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Being one of the most significant occasions on the Christian calendar, the celebration of Easter bears many similarities to New Zealand, but Switzerland also has some own distinctive and unique customs and traditions.

On Good Friday a vegetarian meal is customary, or only fish is eaten; common also are the much loved Swiss fruit or cheese flans (Frucht / Käse Wähe).

Easter Sunday is a family day, where "Oschternäschtli" (Easter nests), containing chocolate rabbits and eggs, are hidden for children to find. It has been known that children have had to spend a good part of a morning to find their hidden goodies! In some parts of Switzerland, lamb is also a customary Sunday dinner.

And then comes one of the most timeless Swiss Easter traditions is the "Eiertütsche", or "Egg Striking".

Firstly, the eggs must be decorated. Methods vary, but basically this is done by smoothly arranging small petals, grasses or leaves against the dampened white egg shell and tying these in place with cotton or similar thread, and finally tightly wrapped in an old stocking to hold together. The eggs are then hard-boiled and coloured in a pot of water containing onion skins, which have been saved in the weeks prior to Easter. Next, the eggs are quickly cooled with cold water and then the wrapping and trimmings can be removed. The result is beautiful and individually patterned eggs, which can then also be shined with bacon rind. Alternatively, hard boiled-eggs are also dyed, and beautifully decorated with a variety of

paints and felts.

Now the fun for the whole family - the "tütsche" - begins, although to the detriment of the decorated shell, which must be broken to reach the egg! Two people hold an egg each, and one person then strikes their egg against the other's, head to head or tail to tail, trying to keep your own egg shell intact while breaking the other. This can be done within a group of people - the 'losers' being rewarded by being able to eat their eggs once both ends have been broken!

This activity often continues on Easter Monday, amongst the local children, who get together with the left over eggs from the previous day. Only this time the competition can become quite intent.

Around Switzerland there are also a variety of distinctive Easter foods, some traditional only to certain regions. These include "Osterfladen", a pie usually made with semolina or rice; "Ostertauben" (Easter Doves), made with 'Zopf' dough in the form of a dove; "Eier im Nest", decorated eggs pressed into nests made with a sweet yeast dough and baked; or "Biskuithasen", rabbit shaped cookies with names iced on. These can then be used as a table setting as an Easter family meal, or to name children's hidden Easter nests.

Children are an important part of the Easter celebration, and there are several rhymes and verses in all the national languages with an Easter theme. Below is a common and favourite one in 'Baslerdütsch'. BL

S'Oschterhäsli

*Hinterm Huus, vorem Huus
machemer Ringetänzli;
s'Oschterhäsli luegt is zue,
wädlet mit em Schwänzli.*

*Hinterm Huus, vorem Huus
sueche mer Moos und Stainli;
s'Oschterhäsli gumpet dervo,
schlenkret syni Bainli.*

*Hinterm Huus, vorem Huus
baue mer glaini Neschtli;
s'Ochsterhäsli springt gschwind heim,
holt sy Aierkäschtli.*

*Hinterm Huus, vorem Huus
tien mer luschtig singe;
s'Oschterhäsli tuet is hit,
gfärbti Aili bringe. (A Mahler-Frey)*

KIDS !! We'd like to encourage children to become more interested in reading the Helvetia, and so from now on, in most issues, we'll be including a variety of competitions, quizzes, or puzzles, with prizes especially for you. Sometimes there will be other interesting activities.

So, for this month, there will be an **Easter Competition**. We want you to decorate an Easter Egg. Draw a large egg on an A4 piece of paper and decorate it however you like by using felts, crayons, paints, glue, glitter, or any other materials. Judging will be in three categories: under 5 years; 5 - 10 years; and over 10 years.

(The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into) Send your "egg" to: The Secretary, Swiss Society of NZ, PO Box 4035, Hamilton East; by 15th April.

Don't forget to include your name & address, as well as your age! Winners' names will be published in the May Helvetia. We're looking forward to getting lots of decorated eggs - Good Luck!!

Trudy and Doris.



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