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ROUNDAABOUT SWITZERLAND

by Derek Meakin

NOVEMBER is the month when Berne makes up for the lack of an annual carnival. In its place they have an event that must be really unique — the onion market.

The Bernese call it the "Zibelemärit", and it started originally to give the townsfolk a good opportunity of stocking up for the winter with supplies of onions and garlic.

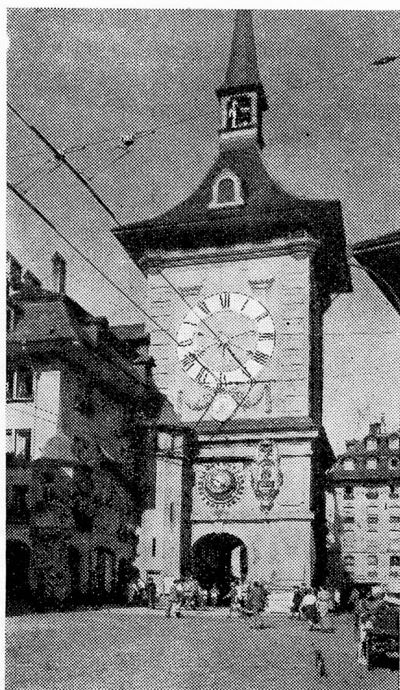
The market opens on a Monday, but the Saturday before the medieval town is invaded by convoys of heavy lorries and horse-drawn carts piled high with onions, celery, leeks, garlic and the like, which are stacked in one of the main squares.

It is typical of the law-abiding Swiss to leave them in the open two nights and a day with no-one standing guard. Early Monday, housewives flock to the square. Businessmen are there, too, for custom says that the head of the family returns home with several strings of onions on "Zibelemärit" day. Even dignified Ministers and M.P.s from the nearby Bundeshaus can be seen jostling with the crowds to make their purchases.

And it goes without saying that on this one day in the year you cannot go into a Bernese

restaurant without seeing onions on the menu.

After school in the afternoon, confetti-throwing children crowd the streets, and at night masked revellers go round the cafés and beerhouses as a merry finale to the old festival.



The clock tower is one of Berne's best-known sights

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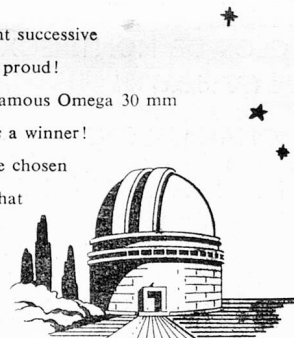
consecutive annual precision contests in the

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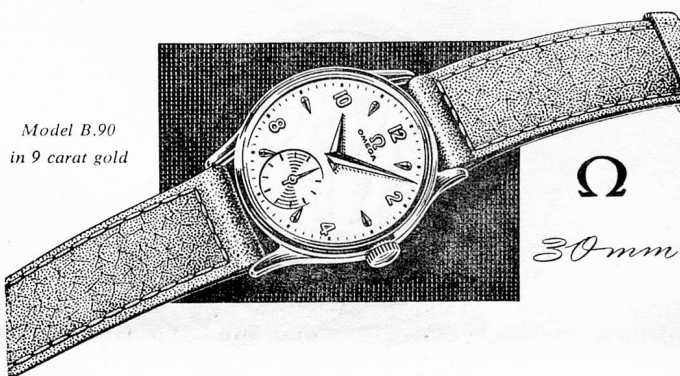
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