

Basle : the international city

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peine plus de soixante ans! Les chasseurs les attaquaient avec le primitif fusil qui se chargeait par la bouche et ne tirait qu'un coup; si la balle ne tuait pas immédiatement l'ours, le chasseur n'avait généralement pas le temps de recharger et c'était alors entre les griffes et les dents de la bête et le couteau de l'homme une lutte qui se terminait souvent par la défaite de celui-ci. Ces souvenirs sont encore vivants dans les vallons sauvages, vêtus de denses fourrés, coupés de couloirs où se brisent les avalanches de rocs, et dominés par les parois rocheuses d'où descendent les torrents. On imagine facilement la piste de l'ours sous la voûte des sapins rouges et des aroles. Son pas écrasait les mousses; sa démarche incroyablement souple, malgré sa lourdeur apparente, surprenait le gibier. Il se tapissait, pour guetter sa proie, dans le fouillis des pins rampants. Aujourd'hui, plus que la beauté de ces vallées et la grandeur des sommets proches, ce qui impressionne surtout dans cette région, c'est son caractère sauvage. Pour le visiteur qui vient de quitter l'Engadine aux riches villages, aux hôtels somptueux, quel étonnant contraste il y a entre ces lieux de villégiature réputés et leur vie brillante et la solitude du Parc national qui est retourné peu à peu à sa nature d'autrefois!

Si tant de grandes espèces d'animaux semblent avoir disparu sans retour, il en est d'autres qui ont repris maintenant possession d'un domaine qui leur appartenait aux siècles passés; le bouquetin dont la silhouette, le pelage couleur de pierriers et les hautes cornes arquées paraissent engendrés par la montagne même, et le cerf dont les hardes deviennent de plus en plus nombreuses. Avec les chamois et les chevreuils, les renards, les lièvres et les marmottes, et d'autres mammifères plus petits, ils peuplent le parc. Mais celui-ci n'est pas cette façon de jardin zoologique de haute montagne que d'aucuns imaginent, et l'accroissement de la faune, pendant ces derniers vingt-cinq ans, y a été limité par différentes conditions. Certaines espèces s'y sont multipliées assez rapidement, tandis que d'autres, comme le chevreuil, après avoir vu leur nombre augmenter dans une assez forte proportion, ont été décimées par des hivers trop rudes, des chutes de neige trop abondantes. Pour la flore comme pour la faune et leurs transformations graduelles, un seul facteur joue désormais: la nature, sans aucune intervention de l'homme.

Pour que cette action régulatrice de la nature puisse s'exercer pleinement et dans les meilleures conditions possibles, la commission fédérale du Parc national, que préside M. Petitmermet, a demandé un agrandissement de la réserve, rectification de ses frontières qui permettra de mieux protéger le gibier, ainsi que l'interdiction de la chasse dans certains districts limitrophes. L'œuvre réalisée il y a vingt-cinq ans par les initiateurs du Parc et les améliorations obtenues depuis, seraient ainsi mieux assurées.

(Tribune de Genève.)

BASLE: THE INTERNATIONAL CITY.

(*"The Queen,"* 20.12.39.)

Basle has a most magnificent railway station, and rightly so, because Basle might well be described as the Clapham Junction of Europe. It is actually situated in the centre of Europe, at the bend of the Rhine. It is the meeting place of three countries — Switzerland, Germany and France — although the town is mostly in Switzerland.

The German railway station to the north of the town is on German territory, while the French frontier to the west and south of Basle only encroaches upon it at the French-Swiss railway station. This is in both France and Switzerland, and is partly on French and partly on Swiss territory.

Basle is much in the news of late, as the French now face the Germans across the Rhine at this point, and it marks the terminal of the Maginot and Siegfried Lines.

The Swiss can regard their city as being the grandstand seats of the war, and although they earnestly hope that it will not become a very active front, they have taken precautions for their own security.

It seems hardly likely that the Germans will attempt any invasion of Switzerland, although it has often been mooted. It would be a highly dangerous and precarious undertaking, as the Swiss have natural protections, by reason of the geography of the country.

The Swiss are extraordinarily fine marksmen, and the type of warfare that would take place, should such a thing happen, would be of a very different nature from that in the fields of France.

I like Basle. I like the quaint little streets. I like its spirit of modernity in a distinctly ancient city, in which the Gothic spirit of the fifteenth century is still in evidence and where the refinement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is more than visible.

Basle is a very important place in many ways. It is certainly the banking centre of Switzerland and ranks high as a trading centre.

You may not appreciate this point, but it is possible to sail from London to Basle, since the Rhine is navigable all that way.

People are inclined to forget the city's historical associations. The very name Basle is applied both to the city and the Canton. Basle, the city, existed as a Roman fortified post, after an imperial visit there in 374 — so that is going back a long time. It then became a bishopric, and in the beginning of the tenth century, when the Emperor Henry I rebuilt the town, it assumed considerable importance. After 1032 it formed part of the German Empire, and that may be why it seems to come into the news again when we hear threats from the Nazis.

The City of Basle was relatively much more important in the Middle Ages than it is now, although in proportion to its population, it is one of the wealthiest in Switzerland.

It is interesting to note, however, that a Treaty was concluded there between the French Republic, Prussia and Spain on April 1st and June 22nd, 1795. So much for the historical side.

From a visitor's point of view, they will find the people of Basle quiet, sedate and serious-looking, as are the Swiss in general; in fact, the whole town has the sedate atmosphere of Switzerland, so different from the appearance of a French town, or even a German

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one, though German is the language of road signs and conversation.

There are a number of modern shops in the main streets, displaying the latest fashions and the latest types of electrical and mechanical appliances.

A great centre of attraction is the River Rhine. Crowds walk over the bridges on Sundays and watch the steamers going up and down. The buildings along the banks on either side are picturesque and the whole scene has a peculiar charm of its own. What always fascinates me is to see the brown-skinned boys jumping into this fast-moving river, and swimming at a speed which must approximate, with the help of the tide, ten to fifteen miles an hour. It takes a mighty strong swimmer to swim against the current of the Rhine at this point.

No less important than the railway station is the airport, from which it is possible to fly almost anywhere. There is a direct service to London — or there was, before the war — a straight run through without a halt, to Croydon. Paris, Lausanne, Geneva, Zurich, Frankfurt, Berlin, Amsterdam are all in direct communication with Basle.

It is a small airport — in fact, it is too small, to tell you the truth, but it is just about as busy as any in Europe.

An hotel known as Les Trois Rois seemed to be a haunt of royalty at one time or another, and the visitors' book is really worth looking at. It is a very delightful hotel, with a restaurant overlooking the Rhine, and believe me, to sit there on a lovely summer evening, listening to good music and drinking a good Rhine wine, is as pleasant an experience as I know, but if you have a more plebeian taste, I can recommend the beer, which is excellent. All through the town you will find taverns — I call them "taverns" for want of a better name — where a good, lively band plays without a break all the evening, and you drink your beer out of big earthenware mugs and the whole atmosphere is very cheerful.

Basle is a very pleasant town to visit.

BRITISH EQUIPMENT FOR SWISS STUDIOS.

Proposals inaugurated nearly two years ago for the establishment of a Swiss film production industry have received an impetus by reason of Switzerland's relative immunity from international complications, and work is being commenced on an ambitious studio project at Berne.

Known as Betofia (Berner Tonfilmatelier), the studios owe some of their features of design to British studios, and will be equipped under the close supervision of W. Vinten, Ltd. The well-conceived layout shows three separate blocks of buildings, the first and largest comprising the studios proper with all ancillary production departments; the second, the cutting and re-recording departments; and the third, the small but well-equipped laboratory.

Along the main road is a building which houses dressing-rooms and administration offices. Provision is made for the handling of crowds, to whose six dressing-rooms and canteen a staircase leads down directly from the main vestibule. Corridors from this vestibule lead to the wardrobe and make-up departments, to the right to the dressing-rooms for small-part players and the restaurant, and to the left to the

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administration and technical departments. On the top floor are 18 stars' dressing-rooms.

The studios comprise four stages of the following dimensions :—

Stage A, 140 by 72 ft. ; stage B, 72 by 56 ft. ; stage C, 110 by 72 ft. ; stage D, 72 by 56 ft.

The stages are built in two blocks, while between each pair of studios is a lamp-room acoustically isolated. The studios are of steel construction, with brick outside walls and isolated by means of inner walls of sound-proof material. The electric power distribution will be from bridges under the trusses, which also carry rails for travelling cranes between the bridges. The system of suspension of lighting bridges will be the same as at Billancourt, Denham and Pinewood. There will also be a remote controlled switching system, and the equipment will be installed between ceiling and roof. The power supply will total 12,000 amps. D.C. ; it is not yet decided if it is to be two- or three-wire system. Each stage includes a tank.

The power-house, between the two studio blocks, is completely underground. A very large concrete block, with cork isolation, serves as foundation for the motor-generators, each of which will also have its individual damping. The switchboard will be on a gallery 10 ft. above the floor level of the power-house.

The boiler-house adjoining the power-house is also underground. The fans and filters, as well as radiators for heating and cooling the stages, are independent units for each stage, installed on the roofs of the lamp stores.

Behind the stages are large stores and workshops, separated by covered ways along which motor-trucks can enter the stages through the lamp stores, the doors of which will serve as temperature locks, to prevent cold air entering the stages.

The rearmost building houses the main workshops, which will be equipped for the manufacture of all woodwork, furniture and some of the illuminating equipment. No provision is yet made for scene docks, garages, etc., which will be placed where experience shows them to be most convenient.

In the second block of buildings housing the sound departments, the greater part of the area is occupied by a scoring stage, the dimensions and construction of which have been based upon American research. A single monitoring room overlooks both this and a projection theatre, and above it is the projection room.

Eight rooms are provided for the sound department, and also two garages for sound trucks. The