

When Easter Comes on April



By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

THIS year Young America has a real problem on its hands. For Easter comes on April 1 and, as everybody knows, April 1 is April Fools' day. So, what to do, what to do!

Shall the solemn significance of Easter Sunday as a religious festival prevail during the day, the beauty of its symbolism unmarred by any sacrilegious shouts of "April fool!"? Or shall the youngsters exercise their right to "spoon" each other and their elders on this day which, by tradition and by custom, is dedicated to the practical joker? Truly, it is a "perplexing problem of conduct" and one wonders how they will solve it to the satisfaction of both themselves and their elders.

Fortunately, perhaps, such a situation doesn't arise very often. The rules by which the date of Easter Sunday is fixed allow this to happen only about every 11 years. Within the memory of most people now living it has happened only four times. In 1866 Easter Sunday came on April 1, again in 1877 and again in 1888. Logically it would seem that the next time would be in 1899 but, due to the vagaries of our calendar, the eleven-year-old rule didn't work. For in 1890 it was one day off that schedule and Easter Sunday in that year came on April 2. It didn't get back on the eleven-year rotation until 1923 when Easter Sunday and April Fools' day coincided. That happens again this year and will happen again 11 years from now in 1945.

Although Easter Sunday and April Fools' day seem utterly inconsistent, so far as the essential spirit of each is concerned, it is interesting to note that, historically, they trace back to similar origins—religious festivals among the ancients celebrating the coming of spring. Although we moderns have changed the form and the meaning of these festivals, we have retained some of the very same symbols which those ancients used.

The celebration of April Fools' day is usually traced back to the festal rites of the period of the vernal equinox in Persia. It was the day when the Persian New Year began and was very close to the old English New Year's day of March 25. The sun was then entering into the sign of the frisky and playful Aries, so it was appropriate that on that day the "season of rural sports and vernal delights" began. In India there was a similar celebration on March 31, called the Hull festival, which was a time for a general holiday and many jests, including the practice of sending people on long and fruitless errands.

From the Orient the custom came into western Europe many centuries ago. The ancient Romans took delight in planning all sorts of practical jokes in connection with their feast of the Saturnalia and more particularly in playing harmless, though often very humiliating jokes, on each other at the time of the athletic tournament, held in honor of Neptune, around April 1. One solemn antiquarian has declared that the first big April Fool joke in history was the time the Romans invited the Sabines to attend this Neptune celebration and then carried off by force the Sabine women.

Just as April Fools' day had its origin in pagan festivals, from which it has departed a long way, so did Easter have such an origin. The Christian peoples of the world, of course, celebrate it as the anniversary of the resurrection of Christ, but in some of its elements, including that essential one of a resurrection, it traces far back beyond the beginning of the Christian era to the religious rites of several different ancient peoples. It is associated with the worship of Astarte, a goddess of the Phoenicians, Isis of the Egyptians, Diana of the Greeks and Romans and Eostre of the Teutons.

In fact, there are some who say that we get the name of Easter from this Teutonic goddess, Eostre, who was worshipped in the spring, although others claim that it is derived from the word "east," one of the four cardinal points. It is also the cardinal point which has always been most important in all religious ceremonies of all races and creeds. This is because it is the part of the heavens where the sun is seen to rise—the sun, bringer of light and heat, the very giver of life itself. The most primitive intelligence of the most primitive man recognized the fact that the sun and life were inseparably associated and it was only natural that when he came to worship the thing which was greater than he, he should turn to the East whence came that greater and higher thing which he recognized as being the life-giving power.

The symbols which we have retained from these pagan festivals to associate with our celebration of Easter include the white lily, the rabbit and the egg. The Greeks and Romans prized the white lily above all other flowers and in their earlier civilizations it had already come to symbolize purity and virtue, hence an appropriate symbol for a festival celebrating renewed life.

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The association of the rabbit or hare with Easter has its foundations in the ancient belief in European and Asiatic countries that the hare is the symbol for the moon. The moon is the "open-eyed watcher of the night," and the hare is a nocturnal animal. The young of the hare are born with their eyes open and are said never to close them. Since the date of Easter is governed by the moon, it is easily seen how the rabbit, which is the symbol for the moon, came to be an Easter symbol also.

As for the egg, the Egyptians regarded it as an emblem of the recreation of things and of men's regeneration and associated it with the worship of their goddess, Isis, as did the Phoenicians, the Greeks, Romans and Teutons with their goddesses who were the objects of their veneration in spring festivals.

Then, too, the egg with its life germ destined to produce a living creature when warmed by the mother hen is easily associated with the idea of the earth blossoming forth under the warm rays of the sun in the spring, both closely akin to the general idea of resurrection. Since the resurrection of Christ occurred in the spring, it is easy to see how the symbols of the egg and all revived life in the springtime came to be associated with this event in the history of Christianity. The egg as a symbol was taken over by the Hebrews as an emblem of their delivery from bondage and next the early Christians took it over as their symbol of the resurrection.

Mention of the Hebrews makes appropriate at this point comment on the fact that the festival now known as Easter was celebrated by

1. These youngsters aren't likely to be taking part in any April Fool pranks on Easter day. They're having fun of a different kind at the annual Easter egg-rolling on the lawn of the White House.

2. This could be either an April Fool joke or an Easter symbol, it would be a better Easter symbol if it looked more like a calla lily. But it isn't either. It's a Hollywood star wearing a strikingly original costume, so if you think it's a real lily, the joke's on you.

3. Can rabbits lay Easter eggs and, if so, is that little bunny responsible for such a big egg? Or is it just another April Fool joke? The young lady in the picture is wondering!

4. Don't be deceived by the wise look on the face of this Easter rabbit! He's probably thinking up a joke to play on Easter day which is also April Fools' day this year.

ancient Israel as the Passover for many centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. It was based upon the events which took place when the Hebrews were saved from the destruction which was visited upon the Egyptians, as given in Exodus 12:27. The first Christians, being in the main Jews, continued for a long time to observe the Passover as well as other ancient ceremonies. But gradually these early followers of the cross began to substitute the Christ for the paschal lamb of Israel in the Passover ceremonies.

Eventually there arose a difference of opinion between the Christians of Hebrew descent and those of Gentile descent as to the time when these ceremonies should be celebrated. Those of Hebrew descent declared that the date of the death of Jesus should be the date of the ending of the paschal fast, which in Hebrew rites always was on the fourteenth day of the moon in the evening. Therefore the Easter festival, which followed, might fall on any day of the week. Those of Gentile descent, however, wanted the first day of the week, Sunday, to be the first day of the resurrection festival. Thus the Friday preceding would be observed as the date of the crucifixion without paying any attention to the day of the month.

For 325 years the difficulty between the Christians of Jewish descent and those of Gentile descent continued. Not being able to decide the recurrence of Easter, the council of the early Christian church finally appealed to the astronomers in Alexandria, Egypt, for aid. However, the scientists were not of much assistance, for they had no lunar tables such as we now have, computed by master mathematicians. They attempted to make rules, but the variations of the full moon in reference to the year would not cause Easter to fall on Sunday any more than any other day. All wanted it to come on Sunday, so each nation celebrated to suit itself so that it would come on that day. Thus in A. D. 357 the Gauls celebrated Easter on March 21, in Italy it fell on April 18, and in Egypt it fell on April 25.

Eventually the selection of a certain Sunday was definitely fixed in the Sixth century A. D. It was designated as the Sunday between the fifteenth and twenty-first days of the moon in the first month of the Jewish lunar years. It was directed that the computation should be made according to the tables of Victorius of Aquitaine, introduced in 457 A. D. Because of the fact that Britain had ceased to be a part of the Roman empire, the Sixth century decree did not affect the British church at first, and it continued to calculate Easter on a basis previously approved at Rome. The matter was finally disposed of at a synod held at Whitby in Yorkshire in 664 A. D., after which the clergy of the British Isles conformed to the general practice of the western church.

Accordingly Easter is now observed by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches on the first Sunday after the full moon (or fourteenth day of the moon) on or next after March 21. So it cannot be earlier than March 22 nor later than April 25. Thus it is possible for the astronomers and mathematicians to tell in advance on what dates Easter will come each year, and they are now known for more than a century in advance. Thus, too, we know how often it is that young America will be confronted with the problem that confronts them this year—that of celebrating on the same day two occasions which are at the opposite poles in character even though they trace back to a similar origin.

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Incense

By Ethelyn Jackson Vance

Dawned the first sweet day of Easter.
Women went at break of day
To the tomb without the city;
There, where hate had had its way.

Woman's heart by God created
For her work, a heart with room;
Lest to leave the foot of Calvary,
First to hasten to the tomb.

She, whom Birth has crowned its usher,
Braving death each life to bring,
First received the wondrous message
That from Death removed the sting.

Flowers in that holy garden,
Mingled sweetness breathed above,
And the yearning hearts of women
Poured the fragrance of their love.

We of God are truly honored,
Ours of life a sacred part;
Let us on our knees accord Him
Incense of a grateful heart.

BLOSSOMS at Easter Time

WHEN an old Dutch resident declares, of an April morning, that "the Paas lilies by the stoop are out," he is not referring to the American pasque flower or to Easter lilies, but to the beloved, hardy, common daffodil, *Narcissus pseudo-narcissus*, called also the Lent lily. That they are not lilies, but, like all narcissi, members of the amaryllis family, did not concern our gardeners, says a writer in the New York Herald Tribune, who knew but a score or so species of a flower that in at least three centuries of cultivation has multiplied with such beautiful confusion that even botanists do not agree about it, while simple visitors to the flower show are driven to adopt the plan of calling daffodils, narcissi and jonquils all "narcissus," which is right and safe if not specific.



The Modern Easter Lily.

Modern methods of cold storage have made the best-known paschal flower, once truly the Bermuda Easter lily, an all-year adornment. The American pasque flower is a wild anemone which keeps to the northern central states and is not familiar here. The pasque flower of Europe is also an anemone, and it is possible that the poppy-flowered anemone of Mediterranean meadows—red, blue and purple like those local florists are selling today—was the gorgeous bloom to which Christ pointed when he admired "the lilies of the field." In Mexico the poinsettia is often called for de Pascua. The "Easter cactus" (*Schlumbergera*) belongs to hony old kitchen windows. But the flower most appropriate of all to Easter is too rarely seen since grandma's conservatory waned—the cerulean passion flower. In itself and in its story it is exquisite, not to be forgotten at the season of earth's resurrection and of the triumphant festival of the church. The first Spanish explorers, beholding it as it trailed from branches in South American forests, were struck with wonder, finding in its strange form the land's own glorification of their task of conversion.

Legend gathered quickly about Passiflora. A drawing of it, brought from Mexico, created a sensation at Rome in 1610. It was proclaimed to enfold "all the mysteries of the Passion." The ten colored parts of the floral envelope, says Bailey, to an ardent fancy represented the ten apostles present at the Crucifixion. The inner fringes became the Crown of Thorns, the five stamens the Five Wounds, or else the hammers that drove in the Three Nails (in that case represented by the three styles). The vine's coiling tendrils were the cords or scourges, while the leaves, with their "fingers," might have been the hands of Christ's tormentors. That this natural manifestation of Christian belief should have been hidden in the New World's untrodden jungle; astounded Europe. And not long ago even Dutch Reformed households would as soon have lacked Paas lilies as passion vines at Easter.

CAP AND BELLS



TICKLING THE PALATE

"This duck is certainly enough to tickle the palate," the boarder told his landlady. The woman beamed. "I'm very glad you like my cooking," she replied. The boarder looked squarely at her. "I didn't say I liked your cooking," he quickly replied. "I said that this duck is enough to tickle the palate, I was referring to the feathers you left on it."—London Answers.

Lacks Finesse

Mrs. E. C. M. writes: "Albert, aged three and a half, was disobedient, and I said to him, 'If you don't behave, you'll get spanked. You would not like that, would you?' " "I wouldn't like daddy to spank me," was the response. "Why not?" "He doesn't know how. He hurts." —Boston Transcript.

Stretching It

"Now, what about some elastic?" suggested the commercial traveler who was getting an order from an Aberdeen shopkeeper. "Na, na," said the Aberdonian. "I'm for nae mair o' it. I couldna measure a yaird o' your last consignment w'oot the stuff snapping." —Montreal Star.

Forgetful

Forgetful Husband (to friend)—I want you to help me. I promised to meet my wife at one o'clock for luncheon, and I can't remember where. Would you mind ringing her up at our house and asking her where I am likely to be about that time? —Royal Arcanum Bulletin.

FAIRLY WARNED



Mr. Piper—May I have your daughter, sir?
Her Dad—Yes, if you can support her. Remember that my auto goes with her.

Advanced Lessons

Young Wife—Going out again? Two years ago you said I was your whole world.
Husband—Yes; it is surprising how much geography you can learn in two years.—Berlin Lustige Blaetter.

Names

"How did you like the reception?"
"Very much," answered Miss Cayenne. "Not only was it noteworthy because of the distinguished people present, but it was interesting because of several who were prominently listed among those absent."

Dead Letter Baritone

"Yessah, Ah's a great singah."
"Wheah did you-all learn to sing?"
"Ah graduated from a correspondence school."
"Boy, you sho' lost lots of 'yo mail."—Florida Times-Union.

She Tried

"How can you let your wife go round saying she made a man of you? My wife could never do that."
"No, but she told my wife she did her best."

Proof

"Rastus, are you a married man?"
"No, sah, boss, Ah earns mah own living."—London Tit-Bits.

THE FLAVOR LASTS

