

# The Spirit of Halloween

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON  
Pale tapers glimmer in the sky,  
The dead and dying leaves go by;  
Dimly across the faded green  
Strange shadows, stranger shades, are  
seen—  
It is the mystic Halloween.

ALTHOUGH this writer is no seventh son of a seventh son and therefore possessing "second sight" and the gift of prophecy, he feels perfectly safe in making a prediction. It is this: On the night of October 31 there will be unusual activity among the juvenile population of the United States of America. Parties of them will gather in houses in which the decorative scheme will include grinning jack-o'-lanterns, dry and yellowed stalks of corn, black cats, witches et cetera. But the principal activity will be outdoors rather than indoors. In the cities and towns white-sheeted figures will roam the streets, and other figures, lacking any special costume, will flit furtively among the shadows in alleys and back streets. In the country the roads and lanes will see more night traffic than usual and dogs will bark at shadowy intruders in farm yards.

The next morning merchants in city and town will find the front windows of their stores decorated with long scrawling lines of white—soap put there, but not to clean the panes. Gates will be missing from their accustomed places, benches and chairs will have disappeared, water will be gushing forth from unguarded taps and in general there will be such a transposition of any object left outdoors by the careless householder as to cause one to wonder by what strange magic have hitherto-inanimate things come to life. Farmers, finding wheels missing from their wagons—hung, perhaps, high up in a tree, or even, perhaps, discovering the wagon itself perched astride the ridgepole of the district school—will mutter the same thing that the merchant is muttering under his breath—"The little heathens!"

They shouldn't call the children that, however. "Pagans" is the word, rather than "heathens." For October 31 is Halloween and on that night young America is a throw-back to their pagan ancestry of thousands of years ago. For the boys and girls who go about on Halloween playing pranks on their elders, even though probably not one out of a hundred knows it, are simply keeping alive a custom born in England in the far-off days of the Druids—with this difference: their ancestors of ancient days observed this custom to keep away or propitiate evil spirits, whereas their descendants assume the characters of evil spirits, or at least, mischievous ones, and act accordingly.

The origin of Halloween goes back to the respect and homage paid by ancient nations to the sun. The pagans of those days, whether Egyptian, Greek or Roman, assigned a place of great importance in their pantheon to the sun god, the giver of light and heat and life. The sun marked out for them the time of work and the time of rest; it divided the year into seasons; it made possible bounteous crops of grain and fruits and under its warming rays flourished all that was beautiful and splendid and wonderful on this earth.

So it was only natural that the early pagan should set aside a day of grief for the ending of summer when his beauty and splendor declined under the frosts and winds of the coming winter, when the earth fell under the spell of the evil powers and was not to be free from them again until the coming of spring. But mingled with this grief over the passing of summer was the joy which he felt as he beheld the golden harvest of the autumn and in his heart he felt a song of thanksgiving for the ripened grain and fruit. The deity to whom the Romans were accustomed to render their thanks for these gifts was the goddess, Pomona, and they were accustomed to set apart October 31 or November 1 in her honor as a festival day in which nuts and apples, representing the winter store of fruits, figured prominently.

The Celts, the original inhabitants of the British Isles, worshipped the spirits of the forests and streams. Their priests, the Druids, held their rites beneath the great oaks which are characteristic of that land, since this tree was held in special veneration by the Celts. The Druids in time became skilled prophets in interpreting the will of the gods. They kept their sacred lore from the people and handed it down only among themselves. They taught that souls were immortal and that they passed from one body to another when life became extinct.

On October 31 the Druids taught that the Lord of Death gathered together the souls of all those who had died during the year just passed and assigned to them bodies of the animals they were to inhabit the coming twelvemonth, according to their condemnation.

Samhain, "summer's end," was November 1 to the Druids. Flocks were



brought in; people rested from labor; fires were built to Baal—fires of thanksgiving for the season's close which brought harvest in abundance. Altars were lighted, and after midnight rites on October 31, fire was carried to every dwelling by the people. The old fires were quenched and the new enthroned. They were kept burning for a year—until the return of Samhain. Fire blessed the household.

From this custom, and that of burning a sheep, arose the practice of delving into the future. In the dying sheep's struggles were read omens of the morrow. Evil spirits that came out of Samhain in Ireland lived for the rest of the year in Cruchan Cave in Connaught, called the "hell-gate of Ireland." On this yearly date the cave was opened and evil spirits in the form of "copper-colored birds" came out. They preyed on families, stealing babies from their cribs, leaving in their places goblins and hideous changelings. These evil spirits had the reputation of being very cunning and the peasantry, in order to get rid of them, and around their evil visitations, performed various and sundry acts of propitiation. They boiled egg shells in the sight of the changelings, treated ill the children left them and did other weird and strange things.

The Celts placed great store in tests. Samhain was the great time for these. Individuals were blindfolded that they might be the better guided by fate.

In the practice of these superstitions the Celts were not alone. They were universal over Europe in the ages previous to the Christian era. Christianity and the Roman emperors put them to rout. Augustus forbade his subjects to be initiated into the Druidical worship when he occupied Britain. Tiberius drove the priestly cult from Gaul and Emperor Claudius stamped out their belief. The Romans pursued the Druids ruthlessly to the island of Mona, near Wales, where they exterminated them at one fell blow and destroyed their oaks. Christianity in time succeeded the Druidical worship. Onto the old religion and old festivals were grafted new names and new customs. The midsummer festival was dedicated to St. John; Lugusad gave way to Lamas. The berries of the mountain ash or rowan tree, which had been food for Tuatha, "the people of the goddess Danu," now served to exorcise the very spirits in whose honor they were once eaten.

All Hallows, or All Saints' Day, on the church calendar, was assigned to November 1. In the beginning it was celebrated in May, the month in which Pope Boniface IV, in 610, consecrated

the Roman Pantheon to the Virgin and all the saints and martyrs of the church. The latter day assignment was made by Pope Gregory IV in 825 in order that the crowds which came up each year to Rome for the religious services might be fed sufficiently from the bountiful harvests of the year. In the Tenth century November 2 was made All Souls' Day.

Since America is the melting pot of the nations it is only natural, perhaps, that this observance, like so many others, partakes of the customs and traditions of many lands. Hence our Halloween lore is a combination of Irish, English, Scotch and German traditions, not to mention contributions from the French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Austrian, Italian and Slavic states as well as Nordic. The original celebrations in this country were mainly English in origin, even though in Colonial times the day was not much celebrated. A few of the English in the colonies kept up the mother country tradition but for the most part it was left pass. This was due largely to the wide settlements, the hardship of communal association and the necessity for the colonists to be busy at this time of the year laying in the harvest and provisions for winter. But despite this one could find now and then old Halloween customs in full force. There followed then such games as apple ducking and apple snapping as well as apple peeling and throwing the peel over the left shoulder, comb and mirror tests and ballads topped off by a round of ghost stories.

A party of twelve may learn their future if one will get from a churchyard a clod of earth and set twelve candles in it, naming them as he lights them. The future of each is governed by the light the candle emits, wavering, steady, sputtering or going out.

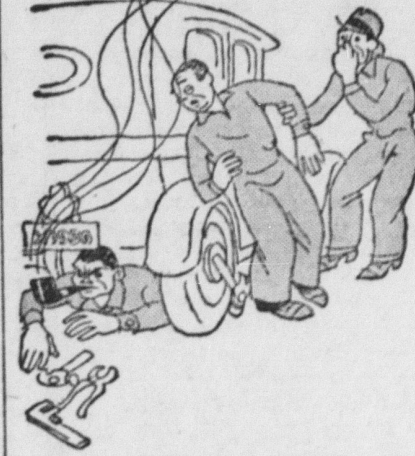
Fairies come in for special attention in Ireland. Good and bad they hold the Irish heart in their power, and, so the story runs, St. Patrick was not immune to their wiles. One lulled him to sleep before Samhain. These spirits dwell in grassy mounds and in streams and on the eve of All Saints' Day troop forth to work their will on countryside. To this day one may hear authentic accounts of the appearance of fairies in Ireland and the necessity of doing certain things in order to hold their good will.

Scottish Halloween traditions seem to be more clearly defined and more purposeful than the Irish ones. There is a lightness in Irish character that is not to be found in the Scottish, and for this reason the Scots take more seriously the traditions in regard to witches, evil spirits and fairies, all of whom they believe to be abroad on Halloween.

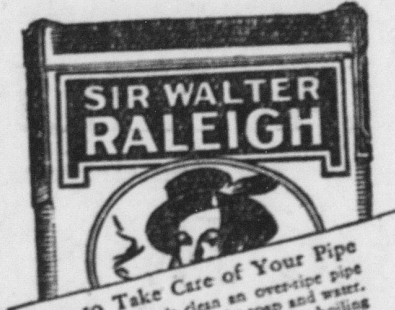
The Scotch invented the idea of "Samhainach," a goblin who comes out just at "Samhain." It is he who in Ireland steals children. The fairies pass at crossroads, and in the Highlands whoever took a three-legged stool to where three cross-roads met, and set upon it at midnight, would hear the names of those who would die in a year. He might bring with him articles of dress, and as each name was pronounced throw one garment to the fairies. They would be so pleased by this gift that they would repeal the sentence of death.

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Hardy Grain for Russia  
A hybrid grain, a cross between rye and wheat, has been grown in the Soviet botanical observatory at Minsk and it will probably make a great change in the grain industry of the country. It has the cold-resistant qualities of rye and the richness of wheat and the yield per acre is about tripled when compared with wheat. It will be ready for general distribution next year.

## Queen's Crucifix Added to Vatican Treasures

The pope has recently added a very important, though quite unostentatious looking crucifix to the already large and priceless collection which he possesses. This crucifix was carried by Marie Antoinette almost up to the moment of her execution and is made of wood and brass.

After the queen had made her confession, an hour or so before her execution, she handed the simple little crucifix to the priest . . . almost her last earthly act. Some time later the priest gave the crucifix to his niece, who lived in Toulouse.

As she lay dying she asked the cure to select some little object as a keepsake. He chose Marie Antoinette's crucifix. Later he became Monseigneur Ricard and it was he who bequeathed the relic to his holiness.

## Millions in Vegetables

One hundred thousand freight cars were required to move the vegetables that were shipped out of the state of California last year. This represents a valuation of \$75,000,000, and the crop was 50 per cent more than it was five years ago.

California is not only conceded to be the first state in vegetable production, but outstanding in the science and practice of vegetable production and marketing. Since the late 90s, when the first shipments of vegetables were made to the East from the Los Angeles basin, methods of growing, packing and loading have been constantly improved until at present the vegetable products of California and Arizona set the standard of quality on the East and Middle West markets.

## Got His on Earth

Anne W. Armstrong tells a little story which reveals the psychology of the southern mountaineer. When she was a child her father took one grim old mountaineer from Yancey county, North Carolina, to visit the finest house in town. The mountaineer gazed at everything without comment, but as they came away he remarked, "Won't no man what lives in a house as fine as that there ever go to heaven!"—Washington Star.

## Dancing Taught by Squares

Dancing steps are being taught by means of a checkerboard floorboard recently invented by a dancing master of Berlin, Germany. It fits the average size room. The squares are numbered and a code tells upon which square the pupil's feet should be for each step.

## Pine for Pulpwood

A great potential source of pulpwood for paper manufacture in this country is the pine belt of the South, as southern pine grows seven to ten times faster than red spruce, long used for paper manufacture.

## Time Out

Mrs. Talkalot—Mrs. Jabber and I are not on speaking terms.  
Mr. Talkalot—Oh, don't mind that! It won't hurt both of you to have a little rest.

## Giants

The word "giant" is conventionally limited to persons over seven feet in height.

Tolerance of things you don't like is like swallowing unpleasant medicine.

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