

## A Word on Easter Eggs.

"GOOD gracious!" exclaimed a hen one morning, as she observed the China egg in her nest, "some of these days I shall turn into a bricklayer."

But it is not of China eggs, such as may well set hens to thinking, that we propose to write, but of those which have been used ceremoniously since the Jews began to commemorate their deliverance from the house of their bondage.

The Pashka, or paste egg, is literally an egg used at the Passover, and was very likely an idea borrowed from the Egyptians, who, in common with other nations of antiquity, regarded the egg as an emblem of creative power.

There is no difficulty either in tracing the hold the Jewish name for the Easter eggs has obtained through so many centuries in our common English tongue. Passover and Easter occur about the same time of year. Formerly the two feasts began on the same day, and when there was an alteration made in the dates there were a number of Christians strong enough to form a sect known as Paschites, who held fixedly to the opinion that Easter should be kept on the fourteenth day of the moon, no matter what day of the week that might be.

The position taken by the Paschites gave rise to long disputes. One of the popes, about the end of the second century, tried to settle the affair by excommunicating all who celebrated Easter on any other day than Sunday. But papal anathemas were of no avail, and it was not until the decree of the Nicene Council that the matter was settled by the acceptance of Sunday, and the additional arrangement that when the fourteenth day of the moon fell on the first day of the week, Easter was not to be observed until the following week.

These decrees did not affect the question of eggs, however. They had been used by European nations, in connection with the new year, as symbolizing a fresh start in life, and when the date of the new year was put back from the vernal equinox to the winter solstice, the Feast of Eggs was not shifted with it, but remained a part of the unwritten rites of Easter.

The Greek Church attaches a great deal of meaning to the egg at Easter-tide. The custom in Russia has varied very little from what is said of it in a book published in London, in 1589, where it stated that the Russians, "Every yeere, against Easter, die or color red with Brazzel (Brazil wood) a great number of Eggs, of which every man and woman giveth one unto the priest of the parish upon Easter Day in the morning. And moreover, the common people carry in their hands one of these red eggs, not only upon Easter Day, but also three or four days after, and gentlemen and gentlewomen have gilded eggs, which they carry in like manner. They use this custom, they say, for a great lore and in token of the resurrection, whereof they rejoyce. For when two friends meete during the Easter Holydayes they take one another by the hand; the one of them saith, 'The Lord is risen,' and the other answereth, 'It is so of a truth'; and then they kiss and exchange eggs, both men and women continuing in kissing four days together."

Kissing in the Russian dominions is not so general now as three hundred years ago, but the eggs are still handed about and the words of greeting are unaltered—"Christ is risen," being met with the response, "It is so of a truth."

Eggs are also exchanged ceremoniously in Greece at Easter and throughout Germany, where, however, Easter cards are more used among grown-up folk, the hunting of eggs through house and garden being a delight specially reserved for children. These cards have been in use among the Germans for a long time. There is one in the British

Museum which represents a basket in which are three eggs, decorated with pictures illustrative of the Resurrection, all being upheld by three hens. Over the center egg is the *Agnus Dei*, with a chalice, representing faith; over the others are emblems of hope and charity. Beneath is a legend,

"All good things are three,  
Therefore I present you three Easter eggs—  
Faith and Hope, together with Charity.  
Never lose from the heart  
Faith to the church: Hope in God,  
And love Him to thy death."

The precise date the Easter egg found its way into England cannot be determined, but certainly before the time of Edward I., for in the household expense book of that monarch there is this item in Latin for Easter Sunday: "Four hundred and a half of eggs, eighteen pence"—cheap enough certainly, and a contrast to the price at the present time.

Some of the superstitious rites pertaining to the egg at this season are retained in various parts of the country, but divested, of course, of the peculiar significance which were attached to them in the days prior to these days of compulsory education. Egg rolling, which was formerly indulged in under the notion that the farm lands on which it was practiced would be sure to yield abundantly at harvest time, has now become a sport.

The very coloring of the eggs has now an artistic meaning only; formerly it was a sacred sign. Easter eggs are no longer thought to be good for ailments; nobody preserves them as charms; it is no longer supposed that eggs laid on Easter Day will keep fresh longer or will result in fowls of the choicest kind. Yet it cannot be said that the interest has diminished with the more practical view we now take of old customs.

Eggs continue to be stained very much as they were centuries ago, and the gilding, which is as ancient, at least, as Greek mythology, is also kept up, while, though the sacred and mysterious meaning which formerly invested them belongs to an age when the common people had no literature, and a peasant who could read was a prodigy, yet the Christian heart must ever feel a fresh springing of the heart with the coming of that Day of Days which commemorates the Resurrection of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

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## Science.

A TRAVELER ONCE within an Eastern land  
Met with a woman brown and dwarfed and plain,  
While he was as a king's son fair and grand,  
And carelessly and cruel sought to gain  
Her heart with wiles and sweet seductive word;  
But when he thought he'd won it, fain would he  
Have thrust it from him as a dead rose stirred  
No longer by the wind, and by the bee  
That wooed her oft forsaken. Lo! she rose  
Transfigured up before him, grander far  
Than is the sun on Himalaya snows,  
Diviner she than royal Juno's are.

And in her eyes there burned a mighty scorn,  
And all the while her lips with scorn were red.  
"Not on you alone, but those unborn  
My vengeance be; your daughters they shall wed  
In their sweet youth with men who've loved me well,  
Your sons for me forsake their new-made bride;  
Though ever old, yet ever young, I dwell  
Unrivaled; let none then my power deride,  
For no one loving me shall e'er again go free."  
So runs the pretty fable, so they say  
The goddess is revenged on you and me,  
That we his children seek her to this day.

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