

Resurrection.

[The following beautiful Easter poem was written by Mary A. Lathbury, and published in the *Sunday School Journal* several years ago:]

I WAS a corn of wheat
That fell in the ground—
Out in the sunlight sweet,
Out of the sound
Of human voices and the song of birds,
Yet in the damp and death I heard the words,
Once spoken in the dark, and now more plain,
"Ye must be born again."

"O Earth, Earth, hear!" I cried,
"The voice of the Lord!
Open your prison wide—
Fulfil his word!"

But denser, darker, round me closed the earth;
It was a day of death, and not of birth;
And crushing human feet passed o'er the sod
That shut me out from God.

There was no way—no choice—
No night—no day—
No knowledge—no device—
Only decay!

Yet at my heart a little flickering life
Remembered God, and ceased its useless strife;
Remembered the command it could not keep,
And fell asleep.

When life began to dawn,
The song of a lark,
With a subtle sense of morn,
Fell through my dark,
And tender sounds of happy-growing things,
Or the soft stirring of a chrysalis' wings,
Thrilled all the under world, sunless and dim,
With an Easter hymn!

Then the great sun leaned low
And kissed the sod.
Ah! what was I, to know
The touch of God!

The dumb earth melted at his voice, and I
Stood face to face with him beneath his sky,
And all around—within—below—above—
Was life and love.

Facts Concerning Easter.

BY GEOFFREY WILLISTON CHRISTINE.

VERY few people, even among devout Christians, can give any accurate account of the origin of the Easter festival, or can tell why it occurs on a different day each year, and how that day is determined. Its name, like those of the days of the week, is a survival of the old Teutonic mythology. To the Germans it was known as Ostern, and to the Anglo-Saxon as Eastre, or Eostre, a name derived from Eostre or Ostara, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of Spring, to whom the fourth month, answering to our April, thence called Eostur monath, was dedicated. The name of the goddess comes from the Saxon oster, to rise.

To the French, Easter is known as Paques; to the Italians, as Pasqua; and to the Spanish, as Pascua—all of which are derived from the Latin Pascha and the Greek Parxa, which are Chaldee or Aramaean forms of the Hebrew word Pesach, signifying the "Passover," by which was meant the passing over of the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt by the destroying angel when he smote the Egyptians, commemorated by the great annual feast so often spoken of in the Scriptures as the Feast of the Passover.

Easter, which from its earliest day has been styled the "Queen of Festivals," was the perpetuation of this feast by the first Christians, who, from their close connection with the Jewish Church, naturally continued to observe the Jewish festivals. Thus the Passover, ennobled by the thought of Christ, the true Paschal Sacrificial Lamb—the first fruits from the dead—became the Christian Easter.

But there quickly sprang up between Christians of Jewish and Gentile descent, a long-continued

and bitter controversy as to the proper time for the observance of this festival. The former insisted that Lent should terminate at the same time as the Paschal fast of the Jews, to which it was analogous on the fourteenth day of the moon, and that Easter should immediately follow, without regard to the day of the week. Gentile Christians, on the contrary, maintained that the first day of the week should be observed as that of our Lord's resurrection, and that the preceding Friday should be kept as the occasion of his crucifixion, without regard to the day of the month. By reason of their observance of the fourteenth day of the moon, the former class were derisively styled "Quartodecimani," or fourteen-day men, by the latter, who also stigmatized them as heretics.

It was the Church of Rome that gradually harmonized these differences. The Council of Nicæa, called by the Emperor Constantine, A.D. 325, partly to settle this controversy, finally agreed that "Easter shall hereafter be kept on one and the same day throughout the world, and none shall hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews."

It was also the Church at Rome which established the rule that the day for the celebration of our Lord's resurrection should be the first Sunday after the fourteenth day of the calendar moon, which happens on or next after March 21—the vernal equinox—thus allowing it to occur as early as March 22, or as late as April 25. This old Roman rule is still observed throughout the Christian world; though as the churches of Russia and Greece, and indeed the Oriental churches generally, still observe the old Julian calendar instead of the more modern Gregorian one, their Easter occurs sometimes before and sometimes after that of the Western Church—though very rarely—as in 1865 it falls upon the same day.

Easter customs, sports, and superstitions afford a wide field of interest. While many of them have existed almost from the first celebration of this festival, and are found among Christians of all nationalities, there are others which are peculiar to peoples and places. In the middle districts of Ireland there is a superstition that the sun dances in the heavens on Easter morning. About eight or nine o'clock of the previous evening, called "Holy Saturday," the wives of prosperous farmers place many a fat hen and choice piece of juicy bacon in the family pot, and woe betide the luckless wight who ventures to taste before cock crow. At midnight, among universal expressions of joy, there are heard loud cries of "Out with the Lent!" Then, after a short period of merriment, the household retires to rest, rising again by four o'clock in the morning, "to see the sun dance." Nor is this superstition confined to the lower or middle classes, for I have been assured by persons of wealth and culture that they have repeatedly seen the sun dance on Easter morning.

The use of flowers to decorate churches at Easter has been in vogue from time immemorial, and they were originally intended as direct emblems of the resurrection, having risen in the spring from the earth in which, during the severe winter, they seem to have been buried.

There is an old superstition, that unless some new article of dress is worn on Easter, misfortune will be sure to follow throughout the year, as stated by the following couplet in "Poor Robin's Almanac":—

"At Easter let your clothes be new,
Or else be sure you will it rue."

An old English name for Easter was "God's Sunday." In Twickenham, England, it was long customary to divide two large cakes among the young people in the parish church; but, in 1645,

it was directed by Act of Parliament that thenceforward there should be bought, in lieu of the cakes, loaves of bread for the parish poor, and for many years it was customary to throw these loaves from the church tower, to be scrambled for by the poor children on the Thursday following Easter.

Among the peasantry of Spain it is the custom to choose an Easter King; and a good story is told of Charles the Fifth, that, during one of his journeys, he encountered one of these royal personages with a tin crown upon his head and a spit in his hand for a sceptre. Wholly ignorant of the real king's rank, the peasant ordered him, rather roughly, to take off his hat to the King of the Easter!

"Your Majesty," said the Prince, uncovering with a profound obeisance, "if you find royalty as troublesome as I do, you will soon be glad to abdicate."

Abstinence from meat on Easter Sunday will, it is said, avert fevers during the ensuing year. In certain parts of England, the first dish brought to the table on that day is a red herring, fashioned by the cook after the likeness of a man riding on horseback. A piece of bacon is then eaten to show abhorrence to Judaism. The usual Easter morning salutation among the primitive Christians was "Christ is risen," to which the response was, "He is risen indeed," or else, "And hath appeared unto Simon."

Parish clerks in the counties of Dorset and Devon leave, as an Easter offering, at the house of every parishioner, immediately after the church service on Good Friday, a large and a small white cake, having a mingled sweet and bitter taste. This is evidently a survival of the "bitter herbs" of the Passion Supper.

The oldest, most familiar, and most universal of all Easter customs, are those associated with eggs. Hundreds of years before Christ, eggs held an important place in the theology and philosophy of the Egyptians, Persians, Gauls, Greeks, and Romans, among all of whom an egg was the emblem of the universe, while the art of colouring it was profoundly studied. The sight of street boys striking their rival eggs together to see which is the stronger and shall win the other, was as common in the streets of Rome and Athens two thousand years ago, if we are to believe antiquarians, as it is in any of our American cities to-day. These eggs, now called Easter eggs, were originally called "Pasche eggs," corrupted to "Paste eggs," because connected with the Paschal, or Passover Feast.

One reason for associating an egg with the day on which our Saviour arose from the dead, may be that the little chick, entombed so to speak, in the egg, and rising from it into life, was regarded as typical of an ascension from the grave.

An old North-of-England custom is the exchanging of Easter eggs as presents, to which usage the sending of cards and other Easter offerings, of late years so much in vogue in this country, may be traced. It is also customary in England's northern counties, to elaborately "engrave" Easter eggs, by scraping off the dye with a penknife, thus leaving the design in white upon a coloured ground. The full name of the decorator, and the date of his or her birth, are often recorded in this manner, and these eggs, preserved as mantel ornaments for generations, present as reliable evidence of dates as the records of a family Bible.

At the Centenary of Sunday-schools in London, in 1880, a speaker said he asked a boy if his father was a Christian. The boy replied: "Yes, sir, he's a Christian, but he doesn't do much at it."