

"Our fatherland" [continued]

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OUR FATHERLAND

(Continuation)

BASEL: All of you have heard of the very reserved Basler, of whom it is said that he considers the best thing about his rival city of Zurich, is to take the afternoon train back to Basel! However, the annual industrial fair, established 37 years ago, has proved itself so popular to all Swiss that this isolation has now practically disappeared. Basel is a rich industrial town, very important to our Fatherland through the Rhine's shipping facilities; the great chemical factories which attained international fame (in particular due to the progress made in the aniline dye industry, the many pharmaceutical inventions and foremost the revolutionary D.D.T.); the large banking institutions; and last but not least, as the principal entry for the annual tourist army of nearly two million visitors.

Historically we remember Basel by the battle of St. Jacob in 1444, when a Swiss advance guard of 1500 soldiers fought against a French army of 20,000 under the Dauphin of France, killing more than half of the French, while all the Swiss fell on the battlefield. The French Prince was so impressed by the courage of his adversaries that he refused to advance any further. Instead he offered a treaty of friendship, which lasted until the time of the French Revolution. St. Jacob, you will recall, forms the text of our National Anthem.

After this period our Northern city became the seat of all the most learned scholars and artists of Europe. Celebrities such as the famous humanist Erasmus was one of the leading personalities. The work of such well-known painters as Hans Holbein and Konrad Witz were created at that time. And in 1501, as a protection against the powerful Austrians, Basel joined the Swiss Confederation.

In 1434, the University of Basel was founded by Pope Pius II, and he left posterity a description of the town as an enchanting place, but regretted that an earthquake in 1335 destroyed much of the old city, causing "great consternation throughout the civilised world." He described the churches as being built of red sandstone containing small wooden cubicles, so that the ladies of the aristocracy could attend Mass unseen and undisturbed. Most of the churches and many of the private houses were roofed with tiles of coloured

glass, which glittered in the sun (as you still can see at the Cathedral today). Furthermore, most of the roofs were steeply sloping and storks roosted in the gables raising their young unmolested, due to the superstition that it would bring bad luck to disturb them. The homes of the aristocracy were well built and luxurious with courtyards and fountains. They were warm and dry, and had windows of glass, a great rarity of that period. The people had outstanding moral qualities and an inner harmony, which welded them together in times of danger. They were decidedly not interested in foreigners and asked nothing more of life than their "freedom."—Thus you may wonder that the old Basler was so reserved!

We are fortunate to have a fine and interesting description of the city's famous carnival festivities written by M. D. Hottinger: "One day in January, at 11 o'clock in the morning, there comes floating down the Rhine on a raft a strange figure, the Wilder Mann, the savage from the woods, crowned and girdled with fresh greens and apples. Landing just by the Middle Bridge on the Klein-Basel side, he is welcomed by a lion and a griffin, and the three together perform a solemn dance in which gestures and steps are strictly prescribed. Then, accompanied by the drums, they march to the exact middle bridge and perform their dance once more, then retire to pass the day junketing in Kleinbasel. These strange figures are the insignia of the three guilds of Kleinbasel, which has always kept itself somewhat aloof from Grossbasel, and it must have been a charming sight when the great gate stood astride the bridge, to see the three dancing, their backs turned to the Lallenkonig, who stretched out his tongue at them."

"At the Grossbasel Carnival, groups are formed and costumes prepared in dead secret. These costumes are illusions to events and personalities of the day, and are by no means lenient in their satire. The leading personalities of Basel must, at Carnival time, be armed with a good sense of humour, for they will not be spared. Hardly a year passes without any fun being poked at the rival city of Zurich. There is an intimate hostility between the two towns, very funny at times, which finds unrestricted expression at Carnival. There are frequent processions during the day, but it is at night that the fun reaches its height. In the small hours, the lights in the centre of the town are turned out. Then from the streets and lanes which lead to the market place, group after group emerges to the sound of the drums and a mighty tattoo is beaten. Magnificent and huge painted lanterns are the only illumination, each group carrying its own, and the spectacle is really unique, for thus we can imagine a carnival in the long past times when the lanterns were not a sport, but a necessity. Then the crowds disperse to eat the succulent soup of roasted flour sacred to the morning of Carnival. Soon there are more processions, balls, and gaieties of all kinds, and as long as it lasts, anybody may say anything to anybody else. The utmost freedom of speech prevails and woe to the person who has offended his neighbour in the past year! Then when all is over, the costumes and the lanterns are put away, and serious work begins again."

Basel has some very fine modern buildings, such as the new public hospital, the largest in Switzerland. It also is a medical centre and the seat of the Swiss Academy of Medicine. Furthermore, there is a Tropical Institute, specialising in the study of tropical diseases as well as general conditions in tropical countries.

The Munster, built of red sandstone, is situated on the highest point in town, with a splendid view over the Rhine into Germany. It was seriously damaged by the earthquake in 1335, but was rebuilt in 1365. Near Munster lies the beautiful 15th Century Residence of the Bishops, which is inwardly, as well as outwardly, a gem of gothic architecture, and contains some very fine paneling. Also worthy of a visit is the Historical Museum, with one of Switzerland's most important art collections

as well as furniture belonging to Erasmus of Rotterdam. And to close the short chapter of Basel, we must reiterate the fame of the city throughout many centuries for its philosophers, painters and mathematicians, as well as its rich commercial traditions.

GASTRONOMY: Fish is well liked in Basel, especially the fine Rhine salmon, which is excellent smoked. The favourite way of cooking this salmon is to cut it in finger sized pieces after it has been scraped and cleaned. The slices should then be dried with a clean cloth, rubbed with salt and pepper, sprinkled lightly with flour, placed in a frying pan and browned with butter. When the meat of the fish begins to pull away from the bones, the slices should be carefully removed to a warm platter. More butter should be added to the pan, and one or two not too finely cut-up onions should then be browned in it. This butter should then be poured over the fish, followed by some broth which has been heated in the same pan in which the fish was cooked.

During Carnival the whole population eats "Gebrannte Mehlsuppe," made with burnt flour, and a pie made of onions, as well as small cheese cakes. "Basler Leckerli," a kind of ginger cookie, and the "Basel Pfamkuchen" are famous.

E.M.

A GOLDEN WEDDING CELEBRATION

It is with great pleasure we extend our hearty congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. E. Brauchli, Te Atatu Road, Henderson, who a few weeks ago celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. It is not often that we hear of compatriots out here attaining such distinction, and we feel that all those knowing Mr. and Mrs. Brauchli will join in wishing both every happiness. They have been members since 1941, shortly after their arrival from Melbourne, and when the Auckland Colony was socially more active than it is now, we always enjoyed their cheerful company.

We are glad to know that the couple are in good health, and we look forward to issuing another publication in this paper ten years hence, when we hope Mr. and Mrs. Brauchli will celebrate their Diamond Anniversary. Until then, all the best of luck and happy days.

COMMITTEE, S.B.S.

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