



SUNDAY READING

AN EASTER FLOWER.

In Westchester County, down Rye way, there is a long, winding road which takes you over the low hills to the sandy beach of the Sound.

A brackish creek of tide-water crosses the road. Some one built a stone bridge over it. This was many years ago, though, because the bridge is cracked with age now, and in the crevices grass, flowers and shrubs grow. On some of the stones a wandering missionary has painted signs praising God and calling upon the wicked to repent. Directly over the largest crevice the sign is painted.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Under this sign violets were born, and they struggled for life in their stony bed. Then she came.

It was late in May or early in June when she went down Rye way, over the cracked stone bridge, to the Sound. She had never been in the country before. She had been in Central Park once, but that was when she was a very small girl, and she had almost forgotten how it looked. Under the shade of the bridge she and the other children and the Fresh Air Fund folks stopped for luncheon. The girls took off their shoes and paddled in the creek.

After sandwiches and cake she found the violets and dug them out. She had never before seen anything so beautiful. They were prettier than the Easter flowers in the Grand street show windows, and they smelled so sweet. Besides, she found them herself, and they were her own.

It is not far from down Rye way at the bridge to down Battery way. Two hours; that's all if you take a fast train, and violets will live a long time when the roots are buried in a clod of moistened earth. Therefore when she reached her home in Battle Court the flowers were as fresh and as sweet as they were in the crevice in the bridge.

A cracked pitcher was their dwelling place and on pleasant days they stood outside of the kitchen on the window-sill, when they could look down in the court yard and see more life in a single day than they could see in the old stone bridge in ten years.

In stormy weather she took them inside and on cold nights they stood in the front room, where the lamp burned all night.

But they were outside long enough to see lots of things that do not fall to most country-bred flowers. They saw blind Flaherty, the drunken beggar, beat his boy in the court yard until the police came in, and the brute went to prison for a year. They saw the wife of Mike Donohoe, the prize fighter, jump out of the four-story window of her room and fall on the pavement a red and black heap that did not even moan as it was picked up.

They saw Paddy McKeever the night that he and Sally agreed to run away and get married. They liked this, because they had seen such things at the old stone bridge and they knew what it meant.

That is the way the flowers lived from late in May or early in June until the winter had gone and Easter had almost come.

II.

Up town there is a great church. It is rich and beautiful. The light that falls upon the marble altar is purple, violet and gold, and sometimes on the chancel floor the figure of a saint in color falls from the stained windows. She, of the violets, used to go to this great church, and she was welcomed there, because it is a great church.

Good Friday, with its seven services, had passed, and the Lenten trappings of gloom were being taken away to make place for Easter flowers. There were lilies, roses, orchids, violets, palms and shrubs. There were wreaths of greens. Rare and common flowers, hot-house and wild, were massed together. All were love offerings, and that is the reason this spray of violets found a place in one corner of the bank that rose from this Easter altar—in one corner and it was almost hid by a splendid bunch of roses.

Only one person saw it except the young women who belong to the Altar Guild, who labor for love and arrange the flowers for Easter and for other feast days. The person who saw it was dressed in black—common black such as other washerwomen wear when their children die. She saw it and her one wish was that the little girl who had brought it to town from the old stone bridge and had saved it all year for this Easter altar were only there to see it, too.

It was a great congregation befitting a great church and a still greater feast day. From the outer doors to the chancel rail every seat was filled. Other seats were full in the aisles, and they, too, were filled. Back of them men and women stood.

The chimps in the belfry had finished their song and the big A bell had ended the last of its three taps, and the sub-organist in the choir room took up his note from it.

"Onward, Christian soldiers," was the air, and the great congregation outside heard it sung behind the closed doors. Then came the "Amen," louder than the air, richer and fuller.

The choir room opened and the choristers, robed in white and black, trooped out. The great organ in the chancel caught up the air and led the singers. The woman in black saw them come in and she heard them and this is what she heard:

First the trebles, as they trailed by her seat in the front pew—first the trebles sweet and high. Then the altos, they came next and made a second in the harmony. After them came the tenors and behind them marched the basses. Last came the big men in long white surplices, that they had to lift with their hands as they stepped up

the chancel stairs, then the harmony was complete.

"Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, With the Cross of Jesus, going on before."

That was the refrain. That is what the whole choir sang as they faced the great congregation, and its mighty strains rang through the church like the strains of a band marching at the head of an army into battle.

III.

After the service came the sermon. It was preached from a high pulpit, covered with so many flowers that you could not see whether it was made of wood or of marble. The preacher was an old man, with silken, white hair. You have seen a skein of fine silk on a cold day. The threads stand out, one away from the other. That is the way his fine white hair stood out from his head. It was like a nimbus frosted. His voice was low and soft and sweet. He had sung a treble in that choir fifty years before, then he was a tenor, and for more than thirty years he has been the pastor.

"I am going to say to you something that I have said to you every Easter day for more than thirty years."

That is the way his sermon began.

"I am preaching the Gospel of Him who rose today, to strong men and women and to children, who will not be alive to hear this blessed word on Easter day next year."

Even the choir listened to this. The boys stopped fidgeting and the men sat very still. The woman in black, who had listened very still to everything, looked at a little spray of violets and tears fell upon her gloves.

That was what he said, although he used more words than I do and took more time to say it, and after he had left the pulpit and joined the other ministers back of the chancel rail there were more wet eyes than the washerwoman's in that great church, and there were some promises made for the coming year that the makers will not live to keep.

IV.

Early Easter Monday the Altar Guild were again at work. Flowers that have been lent for the festival were returned. The great church was crowded near the chancel steps by men and maidens waiting to carry them home. Other flowers—the cut stalks from the florists', from the hot houses and the little spray of violets—were carted away in a big wagon to a hospital. The sick have their Easter on Monday.

It was in a long white-floored ward. Near the lower end of it an iron cot stood near a window. On this cot there lay a boy. His name was Jim, and he had sold newspapers before the street car off his leg. They carried down the ward these fine flowers from the Easter altar—roses, orchids, lilies and more roses still. Their fragrance made the air heavy, and the newsboy turned his face toward the window.

After all had been distributed a nurse brought to the newsboy a spray of faded violets. It was all that was left. He took it in his hands, placed it to his lips and said something about the country that the nurse didn't catch, and then he went to sleep.—Benjamin Northrop, in Mail and Express.

THE CRUCIFIXION IN ART.

How the Transition From the Symbolic to Historic Stage Took Place.

There is no representation of Christ crucified in his human form, either in the catacomb paintings of the first four centuries or in the mosaics of the early Italian churches, until the year A. D. 706, when Pope John VII. introduced the subject into the mosaic decorations of the chapel dedicated to the Virgin, in the Basilica of St. Peter at Rome. The reason of this appears to have been partly on account of the feeling of repugnance with which so shameful a mode of death was looked upon by the converts to the new religion, and partly because all early Christian art is symbolical and not historical or pictorial.

The changes in the ways of treating the crucifixion may be made divided into three stages—(1) the symbolical stage (up to A. D. 600), where the Saviour is shown as the Lamb of God combined with the cross; (2) the historical stage (A. D. 600 to 1100) where the Saviour is shown in his human form attached to the cross, alive; (3) the peevish stage (after A. D. 1100), where the Saviour is shown in his human form attached to the cross, but dead, the details being intended to cause the mind to dwell upon the sufferings of our Lord.

The transition from the symbolical to the historical stage seems to have taken place in the following manner. Towards the end of the fourth century the Agnus Dei bears the Chi-Rho monogram of Christ upon its forehead, which in the fifth century is replaced by a plain Latin cross; and the mosaics in the Church of SS. Comas and Damian at Rome (A. D. 530.) illustrating the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse, the Lamb of God is represented on a throne, as if it were slain, with the cross behind it instead of on the forehead. The famous Vatican cross, which bears an inscription showing that it was given to Rome in the sixth century by Justin II., has a circular medallion in the centre enclosing the Agnus Dei carrying the cross. The substitution of the crucified Saviour upon the cross for the Agnus Dei took place about the time of the Quinisext Council, held at Constantinople in A. D. 683, which decreed "that the form of him who taketh away the sin of the world, the Lamb Christ our Lord, we set up in human shape on images henceforth, instead of the Lamb, formerly used."

Easter Lilies.

There is a beautiful Eastern legend of the early church which tells that when the disciples entered the empty sepulchre of Jesus, they saw where His heart had been, tall, fragrant, sceptred lilies, in white, calm peace, blooming in the holy spot. And still at Easter these lilies, year after year and age after age, rise out of their own grave around us, grow out of Christ's heart as it were, at once a memory and a prophecy; a memory of the sepulchre that came into our garden, and a prophecy of the fadeless garden that shall arise out of our sepulchre.

CHRIST IS RISEN.

Easter Thoughts by Dr. Lynam Abbott, the Well Known Preacher.

After the tomb comes the resurrection. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. The first lesson is a lesson of experience in the very fact itself. He is not here; he is risen. Who can conceive the utter desolation of the disciples when they took the body of their Lord from the cross and laid it in the tomb; felt the heart, and knew that its last pulsation had gone; leaned over the face, and realized that the last warm breath had been breathed; saw the eyes glassy in death, and the lips dumb with death's silencing? Who can conceive the debrans of joy as gradually the truth dawned upon them that he was risen from the dead. A truth broken gently, lest a too great surprise should be disastrous; hinted at first in the stone rolled from the grave; then in the empty tomb; then in the orderly arrangement of the grave-clothes; then declared by shining angel messengers; then by Christ Himself, but by Christ disguised—as the Gardener, as the Stranger chancing to meet disciples on the road, as a fisherman upon the beach; at last with all disguise thrown off, and with the wounded hands and feet exhibited in demonstration of his personality. This lesson of experience cannot be put into words. It is the joy of the morning after the night, of the spring after the winter, of life after death.

When the disciples had recovered from the shock of surprise, there came next, gradually dawning upon them, the new demonstration which the resurrection affords of the power of Christianity, and the new interpretation of what Christianity means. If the reader will turn over the pages of the Book of Acts, he will see that in the earlier sermons of the Apostles little or no mention is made of the sacrificial character of Christ's sufferings and death. The atonement is scarcely mentioned. Little is said either of Christ as a teacher or Christ as an example. These are the aspects of His life which fill our modern thought; but they lay all in the background at first, and the prominent truth was the truth of Christ's resurrection: "Whom God raised up having loosed the pangs of death;" "Whom God raised from the dead."

No "Thou shalt" uttered from without the soul can reverse the "Thou shalt" uttered within. If Christianity is a promise, not a law; if Jesus Christ came to bestow, not to command, to offer pardon and peace to the sin-burdened, to take away remorse and fear, to give assurance of newness of life here and hereafter; if he rightly interpreted his own mission when he said, "I am come that they may have life, and have it abundantly"—some authentication is needed; some witness of His right to speak in God's name and promise with authority. That authentication, that witness, the resurrection affords. The son of a carpenter might say with authority for every auditor's conscience sanctions the command—"Do ye unto others as you would have others do unto you;" but only a Son of God, whose divine authority was attested by some event as significant as the resurrection could say, "I say unto thee, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Hope of immortality never painted a rainbow of promise on pagan tears. It never engraved a motto of hope on a pagan tombstone. There are isolated verses in the Old Testament which indicate that occasional prophets of Israel, in moments of supreme inspiration, experienced a momentary hope respecting the future; but these isolated utterances are like gleams of sunshine breaking through a tempestuous sky, while the wind still sweeps through skeleton trees, and the rain still falls in dreary torrents. There is not a patch of blue sky—no, not even in the palms of sanguine David, or the visions of inspired Isaiah. Christ's resurrection brought life and immortality to light. It covered the fabric of a dream into a historic reality; it transformed a despairing hope into calm assurance. To the believer in Christ's resurrection immortality is no longer a hope. He looks in through the open door and sees the world of light beyond. Once every voyager on the unknown sea was a Columbus, setting sail for he knew not what. Now every Christian voyager is an emigrant starting out for an El Dorado; knowing that it exists, only not knowing what wealth of possibility it contains. "For now is Christ risen, and become the first fruits of them that sleep."

The Church of Christ is the universal brotherhood of all who love him and follow reverently his footsteps, in measurable imitation of his courage, patience, self-denial, love; Christ is risen and is a living Presence in the household of his disciples—more a presence in his invisible Church to day than He ever was in His synagogues of Palestine, or even the upper chamber of Jerusalem; and the resurrection of His body is a parable of a divine resurrection, the arising of the Spirit when He has made it to live in Him, endowed with a new being, and already, here and now, in fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, entering into life eternal.—The Christian Union.

Messages of Help For the Week.

SUNDAY—Psalm 73. "When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. They have more than their heart can wish. And they say, how doth God know? When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."

MONDAY—Prov. 8. 17. "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."

TUESDAY—Ecclesiastes 11. 9. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

WEDNESDAY—Ecclesiastes 12. 1. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

THURSDAY—Psalm 1. 12. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a

little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

FRIDAY—Prov. 10. 7. "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot."

SATURDAY—Revelation 3. 12, 13. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God; and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith."

"TRULY HE IS RISEN."

The Beautiful and Expressive Oriental Salutation for Easter Day.

They have a beautiful custom in Palestine and Syria on the morning of Easter day. When one meets a friend, he does not say "Good morning," or use any of the many Arabic salutations. He simply says: "The Saviour is risen," and the person addressed answers: "Truly he is risen."

Just that, but there is an inexpressible beauty in it. It is an unusual thing, too, to find such simplicity in the nominal Christianity with which the East is filled. Usually it is more complicated. Still this simple greeting remains, and wherever one goes on Easter day one hears the words in Arabic: "El Meseh kam," and the answer, "Hokkan kam."

Easter tide and Good Friday, too, with their memories of the crucifixion, bring to mind an Eastern legend and an Eastern custom growing out of the legend.

When the Empress Helena was making diligent search for the true cross in Jerusalem, she was put to it to know how to convey the news of the discovery (if she should be successful) to Constantinople. Finally she decided that when the cross was found bonfires should be built and lighted upon every prominent point and headland from the Holy City to Constantinople.

The Empress found the cross, so the story goes, and her plan was carried out. The anniversary of the occasion is still celebrated in Syria. It falls in September. On the evening of the day the slopes of the Lebanon twinkle with ten thousand fires, and the people shoot guns and blow horns. From the seashore the sight is a beautiful one. The high mountains are ablaze with light from the base almost to the summit. Yet it is only the form—the spirit of the cross is not there.—Ex.

The Lily the Easter Flower.

Easter flowers are inseparably connected with Easter gladness. In Palestine, where Easter became a fact which has changed the world, the flowers are in their glory at Easter tide, blooming in luxuriance in the valleys and on the hills around the Holy City and symbolizing the joy of the season.

The passion flower, which fancy has made a perfect emblem of the season, hangs gracefully over trellises, the delicate cyclamen, the gorgeous anemones, scarlet and purple and white, and a thousand others help make the fields gay with color. But custom (or perhaps it is not custom after all) has made one flower above all others the flower of Easter.

"In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea," and so the lily, spotless and white, the emblem of purity and innocence, is the Easter flower. It reigns alone.

The "lilies of the field," like which not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed, are now believed by many to have been the anemones, and probably the scarlet variety, which grows wild in great abundance in Palestine in the spring and is of a most wonderful and brilliant color. However that may be, it is not more beautiful than its white namesake used more than anything else in Easter decoration.

An Ancient and Curious Custom.

There is a lively discussion of the ancient custom of "litting" and "heaving" now going on among British antiquarians, and it has come to light that women were lifted by the men and men lifted by the women on Monday and Tuesday after Easter Sunday. The practice is supposed to have been a rude memorial of the resurrection. Women met in the street or elsewhere on Easter Monday were seized and tossed in air. Kissing sometimes accompanied the lifting, and was sometimes the penalty of exemption. Next day the women treated the men in like fashion, and exacted a fine of sixpence for each man spared. Edward I. was caught in his bed about 800 years ago by seven ladies of the court, and made to pay a fine of £14 before the ladies promised to desist from heaving the royal person. There seems to be a trace of this old custom in the schoolboy game of "carrying out the teacher" upon one day of the year. This custom prevails in certain parts of the United States, and the master who resists is likely to have a rude encounter with his pupil.

Ornamental Eggs.

The employment of egg-shells for ornamental purposes is extremely ancient. A MS. in the Harleian collection represents a number of egg-shells ornamented in the most elegant and costly manner. Miniatures were often painted upon egg-shells with extreme care, and shells thus curiously decorated became valuable and highly-esteemed presents. In Venice young noblemen frequently lavished large sums of money upon portraits painted within egg-shells intended as presents.

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