

## EASTER EGGS, AND HOW THE GIRLS MADE THEM.



SHOULD you not like, Rose, to do something or other this Easter towards keeping it up in the orthodox manner?" asked Julia Randall one day at the close of Lent.

"That depends on what you mean by orthodox," replied Rose, the elder sister.

"Well, perhaps that was not the right word to use. But you know in the good old days people had so many queer customs at Easter time, and it seems such a pity to drop all the old usages."

"I think so too, to a certain extent; but in general I must confess I think the 'good old times' are rather a delusion. However, some of the customs of our ancestors were certainly very pleasant indeed. What do you say to preparing some Easter eggs for the occasion?"

"That would be delightful: do let us, it will please the children so much. But how do you make them? I have not an idea—have you?"

"No, I really have not," said Rose, pondering; "but I daresay we can find out. Let us ask Kate the First to join us, as she did with the Christmas-tree; we shall have to do without *our* Kate this time, as she is away."

"That will be splendid. I will go round and ask her now, and then we can have a meeting to-morrow afternoon; and meanwhile we will each ransack all the books we can find on the subject, and the united efforts of three such brains will surely be equal to the task of manufacturing an egg."

Next morning, accordingly, each of the three girls betook herself to study; but as the libraries in both houses were small, the amount of information collected was limited. In the afternoon they met together as arranged, notebook in hand, each very curious as to the notes of the others.

"Now, Rose, 'age before honesty,' as the vulgar little boys say; so you must begin. But what a quantity you have written! Oh, where shall I hide my diminished head? I have only half a page."

"Never mind," said Rose, "perhaps the quality of yours will make up for deficient quantity. The notes I have made from different sources are as follows. The custom of distributing coloured eggs is traced back to very early times and ancient peoples, Egyptians, Gauls, Romans, Greeks, Persians, and others. In many countries the custom still obtains. In Persia the occasion for giving coloured eggs is the beginning of their new year, which takes place in March. In England there are very old records and allusions to these pasch, paste, or pace eggs. In the reign of Edward the First, for example, there is an account of the purchase of four hundred eggs, to be coloured or ornamented for distribution among the Court. No doubt the custom was originally symbolic of the re-awakening of nature in springtime, and was taken advantage of by the early Christians, and used by them to typify the resurrection of Christ.

"I have just noted down one or two other

old customs which are interesting, but I do not think you would care about them being perpetuated, Julia, with all your love of antiquities.

"It was considered the thing to rise by four o'clock in the morning to see the sun dance and curtsy on Easter Day. Shall we keep to that?"

"No, certainly not. I consider that a relic of barbarism which ought to be suppressed. What else?"

"Then there is lifting, or heaving, which is still commonly practised in some parts of England. The person to be lifted sits on a chair, and is two or three times raised high in the air. On Monday the men lift the women, and on Tuesday *vice versa*; no one who comes in the way of the 'heavers' is let off unless they pay a sum of money. That is evidently a vulgar commemoration of the Resurrection. I have several other curious old customs put down for your edification, such as the eating of Tansy cakes; but I must get back to the point, which is the making of Easter eggs, and the only way I have discovered is the very simple one of boiling them in a solution of cochineal, or any other dye."

"Ah!" cried Julia, "when it comes to my turn I think I can offer an improvement, or at least an amendment to that."

"Let us have it then, by all means," said Kate.

"Ahem!" began Julia, with an important air; "my researches have been of a wide-spreading and various character, ranging from the Encyclopædia Britannica to Soyer's cookery book; and in such diverse sources I have gleaned the following information. We cannot definitely fix upon the origin of the custom of using eggs at this time of year; the only reasonable explanation hitherto given is that already mentioned by a former speaker, namely, the re-awakening of nature after a period of death-like slumber—(applause)—though if that be the meaning of the custom, I think the gift of a *chicken* would be more to the point. In some parts of Scotland the custom is still kept up of going out at dawn on Easter Sunday in search of wild fowls' eggs, and the finders are sure to be lucky till the season comes round again. The commonest kind of modern Easter eggs are prepared in the manner previously described, and are often made the source of some excitement and merriment by preparing them the day before; then one of the party goes out in the evening into the garden and hides the eggs in all sorts of nooks and crannies, where no right-minded hen would ever think of laying them. Next morning every one repairs to the garden to hunt for them. They become very hard in course of boiling them sufficiently long to take the dye properly, so that boys keep them for playing at a game similar to that commonly played with chestnuts, which goes, I believe, by the elegant name of 'Conquers,' only that in this case the weapons are held in the hand and the narrow ends knocked together, instead of being swung round on a string. I am grieved to observe symptoms of incredulity amongst the audience, but beg to inform them that I can vouch for the truth of this statement, having myself participated in the sport. I can speak feelingly too on the subject of hiding the eggs in the garden, as, during my brief sojourn at school in Germany, on Easter Day the teachers hid a

large quantity of eggs in the open space which they were pleased to dignify by the name of a garden; but as it was laid out with asphalt instead of flower-beds, and swings and seesaws took the place of shrubs and trees, the hiding-places were less difficult to find than is generally thought desirable. However, as our diet was decidedly plain, and our excitements few, we were not hypercritical, and devoured our eggs with the greatest gusto, though we only had to extend our search to the back of a post, or under one of the leaves with which the garden always happened to be strewn on Easter Day. This was a curious phenomenon in natural history, as they never fell there on any other day in the year.

"I will close my remarks by describing a way for making more ornamental coloured eggs. Prepare a pan of dye, then put the eggs into hot water till they are themselves thoroughly hot, then take them out, and with the pointed end of a tallow candle inscribe them with the name and date, or any appropriate device, and then put them into the dye, and boil for about ten minutes. The greased part will not take the dye, but will remain white, showing up well on the coloured ground. To obtain a good red colour, boil the eggs in a solution of logwood; an onion put in the water, outside skin and all, makes them a beautiful golden colour, or it is said that furze blossoms have the same effect; but Judson's dyes are much less trouble than any of these preparations. The eggs are sometimes wrapped round with different coloured rags, and boiled with some acid in the water, which extracts the colour from the rags, and the eggs come out looking like brilliant patchwork. There, that is the end of my notes. Now, Kate, it is your turn."

"I, too, have been trying to find out the origin of the custom, but it is certainly very obscure. It seems clear that it was in vogue before the Christian era, and one authority thinks the giving of eggs was meant to signify the restoration of man after the Deluge; but that explanation does not commend itself to my mind. Another opinion is that it originated in an old heathen feast, that of the Teutonic goddess Ostera, which was celebrated by the Saxons in the spring. As it seemed evident that no one really knows the origin of it, I gave up trying to find out, and turned my thoughts from theory to practice.

"I think the eggs could be more tastefully ornamented by dyeing them all over first, and then, as it were, engraving devices on them by scraping off the dyed surface with the point of a penknife or strong needle. I tried one last evening, and brought it to show you. You see it was first dyed crimson; then I scraped 'Easter Day,' and the date in ornamental letters in one place, and a little attempt at a landscape in another, and a monogram in a third, while each compartment is separated by a wreath of leaves."

This was so prettily and tastefully done that the other girls were eager to make one for each of the family, but deferred their decision on hearing that Kate had still other ideas to propound. Some of the eggs, she said, should be coated with gold paint, either on a white or a coloured ground, which would be a pretty variety.

"And lastly," said she, "I think we could make some that would be really useful as well as ornamental. One can buy the shells at most confectioners if one has the money to spare, and put a present inside, and tie it up with ribbon."

"But we have *not* the money to spare," said Rose.

"No, nor have I; besides, it is much nicer to really make them all ourselves. The kind I am speaking of are very simple—a penny sheet of coloured cardboard will make two or three. You have to cut out five pieces of this shape, any size you like, but for our purpose I think about six inches long and two broad in the widest part. Each piece is bound round with ribbon first, and then they are all stitched together, the points exactly meeting, but leaving one division open for the entrance.

At each end, where the points meet, a little rosette of ribbon is a great improvement, and a loop of ribbon from end to end forms a handle. Here is a finished one, not exactly true to nature, being too pointed, but near enough for all practical purposes, I think; for if you round the ends more, it is so difficult to make them meet properly."

"It is very pretty; but, Kate, how do you get into it? It is apparently all closed up tight, and you seem to have only used four pieces instead of five."

"That is because the fifth is overlapped by the opposite one; and as for the opening, read the inscription on one of the divisions—

"Press the poles and you will see  
What Easter hath in store for thee,"

read Kate; and gently squeezing the two ends of the egg together one side came open, displaying a prettily-dressed doll lying inside.

"One more idea," said Kate, "and I have done. You observe this empty egg-shell, a relic of my breakfast this morning. Allow me to call your particular attention to the discreet way in which I made only a *small* hole at the *small* end of the egg, and carefully did *not* crack it down the sides more than I could help. At the close of this meeting I shall go out and purchase a halfpenny doll, from which I shall proceed to cut off the head and legs. The head (with as much neck as the shape of my victim will allow) must be adorned with a sailor's hat, which we can easily make with paper or cardboard, and a scrap of ribbon, and round the neck will be a large sailor's collar. Thus equipped, the head will serve for a lid to our egg-box, the neck, if there is any, going into the hole of the egg to steady the lid. The legs must be cut short and painted to represent high boots, and if they are very attenuated-looking they can be much improved by dipping in melted wax till they are of an elegant shape. They must then be glued on to the egg, or, if we have used wax, that will be sufficient to fasten them."

After a little more talk the girls agreed on what should be attempted in the way of providing eggs, and the success was decided when on the morning of Easter Day each member of the family found quite a brilliant display upon their plate.

For the mother there was a large cardboard egg, made according to Kate's plan, containing cottons, thimble, needles, and pins; also a real hard-boiled one, beautifully painted in water-colours, with primroses, violets, and other spring flowers. This was intended to be eaten, but was declared to be much too pretty for anything but an ornament.

The elder children had each a sailor egg, made after Kate's directions, though the dress of the doll was varied in each case, and containing a trifling present; also a real one, ornamented by etching, painting in sepia, or pencil drawing, which latter was done *before* boiling, so that the drawing was well set. Each bore in addition the date and initials of the recipient.

For one of the young children there was a coloured egg, with the name and date left

white by means of greasing the letters, and for another a plain, hard-boiled one, ornamented after boiling by gumming on little coloured pictures. Each had also an egg full of sweets, which was managed by taking an empty shell, with the broken edge as little jagged as possible, washing it quite clean, and then fastening with gum a little piece of coloured muslin just inside the edge of the shell; the sweets were next put in, and the muslin drawn together by a narrow piece of ribbon run through the top.

At the family council over the breakfast-table it was unanimously agreed that, though the origin of the custom might be obscure, and the meaning attached to it now very vague, it was far too pretty a practice to be allowed to drop, and that as far as they were concerned it should be carefully perpetuated.

DORA HOPE.

## PIES AND TARTS.

### SHORT PASTE, SUET PASTE, AND RAISED PIES.

SAID in our last lesson that the idea in puff paste is to have the butter and paste separate, so that the paste shall be made up of a number of layers, divided from each other by layers of butter. In short-paste, on the other hand, the idea is for the butter to be *mixed with the flour* by kneading, not rolling. Indeed, one great secret in making good short-crust is to roll it as little as possible. After the butter and flour have been moistened with water, the paste should be rolled *once only* to make it smooth and of a good shape.

Short paste is much more wholesome than puff paste. It is used chiefly for fruit pies and tartlets. It is made more easily, and is much more commonly met with than puff paste, which is usually regarded as a luxury.

In short paste, as in puff paste, the addition of an egg and of a few drops of lemon-juice enriches the paste, and helps to make it workable. These ingredients are not, however, absolutely necessary, and very good pastry may be made without them.

Short paste is "superior," or "good," or "plain," according to the quality and quantity of the materials used in making it. In very rich pastry equal quantities of butter and flour would be used. Superior crust might, however, be made with less than half the weight of butter than of flour, and good economical pastry may be made with a smaller proportion of butter and a little baking-powder. Good plain pastry may be made with sweet soft beef dripping, such as is obtained from joints, or produced by rendering down ox flare or other kinds of soft beef fat.

A great many people have a strong objection to pastry made with dripping. I cannot quite understand the delicacy of appetite which refuses good beef dripping and accepts cheap common butter. If butter is wanted, let *good* butter be used; but if it is a question between dripping that is fresh, soft, and sweet, and questionable or cooking butter, I should say by all means choose the dripping. A large proportion of the composition sold under the name is not butter at all—it is coloured animal fat. Why should we not use the animal fat, *i.e.*, dripping, and omit the colouring? The difference in price between the

adulterated article and the real one is worth consideration. And I hope the girls who attend our class will be too sensible to scorn economy in cookery. A really good cook is never a wasteful one, and it is wasteful to purchase cheap butter for every-day pastry when there is in the larder *sweet dripping* that could be employed instead. In making pastry a light cool hand is worth more than a pennyworth of colouring matter.

It must not be supposed, however, that I recommend the use of all kinds of dripping in making pastry. Fresh soft beef dripping is excellent for the purpose, but mutton dripping is not so. It has a way of making pastry taste like tallow-candles, and as Europeans have not the same tastes as the Esquimaux, this flavour is not popular. Though mutton dripping is not to be made into pies, however, good hard mutton fat, finely shred, is almost as good as beef suet for making paste for boiled puddings. Lard is much liked by some cooks for making pastry. It is, however, better when mixed with butter or dripping than when used alone. Bacon fat also, if not too much smoked, may be employed to make pastry for meat pies.

The water used in mixing pastry should be added gradually and mixed thoroughly. If a large quantity is poured in at once the pastry may be made over moist, and then an undue proportion of flour will have to be added before the pastry can be rolled. It should be remembered that it is scarcely possible to give the exact measure of water that will be needed in making pastry, because some flours absorb more moisture than others. An experienced cook could tell in a moment by touching the pastry whether or not it was of the right consistency. All one can say to the inexperienced is that pastry should be smooth and stiff, but not too stiff. If over moist it will stick to the rolling-pin or the pastry-board, if too stiff it will not be light when baked.

We will suppose, therefore, that we wish to make superior short crust; how shall we proceed? We must put six ounces of flour on a board, and mix with it a very small pinch of salt. We then rub into it with the fingers four ounces of sweet butter, and keep rubbing until the butter is quite lost to sight and the flour looks like fine oatmeal. If the pastry is intended for a fruit-pie or a tartlet, an ounce of finely powdered white sugar may now be added. We then make a well in the centre of the flour, and break into it the yolk of an egg. We put on this two drops of lemon-juice and a very little (about a tablespoonful) of cold water; mix all, flour, egg, and water together with two fingers (or if the cook has not a cool hand she may mix the paste with the blade of a clean knife), and add more water gradually till there is a smooth stiff paste; knead this lightly, roll out once, and the pastry is ready. Of course, if the egg is not considered necessary it must be omitted.

If plain short crust is wanted, we put one pound of flour into a bowl with a pinch of salt and a heaped teaspoonful of baking powder. Rub into this six ounces of clarified dripping; add cold water to make a smooth stiff paste, knead lightly, roll out once and use.

The excellence of pastry depends very much upon its being properly baked. The best pastry that ever was mixed would be spoilt if the oven was not exactly right. If an oven is not hot enough the pastry will sink away from the edges of the dish and will be heavy. If the oven is too hot the pastry will be burnt or will stiffen without rising. The surest way of testing the heat of the oven is to bake a small piece of pastry before putting the pie or tart into it. Another way is to sprinkle a little flour upon the oven shelf. If it turn a bright brown in a few seconds the oven is hot enough. If it turn black the oven is too hot;