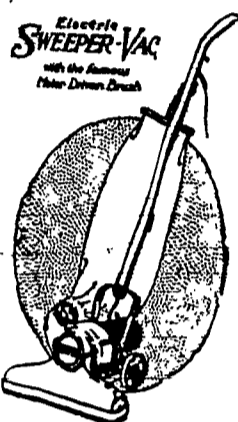


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**Christian Festival of Easter**



THE Christian Festival of Easter was grafted onto the pagan feast which ushered in the spring, and so some of our customs belong to one era and some to another.

Haven't you often wondered what eggs had to do with the Crucifixion of Christ? As a matter of fact, there is no connection except an incidental one between the two. In pre-Christian days folks celebrated the renewal of spring and sunshine at the time of year when Easter now comes, and the egg, with its suggestion of new life, was the most natural symbol in the world. Christianity consecrated the idea, as it were, by coloring the eggs red as a reminder of the blood spilt on the cross—a custom which survives in France to this day.

The hot cross bun is another curious blend of heathen superstition and Christian symbolism. Many centuries before Christ little round loaves were baked and marked with a cross; some were even discovered in the ruins of Herculaneum, one of the ancient Italian cities which was buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius and afterwards uncovered and explored. Some say that these cakes were sacrificed and offered as an act of worship to the heathen gods of the day, particularly to the moon, called the queen of heaven.

Others assert that the cooks of that day were as practical as the coffee-maker of our day, who mark the toffee into small squares, so that it will break up more easily when cold.

Then came the Christians, who saw in this bread marked with their own sacred symbol—a fit association with Easter. They made their Good Friday cakes from dough first used for the Host, and the buns were blessed by the priest and given out at the end of service in church. Worshipers reverently kissed the cross before eating the symbols, and believed that the eating of one would keep them from harm until next Easter.

For the same reason it used to be customary to hang a bun up in a house to bring good luck, just as the horse-shoe is hung over a doorway. In particular it was supposed to guard the house from fire—a real menace in the days when houses were of wood and thatched with straw and fire engines almost unknown.

Were you born on Good Friday? Legend has it that anyone so blessed possesses the gift of second sight. And if you have sufficient fortitude to turn vegetarian just for Easter Sunday, an old superstition promises you good health for a twelvemonth. It seems a small price for so long a benefit, doesn't it?

Another way of inflicting good health, which is much more drastic, but was often practiced in olden days by Spartan maidens, was to leave a linen cloth out in a field all night, so that it became soaked with the cold spring dew. Then they washed themselves all over with the clear, chilly moisture.

Another quaint superstition is the rather ridiculous custom of lifting or heaving, which is still practiced in some parts of the country. On Easter Monday the men lift the women, and on Easter Tuesday the women lift or heave the men. The process is performed by two lusty men or women joining their hands across each other's wrists; then, making the person to be heaved sit down on their arms, they lift him up aloft two or three times and often carry him several yards along a street. In other parts the men claim the privilege of taking off the women's shoes on Eastern Monday, and the next day the women retaliate.



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