

## All Saints' Day, 1st November.

Samhain or "Sowin," as this day is called by Irish-speakers, was reckoned as the first day of winter. It was one of the great pagan festivals, to which the games and rites practised on All Holland Eve, or All Hallows Eve, are traceable.

These may for convenience be grouped under two headings, viz. :—(1) Harmless amusements, and (2) Pisherogues performed in the name of the devil.

Among the former, the most popular diversions were :—

(a) A half-barrel was placed on the floor, and nearly filled with water; silver coins were thrown in, and large apples set floating on it; boys, stripped to the waist, with their hands tied behind their backs, then endeavoured to take up the former with their lips, and the latter with their teeth; and what they landed they were allowed to keep.

(b) Two sticks fastened together, cross-fashion, with their ends pointed, were slung by a cord from a rafter or beam. An apple and a lighted candle, alternately, were stuck on the ends of the sticks, and they were sent spinning round. The game was now for a boy to bite a piece out of the apple, without getting a mouthful of the candle.

(c) Two hazel-nuts, walnuts, or chestnuts, or even two grains of wheat, were selected and named after some boy and girl who were supposed to be courting. They were then placed side by side on a bar of the grate, or in the turf-ashes, and according as to whether they burned quietly, or jumped apart from one another, so would be the future before them.

(d) Four plates having been set down on a table, water was poured into one, a ring placed on another, some clay in the third, and in the fourth was placed either some straw, salt, or meal. A person would then be blind-folded and led up to the table, and into whichever plate he or she placed their hand, so would their future turn out. The water signified migration, the ring marriage, the clay death, and the fourth plate prosperity. On re-arranging the order of the plates, others would be blind-folded and led up in like manner.

Under the second heading, the following are some of the practices which were performed in the name of the devil, and it was only on this one night in the year that his aid was invoked

to produce the future partner in life to the gaze of the man or woman, as the case might be :—

(a) In the name of the devil, a girl would put a bit of cawl-cannon into her stocking when going to bed, and having placed it under her pillow, she expected to see in a dream her future husband.

(b) A boy having soaked his shirt in water (or a girl her chemise), it would, in the name of the devil, be hung up before the fire to dry, while the owner hid himself and watched for "the fetch" of the future partner in life to appear and turn the garment. If there was no appearance, the owner of the garment was destined to remain single. "The fetch" is the apparition of a person in a distant place, who at the very time is lying in a trance. He or she may be quite unknown to the watcher, but so sure as the fetch does appear, so certain is it that the marriage will sooner or later take place.

(c) A boy would go to a barn and sow oats along its floor, in the name of the devil, from one end to the other. Having done that, he would go to the door, open it, and expect to see the fetch of his future wife standing outside. Instances have been known where, in place of the fetch, a coffin has appeared, and this foretells to the beholder that he will not be alive on that night twelve-month.

(d) A girl would take a "bottom," or reel, of thread, and holding one end of the thread, she would throw the reel out of her window, in the name of the devil, and summon her future husband to hold the reel. She would then commence to wind up the thread, and, if she felt a pull at it, she would exclaim, "Good morra, good yarra, who holds my reel?" The fetch would then appear to her, and in reply tell his name and where he lived.

(e) The letters of the alphabet would be cut out of a book, and in the name of the devil, sunk back up into "a gallon" (or pail) of water. In the morning the initials of the future husband's (or wife's) name would be found floating fronts up.

(f) A girl would go at night to a neighbour's garden, and with her eyes closed she would, in the name of the devil, pull up and steal (it must be stolen) a cabbage-plant, root and all. In bringing it home she would stick it up over the door, and the first single man who entered the house next day was destined to be her future husband.

(g) A girl would pull some of the Yarra weed, and on retiring to bed would put it into the stocking of her left-foot, and tie it

up with her right garter. The stocking was then placed under her pillow, and some such rhyme as this was repeated:—

“Good morrow, sweet Yarra, good morrow to thee,  
Tell me the name of my true love, where'er he may be,  
The colour of his hair, and the clothes he does wear,  
And the day that he will be married to me.”

In a dream she should then see her future husband. But from the time she entered her house with the Yarra, till the following morning, she should not utter a single word to anyone; if she did, the charm would be broken.

Such are a few instances of the rites carried on on All Holland Eve to foretell the future; but as a rule the young people avoided the ceremonies which necessitated invoking the devil, as they dreaded the consequences; they were secretly done, and done contrary to their religious instincts.

On All Hallows Eve there is a vegetarian dish partaken of called “cawlcannon,” which is not prepared except on this one night in the year. It consists of cabbage, potatoes, onions, and other vegetables, all pounded together and boiled to the condition of stirabout; pepper, salt, new milk, and butter are added. It is eaten hot. A ring or other token is hidden in the cawlcannon, and on everybody helping themselves, he or she in whose help the token or ring is found can foretell their future fate.

It was customary, too, on this Eve to weave a cross called a “Parshell.” This was done by laying two little sticks, seven inches in length, cross-ways; then starting at their junction by weaving a wheaten straw under one arm, over the next, and so on (adding a fresh straw as the other was used up) until about an inch from the ends of the sticks, when the straw-end was made fast. The “Parshell” was fixed over the dwelling-house doorway on the inside, with the object of warding off ill-luck, sickness, and witchcraft for a twelvemonth. A new one was made on the following All Hallows Eve, and put in place of the old one, which was shifted to another part of the house, or to the cow-stable, the following words being used in removing it:—  
“Fonstaren-sheehy.”

At this time of the year that vicious and terrifying apparition the Pooka, which the peasantry describe as resembling a cross between a mule, a bullock, and a big black pig, was very liable to be met with by the unwary if out late at night. By all accounts, to be in a runaway motor would be preferable to a ride on the Pooka's back, which it is his object to bring about.

Poulaphooka (i.e., the hole of the Pooka), Knockaphuca (the Pooka's hill), near Castledermot, and Ploopluck (recté

Cloghpook, or the Pooka's Stone), near Naas, were former haunts of this unpleasant customer.

#### All Souls' Day, 2nd November.

It is said that on this one day in the year the souls of the dead are allowed to re-visit their native districts; and if only the human eye had the power to see them, they would be observed about one on every side “as plenty as thraneens in an uncut meadow.”

At night time it is customary in every house to light a candle in memory of each member of the family who has died. They are placed in an unused room and allowed to burn till midnight, when, after praying for the souls of the dead, they are extinguished, as by that time the souls themselves have returned to rest.

At the last thing at night the hearth is swept clean, and on it are placed three cups of spring water.

#### St. Martin's Day, 11th November.

Formerly observed as a holy-day.

No wheel was allowed to turn, or plough to work, before 12 noon on St. Martin's Day. This applied equally to the spinning-wheel as to the cart or mill-wheel.

On this day, too, a cock was caught, killed in an out-office, and, while bleeding, brought into the dwelling-house, and its blood allowed to drop in the four corners of the house, so as to ensure a prosperous year. The body of the bird was afterwards cooked, and partaken of by the whole household.

The mild, close days that so often follow a brush of hard weather, about the middle of November, are known as “St. Martin's Summer.”

#### Christmas to Old Christmas Day, 25th December to the 6th January.

Formerly the interval between Christmas and Twelfth Day (inclusive) was observed as a holiday time, when no servile work was performed. The time was spent in football and hurley matches, bull-baiting, badger-drawing, cock-fighting, &c.

In the year 1444, “The Annals of the Four Masters” record the death of a head of the MacNamara Sept as taking place “between the two Christmases.” The 25th of December was known in Ireland as “Great Christmas,” and the 6th of January as “Little Christmas.”