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THE PORT OF BASLE.
Fiftieth Anniversary of Modern Development.

(This interesting article which appeared in the "Modern Transport", June 5th issue, is herewith reproduced by courtesy of the Editor.)

Basle, Switzerland's second largest city, is, through its unique geographical position, a European traffic centre for numerous international road, air and rail routes. The city is situated on both sides of the bend of the Rhine where the river turns north and France, Germany and Switzerland meet. It is here, at Three Countries Corner, that over the last 50 years a dock installation has been developed which now provides the most modern facilities for the transit of all commodities.

A Lapse and Revival.

Commercial navigation on the Rhine goes back well into the Middle Ages. Basle had already in those days become of some considerable importance owing to its extremely favourable traffic position. But until the nineteenth century more than 40 customs levies and tolls formed an artificial and expensive barrier to Rhine shipping. Some 120 years ago the first steamship to arrive at Basle heralded regular services for passengers and cargo. These were operated by two companies, "Service Général de Navigation" and "Adler des Oberrheins," but the railways, then developing, proved too great a competitor, and services ceased in the 1840's.

In contrast to navigation on the lower Rhine, the upper Rhine was left without any important traffic, although in 1868 shipping on the Rhine and its tributaries was freed for all nations from the payments of tolls and dues. The initiative of two Swiss engineers, Paul Speiser and Rudolf Gelpke, restored Basle as the upper terminus for Rhine navigation with the arrival in June, 1904, of a tug and several barges. In the same year, Gelpke founded the "Federation for Navigation on the Upper Rhine," which since then has been largely responsible for the improvements of the section between Strasbourg and Basle, the locks at Kembs, and the construction of the docks at Basle.

Increased Traffic

After completion of the locks and weir at Kembs, in 1932, traffic increased to considerable proportions, and in 1937 reached the high figure of 2.9 million tons or 34 per cent of Swiss foreign trade, as compared with 3,100 tons in 1905. The 1939-45 war interrupted traffic with Basle, when in 1944 the locks at Kembs, five miles below the port, were bombed. These locks are of considerable dimensions, the large one measuring 600 by 80 ft., and the smaller one 320 by 80 ft. The difference in level is 45 ft. In 1946 through traffic between Basle and Rotterdam, a distance of 580 miles, was resumed; a very active period of navigation under the Swiss flag then commenced.

Port of Basle

Today, the Basle Rhine Port comprises the following docks and quays:

Basin I, at Klein Hüningen, 1,550 ft. long, 200 to 320 ft. wide.

Basin II, at Klein Hüningen, 2,000 ft. long, 200 ft. wide. (This was completed in 1942).

Klybeck Quay, 3,000 ft. long; this carries the main pumping installations and storage tanks for liquid fuels, oil, etc.

St. Johann Quay, warehouse and silo. These are situated on the left bank of the river, near the centre of the town.

There are also two further quays above Basle, at Au and Birsfelden. With a combined length of 3,430 ft., they were completed in 1940 and are mainly used for the discharge of solid and liquid fuels.

Equipment available for cargo handling includes 33 cranes, one having a capacity of 18 tons, seven grain elevators, and 13 silos and warehouses with accommodation for 144,000 tons. All docks and quays are connected by rail to the Swiss Federal Railways system. There is a total of 38 miles of track and in 1953 there were 409,881 wagons handled. The road share in the handling of imports arriving at Basle has risen during the last few years to 19.3 per cent in 1953. Lorry traffic is chiefly concerned with grain, feeding stuffs and petrol, which come second in the list of imports. Coal, coke and briquettes are the main import through Basle. The tonnage handled in 1953 by the port was nearly four million.

Docks open to the Public.

The docks are open to the public and an interesting hour or so can be spent in observing the great variety of ships arriving at Basle. They range from the Swiss customs patrol boat and narrow canal barges, which are used on the Rhine-Rhone Canal (connected with Basle by the Canal de Huningue) to motorships of a capacity of 1,130 tons and a length of 265 ft. There are 22 tugs working on the Rhine under the Swiss flag, one of the finest being the 3,600-h.p. diesel vessel *Uri*. The total number of ships in the Swiss Rhine fleet was 378 in 1953. This figure did not include several units belonging to subsidiary companies outside Switzeralnd. There were 167 motorships and 47 motor tankers of which the *Piz Sol*, of 600 h.p. and a capacity of 1,000 tons, might be taken as a representative example.

In conclusion, a few words may be said about the passenger facilities now offered by regular services between Basle and Rotterdam. A fortnightly service by the cargo motorship *Bosco* carries a limited number of passengers at a downstream fare of 175 Sfr. and an upstream fare of 230 Sfr. Twice-weekly there is service by ships of the Nederlandse Stoomboot Rederij Akkermans travelling to Rotterdam in three daily stages and making the return trip in five days. This service also carries passengers for Strasbourg, a journey of 77 miles, which occupies six hours.

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