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EINSIEDELN AND SAINT MEINRAD

by

OSKAR HOLLINGER

The world-famous monastery of Einsiedeln, in Switzerland, stands on the spot where, in the year 861, two bandits attacked and murdered Saint Meinrad. The village as well as the convent are off the main highways and thus are able to preserve their original beauty and charm. The monastery, a work of exceptionally fine architecture, dominates the whole countryside. In the whole of Switzerland, there is no other such masterpiece of magnificent architecture, and it is justly renowned as the finest example of structural beauty in the whole country. The foundation-stone of this great Abbey was laid in the year 934 by Saint Eberhard, then Abbot of Strasbourg. In the year 947 the Emperor Otto I gave it his full approval. The mortal remains of the Saint had once lain in the monastery, but were removed to the island cloister of Reichenau on Lake Konstanz. However, they were returned to Einsiedeln in the year 1039, and now rest there at the scene of his life's labours. A worthier resting-place for them could not be found, and, to pay further tribute to these relics, the head of the Saint is preserved as a sacred relic in a marble tabernacle in the Lady Chapel.

Four different churches which stood on this spot of Einsiedeln were destroyed by fire. The present magnificent building was erected in the years 1705-1735, according to the plans of Kaspar Moosbrugger, one of the lay-brothers of the community. The church stands in the centre between two wings of the enormous monastery, and its two towers, standing watch over the large square with its lovely fountain, dominate the whole countryside.

The structure forms a very lovely frame for a picture which takes form each year on 14th September. It is called "The Angel's Dedication". The pilgrimage which takes place on this date is one of the most important events in the calendar of the monastery and church. Its "raison d'être" is the commemoration of the extraordinary and miraculous dedication of the Lady Chapel in the year 948. For in that year the Abbot Eberhard requested the Bishop of Konstanz, in whose diocese the church was situated, to come for the dedication of the Church. The Bishop acceded to the request and, according to testimony contained in the Papal Bull of Pope Leo VII, passed the

night of the 13th - 14th September in prayer, together with the monks in the church. It was while praying in the Lady Chapel that he heard from above the sounds of heavenly music. He glanced up towards the ceiling and there saw a choir of angels who were engaged in the task which he was to accomplish the next day. They were



(Photo: Swiss National Tourist Office)

Einsiedeln is a famous place of pilgrimage.

going through the ceremony of the dedication of the church! As a result of this miraculous intervention from on high, the Bishop refused to go through with his ceremony of consecrating the edifice. However, he was practically forced to perform his own rites of dedication, and when, however unwillingly, he began his task, a voice was heard from on high, saying: "Brother, desist, because the church is already consecrated". This voice was likewise heard by all those who were present.

This event, generally called "The Angels' Dedication", was responsible for the fame of the church as a source of peace and a place of pilgrimage. In the beginning the event was celebrated every year very solemnly. Around the middle of the 15th century it was celebrated only every seven years, but for fourteen full days, that is, from 13th to 29th September. In the beginning of the 16th century it began to be celebrated only when the 14th of September fell on a Sunday, even so still continuing for two weeks. It remained thus in vogue for a long time, until in the year 1792, the Abbot Thomas introduced what is called the "Little Celebration", which takes place each year and last for but one day. However, if the date happened to fall on a Sunday, the two weeks' manifestation was resumed, until, in 1856, for reasons of economy, the Abbot Henry limited the ceremonies to eight days. The essential elements of the ceremonies, however, continue to this day and are memorable for the famous candle-light procession which takes place every year.

Oskar Hollinger.

Einsiedeln, the Swiss Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is one of the most important European places of pilgrimage north of the Alps. To-day, as in the past, the Benedictine monks of the famous thousand-year-old Abbey watch over the mighty Cathedral of Our Lady, a marvel of Baroque architecture. The centre and focal point for pilgrims is the Blessed Virgin's Chapel of Mercy inside the Monastery Church, which stands on the spot where in 861 its founder, St. Meinrad, was killed by a murderer's hand. On the site of his cell rises the Monastery of to-day, built according to the plans of the lay-brother Moosbrugger, and forming, together with its huge square, the largest and most impressive Baroque building of European significance in Switzerland. Periodically the unique open-air theatre is the scene of unforgettable nightly performances. The Monastery Church is a veritable gem; here decoration and painting have found their perfect expression, giving eloquent evidence of the religious feeling of past ages. Throughout the centuries, right down to the present day, millions of devout, God-fearing people from all countries have gathered here with reverence and emotion before the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

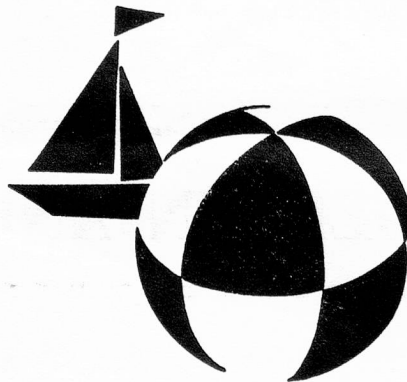
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This year, this famous place of pilgrimage has already staged a number of impressive celebrations in commemoration of the 1,100th anniversary of the death of St. Meinrad. Another significant day was 8th October, the anniversary of the solemn transfer of the saint's relics from the monastery island of Reichenau to Einsiedeln in 1039.

* * *

In winter-time, Einsiedeln's large countryside becomes a glittering ski paradise. Two ski-lifts and ice-rinks for skating and curling are at the disposal of the amateurs of winter sport. The Freiherrenberg in the near neighbourhood offers ideal slopes for ski-school. The surrounding hills invite ski-ing excursions.

Switzerland



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