AN EASTER OFFERING

"Nan, don't you think we ought to wake those boys?"

There was no response to this anxious question.

"Nan, dear, you're not asleep? You're only pretending to be. Wake up! It's the most glorious Easter morning."

Nan yawned, rubbed her eyes, pushed her curly hair away from her face, and then sat up in bed and regarded Agnes sweetly.

"That's a good girl! Nan, you're the only person I ever knew that looked pretty when they got awake. Now, keep awake for that nice little compliment."

Nan laughed and yawned and laughed again.

"Isn't it a beautiful Easter morning? Don't let on; but Mark and I colored two dozen eggs yesterday. I thought it wouldn't be Easter without colored eggs, and Clara is going to boil the breakfast eggs in onion water to make them yellow."

"Pound on the door and wake those boys," said Agnes. "They'll get up for you, Nan."

"I know it. Mark's got to get up, anyway. He promised to help me finish arranging the flowers."

And Nan applied her two small fists to the door of the boy's room with great vigor.

"Yes! Hello, there! What an awful racket! Nan, is that you? I'd give you particular fits, if it weren't Sunday, and Easter Sunday, too."

"Well, you just get up and come over into the church with me. We must fix those flowers before breakfast. Come, now, that's a dear boy!"

Mark bounded out of bed.

"Is Bert awake?" Nan called.

"Bless you, no! But he soon will be—just as soon as this sponge absorbs enough cold water, and I apply it to his cranium."

"Will you, indeed? Well, you won't get the chance, I'll—"

Nan lost the last of this speech, but had a suspicion that it was cut short by a well-directed blow of the pillow with which Bert crushed Mark and the sponge together.

Half an hour later, Nan was running across the churchyard, singing for very joy of the sunshine, the soft west wind and the blue sky that spread like a blessing over the newly-awakened earth.

The tender grass upon the graves was of a vivid green, and here and there great clumps of wild violets made the ground purple.

Nan stopped and picked a few, and put them in her belt. It seemed to her that even the thick, dark ivy on the old church this morning looked young and fresh.

She put the great iron key in the old-fashioned lock of the door. The massive oak door swung slowly open, and Nan stepped out of the light and color into the gray gloom of the church.

For a moment her eyes, dazzled with the morning sunlight, could see nothing. Then the stained glass windows shone out like gems in the darkness, and Nan saw that the sunlight was pouring through the great east window and staining the lilies below it red and purple and gold. She went very softly up the aisle to the chancel rail and began to twine a long rope of smilax about it. When she had arranged it to her satisfaction, she turned her attention to the jars of lilies.

"You great, beautiful things," she said, looking up at the stately white stalks. "You are just like queens, dressed in white and green and gold. But you're dreadfully heavy to lift. I wish Mark was here!"

"Speak of angels," said a voice behind her, "and they immediately appear."

Nan turned to see Mark standing on the chancel steps, with a huge bunch of white lilies in his arms.

"Oh, aren't they lovely? Where did they come from?

"Old Doc Winslow sent them from his forcing-house. Father said they were to be put in the brass vases. Bert's bringing some water over."

"What's Agnes doing?"

"Boiling eggs yellow; and I wanted her to put some of our colored ones on the table to eat hard; but she was afraid father would think we were very frivolous to waste so many eggs."

Nan laughed.

"To tell the truth, I don't know what we'll do with them, now they're colored. I suppose we can take them to school to eat for lunch. Here comes Bert with the water. He's spilling it up the aisle."

"You'd better hurry," Bert said. "Breakfast is almost ready, and I'm hungry as a bear. I hope father won't say a long grace this morning."

"If he has a human heart, he won't," Mark replied. "Simply state, when you sit down, that you're in a starving condition, and he will no doubt take the hint. Nan, I can't make these lilacs stay in. Can't you fix them?"

"You poor boy! You're no better than old Jimmy, the sexton, at fixing flowers. He can never—"

"There's the breakfast bell," interrupted Mark, with scant politeness. "Now for eggs. How many are you going to eat, Bert?"

"Half a dozen, more or less. Nan, those lilacs are simply perfect! They seem to fall right into place when you touch them."

"Thanks! Let's hurry over now, or father will wonder where we are."

"I'm sure we couldn't be doing a better work than beautifying his church," Bert said. "There's the second ringing of the first bell. Somebody's getting impatient—Clara or father or Agnes."

The three hurried across the churchyard and into the breakfast-room, where their father had already seated himself at the table.

The Reverend Doctor Carter was a stately-looking man, with iron-gray hair, and dark eyes that had sometimes a rather stern expression.

The four children greeted him with great respect, and took their places silently at the table. Then grace was said, and when it was over two impatient heads were raised quickly from their plates.

"I'm grub-struck," Bert remarked to Nan, beginning to help himself to oatmeal.

His father, unfortunately, overheard this declaration.

"Albert," he said, "you must break yourself of that unpleasant habit of using slang. It is growing upon you, and it is extremely common."

"Indeed, father," Bert protested, "there are times when slang just fits; and," he ventured, "I heard you use it the other day."

"I use it! What do you mean, Albert? Explain to me, sir!"

"Well, you said to old Miss Jones, 'I'll see you later,' the other day, when you were showing her out of the study."

"I was not aware of the expression being slang," replied his father, gravely. "Agnes, my dear, you are putting three lumps of sugar into my coffee instead of two."

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I was listening to Bert and forgot."

"Did you take the lilacs into the church, Mark?" asked Doctor Carter, addressing his younger son.

Mark looked up from his oatmeal.

"Yes, sir; and Nan fixed them in the vases. They look stunning!"

"'Very beautiful' would be a better expression. How does the church look?" he added, turning to Nan.

"Never saw it look better. The lilies make a fine show. I suppose the church will be crowded," she went on, "it's such a lovely day."

"I've no doubt there will be many missing faces, even at the Easter service," said her father, breaking his egg. "There's one woman whom I know is not bringing up her large family in the right way. It is Mrs. Sterritt. She has not been to church for five or six Sundays, and I scarcely expect to see her this morning."

"But, Father," observed Agnes, "how can she come? She has eight children, you know."

"Four boys and four girls," enumerated Mark. "And three of them are very little kids, and there's a baby that cries all the time. Anyway, it's always crying when I go by there."

"Don't you see?" Nan said. "The big ones have to stay at home to take care of the little ones, and the poor mother has to take care of them all."

Mr. Carter shook his head.

"Where there's a will there's a way," he quoted emphatically.

"But, Father," Agnes urged "you're a man and you don't know what work eight children mean. They mean sewing and cooking and washing from morning till night."

Mr. Carter smiled in a superior way, but made no reply; and Agnes, not knowing what else to say for the sake of her cause, let the subject drop. But after breakfast she said to Nan:

"Let's go to Mrs. Sterritt's before church and take the children some colored eggs."

"Oh, let's!" agreed Nan. "I'll get a basket for the eggs. Maybe the boys will go with us for the sake of the walk."

Within fifteen minutes the four were walking along the one long, elm-shaded street of the village. Agnes carried the basket of eggs, and Bert a lily plant, that had been crowded out by its taller sisters.

"I think father's too hard on Mrs. Sterritt," said Agnes. "Of course, being a man, he can't understand how hard it is for a woman with eight children to get to church."

"I suppose she won't get there this morning," replied Nan.

"The sexton says the Sterritts are dreadfully poor, but that they don't let on because they're so respectable," put in Mark.

Nan suddenly stopped in her walk.

"I have a brilliant idea! Let's send Mrs. Sterritt and the older children to church, and let us four stay and take care of the babies and get the dinner."

"What a lark!" Mark cried. "Let's do it."

Agnes looked almost frightened.

"Oh, could we? Do you think father would like it?"

"Father? Didn't he want Mrs. Sterritt to go to church this morning, and won't he be glad to see her there?" urged Nan. "Oh, it will be fun! We'll wash and dress the children and send them off, and then we'll take possession and do a lot of work for the poor woman before she gets back; and she'll be so glad! She said only the other day, to me, she wished she could get to church on Easter Day, but she didn't see how she was going to manage it."

Agnes was almost won over by this speech of Nan's, and quite so when a turn of the road brought them in sight of Mrs. Sterritt's little house; for two or three small children were playing before the door, and their appearance suggested to Agnes the transformation that soap and water might effect.

When they caught sight of the minister's children, they rushed pell-mell into the house, crying:

"Mom, mom! Here comes the ladies that was here the other day!"

The next moment little Mrs. Sterritt appeared in the doorway, rolling down her sleeves and smoothing out her apron, and looking half-delighted and half-frightened at the sight of Agnes and Nan coming up the garden-walk, with Bert and Mark bringing up the rear.

"Agnes was spokeswoman.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sterritt!" she said. "We have come to bring the children some eggs and to see if you could go to church this morning."

The little woman's face brightened, and then fell.

"Well, that was good of you, Miss Agnes, to think of the children. They'll be delighted with the eggs. I'm sorry you saw them before they were washed and dressed. I haven't had one minute since sunrise to look after them."

"But can you go to church?" said Nan, eagerly.

"I want to go, the worse way; but I can't go this morning. Baby's cross, and, as I said before, the children ain't washed or dressed yet; there's dinner to get."

Nan's eyes sparkled. This was just what she wanted to hear.

"But you must go!" she insisted; "and take Georgie and Mary and Willie and Katie. The music will be lovely, and there are lots of Easter lilies; I arranged them myself."

"I don't see how I can," Mrs. Sterritt repeated, with a little sad shake of her head.

"Oh, but we do!" said Agnes. "Now, listen! Go get your own things on, and we'll help get the four larger children ready, so they can go, too; and we'll stay and take care of the babies."

"And do all the housework besides," spoke up Mark, fired with sudden zeal to help the good cause along.

"And get the dinner," added Bert, with all the assurance of a life-long cook.

Mrs. Sterritt looked at them in a bewildering way, and gave a little gasp of surprise, but was too astonished to say anything.

"Now go, please, and get ready," Agnes urged.

"Bless your dear hearts, I couldn't! You girls couldn't look after the children—oh, my, no! What would your father say?"

"But he wants you to go, Mrs. Sterritt. He said so this morning. And we'll take care of the house and the babies, so you can go with an easy mind."

Mrs. Sterritt could not resist this sort of argument. Forced into going, by the combined urgings of the four young people, she was soon getting her poor belongings together, in a half-reluctant way—smoothing out the black ribbons of her little, old bonnet, and shaking out the folds of her one black alpaca gown, which was old as old could be, but whole and scrupulously neat.

"Give me the baby," said Mark, lifting the eight-months' infant from the lap of its twelve-year-old sister. "Now you run off and get ready for church. And be a good girl while you're there. Don't talk, and do sit still in sermon-time."

Bert grinned.

"Hear Mark lecturing the child, and look how he holds that poor baby! He's got its clothes all twisted about its ears."

A solemn procession filed out of the house headed by little Mrs. Sterritt, who was followed by four children, all with very clean, serious faces.

"I'm so glad I don't know how to tell you, and thankful as can be, Miss Agnes! Mr. Sterritt will be glad, too. Poor man, he had to work to-day!" (Mr. Sterritt was a railroad brakeman on a "long-distance freight"). "Georgie, stop pulling out your tie, that Miss Nan fixed so pretty. Katie, take hold of mother's hand."

"Be sure and tell the sexton to show you into your pew," Agnes called after them. "And don't worry about anything."

When Mrs. Sterritt and the four children had disappeared, Nan rushed out to Mark.

"Give me the baby," she said, "I'm going to wash and dress her. You can help Bert take care of the other one."

"Any assistance will be most welcome," assured Bert, who was down on his knees playing horse with baby number one, as he called him.

Nan carried off baby number two and sent the other two children out to be taken care of by the boys, while Agnes tidied up the little rooms.

While the children were taking care of Mrs. Sterritt's house, Mrs. Sterritt herself sat in the comfortable, red-cushioned pew which the minister's children usually occupied. On each side of her, quiet as mice, sat her boys and girls.

The hard-worked little woman felt as if she was in paradise. The round-eyed children gazed with delight at the beautiful flowers, and were perfectly quiet listening to the Easter music.

The sun shone through the colored windows on the lilies, and every one seemed full of the joy of the day.

Mr. Carter, for some reason or other, did not glance toward his pew as he went through with the service; and, when he did, it was because a clear, fresh child's voice drew his attention.

Little Georgie Sterritt loved music, and when the Easter hymn was sung, he joined in, and his clear, bird-like voice rose above the others.

Mr. Carter looked around, and in his pew saw, not Agnes and Nan, Bert and Mark, but a tired-looking woman, with four bright-faced children, one on whom was singing with all his heart and soul.

"It's Mrs. Sterritt! But where are my boys and girls?"

He ran his eye over the large congregation, but failed to discover Agnes' sweet, serious face, or Nan's bright one, or Mark's with its merry expression sobered for the time being, or Bert's, with the grave look that he always wore in church, and that made people say he was the image of his father.

"I cannot account for it," thought Mr. Carter. "I will have to see Mrs. Sterritt after church."

For he had a vague feeling that his children's absence was in some way or other connected with her presence there.

An hour later the minister's children were astonished to see Mrs. Sterritt coming toward the house accompanied by their father. For a moment Agnes wondered what he would say to them, but only for a moment. As they drew near, she heard her father saying:

"I will have the boy's voice trained. I had no idea he could sing so well."

"You see, sir," Mrs. Sterritt answered. "I think he was that happy to go to church and hear the music that he sang extra well. I have to keep him home mostly to take care of the little ones. Oh, sir, I can't thank you enough for what your children have done for me this morning!"

"Thank them," said the minister. "I hadn't anything to do with it. But we'll see that you get there oftener now."

That evening the four children sat out on the porch overlooking the churchyard. A golden after-glow of sunset was in the west, and the evening wind was stirring the grass upon the graves and lifting the ivy leaves on the old church walls.

"It has been the happiest Easter I've ever spent," remarked Agnes, "even though I didn't get to church myself."

"I know enough about taking care of babies to hire out as a nurse," said Mark.

"There's father," Bert announced. "Where has he been?"

"To mother's grave," replied Anges, softly. "He went to lay some Easter lilies there."

Her father heard what she said as he drew near them.

"I wish she were with us this Eastar night," he said quietly. "I think she would be very proud of her children. Their father is."

Of all the customs regarding Easter eggs, the one which creates the most pleasure and fun is the Easter morning egg hunt. Grown men and women who were brought up in the country always look back to the Easter mornings of their childhood days.

FURNISHING THE SMALL HOUSE

The house which it is proposed to furnish is to belong to the $6,000.00 to $7,000.00 class, and taking the present day prices as a basis for size. would contain eight rooms, namely, Living Room, Dining Room. Breakfast Room and a Kitchen on the ground floor, and three Bedrooms and a Sunroom on the second.

In every case, where the occupant has no existing decoration to interfere with any schemes that he may have proposed, attention should at once be directed to the walls. The walls of a house, with few exceptions, form the largest space to decorate and, of course, must be considered essentially as a background for any further decoration in the way of drapes, carpets, furniture, etc.

Bearing this in mind, it naturally follows that the color of the walls should be low in tone or, if pattern is used, it must not be too overbearing in color or design. In the case of halls, however, where there is little or no furniture and very little drapery the walls can be of a cheerful nature, but not effusively so.

In a house of this size by the careful use of the plainer papers the illusion of larger space is easily gained, for, when a paper of striking design is used in a small room, a crowded effect will be the result, and consequently will be a source of irritation to the occupant.

Taking the Living Room, as in many houses of this type where the Dining Room is separated only by an arch with perhaps French doors dividing, it would not be out of place to paper both rooms with the same paper, the paper in this case being a neutral "stipple" or a two-tone effect in an all-over design. Colors may run anywhere from a warm tan to a cool taupe, and a balance effected by the use of hangings and carpets.

By the use of neutral schemes for walls no limitations are imposed when the time arrives for hangings and the many incidentals that make the human element in a room.

The Breakfast Room can be quite a contrast to this, thus assuring a bright and cheerful aspect gained, of course, by the use of yellows or light colors of this nature.

The best treatment for the Kitchen is paint, which will not absorb the odors and greasy spots that are certain to be the trial of the occupant when a paper is used. It can be easily washed, and is very much more sanitary than a paper. The color is best kept as light as possible, as this will give added light to the person working therein.

The Bedrooms afford interesting treatments for either plain or figured papers of small pattern. These had better be left to the individual taste, some preferring pattern, others plain, but it should be borne in mind that over elaboration in the matter of coloring and pattern is not conducive to a restful state of mind, and a bedroom is primarily a place in which to sleep.

The Sunroom walls had better be left as plain as possible, as in most cases the wall areas are too cut up to permit the use of pattern.

Coming now to hangings, carpets and any upholstery materials, we find that, if plainer papers have been used, we have a perfectly clear field in which to indulge our taste for color. The size of pattern should be in proportion to the size of the room, and choosing from the many excellent patterns of chintzes or damasks, that are at present on the market should not be difficult.

Let us suppose that we have chosen a chintz for the Living Room and a damask for the Dining Room both patterns and on a plain paper; it is quite easy to repeat some of this pattern in the small pieces of upholstered furniture. The large piece, namely, the chesterfield, had better be upholstered plain, and in a color that will harmonize with the chintz. For curtains next to the glass a net. sufficiently sheer not to obstruct the view from inside, yet preventing outside intrusion, or a raw silk curtain, is highly successful. Many pleasing effects can be gained by frilling and draping these curtains and it will be found to give a freer treatment to the windows.

Carpets can either consist of one large or a number of small ones, preferably plain where a patterned fabric is used in the draperies and upholstering. It should also be of a darker hue than the walls to sustain the balance of tone that is very desirable in the successful decoration of all houses. If this is not considered a very disturbing effect of "top-heaviness" is the result.

Carpets of highly naturalistic pattern had best be avoided, as an uncomfortable sensation of walking upon a flower garden cannot be overcome.

For the bedrooms, where a figured paper has been used, a plain hanging of a color that has been taken from the papers is advisable. It forms a pleasing contrast to the surrounding pattern and the effect is restful. The opposite treatment would be used in the case of a plain paper.

For the sunroom raw silk curtains, or curtains made of a guaranteed sun-fast fabric, are best. Many patterns are available with a small all-over figure of a different thread in self-color that make highly successful Sunroom draperies.

The Bathroom where not tiled had better be painted, and finished with as hard a surface as possible, so that any moisture can easily be wiped off.

Lighting is best affected by side-lights and the use of portable lamps. The centre fitting is being less used, and the other more successful form is taking its place. The effect of a quietly lit room is much more soothing, and is easier to the eyes.

Pictures should be used sparingly, and then careful consideration given to the space they are intended to occupy. It will be seen that the maximum effect is gained by the placing of a picture on a plain wall.

Incidentals such as cushions, pottery and lamps are easily overcome. From such a source of color as we now have the choosing of a note of accent can be settled by taking a color that we already possess and repeating it in its brightest and purest form in two or three places in the room, one large piece dominating and that placed in the most interesting spot.

It will then be seen that harmony of color is the result, and the completed room is a source of satisfaction to the occupant and an object of admiration to those who visit him.