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It is often the case that with the passing of time a disaster can turn out to have had some advantages all the same.

At least this is true as far as the Bernese Onion Market is concerned, which began because of a great fire and is now one of Berne's most popular annual festivals.

On the 14th of May, 1405, more than 550 years ago, almost three-quarters of Berne was destroyed by fire and over one hundred people lost their lives.

The turn of the century had proved promising for Berne and now the city was suddenly faced with ruin. At the beginning of the 14th century Berne was still ruled by powerful overlords, but by the beginning of the 15th century it had achieved independence and established itself as the most powerful factor in the Aare district.

The catastrophe of the great fire left Berne so weak that it seemed unlikely that the city could maintain its strong position, but in their moment of need the Bernese received offers of help from all sides.

The town of Freiburg, which might well have been jealous of its powerful neighbor, was particularly generous with help. It sent more than one hundred volunteers, who helped the Bernese to clear up the debris and rebuild the city.

In gratitude the Bernese Town Council decided to grant to Freiburg the right for all time to hold a market in Berne. The fourth Monday in November was the day granted to them and since the 15th century the farmers of Freiburg and round about have made use of this right.

As the onion was the main product of this area, the name Onion Market gradually arose. The Bernese action was not a purely disinterested one, however. In the olden days the onion was considered to be a good remedy against the plague, so by permitting this large scale sale of onions within the town the Bernese Town Council was also doing its best to offer their citizens protection against this dreaded illness.

The Onion Market is still a festival as well as a serious business, though the piece of onion cake that used to be offered to every guest free of charge in the restaurants must be paid for now in hard cash!

Towards dusk there is the confetti battle which is the delight of all school children (and also the not-so-young!). This confetti battle has also a historical origin, as until November 1647 the Onion Market was declared open by the town crier, who rode on horseback from fountain to fountain and to attract attention to his proclamation he threw walnuts among the spectators.

As in the olden days, the Onion Market still serves the purpose of providing the Bernese housewives with a chance to lay in a stock of vegetables for the coming winter. It might be described as an elaborate curb market—much more elaborate and certainly more profitable than the Saturday curb markets that have been operated half-heartedly in New Bern for so these many years.

You know, there's something downright appealing about the Bernese to those of us who pride ourselves on having a sense of humor. Our mother city and its citizens are quite conservative, but under this conservatism is a prankish personality that just won't be denied.

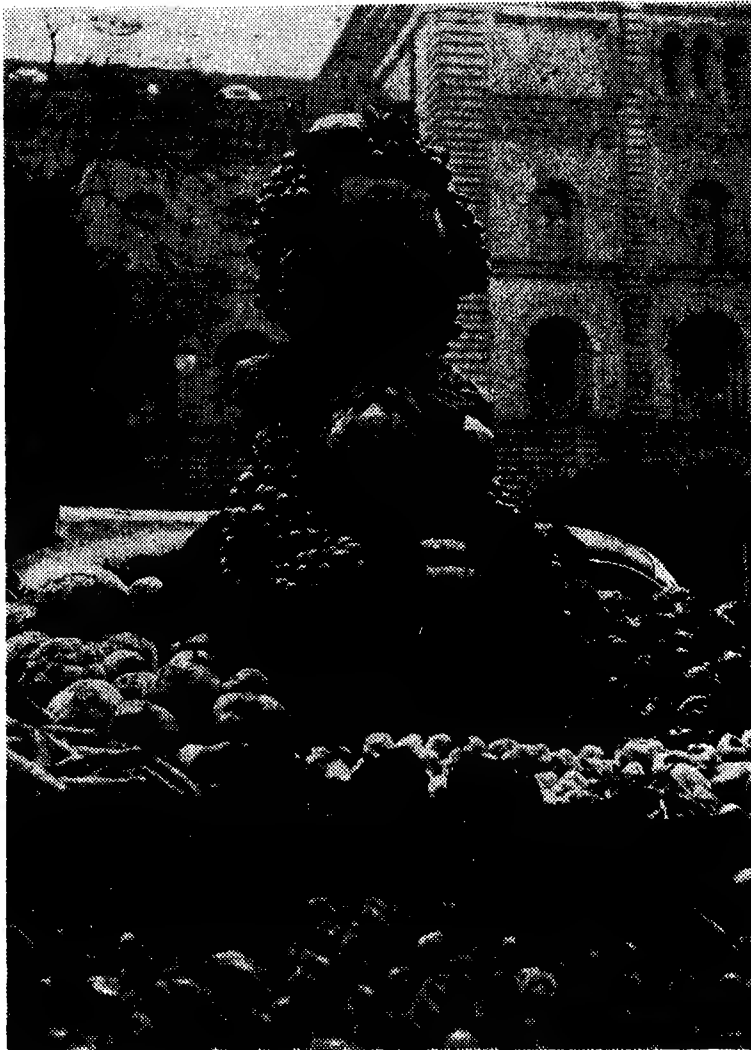
No one lacking imagination and a sense of humor could possibly have envisioned the onion queen that appears elsewhere on the front page of The Mirror this week. It's the sort of imagination a child
(Continued on Back Page)



MIGHTY CLOSE NEIGHBORS—A grandiose conception of old European town planning is to be found on Justice street in our mother city of Berne, Switzerland. Where, with

dwelling inks together and no driveways to be had, does an alley cat go in these parts to escape dogs or engage in personal visitations?

Berne Found Unique Charm In Clinging to the Old Things



BERNE'S ONION QUEEN
(See Looking Glass Column)

It is said of the Bernese that he likes to cling to old things. It is however to this peculiarity that we owe many of the rows of old houses and the old buildings, which distinguished medieval Berne above all other towns.

Whether we look through one of the old town gates onto the long, slightly curved rows of houses which boundary the large streets, or look down from a viewpoint such as the "Rosengarten" which shows the wide, dignified streets winding up the hill through a maze of picturesque roofs—in either case the size and beauty of this town picture is impressive.

Berne is one of the many towns founded by the Dukes of Zähringen. The old part of the town still stands today; just as the Duke ordered the town to be built in 1191.

What is more, the measures which he used were faithfully followed by the Duke of Savoy when he enlarged the city in 1255 and were still used for that part of the town which was built in 1623—200 feet in width and 120 feet in depth for each house.

The first inhabitants tried to ease the burden of the rents which they had to pay to the Duke by subdividing the houses and finding joint tenants, and this helped to increase the population of the new settlement.

So the numerous houses originated which had a width of only two or even one window. Still today five or six houses may be counted as belonging formerly to only one court.

The many fires in the town have

of course often destroyed whole rows of houses; but the old type of houses still exists in abundance.

The uncertainties of war produced a very special style of construction. The townhall is quite castle-like in appearance. It was built in the year 1406 and was renovated between 1940 and '42.

The stately patrician houses which encircle its silent square are very lovely and reminiscent of older times. The corner houses are also castle-like having stone walls right up to the roof. But especially for the patrician houses a special style was devised—the house with the long narrow entrance leading to a small staircase, situated far back. Such houses could be easily defended against any intruders.

But there are far older houses than these. Windows were cut, and flats constructed in the towers which were once the town gates, belonging to the old town fortresses. In the old parts of town city walls, dating back to the foundation of the city, formed the center walls of whole rows of houses.

But the most impressive quality in the Bernese houses is their stately appearance and the good care given to them. On the large buttresses and the houses themselves the dates are inscribed, often going back to the 13th century.

It is hard to believe that these figures actually indicate the dates of the houses' construction, but that is the case. Coats-of-arms and inscriptions tell of former owners, and houses belonging to the guilds have their window fronts decorated with the coats-of-arms and em.
(Continued on Back Page)