

*Countdown
to Easter*

Tuesday Before Palm Sunday



Easter Eggs, Part 1

By Christoph Von Schmid



*M*any centuries ago there dwelt in a little valley surrounded by mountains a few poor charcoal-burners. The narrow valley was closed in on every side by trees and rocks. The huts of the poor peasants lay scattered around. A few cherry or plum trees planted beside each hut—a little tillage and pasture land—a patch of flax and hemp—a cow and one or two goats, constituted all their riches, though they earned a trifle besides by burning charcoal for the iron works in the mountains. Poor as they were, however, they were nevertheless a very happy little community, for they wanted nothing else. Their hardy mode of life, their constant toil and temperate habits, made them very healthy; and in these poor little huts you might see (what you would seek in vain in palaces) men over a hundred years of age.

One day, when the corn was just beginning to ripen, and the heat had become very great in the mountains, a little charcoal-girl, who had been tending her goats, came running down, out of breath, to tell her parents that some strange people had arrived in the valley, who wore wonderful clothes and spoke with a strange accent—a beautiful lady with two children and a very old man, who, though he also wore a very rich dress, seemed to be her servant.

“Ah,” said the little girl, “the poor people are hungry and thirsty and very tired. I met them in the mountains, as I was searching for a stray goat, and I showed them the way to our valley. We must take them out something to eat and drink, and see whether, among the neighbors and ourselves, we cannot get them lodgings for the night.”

Her parents immediately got some oaten bread, milk, and goat’s cheese, and hastened out to meet them. The strangers, meanwhile, had been resting themselves under the cool shade of the bushes—the lady was sitting upon a moss-grown stone, and had drawn a white veil over her face. One of the children, a very pretty delicate little girl, sat upon her knee; the old servant, a man of venerable appearance, was employed in unloading the mule which they had with them; and the other child, a handsome, lively boy, was giving a handful of thistles to the mule, who ate them contentedly.

The charcoal-burner and his wife approached the strange lady with deference, for her graceful figure, noble bearing, and flowing white dress proclaimed her to be of high rank.

“Just look,” said the charcoal-burner’s wife, in a low tone, to her husband, “at the beautiful pointed collar, and the lace cuffs which just show her delicate hands; and her shoes are as white as cherry blossoms, and spangled with silver flowers!”

“Hold your tongue,” said her husband, “you are always thinking of some nonsense like that. Great folk are entitled to fine clothes; but after all, dress does not make a person one whit better, and the poor lady, in spite of her beautiful shoes, has had to walk many a weary step over the rough roads!”

They advanced and offered their bread, milk, and cheese to the strange lady. She threw back her veil, and they were both filled with admiration of her beauty and the gentle expression of her features. She thanked them very much, and immediately gave a cup of the milk to the child in her lap: and the tears streamed down her cheeks, as the poor little thing clutched the cup fast with both her hands and drank eagerly. The pretty boy, too, came and drank. She then gave them some bread, and afterwards drank herself and ate some of the bread; while the strange man cut huge slices of the cheese, and seemed to enjoy it very much. Meanwhile the cottagers, young and old, came out of their huts, and stood round, in a circle watching the newcomers with curious and wondering eyes.

As soon as the old man had done eating, he earnestly begged them to provide, in some of their huts, a little room for the lady for a short time, promising that she should not be a burden to them, but should pay liberally for everything.

“Ah, yes,” said the lady herself, in a soft, pleasing voice, “do take pity on an unhappy mother and her two little ones, whom fate has driven from their home!”

The men went together to consult in what house she could most conveniently be received. In the upper part of the valley there was a little stream which burst out from among the red marble cliffs,

and fell from rock to rock in a mass of milky foam, turning in its course a mill which hung upon the edge of the precipice. On the opposite side of the stream the miller had built another pretty little house. Like all the other houses in the valley, it was but a wooden one; but it was extremely pretty, charmingly shaded by overhanging cherry trees and surrounded by a garden. This house the miller offered the strange lady to take her abode in.

“My new cottage, above yonder,” said he, pointing with his hand, “I most cheerfully give up to you, just as it stands. It is perfectly new; no one has ever lived in it yet. I built it as a place to which I might retire when I should give up the mill to my son. It was only yesterday it was completed, and today you can take possession of it, just as if I had built it expressly for yourself. I am sure you will like it.”

The good lady was delighted with this friendly offer, and after she had rested a little, went to look at the cottage. She carried the little girl in her arms, and the old man led the boy by the hand, while the miller took charge of the mule. To the great joy of the miller, she was delighted with the little house. It was already provided with a table, and a few chairs and bedsteads.

The lady had brought on the mule’s back some handsome carpets and covers; so she was able to take up her lodging for the night, thanking God that, after their long wanderings, He had brought them to so pleasant a spot.

Very early next morning the lady and her two children came out of their cottage, to take a look at the surrounding country, for the day before they were too tired to do so. She was charmed with the prospect. The huts of the charcoal-burners lay far below, as if sown in twos or threes in the green valley. The mill-stream wound, clear as silver, midway between on the hills and cliffs, which were covered with green brushwood on which the goats were browsing, and it presented, in the morning sunshine, a picture which no art could surpass. . . .

Summer and autumn passed, and the winter came. In this wild region it was very severe. For months together the little huts in the valley lay as if buried in snow, the smoking chimneys and parts of the roofs alone appearing above the white covering. Not a bit of the space between the rocks could be seen, the mill stood still, and the waterfalls hung stiff and noiseless upon the cliffs. Neighbors seldom could meet each other now; and when at last the snow disappeared, and the spring returned once more, great was the delight of all.

The children of the valley immediately came up to the mill and brought to the two little strangers, Edmund and Blanda, the earliest violets and cowslips which they could find in the valley; and as soon as there were sufficient of these sweet spring flowers, they made for them a most beautiful blue and yellow garland.

“I must make some return to these kind children also,” said the lady. “I shall get up a little festival for them next Easter Day; for it is right to make these holidays as happy as possible to children. But what shall I give them? At Christmas I was able to give them apples and nuts which I sent for the purpose; but at this season one has nothing in the house but a few eggs. Nature has not yet produced her rich stores. The trees and bushes are without fruits or berries—eggs are the earliest gift of the spring.”

“Ah, yes!” said Martha, “if the eggs were not so much all of one color. White is certainly a nice color, but the various tints of the fruits and berries, and the rosy cheeks of the apples are far prettier.”

“Your suggestion is not a bad one,” said her kind mistress; “I will boil the eggs hard, and color them in the boiling, which can be easily done. The children, I am sure, will be highly delighted with the different colors.”

The clever lady knew all about the different roots and mosses which may be used for dyeing: and she colored the eggs in a variety of ways; some she made blue, others yellow, others a beautiful rose color; and some she wrapped in tender green leaves, which left their pattern on the eggs, and

gave them an extremely pretty variegated appearance. On some of them she wrote a little rhyme.

“Yes,” said the miller, when he saw them, “these colored eggs are just the thing for the festival—now that Nature has laid aside her white attire, and dresses herself out in all her varied hues. The good lady does just like God, who not only gives His fruits an agreeable flavor, but also makes them beautiful and pleasing to the eye—as He dyes the cherry red, the plum purple, and the pear yellow, so does she dye her eggs.”

The lady now sent Martha round the valley to invite all the children who were of the same age as Edmund and Blanda to a little juvenile festival on Easter Day.

Easter Day, this season, proved an extremely beautiful spring day—a true resurrection of nature. The sun seemed so lovely and warm, the sky so clear and blue, that it was really charming and imparted new life to everything around. The meadows in the valley were already a lovely green, and here and there dotted with flowers. Every one enjoyed the sight of enjoyment and happiness.

Long before daybreak the lady and old Kuno were upon their way to the church, which lay at a distance of more than two miles beyond the mountains, Edmund and Blanda remaining at home meanwhile, under Martha’s care; and the grown-up people of the valley, with the elder children who were equal to the journey, accompanied her to church. Towards midday the lady reached home, riding on the mule which Kuno led, but it was long after this hour, in fact nearly evening, when the cottagers and their children returned.

The moment the lady returned, her little guests, who had been left home, and were anxiously longing for her return, came up full of joy, all dressed out in their little finery, and assembled before her door. She came out with Edmund and Blanda, greeted them all affectionately, and brought them into the garden, which Kuno had taken great pains in improving last year, and had extended to the foot of the precipice. The lady sat down on a little bench under a tree, and called the children close to her. They all thronged around, and looked up to her with affectionate smiles while she told them in simple language the beautiful old story of the first Easter Day.

The children all listened to her with great attention, and when she had finished she paused for a moment and looked round at her young hearers. Among them she noticed a brother and sister dressed in deep mourning, and, hearing that they had lost their mother a few days before, she showed them how they might draw comfort from the story of the resurrection, and look forward in joyous hope to beholding their dear mother once more in Paradise.

She now brought the children to the shelter of the rock, where Kuno had prepared a large oval table upon a nice graveled spot. The table was covered with a colored cloth, and seats of fresh green sods were arranged around it. The children, with Edmund and Blanda in the midst of them, took their places at it. All eyes beamed with joy, and with anticipation of the coming entertainment, and it would not be easy to imagine a more interesting sight than the little circle of yellow and brown locks and happy faces which surrounded the table. “A wreath of the most beautiful lilies and roses,” said the lady to herself, “is nothing in comparison with it!”

A large earthen dish filled with warm custard was now placed upon the table, and before each of the little guests was set a nice new bowl, filled with the custard. They enjoyed it exceedingly. The lady then brought them out through a side gate of the garden, into the little pine grove which stood close by. There were nice green plots of grass between the young trees, and here the lady told each of the children to make a little nest with the moss which grew in profusion upon the rocks and trees round about. They joyfully obeyed, those who were not able to make the nest themselves being helped by their more clever companions; and then they all carefully marked their own nests.

Then she brought them again into the garden; when, behold! They found upon the table a huge cake—made with eggs, and shaped like an immense crown. Each of the children was helped to a large slice, and while they were eating, Martha slipped quietly into the grove with a large basketful

of colored eggs, and laid them in the little nests. The blue, red, yellow, or variegated eggs looked very pretty amongst the delicate green moss, of which the nests were formed.

When the children had finished eating, the lady called them to come and look at their nests—and, behold! In every nest were found five eggs of the same color, with a verse upon one of the number. . . . They all consisted of but a few simple and unstudied words; they were inscribed both on the eggs which she had already distributed, and on another set which she afterwards divided among the children. Some of them were as follows:

*To thee our earthly food we owe,
Grant us, O Lord, thy gifts to know!*

*One thing is needful—only one—
Love God, my child, and Him alone.*

*On God's protecting arm rely;
To Him in all thy sorrows fly!*

*A docile child its parents' will
Is ever ready to fulfill.*

*The liar's steps shame will pursue;
His word is doubted, e'en when true.*

*A truly good and pious man
Assists his neighbor when he can.*

*Gentle thoughts and self-control
Bring peace and comfort to the soul.*

*The world and all its joys decay;
Virtue alone endures for aye.*

The spring and summer passed over in the valley without anything remarkable happening. The charcoal-burners tilled their little farms, and then went to the forest to burn charcoal; their wives attended to the housekeeping at home, and reared a great number of hens; and the children would often ask whether Easter would not soon come again. But the noble lady was often very unhappy. Her faithful old servant, who till now had always been at her side, and who in the commencement used to make journeys of greater or less extent for her upon her business, was no longer able to leave the valley, for his health began to fail; and, indeed, when autumn came, and the leaves began to grow brown upon the bushes, he could hardly even leave the house to enjoy what he dearly loved, a little bask in the genial sunshine. His mistress shed many an anxious tear for the good old man who was her last support, and she bitterly felt getting no news from her dear native land, and being shut out from the rest of the world in this secluded valley.

To be continued!

Easter Cooking

Matzo Bread By Amy Puetz

This unleavened bread is the kind used by the Jews during the Passover. A bread similar to this is what Jesus broke and gave to His disciples at the last supper. Read Exodus 12:8 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8 to see why the Israelites ate unleavened bread during the Passover. Sometimes the Passover meal is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

1 cup flour
½ cup water
½ tsp. salt (optional)

Preheat oven to 450° F. Cover a cookie sheet with parchment paper. If using salt, mix it and the flour together and add water. Otherwise combine water and flour together. Use extra flour to knead the dough for a minute or two. Break the dough into egg sized pieces and roll out very thin. Put the bread on the parchment paper (picture at top). Poke all over with a fork to keep it from bubbling up in the middle. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Check at 5 to 7 minutes to insure it is not getting overdone.

May be made using wheat flour (white or whole), rye, barley, spelt, or oat.



Above - matzo bread before and after baking.

Left - To give as a gift, wrap in plastic wrap or pretty paper and tie with a ribbon.

