

EASTER SUNDAY

by Hamish Hendry

On Good Friday the death of Jesus is commemorated, and that being so it is a day of gloom and sadness. On Easter Sunday the rising of Jesus from the dead is commemorated, and that being so it is regarded by the Christian Church as a day of great joy. In the old times, indeed, it was called the Sunday of Joy, and in the Eastern world it is still called the Bright Day. When friends met each other upon Easter Sunday the favourite salutation used to be: "He is risen," and to this was given the reply: "Verily he is risen." Everywhere there was happiness, and this happiness was shown in many ways. At Easter slaves used to receive their freedom, while at the present day, in Russia, birds that have been shut up in a cage have their cage-doors opened, and are permitted to fly away. That is a beautiful custom; an emblem of the freedom that Jesus brought to the world when he broke the power of Death in rising from the grave. In England this happiness is expressed in a practical manner by many marriages at Eastertide.

Easter Sunday is what is called a movable feast; it is not held each year upon the same day of the month. The rule is, that Easter Sunday is always the first Sunday after the full moon that happens upon, or next after, the 21st of March; and if the full moon happens upon a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after. As regards the name "Easter," it is very likely derived from an old Saxon deity called Eastre; for when the Christian religion was first preached to the heathen the missionaries often took an old heathen festival and turned it into a new Christian festival. Now, in the ancient heathen world there was always great joy and feasting in the spring-time when the sun began to rise higher and higher in the heavens, and there is little doubt that the early missionaries, when they converted the heathen, gave a new meaning to the old joy. Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, had risen from the dead; that was the new gladness.

But Christianity did not quite remove all the rites and ceremonies of the heathen worship; some of them, indeed, linger to this day. The ceremonies connected with fire, for instance, were very prominent in the heathen ritual, and in some parts of Europe bonfires are lit at Easter, while in the Roman Catholic Church great importance is given to the lighting of candles and tapers. Then again, there are the Pasch or Easter eggs—boiled hard and dyed in various colours—which are so interesting to children. This name of Pasch is derived from the Jewish festival of the Passover, and the egg we now regard as an emblem of the resurrection; but all the old peoples of the world looked upon the egg as a symbol of new life coming forth with blessing. It was, in some respects, a sacred thing in the old heathen world of the Egyptians and Persians; while here in this country the Easter eggs used to be blessed by the priests at the altar, and kept all the year as a charm against various ailments. Is it not curious to think, children, how races and religions have come to be linked together by small things? These coloured eggs which please you so much at Easter link you with strange old peoples and their strange old customs.

Source:

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