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Gruyères: a Living Museum

The cheese-maker in the traditional costume walking down the streets of Bulle is not an employee of the local tourist office, but a man from the mountains who is on some errands in the town. And the crane, magnificently represented on pots and spoons, is not only a nostalgic witness of the past when the Dukes of Ogoz ruled, but far more a mark of a country which is mirrored in its symbols. Popular art, says Denis Buchs, curator of the museum of La Gruyère, is the response to man's need for charms. The inclination to be creative and to enjoy festive events is another basic element of this kind of art. It is striking that the whole area which stretches around its two centers Bulle and Gruyères has stuck to tradition even in the minutest details although things have changed a lot in the course of time. The 600-year rule of the Dukes of Ogoz on the hill above Gruyères obviously created a spirit of deep regional self-awareness which pays homage to heroes, for example to Duke Michel, who was «crazed with love and encumbered with debts» (G-A Chevallaz in «La Suisse romande»), and, besides, the hereditary enemy of the prospering city of Fribourg (which will probably never be forgiven for having annexed La Gruyère to collect Duke Michel's debts).

The Symbols on the Chest

Owing to its economic stability, the mountainous part of La Gruyère has proved to be a dynamic and innovative element. It used to be the center of technical-agricultural innovation from 1750 through 1850 and is nowadays the mecca of popular arts, which include: rural architecture, furniture, carved tools, traditional costumes, leather pro-

ducts, singing, dancing, etc. The «marriage chest», which is a good specimen of La Gruyère furniture, reveals excellent craftsmanship and exemplifies the artist's thorough use of sentimental elements, for example: ornamental hearts, the goldfinch – symbol of faithfulness, the posy – symbol of fertility, the sloe – standing for providence, etc. «La poya», a representation of the ascent to alpine pastures, is one of those large-scale paintings that can be found on the outside of barns, and it evidences the permanence of tradition. Like their forefathers, the «farmer-artists» of today are no «Beaux-Arts» graduates; yet they know how to sketch cows, and, whether or not to order, create unique pictures.

The Quality of Wood

La Gruyère is also the mecca of singing. Just think of the songs «Ranz des vaches», or «Vieux Chalet», which was composed by Abbot Bovet in the 20th century. He succeeded in adapting traditional thought to the present so well that this song has gone all over the world, and is sung in many a foreign language. In La



The Castle of Gruyères (Photo Glasson)

Gruyère wood plays a major role as a means of expression. Not only is it used for the production of furniture and carved spoons, but it is the very material suited to the preferences of this region. Proof of this was recently supplied by an engineer from Le Pâquier who suggested the construction of a wooden, chalet-styled residential area right near of Gruyères. This project was fully supported by the people between Berne and Fribourg, as well as by the town council of Gruyères. And, as if to show the permanence of the traditional taste of this blessed country, the mighty city of Fribourg broke through its reserve by telling the engineer to erect beautiful buildings.

Robert Curtat

Holidays in Switzerland for Swiss children abroad

(summer 1984)

Who?

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad and Pro Juventute

Whom for?

- children of Swiss nationality
- children of other nationalities whose mother were originally Swiss

- age of participants: 7 to 15 years

Where?

- in Swiss families
- in holiday camps organized by us in different parts of Switzerland (from the age of 10)
- in Swiss children's homes (age 7 to 10)

What now?

Application forms and further information can be obtained from Swiss representations
Application deadline: end of March 1984