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ROUNDAABOUT SWITZERLAND

by Derek Meakin

FEBRUARY provides a first-class opportunity for seeing how a normally highly-respectable Swiss city can let its hair down. The date: February 28. The place: Basle. The occasion: the annual carnival.

This is something really out of this world. How can it fail to be a roaring success when the whole population has been busying itself for many months beforehand making preparations? The costumes and tableaux are designed in strictest secrecy, and different families vie with one another in thinking up the most extraordinary guises.



Carnival cuties — in the Basle fashion!

Every year there are some unforgettable scenes for both visitors and citizens alike.

For the tourist the most fascinating sight will probably be the mummers in their amazing masks. But the Swiss themselves will be looking forward to the rather wicked satires on current events. Decorated lorries and carts are used to depict some scene in local politics. City big-wigs, in parti-

cular, have their efforts over the past 12 months debunked in no uncertain terms. Everyone and everything is open to good-natured abuse at carnival time. Basle's neighbour, Zurich, also comes in for a great deal of leg-pulling, as there is no end to the rivalry between these two cities. In fact the people of Basle rather cuttingly assert that the nicest thing about Zurich is the afternoon train back to Basle!

Naturally breakfast on carnival morning is always in keeping with the great occasion. The restaurants and cafés open at five o'clock to serve a thick brown *Gebrannte Mehlsuppe*, which is a soup made of burnt flour, and an onion flan called *Zwiebelwähe*.