EASTER EGGS, AND HOW THE GIRLS MADE THEM.

Hould 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 Easter eggs for the occasion 2?"

"I think so too, to a certain extent; but in general 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, ponderingly; "but I daresay we can find out. Let us ask Kate the First to join us, as she did with the Christmas trees, we shall have to do it like her, in order to make the occasion worth while.

"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 read 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 result of their researches.

"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 decorating eggs with pictures is traced back to very early times and ancient peoples, Egyptians, Gauls, Romans, Greeks, Persians, and others. In many countries the egg is kept in a basket to be seen. In Persia the custom of giving coloured eggs as a sign of the beginning of the new year, which takes place in March. In England there are very old records and allusions to these pastes, paste, or puce 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 bearing, which is still commonly practised in some parts of England. The person to be lifted sits on a chair, and is raised or lowered in the air. On Monday the men lift the women, and on Tuesday vice versa; no one who comes in the way of the 'heavens' is let off unless they pay a sum of money. That is evidently a vulgar commemoration of the Resurrection, for there have been 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 dyeing of eggs. 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 led me to a wide field of spreading and various character, ranging from the Encyclopedia 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 that is 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 fowl's eggs, and boiling them or baking them till the eggs come 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 morning into the garden and hides the eggs in all sorts of nooks and corners, 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 'tossing.' The weapons are held in the hand and the narrow end knocked together, instead of being swung round on a string. I am grieved to observe that there is some ignorance of this; but once in a while I get to the bottom of the nuts. One of the most ingenious confectioners, I have heard, makes a large quantity of eggs in the open space which are pleased to dignify by the name of a goose egg, but as it was only a common flowerbed instead of flower-beds, and sometimes took the place of shrubs and trees, the hiding-places were less difficult to find than is generally the case. Indeed, our advice was not much taken; our egg was never valued by the gardener, and even the gardeners themselves, but when the leaves are off the tree, it was a great sight to see the garden always covered in violets, or on Easter Day. This was a curious phenomenon in those days, as the eggs were never seen on any other day in the year."

"I would close my remarks by describing a way of making more ornamental coloured eggs. Prepare a pan of dye, then put the eggs into it, and boil them, until they are thoroughly hot, then take them out, and with the pointed end of a tallow candle insert them with the name and date, generally the Easter date, 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, shining up well on the coloured ground. To obtain the 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 these blossoms have the same effect; but I have been told by a my friend that the eggs are much less to be trusted than any of these preparations. The eggs are sometimes wrapped round with different materials, and boiled in the water, which extracts the colour from the rags, and the eggs come out looking like brilliant patchwork. 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 even goes so far as to say that the eggs were used in the restoration of man after the Deluge; but that explanation does not commend itself to my mind. Another opinion is that it originated with the old Scythian goddess Ostara, which was celebrated by the Saxons in the spring. As it seemed evident that no one really knows the origin of eggs, 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 designs 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 another, and the whole egg 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 propose. Some of the eggs, she said, should be coated with gold paint, either on a whole surface, or surrounded, which would be a pretty variety."

"And lastly," said she, "I think we could make some that would be really useful as well as pretty. One of the most picturesque confectioners if one has the money to spend, and put a present inside, and tie it up with ribbon."

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

"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. In each you cut five pieces of a 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 stuck round with ribbon, but not yet, and then they are all stitched together, the points exactly meeting, but leaving one division open for the entrance.

At each end I pin on a little rosette of ribbon, a great improvement, and a loop of ribbon from end to end forms a handle. Here is a finished one, not exactly true to description, but pretty, and, dear me, 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 the one of the divisions—"Press the poles and you will see." What Easter hath I store for thee;"

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

"One more idea," said Kate, "and I have done. You observe this empty eggshell, a relic of my breakfast this morning. Allow me to call your 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 the sides more than I could help close of this. Now, then, 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 head of my victim will allow) must be adorned with a sailor's hat, which can easily make with paper or cardboard, and a scrap of ribbon, and round the neck will be a large sailor's collar. The equipment is now complete, for all that is needed is 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 of the painted parts, in order that the child may be too short to put in the egg, but when dropped, may still be seen and enjoyed."

LEMON SAUCE.—One lemon, six pieces of peel, one tablespoonful of cold water. Pare the rind from the lemon, and cut this into strips the size of a straw. Put these in with a little sugar, and stir occasionally, for about three-quarters of an hour. Then strain, and serve in a cool place.

LEMON CHEESE CAKES.—Take 3 lemons, squeeze the juice out. Put in 1 lb. of cheese, half a pound of sugar, and 1 pound of sifted or lump sugar. Put all into a jar, and boil in a pan of water till thick, stirring occasionally, for about three-quarters of an hour. Then cover and keep in a cool place.

LEMON SPONGE.—One ounce of gelatine, one pint of water, two lemons, one half-pound of cut lemon sugar, one pinch of salt. Put the gelatine into a bowl, cover it with cold water, and let it stand for twenty minutes. At the end of this time, add the juice of the lemon, and stir until the mixture is smooth. Then pour it into a cup or saucer lined with paper, and let it set until hard. When cold, cut it into squares, and serve it with a spoonful of custard.

USEFUL HINTS.

PIG PUDDING.—One half-pound of figs, one half-pound of bread-crumbs, one half-pound of sugar, one half-pound of yeast, three eggs. Remove the skin from the egg, chop it very finely, and put it into the bread-crumbs; add the figs, and mix thoroughly. Add the yeast and water, and mix again. Put the mixture into a buttered pie-dish, and bake until done. When cool, turn it out, and serve it with a spoonful of custard.

WELCOME GUEST PUDDING.—One half-pound of bread-crumbs, one half-pint of milk, four ounces of beef suet, three ounces of sugar, four ounces of salt, four eggs, one tablespoonful of yeast. Place four ounces of the bread-crumbs in a bowl, and, adding the milk, mix it well. Cover the bowl with a plate, and allow the crumbs to soak in the milk for ten minutes. Then put the remaining bread-crumbs, the yeast, and the eggs into the bowl, and mix well. Pour the mixture into a buttered pie-dish, and bake until done. When cool, turn it out, and serve it with a spoonful of custard.