

# Easter Thoughts.

By MARGARET E. SANGSTER.



MORE and more we are drifting into the general current which makes Lent a welcome feature in our busy life. Falling as it does in that part of the calendar which has been signalized by an intense and absorbing activity it gives us opportunity to stop and think, to lay aside some of our social excitements, and to cultivate the inner life. Whether or not we call ourselves by the name of a particular denomination or subscribe to a positive creed, deep down in all our hearts there is a want which cannot be satisfied except by the hand of Almighty God. We are religious by right of our humanity. We may or may not voice our petitions alike, but in the great crisis of life our imperative need is for divine help and comfort, and when Lent comes we feel the impact of aspirations, hopes and purposes that are beyond this transient sphere of being.

In the cities churches are open during Lent for brief services at noontide, and often one sees the business man, the working girl, the woman of fashion, the mourner in her somber robes, and the day laborer, united by a common interest, turning aside and entering where the prayers and hymns of the ages give the day a bit of cheer.

Lent affords an interval of rest to those who are jaded and weary; it excuses us from merely social engagements, and enlists thousands in altruistic endeavors. The poor and sick have reason to be grateful for the penitential days that mean for them much thoughtfulness and kindness and some alleviation of the tedium of their lives. From Ash Wednesday to Good Friday we may if we will, in some sort, go into retreat from the world, shake off its dust, compromise with its care, and seek the blessedness of heaven. Swiftly after the gloom of Good Friday, with its memories of the Cross, follows Easter Day with its memories of the Crown.

## Eastertide.

The coronation of Christendom is expressed in the phrase, "I am the resurrection and the life." From choirs and organs, lofty cathedrals, little chapels, and assemblies of children in school, on week days and Sundays, the Easter music will have this burden, and will send forth exultant chords. The characteristic of our Easter music is triumph. Victory over death is the keynote of the Eastertide. Everything in nature adds emphasis to this motive. A few weeks ago whole forests showed their tracery of bough and twig without a single leaf. The fields were hidden under the snow, or showed brown patches of stubble in corners where the snow had melted. There was an aspect of austerity and silence in the familiar landscape. As if Nature were waiting for something to happen, she withdrew herself from sight, and dwelt in mystery and reserve. No reticence equals that of Nature in a mood of withdrawal and retirement. How it has come about, so imperceptibly, yet so swift are the stages we can hardly explain. But earth has felt an elemental thrill. The passion of reproduction is upon her. Nature throwing off her apparent lethargy is full of eager haste to clothe woods and thickets, orchards and uplands, with beauty and bloom; birds are flying back in countless numbers, the miracle of Spring is again repeated before our eyes. It is Eastertide in the world, and every grass blade, leaf, violet, wind-flower, and dancing brook, sings to the self-same tune the glorious declaration of God, "I am the resurrection and the life." When Easter comes again one feels

like repeating Mary Lathbury's happy poem:

Children of yesterday,  
Heirs of to-morrow,  
What are you weaving,  
Labor or sorrow?  
Look to your looms again.  
Faster and faster  
Fly the great shuttles  
Prepared by the Master.  
Life's in the loom,  
Room for it, room.

Yes, in these April days life's in the loom, the springing life of the fields, the joy over birth, the hope and the pledge of waving harvests yet to be. The synonym of Easter is abundant life. During the year that has glided by since last we exchanged our Easter greetings we have had diverse experiences in our homes. The great family of readers know for themselves what changes and sorrows, as well as joys, have been their portion. On one thing we may always count with confidence, and that is on the certainty of change in this life of ours. Nor is this a matter of regret. Without change there might be stagnation. Growth imperiously requires change; so does development. The baby in the cradle is our pride, but heaven help us if he remained a baby forever. The child of seven is not the lisping toddler of two, nor is the girl of fourteen what she was at seven. We are children of yesterday and heirs of tomorrow, and today is given us that in it we may change for the better. From some of our homes death has taken our very nearest and dearest. The earth life is lonely. Our feet turn often on the sad pilgrimage to the grave that covers a form that once made part of our daily sunshine.

Nevertheless, as we carry our flowers to church and make beautiful chancel and altar, as we leave them in the cemetery or set them before the portraits of those who are gone, we are not without comfort and not without hope. Those who have gone are indeed beyond our sight, but they are living and loving still, and many a time their presence may be with us although we know it not.

Among the songs which rise to the lips in the Eastertide are "Lead, Kindly Light," a poem which is full of inspiration, and Tennyson's matchless "Crossing the Bar." In the family at least one evening during the Eastertide should be spent in reading and singing songs like these.

## Easter Flowers.

The florists' shops are riotous with bloom. The whitest of white flowers, the pure azalea, makes of each plant a magnificent bouquet. There are roses, hyacinths, lilies of the valley, ascension lilies, carnations, daffodils, jonquils, heather, a perfect glory of color, tint and shape, and a perfect wealth of fragrance. One loves to linger in front of the windows that are crammed with so much beauty, and if one can, it is a pleasure beyond words to send a blooming plant or a box of cut flowers to a shut-in friend or an invalid.

Lovers and sweethearts exchange flowers at Easter. The old gentleman who has not forgotten the gallantries of his youth selects a posy for the pretty debutante, granddaughter of the woman whom a lifetime ago he tried to win as his bride. She married another, and there is a sentimental tradition that he never quite got over it, and yet were the truth known he has jogged along very comfortably, and has not in his somewhat withered, but altogether serviceable heart, even a lingering regret. He is well-to-do, and a courtly personage of the old school, and at Easter it is his custom to send flowers to the families of those who were young when he was.

Much more touching to me than

the hothouse beauties that have cost so much care and pains and are worth so much money, are the flowers one finds up-country in farm-houses remote from the ways of men, and in little cottages on back streets; flowers that fill homely living rooms with perfume and brightness, and that reward the loving hands of simple women who have a knack of making plants grow. Do you belong to this elect company? When you appreciate the pleasure there is in watching the unfolding of buds on the calla lily and the monthly rose, in seeing ferns, begonias and geraniums flourish, and in uncovering a bed of pansies at Easter, and seeing the velvet blooms all purple and yellow and gold, laughing at you with faces full of sunshine. Very curious is the sympathy that flowers have for certain people. "If mother so much as looks at a plant it puts on a shoot to reward her," I heard a girl say, "while I may spend mornings of labor and evenings of watching and all my pin money on the garden, and all that I can get in return is a sickly show of stems, half dead and half alive."

The fact is mournfully true. Flowers do not grow for everybody. I am fain to confess that they have never grown for me. There is some witchery about it. You must somehow be very intimate with Mother Earth if her trolls and elves and her good people under the sod are to do their best to you.

Let us not forget that among the privileges that we most prize is that of sending consolation to people who are in grief, who are tired, or who are stumbling along encumbered by the difficulties and obstacles of the road. A flower may carry a message that is understood without words. A flower may revive drooping faith. Flowers spell the love of God to human hearts. Children adore them. Never, if you possibly can help it, refuse a flower to the dimpled hand and the pleading eyes of a little child.

## The Easter Bride.

An Easter wedding is peculiarly charming if it is solemnized in church, while the Easter flowers and palms are still unfaded. The bride in her virginal sweetness, with her dress of purest white, looks extremely lovely as she comes down the aisle on the arm of her father, whose pride and tenderness have never been greater than now, when with a wrench, amid all his satisfaction, he is giving his child away. At one of the most beautiful of Easter weddings, just as the newly wedded pair turned from the altar, a choir of girls in the gallery broke into a peal of joyous song. The church with the palms and azaleas makes the fairest setting for a bride. But there is much to be said in favor of a home wedding, and, if it be the girl's preference, the season will lend itself graciously to the decoration of the house, which should be turned into a bower.

## Easter Holidays.

The Easter holidays are very gay, not only because of the rebound of Lent, but as well because the children come pouring out of school, the young people return from college for a breathing spell, and there is everything to do in preparing the summer wardrobe and in supervising Easter festivities. Parents delight in giving hospitality to the friends of their young people, and a dance where the girls and boys are all friends and intimates is a pretty sight—wholesome and exhilarating. One way of keeping young is to live with young people, and partake with zest and enthusiasm in their pleasures.

Easter is a favorite time for the coming out of the pretty daughter of the house, and her introduction into society is the more auspicious that it takes place in the spring when the pulse of life is full and strong.

## Frivolities and Furbelows.

That we should have something new to wear at Easter is a foregone conclusion. When the happy festi-

val has an April date we may safely lay aside the winter raiment and don the lighter garb of spring. The matron gives much consideration to her Easter bonnet, and no wonder, for a bonnet is verily the top sheaf of a costume, and woman would not be womanly if she regarded it with unconcern. As for the maiden, her hat, her fresh costume, her trim shoes, her dainty gloves, are but the setting and framing of her bewitching personality. She is young and fair, and she accords with the Easter atmosphere. April has its moods. So has she. She may smile or she may sigh, may frown or beam, but in her very caprices she is bewitching. A young girl has the world at her feet, and there is no harm in her taking her share in its romps and vanities. Frivolities and furbelows are not amiss for one whose life is in its morning prime.

## The Heart's Core of Easter.

The deepest meaning of Easter and its most hallowed message do not touch these externals. To the great household of the sorrowing, that circle that is ever widening as other circles break, Easter brings consolation. Has some one been banished, has husband, wife, child or friend gone away, and is there a dull, ever-growing sense of loss and pain? I repeat what I have earlier said, that Easter comes to bid you take heart and go on. Life will never be the same again, but it shall not always be the vacant, empty, echoing chamber that it is today. Other tones will fill it, other forms flit through it, other gladness springs up where there is only dearth and bitterness now.

Beyond the smiling and the weeping there shall be for you and me, love, rest, and home. This is the glorious message of the Easter, sent ringing from the sky by the One whose birthday we kept at Christmas, when angels sang for us, and whose rising we celebrate at Easter, while still the angels sing. For He has said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Never yet was a springtime,  
Late though lingered the snow,  
That the sap stirred not at the whisper  
Of the south wind, sweet and low;  
Never yet was a springtime  
When the buds forgot to blow.

Ever the wings of the Summer  
Are folded under the mold;  
Life, that has known no dying,  
Is Love's, to have and to hold,  
Till sudden, the burgeoning Easter!  
The song! the green and the gold!

## Easter Gifts.

Almost as universal as Christmas giving is the exchange of pretty gifts at Easter. These take the form of Easter symbols; the egg filled with bonbons, the hare, the lily, are sent from hand to hand, and the children are delighted with the chance again brought to them to show their affection for each other, for parents and teachers. As for lovers and sweethearts, all seasons are their own, and yet Easter brings them a most welcome opportunity to signify regard in some tangible form.

Easter parties for children where the hiding and hunting of colored eggs are among the features that have an unceasing charm. In Washington there has been for many years a custom beloved by boys and girls of rolling eggs in the White House grounds on Easter Monday. Little folk crowd thither to enjoy the gay sport, and grave senators and statesmen, and the president himself, are generally enthusiastic spectators, while the air rings with the shouts of happy children. I remember years ago how entertained I was in watching little negro lads in the South as they went about in the Eastertide playing a game which seemed to need a peculiarly deft touch. They took real eggs and touched the shells together; it was called pecking eggs. The one who succeeded in slightly cracking the other's egg won it as his own. An egg broken causes great anger.