

Winter adieu

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WINTER ADIEU

The last of the old traditional rites to celebrate the departure of winter and arrival of spring took place, when the "Böögg" was burnt at the "Sechseläuten" in Zurich towards the end of April. In some parts of the country, the "Fastnacht" which, of course, has the same meaning fundamentally, began as early as 22nd February when the "Chessleten" started the Solothurn carnival. The "Chessler" of every age paraded in the streets, wearing white nightshirts, *Zipfelmützen* and red neckerchiefs and carrying rattles and other noisy instruments of every kind. The "Chesslerlohn" was awarded the participants in the traditional manner by way of *Mütschli* and flour soup. An exhibition took place this year "Von Eva bis 1968", showing old masks and all kinds of carnival accessories, proclamations, etc.

At the end of February, too, carnival festivities took place in the Ticino. Some 4,000 people attended the "Risotto Feast" in Locarno.

The Lucerne carnival, too, is amongst the earlier ones; 25,000 onlookers watched the "Fritschiumzug". The twenty subjects which were ridiculed, included General de Gaulle, the Swiss butter surplus and the "Hofgalerie" scandal.

In Bienne, 1,500 boys and girls walked in the traditional children's procession, and later, Prince Carnival and his wife opened the festivities proper in the old town. The next day, some 40,000 people watched the big procession consisting of 39 groups and 12 bands.

In many parts of Western Switzerland, the "Brandon" was held early in March, when the fires were lit according to an old Celtic tradition. A similar rite is observed at Bovernier (Valais) where the "Poutraze" was burnt. Its ashes were thrown into the river and carried down into the valley.

At Oensingen in Solothurn, this year's huge *Sonnwendfeuerwerk* display marked the thousandth anniversary of the Commune's existence.

The only carnival which attracted criticism once again was that of Zurich. If it had not been for a few "imported" groups from Germany and Central Switzerland, the Zurich carnival would have been a complete fiasco according to some Zurich papers.

An unusual way of burning the winter is followed annually in Liestal, capital of Baselland. It was not mentioned in any of the news reports from Switzerland, except in the local Press, and yet, it is one of the most original customs observed. The carnival procession on Sunday afternoon, 3rd March, was nothing spectacular — though the "Waggis" who climbed through the open window of the police station and emptied a huge sack of chaff over men and furniture, could hardly be called commonplace! But then, in the evening, the "Chienbäsezug" took place. Led by bands, fifes and drums, hundreds of men (and some women) dressed in sacking, carried long poles with burning brushwood on top. Every twenty or thirty men came an iron crate on wheels, filled with blazing wood. No easy task to pull the burning waggon, nor to manoeuvre it by way of long iron chains. As the gateway leading to the main street of the townlet is lined with wood, the burning torches and red-hot crates had to be rushed through at lightning speed, which added to the excitement. On the square near the stream — the soldiers' monument in the background — the crates finally came to a standstill, and then the men ran for dear life throwing their burning torches into the crates. For hours, the fires burned until the fire brigade used their hoses to put an end to it all. The main street was washed down in the

same way, and two hours after the procession, not an ember was left in the road. The children's lampions had been put out, and the crowds dispersed, the smell of burning wood in their clothes reminding them for days that the winter had finally been given its marching orders.

Where else in the world does a folk festival take place in which the entire population participates and which starts at an hour when normally nobody except perhaps the milkman would get up? Well, this unusual event takes place every year, exactly six weeks before Easter Monday, this year from 4th to 6th March, in the ancient humanist city at the bend of the Rhine and is the starting point of the world famous Basle Carnival.

For three days and three nights the entire city was again in the grips of a carnival frenzy which brought out the exceptional wit and the ironic sense of humour of Basle's inhabitants. The carnival began and reached its first highlight with the "Morgestraich"; on Monday morning, at 4 o'clock sharp, when all of Basle was already up and about, the various carnival societies or "Cliques" marched through the centre of the city to a unique tune of drums and pipes and with their giant lanterns, each of them depicting a story, they spread a fantastic twilight and lots of fun. During these three days the wit of Basle manifested itself as usual in its full splendour both in the costumes of the "cliques" and in the satiric rhymes. On Monday and Wednesday afternoon, the "Schnitzelbängg" were distributed from the decorated trucks, and in the evening, groups of masks went round restaurants and inns to sing their verses ridiculing matters of importance that had taken place during the year. *Heimwehbasler* they are called, the men and women who travel for thousands of kilometres to take part in the carnival, the one time — so they say — that the Basle citizens are their true selves.

*"Dr Schah het Veloglämmerli us Jade
und Hooselaadegnepfli us Rubin;
dr Farah waggse Goldhoor uff de Waade,
dr Prinz dä het Uranium im Urin.*

*Dä Rychtum macht dr Wilson muff, är dänggt e volli
Stund:*

Hätt ych doch nur e bitzli Gold im aigne Pfund."

Never before had it been so hot for the "Böögg" as this year (end of April). It was practically a summer's day when the guilds of Zurich in their magnificent historic costumes paraded the town. At six o'clock sharp the fireworks exploded under the effigy of winter erected on the Sechseläutenplatz, and to the delight of the many thousand spectators, the old snowman winter burnt down whilst the guild riders cantered round the fire on their beautiful horses.

Now spring reigns in Switzerland for good, and the traditional carnival and other old farewell customs are but memories.

*(Compiled mainly from reports received from
A.T.S., "Basler Nachrichten" and S.N.T.O.)*

A SECOND SWISS SUBMARINE LEAVES FOR AMERICA

The mesoscaph PX-15 built for an American firm in the Giavanola works at Monthey under the supervision of the famous oceanographer Jacques Piccard, left the works by rail for Antwerp, where it will be shipped to the United States. This submarine, which will weigh 130 tons and measure almost 48 feet once completed, will be used first of all for submarine exploration by drifting in the Gulf Stream. A first mesoscaph, built by the same firm, was one of the attractions at the Swiss National Exhibition in 1964.

[O.S.E.C.]