

Cultural survey

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CULTURAL SURVEY.

By HANS EHINGER.

Four weeks ago we dealt with a couple of cultural questions affecting Zurich — to-day, it is Basle's turn to be in the limelight. For it is not only in the largest, but also in the second largest town of Switzerland that a number of interesting cultural events are taking place. For example: for a short time past, Basle has been in the possession of a new museum, which, even if it is not quite independent, nevertheless constitutes a highly significant event. The "Cherry Garden" which lies in the immediate vicinity of the neo-Gothic Church of St. Elisabeth, is henceforth to serve as an annex to the Historical Museum which is housed in the former Franciscan Church, and which is suffering from lack of space. The "Cherry Garden" is not going to be used merely for storing away things for which there is no room in the principal building. In view of the fact that the "Cherry Garden" is itself a fine cultural monument, it has been decided to use its spacious rooms for a display of 18th Century living conditions among the cultured citizens of Basle. Its salons and rooms are to be furnished with valuable examples of furniture belonging to the periods of Louis XVth and Louis XVIth, which fit in perfectly with the noble proportions of the house, which belongs to the period in question. It is not, however, typical of the other Basle private houses of the period, but forms somewhat of an exception to the rule. A dark shadow lies over its origin, for this lovely house, which was built for the merchant Johann Rudolf Burekhardt by the architect Johann Ulrich Büchel, was never lived in by its owner, nor did he ever see it in its completed state. Difficulties of a private and political nature forced Burekhardt, when still a young man, to leave his home-town. And yet he rendered it a signal service by building this proud mansion, as is fully recognised nowadays.

Quite apart from its architectural advantages, there are others as well, as for instance its very favourable situation, for it can be reached in a few minutes from the centre of the town on the one side and from the Main Railway Station, on the other. It cannot be denied that Basle is most inconvenient viewed from the standpoint of modern traffic, but for that how convenient it is to find most of the cultural establishments within a stone's throw of each other. The theatre, the Casino — where most of the Concerts take place — the Art Gallery, the Art Museum and the various other museums are all situated within a few hundred metres of each other — and that, of course, is an enormous advantage. Nevertheless, there is no lack in problems to be solved, and this must be done very carefully in order not to disturb this delightful compactness. And even if it has proved possible to lift some of the burden of the theatre, through the creation of a repertory company at the "Comedy", it has now been found that this building does not meet long term requirements. The work of reconstruction started upon the interior of the building never got beyond the first stage, because, suddenly, the question was brought up as to whether the easiest solution of the problem would not be to build a new theatre. The interesting plan of a theatre, built so that the auditorium could revolve, has never yet been put into practice and so it has been laid aside; it would mean

however, that the theatre would have to be built in some large space and would moreover cost considerably more than the usual type. Should it be decided that a new theatre was indispensable, then the question of *where* it could be built would arise. On the same place as before? In that case, where would the performances take place whilst it was being put up? Nearby, on the grounds of the Steinen school-house? Unfortunately, this would mean that in addition to building a theatre it would also be necessary to build a new school-house.

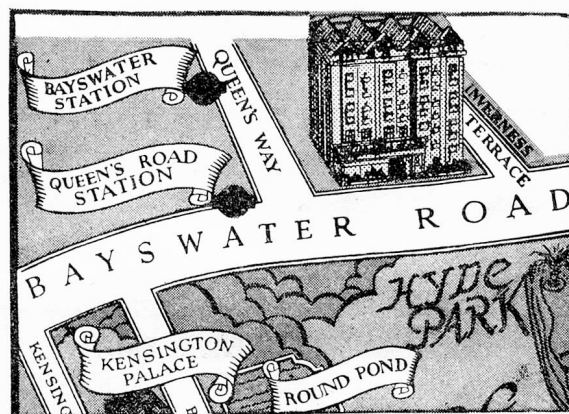
It would appear as if there were a great many questions which had to be clarified before any definite decision can be taken as to whether it is preferable to build a new theatre or to reconstruct the old one. And there is also the question of the future of the Basle Art Gallery which has to be settled by the Basle Art Association. An important bank has made an offer for the grounds on the Steinenberg, immediately above the theatre, where they intend to build an enormous business house, which would mean that the Art Gallery would be at the back of it. Should the Art Association accept this offer, this would mean that their financial troubles would be over for many years to come, but, at the same time, it would mean that the charming garden surrounding the restaurant, locally known as "The Art Hole" would vanish and with it would disappear a green oasis in the dry desert of city houses. So you see, this also is a delicate question which cannot be answered without due consideration.

From the foregoing, you will have gathered that even a city so favoured in the domain of culture, as is Basle, has a number of difficult problems to solve.

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