

Sacred Fire Still Burns in Florence



IF YOU have never seen Easter in Florence you have never seen Easter.

It is one of the unusual happenings in the world, and perhaps most interesting of it all is to witness the ceremony called the "Scarpio del Carro" or the Explosion of the Cart.

About a thousand years ago one of the Florentine Crusaders was a noble named Pazzi. He was evidently a man of considerable prowess, because he was among the first of the warriors to enter a breach in the walls of Jerusalem when that city was stormed and taken by the Christians.

Pazzi rushed through the breach, killing off a few infidels as he went, and directed his steps immediately to the Holy Sepulcher where the Sacred Fire burned on the altar. Here he lit



"Scarpio del Carro" (Burning of the Car), the Florentine Method of Celebrating Easter in Italy.

a torch from the flame, sprang on his horse, and started the return journey to distant Florence.

The story goes that the wind occasioned by the speed of his progress threatened to blow out the sacred fire, so Pazzi turned around in the saddle, and rode backwards, shielding the flame as best he could. The spectacle of this worthy knight solemnly traveling with his face to his horse's tail created considerable surprise and laughter, indeed some people went so far as to cry Pazzo! Pazzo! at him as he passed. Which being translated means crazy! crazy! From this event the family took its name and are known as the Pazzi to this day.

Larg, Arduous Ride.

All this did not bother the Crusader, however, and he continued to ride backwards till he reached Florence. Quite a ride, you'll admit, under any circumstances.

Pazzi did not stop until he arrived before the door of the duomo or cathedral, where he dismounted, and walking rather painfully up the aisle, for he was stiff from his little jaunt, deposited the still burning torch on the high altar. And here, according to the priests of the duomo, it has burned ever since. A Roman correspondent informs us. This exploit of the Pazzi warrior was directly responsible for the strange ceremony of the "Explosion of the Cart." In honor of this fighter, the city council decided, a few hundred years later, that thereafter

There is the sound of singing and the multitude take off their hats. Slowly, escorted by white-robed priests with their hands folded in front of them, a cardinal or archbishop makes his way into the baptistry through the wonderful bronze doors of the Renaissance.

All is quiet once more, until suddenly a bell tinkles, clear and silvery, far away among the shadows of the vast church. The people crane their necks, and wait, expectantly. There is a faint whirr, which gets louder and louder, until, quick as light, what appears to be a dove rushes out of the open cathedral door, penetrates into the cart, and immediately flies back into the church, whizzing along the wire like a thing possessed.

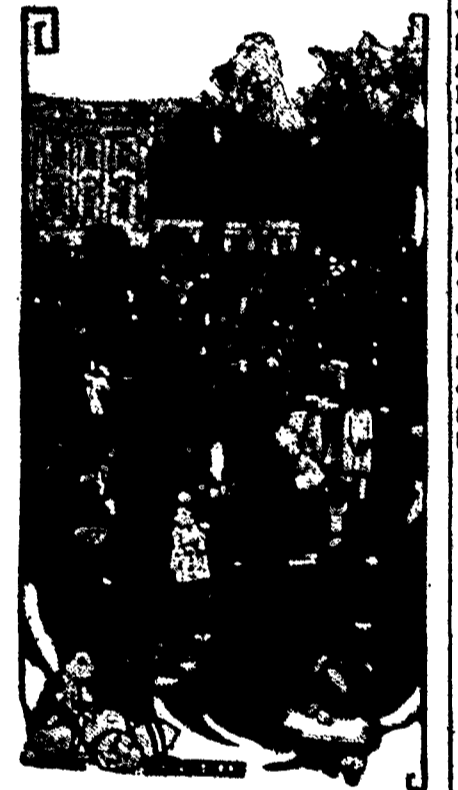
Another second, and there is a loud crash; then another, and finally the air for yards around is filled with the detonation of the firecrackers. The mechanical dove carried a bit of the sacred fire in his beak, and had set off the works.

Pazzi of Today.
All this time, amidst the roaring of the people and the explosions in the cart, the white oxen have remained as quiet as statues, slowly chewing their cud, while their beautiful, bored eyes

are fixed in retrospect on the distant fields of Tuscany. Now and then they shake their golden horns, or move their crimson hoofs abstractedly.

The ceremony is over. The black cart, its duty done for another year, slowly moves away down the crowded street. People are gay and light-hearted. "Happy Easters" fly thick and fast.

The square is emptied in no time, the priests return to the darkness of the cathedral, and the glorious Ghiberti doors are closed.
One man stops a while, and I note his spring suit and smart derby. It is Pazzi of the Twentieth century, and he stands for a minute or two in thought. And a picture comes to my mind of a war-worn knight in chain mail, lighting up the night with a torch whose flame he guards with a great steel shield. A splendid stock of people, surely.



On White House Lawn

Rolling Easter eggs on the White House lawn is a memorable event in the lives of youth of Washington. On the Monday following Easter Sunday the President invites the children to be his guests. Each child must have an Easter egg to get in, and no grown-ups are admitted without a child.



Happiness Beyond

The celebration of Easter day brings to mind the reward which is offered to us for righteousness.

It recalls again the terrible sacrifices made by Jesus Christ on our account.

He made it possible for us to have eternal life.

He gave His own life that we might live.

He came out of the tomb that we might have the promise of eternal happiness.

The way is open. The plan is laid out. We have but to follow the straight and narrow path.

We may have the priceless possession of unending happiness in the life beyond.



Pretty Symbol

The present representative of the Pazzi family has resigned the privilege of owning the famous cart to the city of Florence, but he is still on hand as director of the ceremony. He can be seen now, in a light spring suit and derby, helping to marshal the crowds, very different in appearance from the old steel-hat fellow of a thousand years ago.

Carried by a Dove.
Presently there is a commotion, and some cheers go up. The tall black cart is approaching, drawn by two magnificent white oxen, whose scarlet heads and gilded horns shine in the sun. Their trappings are of crimson and are decorated with the insignia of



Little Miss Mudge De Mercado, five years old, who was the prize "chicken" from an Easter egg at a children's Easter lawn party held last Easter Sunday at Kingston, Jamaica.

EASTER AND EGGS LONG ASSOCIATED

For Centuries Have Been Season's Symbols.

The relation between eggs and Easter does not seem far-fetched when it is remembered that the Easter festival is a celebration of life and that the egg is, perhaps, the most striking symbol of life, with its wonderful possibilities of development. This symbolical conception of it can be traced back to ancient times. One of the Roman games was racing on an oval track for eggs as prizes, and this was in honor of Castor and Pollux, the twins who had come forth from an egg laid by the Swan Lena. In an expense account dating back to the time of Edward I of England is the item: "Eighteen pence for 400 eggs to be used for Easter gifts." Much farther back than that the egg was considered the emblem of the resurrection. The custom of coloring the shells was probably the grafting of the art instinct upon the Easter observance. It once found much more elaborate expression than now, when sentimental inscriptions and beautiful designs were etched into the colors. Many customs and superstitions have grown up around the Easter observance. Suckling's verse:

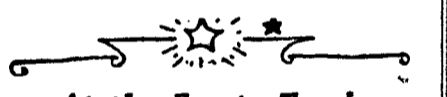
But, oh, she dances such a way
No sun upon an Easter day
Is half so fine a sight.

borrow meaning when we know that, according to an old belief, the sun in the heavens danced on Easter morning in joy for the resurrection. The Scotch tradition was still more specific, and claimed that the god of day whirled around like a cartwheel and gave three leaps, and these performances were solemnly argued about by wiseacres. Another belief was that as it shines or rains on Easter day so will it shine or rain a little every day in the year, and an old couplet ran:

A good deal of rain on Easter day
Gives a good crop of grass, but little
good hay.

If the wind on that day was in the east, one should draw Easter water (whatever that may be) and bathe in it to prevent ill effects from the east wind. An old English custom was to wear a new article of dress on Easter Sunday to insure good fortune in love affairs during the coming year. The Easter hat is probably a relic of that practice. Still another custom was to court good luck by putting out all fires on Easter eve and lighting them afresh.

Constantine, the Christian emperor of Rome, first invested the observance of Easter with pomp. The day was distinguished by the most elaborate ceremonies in the churches, and by night not only the churches but the city itself was illuminated by a multitude of gigantic candles or wax pillars in an attempt to outshine the day.



At the Empty Tomb





"Ye Seek Jesus, Who Was Crucified . . . He Is Not Here: for He Is Risen, as He Said."
—Matt. xxviii: 5-6.



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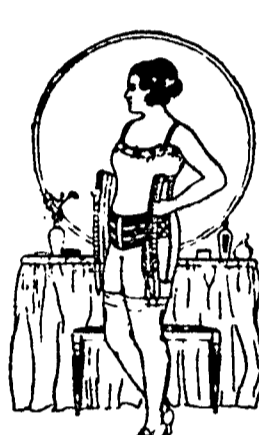


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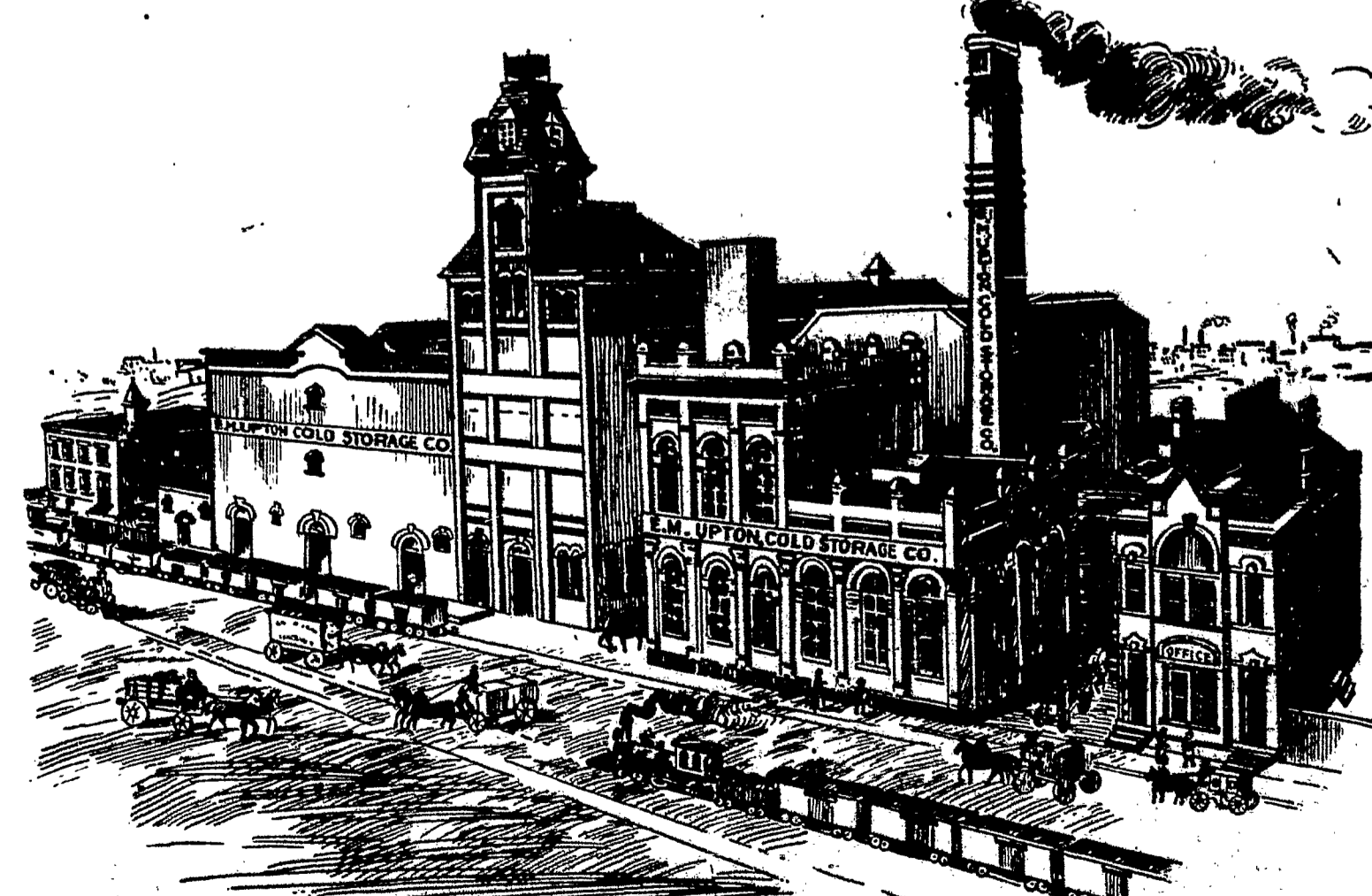
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