

Easter.

BY MARGARET E. SANDER.

Sing, that the winter is over,
Sing for the coming of spring,
For the showers and flowers and beautiful hours,
And the flash of the robin's wing,
Sing, for the gladness of Easter;
Lift up your voices and sing.

Deep in the heart of the forest,
Down at the roots of the trees,
There is the stir of the violets coming,
And smile of anemones,
And many a kiss of fragrance
Goes out to the fragrant breeze.

Sing, for the coming of Easter,
And many a rare surprise
Of beauty and bloom awaiting
The looking of happy eyes.
Sing, for the Easter sunshine
And the blue benignant skies.

And carry the tall white lilies,
And the roses brimming sweet,
To the church where aisle and altar
Are sought by hastening feet.
Sing, to the Lord of the Easter,
Who is coming, your songs to meet.
—Harper's Round Table.

FACTS CONCERNING EASTER.

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 moon, answering to our April, thence called Eostur monath, who 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 was derisively styled "Quarto-decimani," 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 Nicea, 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 of 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

comes 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 split 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 Passover Supper.

The oldest, most familiar, and most universal of the 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 "Paste eggs," corrupted to "Pascate 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 countries, to elaborate "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, preserved as mantel ornaments for generations, present as reliable evidence of dates as the records of a family Bible.

HOW RAY SET THE BALL ROLLING.

It was fine coasting in Bruce's field, and Ray Light was off for a good time with the sled all to himself; for Ralph had a toothache that morning—a real one, that kept him in the house, and sent the big tears trickling down his cheeks.

"Hi rrah! Won't I have a jolly time with nobody to say, 'Here, it's my turn now!'" he thought, as he trudged along after the other boys.

He had coasted down a few times, enjoying every minute, when, as he drew his sled up the hill, he noticed a new boy standing watching the others. His clothes were old and patched, and his hands were in his pockets for warmth, because he had no mittens.

Away went Ray again, to show the new boy how fast his sled could go. Conscience was talking to him. "I don't have to," he answered. "Every other time I have to share it with Ralph; so—" And away he spun down the hill the second time. But some way it didn't seem so much fun this time, and by the time Ray reached the top again conscience had won.

"Say, want a coast?" he called out as he passed the new boy. "Come on, if you do."

The new boy did not wait for a second invitation. His face beamed with delight as he hastened to "come on." My, how the sled did whiz! He fairly flew down the hill, and his pinched cheeks were rosy as he trudged back.

"Haven't you any sled?" asked Ray.

The boy shook his head.

"We'll take turns, then," said Ray, bravely. "Here goes! Hooray!"

Every coast was fine now, as they took turns, and Ray saw how happy Jack was to be in the fun with the rest. Soon the other boys began to offer their sleds, and by-and-bye Joe Hill said he must go, but if Ray would bring it along when he came, Jack could take his sled the rest of the morning.

To say that Jack was happy would not begin to tell what a joyful flutter was in his heart. He had but lately moved to town, but if this was the way boys did here, it must be a pretty good sort of place, he thought. Ray now had his sled to himself, and, as conscience was very well contented, he enjoyed every minute.

When noon came, and the boys started home, some one asked Jack where he lived.

"Down by the old mill," he answered.

"What, are you the folks that were burned out over in the South village?"

"Yes. There's where I lost my sled, in the fire," answered Jack.

"Whew! that's tough," whistled a chorus of voices. And the new boy was a hero at once.

When boys are interested, "does not take long to do things." The next time he coasting was good in Bruce's field, Jack was there with a brand new sled, of which he was very proud; and with boyish good-nature it was passed around and tried by all, for hadn't the boys an interest in that particular sled? When a boy's pocket-money goes to give some other boy a good time, his interest goes with it, you may be sure. A new pair of mittens kept Jack's hands nice and warm, and his ragged jacket was covered by a thick reefer.

The mothers heard about the sled, and began to inquire about the family down by the old mill. Then they found that the mother had been sick, and the father was so burned in the fire he could not use his hands; and so they were very poor, and had scarcely anything to be comfortable with.

So bags and boxes of good things to eat began to appear in Jack's home, and warm clothing, made by kind and generous hands, came to the sick mother; and matters began to look very encouraging to the poor people, who had felt that everything had gone in that terrible fire. Work was found for the father, the mother gained rapidly, and home seemed a very different place to Jack in a few months.

And it was Ray Light who had set the ball rolling which brought so much comfort and good cheer to them all. But Ray never thought of it in that way. He had only shared his sled with the new boy; that was all—Every other Sunday.

LESSON NOTES.

SECOND QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE ACTS AND EPISTLES.

LESSON IV.—APRIL 25.

PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON.

Acts 12, 5-17. Memory verses, 7-9.

GOLDEN TEXT.

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.—Psalm 34, 7.

OUTLINE.

1. The Prisoner, v. 5, 6.
2. The Angel, v. 7-11.
3. The Disciples, v. 12-17.

Time.—In the spring of A.D. 44.

Place.—Jerusalem.

HOME READINGS.

1. Peter delivered from prison.—Acts 12, 1-10.
2. Peter delivered from prison.—Acts 12, 11-19.
3. God's power to save.—Psalm 83, 10-22.
4. The Lord's angel.—Psalm 34, 1-10.
5. Refuge of the godly.—Psalm 91.
6. Able to deliver.—Dan. 6, 15-23.
7. Helping by prayer.—2 Cor. 1, 1-11.

QUESTIONS FOR HOME STUDY.

1. The Prisoner, v. 5, 6.
What encouragement had the church to pray? Matt. 18, 19.
How was Peter guarded while the church prayed?
2. The Angel, v. 7-11.
What visitor came to Peter?
What did he do and say?
What further did he tell Peter to do?
What did Peter think of all this?
How did they get out of prison?
Where did the angel leave Peter?
To what conclusion did Peter then come?
What truth concerning God's care does this illustrate? Golden Text.
3. The Disciples, v. 12-17.
To whose house did Peter go?
Who came to the door when he knocked?
What did she do? Why?
What did the disciples think?
When they saw Peter how did they feel?
What did he tell them?
What did he bid them?
What "James" was this? Matt. 10, 3.

PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.

- Where in this lesson are we shown—
1. The strength of prejudice?
 2. The value of united prayer?
 3. The power of God?

THE SALOON AND DRINK.

WHAT THEY THINK OF IT.

- A curse.—Queen Victoria.
- A scandal and a shame.—Wm. E. Gladstone.
- Traps for workmen.—Earl Cairns.
- Devilish and destructive.—Lord Randolph Churchill.
- Drink is the curse of the country.—Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.
- Stupelics and besota.—Bismarck.
- The mother of sins.—Southey.
- The devil in solution.—Sir Wilfred Lawson.
- Liquid fire and distilled damnation.—Robert Hall.
- The mother of want and the nurse of crime.—Lord Brougham.
- A poison in politics as well as in society.—Sir W. Harcourt.
- The nation is being throttled by the traffic.—Lord Rosebery.
- A huge nuisance and misery.—London Times.
- Yet "this curse," so "devilish and destructive," that "stupelics and besota," "the mother of sins," "of want and the nurse of crimes," the "devil in solution," "the nations' scandal and shame," and the "trap for workmen," the English nation legalizes, protects and cherishes at a cost of well-nigh seven hundred million dollars, and the American nation does the same with the huge curse at a cost of one billion dollars, and Canada at a cost of fifty millions.