



EASTER PAST and PRESENT

Easter is the name given to the Church Feast of our Lord's Resurrection. It is one of the three Great Ecclesiastical Festivals of the year, the other two being Christmas and Whitsuntide, and of these three it is the Queen. For however the Church may glory in the event which Christmas commemorates, the deep and lasting foundation of our religion rests not so much upon the birth of the little Babe in Bethlehem as upon the sacrifice and death of the Man—the Son of Man, upon the Cross—His resurrection from the grave, and His ascension into Heaven.

The Book of Prayer tells us that "Easter Day is always the first Sunday after the full moon, which happens upon, or next after, the twenty-first day of March; and if the full moon happens upon a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after."

It is thus a movable feast, and upon it depend all the other movable feasts and fasts throughout the year.

The Latin name Pascha takes us back to the historic origin of the Passover, from which the story of Easter necessarily begins. The Passover was the greatest of the three great annual feasts in the time of Moses, the other two being the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, of Wheat Harvest, or of First Fruits; and the Feast of Tabernacles, or Ingathering.

The Passover was celebrated at the first full moon of the Springtide, and lasted eight days. It was the celebration of the Exodus from Egypt, and as it was ordained that only unleavened bread should be eaten, it was also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. A lamb, without blemish, roasted whole, formed the meal in every house on the eve of the Festival. The members of the family appeared in travelling garb, and prayers and thanksgivings, with special reference to the freedom from bondage which they had met to commemorate, accompanied the repast, and at a later time cups of red wine were added. The name Passover was strictly applied to the first day, when the paschal lamb was eaten, entirely consumed, any remnant having been forbidden; and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was really the rest of the week, during which other animal food was eaten. But the two names were often interchangeable.

The Paschal Meal.

as at present celebrated among our Jewish brethren, partakes of the character of a hallowed family feast with reference to the great national event. On account of the uncertainty prevailing in former times about fixing the full moon, the Jews, out of the Holy Land, keep the feast on the two first evenings. They are known as Exiles, and although considered orthodox, the regulations of the lamb for each house, the travelling garb, etc., have been abrogated, and other symbolical tokens have taken their place. The order of prayers and chants to be recited has received many additions, and even Medieval German songs have crept in which are supposed to bear upon the past and future of the Chosen People.

In the Early Christian Church, the paschal season extended over fifteen days, of which Easter Day was the central point. It had a double signification—lenten and jubilant; sorrow for the past, and hope for the future.

The fast of Easter Eve was of the strictest character, and was prolonged at least till midnight; Good Friday and Easter Eve being a continuous fast, in supposed obedience to our Lord's words—"The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." (Matt. ix., 15). As night advanced and

Easter drew near.

all sign of sorrow was laid aside. Lamps and candles were lighted, and people of all ranks, even magistrates and ladies of high degree went about carrying lamps and lighting tapers in the churches. Sorrow gave place to jubilant joy, and the latter part of the Eve was spent in prayers, hymns, reading of Scripture, and exhortations.