

# MAGAZINE SECTION THE CAIRO BULLETIN.

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## Easter Observances in the Land of the Czar

### CURIOUS Ceremonies in the Preparation of the Holy Chrism During Passion Week

**I**N THE countries which properly may be classified as Greek—and that means Russia and the countries which come under the control of the Greek, or Eastern, Church—Easter is not only a great religious event, but, through the changes of time, has come to be a great national festival. This year's celebration promises to be peculiarly sad because of the war.

Lent—as it is understood by the people of the West—lasts for six weeks from Ash Wednesday, or forty days. In the calendar of the Russian Church it lasts for seven weeks, and, owing to the differences between the Gregorian method of computing time and that still in use in the Russian Church, the Lenten season will end this year on April 11—a week later than the Easter Day as it is celebrated in the United States and elsewhere where the Gregorian calendar is in use. In Russia they call Lent "The Great Fast," and during the Great Fast no animal food may be eaten. No fish food, even, may be eaten except during the first four weeks of the season, and among the lower classes the fast is strictly observed.

There is no *mi careme* in Russia, but Palm Sunday—or what is called Palm Sunday in the Western Church—is the nearest approach to any holiday seen during the Lenten season. In Russia this Sunday is called Willow Day, and on Willow Eve—the evening preceding the Willow Day—the first duty of everyone who appears upon the streets is to buy a sprig of willow. If the spring comes early, one may buy this sprig with the catkins. This, though, depends upon the Easter season, for when the Easter comes late in the year, then the spring comes early, and willows in Russia—like the willows the world over—come when the first breath of the spring makes them show their fur to those who would buy—as everyone buys in Moscow on Willow Eve.

On the streets on this evening may be seen peddlers with their trays filled with Easter eggs, toy balloons and everything that might appeal to the children. In Russia, as in the Teutonic countries, Easter is planned for the children's entertainment, as well as for the religious ceremony of the elders.

A priest of the Russian Church, who has lived for the greater part of his life in Russia, but who has come to America to minister to his people, told the other day of one of the ceremonies of Passion Week. He said:

"Every two or three years the Church prepares the myro, or holy chrism. This is sacred oil used for anointing children in baptism, the consecration of churches, and at the ceremony of the coronation of the Emperor and Empress.

"Down to a few years ago this holy oil was prepared only at Kiev and at Moscow. It may be prepared elsewhere now—I do not know. The ceremony takes place in the Sacristy of the Patriarchs, and the Metropolitan in person lights the fire, pours into the caldron the first gallon of oil and begins to read the gospel.

"This ceremony begins on the Monday morning preceding Easter, and I remember going into the church in Moscow during the year of the coronation of the Czar while this ceremony was in progress. The Sacristy of the Patriarchs is a great hall filled with the most marvelous decorations. At the north end, under a great canopy of gilded wood, there was a stove of porcelain. On this stove were placed two tremendous caldrons of silver, lined with gold, each weighing two hundred pounds. A number of priests were grouped about these caldrons, and six deacons in black robes, trimmed with silver, were stirring the oil with long silver ladles.

"For three days and nights this ceremony is kept up, the oil is constantly stirred by the deacons and monks while the priests read the gospels aloud. There was a large vase in the center of the hall. It was made of silver, richly ornamented with gold, and was presented to the Sacristy by the Empress Catherine II. Into this vase, after the myro is boiled for the required time, the holy oil is poured to be blessed. On the Thursday before Easter there was a great procession of all the Church dignitaries, and the oil was carried to the Church of the Assumption from the Sacristy of the Patriarchs. Then the Metropolitan, assisted by a number of archbishops, said Mass, the Metropolitan pouring from the alabaster a few drops of the sacred oil into the myro, blessed it, and the holy chrism was taken back to the Sacristy to be divided and sent away.

"The alabaster, so called in memory of the alabaster box of ointment, broken by Mary on the Saviour, is a small copper bottle, covered with mother-of-pearl, and originally filled with oil brought from Constantinople when Christianity was introduced into Russia. Each time the myro is prepared a few drops of this oil is poured in and the alabaster is again filled, so that after centuries there still remains a minute portion of the original oil.

"The myro which I watched in the making and blessing consisted of about a thousand pounds of olive oil, forty gallons of white Lisbon wine and



A TYPICAL RUSSIAN ICON



AN EASTER PROCESSION IN MANCHURIA

### KISSING Promiscuously Is One of the Essential Ceremonies of This Holiday Season in Russia

thirty or more fragrant spices, gums and other oils in varying quantities. The ceremonies incidental to the preparation of the myro are peculiarly impressive, and are among the most remarkable features of the celebration of the Easter in Russia, though, as I have said, they occur but once in two or three years.

An American woman, who married a Russian nobleman, was recently visiting her old home in America. In describing the Russian Easter celebrations she said:

"Easter is the greatest, perhaps, of all the Russian holiday seasons. It is a sort of combination Christmas and New Year as we understand the days. It is the great Russian national festival, and this is particularly true when said of the celebrations among the lower classes, though there is nothing in all the Russian customs which so thoroughly shows the true democracy of the Russians."

"But," said the one who was listening, "I always had an idea that in Russia there was no such thing as democracy as we understand it."

"There never was a more erroneous idea," she said. "I have found that the truest sort of democracy exists in Russia, and by that I mean a democracy that almost amounts to too much personal liberty. I can, perhaps, best explain this by telling an incident which happened at a railway station as we were about to take the train for Moscow, where we were going last Easter time to spend the holidays. A distinguished army officer and his beautiful wife were waiting on the platform. A peasant dressed in sheepskins approached the officer. 'Christos Voskresen!' he said to the lady. She turned instantly, and kissed the peasant three times. 'Vo istine voskres!' she said. This being translated means 'Christ is risen,' and 'He is risen, indeed.' Thus you will see that it matters little in what country the Easter is celebrated, the same expressions of greeting are used, though in America I imagine there would be some surprise if when one was greeted by the familiar expression 'Christ is risen,' it were necessary to kiss whoever said it.

"To understand this incident fully, you must remember that an army officer is the direct representative of the Czar himself, and even had the peasant a chance to first greet the Empress in the way he greeted the officer's wife, the custom would have been fulfilled just the same, and she would have kissed the man three times. This triple kiss is supposed to signify the Holy Trinity, and is, perhaps, the most distinguishing feature of the Russian celebration.

"In Moscow, where the national celebration of Easter is to be seen at its best, the streets become quiet very early on Easter Eve. At half past eleven on Easter Eve last year we started for the Kremlin. We groped up the dark staircase of the tower of Ivan Veliki to get a better view of the scene of which we had heard so much. At twelve o'clock the tower began to tremble violently—the great bell of the Assumption, which weighs sixty-four tons, and is the largest in the world, was striking the hour. Instantly every bell in all the four hundred churches of Moscow took up the ringing, joyfully and rapidly. It was Easter morning, and from the streets below we could plainly hear the great shouts, 'Christos Voskresen!' and 'Vo istine voskres!'

"A hundred cannon boomed from the Tainitzky tower, and, as if lighted by magic, every spire and dome were illuminated. The Kremlin fairly blazed. A circle of light shone about every church, and every street in Moscow became a scene of indescribable glory of light.

"At the same moment a procession of the clergy with torch-bearers, all dressed in the most brilliant robes of gold and silver, with incense, choirs and banners, began the circuit of the churches, walking over branches of evergreen which had been strewn about. The chanting of the choirs and the solemn singing of the Easter hymn:

"Christ is risen,  
Is risen from the dead,"

made a symphony of music such as I have never heard elsewhere on earth.

"The square about the Kremlin became as light as day, and we could see the Metropolitan in his magnificent robes, with his train bearers, his cross of crystal, incense and great candles, walking about the Cathedral of the Assumption. The vast crowds which had suddenly sprung into the quiet streets rushed into the churches. Each carried a candle, which was lighted at the altar, and each, as the candle was lighted, turned to his neighbor, whom he saluted with the cry of 'Christos Voskresen!' at the same time kissing him three times.

"We hastened through the streets to other churches, and everywhere on the short pillars, which answer for curbstones in Moscow, there were little earthen bowls, filled with melted tallow, in which a lighted wick was floating. The smoke and smell were disagreeable—much like the smoke and smell of an American Fourth of July—but the scene was indescribably beautiful. Everywhere around the churches there were the people with dishes of colored eggs, waiting to have them blessed."