

The Paschal Candle is composed of pure beeswax, and in some of the old English churches, before England became Protestant, was colossal. In 1577 the Paschal Candle made for Westminster Abbey weighed three hundred pounds. This candle is also a symbol of the Pillar of Fire which lights the Spiritual Israel through the wilderness of the world.

Closely connected with the Paschal Candle is the "Holy Fire." The lighting of fire at Eastertide is a custom which dates from the beginning of Christianity; and it was perhaps derived from pre-Christian observances which commemorated the coming of Spring. When Christianity became dominant, the Church became a depository of the sacred fire; and a lamp was kept burning to indicate its presence to the people. There are still in existence some of the old contrivances for the lighting of the sacred fire; they are known as "Cressets" and may be seen at Furness and Calder Abbeys, in England.

Social Customs.

Closely related to the liturgical functions of Eastertide are certainly expressions of popular feeling which we term social customs. Amongst these may be mentioned the blessing of lambs and the hallowing of food. The blessing of lambs took place either in the church or in the home. This custom is perpetuated in the Easter observances of some religious communities, where, on Easter Sunday, a lamb, set upon a huge platter, surmounted by a little banner (a red cross on a white field) is placed in the centre of the dining-table. Whatever remains of the hallowed food is, after the repast, cast into the fire. The most widely observed popular custom is, undoubtedly, the "Easter Egg." Some antiquaries declare this to be of Christian origin; but it is evidently older than Christianity. Eggs were eaten (after having been colored) in the remotest antiquity, in commemoration of the advent of Spring. Even at the present day the egg is a prominent feature of the Feast of Noruz (New Year) held throughout Central Asia, about the 25th of March. The custom is also recorded in the "Sagas" of the Northland. According to these old traditions, the earth was symbolized by an egg, and ancient temples, in consequence, were oval in shape. This typification is found in nearly every oriental cosmogony.

A writer on Eastern Cosmogonies (Bellew), discussing this custom, says:—In ancient Persia, long centuries before the coming of Christ, the people were all worshippers of fire. According to their belief, there was a great spirit that had existed from