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Memories are History

After a function at the Swiss Club the other night, Hans Buess stayed at my place, and over breakfast we got talking, and that's what he told me:

"I grew up in the Tafeljura of rural Baselland. My parents were farming like most people in our small village. We owned seven acres of land, plus we were entitled to use sixteen ares (1 are = 100 sqm) of communal land as we were citizens and had a house with a stove ("Haus und Herd").

Until the beginning of the Second World War we had three cows and grew wheat, potatoes and vegetables for our own use. We also had many fruit trees, cherries, apples, pears and plums. We only sold the cherries; the rest was for our own use: We made also apple juice and cider, preserved fruit and dried a lot.

We grew our own wheat. When it was ripe, we cut it by scythe, and we tied an armful with a sheaf rope. You stand three sheaves upright and cover them with a fourth as a roof, so the rain will run off. Sometimes the wheat took a long time to dry, and sometimes it never quite got dry. We brought it home with a cart, drawn by one of our cows. We always used the same cow for the cart; if it was a heavy load, we'd use two cows.

At home we pulled the sheaves up to the second level over the barn. At ground level were the cows. Above them, on level one, was their hay. Above the hay, on level two, was the wheat. There the sheaves stayed till winter. Then we'd arrange for the thrashing machine to come round to our place. We'd lower the sheaves again and have our wheat thrashed. The grain would go into bags. We stored the bags of wheat two storeys up. The straw was used for the cows to lie on. The thrashing would take a whole day, and it was noisy and dusty.

Each month the miller came and brought us a bag of flour, and we gave him a bag of grain. Next month he'd come back with that bag of wheat ground, and we exchanged it for the next bag of wheat. Mother baked bread once a week, usually about 10 big loaves. The first couple of days the bread was wonderful, so crisp and fresh, you couldn't get enough of it. Towards the end of the week a loaf lasted much longer. Sometimes it tasted almost sour. The last bits ended up with the pigs; they didn't mind.

We also had hens for eggs and kept a pig, which gave us meat for the whole year; some was preserved, but most was pickled and smoked. What a delight it was to open the smoke chamber and cut a slice of bacon when we were hungry! Bread was always available, and fresh apples were in the cellar and dried fruit in a big chest in the attic. We did not have much money, but we never went hungry."

tb

(To be continued in the next issue of Helvetia)



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