

# THE LEG OF EASTER AND ITS MANY MYTHS

## Curious Traditions That Reach Back Through the Centuries

**T**HERE were eggs long before hens had begun to lay—at least in myth. And things were hatched from eggs—in myth—long before fowls had developed the maternal instinct.

Many centuries before the first Easter the egg was associated in men's minds with certain seasons and with hoary traditions. There are few objects about which cling such antique myths.

In ancient mythology it was believed that the world itself sprang from the egg. Before Zoroaster was born the Persians presented eggs to one another at the time of the year



*The Persian Idea of Creation*  
Inated in Germany. From Germany, too, came the quaint idea that hares laid eggs. While eggs are colored at Easter the world around, the people of certain parts of Austria believe it is an unholy custom, and that the person who colors eggs at this season of the year will never be married.  
In the charming district of Bresse, on the western slopes of the Alps, a pretty custom prevails. On Easter morning a hundred eggs are scattered over a level space in the town. A lad and lass come forward and dance the "Branlee."  
If they complete the dance without breaking an



*A Modern Interpretation of the Easter Egg*

corresponding to our Easter. So did the Romans before the gods oracled of Caesar; so did the Franks before the story of the cross reached their forest homes.

Most ancient symbol of life, the egg recalls many interesting legends. The humble hen may cackle with pride over the importance ascribed to her product. The Chinese believe man himself sprang from the egg.

Perhaps there is a nest in your home this morning—eggs variegated, tinted with all the colors of the rainbow; chicken eggs, bird eggs, chocolate and candy eggs—Easter is the hey-day of the egg.

So perhaps you may be interested in a journey back to the periods when the egg myths began.

**A**DAM and Eve did not figure in Persian mythology. There were two forces, good and evil, Ahriaman and Ormuzd; the world, they believed, was created from a gigantic egg.

At that time—before the creation—there was no light—only an egg. The egg broke. Then, lo! the lower portion of the shell changed into the earth; the white albumen soared into the heavens and became the sun, while the yolk became the moon to light the new sphere by night.

Breaking into little pieces, the upper portion of the shell tilted the sky, and countless stars twinkled.

Thus, the Persians declared, the world was created. At the celebration of their New Year they presented to one another beautifully tinted eggs in commemoration of the creation.

"Everything springs from the egg. It is the world's cradle," was a proverb among the ancients. The old Finns cherished a myth similar to that of the Persians.

A mysterious bird laid an egg on the lap of Vainmou, the god, who hatched it on his bosom. Whether the god tired or fell asleep is not recorded, but he let the egg fall. It broke; the lower half became the earth, the upper portion heaven.

The charming islands of Hawaii, the natives believe, emerged from an egg, which a strange bird laid upon the waters.

Man, the Chinese declare, had his origin in a colossal egg. When the egg broke Pon-Koo-Wong, the first human being, emerged.

Pon-Koo-Wong had an idea as to the utility of things, so he set to work and of the egg made the earth and heaven. With the lower half he created the planet, and with the upper half the sky. When he settled down peacefully in the home prepared for his descendants.

### ALWAYS A DELICACY

Eggs have always been a food for human beings. Before the time of Adam, some scientists assert, the simians regarded them with delight as the chef-d'oeuvre of Mother Nature, and after man, having tried of apples, learned of their rare delicacy, the snake, in its evil desire to compass all knowledge, began sucking eggs.

They have always been regarded by man, and by not a few beasts, as a morsel of tastefulness, and to-day volumes of French cookery books are devoted to the egg.

When the custom of presenting eggs began is not definitely known. Egg games were celebrated by the Romans in egg-shaped arenas, the winners receiving baskets of eggs as prizes. These games were instituted in honor of Easter and Follux, who were brought forth from eggs laid by Leda after the visitation of Jupiter.

Many writers claim that the custom of using eggs at Easter was borrowed from the Hebrews, who used them at their Passover feasts. It is more likely that the custom originated in the fourth century, when the church prohibited the use of eggs during forty days of Lent.

During that time, however, the hens continued to lay, so that by the end of Lent there were large quantities of eggs on hand. Parents then gave the eggs to their children, and, in order to make them attractive, dyed them various colors.

It was at this time the game of picking eggs began, and the children had great fun trying to see who had the egg of hardest shell. Of course, it was a rather sloppy game at first, for the contents were run to the ground, and often on the clothing of the little ones. So the custom of boiling them hard originated, and it has lasted to this day.

Many peculiar customs are observed in various countries in connection with the egg. In many districts of France the parish priest visits and blesses the houses at Easter. As a reward he is given baskets of boiled eggs, both plain and colored.

In various parts of Europe there is told a legend that early each Easter morning, while soft, sweet music pulses through the budding trees, and the sky brightens, beautiful angels with aureole wings descend from heaven and visit the homes of the faithful. They all bear baskets of eggs, which, the people believe, are deposited in the homes.

Sometimes, they say, the evil one enters the house

after the angel has departed and leaves an egg containing all evil. An old legend in central France is founded on this belief. The peasant housewives tell the story each Easter to their children to teach them the moral of being humble and satisfied with their position.

Once upon a time, the legend runs, there lived in a small village in France a widow and her daughter. Jeanne was young and pure, and possessed an almost unearthly beauty. She had many suitors, but loved none. She loved her mother and her church.

One Easter morning, while returning from mass, Jeanne was accosted by an old beggar woman. Into the outstretched palm Jeanne slipped a coin, and was passing on when the old woman alighted on her back. "Beautiful young woman," croaked the old dame, "do not disdain a little gift. Take this egg, and within twelve months you will be a great lady. A handsome noble will ask you in marriage." The face of the old woman was hidden in her hood, in her extended hand was a red egg. "You will have riches, dresses, pleasure," Jeanne took the egg. "But on your nuptial night," added the crone, "break it. There will be within it a nuptial gift."

From that moment Jeanne was unhappy. She dreamed of honor and wealth; she became vain and devoted hours to caring for her beauty. She dreamed of luxuries.

One day a knight rode into the village. He took possession of an old castle, which had not been tenanted within the memory of man. He proclaimed himself the heir of the ancient lords, restored the castle and furnished it magnificently. Hunting parties were held without interruption. At night the castle glowed with lights. By day laughter rang from the turrets.

While riding through the village one day the young lord, who called himself Sir Robert de Volpiac, saw Jeanne. Struck by her beauty, he sought her mother and asked her in marriage. The mother wished Jeanne to refuse, but Jeanne, burning with ambition, accepted.

On the nuptial night, after the feast, Jeanne and her husband retired to their chamber. The hour of twelve struck. Volpiac opened his arms to caress the bride.

"Wait," she declared, "I must see what the egg contains." She opened a casket, and, after telling him the story of the egg, took it into her hands. It was so hot it burnt her fingers. She let it drop. The instant it broke a hideous toad sprang from the egg, fire spouting from its nostrils. In a moment the room was aflame, the bride and her husband were enveloped in fire. The next morning where the castle had stood there was a mass of smouldering ruins.

During the Middle Ages France was scourged for unusually large eggs, which were brought as tribute to the king on Easter Sunday. After mass had been celebrated in the chapel of the Louvre, great baskets of these large eggs, beautifully gilded, were brought before the chaplain and blessed, after which the chaplain distributed them in the presence of his majesty to the people of the court.

Colored eggs, according to an ancient legend, had a strange origin. On the day after the Saviour died a little bird alighted outside the sepulcher and sang a sweet and plaintive. Ever afterward the bird and its progeny laid wonderful eggs of rainbow hues.

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*The Largest Easter Egg, 18 feet Around and Cost \$2500.*

egg they are irrevocably affianced. The opposition of parents cannot prevail. So at this time lovers whose marriage is opposed by parents invariably join the dance.

An egg dyed scarlet at Easter time is carried during the entire year by many Italians. They declare it brings good luck. The peasants of France at Easter give their children a scarlet egg, which, they say, wards off evil charms.

In the Tyrolean mountains a young woman desirous of winning the favor of a young man gives him a scarlet egg. In Armenia the people place red eggs on the graves of the dead at Easter, so the spirits may take part in the glorious resurrection.

The custom of egg rolling originated among the farmers of Europe, who believed that the land over which eggs were rolled at Easter would be fruitful and yield large crops. In Scotland many of the Highlanders search for the eggs of wild birds at Easter; to eat them, they believe, will bring good

fortune. While coloring eggs, Macedonians rub one over both cheeks, with the belief that their complexions will remain ruddy.

A general superstition is that one calls bad luck upon himself by painting a cross on an egg. Good luck is secured if flowers are painted on an egg.

In Italy the egg figures largely in the Easter celebration. William Jones quotes a description from "Emilliane," which is quite picturesque:

"In Italy the heads of a family on Easter eve send great chargers filled with boiled eggs to the church to be blessed. The priest having performed the ceremony, every one carries his portion home, and causes a large table to be set in the best room of the house, which they cover with their best linen, all bedstrewn with flowers, and place around it a dozen dishes of meat."

"'Tis a pleasant sight to see these tables set forth in the houses of great persons, when they expose on side tables, round about the chamber, all the plate they have in the house, and whatever else they have that is rich and curious, in honor of their Easter eggs, which by themselves make a great show, for the shells of them are painted with divers colors and gilt."

"Sometimes there are no less than twenty dozen in the same charger, neatly laid in the form of a pyramid. All who come to visit at that time are

invited to eat an Easter egg, which they must not refuse."

In modern life the egg of Easter has assumed large and costly proportions. Not satisfied with the product of the hen, we have gone to the confectioner and novelty dealer. There are eggs of candy, chocolate, paste-board and glass. One gives his sweetheart her Easter gift of bonbons in a pasteboard egg. And grown folk find amusement in the egg kaleidoscope, while children find stomach ache in the twenty-pound egg of chocolate.

Some years ago the largest Easter egg ever constructed was made in England. It was eighteen feet in circumference and held half a ton of candy. Eggs and contents cost, it was stated, no less than \$2500.

Created just as legend created the egg and things were made of it, the egg of Easter has become a part of the fifth day of creation, so today—thanks to the confectioner—there are Easter eggs regardless of the humor of the hen.

## GOOD AND BAD LUCK OMENS OF EASTER



*How Bohemians Punish Heals at Easter*

*An English Method of Insuring Good Luck*

*The Worst Omen—A Squirrel Across Your Path*

*Slav Method of Seeking a Blessing*

**G**IRLS, do you wish to know whether your lover is true? Would you not like to learn whether your image entirely fills his heart, whether he loves you, sincerely? It is easy. On Easter morning the maiden who eats an

apple may learn her fate. While you eat you must say: "As Eve in her thirst for knowledge ate, So I, too, wish to know my fate."

Then count the seeds. If they are of an even number—he is true; if not—look for another fellow.

**H**ARKEN, ye married ladies, would you enjoy a thrashing this morning? Would you consider it a good omen if your husband, after breakfast, had applied a switch to your shoulders with vigor?

In Bohemia—they do strange things in Bohemia—every faithful husband faithfully switches his faithful wife on Easter morning. If he did not, they will tell you, the couple would almost perish from a scourge of seas during the summer.

Then, imagine what you would do if, while you were on your way to church, in your spring best, some well-meaning friend should pour upon you the contents of a pitcher of water.

Such is a custom of the Slavs. Every Slav tries to douse his or her friend with water; if success attend the effort, good luck to both; if there is failure, the year will be fruitless of blessings.

Were you in Manchester this morning you would see, no doubt, women, in parties of six, walking the streets. They are looking for men. One comes along. The women jump upon him, and seize him by the arms and legs. Lifting him, they throw him over their heads, and, catching him, repeat the performance. This custom brings good luck to the city, they declare.

Many such strange Easter beliefs and customs prevail. In parts of Europe the people arise early Easter

morning and with a pail or pitcher go to the forest. They neither talk nor look behind them going or returning. Just as the light of the rising sun sparkles on the water of a running stream they fill the vessel.

This water is bottled and preserved. By taking a sip occasionally the peasants believe they bring good luck and prosperity to their homes. A little rubbed on the skin is said to give a clear and beautiful complexion.

As the "Gloria" is sung in the churches on Easter morning the mothers of Malta dip their babies in a bath of cold water in which have been sprinkled the petals of flowers which have decorated the sepulcher in the churches on Good Friday. This done, they are satisfied the child will not suffer from any fright it

may have received during the year. Returning from church on Easter morning, the Christians of Macedonia carry lighted candles in their hands, believing that if the candle remains lighted until they arrive at their homes their families will be multiplied, and they will be blessed with good fortunes.

If the candle is extinguished, they look for the death of a relative. The fortunate person arriving home with a lighted taper, with it lights an oil lamp which burns before the picture of the patron saint of the household.

Of course, the belief that if one wears a new garment on Easter he will be blessed with good luck prevails even in this country. At least, the superstition, if not credited, is observed. The young folk of East Yorkshire, England, however, make it an act of sacred duty to wear a new article of attire so as to prevent any spoiling of their clothes during the year.

Great fires are built in the churchyards of certain portions of Bavaria on Easter Sunday. They are lighted with steel and flint. To the fire the devout come, with wailing sticks, which they light, and, when partly consumed, take to their homes. These sticks are placed above the hearth with the belief they will protect the house from lightning.

In many parts of England the people extinguish the fires on Easter day and relight them with flint. This is believed to bring blessings and protect the folk from thunderstorms.

A curious belief prevails in many sections of Europe that if one goes to the grave of a dearly loved one, sings a hymn as the sun rises, the spirit of the dead will rise above the grave and reveal the secrets of the after life.

Many pious folk believe that if they abstain from meat on Easter day, they will not suffer from fever during the ensuing year. The fishermen of Holland regard it as extremely unlucky to eat meat on Easter day.

In Albania the priest of each parish visits the houses of his parishioners after mass and blesses them. As he leaves, the people throw after him ashes from the hearth. They are then convinced that he carries all evil away with him.

### WOE TO CARELESS HUSBANDS

Should a husband be foolish enough to mistake his other woman for his wife on Easter, many people declare he will become a widower before another Easter day.

To bring luck to the house, the good wife should visit every room on Easter. Another omen of good luck is the visit for the first time of a friend bringing a baby on Easter morning.

To fall while going upstairs on Easter day is a sign that one will be robbed of valuables within a short time. To see a star fall on Easter night means the loss of one's sweetheart.

Perhaps the worst omen of Easter day is to have a squirrel cross your path. There is a widespread belief in this country that if a squirrel crosses your path on Easter morning, you will have an accident on the Fourth of July. Do not make love until Whit Sunday. Do not reject an invitation extended today; if you do, it will be your last from that source.

Should you find a cat this morning, do not worry. It is the omen, command the cat. Keep it, and you will come into a fortune.