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CARNIVAL BONFIRES.

The ancient heathen cult of the Fire has survived more or less in the Swiss Alps, where large bonfires are still lit between the winter solstice and Carnival time.

At one time they were magic fires, which were to dispel the demons of winter darkness and were supposed thereby to prevent a scarcity of crops and outbreak of epidemics. On the Sunday of "Laetare", the old Carnival, bonfires are lit on peaks in German-speaking Cantons of Switzerland. On the Sunday of "Invocavit", or "Dimanche des Brandons", such fires are lit in French Switzerland, as well as in parts of Eastern Switzerland, where that day is called the Sunday of Cakes, or the "Funkensonntag", i.e. Sunday of Sparks, or firebrands. Another Sunday at the end of the Carnival is chosen in the Werdenberg district as the Sunday of Torches. As a rule, each village tries to make a bigger bonfire than the neighbouring hamlets, and the village boys gather as much wood as they can find for the purpose. In Wartau (Rhine Valley) three youths, dressed up as bogeys, preside over the function, which is inaugurated by a torch procession that winds its way up the snow-clad hill. In some places wooden wheels, covered with cloth that has been dipped in oil, are swung about and sent rolling down the hill. They are symbols of the sun, whose victory over darkness is hailed.

In Herisau (Appenzell) a grotesque bogey called "Gideo Hosens-toss" is solemnly burnt on the bonfire, just as the "Bügg" in Zurich is publicly burnt as a symbol of the Winter demon, early in April. The heathen custom of jumping over a fire is still extant in parts of Eastern Switzerland, where young couples hold hands and jump across the remnants of a bonfire. The old belief is that this action brings luck to the jumpers and shields them against illness and evil spirits. It is chiefly practised at the summer solstice.

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AN UNUSUAL APPLICANT FOR THE ARMY.

According to the "Schweizerische Schützenzeitung" the following charming episode happened last Fall at Faido in the Italian speaking Canton of Ticino: The new recruits had just arrived to report for duty and as the officer in command made his rounds, he was, to his utter astonishment, confronted by a young lady. She was attired in mountaineer's garb; golden ringlets fell down to her shoulders, and shining blue eyes betrayed good health and lots of enthusiasm. The girl saluted the officer in regular military fashion and in a serious voice announced that she had come to report as recruit for the Swiss Army. The officer at first suspected a joke, but the girl entreated him that she be taken seriously. She told him that she originated from Eastern Switzerland and that she had done climbing in the St. Gothard region for the last few days. She went on explaining that she and many of her friends disapproved of the pacifistic tendencies of certain Swiss men and women, and that she had heard that battalions composed of women were also being formed in other countries. The officer tried to persuade the youthful amazon that women's duties in wartime are in hospitals and in various fields of endeavour where men doing active service have to be replaced. But no reasoning could subdue the young lady's military ardour, until she finally burst into tears and hurriedly disappeared in a small side street.

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YOUTHFUL ENTERPRISE.

Since 1925 the school children of Berne have made a bi-annual house to house canvass for old newspapers, etc. The first collection yielded a net profit of 3,434 Swiss Francs. Subsequent efforts brought increasingly bigger results, until the 1934 old-paper collections yielded a net profit of almost 15,000 Francs.

The money thus collected is used for various commendable purposes. A large percentage is handed over to an Auxiliary Society which enables poor children to enjoy a sojourn at a Summer Vacation Home; another percentage is turned over to the "School Excursions" fund, and an appropriate amount is also allotted for the purchase of

skis and skates for poor school children. Youth hostelries also receive a share, and in view of these many needs Young Berne has carried on an especially active 1935 old-papers campaign, the final results of which are not as yet known.

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AN OLD CUSTOM: FISH CARNIVAL AT ERMATINGEN - March 31.

A small fish, only 4-6 inches long, is a great favourite among the connoisseurs of Ermatingen, a town situated on a branch of Lake Constance. According to tradition, two rival Popes lived at Ermatingen during the famous Church Council of Constance in 1414-18, one of whom, eventually crowned as Pope Martin V, was specially fond of the baked fish, called "Groppen". Wishing to show his appreciation to the populace of Ermatingen when he left the country in 1418, he granted them the privilege of a late Carnival on Laetare-Sunday, which was finally named the "Groppen" Carnival.

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SPRING FESTIVAL.

Zurich celebrates its ever lovely Sechseläuten Festival on Monday, April 16. This annual event glorifies the passing of Winter and arrival of Spring. The "Bögg", an effigy of Winter, is burned at the stake with quaint ceremonies at six o'clock in the evening. A parade of the ancient guilds precedes this rite, and balls and other gay festivities furnish a grand finale for Winter's retreat. Needless to say, the children, too, come into their own on a special day, and their festival, with cortège and juvenile ball, sparkles with the gladness of youth.

Ausgeschritten.

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