

Fribourg

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Compatriots who would like to read the National Festival Message delivered by the President of the Swiss Confederation may apply to our Embassies or Consulates.

Fribourg

The author

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There are few Cantons only which have such an attraction for those who have left its territory as has the Canton of Fribourg. For the expatriate and even for the one who cherishes not only good feelings for his homeland because its all too poor soil denied him a livelihood, his Canton remains a homeland dream, the rural community, the green pastures to which one retires from time to time in order to refresh the vague idealistic picture and at the same time to renew one's determination to find one's livelihood and one's environment elsewhere. Yet this is the Fribourgeois abroad who is always willing to join a federation of his compatriots. Many are the examples of Fribourgeois who have either grown wealthy in large industrial towns or who have remained modestly rewarded workers in manufacturing suburbs, and who would not for anything in the world have «their» Canton moved up to the ranks of the wealthier ones. They resent any growth in building even in a modest settlement as the town of Fribourg.

Not many Cantons can prove with such tenacity how deeply rooted is their attachment to folklore, even if this sometimes appears to be an escape from the future. The hereditary dialect, the regional costume, the folksong, preserved by enthusiastic experts, illustrate not only the abundance of traditions, but also the determination, rarely evident elsewhere to such an extent, to keep aloof from injurious influences of today. In this connexion one might easily use irony and hurt the Fribourgeois with it,

for in this he is a genuine Swiss and biting humour offends him deeply. In this trait one rather finds a certain fear. Not that the Fribourgeois is timid! The soldiers of the Canton have given proof of their courage on many European battlefields. And one knows of more than one in its history who might have been a Roland or a Knight Bayard, had there been an epic poet or patriotic narrator to witness their heroic deeds. No, the Fribourgeois is no coward, but he is aware by instinct of the vulnerability of his Canton. The chief city, which can hardly be called that and which nobody would think of calling by the magnificent title of «capital», is a town — and one of the most beautiful in Switzerland — but its radiation hardly extends to the whole Canton. Thus one may be the best of Fribourgeois and still stay aloof from this settlement by the House of Zaehringen. One look at the map is enough to make this congenial weakness quite obvious! Fribourg is a Canton of the Midlands and at the same time of the Lower Alps, neither isolated by its valleys, nor nestling on the shore of a lake. It is a territory of transit, but not of transit at all cost!

At first sight, there seems to be a lack of uniformity. The valley of the Veveyse inclines-almost perilously one might say — over the last hillsides of the Lavaux, and its inhabitants go down to Vevey both to

Two «armaillis» of whom the first is carrying his «demoiselle» (Photo Fleury)



Features

work and to shop. Nothing distinguishes the Fribourg valley of the Broye from that of Vaud, except possibly religion which has drawn a deep if invisible boundary. The land of Gruyère has its own history which ties it to the upper valley of the Simme and the Vaudois valley of Château-d'Œx, and the people there proudly claim that only bise and taxes come from Fribourg. The Wistenlach is orientated towards Neuchâtel, and the lake district (Seeland) with Morat is always ready to renew its old love for Berne. And finally, as regards the Sense region, it defends itself against the adjoining Bernese power by the depth of its religious and dialectic roots.

All these regions have not adhered to the same banner throughout the centuries of their history. In one, allegiance was still to the House of Savoy, whilst in another one marched already side by side with the alemannic Confederates.

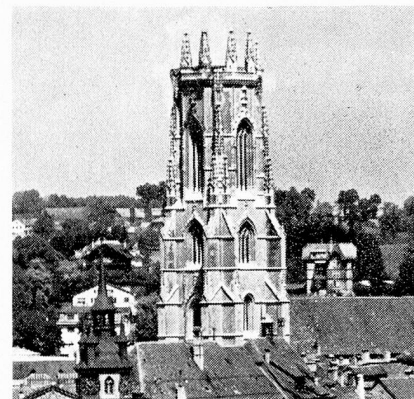
Thus it needed much willpower – political willpower – to unite this bunch of fine branches. In this respect, the Canton of Fribourg is an excellent likeness to Switzerland as a whole. This, too, is where the liveliness of federalistic feeling is to be found. In Fribourg, one knows, without knowing it as it were, that any centralisation, be it brutal or not, leads to rebellion, and that the freedom-loving hero of the Gruyère, Nicolas Chenaux, raises his fist against the symbol of cantonal supremacy outside the Castle of

Bulle. Remembrance, but also a warning!

Is it surprising therefore that part of Fribourg's energy went into politics in the course of centuries? The first «industry» of the Canton was to unite this jigsaw puzzle and to give it a common profile. Religion played a big part in this effort which up to a certain degree had been directed against the Reformation and had taken place in a double-sided game of hostility and alliance with the Bernese neighbour.

It is faith which has anchored deeply in the soul of the Fribourgeois the conviction of being different. It contributes to the fact that he retires into himself when markets outside collapse at which cloth weaver and tanner used to selling their wares of high quality. He fostered the agricultural community above all else – it was really flourishing – when the set-backs of the 19th century kept Fribourg on the fringe of industrial development. But equally he supported whole-heartedly the start of the great adventure of founding a university and created out of the martial and feudal city a refuge for culture with world-wide radiation, a fact which, incidentally, the Fribourg citizens have not realised properly themselves.

Once more it is faith with its «*aggiornamento*» which accompanies the evolution of a Canton that is at a disadvantage through the unwritten law in Switzerland that the rich becomes even richer



View of the Basilica Notre-Dame in Fribourg
(Photo Chiffelle)

and the poor grows relatively less poor. Finally, one wonders everywhere but in Fribourg itself why, in the middle of the 20th century, such a Canton can suddenly and passionately take sides with a theologian in distress. But this means forgetting that various philosophies are indeed hidden behind a theological conception. This is more easily recognisable when one hears that Fribourg notabilities worry about some economic development which, though modest in comparison with advancement elsewhere, is most vulnerable and requires careful attention and persistent tenacity.

One does not forget in Fribourg that the first so-called measures to dampen the boom of the 'sixties hit the young and still delicate tree extremely hard, and that the economic and social upheavals of today could equally put in peril the carefully and patiently built-up structure. As he is of rural origin, the Fribourgeois is used to thunderstorms which could dash to the ground the grain on the eve of the harvest, to hail which destroys the vines of the Wistenlach when the grapes are nearly ripe. He will not be discouraged by this, but he remembers all the Fribourgeois outside the Canton, whom better economic development at home might have kept back in order to work together for the common good.

F. Gross

A few figures

Surface area:	1669,9 km ²
Population:	180 300 inhabitants for 279 communes (39 695 in the town of Fribourg)
Denomination:	156 677 Roman Catholics 24 084 Protestants 1 548 other religions
Languages:	$\frac{2}{3}$ French, $\frac{1}{3}$ German
Agricultural estates:	8442
Tourism:	198 hotels (3400 beds)
Industrial undertakings:	240 (16 661 employees)
Limited companies:	2506
Net of roads:	3000 km
Total of engine-vehicles:	50 945