

## Fasnacht in der Schweiz / Carnival in Switzerland



Two Tschägäggättä in the snow near Kippel (elevation 1376 meters).

# Switzerland's Terrible Tschägäggättä

Frightful Carnival figures roam the streets but they draw more tourists than they scare away

Carnival, those crazy days of revelry before the beginning of Lent, takes many forms. In Germany's Catholic regions, there are huge, lusty parades in the big cities of Mainz, Düsseldorf, and Cologne. Festivities in the Black Forest border on the bizarre with parade figures wearing strange, even frightful, masks. Basel, Switzerland, puts on a wonderfully weird cel-

ebration that begins at 4:00 a.m. when the city lights go out and costumed, marching musicians play haunting sounds and wander through the streets. In Switzerland's Lötschental, a valley in the southern canton of Valais, there are more peculiar celebrations personified in the "Tschägäggättä," costumed figures sporting dreadful hand-carved wooden masks.

In the old days, during the Carnival

season the unmarried young men of the Lötschental villages would put their clothes on inside out, cover up their shoes with sacks, wrap themselves in a blanket of sheep or goat fur, then don a scary mask that they had carved themselves. They also wore soot-covered mittens and a cowbell attached to a fat leather belt. They would run through the villages at night, clinging and clanging, in