces death. Good Friday means death, and death is a sign that life has reached deadlock. But Easter proclaims an end to death and the deadlock in our lives. As the grave burst open and the earth trembled and Life followed Death — so Easter means in our daily life an end to distress and unhappiness, to worry and pain, hatred and mistrust. That is the true meaning of Easter, and with it we may enjoy to the full the advent of spring and all the good things it brings.

IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF BASELSTADT

In the 1830's there was trouble in the Canton of Basle. The Municipality would not agree to an adequate representation of the countryside in the Grand Council. The Diet intervened, and for two and a half years federal efforts of mediation continued painfully and fruitlessly. The country folks had many sympathisers in the liberal Cantons. They condemned the Basle people who demanded the old obedience, whilst the countryside insisted on its rights.

Yet in spite of the quarrels, the country people accepted the new draft constitution which became valid in 1831. But discontent in the "Landschaft" went on, and open rebellion started. Colonel Johannes Wieland was sent to occupy Liestal, but he returned the same evening, unsure and badly briefed. After the insurgents conquered the Reigoldswil valley in September the same year, federal troops moved in and disarmed the rebels. But the defiant country people would not be subjected. Further negotiations were fruitless, and Basle's position in the Diet became insecure. The intransigent Municipality deprived the Communes who had declared in favour of separation, of public administration rights. But the sanctions misfired, and the revolutionaries announced the formation of a Canton Basel-Landschaft. The town's military interference had no success. In September 1832, the Diet decided to acknowledge the separation of the Canton of Basle into two halves. Other Cantons took sides, and the position became worse. On 3rd August 1833, the Basle Municipal troops finally had to retreat, pursued by angry "Landschäftler". The Canton was then occupied by federal troops. The Basle people realised that the rest of the Confederation was against them and finally agreed to all the Diet's proposals. The last federal troops left in October 1833. Basle felt hurt, and its relationship with the Confederation was troubled for some time.

Since that time Basle has been divided into two Half-Cantons. When the centenary of the separation was held

in 1933, I remember the assurances country people gave that never would they unite again. In my own family, staunch "Baselbieter" all, there was great conviction, and had we youngsters ever declared in favour of "Wiedervereinigung", we would have been committing near treason! There were many in favour of a re-amalgamation, but nasty tongues had it that Basle wanted the communes of the neighbouring countryside in order to become a large town like her rival Zurich which had grown considerably by incorporating the neighbouring communes.

Nevertheless, efforts in the direction of merging were made, but they got delayed through the war. Re-amalgamation was decided in principle by the electorate, and on 28th November 1960, a constitutional council was formed which has to study ways and means of a new Canton Basle. Eight sub-committees have been working on special tasks, covering every aspect of the new constitution. The drafting committee has now been charged with the main job of working out details. Much will have to be done before the 150 council members are agreed and the electorate of the Cantons and later the Confederation have had their say. The men at work try to keep the best and most valuable heritage of both Half-Cantons. Both sides would gain, both would have to make sacrifices. The aim of creating a model Canton may not be fully realised, for when it comes to such questions as finance and taxes, it is possible that the final draft may deviate from an ideal creation.

At the moment, there is more opposition in the countryside than there is in town. There is a movement for the independent "Baselbiet", i.e. the countryside. There is a certain fear that a merger may result in a new state of dependence of the rural parts, though Baselland is today no longer an agrarian republic, but a modern industrial state. To try and make one whole Canton out of two such different parts has been likened to the useless

effort of trying to make a whole out of half an apple and half a pear.

The two Half-Cantons co-operate in many spheres. Early last year a proposal was accepted for a communal technical college at Muttentz near Basle. Baselland contributes to educational, cultural and other establishments and institutions in Basle which are used by "Land-schäftler". Liestal has its own "Gymnasium" now, its own grammar school, the last of the Swiss Cantons. The commune of Pratteln is building a secondary school at the cost of over seven million francs. Reinach has to have increased school accommodation as its inhabitants have grown from 3,500 in 1950 to 8,500, and its schoolchildren from barely 400 to 1,100. The cost of two new schools and the enlargement of an existing school building will amount to over 16.6 million francs.

The question of curbing the economic boom occupied the government of Baselland already as early as last April. On 24th January this year, when the cantonal parliament (Landrat) met for the first time in the renovated hall in the government building in Liestal, problems of dealing with the excessive boom, were brought up anew.

Thanks to the boom, building is in full swing. Road construction, too, is progressing. The project for a motorway tunnel through the Belchen has been accepted. The Confederation will carry 84% of the eighty million francs which it is estimated to cost. As the first town in North-West Switzerland, Liestal has introduced "blue zone" parking. Every motorist has been issued with a parking disc, and the system allows limited free parking.

Last summer, Birsfelden passed 1.2 million francs for a new cemetery, and at the same commune assembly plans for an ozonisation plant for drinking water were accepted; the headings in the "Basler Nachrichten" said laconically "New hall for the dead — purer water for the living".

The Birstal railway has to be renovated, and the cost will be shared by the Confederation, Baselstadt and Solothurn. The basic pay of the members of the Baselland government has been increased from Fr.33,700.— to Fr.40,000.—, to which a cost of living grant of 18% is added. Talking of figures, the budget for 1964 estimates a surplus of 1.9 million francs with a total income of 138.9 million francs.

Ten of the seventy-four communes of the "Baselbiet" elect their authorities according to the proportional system. The voters of Oberwil rejected an initiative proposing to introduce the proportional system for elections. Liestal, at a well-attended commune assembly in October, decided with 303 against 30 votes to change the part-time job of Commune President into that of a full-time position. Thus it has become the only commune in the Canton with a full-time President.

Last summer, the Roman theatre at Augst was the scene of successful open-air performances by students of Basle University. In the ruins of the Roman villa Munzach in Liestal, a serenade was performed. The villa is rich in mosaics and has been renovated by the archaeologist Theodor Struebin. Already five hundred seats are available. Incidentally, a working party of the youth music schools in the Canton of Baselland has been formed, aiming at promoting the study of music.

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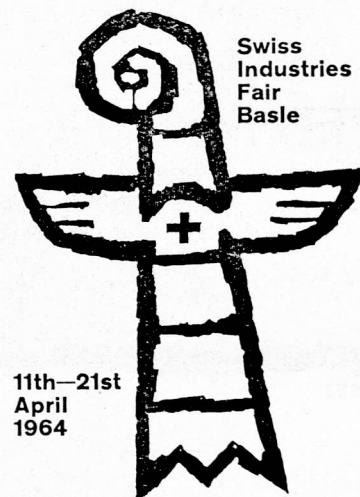
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