

Easter Day, in the Early Church, was the Feast of Feasts, the Desirable Festival of all Salvation, the Queen of Days, the Assembly of Assemblies, the Crown and Head of all Festivals. Its chief distinction lay not so much in ceremonial, as in enthusiasm, not in concentrated and vicarious forms, but in universal and individual participation. Every man, woman, and child had a place to fill,

A share to perform.

All labour ceased. Trade was suspended. Spade, plough, and market were forsaken, for holiday attire, fraternity, rejoicing. The father with his children, the mistress with her maids, all wore the smile of universal brotherhood. The poor dressed like the rich; the rich like princes; and the beggar borrowed his robes for the occasion.

The whole history of the resurrection was read to the people on the successive days of the feast. Sermons were preached explaining how the festival should be kept. Prisons were thrown open. Pardons were granted. Debtors were forgiven, and slaves made free.



many curious customs came to be attached to the season of Easter, which more or less, in one place or another, have lingered on long after their meaning has been forgotten or changed.

For example, on Easter Monday, in rural parishes and villages, the swains went about in pairs, make an easy-chair of their arms and hands, and carrying the young women about, much in the fashion which is know in our modern nursery as

LADYS CHAIR.

On Tuesday the women returned the compliment to the men. In some places the men claimed the privilege of taking off the shoes of their fair burdens, and, as a matter of course, the women revenged themselves to the same extent.

In other places the Church Clerk carried around to every home a few white cakes as an Easter offering, in return for which he received a gratuity in proportion to the generosity of the householder.

In one parish twenty acres, known as the Bread and Cheese Lands, were benefacted as an endowment to supply every year a distribution of cakes to the poor.

In another two Sheriffs were compelled to engage in a rivalry of shooting, the reward being a breakfast of calf's-head and bacon. And when the Puritan stepped in and changed the prize into a silver plate, the proverbial love of the English peasant for good fare rebelled, and the calf's-head and bacon were re-instated.

A band of gay gallants used to parade the streets with a luxuriously cushioned and brilliantly decorated chair, gaily trimmed with bouquets of flowers and streamers of ribbons. Each fair young damsel was invited to seat herself in the improvised carriage, when the chair was raised high in the air, and on its descent a kiss was demanded for each of the escort. The women appear to have consented gladly not only to the ride but to the pay, and on the following day took their revenge by returning the compliment.

At Easter-time, both priest and people were fired with

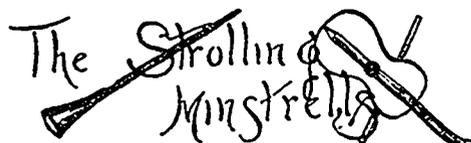
A Religious Enthusiasm for Ball-Playing

The custom was universal in all ranks. The game was made part of the church service. Bishops and Deans took the ball into the sacred building, and at the proper time, began to dance and throw the ball to the choristers. All afterwards adjourned for refreshments, at which taisy cakes, and a gammon of bacon, in token of their abhorrence of the Jews, were favourite dishes.

The Mayor and Corporation, with twenty incorporated guilds, in full pageant of crimson and gold, went out to football. The Shoemakers' Guild presented the ball to His Worship, and the sport began. As games will have it, strife would arise, and King Henry VIII. ordained that the competition should take the form of foot-racing, the prize to the swiftest consisting of silver ornaments. Later, the prize was a silver bell, and the races were on horseback, the bell being used to decorate the successful horse. In this too, the women were upsides with their lords and masters, when football was indulged in headed by the Mayor's daughter.

Eggs were distributed to such an extent that the price rose to a serious degree. They were the valentines of the season. They were boiled very hard in water which was coloured with red, blue, or violet dyes, and inscriptions or landscapes were traced on them. They too were sometimes used in the religious game of football. Their significance in relation to Easter arose, no doubt, from their being emblematic of the revival of Nature in Spring from the death of winter, and so of the resurrection of Christ.

In the Tyrol, the peasants keep the festival with picturesque ceremony. Easter hymns echo through their beautiful valleys to the sympathetic strains of the guitar. Their simple homes are decorated with flowers. The children dance in the sun-light; and, when the sun is getting low, torches of pinewood throw their lights and shadows over the peaceful mountains.



pass by. The farmer brings his wine, and his good dame her cakes, and the singers and players refresh themselves for further strolls and future carols.