

A LEGEND OF EASTER

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FROM another far-off Northland, here's a tale the children sing:—
How each year a goddess-maiden comes to wake the earth to spring.

Gay her laughter as the sunlight dancing gaily round her head,
Touching curls that wave and ripple golden to a warmer red.
Round her little winds go playing, butterflies of joyous birth
Swarm; and at her feet the flowers happy spring from happy earth.
High above her herald-swallows dart and swoop o'er land and sea,
Crying "Wake old world from winter, for the spring has set you free."
And it tells, the old-time story, how one year she called "Go forth,
Oh my valiant herald-swallows! to the far-off frozen North,
Where old Winter holds his castle with its walls of drifted snow,
And the bergs in icy stillness wait the moving of the floe."

To the bitter home of Winter, brave of heart though worn of wing
Came the tired herald-swallows with their message of the spring.
But old Winter breathed upon them with his numbing, numbing
breath,

And he gripped them in his fingers,—Oh those icicles of death!
Of the darting herald-swallows, once so gay—of wing so fleet—
Only two came back and fluttered, spent and dying, at her feet.
Warm she held them in her bosom, and she whispered words of love,
While her cheeks were wet with tear-drops, and the sky grew grey
above.

Long she pondered,—long she pondered. When she let them slip
from her,

Birds no longer—they were rabbits!—clothed from tip to tail in fur.
Then she kissed them, and she begged them—"Oh my rabbits
venture forth,

Who but you can take my message even to the bitter north?"
So they loped and loped to northward to the land of frost and snow,
Where the bergs in icy stillness wait the melting of the flow.

What to rabbits that old Winter blew on them his numbing breath?
Snuggled in their warm fur trappings they could laugh at frozen
death;

And they cried "The spring is coming," till the sun he heard their cry
And he wakened from his slumbers, and he climbed the Northern sky.
Then the ice chains cracked and parted, and the great icebergs
broke free

With a tossing and a plunging, till they found the open sea.

Now whene'er the goddess-maiden comes to wake the earth to spring
With her butterflies and flowers and her swallows on the wing,—
With her breezes and her sunshine,—still the rabbits come with her,
Jumping here and running thither, dressed from tip to tail in fur.
And each year, so they'll remember, one tremendous egg they lay:
And I think you'll find this happens every year on Easter day!
And you'd see, could you be present at this memorable scene,
All the rabbits very puzzled wondering what this egg can mean,
Till the very oldest rabbit flops his ears and cries,—"Absurd!
Do you know I had forgotten that I too was once a bird."