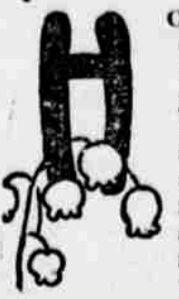


Easter Facts and Fancies



OLY WEEK leads us through the deep shades of penitence and sorrow to Gethsemane, the Last Supper, Good Friday and the Cross, leaving us in silence and darkness at the sepulchre. But now, lo, as at Christmas, an angel brings joyful tidings to them. Here again an angel voices the greatest, gladdest, most blessed truth that ever thrilled the ears and elated the souls of men: "Christ is risen."

Thus our week of sorrows and our way by the Cross, lead us to this brightest morn of time, to the shining mount of immortality, to the glorious vision of eternal life. What a gift is life! What a joy it is to live! The joys of sight and the visions of the eye; the joy of activity and work, the joy of high and noble aims, the joys of the heart, of friendship, and love; the joy of elevated thoughts; the manly joy of overcoming difficulties; the high transports of doing good and sacrifice for truth's sake; the joy in the sense of the beautiful and sublime in nature; the ecstasies in the rapt harmonies of music; the joy in religious worship and prayer—what tongue of archangel can tell the joy, the bliss, the rapture, embraced in this all in—life!

But sweet, varied and glorious as is this gift of life, we see confronting it the black, spectral, inevitable figure of death. Who, then, but must study this question which concerns his happiness more deeply than all else? This death, which steadily creeps toward me, will it really wrest from me this priceless possession of life? This is the supreme thought for every living soul to reflect upon on Easter Day. To study in the light of the Gospel of the Resurrection.

Nature here is our first teacher. She is full of emblems of the Resurrection. Could you forecast the golden fruit from the withered blossom, or the bird from the broken shell, or the brilliant, plumaged insect's wings from the chrysalis coffin from which it emerges? So spring is full of signs. Every spring, in forest, garden and field, death is swallowed up of life. All winter the trees stand stripped and bare; the shrubs, the grasses, the flowers sleep in a cold white sepulchre of snow. But in the spring comes the dawn of a new life. The drifts melt, the fountains flow, the rivers burst their ice bonds, the trees put forth buds and leaves, the grasses awake from their chill slumbers, and the crocus and myrtle peep from the ground—the advance guard of that lovely army of flowers which will decorate the whole summer with their plumage.

It is the Resurrection time of the visible creation. It is the Easter of the world. It is nature's prophetic answer to the inquiring soul of man, and it is full of hope. It is the grand Epic of Immortality, written by the finger of God upon the strata of the earth.—Rev. J. B. Remensnyder.

There is one day in the year on which custom requires that the grounds of the White House, ordinarily sacred against intrusion, shall be thrown open to all comers. It is Easter Monday, which is par excellence the children's day in Washington. On that occasion the little ones come from far and near to roll eggs on the smooth lawns in the rear of the executive mansion, and their prerogative in this regard is of long standing.

It is one of the prettiest customs of the festive kind that survive in this part of the world, and nobody knows exactly how or when it originated. Ever so long, perhaps a century ago, in the neighborhood of Baltimore and adjacent counties of Virginia, it was the habit of the children to go out in little parties on Easter Monday and roll eggs. For some reason unexplained the sport has become in a manner localized in Washington, and in earlier days the egg rolling was done on the capitol grounds as well as at the White House. But on one unfortunate occasion so much damage was done to the grass that unsympathetic legislators for the nation promulgated a decree forbidding the practice.

Thus it has come about that the children all assemble at the White House, where the grounds are specially adapted to that purpose, being of a rolling contour, with many small mound-shaped hills, down the slopes of which the eggs easily travel. McKinley took much interest in this Easter pastime, and usually found time to go out himself into the crowd and watch the sport for a few minutes. General Grant used to do the same thing, a cigar in his mouth, and Nellie Arthur, who was a child when she lived in the executive mansion, herself took part in the games. Benjamin Harrison's grandchildren did the same thing.

The festival is one to which nearly every child in Washington looks forward when Easter time comes round, and not the least part of the fun is the decoration of the eggs, which must be dyed beforehand in all sorts of colors. The older youngsters take pride in coloring their own eggs, while the younger ones depend upon mamma. By Saturday night the eggs must be ready, snuggled in a little basket, with some green excelsior, if possible, to counterfeit grass. Then, when Monday's sun has risen, with promise of favorable weather, the hairns start for the festive scene, in most cases accompanied by parents or nurse.

It is an all-day affair, this business of egg rolling, and the children are anxious to begin it as

early as possible. They gather in crowds outside the tall iron fence that encloses the White House grounds, and when the gates are thrown open, at exactly nine a. m., they flock in pell-mell and distribute themselves in gladsome squads over the grass-covered hillocks. No time is lost, the sport beginning at once, and soon it is in fast and furious progress, the greensward speckled with eggs of rainbow hues, and the echoes of merry childish voices gladdening the spring time air.

All the children wear their best clothes, which are destined to be sadly mussed and more or less torn before the day is over, yet a thoroughly democratic spirit reigns, the youngsters being of all classes. The fashionable northwestern section of the city is largely represented, as well as the commonalty, and there is not even any distinction of color, the small black urchin joining in the play with the aristocratic offspring of a cabinet member.

Some of the children make races with their eggs, starting them simultaneously from the top of a hillock, with the understanding that the one to reach the bottom first is the winner. If it is "for fair" the egg of the loser passes into the possession of the successful contestant. Another way is to roll an egg down hill, to be received at the bottom on the point of a second egg, if the thing is properly done, and failure or success in this object gives rise to much merriment. Or, again, two children may roll their eggs toward each other on a flat piece of ground, and when they have met the one cracked is lost.

"Picking eggs" is a form of the sport peculiar to the boys, requiring as it does some degree of expertness, while having about it the thrilling suggestion of a gamble. One boy holds an egg in his fist, so as to expose the smallest possible bit of the point, and this is attacked by the point of another boy's egg, a series of taps deciding which is the harder of the two. First it is point to point, then butt to butt, and then finally "siders," the upshot of the affair being a transfer of the cracked egg to the owner of the one that remains unbroken.

Now and then along comes a knowing youth, with wisdom beyond his years, and a guinea hen's egg, which, inasmuch as it is much harder than any hen's egg, is a sure winner. But it is a green youngster that does not know enough to be on his guard against an egg that has speckles on it, even though it be artfully explained to him that it was laid by a speckled hen. Occasionally a china egg is similarly worked as a "ringer."

When the eggs are rolled down hill, it is customary for the owners to roll after them—a performance somewhat calculated to injure clothes and incidentally liable to result in the smashing of the eggs. But this latter is a matter of no great importance, inasmuch as a broken egg is something to be immediately eaten, and the devouring of it is a pleasant incident. Necessarily the eggs are all hard boiled, and, therefore in condition for off-hand consumption.

At twelve o'clock it is time for lunch, and then mamma or nurse spreads a delightful meal on the greensward—a feast, which, owing to the joyful circumstances, is vastly more appetizing than the most elaborate banquet at home could be. Eggs, as is proper, furnish the piece de resistance usually, but there is milk in bottles for the very small tots, for children of all ages are present, and many of them even come in baby carriages, being not yet old enough to walk. Outside the grounds are many hucksters with goat wagons and donkey carts, who have for sale plentiful supplies of candy, peanuts, pies, apples and oranges. On the whole, it is somewhat like a circus.

To make things altogether joyful, the marine band, which is the President's own troop of musicians, usually plays for the benefit of the little ones, being stationed on a platform near by.

In the afternoon great numbers of grown folks come to see the fun, enjoying it almost as much as the youngsters do. By the time the sun gets well over into the western sky most of the eggs have been broken, and then it is that colored persons with large grins and cavernous stomachs come around, suggesting a willingness to devour all the eggs the children will give them. This is great sport from the children's point of view, and the number of eggs consumed by some of the volunteers is really astonishing.

Finally it is all over. The wreck that is left behind is doleful indeed. Everywhere the grass is strewn with a litter of broken eggs, brown paper and other debris, and little feet have made many a hole in the turf. It cost \$114 one year to repair the damage done on this one day of jollification. But Uncle Sam paid the bill without a murmur—the fun was worth the money.

In Jerusalem, Holy week, between Palm Sunday and Easter, besides being the occasion of solemn service inside the churches, sees many associated ceremonies that are as picturesque as devout. The Via Dolorosa (Sorrowful Way), (supposed to be the road over which Christ bore the cross to Calvary), is thronged with pilgrims from all parts of the world, who follow the route on their knees.

In Rome, in a small building near the Lateran palace, similar devotees climb, upon their knees, the whole length of a flight of 28 steps—the Scala Santa (sacred stairway), which once stood in Pilate's palace at Jerusalem, and was trodden by the Man of Sorrows, whom Pilate delivered up to death.

In New Mexico a religious fraternity known as the Brothers of Penitence for over a century celebrated the week before Easter with self-tortures of the most sickening description. The members of the organization are not monks, but men who live the rest of the year like their neighbors, as commonplace farmers, herdsmen and traders. Only at this season they take it upon themselves to offer heaven the grewsome sight of human creatures whipping themselves with rawhide thongs and pressing cactus thorns into their own flesh. Not many years ago they even used to nail one chosen out of their own number to a tall wooden cross, set up in the wilderness. Efforts, in the main, successful, have been made of late years, to stop the observance.

In Russia the Easter salutation is a picturesque survival from apostolic customs. Friends and neighbors, or even strangers, who chance to meet on the street, say: "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" the other person responds. And very often a kiss is exchanged even by two men, in token of the day's significance. The religious observance is elaborate. This, of course, was in the old Russia. Nobody seems to know what observance there is, under Soviet rule.

Our Filipino cousins, after going to church Easter morning, will think the afternoon wasted unless they see a good cock fight. In Spain and most Spanish-speaking countries a bull fight is both popular and distinctly fashionable as entertainment for the afternoon of Easter day.

Greece has local celebrations that are full of dignity and beauty. One of these is the famous choral dance, which takes place each year at Megara, a few miles from Athens. It is performed out of doors, in the presence of thousands of spectators by country girls of marriageable age, all dressed in a special holiday costume of singular beauty and elegance. The dance is sedate and stately to the last degree, and is said to have close resemblance to the religious dance of Greek maidens 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. But, though the dancers are most demure in their manners, it is an open secret that their appearance now is practically a bid for offers of marriage. One would not suppose this could be necessary to encourage wooers, but the fact is the modern Greek stands out rather stiffly for a good dowry with his bride, and a girl whose face is her fortune has to advertise it.

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