

HALLOWEEN!

The Vigil of All Saints' Day.

How It Was Anciently Observed.

Demons, Witches and Fairies at Their Midnight Pranks.

The Power of Charms and Spells.

How Husbands and Wives Were Sought and Found.

Etc., Etc., Etc., Etc., Etc., Etc.

At no time in its history has the Church of Rome been ungrateful to the most faithful and efficient among its servants. And though the custom of raising them by canonization to the dignity of sainthood has fallen almost entirely into disuse, it was actively continued for so many centuries that soon no place in the calendar could be found for the new creations. The first day of November was therefore selected and devoted in general to all such as were not otherwise provided for.

The Fairy Carnival.

The first of November thus became one of the great festivals of the Church of Rome, and was continued as such by the Church of England, passing under the name of All Saints' Day, or All Hallow's. The preceding evening, of which this night is the anniversary, being known as All Hallow Eve, or Halloween, by some strange freak of man was selected, long years ago, as the one on which the Evil Spirit and his attendants would be most likely to visit the earth in force, to vent their spite against the numerous saints whose festival was so near at hand, by holding a high carnival of their own. The poet Burns says of it that "it is thought to be a night when witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings are all abroad on their baneful midnight errands; and when these aerial people, the fairies in particular, are said to hold a grand anniversary."

Spying into the Future.

The heart of man, especially in ages and countries where superstition has a foothold, is ever longing to penetrate the veil of mystery which overhangs the future. It has ever been the province of devils, witches, and imps of every grade to assist in such questionable pursuits; and for this reason All Hallow Eve, the night of all the year when these doubtful personages were supposed to be abroad in more than their usual numbers, was selected as the one on which they would have the surest warrant of success.

The different ceremonies, enchantments, or spells for which Halloween has been noted during many centuries, had, therefore, as their grand object the revelation of things ordinarily hidden from the world. There was, indeed, a time when they were all conducted with sober earnestness, and with a full and abiding faith in the infallibility of their results. Except in the most ignorant and superstitious neighborhoods in the old country, this, of course, is no longer the case. But even now it is quite a common thing for the young people, in city and country, to meet together and engage in frolicsome pastimes, such as ducking for apples in water and pulling cabbage stocks, all of which are founded on the ancient observances of the day.

But few of these found their way into this country, as at the time of its settlement grave doubts began to be cast upon their efficacy or propriety by that more intelligent class of persons to which the emigrants from the most part belonged.

About the only customs pertaining to the past which are now in vogue among our youth are those of hanging dead cats to door-bells, and of passing through the streets late at night and arousing people of a quiet turn of mind by thumping boltingly on their doors with cabbage-stalks. In some sections, however, it is still considered rare sport to kindle huge bonfires, and make night hideous in a general and miscellaneous manner.

Halloween in Scotland.

Burns, in a lengthy poem, has pathetically described the manner in which the vigil of All Saints' Day was kept in old times by the peasantry in the west of Scotland, to whom its charms and spells were "so big with prophecy." We quote the opening and closing stanzas:

"Upon that night, when fairies light
On Casalis Downians dance,
Or o'er the lays, in splendid blaze,
On sprightly measures prance;
Or, lo! (O'er the route is laid,
Beneath the moon's pale beams;
There, up the Cairns, we wander,
Among the rocks and straws
To sport that night,
While by the thicket's side,
Among the heath, winding banks,
Where Doon flows, "impalpable," clear,
We retrace once more the martial ranks,
And about his Carrick spear,
Some merry, irreverend, country wags
Together did converse,
To burn their nuts, and pour their stocks,
And hand their Hallowe'en
Fu' by the thicket's side,
The lasses sat, and c'eanly neat,
Mair brae than when they're fine;
Their faces blithly, fu' sweetly lit,
Hearts (ae) and warm, and kin';
The lads sae trig, w' woobie-bags
Well knotted on their garters,
Some unc'eo blate, and some w' gabs
Gar lassies' hearts rang stannin';
Gar lassies' hearts rang stannin';
Gar lassies' hearts rang stannin';

In Ireland the charm of burning nuts was even more elaborate than in Scotland or England. The young women placed the nuts on the bars of the grate, naming each one after a lover. If the nut cracked or jumped, it showed that the lover for whom it was named would prove unfaithful; if it began to blaze or burn, it gave token of regard on his part for the one who had placed it on the fire; and if two nuts, named after the dame and her lover, twined gently and evenly together, the enamored pair were sure to marry.

Eating an Apple All Alone.

Another very popular ceremony was that of eating apples before a glass. This is still customary, even in this country, as it is so easily performed. The young lady who desires to know with whom she is destined to share the joys and sorrows of life, goes alone into a darkened room, and holding in her hand a candle, she stands before a mirror and nibbles at an apple. According to some traditions she is also required to comb her hair all the while, though we are not informed how she is to hold the candle, the apple, and the comb at one and the same time. While she is thus occupied, the face of her future husband will be seen reflected in the glass, in the act of peeping over her shoulder.

"Winning Three Weeks O'Naething."

Another favorite Scottish ceremony was that of "winning three weeks o'naething," the week being the instrument used in winnowing grain. The spell required the accompaniment of loneliness, and if any one chanced to overlook it, a failure was the result. The adventurer proceeded to the barn, and opened both doors, taking them off the hinges, if possible. This precaution was deemed prudent for fear the being about to be invoked might close the doors and work the conjurer some mischief. Then the process of winnowing grain must be gone through with, in pretence, and when it was repeated the third time an apparition of the future wife or husband would pass in at the waily door, and out at the other. Following the apparition would come a name of nobility, which by number and dress indicated the station and employment of their leader.

Other Sure Methods of Divination.

Winnowing the barley stack was also a favorite device. The enhancer went alone and upon a three time stack of barley, and fathomed it in a single night. At the last station he caught in his hand (or she in hers, as the case might be) the grain which was the future spouse. In another ceremony the number of persons went out together and by number of persons shirt-sleeve in a south-runnin' way, at a point where the lands of "three lasses" are, at that each person went to bed in sight of a fire, hanging the wet sleeve by it to dry. The first dress was necessary to witness the result, close upon the hour of midnight an apparition of the lover came and turned the sleeve, so that the other side might dry.

The Lottery of the Three Dishes.

There was still another custom in vogue in Scotland, although its results were rather unsatisfactory, because they were indefinite. This consisted of divination by means of three "jugless" or dishes, in one of which was placed clean water, in another foul water, and in a third nothing at all. These were ranged on the hearth, and a person was then led up to them blindfolded. He, or she, as it happened, dipped his left hand in one of the dishes. Whether the experimenter was to marry a maid or a

fortune was to be expected as one of the as yet unknown spouse's attractions. To ascertain his or her temper and natural disposition, it was only necessary to taste the heart of the stem. Bitter and sweet were of course two distinguishable characteristics. But one thing more was desired, and that was the name of one's future life companion. To discover this the cabbage stocks were placed over the door, and the Christian names of suitors persons as chanced to enter the house thereafter settled the vexed question beyond all manner of doubt.

Sowing Hemp-Seed.

But by far the most popular ceremony was that of sowing hemp-seed. In this case one must steal out of the house unperceived, and then cast about him a handful of hemp-seed, harrowing it in with the most convenient thing that came to hand. While performing this operation, the following words must be repeated:—"Hemp-seed, I saw thee; hemp-seed I saw thee; And she that is to be my true, come after me and see thee."

Then, on looking over the left shoulder, an apparition of the person thus invoked was seen in the attitude of pulling hemp.

One of Burns' valiant heroes swore he would sow hemp-seed, and he, the whole thing "consense." The adventurer thus fared:—"He marches through among the stalks,
The grasp he for a harrow take,
And haul it on his cart,
And every now and then he says,
"Hemp-seed, I saw thee,
And she that is to be my true,
Come after me, and draw thee
As fast this night!"

"He whistled up Lord Lennox' march,
To keep his courage cheery;
A shout he took to begin to arch,
He was sae fey'd and eerie;
Till presently he hears a squeak,
And then a grane and grattle;
He by his slouther gabs a seek,
And tumbled wi' a wuntie
Out-owre that night."

"He roared a horrid murder-shout,
In dreardin' desperation;
And cooing and aye can rannin' out,
And hear the ad narration;
He swore 'twas Wilton, J. an' M' Craw,
Or cronicle Jerran, or some sic name,
Till, stop-she trotted through them a'—
Aster that night!"

Throwing the Clue of Yarn.

Another method of ascertaining the name of your future spouse required you to steal out of the house of alone in the dark, and having sought the kiln, to throw into the pot a clue of blue yarn. Then you were to wind the yarn off the old clue into a new one, and as you neared the end of the thread, something within the pot would cry "Hi." At the moment the adventurer must summon all his or her courage and cry out, "Who holds?" From the kiln-pot would be returned an answer, giving the full name of your future wife or husband. Burns thus puts one of his lasses so "feet and clean" through the operation, with but a poor show of success:—"She through the yard the nearest take,
And to the kiln she goes then,
And carries her grip for the ske, and
And in the blue-clue throws then.
Right fear's last night,
"And aye she win't, and aye she swar,
"I'll something bid wi' the pot,
Guid L! but she was quakin';
But whether 'twas the gel hamse,
Or whether 'twas the lassie,
Or whether 'twas Andrew Bell,
She did na wait on talkin'
To spier that night."

Burning Nuts.

Another favorite spell was that produced by the burning of nuts, which was at one time so customary in England, as well as in Scotland, that Halloween passed commonly as "nut-crack night." Nuts named after the lad and lass who had a liking for each other were placed side by side on the hearth. If they burned quietly together all would be well, and the loving twain would be made one in due time. But if there were a crackling and spluttering, and other unseemly proceedings on the part of the nuts, the match would not be prosperous. Charles Graydon, a quaint poet of the last century, has invested this favorite spell with the charms of rhyme:—"These glowing nuts are emblems true
Of what in human life we view;
The ill-matched couple fret and fume,
And thus, in strife, themselves consume;
Or from each other fly at start,
And with a noise forever part.
But see the happy, happy pair,
Of genuine truth and love sincere;
With mutual fondness while they burn,
Still to each other cling and yearn,
And as the vital sparks decay,
Together gently sink away;
Till life's fierce ordeal being past,
Their mingled ashes rest at last."

The Ringing of Bells.

For the repose of Christian souls was another and popular custom in the old Papal days in England. When Henry VIII renounced his vocation as "Defender of the Faith," he wrote a letter to Crommer, prohibiting all "superstitious practices," especially "the vigils and ringing of bells at the night long upon All Hallow's Eve, at night." Queen Elizabeth likewise ordered "that the superstitious ringing of bells, and the singing of hymns, or such like, at All Hallow's Eve, and at St. Soul's-day, with the night long before and after, be prohibited."

It is undoubtedly owing to the same dislike of practices which are in any degree of superstition, that the many quaint and ludicrous methods of keeping the Vigil of All Saints' Day have fallen into disrepute and disuse.

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WIDOW, or nobody at all, depended on his dipping his hand in the clean water, the foul water, or the empty dish. The ceremony was repeated three times, in the order of the dishes being changed each time.

The above are the principal ceremonies which were anciently observed on the "occasion of this ancient, chimerical solemnity," as Harvey, the conjuror of the last century, has styled it. They all had for their object the revelation of the mysteries of the future. But there are many traditions which go to prove that the occasion was also celebrated in the old time as a festival, or general merry-making, without any such sinister designs.

Diving for Apples.
In the north of England the young people used to dive for apples, or—what was a rarer sport—catch at them with open mouths, the apples being fixed to the end of a swinging stick, to the other end of which was fastened a lighted candle.

In an old illuminated missal in Douce's collection, a ceremony similar to the last is represented in the quaint figure painting of the middle ages. A person is represented as attempting to light a candle, which he holds in one hand, by means of another fastened to the end of a pole. The pole is supported by two stools placed at a distance from each other, and on this the operator balances himself, at the risk of receiving his feet in any of the apples beneath, while he attempts to light his candle.

The Carnival of Fire.
One of the most common methods of observing Halloween was by kindling fires in prominent positions. In Moray, Scotland, this ceremony was performed by way of thanksgiving for the successful gathering of the crops. In Ireland fires were also kindled on the four great Druidical festivals, of which Halloween happened to be one. But this last was long since discontinued, candles taking the place of bonfires. Although the Welsh still adhere to the custom of kindling large fires on this occasion, they can give no account of the origin or purpose of their illuminations.

In Perthshire, Scotland, there were formerly many different ways of keeping the Vigil of All Saints' Day, but the element of fire was the most favored in their ceremonies. In some places the peasantry would form faggots of heath, broom, and flax, which were lighted and carried through the village streets in grand and brilliant procession. In other sections larger fires were kindled in every village, and when they were burnt out the ashes were carefully collected and arranged in the form of a circle. Within this circle, and near the edge, a stone was then placed by every person who had an interest in the ceremony. If any of these stones were removed, or in any way interfered with during the night, the persons whom they represented were considered of encountering death within a year. Various other enchantments were also resorted to for the purpose of foiling the evil designs of the witches and demons who were supposed to be abroad. In many parts of Wales, also, a custom much resembling the above prevailed. It was attended by several curious ceremonies. The people ran swiftly through the fire and smoke, casting a stone behind them as they went; and at the conclusion they all made off as fast as their feet would carry them, saying the black words, "Did you see me? Did you see me? Did you see me?" This unseemly haste was then compensated for by a rousing supper upon pumpkins, nuts, and apples. The latter were to be eaten only after catching them in the mouth, a task attended with considerable difficulty, as they were either suspended in the air by a string, or sent whirling around a tub of water. On the following morning each person who had cast a stone into the fire sought for it, among the ashes, and if any one failed to find his, ill-luck would soon betide him or her.

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