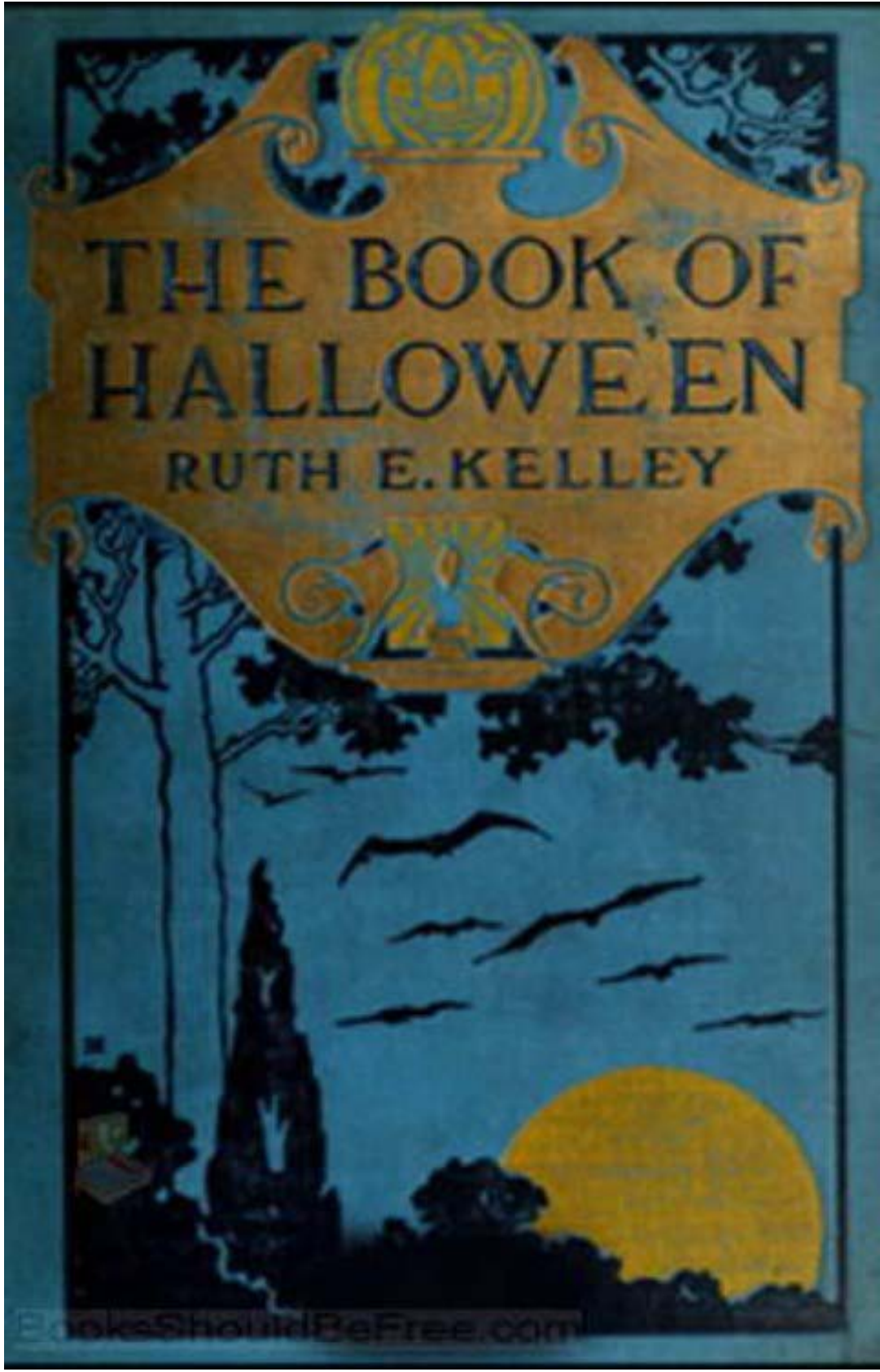




THE BOOK OF
HALLOWE'EN
RUTH E. KELLEY



THE BOOK OF
HALLOWEEN
BY
RUTH EDNA KELLEY, A.M.

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To my Mother and the memory of my Father who inspired and encouraged me
in the writing of this book.

The Book of Hallowe'en By Ruth Edna Kelley.

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FOUR POEMS

"They will sit where we sat, and will talk of us as we talked of them: in the gray of the morning only will they go away."

--LE BRAZ: Night of the Dead.

The supper for the souls is then set out. The poor who live on the mountains have only black corn, milk, and smoked bacon to offer, but it is given freely. Those who can afford it spread on a white cloth dishes of clotted milk, hot pancakes, and mugs of cider.

After all have retired to lie with both eyes shut tight lest they see one of the guests, death-singers make their rounds, chanting under the windows:

"You are comfortably lying in your bed,
But with the poor dead it is otherwise;
You are stretched softly in your bed
While the poor souls are wandering abroad.

"A white sheet and five planks,
A bundle of straw beneath the head,
Five feet of earth above
Are all the worldly goods we own."

--LE BRAZ: Night of the Dead.

The tears of their deserted friends disturb the comfort of the dead, and sometimes they appear to tell those in sorrow that their shrouds are always wet from the tears shed on their graves.

Wakened by the dirge of the death-singers the people rise and pray for the souls of the departed.

Divination has little part in the annals of the evening, but one in Finistere is recorded. Twenty-five new needles are laid in a dish, and named, and water is poured upon them. Those who cross are enemies.

In France is held a typical Continental celebration of All Saints' and All Souls'. On October 31st the children go asking for flowers to decorate the graves, and to adorn the church. At night bells ring to usher in All Saints'. On the day itself the churches are decorated gaily with flowers, candles, and banners, and a special service is held. On the second day of November the light and color give way to black drapings, funeral songs, and prayers.



CHAPTER XII

THE TEUTONIC RELIGION. WITCHES

THE Teutons, that race of northern peoples called by the Romans, "barbarians," comprised the Goths and Vandals who lived in Scandinavia, and the Germans who dwelt north of Italy and east of Gaul.

The nature of the northern country was such that the people could not get a living by peaceful agriculture. So it was natural that in the intervals of cattle-tending they should explore the seas all about, and ravage neighboring lands. The Romans and the Gauls experienced this in the centuries just before and after Christ, and England from the eighth to the tenth centuries. Such a life made the Norsemen adventurous, hardy, warlike, independent, and quick of action, while the Celts were by nature more slothful and fond of peaceful social gatherings, though of quicker intellect and wit.

Like the Greeks and Romans, the Teutons had twelve gods and goddesses, among whom were Odin or Wotan, the king, and his wife Freya, queen of Beauty and love. Idun guarded the apples of immortality, which the gods ate to keep them eternally young. The chief difference in Teutonic mythology was the presence of an evil god, Loki. Like Vulcan, Loki was a god of fire, like him, Loki was lame because he had been cast out of heaven. Loki was always plotting against the other gods, as Lucifer, after being banished from Heaven by God, plotted against him and his people, and became Satan, "the enemy."

"Him the Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms."

--MILTON: Paradise Lost.

It was this god of evil in Teutonic myth who was responsible for the death of the bright beautiful sun-god, Baldur. Mistletoe was the only thing in the world which had not sworn not to harm Baldur. Loki knew this, and gave a twig of mistletoe to Baldur's blind brother, Hodur, and Hodur cast it at Baldur and "unwittingly slew" him. Vali, a younger brother of Baldur, avenged him by killing Hodur. Hodur is darkness and Baldur light; they are brothers; the light falls a victim to blind darkness, who reigns until a younger brother, the sun of the next day, rises to slay him in turn.

Below these gods, all nature was peopled with divinities. There were elves of two kinds: black elves, called trolls, who were frost spirits, and guarded treasure (seeds) in the ground; and white elves, who lived in mid-heaven, and danced on the earth in fairy rings, where a mortal entering died. Will-o'-the-wisps hovered over swamps to mislead

travellers, and jack-o'-lanterns, the spirits of murderers, walked the earth near the places of their crimes.

The Otherworlds of the Teutons were Valhalla, the abode of the heroes whom death had found on the battlefield, and Niflheim, "the misty realm," secure from the cold outside, ruled over by Queen Hel. Valkyries, warlike women who rode through the air on swift horses, seized the heroes from the field of slaughter, and took them to the halls of Valhalla, where they enjoyed daily combats, long feasts, and drinking-bouts, music and story-telling.

The sacred tree of the Druids was the oak; that of the Teutonic priests the ash. The flat disk of earth was believed to be supported by a great ash-tree, Yggdrasil,

"An ash know I standing,
Named Yggdrasil,
A stately tree sprinkled
With water the purest;
Thence come the dewdrops
That fall in the dales;
Ever-blooming, it stands
O'er the Urdar-fountain."

--Voluspa saga. (Blackwell trans.)

guarded by three fates, Was, Will, and Shall Be. The name of Was means the past, of Will, the power, howbeit small, which men have over present circumstances, and Shall Be, the future over which man has no control. Vurdh, the name of the latter, gives us the word "weird," which means fate or fateful. The three Weird Sister in Macbeth are seeresses.

Besides the ash, other trees and shrubs were believed to have peculiar powers, which they have kept, with some changes of meaning, to this day. The elder (elves' grave), the hawthorn, and the juniper, were sacred to supernatural powers.

The priests of the Teutons sacrificed prisoners of war in consecrated groves, to Tyr, god of the sword. The victims were not burned alive, as by the Druids, but cut and torn terribly, and their dead bodies burned. From these sacrifices auspices were taken. A man's innocence or guilt was manifested by gods to men through ordeals by fire; walking upon red-hot ploughshares, holding a heated bar of iron, or thrusting the hands into red-hot gauntlets, or into boiling water. If after a certain number of days no burns appeared the person was declared innocent. If a suspected man, thrown into the water, floated, he was guilty; if he sank, he was acquitted.

The rites of the Celts were done in secret, and it was forbidden that they be written down. Those of the Teutons were commemorated in Edda and Saga (poetry and prose).

In the far north the shortness of summer and the length of winter so impressed the people that when they made a story about it they told of a maiden, the Spring, put to

sleep, and guarded, along with a hoard of treasure, by a ring of fire. One knight only could break through the flames, awaken her and seize the treasure. He is the returning sun, and the treasure he gets possession of is the wealth of summer vegetation. So there is the story of Brynhild, pricked by the "sleep-thorn" of her father, Wotan, and sleeping until Sigurd wakens her. They marry, but soon Sigurd has to give her up to Gunnar, the relentless winter, and Gunnar cannot rest until he has killed Sigurd, and reigns undisturbed. Grimm's story of Rapunzel, the princess who was shut up by a winter witch, and of Briar-Rose, pricked by a witch's spindle, and sleeping inside a hedge which blooms with spring at the knight's approach, mean likewise the struggle between summer and winter.

The chief festivals of the Teutonic year were held at Midsummer and Midwinter. May-Day, the very beginning of spring, was celebrated by May-ridings, when winter and spring, personified by two warriors, engaged in a combat in which Winter, the fur-clad king of ice and snow, was defeated. It was then that the sacred fire had been kindled, and the sacrificial feast held. Judgements were rendered then.

The summer solstice was marked by bonfires, like those of the Celts on May Eve and Midsummer. They were kindled in an open place or on a hill, and the ceremonies held about them were similar to the Celtic. As late as the eighteenth century these same customs were observed in Iceland.

A May-pole wreathed with magical herbs is erected as the center of the dance in Sweden, and in Norway a child chosen May-bride is followed by a procession as at a real wedding. This is a symbol of the wedding of sun and earth deities in the spring. The May-pole, probably imported from Celtic countries, is used at Midsummer because the spring does not begin in the north before June.

Yule-tide in December celebrated the sun's turning back, and was marked by banquets and gayety. A chief feature of all these feasts was the drinking of toasts to the gods, with vows and prayers.

By the sixth century Christianity had supplanted Druidism in the British Isles. It was the ninth before Christianity made much progress in Scandinavia. After King Olaf had converted his nation, the toasts which had been drunk to the pagan gods were kept in honor of Christian saints; for instance, those to Freya were now drunk to the Virgin Mary or to St. Gertrude.

The "wetting of the sark-sleeve," that custom of Scotland and Ireland, was in its earliest form a rite to Freya as the northern goddess of love. To secure her aid in a love-affair, a maid would wash in a running stream a piece of fine linen--for Freya was fond of personal adornment--and would hang it before the fire to dry an hour before midnight. At half-past eleven she must turn it, and at twelve her lover's apparition would appear to her, coming in at the half-open door.

"The wind howled through the leafless boughs, and there was every appearance of an early and severe winter, as indeed befell. Long before eleven o'clock all was hushed and

quiet within the house, and indeed without (nothing was heard), except the cold wind which howled mournfully in gusts. The house was an old farmhouse, and we sat in the large kitchen with its stone floor, awaiting the first stroke of the eleventh hour. It struck at last, and then all pale and trembling we hung the garment before the fire which we had piled up with wood, and set the door ajar, for that was an essential point. The door was lofty and opened upon the farm-yard, through which there was a kind of thoroughfare, very seldom used, it is true, and at each end of it there was a gate by which wayfarers occasionally passed to shorten the way. There we sat without speaking a word, shivering with cold and fear, listening to the clock which went slowly, tick, tick, and occasionally starting as the door creaked on its hinges, or a half-burnt billet fell upon the hearth. My sister was ghastly white, as white as the garment which was drying before the fire. And how half an hour had elapsed and it was time to turn. . . . This we did, I and my sister, without saying a word, and then we again sank on our chairs on either side of the fire. I was tired, and as the clock went tick-a-tock, I began to feel myself dozing. I did doze, I believe. All of a sudden I sprang up. The clock was striking one, two, but ere it could give the third chime, mercy upon us! we heard the gate slam with a tremendous noise. . . ."

"Well, and what happened then?"

"Happened! before I could recover myself, my sister had sprung to the door, and both locked and bolted it. The next moment she was in convulsions. I scarcely knew what happened; and yet it appeared to me for a moment that something pressed against the door with a low moaning sound. Whether it was the wind or not, I can't say. I shall never forget that night. About two hours later, my father came home. He had been set upon by a highwayman whom he beat off."

--BORROW: Lavengro.

Freya and Odin especially had had power over the souls of the dead. When Christianity turned all the old gods into spirits of evil, these two were accused especially of possessing unlawful learning, as having knowledge of the hidden matters of death. This unlawful wisdom is the first accusation that has always been brought against witches. A mirror is often used to contain it. Such are the crystals of the astrologers, and the looking-glasses which on Hallowe'en materialize wishes.

From that time in the Middle Ages when witches were first heard of, it has nearly always been women who were accused. Women for the most part were the priests in the old days: it was a woman to whom Apollo at Delphi breathed his oracles. In all times it has been women who plucked herbs and concocted drinks of healing and refreshment. So it was very easy to imagine that they experimented with poisons and herbs of magic power under the guidance of the now evil gods. If they were so directed, they must go on occasions to consult with their masters. The idea arose of a witches' Sabbath, when women were enabled by evil means to fly away, and adore in secret the gods from whom the rest of the world had turned. There were such meeting-places all over Europe. They had been places of sacrifice, of judgement, or of wells and springs

considered holy under the old religion, and whither the gods had now been banished. The most famous was the Blocksberg in the Hartz mountains in Germany.

"Dame Baubo first, to lead the cerw!
A tough old sow and the mother thereon,
Then follow the witches, every one."

--GOETHE: Faust. (Taylor trans.)

In Norway the mountains above Bergen were a resort, and the Dovrefeld, once the home of the trolls.

"It's easy to slip in here,
But outward the Dovre-King's gate opens not."

--IBSEN: Peer Gynt. (Archer trans.)

In Italy the witches met under a walnut tree near Benevento; in France, in Puy de Dome; in Spain, near Seville.

In these night-ridings Odin was the leader of a wild hunt. In stormy, blustering autumn weather.

"The wonted roar was up among the woods."

--MILTON: Comus.

Odin rode in pursuit of shadowy deer with the Furious Host behind him. A ghostly huntsman of a later age was Dietrich von Bern, doomed to hunt till the Judgement Day.

Frau Venus in Wagner's Tannhauser held her revels in an underground palace in the Horselberg in Thuringia, Germany. This was one of the seats of Holda, the goddess of spring. Venus herself is like the Christian conception of Freya and Hel. She gathers about her a throng of nymphs, sylphs, and those she has lured into the mountain by intoxicating music and promises. "The enchanting sounds enticed only those in whose hearts wild sensuous longings had already taken root." Of these Tannhauser is one. He has stayed a year, but it seems to him only one day. Already he is tired of the rosy light and eternal music and languor, and longs for the fresh green world of action he once knew. He fears that he has forfeited his soul's salvation by being there at all, but cries,

"Salvation rests for me in Mary!"

--WAGNER: Tannhauser.

At the holy name Venus and her revellers vanish, and Tannhauser finds himself in a meadow, hears the tinkling herd-bells, and a shepherd's voice singing,

"Frau Holda, goddess of the spring,
Steps forth from the mountains old;
She comes, and all the brooklets sing,
And fled is winter's cold.

* * * * *

Play, play, my pipe, your lightest lay,
For spring has come, and merry May!"

--Tannhauser. (Huckel trans.)

praising the goddess in her blameless state.

By the fifteenth century Satan, taking the place of the gods, assumed control of the evil creatures. Now that witches were the followers of the Devil, they wrote their names in his book, and were carried away by him for the revels by night. A new witch was pricked with a needle to initiate her into his company. At the party the Devil was adored with worship due to God alone. Dancing, a device of the pagans, and hence considered wholly wicked, was indulged in to unseemly lengths. In 1883 in Sweden it was believed that dances were held about the sanctuaries of the ancient gods, and that whoever stopped to watch were caught by the dancers and whirled away. If they profaned holy days by this dancing, they were doomed to keep it up for a year.

At the witches' Sabbath the Devil himself sometimes appeared as a goat, and the witches were attended by cats, owls, bats, and cuckoos, because these creatures had once been sacred to Freya. At the fest horse-flesh, once the food of the gods at banquets, was eaten. The broth for the feast was brewed in a kettle held over the fire by a tripod, like that which supported the seat of Apollo's priestess at Delphi. The kettle may be a reminder of the one Thor got, which gave to each guest whatever food he asked of it, or it may be merely that used in brewing the herb-remedies which women made before they were thought to practise witchcraft. In the kettle were cooked mixtures which caused storms and shipwrecks, plagues, and blights. No salt was eaten, for that was a wholesome substance.

The witches of Germany did not have prophetic power; those of Scandinavia, like the Norse Fates, did have it. The troll-wives of Scandinavia were like the witches of Germany--they were cannibals, especially relishing children, like the witch in Hansel and Grethel.

For the fourteenth to the eighteenth century all through Europe and the new world people thought to be witches, and hence in the devil's service, were persecuted. It was believed that they were able to take the form of beasts. A wolf or other animal is caught in a trap or shot, and disappears. Later an old woman who lives alone in the woods is found suffering from a similar wound. She is then declared to be a witch.

"There was once an old castle in the middle of a vast thick wood; in it lived an old woman quite alone, and she was a witch. By day she made herself into a cat or a screech-owl, but regularly at night she became a human being again."

--GRIMM: Jorinda and Joringel.

"Hares found on May morning are witches and should be stoned," reads an old superstition. "If you tease a cat on May Eve, it will turn into a witch and hurt you."



CHAPTER XIII

WALPURGIS NIGHT

WALPURGA was a British nun who went to Germany in the eighth century to found holy houses. After a pious life she was buried at Eichstatt, where it is said a healing oil trickled from her rock-tomb. This miracle reminded men of the fruitful dew which fell from the manes of the Valkyries' horses, and when one of the days sacred to her came on May first, the wedding-day of Frau Holda and the sun-god, the people thought of her as a Valkyrie, and identified her with Holda. As, like a Valkyrie, she rode armed on her steed, she scattered, like Holda, spring flowers and fruitful dew upon the fields and vales. When these deities fell into disrepute, Walpurga too joined the pagan train that swept the sky on the eve of May first, and met afterwards on mountain-tops to sacrifice and adore Holda, as the priests had sacrificed for a prosperous season and a bountiful harvest.

So this night was called Walpurgis Night, when evil beings were abroad, and with them human worshippers who still guarded the old faith in secret.

This is very like the occasion of November Eve, which shared with May first Celtic manifestations of evil. Witches complete the list of supernatural beings which are out on Hallowe'en. All are to be met at crossroads, with harm to the beholders. A superstition goes, that if one wishes to see witches, he must put on his clothes wrong side out, and creep backward to a crossroads, or wear wild radish, on May Eve.

On Walpurgis Night precaution must be taken against witches who may harm cattle. The stable doors are locked and sealed with three crosses. Sprigs of ash, hawthorn, juniper, and elder, once sacred to the pagan gods, are now used as a protection against them.

Horseshoes are nailed prongs up on the threshold or over the door. Holy bells are hung on the cows to scare away the witches, and they are guided to pasture by a goad which has been blessed. Shots are fired over the cornfield. If one wishes, he may hide in the corn and hear what will happen for a year.

Signs and omens on Walpurgis Night have more weight than at other times except on St. John's Day.

"On Walpurgis Night rain
Makes good crops of autumn grain,"

but rain on May Day is harmful to them.

Lovers try omens on this eve, as they do in Scotland on Hallowe'en. If you sleep with one stocking on, you will find on May morning in the toe a hair the color of your sweetheart's. Girls try to find out the temperament of their husbands-to-be by keeping a linen thread for three days near an image of the Madonna, and at midnight on May Eve pulling it apart, saying:

"Thread, I pull thee;
Walpurga, I pray thee,
That thou show to me
What my husband's like to be."

They judge of his disposition by the thread's being strong or easily broken, soft or tightly woven.

Dew on the morning of May first makes girls who wash in it beautiful.

"The fair maid who on the first of May
Goes to the fields at break of day
And washes in dew from the hawthorn tree
Will ever after handsome be."

--Encyclopedia of Superstitions.

A heavy dew on this morning presages a good "butter-year." You will find fateful initials printed in dew on a handkerchief that has been left out all the night of April thirtieth.

On May Day girls invoke the cuckoo:

"Cuckoo! cuckoo! on the bough,
Tell me truly, tell me how
Many years there will be
Till a husband comes to me."

Then they count the calls of the cuckoo until he pauses again.

If a man wears clothes made of yarn spun on Walpurgis Night to the May-shooting, he will always hit the bull's-eye, for the Devil gives away to those he favors, "freikugeln," bullets which always hit the mark.

On Walpurgis Night as on Hallowe'en strange things may happen to one. Zschokke tells a story of a Walpurgis Night dream that is more a vision than a dream. Led to be unfaithful to his wife, a man murders the husband of a former sweetheart; to escape capture he fires a haystack, from which a whole village is kindled. In his flight he enters an empty carriage, and drives away madly, crushing the owner under the wheels. He finds that the dead man is his own brother. Faced by the person whom he believes to be the Devil, responsible for his misfortunes, the wretched man is ready to worship him if he will protect him. He finds that the seeming Devil is in reality his guardian-angel who sent him this dream that he might learn the depths of wickedness lying unfathomed in his heart, waiting an opportunity to burst out.

Both May Eve and St. John's Eve are times of freedom and unrestraint. People are filled with a sort of madness which makes them unaccountable for their deeds.

"For you see, pastor, within every one of us a spark of paganism is glowing. It has outlasted the thousand years since the old Teutonic times. Once a year is flames up high, and we call it St. John's Fire. Once a year comes Free-night. Yes, truly, Free-night. Then

the witches, laughing scornfully, ride to Blocksberg, upon the mountain-top, on their broomsticks, the same broomsticks with which at other times their witchcraft is whipped out of them,--then the whole wild company skims along the forest way,--and then the wild desires awaken in our hearts which life has not fulfilled."

--SUDERMANN: St. John's Fire. (Porter trans.)



CHAPTER XIV

MORE HALLOWTIDE BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

ONLY the Celts and the Teutonics celebrate an occasion actually like our Hallowe'en. The countries of southern Europe make of it a religious vigil, like that already described in France.

In Italy on the night of All Souls', the spirits of the dead are thought to be abroad, as in Brittany. They may mingle with living people, and not be remarked. The Miserere is heard in all the cities. As the people pass dressed in black, bells are rung on street corners to remind them to pray for the souls of the dead. In Naples the skeletons in the funeral vaults are dressed up, and the place visited on All Souls' Day. In Salerno before the people go to the all-night services at church they set out a banquet for the dead. If any food is left in the morning, evil is in store for the house.

"Hark! Hark to the wind! 'T is the night, they say,
When all souls come back from the far away--
The dead, forgotten this many a day!

"And the dead remembered--ay! long and well--
And the little children whose spirits dwell
In God's green garden of asphodel.

"Have you reached the country of all content,
O souls we know, since the day you went
From this time-worn world, where your years were spent?

"Would you come back to the sun and the rain,
The sweetness, the strife, the thing we call pain,
And then unravel life's tangle again?

"I lean to the dark--Hush!--was it a sigh?
Or the painted vine-leaves that rustled by?
Or only a night-bird's echoing cry?"

--SHEARD: Hallowe'en.

In Malta bells are rung, prayers said, and mourning worn on All Souls' Day. Graves are decorated, and the inscriptions on tombs read and reread. For the poor is prepared an All Souls' dinner, as cakes are given to the poor in England and Wales. The custom of decorating graves with flowers and offering flowers to the dead comes from the crowning of the dead by the ancients with short-lived blooms, to signify the brevity of life.

In Spain at dark on Hallowe'en cakes and nuts are laid on graves to bribe the spirits not to disturb the vigils of the saints.

In Germany the graves of the dead are decorated with flowers and lights, on the first and second of November. To drive away ghosts from a church a key or a wand must be struck three times against a bier. An All Souls' divination in Germany is a girl's going out and asking the first young man she meets his name. Her husband's will be like it. If she walks thrice about a church and makes a wish, she will see it fulfilled.

Belgian children build shrines in front of their homes with figures of the Madonna and candles, and beg for money to buy cakes. As many cakes as one eats, so many souls he frees from Purgatory.

The races of northern Europe believed that the dead returned, and were grieved at the lamentations of their living relatives. The same belief was found in Brittany, and among the American Indians.

"Think of this, O Hiawatha!
 Speak of it to all the people,
 That henceforward and forever
 They no more with lamentations
 Sadden souls of the departed
 In the Islands of the Blessed!"

--LONGFELLOW: Hiawatha.

The Chinese fear the dead and the dragons of the air. They devote the first three weeks in April to visiting the graves of their ancestors, and laying baskets of offerings on them. The great dragon, Feng-Shin, flies scattering blessings upon the houses. His path is straight, unless he meets with some building. Then he turns aside, and the owner of the too lofty edifice misses the blessing.

At Nikko, Japan, where there are many shrines to the spirits of the dead, masques are held to entertain the ghosts who return on Midsummer Day. Every street is lined with lighted lanterns, and the spirits are sent back to the otherworld in straw boats lit with lanterns, and floated down the river. To see ghosts in Japan one must put one hundred rush-lights into a large lantern, and repeat one hundred lines of poetry, taking one light out at the end of each line; or go out into the dark with one light and blow it out. Ghosts are identified with witches. They come back especially on moonlit nights.

"On moonlight nights, when the coast-wind
 whispers in the branches of the tree, O-Matsue
 and Teoyo may sometimes be seen, with bamboo
 racks in their hands, gathering together the
 needles of the fir."

--RINDER: Great Fir-Tree of Takasago.

There is a Chinese saying that a mirror is the soul of a woman. A pretty story is told of a girl whose mother before she died gave her a mirror, saying:

"Now after I am dead, if you think longingly of me, take out the thing that you will find inside this box, and look at it. When you do so my spirit will meet yours, and you will be comforted." When she was lonely or her stepmother was harsh with her, the girl went to her room and looked earnestly into the mirror. She saw there only her own face, but it was so much like her mother's that she believed it was hers indeed, and was consoled. When the stepmother learned what it was her daughter cherished so closely, her heart softened toward the lonely girl, and her life was made easier.

By the Arabs spirits were called Djinns (or genii). They came from fire, and looked like men or beasts. They might be good or evil, beautiful or horrible, and could disappear from mortal sight at will. Nights when they were abroad, it behooved men to stay under cover.

"Ha! They are on us, close without!
Shut tight the shelter where we lie;
With hideous din the monster rout,
Dragon and vampire, fill the sky."

--HUGO: The Djinns.



CHAPTER XV

HALLOWE'EN IN AMERICA

IN Colonial days Hallowe'en was not celebrated much in America. Some English still kept the customs of the old world, such as apple-ducking and snapping, and girls tried the apple-paring charm to reveal their lovers' initials, and the comb-and-mirror test to see their faces. Ballads were sung and ghost-stories told, for the dead were thought to return on Hallowe'en.

"There was a young officer in Phip's company at the time of the finding of the Spanish treasure-ship, who had gone mad at the sight of the bursting sacks that the divers had brought up from the sea, as the gold coins covered the deck. This man had once lived in the old stone house on the 'faire greene lane,' and a report had gone out that his spirit still visited it, and caused discordant noises. Once . . . on a gusty November evening, when the clouds were scudding over the moon, a hall-door had blown open with a shrieking draft and a force that caused the floor to tremble."

--BUTTERWORTH: Hallowe'en Reformation.

Elves, goblins, and fairies are native on American soil. The Indians believed in evil manitous, some of whom were water-gods who exacted tribute from all who passed over their lakes. Henry Hudson and his fellow-explorers haunted as mountain-trolls the Catskill range. Like Ossian and so many other visitors to the Otherworld, Rip Van Winkle is lured into the strange gathering, thinks that he passes the night there, wakes, and goes home to find that twenty years have whitened his hair, rusted his gun, and snatched from life many of his boon-companions.

"My gun must have cotched the rheumatix too. Now that's too bad. Them fellows have gone and stolen my good gun, and leave me this rusty old barrel.

"Why, is that the village of Falling Waters that I see? Why, the place is more than twice the size it was last night--I---

"I don't know whether I am dreaming, or sleeping, or waking."

--JEFFERSON: Rip Van Winkle.

The persecution of witches, prevalent in Europe, reached this side of the Atlantic in the seventeenth century.

"This sudden burst of wickedness and crime
Was but the common madness of the time,
When in all lands, that lie within the sound
Of Sabbath bells, a witch was burned or drowned."

--LONGFELLOW: Giles Corey of the Salem Farms.

Men and women who had enemies to accuse them of evil knowledge and the power to cause illness in others, were hanged or pressed to death by heavy weights. Such

sicknesses they could cause by keeping a waxen image, and sticking pins or nails into it, or melting it before the fire. The person whom they hated would be in torture, or would waste away like the waxen doll. Witches' power to injure and to prophesy came from the Devil, who marked them with a needle-prick. Such marks were sought as evidence at trials.

"Witches' eyes are coals of fire from the pit." They were attended by black cats, owls, bats, and toads.

Iron, as being a product of fire, was a protection against them, as against evil spirits everywhere. It had especial power when in the shape of a horseshoe.

"This horseshoe will I nail upon the threshold.
There, ye night-hags and witches that torment
The neighborhood, ye shall not enter here."

--LONGFELLOW: Giles Corey of the Salem Farms.

The holiday-time of elves, witches, and ghosts is Hallowe'en. It is not believed in here except by some children, who people the dark with bogies who will carry them away if they are naughty.

"Onc't they was a little boy wouldn't say his prayers--
An' when he went to bed at night, away upstairs,
His mammy heerd him holler, an' his daddy heerd him bawl,
An' when they turn't the kivvers down, he wasn't there at all!
An' they seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press,
An' seeked him up the chimbley-flue, an' ever'wheres, I guess;
But all they ever found was thist his pants an' roundabout!
An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you, ef you don't watch out!"

--RILEY: Little Orphant Annie.

Negroes are very superstitious, putting faith in all sorts of supernatural beings.

"Blame my trap! how de wind do blow;
And dis is das de night for de witches, sho!
Dey's trouble going to waste when de ole slut whine,
An' you hear de cat a-spittin' when de moon don't shine."

--RILEY: When de Folks is Gone.

While the original customs of Hallowe'en are being forgotten more and more across the ocean, Americans have fostered them, and are making this an occasion something like what it must have been in its best days overseas. All Hallowe'en customs in the United States are borrowed directly or adapted from those of other countries. All superstitions, everyday ones, and those pertaining to Christmas and New Year's, have special value on Hallowe'en.

It is a night of ghostly and merry revelry. Mischievous spirits choose it for carrying off gates and other objects, and hiding them or putting them out of reach.

"Dear me, Polly, I wonder what them boys will be up to to-night. I do hope they'll not put the gate up on the shed as they did last year."

--WRIGHT: Tom's Hallowe'en Joke.

Bags filled with flour sprinkle the passers-by. Door-bells are rung and mysterious raps sounded on doors, things thrown into halls, and knobs stolen. Such sports mean no more at Hallowe'en than the tricks played the night before the Fourth of July have to do with the Declaration of Independence. We see manifested on all such occasions the spirit of "Free-night" of which George von Hartwig speaks so enthusiastically in St. John's Fire (page 141).

Hallowe'en parties are the real survival of the ancient merrymakings. They are prepared for in secret. Guests are not to divulge the fact that they are invited. Often they come masked, as ghosts or witches.

The decorations make plain the two elements of the festival. For the centerpiece of the table there may be a hollowed pumpkin, filled with apples and nuts and other fruits of harvest, or a pumpkin-chariot drawn by field-mice. So it is clear that this is a harvest-party, like Pomona's feast. In the coach rides a witch, representing the other element, of magic and prophesy. Jack-o'-lanterns, with which the room is lighted, are hollowed pumpkins with candles inside. The candlelight shines through holes cut like features. So the lantern becomes a bogey, and is held up at a window to frighten those inside. Cornstalks from the garden stand in clumps about the room. A frieze of witches on broomsticks, with cats, bats, and owls surmounts the fireplace, perhaps. A full moon shines over all, and a caldron on a tripod holds fortunes tied in nut-shells. The prevailing colors are yellow and black; a deep yellow is the color of most ripe grain and fruit; black stands for black magic and demoniac influence. Ghosts and skulls and cross-bones, symbols of death, startle the beholder. Since Hallowe'en is a time for lovers to learn their fate, hearts and other sentimental tokens are used to good effect, as the Scotch lads of Burns's time wore love-knots.

Having marched to the dining-room to the time of a dirge, the guests find before them plain, hearty fare; doughnuts, gingerbread, cider, popcorn, apples, and nuts honored by time. The Hallowe'en cake had held the place of honor since the beginning here in America. A ring, key, thimble, penny, and button baked in it foretell respectively speedy marriage, a journey, spinsterhood, wealth, and bachelorhood.

"Polly was going to be married, Jennie was going on a long journey, and you--down went the knife against something hard. The girls crowded round. You had a hurt in your throat, and there, there, in your slice, was the horrid, hateful, big brass thimble. It was more than you could bear--soaking, dripping wet, and an old maid!"

--BRADLEY: Different Party.

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 Hallowe'en.

Soft gusts of love and memory
Beat at the heart reproachfully;
The lights that burn for those who die
Were flickering low, let them flare high--
It is the haunting Hallowe'en.

--A.F. MURRAY in Harper's Weekly, Oct. 30, 1909.

THE END

