

Carnival time

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CARNIVAL TIME

The first Swiss carnival of the year took place in Solothurn. It was opened traditionally on 13th January and started properly on 21st February with the "Chessleten". Well over 2,000 "Chessler", dressed in white nightshirts and carrying every kind of noisy instrument, paraded through the town at five a.m. During carnival Solothurn calls itself Honolulu in honour of its geographic antipode.

On Tuesday, 19th February, the carnival began in Lucerne with its traditional masked group of the Fritschi family going to the guild master's house, where the battle of oranges took place. In the afternoon some 10,000 spectators (only about half the usual number owing to the inclement weather) watched the long procession. The Lucerne carnival ended on 26th February with the traditional folkloristic dance and the concert of the combined "Guggenmusik" bands on the historic Muehleplatz.

Bellinzona celebrated the centenary of its "Roi Rabadan" with its humoristic procession and the free distribution of Risotto to the population.

Many other places in Switzerland celebrated carnival time with masked balls, processions and special pre-Lent festivities, Langenthal, Bienne, Liestal, the Valais and many villages and towns in the Jura.

At Schwyz the last of the series of "Japanese" Games ended the local carnival. The "Japanesengesellschaft" has been functioning for one hundred years. This year's pageant, "Trumpf und Bock", written by Prof. Dr. P. Kamer, was the climax. The First Secretary of the Japanese Embassy in Berne attended the revelries.

Zurich's carnival began on 23rd February with the "Jaegerball". Early in March, the week-end brought the concert of the "Guggenmusik" and the big social event, the artists' ball. On Sunday, the procession wended its way through the town. It was not only a show of Zurich carnival tradition going back forty years, but many original groups from other Swiss towns and villages and from Germany took part in the pageant.

But there is no other Swiss who has the flair for celebrating carnival as the citizen of Basle. A fortnight before carnival the famous drum concert took place at the Kuechlin Theatre. In nine performances the quality of the drumming by the individual "cliques", large and small, was demonstrated.

One of the most impressive events of carnival time in Basle is the "Morgestraich". At 4 a.m. all the street lighting in the centre of the town is extinguished and from all the roads and lanes leading to the Market Square groups of men emerge carrying huge, lighted painted lanterns and transparencies. They are accompanied by drummers and fifers whose music echoes from the house fronts. Dense crowds mingle with the lantern carriers and musicians. Afterwards, every inn in town serves the famous brown flour soup and onion flan.

On Monday afternoon, 4th March, the procession went through Basle, every "clique" (65 of them) making fun of some happening in the public life of the town or the nation, showing the caricatured subject on lanterns and in the costumes of the drummers and piccolo players. Special carriages from which masked men (and women) distributed "Fastnachtzettel", flowers and fruit, completed each group. In addition, other individual carriages and horsedrawn coaches took part, about thirty of them with "Waggis", men wearing the traditional fancy dress based on the costume of the neighbouring Alsace. The

crowds were dense and confetti battles raged everywhere. Towards the evening the "cliques" and masks went to the restaurants, where they sang their witty "Schnitzelbänk" in which they poked fun according to the particular subject chosen. One of this year's favourite subjects was President de Gaulle. The verses are printed on sheets of paper like galley proofs. They are called "Fastnachtzettel", and this year, for the first time, the Basle Commission for Literature decided to give prizes for the best "Schnitzelbänk", the humorous poetry printed on these sheets and sung in inimitable fashion by the Basler.

On Tuesday, as usual, there was an exhibition of the painted lanterns, artistic and original, and the children had their own processions. The youngsters copy their elders in a priceless manner and the "Buebezygli" show to perfection the gift of the Bâlois to turn anything into a fancy dress. In the evening, the "Guggenmusik" groups, instrumentalists playing jazz-like music, gave open-air concerts.

On Wednesday, Monday's performance was repeated, again in good weather, if with less sunshine. The crowds were huge and it seemed incredible that over 20,000 Basle inhabitants had left before the carnival to spend the holiday skiing in the mountains.

For the real Basler the whole week was the highlight of the year and he finished the revelries on Saturday with the "Kehraus", the final bout of frolic.

The Basle carnival is a unique experience, and this year it was particularly successful. The badge, sold in copper, silver or gilt, is amongst the most attractive ever produced, and the writer cherishes it as a special souvenir of the Basler "Fastnacht" 1963 she was able to attend again after many years of absence.

(Partly based on A.T.S. news.)

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THE "SWISS OBSERVER" THIRTY YEARS AGO

Reading the "Swiss Observer" of March 1933 made me feel a little depressed. The news from Switzerland was not good; the highest unemployment figures ever reached were published on 11th March and showed a total of 101,111. Further import restrictions were announced, and in Basle noisy demonstrations took place when the Nazi flag was hoisted at the German Railway Station. Twenty Communists were arrested. In several issues there was an exposé in French called "L'EMPLOI DE LA TROUPE LORS DES EVENEMENTS DU 9 NOVEMBRE 1932 A GENEVE". This report had been issued by the Federal Military Department and it was based on the official enquiry made after the riots in Geneva.

The fourth issue of the month carried some more cheerful matter. There was a long report on the Annual Banquet and Ball of the Unione Ticinese at Pagani's Restaurant in Great Portland Street, London W.1. Over 175 members and friends sat down to a dinner which in these days when we are told that we have never had it so good seems a dream. It was a seven-course meal, starting with oysters, then turtle soup, salmon, sweetbreads, followed by *Granite des Alpes*, then chicken in casserole, a sumptuous sweet and, to end, *Plaisirs des Dames*, whatever that meant. It was typical of that time; on one hand unemployment and poverty, on the other abundance and luxury. In the presidential address Mr. M. Notari was able to look back on a very successful year of the Society. The then Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, was the guest of honour.