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*The Holiday Customs of Ireland.*

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The world has grown so familiar with the stories of misrule, suffering and violence in Ireland, that we are apt to forget that there is another side to the picture, and that every nation has a home life as well as a political existence. The little every day cares and pleasures of the household, the merrymakings and social gatherings of neighbors, and the occasional holidays, make up the real life of a people, and he who is ignorant of these knows not the nation, however familiar he may be with the history of its kings and rulers, their battles, victories and defeats. The heroes of Gettysburg and Spotsylvania were men who enjoyed a good dinner, or a quiet smoke after a hard day's work, as much as any of us, and, as boys, took fully as much delight in a Fourth of July celebration or a raid on a watermelon patch. The dreaded Moonlighter or the unspeakable Fenian will walk as many miles to a country dance as ever did Carleton's rollicking Ned M'Keown, is just as anxious about the condition of the potatoes and the health of the pig, finds as much satisfaction in listening to a fiddler at a wedding or a story teller at a wake, and in his young days was just as eager in hunting the wren on Saint Stephen's day or feeding the bonfires on Saint John's eve.

What are called the popular customs of a nation are always best preserved by the agricultural and village portion of the population, a class especially numerous in Ireland from the fact that the peculiar political conditions of the country compel the great bulk of the people to draw their living directly from the soil, leaving them but scant opportunity to acquire an education or to become familiar with modern progress. In spite of all this, however, the old customs are decaying here as elsewhere,



and many of the observances which wer once general ar now confined to remote mountain districts or liv only in the memory of the older people, while others, again, ar stil common throughout the country. As there is but little communication amongst the peasantry of different districts, excepting at the fairs in the summer time, the customs common in one parish ar sometimes entirely unknown in another hardly ten miles distant. In this paper we shal describe the beliefs and customs connected with the observance of the principal Irish holidays, omitting those of lesser importance. As a number of these holiday observances ar more or less common to all the Aryan nations, especially to those of Western Europe, it must suffice to note the fact here without entering into a detaild comparison. The features more peculiarly Irish ar mainly derived from the old druidic worship. Where authorities ar not given, the statements ar the result of personal investigation. As a matter of convenience, all those customs which wer in use within the present generation ar described as stil existing, altho some of them ar now obsolete.

The essentially foreign customs found only in those districts—chiefly in the north—occupied principally by Scotch and English settlers, hav no place in this connection. Aside from these, however, many of the genuin Irish observances hav evidently been considerably modified by English influences. This is especially true of the May-day and Christmas celebrations, while in regard to the many holiday rimes it is hardly too much to say that they hav been imported bodily from England. The same may be said of many of the children's rimes, riddles and other formulas, even in the remote west where the Gaelic is the ordinary language of the people. This may be due in some slight degree to contact with the English colonists in Ireland, but by far a more efficient cause is to be found in the annual summer exodus of the Irish harvesters. As soon as the corn begins to ripen troops of the poorer laborers from every part of the country turn their faces toward Dublin and Queenstown, where, embarking by thousands, they cross over to Liverpool and range in small parties from one end of the country to the other until the harvest is over and cold weather approaches, when they return to their own land with a few pounds apiece to pay the rent and perhaps a few shillings extra to buy salt for the potatoes. During these summer months they mingle constantly with the rural English population, by whom the old customs ar most cherisht, become familiar with their habits, games and sayings, and enter into a friendly intimacy such as is never extended to those of the same race in Ireland, where they ar always regarded by the natives as foreign usurpers, and disliked and avoided accordingly.

#### SAINT BRIDGET'S DAY, FEBRUARY 1.

The observances connected with New Year and Twelfth-night wil be described in treating of the Christmas holidays, of which these festivals form a part. Proceeding onward in the calendar the first great festival is that of Saint Bridget's day, February 1. The ceremonies in this case, as



in that of several other holidays, begin on the preceding eve, as among the ancient Irish the day was considered to begin at sundown. This is a peculiarly Gaelic festival, and its observance under this name seems to be confined to Ireland and the remoter districts of Scotland; but there is every reason to believe that it was a part of a general European fire celebration, which still survives in Candlemas, the second of February. In ancient Rome, as in Ireland, this festival was dedicated to a female deity, Februa, in whose honor the people carried burning torches about the streets just as the candles are now lighted in honor of the Virgin Mary. In ancient Ireland the day now consecrated to Saint Bridget was the occasion of the first of the five great fire celebrations of the year, and it seems probable that bonfires were lighted then as on the eves of May-day and Saint John.

Saint Bridget was one of the earliest disciples of Saint Patrick, the apostle of Ireland, and founded a convent of nuns at Kildare in the year 484. This cloister, like that of the vestal virgins of ancient Rome, was celebrated for its perpetual fire, which was fed and guarded by the nuns, and which, with the exception of a short intermission in the thirteenth century, burned constantly for more than a thousand years until the suppression of religious establishments by Henry VIII. It was permitted to blow this fire only with a bellows and not with the breath.\* This remarkable incorporation of the old fire worship of the country into the service of a Christian saint, together with the fact that *Brigid* (pronounced *Breej*) was the name of one of the deities of pagan Ireland, render it probable that the ceremonies now practiced in honor of the saint are but modifications of the ancient rites intended to propitiate the heathen goddess, who, from the character of the observances, would appear to have been the special protectress of cattle and the dairy. This is the more likely as it is a well established fact that almost every practice known to the holiday calendar of modern Europe had its origin in the pagan ceremonials of pre-Christian times. The date also corresponds closely with that of the first of the five great annual fire festivals of ancient Ireland. The lark is held sacred to Saint Bridget because its song used to wake her to prayers every morning, and if heard singing upon her day it presages good luck and fine weather.†

The Gaelic name of Saint Bridget's eve is *Oid'c'e Brigid* (pronounced *Ekha Vreja*, or, incorrectly, *Eel Vreja*), "Bridget's Night." In the last century, according to Vallancey, it was customary on this occasion for every farmer's wife to bake a cake called the *bairean breac* (*bawran brac*) or spotted cake. The house was then set in order and the neighbors invited, the cake sent round with ale and pipes, and the evening was spent in mirth and good humor.‡ In the east and south-east young girls dress up the churn-dash to represent Saint Bridget, and carry it in procession

\* Grimm, *Mythologie*, i, 578.

† Lady Wilde, ii, 121, 136.

‡ Vallancey, *Collectanea* (Ant. Ir. Lang.), ii, 291.



from one house to another, expecting to receive a treat at each, and in this they are seldom disappointed. In the city of Limerick, where, as may well be supposed, the old custom has degenerated, a broom is dressed up, not as the saint, but as "Miss Bridget."

In Galway and other parts of the west, companies of young girls carry about on this eve a figure known as the *Brideog* (*Breejoeg*), made of straw and rushes and dressed to resemble the saint. At every house the carriers sing a short verse or two, and are rewarded with a small gift of money or cakes, the net proceeds being expended by the participants in a jollification later in the evening. The young men, with their faces covered with painted masks of paper, go about in like manner, singing verses and carrying a rope known as the *Crios B'rig'ide* (*cris Vreja*) or "girdle of Bridget," which will be described later. The ends of this rope are joined so as to form a circle, through which every one is expected to pass on payment of a small trifle. The Gaelic verse commonly used in Galway is as follows :

Crios B'rig'ide, mo c'rios,  
Crios na d-tri g-cros.  
Eirig' suas, a b'ean na tig',  
Tab'air d'am rod-a cinnt' sgo t'ri mo c'rios,  
Agus go m-bud' seac't mile fearr b'eid'eas tu bliag'ain ó anoc'd.\*

Which may be rendered literally :

Bridget's girdle, my girdle,  
Girdle of the three crosses.  
Rise up, woman of the house,  
Giv me something and pass through my girdle,  
And may you be seven thousand times better a year from to-night.

The English verse used in Eastern Galway runs thus :

God bless the master of the house,  
And the mistress also,  
And likewise the little children  
That around the table grow.  
Go down into your cellar,  
If anything you can find  
Your pockets are not empty  
If to help us you're inclined.  
Your pockets are not empty  
Of money or strong beer (!)  
And we'll trouble you no more again  
Until another year.

While this verse is well known in East Galway, it is English in its origin and easily to be recognized as such, altho as here given it has received one or two unmistakable Irish touches. No genuine Irish popular song would ever bid the master go down into the cellar, such a thing being an

\* Pronounced : *Cris Vreja, mo khris,*  
*Cris na jre grus.*  
*Iree suas, a van a che,*  
*Thoar um rudh a ceench sgú hre mo khris,*  
*Ógus go mú shokhth meelya fár víse thu bleean o nuklith.*



unknown appendage to the house of the ordinary farmer or peasant. In trying to avoid this incongruity farther on, by substituting the word pocket for cellar, the boys have only made matters worse by filling the pockets aforesaid with strong beer. The original of the first four lines is the Yorkshire Christmas carol, as given by a writer of 1824 in the *Gentleman's Magazine* :

"God bless the master of this house.  
The mistress also,  
And all the little children  
That round the table go."\*

The remainder is probably taken from a verse given by Brand as sung by English children on All Souls' day, and much resembling another verse sung on Easter morning. The last lines of the former are as follows :

"Put your hand in your pocket and pull out your keys,  
Go down in the cellar, bring up what you please,  
A glass of your wine or a cup of your beer,  
And we'll never come Souling till this time next year."†

According to O'Reilly's "Dictionary," the Brideog is used by girls on the eve of the saint to determine who shall be their future husbands,‡ which is the only hint the writer has received thus far of its use as a love charm. The Brideog is unknown in the north and in the south-west, but in both sections, as well as in Galway and throughout the greater part of Ireland, it is customary to hang up about the walls of the house numbers of small crosses made of straw or rushes. In Galway these are made, at least in part, of materials taken from the Brideog after it has served its original purpose in the procession. In the ordinary cross each arm is made of three strong rushes or straws, converging at the ends and widening out in the centre of the cross, where they are interwoven. In Kerry a more elaborate cross is sometimes made of wood, about 5 x 8 inches in length. Short crosspieces are fastened near each end so as to make four smaller crosses, around each of which is brought a single rush or straw in diamond fashion, while a similar larger diamond is fixed around the centre of the cross. Should a Kerry farmer have a firkin of butter on hand as spring approaches, he will defer opening it until this day.

The *Crios Bríde* or "Girdle of Bridget," already mentioned, plays an important part in these ceremonies in the western districts. This is a rope made of green rushes, procured the day before, or if rushes be scarce, it is made of straw, with three green rushes plaited into it. The rope is made sufficiently long to allow a tall man to pass through the circle without difficulty when the ends are joined together to form the girdle. It is made on Saint Bridget's eve, and as soon as the ends of the rope have been joined, the master of the house holding it doubled up in his right hand, makes the sign of the cross with it in the name of the Trinity

\* Pop. Sup., 94.

† Brand, *Antiquities*, i, 413.

‡ Edward O'Reilly, *Irish-English Dictionary*, new ed., n. d., Dublin, under *Brideog*.



and passes it three times from right to left around his body. Then holding it out at arm's length in his right hand, he lets one end drop so as to form a circle, through which he passes three times, putting the right foot through first each time. He then doubles up the rope and again passes it three times around his body as at first. He is followed in turn by every member of the family. In some cases the girdle is simply laid on the floor in the shape of a circle and each one passes through it by lifting up one side to step under, and then raising the other side to step out again. In the morning—Saint Bridget's day—the girdle is hung over the stable door and all the animals are made to go through it. This ceremony protects both men and animals from the influence of evil spirits throughout the year. In some cases the rope is kept in the family from one recurrence of the festival to another. A rush taken from it and tied about the head will keep the headache away from the wearer for a year.

In different parts of the country there are several interesting ceremonies in connection with bringing home the rushes, which are procured on the day preceding the festival. In Galway, the boys go in the morning to the small streams in the neighborhood and gather bundles of the green rushes. In the evening—the eve of the festival—these are brought around to each house, which, in every instance, is found with the door tightly closed, the family being waiting in silence within. Going up to the door, the boys shout seven times, "*Leig asteac Brig'id*" (*Lig aschökh' Breej*), "Let Bridget enter," while to each demand those within reply, "*Leig a's céad fáilte rom'ad*" (*Lig os caedh faulcha roath*), "Enter and a hundred welcomes before you." The door is then thrown open and the boys come in and leave some of their rushes, for which they are rewarded with a small treat, after which they go on to the next house. Occasionally, some families get their own rushes.

In Donegal, the bringer of the rushes is a girl, who is called *Brig'id* for the occasion, and it is seldom that a family of girls is without one of this name to enact that part in the ceremony. The rushes having been previously left at some convenient spot outside, Brigid goes out after dark and the door is at once closed after her. Taking up the bundle of rushes, she approaches the house and goes all around it, seeking an entrance, while those inside affect great terror and observe the strictest silence. On getting around to the back of the house, she sings:

*Guid' me air mo g'luna,  
Agus deoirid' go mo súile,  
Agus leig asteac Brig'id.\**

I implore on my knees  
And with tears in my eyes,  
And let Bridget within.

\* Pronounced in Donegal, somewhat incorrectly: *Gú mae er mo ghluna,  
Óus dherdhre go mo súila,  
Óus lig aschokh' Breej.*



on which those inside shout gladly, "*Sì b'eat'a, sì b'eat'a, sì b'eat'a*" (*she vāha, she vāha, she vāha*), "She's welcome, she's welcome, she's welcome," and, the door being opened, Brighid enters and deposits her rushes on the floor. According to a writer of 1716, a somewhat similar custom formerly existed in the Hebrides, where a sheaf of oats was dressed as a woman and laid in a cradle known as "Brighid's bed," while the people shouted, "Brighid is come, Brighid is welcome."\* This ceremony is, probably incorrectly, assigned to Candlemas, the day following Saint Bridget's day.

In the west and south a handkerchief, known as the *Brat Brìgìde* (*Broth Breja*), or "veil of Bridget," is left out over night on the saint's eve, and when saturated with dew in the morning is used to cure calves of a disease known as *ruatt'ar péiste* (*roehar paeshcha*), or the "depredation of the worm," by striking them with it three times in the name of the Trinity.

#### SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, MARCH 17.

Altho Saint Patrick's day is pre-eminently the Irish national holiday, not much can be said of it in a descriptive way, as the observances connected with it have but little of the old ceremonial or mythologic character. Processions and speeches in the larger towns and smaller gatherings in the country villages, with the assistance of the pipers and fiddlers in the evening, fill out the day, while every one seems bent on carrying out to the letter the spirit of the old ballad which declares that

"Saint Patrick's day we'll be all very gay."

The festival commemorates the apostle and patron saint of Ireland, this day, according to most writers, being the anniversary both of his landing in Ireland and of his death, the latter occurring in the year 493. That typical Irish poet, Samuel Lover, by turns so humorous and so pathetic, gives the following characteristic account of the origin of the celebration :

#### *The Birth of Saint Patrick.*

On the eighth day of March it was, some people say,  
That Saint Patrick at midnight he first saw the day,  
While others declare 'twas the ninth he was born,  
And 'twas all a mistake between midnight and morn ;  
For mistakes will occur in a hurry and shock,  
And some blamed the baby, and some blamed the clock,  
Till with all their cross-questions, sure no one could know  
If the child was too fast or the clock was too slow.

Now the first faction fight in old Ireland, they say,  
Was all on account of Saint Patrick's birthday.  
Some fought for the eighth—for the ninth more would die ;  
And who wouldn't see right, sure, they blackened his eye !  
At last both the factions so positive grew  
That each kept a birthday, so Pat then had two ;  
Till Father Mulcahy, who showed them their sins,  
Said, "No one can have two birthdays but twins."

\* Martin, "Account of the Western Islands of Scotland," quoted in Brand, *Antiquities*, 50.



Says he, "Boys, don't be fightin' for eight or for nine;  
 Don't be always dividin'—but sometimes combine;  
 Combine eight with nine, seventeen is the mark,  
 So let that be his birthday." "Amen," says the clark,  
 "If he wasn't a twin, sure our history will show  
 That, at least, he's worth any two saints that we know!"  
 Then they all got blind drunk, which completed their bliss,  
 And we keep up the practice from that day to this.

It is a saying among the people that after Saint Patrick's day it is time to begin to make garden. In Connemara they say that one should have half his farm work done by this time and half his fodder still on hands, and that after this every alternate day will be clear and sunshiny. The weather on this day is proverbially fine, and of course there is an Irish reason for it. In the first days of Christianity in Ireland Saint Bridget was much hindered in her work by the rains, which are especially frequent in this country, until at last she obtained as a favor from God that every other Sunday should be a clear day, so that she might preach to the crowds which came to hear her. Not to be outdone, Saint Patrick asked that his anniversary might be a day of sunshine, which was granted, and from that time forth the 17th of March has always been a fine day.\*

On this day every child throughout Ireland, excepting in Connemara and some of the northern districts, is expected to wear upon the left breast a small disk intersected by crosses upon the surface and known as a *croiseog* (*crishoeg*) or "favor." In Connemara the *croiseog* is worn only by the women. They are of various designs and colors, but the general pattern is everywhere the same. The disk is made of stiff paper, or of silk lined with pasteboard, and across the surface are pasted strips of paper of different colors, crossing each other at right angles, so as to form some even number of crosses having a common centre in the middle of the disk. These strips are sometimes cut so as to give the arms of the cross an elliptical shape. Around the edge of the disk, between the arms of the crosses, are drawn small arcs which are filled in with dots, shamrocks and other figures, in ink of various colors. The ends of the crosses are sometimes trimmed with ribbons. In Clare and Connemara there is usually but one cross, which is drawn upon the surface of the disk with the blood of the wearer, the blood being obtained by pricking the end of the finger. The green is usually procured from grass and the yellow from the yolk of an egg.

At the merrymaking, in the evening, no good Irishman neglects to "drown the shamrock" in "Patrick's pot"—in other words, to dip the shamrock in a glass of whisky. After wishing the company health, wealth and every prosperity, including "long leases and low rents," he dips the sprig of shamrock into the liquor which he is about to drink and then touches it against another, which he wears in his hatband in honor of the day. It is hardly necessary to state that the shamrock is a small variety of clover and the national emblem of Ireland. According to the popular

\* Lady Wilde, ii, 121, 122.



belief, its adoption as the national ensign dates from the time when Saint Patrick used it to explain to the pagan Irish the mystery of the Trinity, or three in one. In East Galway and adjacent parts, the processions on this day carry banners bearing representations of incidents in the traditional life of Saint Patrick, such as the baptism of Oisín, the banishing of the snakes, etc. Everywhere men wear the shamrock in their hatbands, while women and children fasten it in their hair or upon their breasts.

#### SHROVE TUESDAY, THE LENTEN SEASON AND EASTER.

The customs pertaining to the Lenten season, with the attendant festivals of Shrove Tuesday, Good-Friday and Easter, may properly be treated together, and as they are based upon ideas which are in great part the common heritage of Christian Europe, they vary but little in the different countries. The first festival of this season is *Shrove Tuesday*, or as it is called in the eastern and northern districts, *Seraf' Tuesday*. This feast, like the others pertaining to Lent, is movable, but generally occurs toward the close of February, thus corresponding with the old pagan feasts of Bacchus and Pan—the Bacchanalia and Lupercalia—of which Shrove Tuesday is probably the modern descendant. From its Gaelic name, *Inid* (*Inij*), Smiddy argues that it may correspond in Ireland with the ancient festival of Beinid, the Minerva of the pagan Irish.\* The Roman feast of Minerva took place about the middle of March, and was celebrated by public amusements, and was also a favorite time for getting married. This statement still holds good throughout all Catholic countries, where marriages are prohibited by the Church during the succeeding six weeks of Lent. On this subject the same author says: "It is also remarkable that in the Irish-speaking districts more marriages take place at this season than at any other period of the year. The feasts and the marriages are at present ascribed to the near approach of the season of Lent; but perhaps, like the other popular festivities of the year, they had their origin in something more remote, though now forgotten."† Back of all mythology the custom probably has its explanation in the fact, as stated by the poet, that

"In the spring the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

It is popularly expected that all the marriageable young folks shall have been mated before Lent, and on this, the last day of grace, the young men in Cork, Waterford and other towns of the south, were formerly accustomed to go through the streets in bands, carrying ropes, with which they caught any unlucky girl who had "mist her chance," and pulled her a few rods along the road, after which she was released. This was called taking her to Skellig to get married, the allusion being to the Skellig rocks on the coast of Kerry, formerly a noted place of pilgrimage, toward the end of the Lenten season, for young women who desired good husbands. This "taking to Skellig" has supplanted an older and rougher pastime,

\* Smiddy, *Druids*, 112.

† *Idem*, 112-3.



practiced in the south about fifty years ago and known as "drawing the log." Any unmarried young folks of either sex who wer so unfortunate as to be caught on the streets on this day wer compeld to drag a heavy timber at the end of a rope, followd by crowds of men and boys armd with shillelaghs and shouting, "Come draw the log, come draw the log," while keeping step to the music of a piper in attendance. In Hall's "Ireland,"\* this custom is assigned to the following day, Ash-Wednesday, which is obviously a mistake.

In Clare, it is said that all the disappointed young women—and, for that matter, the disappointed young men as wel—ar in a bad humor on Shrove Tuesday night, and their soreness continues to increase all week, so that by Sunday they can be distinguisht by the "puss" on their countenances. Hence, the first Sunday in Lent is there known as "Puss Sunday," and mischievous boys delight in marking the backs of the unfortunate ones with flour or chalk so as point them out to the whole congregation. This practice exists also in Kerry, where there is a popular legend that on the night of Shrove Tuesday, all the disappointed lovers of both sexes shoulder their burden of wasted hopes and blighted affections under the form of a bundle of gads or rods and repair to the banks of a mystic river, known, on this account, as *Srut'án na ngadaraid'e* (*srúhaon na ngódhreé*), or the "stream of the gads," where they get rid of their troubles by throwing the whole load of affliction into the water. Going to *Srut'án na ngadaraid'e* is the Kerry equivalent for going up Salt river.

In the evening, the young folks—and the old ones as wel—gather round the turf fire to learn, by "tossing the pancake," what is to be the result of their future marriage ventures. A crock of batter having been prepared, a part is poud out on the pan to form the first cake, which is consigd to the care of the oldest unmarried daughter. At the proper time, she turns the cake with a dextrous toss up the chimney, and if it comes down smoothly on the other side in the pan, she can hav her choice of a husband whenever she likes. If, on the other hand, it falls into the ashes or comes down with a corner doubled over, she cannot marry for at least a year. This is also regarded as an omen of il fortune with an accepted lover, and so strong is this feeling that engagements hav even been broken off for no other reason. The lucky tosser of the first cake at once shares it with the other girls. On eating it there is generally found in one slice the mother's wedding ring and in another a piece of furz, both having been put into the batter before baking. Whoever gets the ring wil be most happy in her future choice, while the other wil remain unmarried. A similar custom exists in England and Scotland.

The cruel custom of cock throwing on Shrove Tuesday, which stil exists in England, was formerly known also in Ireland, but is now extinct.† A cock was tied by the leg to a stone or stick, and every person who paid the small sum demanded was allowd to throw at it from a certain distance,

\* Hall, Ireland, i, 315.

† *Ibid.*



the one who kild the bird being permitted to take it home with him. There is evidence to show that this custom originated in England, and was probably intended at first to giv expression to the national hatred for the French, a cock and a Frenchman having in Latin the same name, *Gallus*.\*

Little need be said of *Ash-Wednesday*, rendered literally in Gaelic by *Cedín a Luaitrid* (*Cédheen a Luaree*). In accordance with the general custom, it is observd as a day of solemn devotion. The ashes consecrated in the church upon this day ar preservd with religious care as a safeguard against evil influences, and with this intention mothers sometimes make the sign of the cross with the sacred ashes upon the foreheads of their new-born infants. In Ireland, as in all Catholic countries, branches of palm, or some evergreen substitute, ar worn in the hat or upon the breast on Palm Sunday.

*Good-Friday*, in Gaelic *Aoine Ceasdad* (*Ena Caesdhu*), or "Crucifixion Friday," is also of but secondary importance in regard to any popular customs connected with it, altho one of the most solemn festivals of the Church. It is a day of prayer and rigid fasting, and in some parts of the country even infants ar not allowd the breast unless they cry three times for their accusomd nourishment. Brand states that it was formerly customary for women to go along the roads with bare feet and disheveld hair in imitation of Christ's sorrowful journey to Calvary.†

It is said that an eg laid on Good-Friday wil keep good until that day twelv-month. The same belief is held in England and on the continent in regard to bread baked upon this day. It is also customary to cut the hair upon Good-Friday in order to cut away the sins of the past year and begin a new life with the coming Easter, and any one doing so wil hav no headache for a year thereafter. Among the west coast fishermen of Connemara there exists the strange and barbarous practice of bringing home on this day living fish, which ar afterward fried alive.

*Easter Sunday* is the festival of colored eggs in Ireland, as wel as elsewhere in Europe and America, the eg being an ancient symbol of the resurrection. Eggs and bacon form the principal Easter dish, to which, in Roscommon and adjacent districts, there is added a cake, with a dance in the evening. According to an old writer, quoted in Brand, the eggs and bacon wer formerly prepared, in the central districts, late the previous evening, but not toucht until the cock crew. The company then clapt hands with shouts of "Out with the Lent!" and made merry a short while before going to bed.‡

Piers thus describes the Easter festivities in Westmeath, in 1682: "On the feasts of Easter and Whitsuntide, the more ordinary sort of people meet near the ale house in the afternoon on some convenient spot of ground and dance for the cake; here, to be sure, the piper fails not of diligent

\* See Pop. Sup., 310, 311.

† Brand, *Antiquities*, 1, 152.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1, 161.



attendance. The cake to be danced for is provided at the charge of the ale-wife, and is advanced on a board on the top of a pike about ten feet high; this board is round, and from it riseth a kind of a garland, beset and tied round with meadow flowers, if it be early in the summer; if later, the garland has the addition of apples set round on pegs fastened unto it; the whole number of dancers begin all at once in a large ring, a man and a woman, and dance round about the bush, so is this garland call'd, and the piper, as long as they are able to hold out; they that hold out longest at the exercise win the cake and apples, and then the ale-wife's trade goes on." \*

If any one who has kept the Lent wel wil rise early on Easter morning, he wil be able to see the sun dance in the sky for joy at the resurrection, altho some persons assert that the sun givs but three leaps on this occasion. A favorit method is to observ the reflection in a wel or stream of water. In Kerry, the fish ar said to be asleep on this day, and the old people declare positivly that they can easily be caught with the hand in shallow water. In Meath, the day is held so sacred that it is said, that if one should black his shoes in the morning and then rub the brush against a tree, the tree would be dead before that day twelv-month. More wil be given in this connection in speaking of the next festival.

#### MAY-DAY OR BEALTUINE, MAY 1.

The next great festival is May-day, the first day of May, which, being generally regarded as the beginning of summer, has been observd as a holiday throughout Europe and in many parts of the Orient from the most ancient times. In Rome the feast of Maia was held upon this day and was preceded by the Floralia, lasting four days and celebrated in honor of Flora, goddess of fruits and flowers. It is probable that the ancient Irish festival also lasted several days, as in Gaelic Scotland the Bealtuine period is stil considerd to extend from the first to the eighth of May.† The old Scandinavians observd the day with feasting and dancing and a mock fight between winter and summer.‡ The ancient Persians celebrated the festival upon the 21st of April, when every fire was extinguisht, to be relighted with sacred fire from the temples.§ The essential features of this modern celebration, as wel as the beliefs connected with the day, vary but little throughout Europe, the festivities consisting chiefly of dancing around bonfires, or poles decorated with flowers and ribbons, while the omens relate to the prosperity of the dairy or the wedded lot of the girls. Certain trees ar held particularly sacred in connection with these observances, the May-pole being of oak in England, an elm in Cornwall and a birch in Wales,|| while in Ireland the chosen tree is the *crann-*

\* Piers, Westmeath, 123.

† See note in Pop. Sup., 51.

‡ Brand, Antiquities, i, 222.

§ Lady Wilde, i, 194.

|| Brand, Antiquities (quoted), i. 236-7.



*caoran* (*craun-ceeran*), the rowan or mountain ash. The May season, and especially May eve, is universally regarded as a favorite time for fairy revels and witches' spells.

The Gaelic name of May-day is *Lā Bealtuine* (*Lao Báwlthinny*), "the day of the Beal fire," Beal being the fire god of the Keltic nations and almost identical with Baal or Bel, the sun god of the Phœnicians and Assyrians. The month itself is called "the month of Bealtuine." The pagan Irish were fire worshipers, and this was one of the five great fire festivals of the year, the others being celebrated respectively at the beginning of spring—about Saint Bridget's day; at midsummer on Saint John's day; at Lughnas or the beginning of August, and on the first day of November, the celebration in each case beginning on the preceding eve, as already stated. Fire still holds an important place in the May-day and midsummer festivities, and Grimm states that in Wales, where a Keltic language is yet spoken, the "holy fires" are also lighted on the first of November.\*

The worship of fire and of its glorious embodiment, the sun, was a form of religious belief at once so ancient and universal that the subject need not be here discussed. The system probably attained its highest development and greatest splendor in Persia in the east and in Ireland in the west, and in both countries, as well as elsewhere, an impressive ceremony of the ritual was the simultaneous extinction of every hearth-fire throughout the land, to be rekindled from the new fire solemnly lighted by the priests of the sun.

In Ireland the great festival of the new fire took place on the eve of Bealtuine, and the first fire was kindled by the druid priests either on the hill of Uisneach, which occupied a central position in the kingdom, or upon the hill of Tara, where stood the royal palace of the monarch.† Both hills are in the county Meath. As soon as the blaze appeared above the trees other piles were lighted on the surrounding hill-tops, until in a short time the circle of fire ran round the whole island. Death was the penalty for lighting a fire before the great one was kindled by the druids in Meath. Smiddy, who has investigated the druidic religion to some extent, is inclined to think that this new fire was procured from the rays of the sun by some simple mechanical apparatus, but as the ceremonies took place at night, it is difficult to see how it could have been obtained in this way, unless the fire was actually lighted before darkness came on, which does not appear to have been the case. It is more probable that fire was obtained by the friction of two pieces of dry wood, the method still in use among primitive peoples, and often retained in religious ceremonies after it has been superseded in every-day life by some more convenient invention. The particular method used was probably the twirling of a stick in a solid block or wheel of wood until sufficient heat was produced to ignite the

\* Grimm, *Mythologie*, 4, 580.

† Smiddy (*Essay on the Druids*, 97) favors the first location, while other writers think Tara more probably the true one.



tinder placed at the point of contact. This was the process used by the Roman vestals, by the ancient priests of India and by their modern Brahmanic successors, and has even been practiced in the western islands of Scotland, one of the last sanctuaries of druidism, as late as 1767, in order to procure sacred fire with which to check a murrain amongst the cattle.\*

According to Smiddy, as soon as the new fires wer blazing on every hil, "Feasts and sacrifices followed. Victims were given to the flames, and among them probably were included human beings. As on all other occasions of prayer and sacrifice, both priests and people placed themselves at the west of the fires, with their faces turned to the mystical and magical east. Most probably these ceremonies took place at an advanced hour of the night and were continued till morning, when the sun, the great form of Beal, appeared in his glory above the horizon. \* \* \* It is stated that from the fires lighted by the druids on this solemn occasion the people carried home burning brands or live embers, with which to rekindle the domestic hearths, and that the seed of it, *siol na tinne*, was preserved and continued among them till the next anniversary of Beil-tinne again. \* \* \* The druids believed that in this way they kept the sacred fire of Beal perpetually burning and that great were the benefits which their people derived from its presence and influence among them. Even the fields at this season received portions of it to ensure a fruitful year and an abundant harvest."†

The great ceremony of Bealtuine was intended especially to bring a blessing upon the crops and herds, and it is stated by some authors that both human beings and cattle wer offered as a sacrifice to the fire upon this occasion. It is certain, at least, that two fires wer built close together and that men and cattle past between them, the purpose being to ward off the influence of disease.‡ In the last century the cattle wer stil driven through the May fires to preserv them from all disorders during the year,§ while the existing May-day beliefs concern themselvs chiefly with the safety of the milk and butter. The cardinal points derive their Gaelic names from the position assumed by the druids and people when paying the ancient homage to the rising sun. As the priest stood facing *soir* (*ser*), "the bright" place, his right hand was to the south, his left hand to the north and his back was turnd to the west. The Gaelic names for south, north and west ar *deas*, *tuaigh* and *iar* (*jäs*, *thuee*, *eer*), signifying respectively, right hand, left hand and behind.

It is said that Saint Patrick first arrived in the neighborhood of Tara on the night when the people had assembled from all parts of the royal plain of Meath to celebrate the great Bealtuine, which, as it so happend, occurd this year upon the eve of Easter, and that the first intimation of the

\* Grimm, *Mythologie*, i, 574-5; see also Kelly, *Folk-lore*, in his chapter on "The descent of fire."

† Smiddy, *Druids*, 94-7.

‡ Cormac (A. D. 908), noted in Grimm, *Mythologie*, i, 580.

§ Vallancey, *Collectanea*, ii, 276.



presence of the saint was given by the appearance of the blaze which he had kindled upon the adjacent hil of Slane in order to celebrate the offices of the Christian festival. In angry surprise the monarch askt who had dared to light that fire at a time when even the palace itself was in darkness, and receivd for answer from his druid that a stranger who revered not their ancient gods had kindled the fire, which, if not extinguisht that night, would burn on forever. Thereupon the saint was summond into the presence of the king, before whom he was examind, but, despite the warning of the druid, he was permitted to continue in the work which finally resulted in the overthrow of fire worship in Ireland.

The midsummer fires stil burn brightly, but those of Bealtuine ar nearly extinguisht, which is probably due to the fact that on the introduction of Christianity the old celebration was superseded by that of Easter, when the ceremonies took place by day, thus rendering bonfires out of place. Moreover, as Easter is a movable festival, never occurring on the same day in consecutiv years, it would become more and more difficult, under the new system, for the people to keep up the old accustomd periodic celebration. Within the last fifty years the May fires wer stil common throughout the south and east, and a Galway correspondent states that they wer also lighted around Lough Corrib in the extreme west, but they ar now confined chiefly to the counties of Limerick and Cork. The people gatherd together with fiddlers and pipers to dance around the blaze as on Saint John's eve, and when the fire had burnd low the cattle wer driven through it to keep them from all sickness until the next May-day. In Kildare, in addition to the bonfire, a May-bush was set up and decorated with lighted candles. In the adjacent county of Meath the custom is now unknown, but seems to hav been practiced at an earlier period. In the County Limerick the fires ar stil lighted as on Saint John's eve and the cows ar sprinkled with holy water and burnd with blessed candles and with blazing branches of white or black thorn from the pile, in order to keep them in health and insure plenty of milk and butter during the year.

Another old May-day custom is thus described as it existed in the south nearly a hundred years ago. The gilt ball mentiond was probably at one time a mystic symbol of the sun: "On the 1st of May all the young men assemble in their several districts, and go in procession, dressed out in ribbons, garlands, etc. The leader bears on a pole a double circle of hoops, in the centre of which hangs a gilt ball. They call at every house where a marriage had taken place since the last May-day. The new-married lady, together with a pecuniary present, presents another ball, which is, like the former, elevated on another pole. This last ceremony is only practiced in the south of Ireland."\* This custom is described in Hall's "Ireland" (i, 167), already quoted, as stil existing about forty years ago, altho then nearly obsolete, and it is also stated that the May-pole carried was a tall tree, which was set up in front of the door, and around which the party danced in honor of the bride.

\* E. W., quoted in Pop. Sup., 55.



In the city of Cork the celebration is held on "May Sunday," the first Sunday of May, perhaps because the working people are then more at leisure. For some nights beforehand parties of young men make secret forays upon the demenes of the neighboring gentry in order to secure tall, straight-growing oak trees, which are cut down and trimmed off to serve as May-poles. These are then carried into the town and set up in every convenient gathering place throughout the city. The poles are as high as a tall flag-staff and are firmly planted in the ground, but not decorated in any way. The work must all be done by night, as the whole business is an offense against the peace and dignity of the law, which woodrangers and police consider it their bounden duty to prevent. There seems to be a tacit understanding that the sports shall not be interfered with after the poles have been set up. On the evening of May Sunday small parties collect and proceed toward their respective poles, with numerous tar-barrels placed upon doors which are borne upon the shoulders of the men, while on other doors carried in the same way are placed chairs in which are seated a piper and fiddler. With music playing and shouts and laughter ringing out on the air, they march in this fashion to the pole, and, on reaching it, the barrels are piled around its base, together with a plentiful supply of turf. The musicians are then installed on a temporary throne, the pile is lighted and the dance begins, to last until daybreak. Parties from different poles pay mutual visits to each other during the night, each party headed by a musician, and dance three times around the pole of the party visited. As the poles are green they are but little injured by the fire and are afterward cut down by those who procured them and sold for a few shillings apiece, the proceeds being spent for drink or other refreshments. A small collection is also taken up outside the church in the morning to pay the musicians.

Another May eve observance in this city is thus described as it existed forty years ago: "Another old custom prevails also to some extent. May eve, the last day of April, is called 'Nettlemas night;' boys parade the streets with large bunches of nettles, stinging their playmates and occasionally bestowing a sly touch upon strangers who come in their way. Young and merry maidens, too, not infrequently avail themselves of the privilege to 'sting' their lovers; and the laughter in the street is often echoed in the drawing-room."\*

Fire is held sacred in Ireland, and there are a number of May-day beliefs connected with it. None will be given out of the house on this day for any consideration, as such an act brings all kinds of ill fortune upon the family, and especially enables the borrower to steal all the butter from the milk, so that any one who should ask for the loan of a lighted sod of turf on May-day would be regarded as a suspicious character, whom it would be just as well to watch. To give out either fire or salt on this day is to give away the year's luck. One old writer states that fire would be given only to a sick person, and then with an imprecation, but the butter,

\* Hall, Ireland, i, 25.



if stolen, might be recovered by burning some of the thatch from over the door. In the city of Limerick the fire is always lighted by the man of the house on May morning, as it is unlucky to have it done by a woman.

According to Lady Wilde, "If the fire goes out on May morning it is considered very unlucky, and it cannot be rekindled except by a lighted sod brought from the priest's house. And the ashes of this blessed turf are afterwards sprinkled on the floor and the threshold of the house."\* The same author asserts that milk is also poured on the threshold, and that if a traveler should ask for a cup of milk he must drink it in the house, and with a pinch of salt in it, for no fire, water, salt or milk must be given out on this day.

Owing to the scarcity of timber the May-pole has long since disappeared from Ireland, excepting in a few isolated districts, chiefly in the south, altho it was once known to all Keltic countries, and was found in Britain as early as the Roman invasion. At Maghera, in the extreme northern county of Derry, the May-pole was annually planted in the market place until 1798.† The custom has even been carried across the Atlantic by the emigrant French, and "*un mai*" is frequently planted on the shores of the Saint Lawrence in honor of some local celebrity.‡ The tree or pole decorated with garlands was an appropriate symbol of the spring, and the peculiar dance around it may have had some reference to the circuit of the sun in the heavens. In Ireland and in Gaelic Scotland the dancers always follow the course of the sun from right to left, and one who takes the contrary direction is quickly told to "dance with the sun." Two hundred years ago, in districts where timber was plentiful, tall poles were set up on May eve, and allowed to stand nearly the whole year, while in front of every door was placed a green bush decorated with yellow flowers (buttercups?). §

The May-bush, trimmed with flowers, is still more or less general throughout the country, especially in the south. In Meath, in addition to setting up the May-bush, the children formerly strewed flowers in front of the doorway, while in Kildare, as already stated, the bush was decorated at night with lighted candles. In Clare, Galway and other parts of the west, a branch of the rowan tree (*crann caoran*) is put over the doorway or planted in front of the house, and is known as the *Cráinín Bealtuine* (*Crawnyeen Baulthinny*) or "little May-tree." In some mysterious way the *crann caoran* has power against all spells of witches or fairies, who are uncommonly active on May-day, for which reason branches of the tree are put in the haggart or in the fields on this occasion, while smaller twigs are twisted around the churns and milking vessels, to protect the crops and the butter. The same custom, as it exists in Sweden and Germany, is

\* Lady Wilde, i, 201.

† Quoted from the "Parochial Survey of Ireland," in *The Folk-lore Journal*, ii, 212, London, 1884.

‡ Bender, "Holidays of the French Canadians," in *Magazine of American History*, xx, No. 6, p. 467, New York, December, 1888.

§ Piers, Westmeath, 123.



described by Kelly,\* who identifies the rowan with the Sanskrit palasa, which, according to the Vedas, sprang from a feather dropt by the fire god Agni, who had assumed for a time the form of a falcon. This, again, brings us back to the old fire worship.

The old May dance is thus described by Lady Wilde: "At the great long dance, held in old times on May-day, all the people held hands and danced round a great May-bush erected on a mound. The circle sometimes extended for a mile, the girls wearing garlands and the young men carrying wands of green boughs, while the elder people sat round on the grass as spectators and applauded the ceremony. The tallest and strongest young men in the county stood in the centre and directed the movements, while the pipers and harpers, wearing green and gold sashes, played the most spirited dance tunes."† This dance, equivalent to the May-pole dance of England, has long been discontinued on May-day, altho a similar "long dance" is stil performd in the north around the fire on Saint John's eve.

At Finglas, near Dublin, there was formerly an annual May fair lasting several days, which was celebrated on a grand scale, and was attended by great crowds from the city. The fair was presided over by a queen, drest in gorgeous apparel and wearing on her head a royal crown, and attended by a company of maids and courtiers arrayd in the same splendid fashion. But the fair finally degenerated into an occasion of reckless dissipation, so that it was discountenanced by the respectable citizens, until, about fifty years ago, when the last queen died and the royal show of Finglas came to an end.‡ This custom of a May queen, which does not appear to hav existed elsewhere in Ireland, may hav been introduced by the Danes, who for several centuries held possession of the country about Dublin.

The May boys ar an important feature of the celebration on this day, especially in the west and south. Companies of young men and boys, sometimes as many as a hundred or more together, drest up with ribbons on the arms and shoulders, and gay sashes about the waist, and sometimes wearing fantastic masks made of cloth or paper, march about the country, headed by pipers and fiddlers, who ar often assisted by some of the company with improvised instruments. On coming to the house of a rich farmer or gentleman they halt and sing May songs and perform a dance to the sound of the music, receiving in return a treat or a small sum of money. The dance is generally enlivened by the antics of a "fool," who has his face smeard over with flour and wears a bladder for a skulcap, while, at the end of a long pole, he carries another, with which he keeps order among the noisy spectators. Another fantastic character, drest in woman's clothes and known as the "ape," acts as assistant to the fool.

Several of the May-day beliefs in relation to the dairy hav already been

\* Kelly, Folk-lore, 158-167.

† Lady Wilde, i, 195-6.

‡ Hall, Ireland, ii, 345.



mentiond, but these by no means exhaust the list. This is the day above all others when witches and fairies work their spells, and, if the proper precautions ar not taken *before sunrise* to defeat their evil designs, there wil be no luck in the family and no butter in the churn for the rest of the year. Wo to the hare that is found in the pasture on May-day, for it is wel known to be a witch who has assumed this form in order the more easily to accomplish her wicked purposes. One of the best safeguards is to get the clay which collects in the split of the cow's hoofs when she is driven out on this morning, put it under the churn with a coal of fire and some salt, and then proceed with the churning. After this the butter is safe for the year, provided the churning be done before sunrise. If a twig of rowan or whitehorn, gatherd on the preceding eve, be twisted about the churn, so much the better, and, to make doubly sure, it is just as wel to hav the churn-dash also made of rowan. A piece of iron is sometimes kept red hot in the fire while the churning is going on—another instance of the use of the combined forces of fire and iron against evil influences. Should the witch get the first clay from under the hoof and moisten it with three drops of the same cow's milk, secretly obtaind, and place it under her own churn while churning, she can draw all the butter of that cow to herself. According to Lady Wilde, primroses gatherd before sunrise ar also strewn about the house and tied in bunches to the cow's tail on May-day to ward off the fairy influence.\* The same author also mentions a traditional snow-white heifer which sometimes appears amongst the cattle on May-day, and always brings the best of good luck to the farmer.†

In Donegal, and probably in some other parts of the country, no house-keeper wishes to be first to light a fire on May-day. This seems to be explaind by a story told as a fact by a Limerick woman. According to her account, a woman who was suspected of being a witch was observd going out to the spring wel early one May morning. The priest followd her and conceald himself near the wel. He saw her perform some spel with the water, after which she waited until she saw the first smoke rise from a neighboring chimney, when she said: *Im an deatac' sin agamsa* (*Im an dhōthakh shin ō'gamsa*), "Butter of that smoke to myself." Soon the smoke rose from another chimney, and he heard the witch mutter: *Im an deatac' sin cuma leis* (*Im an dhōthakh shin cumma lesh*), "Butter of that smoke with it likewise." By this time the priest's housekeeper was stirring at home, and soon a third column ascended from his own chimney. "*Im a t-sagairt cuma leis* (*Im a thōgarch cumma lesh*), "The priest's butter with it, too," said the witch; but this was too much for the good man, who sprang from his concealment and laid his riding-whip across her astonisht shoulders. This broke the spel so far as his own butter was concernd, but she got that of the others.

The crops ar sometimes stolen as wel as the butter. The evil-minded

\* Lady Wilde, 1, 197.

† *Ibidem*, 1, 195.



person who knows how to invoke the aid of the spirit of darkness goes secretly early in the season to his neighbor's field and sows a handful of grain in some out-of-the-way spot where it is not likely to attract attention. Then by going before sunrise on May morning and reaping it, he is able to take to himself the greater part of that year's crop. A Clare man told how, when a boy, he was once walking with his father through their field of oats just before May-day, when they came upon the witch's tuft in a corner. His father got a spade and, taking up the bunch of oats by the roots, threw it over the ditch, and thus saved his crop. In connection with the crops, Sir Henry Piers, writing in 1682, says that in Ireland May-day was considered the first day of summer, and on this day, whatever else they might have, all, even the rich, prepared a dish of stirabout. This was regarded as an evidence of the wife's good management in making the grain last until the beginning of summer, as it was thought that if they could do so well, they could then very easily get along with the new provisions until harvest.\*

The fairies are very active at this season, especially on May eve, when they change their quarters from one district to another, and the sound of their music and dancing may then be heard in every green fort by any mortal who has the courage to venture near. Some of the sweetest of the Irish tunes have been learned in this way from the fairy pipes, but of the many who have stooped to listen to the spirit music, few have ever returned to their friends. On May morning, also enchanted cities, long sunk below the sea, are seen to rise once more above the waters in all their old-time splendor, and O'Donoghue, of Killarney, emerges from his subaqueous palace and rides across the surface of the lake on a snow-white horse, attended by all his retinue of knights and maidens.

While every one else is on the alert, it may well be supposed that the girls are not idle, and, in truth, most of them are anxiously consulting the oracles in regard to their marriage prospects. Before going out the door in the morning, the maiden recites a charm, and the first man or boy met on the road after this will bear the Christian name of her future husband. The first snail found before sunrise will be of the color of his hair, while its track upon the ground will mark out the initial of his name, but if the snail has a "box" or shell, the predestined partner will be a widower. The snail is taken home and put upon a plate in the sun, where it crawls about for a while and finally stops facing the direction whence the lover is to come. According to Lady Wilde, a black snail met first in the morning is unlucky and an omen of death, while a white one brings good fortune.†

The young women do not trust entirely to the oracle, however, but take some precautions of their own, chief of which is to bathe the face in May dew before the sun rises and to dry it with the hair. This renders the

\* Piers, Westmeath, 121.

† Lady Wilde, i, 198.



features fair and beautiful, and also prevents headache and fevers during the year. An old riddle thus alludes to this custom :

"I washt my face in water that never rained or *run*,  
And dried it on a towel that never was woven or spun."

In the north, the girls on May morning recite a charm call'd the "comedher" to attract the lover. The name is, probably, a corruption of "come hither," and when a young man appears to be fascinated by a girl, she is said to hav put her comedher on him. There is a wonderful virtue in the dew which forms on May morning, when gatherd before sunrise, and some of the knowing women do a thriving business in this line. The May dew is frequently preservd in bottles and rubd on sores, in the name of the Trinity, to quicken the healing process. Herbs gatherd on May eve possess mysterious powers for good or evil, according as they ar pulld in the name of the Trinity or of the devil, and the virtue of the preparation is increast when compounded with butter made on May morning. It may be of interest to Americans to learn that many of these old May-day charms ar stil known amongst the mountaineers of the Southern Alleganies, who hav long since lost most of the folk-lore inherited from their transatlantic forefathers.

There ar a number of miscellaneous customs and beliefs connected with May-day. In many parts of the country, it is considerd unlucky to do any regular work, but the day is spent in mending the fences. This custom is, perhaps, akin to the former English ceremony of surveying the parish boundaries about this time,\* a practice, probably, as old as the Roman Terminalia, or feast of Terminus, the god of fields and boundaries. In Kerry, and probably throughout the south, this is also the day for "settling the dues," or arranging what stock shal be kept by each of the partners in a common pasture. In making this settlement, the unit of measurement is call'd a collop, the name applied to a sufficiency of pasturage for one cow,† which is held to equal the amount required for eighteen geese, six sheep, hogs or asses, or two mules, while a horse is equivalent to a collop and a half. Thus, if one man pastures six sheep in a field, his partner has the right to put in as many asses or eighteen geese, while a single horse is held to consume as much pasturage as nine sheep. Goats ar not put into the calculation, being usually sent to range the uncultivated mountain slopes. The pasturage sufficient for a sheep, hog or ass is call'd a due, and according to this primitiv agricultural table, three bills (of geese) make a mouth or due, and six dues make a collop.

In Clare, a ribbon is left out on May eve, and according as it is found to hav lengthend or shortend in the morning, so wil the prosperity of the family increase or decrease during the year. In Cork, the sun dances in the water on this morning as wel as on Easter, and it was formerly the

\* Just before Holy Thursday, near the end of the Lenten season ; see Brand, *Antiquities*, i. 197.

† Gaelic *colbt'ac*, a cow, calf or heifer.



custom to go early in the morning to Sunday's wel, a noted wel near that city, to observ it. A girl born upon this day wil prove to be of a bad disposition, while a cow born at the same time wil be vicious and inclined to gore. Omens ar also drawn from the way in which the wind blows. According to Lady Wilde, ashes ar sprinkled on the threshold on May eve, and if in the morning there be found the print of a foot turnd inward it betokens a wedding, but if turnd outward, a death.\*

Grimm, in his interesting subchapter on fire,† notes the fact that in the Germanic countries the Easter or May-fires ar almost entirely confined to the northern provinces, while the midsummer or Saint John's fires belong to the south. Almost every detail mentiond in this paper in connection with the May-fires in Ireland is described by him as a part of the modern Easter celebration in Germany, Denmark or Sweden, while precisely similar ceremonies wer enacted at the ancient Roman festival of the Palilia, which occurd about the same time of the year, viz., April 21. In the festival of Easter, as celebrated in Germany, with its bonfires and dances upon every hil and its lighted tapers in the churches, he sees only a Christian adaptation of the old pagan Bealtuine, or, possibly, of the midsummer feast, which the missionaries wer obliged to incorporate into the service of the new religion, while the very name is derived from that of the heathen goddess Ostara, whose festival was, probably, celebrated about the first of May. In regard to this connection, Grimm says: "Wurden seit der Bekehrung die Deutschen Maifeuer auf Ostern und Johannis verlegt, um sie christlichem Cultus naecher zu bringen? Oder ist, da auch Sonnenwende tief im Heidenthum wurzelte, bloss Osternzeit Stellvertreterin fuer das alte Maifeuer?" and again: "Ihren Namen (Ostara) und ihre Feuer, die vielleicht in Maianfang fielen, verlegte man, nach Bekehrung der Sachsen, auf das christliche Fest."‡

#### WHITSUNTIDE.

Whitsunday, in Gaelic calld *Oingcís* (*Oingceesh*), is a movable festival occurring generally about the end of May or the beginning of June, and deservs notice on account of the mysterious fatality connected with it, as wel as with the following Monday and Tuesday. It is an unlucky season, and should a man born on any one of these three days ever throw a stone it wil inevitably kil or cripple some one. No water must be soild during the same period, and for this reason no clothes ar washt from Saturday until Thursday, nor ar any sheep washt for shearing. Neither must one start on a journey or begin any important work, but, above all, no one must go near the water, either for bathing or boating, or even to cross a stream, for at this season one may be drown'd in a cup of water. There ar ancient legends to prove the truth of this belief, and every old woman can tel of instances within her own knowledge where a neglect of these

\* Lady Wilde, i, 199.

† Grimm, *Mythologie*, i, 567-597.

‡ *Ibid.*, 581 and 583.



precautions has resulted fatally. Death is not inevitable, however, for only one hour of all this time is fatal, but as no one may know which is the hour, or even on which of the three days it occurs, the only way to avoid the evil consequences is to observe the prohibition until the period has terminated. According to Lady Wilde, the fairies are also to be feared at this season, so that holy water must be sprinkled about the house to keep them away, and at this time also the water-spirits come up out of the sea to hold their revels on the shore, and the water-horse rises from the lough to graze at midnight in the green pastures upon its banks.\* A dance was formerly held also on Whitsunday, as already described in speaking of Easter Sunday.

#### SAINT JOHN'S EVE, JUNE 23.

Next comes Saint John's eve, June 23, better known, perhaps, as midsummer night, after which the sun begins its backward course and the days grow shorter. This was one of the most solemn festivals of the ancient pagan world, and numerous vestiges of it still exist throughout the greater part of Europe, after nearly two thousand years of Christianity. In fact, such a hold had the old fire worship upon the minds of the people that in many instances, especially in Germany, the teachers of the new faith found it necessary to incorporate the pagan ceremonies into the accepted rites of the church.† In France, Germany, Austria, Italy and the Slavic countries, the observances connected with this festival are practically identical with those in Ireland. In Servia and the other south Slavic countries, according to Krauss, the very names of Saint John's day and Saint John's fire "wie elektrische Funken im Herzen und Gemüthe des südslavischen Bauernvolkes tausend tolle, lebenslustige, verliebte und glückliche Gedanken entzünden! Wann um mitternächtlicher Stunde auf steiler Höhe der mächtig aufgeschichtete Holzstoss helllodernd gen dunkelblauen sternebesäeten Himmel harzduftende Feuerflammen züngelt, da tanzen Burschen und Mädchen jauchzend und singend um das Feuer gar schnellfüssigen Reigen. Zauberhaft die Nacht, die Feuergluth, zauberhaft der schnelle Reigen, Alles ist bezaubert, Alles zaubert."‡

As has been stated, the fires of Bealtuine have paled before the Easter tapers, but the midsummer fires still blaze from every hill-top in Ireland on the eve of June 23, now called in Gaelic, *Oid'e Tein' Seag'an* (*Eha or Eel Chin Shawn*), or the "Night of John's Fire." The introduction of the new calendar in 1752 seems to have caused some confusion for a time,§ but this can have been but temporary. Speaking of the old fire worship, Smiddy says, in this connection: "There was a sort of poetry and of mystery about this system, which certainly exercised a powerful fascination over the human mind. The altar and the cairn of the Druid have

\* Lady Wilde, i, 204-5.

† See Kelly, Folk-lore, 46-8.

‡ F. S. Krauss, *Sitte und Brauch der Südslaven*, 176, Wien, 1885.

§ Writer quoted in Brand, *Antiquities*.



been deserted for ages, and yet, to this day, there are living vestiges and memorials of his anniversary fire in Ireland. At a certain period of the summer, when the shades of evening gather over the face of the land, flames of fire are seen to spring like magic from hill to hill, through the whole expanse of the country. They are also lighted in the hamlets and villages and in many of the towns. A few of these take place at Beiltinne, that is, at the beginning of May; but the great blaze is reserved for the eve of St. John the Baptist, the 23d of June."\*

In pre-Christian times the first fire was lighted on the hil of Howth, on the east coast of Ireland, near Dublin, and the moment the flame appeared through the darkness a great shout went up from the watchers on all the surrounding hil-tops, where other fires wer quickly kindled until soon the whole country was in a blaze.†

The modern ceremonies hav changed but little in the last two centuries. Sir Henry Piers, writing in 1682, says that on this eve there was a bonfire in every town, and that the people carried about blazing torches of dried rushes, so that "a stranger would go near to imagine the whole country was on fire."‡ Another author quoted in Brand, writing in 1723, says, "they make bonfires and run along the streets and fields with wisps of straw blazing on long poles to purify the air, which they think infectious, by believing all the devils, spirits, ghosts and hobgoblins fly abroad this night to hurt mankind."§ These bundles of straw tied to long poles ar calld "clears," and the custom is stil kept up. ||

It is here in place to say something in regard to the word *bonfire*. As commonly pronounced and as given in the dictionary the word is bonfire, and is derived by most etymologists from the Teutonic *boen* or blessing. It seems probable, however, that the original form and meaning was *bone-fire*. The word is so pronounced in the English-speaking districts of Ireland—where many archaic English forms ar preservd—and the Gaelic name, *tein'na cnam'* (*chin na cnaw*), means exactly the same thing. This may indeed be a mere translation of the English name, but such does not appear to be the case. Kelly, writing upon the midsummer fires, gives the account of a mediæval author as follows: "The bonfires, he says, were lighted for the purpose of scaring away the dragons that poisoned the waters with the slime that fell from them at that hot season, and therefore bones and all sorts of filth were thrown into the fire, that the smoke might be the fouler and more offensive to the dragons."¶ In several parts of the west of Ireland, especially in Connemara, the bones are stil saved up to burn in the midsummer fires.

The piles for the Saint John's fires ar built of turf, bog deal and furz,

\* Smiddy, *Druids*, 97-98, i, 304.

† Lady Wilde, i, 214.

‡ Piers, *Westmeath*, 123.

§ Brand, *Antiquities*, i, 305.

|| See quotation from the *Parochial Survey of Ireland*, in the *Folk-lore Journal*, ii, 213, London, 1884.

¶ Kelly, *Folk-lore*, 57.



with sufficient green stuff to prevent its burning too rapidly. The fire is generally lighted after dark, but in some parts of the north it is kindled in the afternoon. The people gather about the fires with pipers and fiddlers, and the evening is given up to dancing and merry-making. In Meath the young folks were allowed on this night to milk the sheep in the pastures, and came provided with buckets for the purpose, together with oaten bread to dip in the milk, which was boiled over the fires in regular picnic style. The next morning was considered the proper time to hunt mushrooms. It was also customary to walk three times round the fires, reciting certain prayers to ward off sickness during the coming year. In Down the festivities began in the afternoon, when the people went in procession, carrying an effigy called a "Paddy," and danced round the fire to the music of a fiddler. In the Orange districts it was sometimes necessary, thirty years ago, to put out an armed picket to prevent interruption. On asking an old man where the guards got their guns, he said, "We hadn't many, but we had more than the law allowed." As the fires burn low, the young men leap over the blaze, and later on the girls and women walk across the hot embers. Long after midnight, when the pile has burned down to the ground, the people disperse to their homes, some one of each family carrying a shovelful of live coals to scatter over the fields in order to insure a good crop, with a lighted sod of turf to put into the hearth-fire, to bring down prosperity upon the household. It is also an omen of a good crop to be able to reach the field with a burning brand before the embers have time to go out.\* In the city of Dublin, where bonfires could not well be kindled, it was customary in the last century to set up a bush in the middle of the street and adorn it with lighted candles.†

Connected with this celebration are several local customs which were probably more general in former days. At Armoy, near Ballycastle, County Antrim, the people join hands about a blessed well in a game known as "Round Ring," and much resembling "Hunt the Handkerchief." One standing on the outside touches some person in the circle, who then lets go his partner's hands and runs round the ring in pursuit of the first, who endeavors to get into the vacated place before he can be caught. If successful, the other takes his place outside the circle until released in a similar manner.

In Kerry, and other parts of the west, as the fires burn down, the people pull out blazing brands from the pile and singe the cows with them, in order to bring increase to the herds. The cattle are sometimes chased through the fields, at other times collected into pens for the purpose. In former times they were driven round or through the fire, as on May-day, a custom which still existed in the north within the present century.‡

\* Charles DeKay, *Fairies and Druids of Ireland*, in *Century Magazine*, xxxvii, No. 4, 597, New York, Feb., 1889.

† E. W. (1791), *Pop. Sup.*, 55.

‡ *Parochial Survey of Ireland*, quoted in the *Folk-lore Journal*, ii, 140, London, 1884.



Coals from the Saint John's fire are also sewn into the clothes of women to prevent their being carried off by fairies. According to Grimm, a ceremony similar to this singeing or passing of the cattle through the fires on Saint John's eve exists also in France, Germany, Russia, Bohemia and Servia,\* but the writer has not been able to learn of the existence in Ireland of the custom mentioned by the same author in this connection, of throwing flowers into the fire or putting herbs over the doorway of the dwelling house or stable.

A writer quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1843, in describing a celebration witnessed on Saint John's eve in the King's county, mentions one curious feature, which is evidently a local substitute for driving the cattle through the fire, and which closely resembles a Christmas custom in Wales, another Keltic country, as described in the same article. After speaking of the brilliant effect of the bonfires blazing on every hill, the author continues:

"But something was to follow that puzzled me not a little; when the fire had burned for some hours and got low, an indispensable part of the ceremony commenced. Every one present of the peasantry passed through it, and several children were thrown across the sparkling embers, while a wooden frame of some eight feet long, with a horse's head fixed to one end and a large white sheet thrown over it, concealing the wood and the man on whose head it was carried, made its appearance. This was greeted with loud shouts of 'The white horse!' and having been safely carried by the skill of its bearer several times through the fire with a bold leap, it pursued the people, who ran screaming and laughing in every direction. I asked what the horse was meant for, and was told it represented all cattle."†

Saint John's eve is also a favorite fairy season, when the "good people" hold their midnight revels in every green fort. That the same belief existed in England is evident from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." On this night especially the fairies are on the watch to carry off incautious mortals, particularly women and infants who are not protected by a sprig of *lusmór* (foxglove), or some other safeguard against fairy influence. An old writer of 1723, quoted by Brand, mentions a belief that on this eve every human soul leaves its bodily habitation and takes a journey to that place on land or sea where death shall finally separate them forever.‡ This is also a chosen time for visiting many holy places, especially the numerous wells called after Saint John.§

The following account of the celebration, as still carried out in the west, is given by Lady Wilde: "The fires are still lighted on St. John's eve on every hill in Ireland. When the fire has burned down to a red glow,

\* Grimm, *Mythologie*, i, 588-591.

† Pop. Sup., 90.

‡ Brand, *Antiquities*, i, 305.

§ See the author's "Medical Mythology of Ireland," in *Proc. Am. Philos. Soc.*, xxiv, No. 125, 152, Philadelphia, 1887; also, Hall, *Ireland*, iii, 117, note.



the young men strip to the waist and leap over or through the flames ; this is done backwards and forwards several times, and he who braves the greatest blaze is considered the victor over the powers of evil, and is greeted with tremendous applause. When the fire burns still lower, the young girls leap the flame, and those who leap clean over three times, back and forward, will be certain of a speedy marriage and good luck in after-life, with many children. The married women then walk through the lines of the burning embers ; and when the fire is nearly burnt and trampled down, the yearling cattle are driven through the hot ashes, and their back is singed with a lighted hazel twig. These hazel rods are kept safely afterwards, being considered of immense power to drive the cattle to and from the watering places. As the fire diminishes the shouting grows fainter, and the song and the dance commence ; while the professional story-tellers narrate tales of fairy-land, or of the good old times long ago, when the kings and princes of Ireland dwelt amongst their own people, and there was food to eat and wine to drink for all comers to the feast at the king's house. When the crowd at length separate, every one carries home a brand from the fire, and great virtue is attached to the lighted *brone* which is safely carried to the house without breaking or falling to the ground. Many contests also arise amongst the young men, for whoever enters his house first with the sacred fire brings the good luck of the year with him." \*

#### SAMHAN, HALLOW E'EN, OR ALL SOULS' DAY, NOVEMBER 1.

We will pass over several minor dates, chief among which is Lady day, on the fifteenth of August, nearly corresponding with the ancient festival of Lughnas, which has given its name to the month, but has now faded from the popular recollection. Next comes the great festival of Samhan, or November eve, calld in the eastern districts Hol' eve, and better known in this country as Hallow e'en, the eve preceding the first day of November, designated in the calendar as the day of All Saints. This appears to have been a universal festival throughout pagan Europe in honor of the goddess of fruits,† which probably accounts for the prominent part playd by the apple in the modern celebration. So firmly wer the people wedded to this pagan festival that the church was compeld to incorporate it into the Christian calendar, merely changing the name so as to give it a new significance.

The Gaelic name of this festival is *Sam'an* (*Sowan*), November being calld *mi na Sam'ain*, the month of Samhan. In ancient Ireland it was the last of the five great fire festivals. Vallancey states that the festival was dedicated to the god of fruits and seeds, and lasted throughout the month of November.‡ The only trace of fire worship remaining in con-

\* Lady Wilde, i, 214-5.

† Hutchinson, "Northumberland," quoted in Brand, *Antiquities*, i, 378.

‡ Vallancey, *Collectanea*, iii, Part ii, 443 *passim*.



nection with the modern celebration in Ireland is in the use of lighted candles, but in Scotland and Wales bonfires wer stil kindled with mystic rites a generation ago, while the same custom prevaild also in England at an earlier day.\* Smiddy states that the ancient Irish celebrated the day with sacrifices and feasts, and that "the horse was offered as a victim to the sun, and perhaps the human being, too." On this occasion, also, special honors wer paid to the great idol of Crom Cruach, which was set up at a place calld Magh Sleachta, supposed to hav been in the County Leitrim, and which is described as a stone capt with gold and silver, and surrounded by twelv other rough stones. To this idol, until its destruction by Saint Patrick, wer sacrificed the first born of every species, and on the great day of Samhan the people prostrated themselvs before it until the blood streamd from their lacerated faces, knees and elbows. The figure evidently had an astronomic significance. The festival partook of the character of a thanksgiving for the ripend fruits. †

The feast of Samhan was the occasion of the convening of the Feis, or great national assembly of ancient Ireland, which was held every three years at the palace of Tara and lasted for a week, being convoked by the monarch himself three days before the day of Samhan (November 1) and continuing three days after. According to the annalists, this assembly was instituted by Ollamh Fodhla (pronounced Ollav Fola), the first monarch of Ireland and builder of the palace of Tara, who is said to hav flourishd nine hundred years before Christ. The purpose of the convocation, which was attended by all the druids, bards, rulers and scholars of Ireland, was to enact laws and revise the annals of the country. The first two days wer devoted to friendly intercourse, and on the third the assembly was formally opend by the chief bard with music and the recitation of poetry. The sacred fire of Samhan was then lighted and the favor of the gods invoked, after which the regular business of the convention began. Whoever was convicted of murder, theft or quarreling during this period sufferd death, tho at other times punishd only by a fine. ‡

With regard to the modern celebration of November eve,§ it may be stated briefly that almost every practice or belief found in Ireland is common as wel to England, Scotland, Germany and other countries of Europe, while, as on May eve, the chief purpose of the mystic rites is to discover to the girls the names and characters of their destind partners. Unless otherwise noted, it may be assumed that the customs about to be described exist in some form throughout the country. The apple is the great feature of the occasion, and is made to contribute in a number of ways to the general enjoyment. Apples ar provided in abundance in every farmer's house, and a favorit pastime is ducking for them in a tub of water. The apple floats upon the water, and each one who makes the trial must kneel

\* Brand, *Antiquities*, i, 388-390.

† Vallancey, *Collectanea*, iii, Part ii, 457-8.

‡ Smiddy, *Druids*, 106-110.

§ Hall, *Ireland*, ii, 387 note.



down with his hands behind his back, and dipping his head into the tub, endeavor to bring up the apple in his mouth. As the apple is forced under the water at each attempt, unless he can succeed in seizing it between his teeth, it may readily be supposed that this simple play affords a vast deal of amusement to those gathered about the tub.

Sometimes an apple is suspended on a string, fastend at one end to the wall, while the other end is held by one of the company. The biter, with his hands tied behind him, tries to catch the apple between his teeth, while the other strives to defeat his purpose by jerking the string just at the critical moment. To render the feat stil more difficult, the biter is sometimes compeld to bend backward over a stick resting on the backs of two chairs. Again, the apple is hung by a string from the mantel. Then each person runs with head down around a firkin placed in the middle of the floor, keeping his fingers on the firkin all the time until dizzy, and at last, straightening up, tries to take a direct course and hit the apple with his finger.

This last method seems to be a degenerate form of a more elaborate practice which stil exists in the County Clare, as wel as in the north, and may originally hav had an astronomic meaning. A contrivance known as the "snap apple," and somewhat resembling the hub of a wheel with fifty-two spokes, is suspended by a string from the loft, at about the hight of an average man's head. The spokes ar arranged horizontally around the hub in several series one above another, and of every three spokes the first has a short candle blazing at the extremity, the second is sharpend to a point and the third has an apple stuck upon the end. Under it is placed a stool, around which a line is drawn upon the floor. While one person keeps the wheel revolving, each of the others in turn runs around in this circle, stooping down with one hand on the stool, as already described, as many times as there ar spokes on the wheel, when he rises and endeavors to catch the apple, at the risk of being burnd by the candle or scratchd by the sharpend stick should he fail.

A writer of 1784, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, speaking of this celebration in the eastern counties, says, that in his time an important part of the refreshment provided for the occasion was "lamb's wool," made by bruising roasted apples and mixing the pulp with milk, ale, or even wine amongst the upper classes who wer not too refined to take part in these periodical merry-makings. Apples and nuts always accompanied the lamb's wool.\* As far back as 1728, the Dublin servants wer accustomed to demand apples, ale and nuts of their employers on this eve.† Another favorit dish on this occasion is culcannon, whence the festival is sometimes known as "culcannon night." It consists chiefly of potatoes and turnips boild and mashd together, with a generous lump of butter swimming on the top.

Vallancey, also writing in the last century, states that in the south of

\* Quoted in Brand, *Antiquities*, I, 396.

† Brand, *Antiquities*, I, 377.



Ireland, on this eve, the peasants "assemble with sticks and clubs (the emblems of laceration), going from house to house, collecting money, bread-cake, butter, cheese, eggs, etc., etc., for the feast, repeating verses in honor of the solemnity, demanding preparations for the festival in the name of St. Columb-kill, desiring them to lay aside the *fatted calf* and to bring forth the *black sheep*. The good women are employed in making the griddle cake and candles; these *last* are sent from house to house in the vicinity and are lighted upon the (Saman) next day, before *which* they pray, or are supposed to pray, for the *departed souls* of the donor. Every house abounds in the best viands they can afford; apples and nuts are devoured in abundance."\* In a previous passage, he explains the allusion to the black sheep by stating that such an animal was formerly sacrificed by the druids on this occasion for the benefit of the souls of the departed. He also mentions several love charms which will now be described.

Quite a number of experiments are tried by the girls with beans or nuts to test the affection of their sweethearts. Sometimes two nuts are named after a pair of lovers and placed in front of the fire. If either cracks or jumps away from its place, the one whose name it bears will prove inconstant. Should it blaze up brightly, its namesake has an affection for the one represented by the other nut, and if the two burn quietly together the lovers will be married. In Kerry, the trial is sometimes made with beans, large ones being used to represent the young men, while smaller ones serve for the young women. If neither one of the pair jumps away from the other, they are lighted and allowed to burn to a coal, after which they are put into a glass of water. Should both sink, it is a sign that the lovers will be married; if neither, they will never be wedded; but if only one sinks, it is, as the people say, "between I will and I won't." Again, white beans to represent the girls, and black beans for their lovers, are placed in pairs on a pan over the fire. If the black bean remains by the side of the white one, the girl knows her lover is true to her, but if it pops over to the neighborhood of another white bean, she knows that the recreant sweetheart has been won from her by the rival whose name the white bean bears.

The lover sometimes roasts ten beans, and then, throwing one of them over the shoulder and taking the other nine in the mouth with a sup of "mairn" water, he goes to three houses in succession and listens secretly on the outside.† The first name belonging to one of the opposite sex heard spoken inside the house will be that of the future husband or wife, as the case may be. If the same name be heard at the next and the third house the omen receives additional confirmation, but should a different name be heard in the second house, that will be the name of the destined

\* Vallancey, *Collectanea*, iii, Part ii, 459.

† The selection of ten objects, one of which is afterwards thrown away, is of common occurrence in Irish folk-lore, and will be met with again in this chapter. For another instance, see the author's paper on "The Medical Mythology of Ireland," in *Proc. Am. Philos. Soc.*, xxiv, No. 125, p. 144, Philadelphia, 1887. A "mairn"—properly mering—stream is a boundary ditch between two fields.



partner in case the other should die, and so on with the third. One old man admitted that he had tried this in his young days, at a time when he was paying some attention to a girl named Mary, whom, however, he had no intention of marrying. Sure enough, what name did he hear at the first house but Mary. He went on to the next, and again he heard the same name. Afraid to go to the third, he spit out the beans and the water, exclaiming in a passion, "To hel with Mary!" He finally fulfilled the prophecy by marrying a Mary, but a different one, of whom, at the time, he had no thought. His wife, who had been an interested listener, added, "No, but she was kind to you."

Two pieces of alum ar sometimes christend in the same way and placed together near the fire. If they melt or run together, it is a sure token that the fortunes of the lovers wil be joind, but otherwise, they wil never wed each other.

The young folks also go blindfolded into the garden at midnight to pull up cabbages, and according as these ar full or stunted, with straight stalks or crooked, so wil the future partner be of fine appearance or witherd and misshapen, or neat or slovenly in habit. The stalk is taken home and placed over the door, and the first one who comes under it in the morning wil bear the Christian name of the destined husband or wife. The cabbage stalks ar sometimes thrown against the doors of the farmers.

Another mode of divination is by means of melted lead, which is poured through the ring of a key into a vessel of water drawn from a spring wel. The shape assumed by the metal on coming in contact with the water indicates the trade or occupation of the coming man. Each girl making the trial must hav a separate vessel of water, and the water must be brought and the operation performed in silence.

Three basins ar also ranged on a table, the first containing clean water, the second, calld the *baintreab'ae* (*bonchōrakh*) or "widow" containing dirty water, and the third fild with clay. With eyes closed or blindfolded, each girl then walks up to the table and lays her hand on one of the basins, and according as she touches the clean water, dirty water or clay, so wil she find a handsome mate, an ugly husband or widower, or a grave before the end of the year. In the south, according to one authority, the basins ar fild respectively with water, earth and meal, symbolic of long life, death within a year, or the attainment of wealth.\*

In Limerick a cake is baked with a ring inside, from which omens ar drawn in the manner already described in treating of Shrove Tuesday.

Various devices ar resorted to in order to dream of the future husband, the method generally adopted being to eat something which wil cause intense thirst, in the belief that the apparition of the destined man wil come to the bedside of the sleeping girl at midnight and offer her a drink from a glass of water which has been placed conveniently near. Sometimes a cake containing a large quantity of salt is baked, and must be eaten in three

\* O'Hanlon (1865), in *English Traditions and Foreign Customs*, Gentleman's Magazine Library, 29, Boston, n.d. (1885).



bites. Again it is a salt herring, which must be stolen and eaten, bones and all. Sometimes the girl takes ten pins, and, throwing one over her left shoulder, sticks the remaining nine into an apple, which she places under her pillow on retiring. But the most elaborate method of augury is that performed with the egg. For this purpose the first egg ever laid by a black hen must be procured and boiled until hard, when the yolk is taken out and the cavity filled with salt. On retiring at night the girl eats the egg and then gets into bed backward. A glass of water has been placed on the table at the bedside, but she must endure the burning thirst until the hour of midnight, when her destined partner will infallibly appear and offer her a drink. In no case must a word be spoken or a drop of water taken after eating the egg.

Hemp seed is also sown by the maiden, who probably repeats a secret formula at the same time, and it is understood that, on looking back over her left shoulder, she will see the apparition of her future spouse gathering the hemp. Akin to this is the practice of winnowing grain at the barn door, with the same result of seeing the figure of the destined husband before the task is ended.

Most of these methods of love divination, although common enough, are considered somewhat uncanny, but those now to be described are regarded with undisguised horror, as being veritable compacts with the powers of darkness, and few can be found who will admit ever having tried them, while the majority profess ignorance of the whole subject.

Chief among these unholy rites is that known in Gaelic as *Tarruing na Sruit* (*Thörinj na srüh*), or, "the dragging of the stream." The one who thus seeks the aid of the demons takes her smock, or, if a man, his shirt—the garment must always be that worn next the skin—and, going under cover of the darkness to a "mairn" stream, washes it in the water, drawing it always against the current, "*ann ainm an d'eam'ain 'sa d'iab'ail*,"\* i.e., in the name of the fiend and the devil. The smock is drawn against the stream because the whole performance is believed to be in direct opposition to the laws of God. Returning to the house the girl sweeps the hearth clean, and then hangs the garment on a chair before the fire, expecting, just as the clock strikes twelve, to see the ghostly shape of her future husband enter the room and turn the smock. In some cases a razor and looking-glass are added in order that the lover may shave himself.

Still more terrible is the conjuration of the ball of yarn and the lime kiln. As described by one informant, the girl who dares risk the event of this awful spell goes at night to the nearest lime kiln—in which an oracular spirit is supposed always to reside—and in the name of the devil throws into it a ball of yarn, retaining one end of the thread in her hand. She begins to wind up the yarn, but soon feels a pull at the other end and asks, "Who pulls my yarn?" when the spirit within the kiln calls out the name of her future husband, whose figure she then sees rising out of the

\* Pronounced, *An ánim an yowan sa yowl*.



pit before her, on which she must turn and run with all speed toward the house, repeating a terrible charm as she goes. The shape pursues her, but as it comes nearer it loses the appearance of her lover and becomes a horrible demon, uttering the most blood-chilling cries. Should it overtake her, the unfortunate girl would be torn in pieces, but if she can enter the house and lock the door before the monster comes up she is safe, altho in almost every case she falls on the floor in a dead faint from terror. Sometimes the baffled demon peers in through the window, but, strangely enough, no one but the girl herself can see the apparition or hear the horrible sounds. At the moment of the occurrence the future husband, whose spirit is thus made to appear, is conscious of some mysterious disturbance in himself, without being aware of the cause. The working of this diabolic spel always results unfortunately, and the children born to the girl after marriage ar almost certain to be idiotic or deformd.

A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* gives a somewhat different account of this ceremony. According to his statement, if the girl winds on and feels nothing pull at the other end, it is a sign that she wil die unmarried; if something pulls, she asks the question, when her future husband wil giv his name or appear to her, but sometimes a demon wil approach instead, and this is a token that her death is not far off.\* Vallancey says that the Lord's Prayer is recited backwards while winding up the yarn on the ball.†

Lady Wilde hints mysteriously at another awful incantation performd in front of a looking glass in the devil's name—something so unspeakably fearful in its nature that one young girl who tried it was found the next night with distorted features lying dead before the mirror, while the glass itself was shatterd to pieces. The same author continues :

"Another spell is the building of the house. Twelve couples are taken, each being made of two holly twigs tied together with a hempen thread ; these are all named and stuck round in a circle in the clay. A live coal is then placed in the centre, and whichever couple catches fire first will assuredly be married. Then the future husband is invoked in the name of the Evil One to appear and quench the flame. On one occasion a dead man in his shroud answered the call and silently drew away the girl from the rest of the party. The fright turned her brain and she never recovered her reason afterward."‡

This season is also a great time for fairies, ghosts and witches. In Connemara, the churn-dash is trimd with *crann caoran*, or rowan twigs, on November eve, to prevent the stealing of the cream by the witches during the coming year. The author just quoted also states that if the cattle fall sick about this time the blame is laid upon the witches.§

\* O'Hanlon (1865), in *English Traditions and Foreign Customs*, *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, 20, Boston, n.d. (1885).

† Vallancey, *Collectanea*, iii, Part ii, 460.

‡ Lady Wilde, *i*, 209-210.

§ *Ibid.*, 211.



On this night it is dangerous to be abroad, and no one would think of telling a fairy story, because the fairies are then going in troops from one green fort to another, making merry with their elfin comrades and dancing to the sound until the first gray streak of day appears in the east. In Connemara, they carry about with them a golden halter, with which they are able to seize and drag off incautious mortals to their underground abodes, but he who is so fortunate as to get possession of this rope will thenceforward know the hiding-place of all the fairy treasures. Should any one meet a company of fairies on their travels and have the presence of mind to throw at them a handful of dust from under his feet, they will be compelled to release any mortal prisoner they may have with them.

On this night it behoves one to be on his guard against the puca, a hateful goblin monster, assuming by turn the form of a horse, a bull, a goat, or a dwarfish imp, with all the intelligence of a man and all the malice of a demon. From this Keltic name—alike in Gaelic and Welsh—is derived the English Puck. A favorite trick of the puca is to present himself in the guise of a gentle horse to some belated foot traveler, who is easily induced to mount in order the sooner to reach his journey's end. The puca sometimes facilitates the operation by approaching stealthily from behind and deftly inserting his head between the legs of the victim. Then begins a wild ride over hill and dale, through fields and across meadows, until at last the puca halts on the edge of a lofty cliff and with a sudden toss hurls his victim down upon the rocks below. On this night, also, it is said that he spoils the sloes and the blackberries, so that they are no longer fit to be eaten. The same belief, transferred to the eve of Michaelmas, September 29, is found also in Cornwall.\*

While the fairies, the witches and the puca are thus abroad, the dead also leave their graves to revisit once more their former haunts and mingle unseen with the living. In order that they may be comfortable and know they are not forgotten on this one night in the year, their pitying friends sweep clean around the hearth and build up a good fire so that the ghosts may warm themselves after leaving their chilly graves, while food and milk in abundance are set out for their refreshment. At the same time the souls of the departed are especially remembered in the prayers of the living. Those, also, who are not dead, but in captivity with the fairies, are now permitted to return again to their old homes for a few short hours, and it is even said that the spirits of the dead join in the fairy revels on this one night of the year. Lady Wilde also states that "on November eve, by certain incantations, the dead can be made to appear and answer questions; but for this purpose blood must be sprinkled on the dead body when it rises; for it is said the spirits love blood. The color excites them and gives them for the time the power and the semblance of life."†

From one of Wakeman's charming Irish letters in the *Washington Evening Star*, we extract the following account of a recent November eve

\* W. S. Lach-Szyrma, in *Folk-lore Journal*, i, 365, London, 1883.

† Lady Wilde, i, 207.



celebration in far-off Donegal. Altho somewhat lengthy, it comes all in good place and mentions several features not previously referd to :

“Of all brief periods of Irish pleasure, Hallowe’en yields the sweetest, because the most harmless and innocent, delights. It is the night of unbounded mirth, witching charm and sinless dream. It is then that the tenderest of all superstition’s eerie broods, the kindly Irish fairies, mingle with human moods and wish, and weave their friendly spells through all the warp and woof of thought, emotion, dream and desire. And his is an insensate heart that will not grow younger and tenderer under the influence of those mirthful revels. Where will one begin and end in telling them as he sees and feels them? Over every door to house, room or barn, an apple-paring was hanging, and some maiden’s eager eye was watching for him who first passed beneath, for that one the fairies had charmed as her beloved. Groups of lads on all-fours ducked their heads in buckets of water and brought out small coin with their teeth. Lasses were busy cutting out alphabets with which the fairies were to spell, in water basins, secretly-cherished names. Stolen herrings—which must be salt, must be broiled without turning, eaten with hot tongs, and dreamed on, ‘without drink’—now made their appearance. Then the ‘bannock-baking’ and its wild merriment. Whoever turned the bannock on the huge griddle that hung from the crane was to wed her whose nimble fingers kneaded its oaten meal, salt, soda and water together. ‘Nut-burning’ and ‘snap-apple’ were going on merrily at the hob. The hazelnut ashes in dainty packets beneath the pillows yield charmed dreams; the burning ‘snap-apples’ tell whether loving pairs will sputter or mellowly age during wedded life. Then there was the ‘dumb-cake’ making for fairy-aided dreams; the ‘charm-pies’ with their buttons for old bachelors, thimbles for old maids, and rings for the lucky ones who should wed; the ‘candle-and-sweets,’ suspended and whirling between grinning faces where teeth snapped for bites, and luckless frowsy hair was singed; and an hundred other innocent delights, leading to the more serious affairs of ‘postman’s-knock’ and ‘forfeits,’ where genuine old-fashioned kissing was there for the fighting; and the struggle for your ‘rights’ with a bouncing Irish lass from the mountains insured her hatred if you did *not* overcome her, and a sore body and broken bones if you did!—and then, amid deafening clatter and chatter, the supper in the great-room, piled upon tables like fat stalls in a plethoric market, various, smoking, awful; but with the jolliest, hungriest crew you ever broke bread with in your life. And oh, for room in which to tell the tales here told, to give the songs here sung, to reproduce with all the delicious floriture the quips and jokes here perpetrated; while oceans of tea flowed gurglingly, and the poteen, clear as rock-water and as guileless of excise, went on its ‘winding’ way. \* \* \*

“A hullabuloo without now arrested our attention. ‘The byes’ had planned a great surprise. Sallying forth when the tales and songs were at their height, they had descended upon another Hallowe’en party a few miles distant, and by main force had captured and brought a fiddler bodily



away, the whole crowd of defeated friendly rivals following after in prideful acclamation. And here they came with wild whoop and hurroo, carrying their prize on their shoulders into the great room, where the procession was received with ringing cheers. It was old Billy Drain, the blind fiddler, all the way from Belfast; hero now above all pedagogues and strangers; hatless, coatless, breathless from the odd melee, but with pursed and smiling mouth and positive radiance shining from his white locks and beaming from his blinking upraised and sightless old eyes. Was there a dance this Hallowe'en night at that farmhouse on the ancient Kilmacrenan road? Ask the rafters of oak that shivered a century's splinters and mould upon the vaulting heads and heels of this big-hearted Irish peasantry. And ask the stars that looked softly down until their shining eyes went out in the brighter dawn which lifted flaming cones upon the peaks of fair Glendowan." \*

#### SAINT MARTIN'S DAY, NOVEMBER 11.

We come now to Saint Martin's day, a festival which for some reason seems to be connected with animal sacrifice throughout Christian Europe. Among the ancient Greeks this day was the beginning of the Vinalia or feast of Bacchus, which lasted four days and was a season of public carousing, being considered the time for trying the new wine, but there is no mention of sacrifices. In modern Europe also it is—or was—a time for testing the new wine and for feasting, drinking and public sports, but, in addition to this, we find among all the northern nations traces of sacrifice, which may have come down from the old Teutonic and Celtic religions. With the more practical moderns, this rite has generally degenerated into a simple provision of the winter's meat. On the continent, the animal commonly selected to die on this occasion is a goose, a preference for which the Norse assign a legendary reason. In England, the goose is killed on Saint Michael's day, September 29, while Saint Martin's day is considered about the proper time to kill beef and hogs for winter, whence it comes that a beef is called a marten in the north of England. In Gaelic Ireland, a beef cow is called a *márt* (*marth*). In England, it is said that on this night water is changed to wine, a belief transferred in Ireland to Twelfth-night, while in both countries it is held that on this day "No beam doth swinge, nor wheel go round."

Saint Martin, who has been styled the second apostle of France, came of a noble family in Pannonia, now included under the government of Hungary. By his father, he was designed for the military profession, but this life was distasteful to him, and he became a religious, being finally appointed bishop of Tours. He died, surrounded by his clerical companions, about the year 397. In the history of his life, even as related in Butler's "Lives of the Saints," a work which deals largely in the marvelous, we find nothing to account for the strange legends and practices

\* Edgar L. Wakeman, Afoot in Ireland, in Washington (D. C.) *Evening Star*, Nov. 17, 1888.



connected with his name, and the conclusion seems irresistible that these belong properly to some earlier pagan god or hero.\* Can it be that under the name of Saint Martin, the modern peasant is honoring Mars, the ancient god of war? The bloody rites which so distinguish this day from all others might well bear out such an assumption.

In Ireland, the poorer people sacrifice a goose or a rooster, while the wealthier farmers and graziers offer a sheep. When a rooster is to be the victim an effort is made to procure a black one, and in some districts it must be a *coilleach Mártain* (*cölyakh Marthan*), or March cock, i. e., one hatched in March from an egg laid in the same month. Strangely enough, a rooster is never sacrificed in some parts of Kerry, where the people dislike to kill one under any circumstances. The doomed animal is previously "named for Saint Martin," that is, dedicated for a sacrifice in his honor on Saint Martin's day, and the vow is sealed by "drawing blood" from it. In the case of a sheep, this is done by cutting a piece from its ear. A weakly sheep is sometimes thus consecrated, and so well tended in consequence that it may become the best in the flock, but no money would tempt the owner to sell it for any other purpose, altho there is no objection to selling the wool. The animal is killed on the day preceding the festival, and the flesh is eaten on Saint Martin's and succeeding days until consumed, a portion being also given to the poor in honor of the saint. The chief object in killing the animal is not to feast upon its flesh, but to "draw blood" for the saint, and it is believed that if any fail to draw blood for Saint Martin, he will draw blood from them.

In illustration of this belief, there is a story told in Connemara to the effect that a man once named a sheep for Saint Martin, but as the day approached the animal was in such fine condition that his avaricious wife was constantly urging him to sell it instead. Afraid to break his vow, and equally unwilling to incur his wife's displeasure, he secretly killed a fowl and smeared the bed with the blood. Then getting into bed and covering himself up as if sick, he persuaded the woman that the saint was drawing blood from him in punishment of the contemplated impiety, until such fear seized her heart that she was as anxious as himself to see the sheep killed.

In Kerry, they tell a story of a man who had been always mindful to draw blood for Saint Martin, but who, for some reason, was at last banished from his native land. One night, in his new home, he was going along a road all alone when he suddenly remembered that it was Saint Martin's eve, and there came over him a feeling of deep regret that he could not be at home to draw blood on the occasion. At that moment a horseman rode up from behind and inquired where he was going. On being told, the stranger said that he was going the same way and invited the man to ride behind him on the horse. He consented, and mounted behind the

\* It is, indeed, related that he once restored a woman's child to life, but the story as told seems hardly sufficient to give rise to the legends in connection with the drawing of blood on this day.



other. Soon the night grew so dark that he could not distinguish objects about him, until, at last, the stranger set him down at the end of his journey, and, sure, where did he find himself but at his own door at home in Ireland. "It was supposed from this," added the old man who told the story, "that the horseman was Saint Martin."

Like the other festivals, Saint Martin's day is considered to begin at midnight and to last until the following midnight. The blood must be drawn before the "day" begins—usually on the eve—as it is a common saying that the saint will take it before, but not after. A part of the blood is soaked up with tow or cotton and preserved for use in connection with certain prayers in the cure of various ailments.\* In parts of Galway the blood is not preserved, but is sprinkled about the house and upon the people, and a bloody cross is marked upon the forehead of each member of the family. Those who are too poor even to afford a rooster sometimes gash one of their own fingers for this purpose.

The following detailed account of the practice as it exists to-day on the west coast, together with the reason assigned for the usage, is given by Lady Wilde, and applies equally well to other districts where the primitive customs are still kept alive :

"There is an old superstition still observed by the people, that blood must be spilt on St. Martin's day ; so a goose is killed, or a black cock, and the blood is sprinkled over the floor and on the threshold. And some of the flesh is given to the first beggar that comes by, in the name and in honor of St. Martin.

"In the Arran isles, St. Martin's day is observed with particular solemnity, and it was held necessary, from ancient times, to spill blood on the ground in honor of the saint. For this purpose a cock was sacrificed ; but if such could not be procured, people have been known to cut their finger in order to draw blood, and let it fall upon the earth. The custom arose in this way : St. Martin, having given away all his goods to the poor, was often in want of food, and one day he entered a widow's house and begged for something to eat. The widow was poor, and having no food in the house, she sacrificed her young child, boiled it, and set it before the saint for supper. Having eaten and taken his departure, the woman went over to the cradle to weep for her lost child ; when, lo ! there he was, lying whole and well, in a beautiful sleep, as if no evil had ever happened to him ; and to commemorate this miracle and from gratitude to the saint, a sacrifice of some living thing is made yearly in his honor. The blood is poured or sprinkled on the ground, and along the door-posts, and both within and without the threshold, and at the four corners of each room in the house.

"For this symbol of purification by blood the rich farmers sacrifice a sheep ; while the poorer people kill a black cock or a white hen, and

\* See the author's "Medical Mythology of Ireland," in *Proc. Am. Philos. Soc.*, xxiv, No. 125, p. 164, Philadelphia, 1887.



sprinkle the blood according to ancient usage. Afterwards the whole family dine upon the sacrificed victim. In some places it was the custom for the master of the house to draw a cross on the arm of each member of the family, and mark it out in blood."\*

Another legend makes it his own son whom Saint Martin, like Abraham of old, was about to sacrifice out of love to God, because in his great poverty he had nothing else to offer him. Altho he loved the boy more than life, he kild him late one night, and then lay down, intending to complete the sacrifice at daybreak. On opening his eyes in the morning, he was surprised to see a sheep hanging up in front of him, all skind and drest. Full of wonder he went over to his son's bed, and there he found the boy sleeping quietly and in perfect health, with not even a mark to show where his father had driven the knife. The saint gratefully offerd up the sheep as a sacrifice to God in the place of his son, and thus the custom originated in remembrance of the miracle.

Saint Martin is stated to hav been a miller, and his festival is said to commemorate the day on which he was "drawn on the wheel," an expression which seems to hint at martyrdom and the rack, altho there is no authority for believing that he was either a miller or a martyr. In accordance with this tradition, it is held that no wheel should turn, or anything go round, on this day; no yarn may be spun, no mil may grind and no cart may be driven on the highway. Even a stocking should not be knitted, because in so doing it is necessary to turn it round upon the hand, and the boatman wil not put out from shore on this day, because in starting it is customary to turn the boat round on the water. So strong is this feeling that even in the city of Limerick the large factories sometimes find it difficult to procure a working force on the eleventh of November.

#### SAINT STEPHEN'S DAY, DECEMBER 26.

Christmas and New Year may properly be treated together, but Saint Stephen's day, the day after Christmas, deserves a separate notice, as it is one of the greatest of the Irish holidays, being always an occasion of mirth and merriment, in spite of bad crops and political agitation. The peculiar custom of carrying the wren (universally pronounced *wran*) on this or the preceding day seems to hav been common to the whole Keltic race, being found in Ireland, Man, Wales and France, altho, strangely enough, it is unknown in the extreme north of Ireland. In ancient Rhodes, the swallow was carried about by bands of children in early spring time, with singing of verses and demands for small gifts, very much in accordance with the modern Irish practice. Various stories ar current in Ireland to account for the cruelty shown the wren on this occasion, the reason commonly assignd being that the wren once gave the alarm to an army of invaders—according to one account, the followers of William of Orange, but by others said to hav been the Danes—by perching upon a drum head

\* Lady Wilde, II, 131-2.



and thus waking a sleeping sentinel just as the Irish were on the point of surrounding them. This very much resembles the old story of the sacred geese of Rome, but aside from the fact that the same tradition is related of other armies in other countries, being merely one factor in the universal folk-lore of Europe, the existence of the custom in France and Wales shows that it had its origin in some ancient Keltic festival prior to the introduction of Christianity. In the Isle of Man, the people defend the practice by saying that at this season the wren's body is animated by the spirit of a wicked fairy resembling the German Lorelei, and who can be kild at no other time.\* Vallancey asserts that the custom originated in Ireland through the contrivance of the early Christian missionaries, who found the wren an object of superstitious regard amongst the people, and accordingly undertook to overcome this feeling by ordering that he should be hunted and kild on Christmas day, and his dead body carried about in triumph on the day following.† In Ireland and Germany, the wren is considered the king of birds, having won the kingship in a contest with the eagle, a story as old as the days of Aristotle and Pliny, as we are reminded by the Latin name of *regulus* or "little king." In Breton legend, it is said to have brought down fire from heaven, which would account for its sacred character among the Kelts.‡

For some days before Saint Stephen's, and especially on Christmas, troops of boys go about the hedges searching for wrens. The instant that one is perceived, he is pursued by the whole crowd with stones and clubs, and it is generally but a few moments before his lifeless body is in the hands of his captors. It is believed in some parts that the wren is blind on this day, and therefore the more easily caught. Early in the morning of Saint Stephen's day, the various companies gather at their respective headquarters with bushes of holly or furz, which are elevated on poles and decorated with the bodies of the slaughtered wrens, the more the better. A live bird is frequently tied by the legs to the top of the bush and is allowed to hang thus, with head down and wings vainly flapping, as the procession moves along. There is sometimes but one wren, which, in the south, is frequently carried in a frame consisting of two hoops, crossing each other at right angles, and fixed to the end of a long pole. Occasionally, dead wrens are worn in the caps of the members of the party, some of whom wear masks as on Saint Bridget's eve. In Limerick and the adjacent districts of Clare, and sometimes also in Longford, and, perhaps, elsewhere, the wren is carried in a small coffin resting on a bier borne by four pall-bearers. In the Isle of Man also the wren is carried on a bier, and the whole ceremony is a whimsical travesty on a funeral.§ In Ireland, however, the proceedings are by no means of a somber character. The crowd of boys and young men is generally accompanied by a piper

\* Kelly, Folk-lore, 77.

† Vallancey, Collectanea, iv, Part i, 97.

‡ Kelly, Folk-lore, 75.

§ Waldron, quoted in Brand, Antiquities, i, 472.



or fiddler, or at least by an expert trickster and tumbler, and in high good humor, and, carrying aloft the captured wrens, they go from house to house singing appropriate verses, and expecting in return a small gift of money, food or drink, on penalty of burying the wren in front of the door in case of refusal. This burial of the wren would doubtless be considered to bring bad luck to the members of the household, but, at all events, it would inevitably brand them as ungenerous, and this alone has such an effect upon the miserly ones that in all the author's inquiries he has heard of but one case in which the wren was actually buried in this manner. The money collected during the day is spent in a convenient tavern at night and a considerable portion is usually distributed among the poorer people. It should be stated that the "wren boys," as they are called, generally confine their visits to the houses of the wealthier farmers and gentry. When two parties of wren boys from different parishes come into collision there is frequently a contest for the possession of the wrens. In the city of Cork, where it is naturally somewhat difficult to procure birds, a dead mouse is sometimes made to do duty instead.

In Hall's "Ireland" it is incorrectly stated that the hunting of the wren is confined to the southern districts of Ireland,\* but this is a mistake, for the custom is practiced in each of the four provinces. In Ulster, the northern province, it certainly exists in the counties of Cavan, Fermanagh and Tyrone, but seems to be unknown in Donegal, Antrim and the extreme north.

The songs sung by the wren boys vary greatly in character and meter, and many of them are doubtless improvised for the occasion. Like those sung on Saint Bridget's eve, a number are clearly of English origin. Some of them are mere nonsense rimes, but the first verse sung at each house is the same all over the country, the Gaelic form used in the west being nearly the equivalent of the English verse used in the eastern districts, and, as this verse refers more especially to the custom of the day, it is doubtless the original, to which the others have been tacked on later. The Gaelic version still used in Galway is as follows :

*Dreolín, dreolín, rí na n-eun,  
Lá Steafáin a gab an t-eun.  
Is beag é féin, is mór a m'uintir,  
Agus dá g'ab sé capáire déanfaid sé rince. †*

Which may be rendered literally :

Wren, wren, king of the birds,  
On Stephen's day the bird was caught.  
He is small himself, his family is great,  
And if he gets an oaten cake, he will make a dance.

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\* Hall, Ireland, i, 13.

† Pronounced : *Jroelyeen, jroelyeen, re na n'yaen,  
Law Schúfawn a gow an chaen.  
Is byug ae haen, is moer a winchtir,  
Ógus dhaw ghaw'shae cápara yena shae rinca.*



The following is the corresponding verse used in the English-speaking districts :

The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,  
Saint Stephens'es day he was caught in the furz.  
Altho he's but small, his family's great ;  
Rise up, landlady, and giv him a *thrate*.

Among the verses added in different parts of the country ar the following, the names being changed according to the house visited :

1. Mister O'Brien is a worthy man,  
And to his house we brought the wran—  
We brought the wran to visit you here,  
Wishing you a happy Christmas and many New Years (*sic*).—CORK.
2. The wran was so cute and I was so cunning,  
He stood in the bush while I was a-running.  
On Christmas day in turning a spit,  
I burnt my finger and I feel it yet.  
Between my finger and my thumb  
There lies a blister as big as a plum.—CORK.
3. My shoes ar wore, my coat I tore,  
I followd the wran three days or more.—MEATH.
4. The wran is dry and so am I,  
Giv us something or we'll let him fly.  
From bush to bush, from tree to tree,  
They hunted the wran along with me ;  
Then up with the kettle and down with the pan,  
And giv us a drink and let us be *gan*.—LIMERICK.
5. Come huntin' the wren, says Robin to Bobbin ;  
Come huntin' the wren, says Richard to Robin ;  
Come huntin' the wren, says Jack Tilaone ;  
Come huntin' the wren, says every one !\*
6. We hunted the wren through frost and snow ;  
We hunted the wren seven miles or more ;  
We knocked him down and he could not see ;  
And we brought him home in a holly tree.\*
7. *T'ugas t'u mo d'reolin liom air saot'ar,  
Agus air a g-Cnoc Árd-d'roig'canac b'í se air béile.  
'Nuair-a b'í se d'a t'úirt agus a t-anam da creat'ad  
D'iarr se a t'ab'airt go dtí Mister Read'mond.  
Air M'ister Read'mond é f'eín a f'uascailt,  
Beoir 'gus coíft go fairsing da c'om'luc'd.†*—KERRY.

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\* Probably used in Galway or some other part of the west. From Edgar L. Wakeman, Afoot in Ireland, in Washington (D. C.) *Evening Star*, Dec. 22, 1888.

† Pronounced : *Huggas hu ma ghroelyeen loom er sachar,  
Ógus er a gnuc ardh-reenakh ve shae er baela.  
Nur-a ve shae ghaw hoorch ógus a thunnam dhaw khraeha,  
Jeer shae a hoorch go jee Míster Raymond.  
Er Víster Raymond ae haen a wuasculch,  
B'yoer 'gus coffee go fursing dhaw khoalakhdh.*



This, which is not strictly grammatic, may be rendered :

I hav brought to you my panting wren ;  
 And on the high blackthorn hil\* he was at his meal.  
 When he was exhausted and his soul a-trembling,  
 He begd to be taken to Mr. Raymond.  
 From Mr. Raymond, to release himself,  
 Beer and coffee in abundance (to demand) for his companions.

8. As down the glen, boys, we did *bate*,  
 Our gentleman to overtake,  
 We overtook him in the glen,  
 Which caused our wran boys for to sing—  
 Sing holly, sing ivy—sing ivy, sing holly,  
 Christmas day it is all but a folly,  
 But Christmas comes but once a year,  
 And when it comes, it brings good cheer.—CORK.
9. The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,  
 Saint Stephens'es day, he was caught in the furz.  
 I broke all my toes a-gathering the sand,  
 Pray, madam, do giv me a drop of the dram.—CAVAN.
10. Here comes I, says Beelzebub,  
 And over my shoulder I carry a club,  
 And in my hand a dripping pan,  
 I call myself a jolly old man.—CAVAN.
11. Sing holly, sing ivy—sing ivy, sing holly,  
 A drop just to drink, it would drown melancholy,  
 And if you fil it of the best,  
 I hope in heaven your soul may rest ;  
 But if you draw it of the small,  
 It won't agree with my boys at all.—KERRY.

Nos. 4 and 11, like the verses already given under Saint Bridget's eve, ar evidently derived in part from some old English verses sung on Saint Catherine's day, November 25, by children going from house to house like the Irish wren boys. Among those quoted by Brand ar the following :

Up with your kettle and down with your pan,  
 Give us an answer and let us be gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Roll, roll,  
 Gentle butler, fill the bowl ;  
 If you fill it of the best,  
 God will send your soul to rest ;  
 But if you fill it of the small,  
 The devil take butler, bowl and all.†

No. 10 is probably derived from an old Christmas drama of Cornwall,

\* *Cnoc Ard-d'roig'eanac*, "the high blackthorn hil," overlooks the town of Tralee in Kerry.

† Brand, *Antiquities*, I, 413-4.



described by a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in which one of the characters, known as Rub-a-bub, enters, saying :

Here comes I, Old Rub, Bub, Bub, Bub;  
Upon my shoulders I carries a club,  
And in my hand a frying pan,  
So am I not a valiant man? \*

#### THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS, NEW YEAR AND TWELFTH-NIGHT.

The Christmas holidays ar supposed to include the whole season from Christmas eve to Twelfth-night, and may properly be treated together, with the exception of Saint Stephen's day, which has already been noticed. The holiday season therefore lasts nearly two weeks, the principal days being Christmas, December 25; New Year, January 1; and Twelfth-night, January 6. In England and in some countries on the continent, the season was formerly considerd to begin at Hallow e'en and extended to Candlemas, February 2, thus embracing a period of three months.

With regard to the origin of these winter holidays, it may be stated that, like nearly every other festival in the modern calendar, they ar simply heathen festivals which the church, being unable to suppress, found it necessary to tolerate and finally to invest with a Christian significance. This festival season was common to all the prominent nations of antiquity, even as far as Persia. In Rome the period was devoted to the Saturnalia, Sigillaria and Compitalia, the first of which lasted several days, and was celebrated in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The feasting and gayety, the evergreen decorations, the fantastic processions of the mummers, and the custom of giving and receiving presents at this season, hav all come down to us unchanged from the ancient pagan festival of two thousand years ago. The Compitalia or plowman's feast, which closed the festivities in pre-Christian Rome, stil survives in the Plow Monday of England, following immediately after Twelfth-night. The custom of secretly putting presents into stockings belongs properly to the feast of Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus), December 6, and is supposed to be typical of that saint's practice of secret almsgiving. The transfer of the custom from the lesser to the greater holiday was natural and easy. In Ireland, as in other countries of Europe, the children hang up their stockings on Christmas eve to receiv the gifts which they ar told Santa Claus puts into them during the night, climbing down the chimney for the purpose. The Christmas tree is not a feature of the Irish observance. Presents ar also exchanged among the older ones, and on meeting at the chapel in the morning each seeks to make the first claim upon his neighbor by shouting, "My Christmas box on you!" at the same time wishing the customary "Merry Christmas and happy New Year." Presents ar also made on New Year, altho not to the same extent.

The ancient Germans and Scandinavians had, at this season, a festival

\* W. S. (1811), in Pop. Sup., 82.



call'd Yule, which was with them one of the principal occasions of the year. Fire seems to hav playd an important part in the Yule celebration, and Grimm is of the opinion that the Yule fire of the Germans was the equivalent of the Samhan fire of the Keltic nations.\* The "Christmas log" and "Christmas candle," which ar kept burning from Christmas to Twelfth-night, ar common to Ireland, England and Scotland, the former being found also in France and among the Letts.† Speaking in this connection, Brand says : "I am pretty confident that the Yule block will be found, in its first use, to have been only a counterpart of the midsummer fires, made within doors because of the cold weather at this winter solstice, as those in the hot season, at the summer one, are kindled in the open air."‡

At this season of the year the druids of Gaul wer accustomd to repair to the woods to gather the mistletoe with much ceremony, but how far this practice was observd by their Irish brethren is not clear, altho the mistletoe was a sacred plant with ancient Kelts and Germans alike, being regarded as a great panacea and a promoter of fertility in cattle.

The Gaelic name of Christmas is *Nodlog* (*Nullog*),§ and it is considerd at once the most joyous and the most solemn festival of the whole year. Everybody is up long before daylight, and it would be regarded as the greatest of misfortunes to be unable to attend early mass in the morning. Even the poorest strive to hav something better than common for the Christmas dinner, and this feeling is embodied in the Kerry proverb :

Christmas day and the day of the turf,  
Them ar the days we'l eat enough,

alluding to the day on which the turf is cut, on which occasion the farmers hire a number of the poverty-stricken laborers to assist them, and always make it a point to give them a good dinner for once. As the general festivities, the giving of presents and hanging up of stockings by the little ones, hav already been noticed, we shal proceed to describe those features which savor more of a national character.

The mummers, as they ar call'd, go about here as they do in England and on the continent, from Christmas to Twelfth-night. In appearance and manner they resemble the May boys already described in treating of May-day. Drest in fantastic style and singing verses suited to the occasion, they visit the houses of the farmers and gentry, and go through a whimsical dance or rude dramatic performance, with the aid of a piper and a "fool," the latter being frequently envelopt in the skin of a cow. Sometimes a sham battle is enacted by mounted warriors armed with wooden swords. In return for their efforts to amuse the people, they

\* Grimm, *Mythologie*, 1, 581 and 593.

† *Ibid.*, 594.

‡ Brand, *Antiquities*, 1, 471.

§ Evidently the same as the French Noel, and perhaps, also, the German Yule.



expect a small reward at each house, and in this they are seldom disappointed.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824 we find an interesting description of a company of mummers, who had ventured to cross over to the vicinity of Dublin from their native parish on the other side of the bay. They seem to have created as much alarm among the ruling powers as an army with banners, and the account furnishes an apt illustration of the combination of police surveillance and ponderous magisterial acumen that has so long prevailed in the Green Isle.

"They consisted of fifteen young men grotesquely attired in ribands, white shirts outside their clothes, papers and rosettes in their hats, and large sashes round their waists, and one was dressed in woman's clothes; two of them carried swords of a very ancient appearance; the remainder had sticks. Being noticed by the police landing from a boat, Peace-officer Sharpley proceeded to interrogate them; and considering it necessary to prevent such a formidable body from perambulating the district, immediately despatched a messenger to Mr. Goodison of the College Street office, who directed Peace-officer Campain and his party to proceed to Williamstown, when they took the whole number into custody as suspicious characters going through the country disguised. They were brought before Mr. Alderman Fleming and Sir Garret Neville, when one of them, Michael Darley, who stated himself to be the king of the party, said, that they came from Raheny, and that they had been out on the Christmas gambols since St. Stephen's day; that hearing there were a number of gentlemen's seats at the side of the water, he and his subjects undertook a voyage across the bay, to visit the shore of Williamstown and its vicinity. On being asked by Sir Garrett Neville where they got the swords, he said they got one from a man of the name of Neill, gardener to Mr. Joy, and the other from a person at Raheny, and that their intentions were entirely harmless; they assembled for the purpose of getting Christmas boxes, according to an ancient custom (in his dominions) at the other side of the water; and that the king and Hector (one of his guards) were always armed with swords. To a question by the magistrates, he said he was an historian, and his fool was treasurer, and carried a bladder fixed to a long pole; the party spent whatever they got in drinking, dancing and other amusements. They got money from Dean Ponsonby, Dean Gore, and many other gentlemen. 'His majesty' referred to Counsellor Casey for a character. The magistrates, after a severe admonition, had them detained for further examination." \*

In Connemara the people "draw blood" on Christmas as on Saint Martin's day. The animal is killed the day before, but is not previously "named" as is the case when dedicated to the saint. So deeply rooted is this custom that poor people eagerly buy from the farmers old sheep which are almost worthless, in order to kill them for this occasion, and

\* Writer in Pop. Sup., 96, 97.



those who ar without money wil bind themselvs to do a certain amount of work in return for such an animal. While this eagerness is due in great part to the natural desire to hav a good dinner on Christmas at least, it may point also to sacrificial rites in connection with the old druidic celebration of the winter festival.

Every family that can possibly do so procures a large log known as the *bloc na Nodlog* (*bluc na Nullog*) or "Christmas block," to burn in the hearth-fire upon this day. The log is usually from the trunk of the resinous bog deal, now found only below the surface of the bogs. It is procured some time in advance, so as to be thoroughly dry for the occasion, and is sometimes kept burning at intervals until Twelfth-night. As previously stated, this custom, with that of the Christmas candle, is found also in other countries, and is evidently a survival of an ancient fire celebration.

The Christmas candle, which is usually kept lighted at intervals from Christmas to Twelfth-night, varies considerably in the different districts. In Connemara it is calld *truislán* (*thrushlawn*) and is made of twelve rushes plaited together and wrapt around with thread to prevent their untwisting in burning, the whole being dipt in melted tallow so as to form a large candle a yard or more in length. This is fixt upright on the table at supper on Christmas night (eve?) and allowd to burn for about an hour, when it is extinguisht, to be relighted in the same way on New Year's night and Twelfth-night. What remains is then put carefully away and preservd as a talisman to bring good luck to the house.

In many parts of the country the Christmas candles ar now supplied by the stores. They ar made of large size and variously colord, and in Kerry ar lighted on Christmas night and each night thereafter until Twelfth-night, inclusiv. On Twelfth-night they hav what is known as the *coinneal trí lad'rae* (*cunyoel chre liarakh*) or "three-prongd candle," made by dividing the wick of an ordinary candle into three parts, which ar then dipt into melted tallow, so as to form three smaller candles above the large one. These ar all lighted simultaneously and gradually burn down to the main one, which continues to burn until extinguisht. A similar candle is described in Hall's "Ireland" as being burnd in Cork on Christmas eve until midnight, after which what remains is preservd as a safeguard against evil spirits.\* It was probably originally used in the south, as in Connemara, during the whole period of the Christmas holidays.

On Twelfth-night, in Roscommon and the adjacent parts of Galway, rushes ar cut into pieces about six inches in length, which ar peeld from top to bottom, leaving only a thin strip of skin to prevent their breaking. These ar then dipt into melted lard or tallow and arranged in a circle around the edge of a cake of cow-dung, after which each member of the family selects one to represent himself. They ar then lighted, and it is believd that the lives of those present wil be long in proportion to the time occupied by the rushes in burning, he whose light goes out first be-

\* Hall, Ireland, I, 25.



ing doomed to die soonest, and so on with the others. If there be more than twelve persons in the household, there are an equal number of the rush candles, but there are always at least twelve rushes. Piers describes a similar custom on this night as existing in Westmeath as far back as 1682, when a sieve of oats was set up in an elevated position and a lighted candle placed in the centre, surrounded by twelve smaller ones around the edge.\* The twelve small candles surrounding a larger one, and the twelve rushes used in the same way in the west, had probably an astronomic significance in connection with the ancient pagan fire festival, although they are now explained to be typical of Christ and His Apostles.

In the eastern districts there is a proverb that "a green Christmas makes a fat graveyard," as warm weather at this time of the year is believed to be unhealthy. Christmas night is not regarded as particularly sacred, but Christmas eve is held in high veneration, and no danger can come to any one walking out at that time, as no evil spirit has then the power to harm. On Twelfth-night, on the contrary, as on Saint John's eve and November eve, it is considered unsafe to be out after dark. According to Lady Wilde,† the ass is said to kneel down in adoration of Christ on Christmas morning, and if one can manage to touch the cross on the animal's back at that moment, any wish of his heart will be granted.

January 1, in the church calendar, is the feast of the circumcision, but its popular name of New Year points to a more remote origin in the pagan festival of Janus, the god of the year, represented on old sculptures as having two faces, one looking back over the year that is gone, the other looking forward to the new one coming on. No particular observances are connected with the day beyond going to church and giving and receiving presents as on Christmas, the latter custom having come down from the ancient celebration. Strangely enough, the practice of giving presents was forbidden by the early church, but the popular custom proved too strong to be broken down.

As might naturally be expected in connection with the first day of the year, several interesting beliefs are held in regard to New Year. He who gets up before sunrise on this morning will not be lazy for one year—a statement which we can easily believe without any great stretch of the imagination. It is unlucky to pay out money, or to lend or give anything—particularly fire—out of the house on this day, regular presents only excepted, as this would be to give away the year's prosperity. This was also an ancient Roman belief in connection with the feast of Janus. In several districts, both north and south, it is customary to throw a pancake against the door to keep out hunger during the coming year, but this practice seems to be unknown in Galway.

If a woman be the first to enter the house on New Year, bad luck will come to the inmates. In order to guard against such a misfortune two

\* Piers, Westmeath, 124.

† Lady Wilde, ii, 107.



neighboring families sometimes arrange to hav a man from each house visit the other the first thing in the morning, and one man was said to get over the difficulty by making it a point to get up himself before daybreak and go through the door and back again. A similar belief exists in England.

In Galway and probably in other parts of the country, it is customary on New Year eve to put a stick into a stream or pool with a notch cut to indicate the hight of the water. If the water be above the mark in the morning—*i. e.*, should any rain fall during the night—provisions will be high during the coming year. If the water be found to be below the notch, provisions will be correspondingly low. As the Gaelic proverb has it, *Má éirig'eann an tuile, éirig'eann an buiseul, 'smá íslig'eann an tuile, tuituig'eann an buiseul*,\* "If the flood rises the bushel rises, and if the flood lowers the bushel falls." The same custom is practiced in Germany to determin whether the year will be wet or dry.

Twelfth-night, January 6, is so calld on account of its being the twelfth night after Christmas. It is also known as Little Christmas or Old Christmas, by reason of its being the date formerly fixt for Christmas before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752. Stil another name, used more especially in the south, is "Night of the Three Kings," as it is believd to hav been on this night that the magi from the East visited the infant Savior. In commemoration of this event the triple candle is lighted in Kerry, as already described, and it was formerly the custom also to bake a three-cornerd loaf or cake of bread on this day for the same reason, just as it is customary in England to bake a pie in the shape of a cradle and a cake in form like an infant on Christmas day.

On this night the cattle all kneel down and worship with their faces toward the east. In Kerry, it is said to hav been on Twelfth-night that Christ turnd water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana, and at a certain hour on this night every running stream is changed into wine. But no one must venture out to watch for the miracle, for two girls once went out to see the wonder and wer never heard of afterward. In Connemara, the change is believd to take place on New Year eve, and it is customary to begin the day by drinking a glass of water in honor of the event. In England, a similar miracle is said to occur on Saint Martin's night, November 11, the anniversary of the ancient feast of Bacchus, god of wine, a fact which is probably at the bottom of the modern belief.

The mummers go about with their songs and dances from Christmas until Twelfth-night, when the holidays come to an end. The national game of *camán*, or hurling, also holds a prominent place in the holiday sports in all parts of the country. The whole period is deemd sacred and no work that can possibly be postponed is done while it lasts. Each of the twelve days during this period is held to foreshadow the weather for the

\* Pronounced: *Maw irecan an thuilya, irecan an búshael, smaw eeshlecan an thuilya, thichecan an búshael.*



corresponding one of the twelve months of the coming year. Thus, should a snow storm occur on the day after Christmas, January will be a month of snow; and if the day before New Year be mild and agreeable, so will be the coming month of June. Now also might one bid farewell to the cares of the world without regret, for all who die during this blessed season go straight to paradise.

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