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ALPHORN BLOWING, YODELLING AND FLAG THROWING IN
SWITZERLAND.

There are perhaps no customs more traditionally Swiss than Alphorn blowing, and what is locally called flag "swinging". These, together with yodelling, provide the characteristic atmosphere for every public festival. In the other traditional games, such as stone lifting and throwing, it is sheer strength that decides the victory; flag-throwing, however, depends upon practice and skill. The Swiss banner heads every parade of Alpine athletes, the sturdy standard-bearer marching proudly in front of the procession. As he marches he throws the red-and-white square of cloth on its short staff high into the air, cheering as he catches it in its fall. With it he describes intricate figures in the air, all the while taking care that there is never a crease or fold to hide the white cross in its centre. An Alpine festival is a quaint but impressive scene - the "swinger" in his richly ornamented traditional costume, the music to whose rhythm he attunes his movements, the picturesquely clad spectators standing around. Seemingly without effort, though in reality considerable strength and concentration are needed, the fluttering banner is made to describe vertical and horizontal circles; the thrower, using either one hand or both, passes it between his legs, up his back, round and round his body, tosses it aloft and catches it again, never once impeding its smooth, continuous movement or allowing it to touch the ground. Flag-throwing originated in the very heart of Switzerland, in the birth-place of the present Confederation, where it has always been practised by the Alpine peasants during the summer months. Perhaps at one time it was used as a method of signalling over long distances. At any rate, there is an old Swiss saying "Let us throw the flag over it now", a conciliatory offer meaning "Let us bury the hatchet".

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