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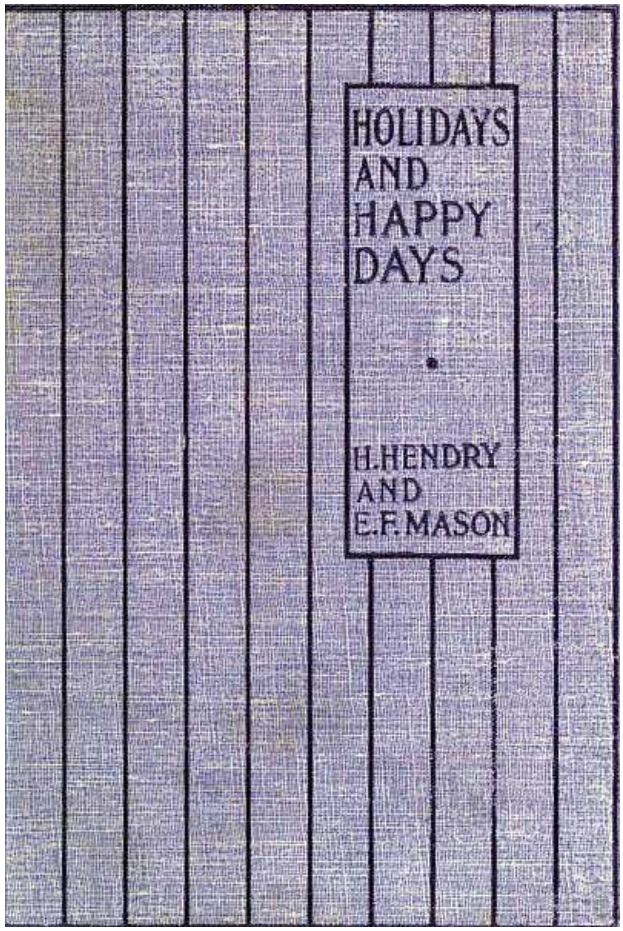

Holidays and Happy Days
H. Hendry and E. F. Mason

Holidays & Happy Days

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Little children are usually snug in bed when the first holiday of the year arrives. It comes at midnight when all is dark out of doors. Sometimes the weather is very cold, here in England, with snow upon the ground; and as it nears midnight on the 31st December there is a great silence beneath the stars. The children are in bed; but in most homes there are grown-up people—fathers, mothers, uncles or aunts—who sit late and watch the clock. They watch; and when the clock strikes twelve they know that the first day of the New Year has arrived.

Then it is no longer silent out of doors. The bells are ringing loudly, and ringing merrily; they are ringing a welcome to the Stranger. So the grown-up people, who have been watching the clock, rise up smiling and wish each other a Happy New Year. The father says to the mother: "I wish you a Happy New Year, my dear," and in saying this they shake hands, and kiss each other. Then [4]
the mother, if she has children in bed, goes upstairs. They are all asleep; so she does not waken them. She simply kisses them, each one, and smiles as she whispers: "A Happy New Year to all of you, my dears." That is how the New Year arrives in England. In Scotland there is more ceremony. There it used to be the custom for the whole household to sit up till twelve o'clock and bring in the New Year with singing and frolic. But that custom is dying out.

You children, I hope, get to know about the New Year in the morning. You find that everybody is looking happy, and wishing happiness to other people. Even although the sun is not shining there is brightness in the house and in the street. People when they meet shake hands and joke and laugh. Your aunt will give you a good hug, and more than likely your uncle will put his hand into his pocket and give you something; something round and bright; something that will make you smile. Then you learn that the New Year brings gifts as well as gladness.

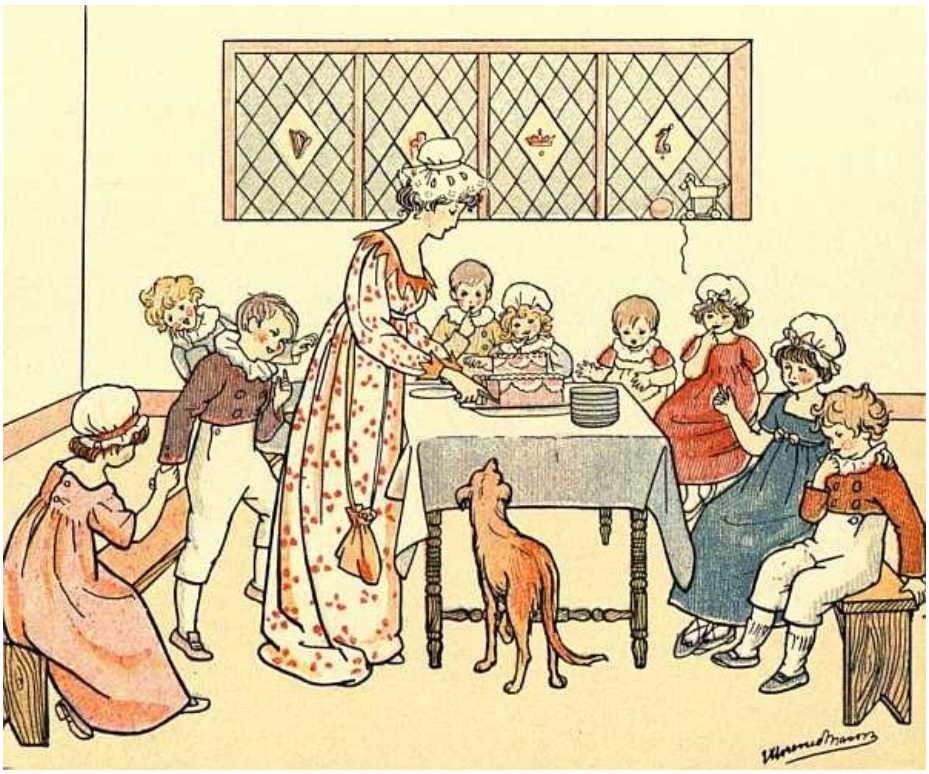
But nowadays the giving of presents is not so common as it used to be. Far back in English history the grown-up people gave each other gifts on New Year's Day, and some of these gifts [5]
were very beautiful and very costly. Diamond necklaces, gold caskets, jewelled swords, embroidered mantles—these were the kind of gifts which rich people gave to each other at the feast of the New Year. Our English Kings and Queens, in the old days, received many such precious gifts. Queen Elizabeth got so many valuable presents in this way that a list of them was kept upon parchment, and in the history books it may still be read.

This custom of giving rich presents to rich people on New Year's Day exists no longer in England; and that is well. For in many cases these costly gifts were given not from kindness but from selfishness; the gift-givers wanted some favour in return. Now, it is an ill thing to begin a New Year with a spirit of greediness. None of you children, I am sure, will do so. Be thankful that you have got the gift of another New Year's Day. It is the first clean page of a fine new book in which you can write just what you please. Write something cheerful; and see to it that there are no blots.

TWELFTH DAY. [6]

The sixth day in each year is called Twelfth Day. That is a little odd is it not? Well, the reason is

this: In very ancient times there was a great Christian Festival which began upon Christmas Day and lasted for twelve days. It was called the Feast of the Nativity, because it was held in honour of the coming of Christ to earth, and both the first day of the feast and the last day were held very sacred. On the last, or twelfth day, special honour was given to the Three Kings who are spoken of in the New Testament as the Three Wise Men who came from the east to Jerusalem, led by a star. The star guided these Three Kings to Bethlehem where they saw the young child Jesus and offered gifts to him of gold, frankincense and myrrh.



At first this feast, which we call Epiphany, was of a very solemn nature, but in the Middle Ages it lost a great deal of its sacred character. The festival of the Three Kings became noisy and [9] frolicsome, and sometimes it was arranged in the form of a little play. In this play three friars or monks were dressed up like Kings, with crowns upon their heads, and a golden star was carried before them. Within the church, near the altar, a manger would be arranged with an ox and an ass, in imitation of the manger at Bethlehem. Here, also, was the child Christ and his mother. To them would enter the Three Kings, accompanied by a merry crowd, and gifts were offered to the Babe—gold, frankincense and myrrh. It was a pretty sight, perhaps, but not at all devout.

In later times still, Twelfth Day was almost wholly given up to frolic and feasting. Special plays were written to amuse the people, and it is probably for that reason we have Shakspere's play called "Twelfth Night." The chief custom of this merry day was the election of a King of the Bean; sometimes there was also a Queen. No doubt this making of a King had its connection with the honour done to the Three Kings in the early festival; it may also be connected with an old Roman custom. Here is how the King was elected on Twelfth Day. A large cake, called Twelfth Cake, was baked for the day, and inside the cake a bean was placed. When all the company were gathered [10] to the feast the cake was cut up, and the fortunate person who got the piece of cake with the bean in it was made King of the Bean, and had charge of the revels. Sometimes the names of the company were put in a bowl, and each one received a piece of the cake as his or her name was drawn by lot.

There was much fun and laughter, you may be sure, as the names were being drawn, the cake cut up, and the bean discovered. It is the kind of fun which you children would have enjoyed. For the Twelfth Cake, in the old days, was usually very large, baked into very queer shapes, and always very nice to eat. Nowadays, the cakes upon Twelfth Day have become much smaller, and in some households this merry day is forgotten altogether. You will agree with me, children, that this is a mistake. It is a mistake to forget the good old customs; and it is doubly a mistake when the custom is made cheerful with laughter and cake.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY. [13]

Not very much is known about St. Valentine. Indeed, there were several saints of that name who were set down in the calendar for loving remembrance on the Fourteenth day of February. One of them was a martyr, and died for the Christian faith at Rome. But these saints have no connection with the ceremonies of St. Valentine's Day except that the priests of the early Christian Church set that particular day apart for a special feast. This feast was meant to take the place of certain ceremonies practised by the common people of the old world in their worship of the Roman gods. But the people did not easily forget their old customs, and some of these were, until recent times, practised on St. Valentine's Day in a new form.

One of these customs was for young men and maidens to cast lots in the choice of partners. Upon the eve of St. Valentine's Day, in England, it was usual for young people to meet together, each [14] one writing his or her name upon a piece of paper. When this was done the papers were rolled up tightly and put into two bowls. Then each young man drew the name of a girl and she was his *Valentine*, and each girl drew the name of a young man and he was her *Valentine*. It was little more than a merry mode of choosing partners for the festival of St. Valentine; but sometimes the young folks took this choice by lot quite seriously, and the partnership ended in marriage.

With the English poets St. Valentine's Day has always been a favourite. You will find it mentioned by Chaucer, Shakspere, and many another of lesser note. At one time it was not uncommon for a young man to send a set of verses to his *Valentine* on the morning of the 14th of February. Most of these were very poor verses, but sometimes a true poet sent a greeting to his Valentine. As when Drayton sent these happy lines:

> Muse, bid the Morn awake,
> Sad winter now declines,
> Each bird doth choose a mate;
> This day's St. Valentines
> For that good Bishop's sake
> Get up and let us see
> What beauty it shall be
> That fortune us assigns.

[15]

Nowadays St. Valentine's Day has lost nearly all its popularity; certainly, it has lost all its merry charm. The time is not so distant—your fathers and mothers may remember it—when the postman's bag was laden with valentines upon St. Valentine's Day. Some of them were in large embossed envelopes and the valentines themselves were glittering things. There was nearly always a little gilt Cupid with his bow and arrows, and the mottoes and verses were always very very sentimental. Some of the valentines, also, were strange and ugly as they came from the postman's bag. These were what is called "mock" valentines, and the people who received them were sometimes very angry. Now the sending of valentines has fallen into disfavour, especially the pretty ones. As for the others, the ugly mock valentines, they are very ill-natured and foolish. Have nothing to do with them; they are not worthy of happy St. Valentine's Day.

PANCAKE TUESDAY

[16]

Pancake Tuesday is quite a nice name is it not? But it is not the only name for this holiday. It is also called Shrove Tuesday, Shrovetide, Fasting-tide, and Fasten-e'en or Fastern's-e'en. I shall try to explain to you why it has all these names. There is, as you must know, a great festival of the Christian Church called Easter. It is the festival of the resurrection of Christ, and to prepare for this solemn festival the ancient Church set apart a period of fasting which we call Lent. This fasting-time begins upon Ash Wednesday, and on the morning of the previous day, in the old times, people went to the priests to confess their sins and get shriven. Hence it was called Shrove or Shriven Tuesday; hence, also, it was called Fasten-e'en, because it was upon the eve of the Great Fast.

After attending church in the morning the people were permitted to enjoy themselves to their heart's desire all the rest of Shrove Tuesday, and before the rigorous fasting-time of Lent began. During the Middle Ages, indeed, this merry-tide lasted for several days, and some idea of the [19] jollity of Shrovetide can be gathered from the way in which the Carnival is held upon the Continent, even now. In England, during the old times before the Reformation, there were great feasts during Shrovetide, and all the old English games and pastimes went right merrily. Some of these pastimes were very rough and cruel—such as cock-fighting and bull-baiting—and would not be permitted to-day. But there were also such games as football and hand-ball; and in certain towns in Scotland the game of hand-ball is still played, sometimes very roughly, upon Fastern's-e'en.

Of all the jollity and junketting of that festive time very little remains to us; almost nothing except the practice of baking and eating pancakes upon Shrove Tuesday. But nowadays the ceremonies connected with Pancake Tuesday are not so important and picturesque as they used to be. In the old days—the days when Shakspere lived—a bell was rung in the morning called the Pancake Bell. At the sound of the bell the preparation of the pancakes began. Wheaten flour mixed with water, spices, eggs and other nice things were dropped into the frying-pan as it sizzled over the [20] fire. Then followed the tossing of the pancakes. This was a time of great fun, because it required a good deal of skill to toss the pancakes and catch them in the pan. In giving them a quick twirl round the pancakes sometimes dropped into the fire. But that did not greatly matter, because there were always plenty of pancakes for everybody; and also plenty of fun in the eating of them.

There was only one person in the company who did not enjoy the fun. For the first pancake tossed in the pan was given to that member of the party who was considered the most lazy. It was seldom eaten, you may be sure, as the Lazy One found it the best plan to run away and hide. But it was a merry day, especially for young people at school and college. At Westminster School, for instance, the cook used to bring his frying-pan with a pancake in it right into the schoolroom and toss it among the boys. In the scramble that followed the boy who captured the pancake unbroken and carried it to the Dean received a guinea for his cleverness. That was a jolly game and it is only one of many that used to be popular on Pancake Tuesday. 'Tis a pity that much of this merry-making has disappeared.>/p>

ST. DAVID'S DAY.

[23]

There is a little corner of Wales which is very dear to all true Welsh folk. It is very close to the sea, near St. David's Head, and its interest gathers round an ancient cathedral of red stone and the holy man who is buried in this cathedral. This old building, with others, stands beside a little stream called the Alan, and here also is the city of St. David's, now a small village. It is all very lonely nowadays, this peaceful shrine near the restless sea, but in the Middle Ages it was a busy place. There were the comings and goings of great Kings and Queens with their followers, and many pilgrims of lesser name visited this shrine to do homage to the memory of the Welsh Saint. There are still many people who visit St. David's, the ancient Menevia, and the cathedral founded by the patron saint of Wales.

A great number of legends—stories of marvel and miracle—have been told about St. David. An angel is said to have been his constant attendant in his youth, and to have ministered to all his wants. In later years he began to preach, making long journeys through Wales and England, and visiting Jerusalem. When he preached to the people, so the old legends tell us, a snow-white dove sat upon the shoulder of the saint. The power to work miracles also was ascribed to St. David; he is said to have healed all diseases, and even raised up the dead. Many other strange and marvellous things are set down in the old chronicles as having been accomplished by the saint.

[24]

It is impossible to believe all these tales, and what we actually know to be true regarding St. David can be told in a few words. What is certain is that he was a great preacher and organiser in the early church, and his powers were so much approved that he was made Archbishop of Wales, taking up his residence at St. David's. We have also been told by the old chroniclers that he was a very good man, and this we can well believe. One of his biographers says of him that he was a guide to the religious, a life to the poor, a support to orphans, a protection to widows, a father to the fatherless. He is said to have died in A.D. 601.

[25]

Having been such a noble and good man the Welsh people have chosen to make St. David their patron saint. On the first day of March, in every year, they hold in remembrance the old preacher and teacher who lived so long ago beside the little stream in Menevia. They also keep in remembrance, by so doing, all that is good and noble in the history of the Welsh race. That is surely a right thing to do. For although Wales is now a part of Great Britain it has a history of its own, a language of its own, and a literature of its own. It is well that these things should be held in remembrance, both by the Welsh folk at home and those who have travelled into far lands, and they set apart St. David's Day as a special day for doing honour to all that is best in the ancient history of their country. It is a happy custom, alike for old and young.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY.

[26]

The national emblem of Ireland is a plant, the leaf of which has three small leaflets. This is called the Shamrock. It is beloved by Irish folks at all times, but most of them wear it conspicuously upon the 17th day of March. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, and that is St. Patrick's Day. There are very good reasons why the Saint should be honoured by Irishmen, yet it is a curious fact that he was not born in Ireland. Indeed, there is some doubt regarding both the time and place of his birth. Some people think that the Saint was born in France, while others hold that his birthplace was at Kilpatrick, near Dunbarton, in Scotland.

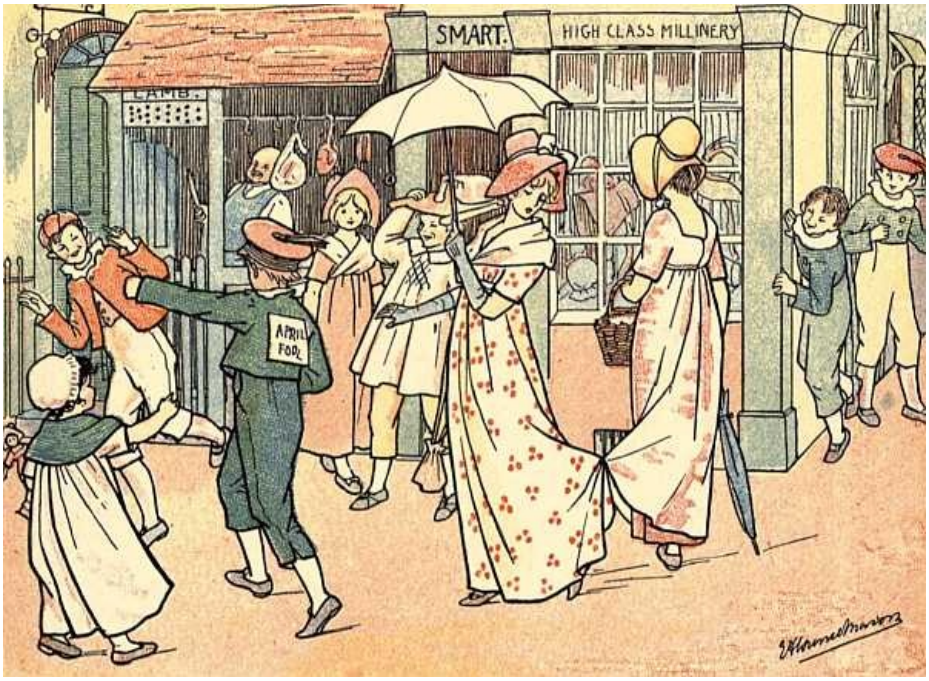
But this we know for certain that St. Patrick, when he was a lad of sixteen years of age, was captured by pirates on his father's farm and carried by them to Ireland, where he was sold into slavery. The Irish Chief who bought the lad lived in County Antrim, near Sleamish Mountain, and [29] he employed Patrick in herding swine. All the people who lived in that part of Ireland at this time —about the end of the 4th century—were heathen. Now, young Patrick had been trained by his father and grandfather in the Christian religion, and it made him very unhappy to think that his master, and the people of Ireland, were ignorant of the true faith; he was also unhappy when he thought of his home and his friends. But after six years he escaped from slavery, and sailed away from Ireland.

He went to another country, either Scotland or France, and there became a priest and a preacher of the Christian religion. Patrick was very successful, and after many years he was made a Bishop. But all this time he kept in remembrance the people of Ireland who had never heard the Gospel, and at last he determined to go and preach the good news in the country where he had been a slave and a swineherd. He was sixty years of age when he landed in Wicklow as the apostle of Christianity to Ireland, but Patrick was a strong old man and he had great faith in his message. Up and down the country he travelled converting the heathen Chiefs and their followers. As many as 12,000 people were baptised with his own hands, and by his efforts the [30] Christian religion was firmly planted in Ireland. A great many marvellous stories are told about the Saint. It is said, for instance, that on one occasion he made a heap of snow-balls blaze up into a fire by simply breathing upon them; and there is also the well-known legend that he drove all the snakes from Ireland by the beating of a drum. The year of his death is uncertain, but we know that he must have been a very old man, and that he was buried at Downpatrick.

This is the man who is held in honour by Irishmen in all parts of the world. On St. Patrick's Day they give themselves a holiday, and make merry,—those of them, at least, who still remain in the old Catholic Church. Surely that is well. For in honouring St. Patrick the Irish people do honour to themselves, and to all that is noble and brave in their long sad history.

ALL FOOLS' DAY.

He must have been a merry person who invented All Fools' Day, but no one can tell when he lived, where he lived, or what was his name. All we know about the matter is that the custom of fool-making upon the First of April is very old, and that it prevails over nearly the whole of Europe. Some people have tried to guess how this odd custom began, and they have found its origin in one of the old Miracle Plays that used to be played by the Monks in the Middle Ages at the Easter Festival. In this play Christ was represented as being sent hither and thither from one judge to another, from Annas to Caiaphas, and then from Pilate to Herod. This explanation is doubtful; it is more likely that the custom of fool-making had its origin in heathen times. In any case, it is a merry custom; and as the joker and the fool have many sons and daughters it is a custom that shall endure yet a while. [34]



The great thing on the First of April is to have a good memory. Most people know about April fooling, but many people forget about it when the special day arrives. Some of you children, no doubt, have forgotten; with the result that the joker with a good memory has made of you an April Fool. In coming down to breakfast you have been asked quite solemnly, let us say, why your hair is brushed to the wrong side. If you have gone and peeped into a looking-glass there was an instant burst of laughter, and then you have become aware that All Fools' Day has come round again. Some boys and girls get angry when they have been thus fooled; but that only adds to their foolishness. A good plan is to laugh with those who are laughing; and you can better this plan by catching the joker off his guard. By so doing you may, if you are clever at keeping a solemn face, make a fool of the joker in his turn. Then the laugh is with you, and you can feel quite pleased with yourself until the next All Fools' Day.

This is the great festival of the Practical Joker, and all is well when his jokes are simple and amusing. To pin a piece of paper on someone's back, or to send the school Dunce into a bookseller's shop for a "History of Adam's Grandfather," is quite good fun. But there are some [35] jokes which are carefully prepared in order to give pain to the persons upon whom they are played; they are not amusing, but merely cruel. It is not a good joke, for instance, to balance a bowl of water upon the top of a door, so that the first person to enter the room gets drenched. Neither is it nice fun to send an innocent boy upon an errand with a letter containing the instruction: "Send the fool another mile." This used to be a common form of April joke in Scotland, and it was not unusual to keep the poor boy trudging long distances for the greater part of the day. This is not fun, but a stupid form of cruelty; and of much the same character as the hoax that is played upon tradesmen who are asked to send goods to a particular house upon a particular morning. It is only when the vans choke up the street from end to end that someone remembers it is the First of April, and that the Practical Joker—a stupid and heartless person in this case—has again been exhibiting his foolishness.

PALM SUNDAY. [36]

In the New Testament you have it written that Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time riding on a colt, the foal of an ass. Two of his disciples, acting upon the instructions of their Master, had entered a village near the Mount of Olives, and there they found the colt by the door without, in a place where two ways met. They unloosed the animal, telling those that stood by and questioned them, that the Master had need of him. Then they brought the colt to Jesus, who mounted upon its back, after some of the disciples had spread their garments thereon. It was thus that Jesus rode into Jerusalem to his death. And when the great multitude of people who were gathered to the Passover saw him coming they cut branches from the palm trees by the side of the way, and spread them on the ground before Jesus, while they cried with joyful voices: "Hosanna; blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." [37]

In this incident you have the origin of Palm Sunday. It is the first day of Holy Week, the week which is dedicated by the Catholic Church to the commemoration of the sufferings and death of Jesus. With the early church throughout Europe it was the custom to lay the branches of a tree upon the altar on this day, and as the palm tree does not grow in Europe, the box, the yew, and especially the willow tree, were used instead. The branches were blessed by the priest, sprinkled with holy water, and then carried in procession through the town. As part of this procession it was sometimes arranged to have a figure representing Jesus sitting upon an ass—either a living figure or one made of wood, sitting upon a wooden animal. This wooden effigy was drawn along upon wheels, and the people in the street scattered the consecrated branches before it. Flowers were sometimes used as well as the branches of trees. [39]

It is a beautiful ceremony, this blessing of flowers and tree-branches upon Palm Sunday in memory of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and it is one to interest all you children. But in the Middle Ages a great many unworthy things, such as the selling of palm-branches in order to avert diseases, became associated with Palm Sunday. Indeed, that whole week, the week that should have been so solemn and sacred, was turned into an occasion of feasting and frivolity. At the Reformation many of these unworthy things were abolished, and the ceremonies in connection with Palm Sunday were considerably modified here in England. Yet in some parts of the country it is still a custom to go a-palming—that is to say, to gather willow-branches—on the day before Palm Sunday. [40]

With the Roman Catholic Church, however, and especially in the ceremonies at Rome during Holy Week, an important place is given to Palm Sunday. The officiating priest blesses the branches, which are then distributed. In the solemn mass that follows, the people in the congregation hold the branches in their hands to the end of the service. In most cases these consecrated branches are taken home and preserved during the year; then they are burned and the ashes used upon Ash Wednesday.

MAUNDY THURSDAY. [43]

There is another day in Holy Week that has old and interesting ceremonies connected with it. This is Maundy Thursday, which always falls, of course, on the day before Good Friday. It is the

day which is set apart to commemorate the humility and tender loving-kindness of Jesus during that week of his suffering and death. You remember that, after the Master with his disciples, had partaken of supper in that upper room in Jerusalem, He rose up and laid aside his garments. Then He took a towel and girded himself. After that He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. In this beautiful act of humility you have the origin of Maundy Thursday; and its odd name is derived from the circumstance that, in the Ancient Church, the anthem *Maudatum novum* was sung at the ceremony.

For the Early Church consecrated this day to acts of lowliness in imitation of Christ. The washing [44]
in public of the feet of the poor became the outward sign of humility in the whole church. In later times this washing was accompanied by gifts, and the ceremony was performed by Kings and Queens. Thus we find, here in England, that Queen Elizabeth performed the ceremony at her palace of Greenwich. The age of Her Majesty being thirty-nine, there were thirty-nine poor people chosen to assemble in her presence on Maundy Thursday. Then the yeomen of the laundry, the sub-almoner, and finally the Queen herself, washed each foot of the poor people in water mixed with sweet herbs, marked the sign of the cross above the toes, and then kissed it. Afterwards various gifts were distributed to these poor people in clothes, food, and money. Since James II. no English monarch has performed this ceremony, but in Spain and Austria the yearly foot-washing upon Holy Thursday is still performed by the Head of the State.

In England the giving of gifts on Maundy Thursday has taken the place of foot-washing. During the reign of George II. the old men and women who gathered in the Banqueting House, at Whitehall, received half-quartern loaves, boiled beef and mutton, herrings red and white, with [45]
small bowls of ale. They were also given shoes and stockings, cloth to make dresses, and a leathern bag filled with money. The money was in silver-pieces, of the value of a penny and upwards; and these coins being made at the Mint for this special purpose were called Maundy Money. During the Reign of Queen Victoria the giving of meat and clothes was discontinued, but the poor people still received their dole or maund.

It is to be hoped that King Edward VII. will continue this practice for—unlike some of the old customs—it is well worthy of being continued. Most people are inclined to be proud, and when people are proud they are usually greedy and selfish. Therefore, it is a good thing to have at least one day in the year set apart to help us to remember that true greatness, the greatness which Jesus Christ expects from his disciples, is only to be attained by lowliness and unselfishness.

GOOD FRIDAY. [46]

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter, and by the Christian Church it is regarded as one of the most sacred days in the whole year. From a very early time it was regarded, in a special degree, as a day of fasting and mourning, because upon this Holy Friday the crucifixion of Jesus is commemorated. In the Church of England before the Reformation, and in the Roman Catholic Church still, the church service upon Good Friday is peculiar. Everything is made to appear

mournful. The priests are dressed in black, at the elevation of the Host a wooden clapper is used instead of a bell, all the glittering ornaments are removed from the altar, and the music is more than usually sad.

But even more strange than that is the chief ceremony. In old times, it used to be that the priests had a figure of Christ fixed to a crucifix which they carried round the church, treated with great reverence, and ultimately buried solemnly by torchlight. Nowadays, this ceremony has been [49] somewhat changed. On Good Friday the crucifix, in the Roman Catholic Church, is placed before the altar. Then the priests, followed by the whole congregation, approach the figure upon the crucifix creeping upon their knees, and reverently kiss its feet. This ceremony, and the chanting of the *Miserere*, have a very solemnizing effect upon all who are present.

Long ago, here in England, there was an odd ceremony performed by the King upon Good Friday. This was called Blessing the Cramp-rings. The ceremony is said to have originated in a wonderful ring, presented by a pilgrim to Edward the Confessor, and long used in Westminster Abbey as a cure for falling-sickness and cramp. On Good Friday the King of England used to go in state to his private chapel, and creep humbly upon his knees towards the crucifix. Following him came the King's Almoner with a silver basin in which were a number of gold or silver rings, and these rings the King blessed. Thereafter, they were given away to be used as an unfailing cure for cramp and epilepsy. In those days everybody believed that cramp-rings had the power to cure cramp, and in [50] England to-day there are still a few people who so believe.

You children, however, do not think of rings upon Good Friday; it is much better to think of hot cross buns. If you ask how it is that buns came to be eaten on this day I cannot answer. All that can be said is that bread, in one or another form, has always formed part of religious observances; and it may be that the spicy buns which you eat on Good Friday are connected with a religion that is older than Christianity. All things change, you know, and even the desire for hot cross buns is not so great as it used to be when people struggled in crowds at the doors of the famous Chelsea bun-houses. On Good Friday we do not so often hear the cry:

One a penny, buns,
Two a penny, buns,
One a penny, two a penny,
Hot cross buns!

EASTER SUNDAY. [53]

On Good Friday the death of Jesus is commemorated, and that being so it is a day of gloom and sadness. On Easter Sunday the rising of Jesus from the dead is commemorated, and that being so it is regarded by the Christian Church as a day of great joy. In the old times, indeed, it was called the Sunday of Joy, and in the Eastern world it is still called the Bright Day. When friends met each other upon Easter Sunday the favourite salutation used to be: "He is risen," and to this was given the reply: "Verily he is risen." Everywhere there was happiness, and this happiness was

shown in many ways. At Easter slaves used to receive their freedom, while at the present day, in Russia, birds that have been shut up in a cage have their cage-doors opened, and are permitted to fly away. That is a beautiful custom; an emblem of the freedom that Jesus brought to the world when he broke the power of Death in rising from the grave. In England this happiness is [54] expressed in a practical manner by many marriages at Eastertide.

Easter Sunday is what is called a movable feast; it is not held each year upon the same day of the month. The rule is, that Easter Sunday is always the first Sunday after the full moon that happens upon, or next after, the 21st of March; and if the full moon happens upon a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after. As regards the name "Easter," it is very likely derived from an old Saxon deity called Eastre; for when the Christian religion was first preached to the heathen the missionaries often took an old heathen festival and turned it into a new Christian festival. Now, in the ancient heathen world there was always great joy and feasting in the spring-time when the sun began to rise higher and higher in the heavens, and there is little doubt that the early missionaries, when they converted the heathen, gave a new meaning to the old joy. Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, had risen from the dead; that was the new gladness.

But Christianity did not quite remove all the rites and ceremonies of the heathen worship; some of them, indeed, linger to this day. The ceremonies connected with fire, for instance, were very prominent in the heathen ritual, and in some parts of Europe bonfires are lit at Easter, while in [55] the Roman Catholic Church great importance is given to the lighting of candles and tapers. Then again, there are the Pasch or Easter eggs—boiled hard and dyed in various colours—which are so interesting to children. This name of Pasch is derived from the Jewish festival of the Passover, and the egg we now regard as an emblem of the resurrection; but all the old peoples of the world looked upon the egg as a symbol of new life coming forth with blessing. It was, in some respects, a sacred thing in the old heathen world of the Egyptians and Persians; while here in this country the Easter eggs used to be blessed by the priests at the altar, and kept all the year as a charm against various ailments. Is it not curious to think, children, how races and religions have come to be linked together by small things? These coloured eggs which please you so much at Easter link you with strange old peoples and their strange old customs.

ST. GEORGE'S DAY. [56]

On the back of some old English coins you will find the figure of a warrior on horseback, and in his hand a long spear with which he is slaying a dragon. That figure with the helmet and spear is St. George, the patron saint of England, and the patron saint of all that is chivalrous in Christianity. Regarding this hero and martyr we know very little; and indeed there are two men who have claims to be regarded as St. George. The most noble of these, and probably the true saint, was born of Christian parents in Cappadocia, became a warrior prince, and having testified for the Christian faith, was put to death at Nicomedia on April 23rd, 303 A.D., by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. From this time, and for that reason, he was venerated by all the Christian Churches, until about the year 494 A.D. George of Cappadocia was formally made a saint by Pope

Gelasius.

A great many legends have gathered round the name of St. George. The most famous of these, of course, is the story of how this Christian warrior slew a dragon that was about to kill and devour a young girl. With heavy labour, and at great risk to himself St. George is said to have rescued the maiden and destroyed the dragon. It is a very interesting adventure, but unfortunately it cannot be accepted as literally true. In these old days it was quite common to attribute to brave men the slaying of a dragon, and that St. George was the bravest of the brave we need not doubt. There is also no doubt that, as a Christian warrior, he fought against all that was sly, cruel and ravenous—these being the evil characteristics of a dragon. [59]

Several nations adopted St. George as their patron saint, for his bravery was known all over Christendom, and he was specially honoured during the Crusades. It was in England, however, that the saint was held in highest esteem. In 1222 A.D. the 23rd April became a great national festival by order of the Council of Oxford; while in the reign of Edward III. the famous Order of St. George, or the Blue Garter, was instituted. This is an Order of Knighthood, and when it was formed there was a great tournament in which forty of the stoutest and bravest of England's knights held the field against all the foreign knights who had been summoned to enter the contest. This Order of St. George, better known as the Order of the Garter, still exists, and its motto is still the same: *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. [60]

In recent times St. George's Day has not been generously honoured by the English people. This is, indeed, a very great pity, because the saint is closely linked with English history; because his emblem—the red cross on a white ground—is to be seen wherever the British flag flies; and because he represents all that is best and bravest in the English character. "God and St. George"; "Saint George and Merrie England"—these were the stout battle cries which led on to victory when the foundations of the British Empire were laid. He is a good patriot, therefore, who remembers St. George's Day.

MAY DAY. [63]

If there is one month in the year that is more joyful than another it is the month of May—the merry month of May. And it is not difficult to understand why it should be so. In Europe it is the month when nature out-of-doors awakens into life; when leaves appear upon the trees; when flowers in profusion peep from among the grass; when the little birds in lane and woodland sing their sweetest. Nature is joyously astir; and in the sunshine of the open sky all people, especially young people, find it good to be alive. That is the reason why May is the merry month. It is Nature's holiday time; the time when she calls upon all folk who are weary of winter and rough weather, to come out of their stuffy houses and enjoy themselves for a little in green places, under the blue tent of the sky.

It is the sun that brings all this new life and gladness as it goes higher in the heavens and shines brighter. So it happened that the ancient inhabitants of these islands, not knowing any better, [64] held a great festival on the First of May to the praise and glory of the sun-god. A relic of this worship lingered until recently in the Beltane fires that were lit on the high hills of Scotland and Ireland. It was the same with the old Romans. They had a goddess of flowers called Flora, and about the beginning of May they held a festival in her honour. The houses were decked with garlands, there was much feasting and dancing out-of-doors, and at these feasts the goddess herself was represented by a beautiful maiden crowned with flowers.

There is reason to think that some of our May Day customs were derived from these ancient peoples. In any case, it has always been a joyful day in England, especially in the ancient times before the Puritans abolished May-poles and merry-making. Not only the citizens of London, but also the lords and ladies of the Court, used to go out to the woods around the city—it was a very much smaller city then—and gather hawthorn blossom. This they called going a-Maying, and the flower of the hawthorn came to be called May-blossom. It was brought into hamlet, town, and city with great rejoicing, and to the sound of music.

Then the whole day thereafter was spent in merry-making. In every town and village there was a [65] tall pole fixed, called a May-pole; and on May Day this pole, the centre of all the frolic, was made gay with great garlands of flowers. Every town and village, also, had a Queen of the May, a maiden who was chosen for her beauty, and who sat apart crowned with flowers, an object of envy and admiration. The lads and lassies sang carols, played at such games as kiss-in-the-ring, and danced the morris dance. Not many of these customs now remain; the May-poles have disappeared; and very few of you children, I suppose, go a-Maying. Do you not think that is a mistake? I do; the work-a-day world is not such a mirthful place that we can afford to forget the cheery old customs, and there are surely many worse ways of spending a day than in dancing round a May-pole. I am sure that you children would like to have the merry-making of May Day brought back again.

ROYAL OAK DAY. [66]

In your English history-book you will find some account of Oliver Cromwell and the many battles he fought against the royal house of Stuart and the cavaliers. One of the most famous of these was the battle of Worcester, fought near the town of that name on the 3rd September, 1651, in which the army of King Charles II. was utterly defeated. As the result of this defeat by Cromwell, all the followers of the King were placed in danger, and the King's life was in great jeopardy. The only thing he could do was to flee out of England, but that was no easy matter because his enemies were numerous, and they searched for him with great diligence. His first plan was to try to reach London before the news of his defeat, and by proceeding from there in disguise he hoped to get a ship on the south coast that would carry him to France. This plan was in part successful, but before he embarked at Shoreham, near Brighton, the fugitive king had many strange adventures and hair-breadth escapes. [67]

One of the most notable of these was connected with a large country house called Boscobel, [69] situated in Shropshire, and about thirty-seven miles from Worcester, where the great battle was fought. In fleeing northward after the fight Charles was accompanied by many of his followers, but in order to give him a better chance to escape the king was advised to leave all the others and make his way to Boscobel where the folk were all friendly. This he did, with trusty Richard Penderel for his guide; and as the house was a lonely place set among woods, the king hoped that he would not be disturbed. But the pursuit after him was very hot, and the soldiers of Cromwell arrived in the neighbourhood. So the king had to seek a hiding-place somewhere out of doors, and one of his friends, Colonel William Careless, suggested that they should conceal themselves among the branches of a large bushy oak-tree that stood near the house. There the two remained for a whole day, with little to eat except bread and cheese, and with the constant fear of being discovered. From where they sat among the branches they could peep through the leaves and see the soldiers searching the woods around. But they were not discovered, and at length the king [70] escaped from that neighbourhood dressed like a countryman in leathern doublet and green jerkin.

After many years, as you all know, the man who hid in the oak-tree was invited to return to England, where he reigned as Charles II. It was on the 29th May, 1660, and the king's thirtieth birthday, that he entered London in triumph. The story of his adventure in the oak-tree having become known, garlands of oak-branches, and the Royal Oak used as a symbol, were prominent in the coronation ceremonies; while from thenceforth the 29th May was established as Royal Oak Day, or Oak-Apple Day. During the Restoration Period, and for long afterwards, it was the custom to go forth into the woods on the morning of that day and gather branches of oak. In town and village the houses were decorated with the woodland spoil, and thus did the people of England exhibit their loyalty to the House of Stuart. Even now the old custom lingers in out-of-the-way hamlets, and the sign of the Royal Oak may still be seen on many an old inn, but the oak-leaf and the acorn have lost all their significance in the world of politics. Oak-Apple Day, I fear, will never again become a general holiday.

MIDSUMMER'S EVE. [73]

Midsummer Day is the 24th June; this is also the day upon which the birth of St. John the Baptist is celebrated by the Christian Church. During the Middle Ages it was a joyous time of feast and merry-making, for in these old times, as you must have gathered from this little book, people did not work and worry so much as they do nowadays. But here is a curious thing: nearly all the ceremonies connected with this holiday were performed the night previous—variously called Midsummer's Eve, or St. John's Eve. These customs and ceremonies were observed in various forms throughout Christendom, and some of them were very strange. I have often had to tell you that many of our holiday practices and usages were founded upon ancient heathen rites and ceremonies; this is perhaps more observable in connection with Midsummer Eve than upon any other holiday occasion.

Flowers and fire were two things that became of great importance on Midsummer's Eve. Nearly every town and village had its bonfire lit in the market-place, and at one time these fires were formally blessed by the priests of the church. One practice connected with these fires, a practice that carries us far back into heathen times, was the way in which the boys and girls leaped through and over the flames. It was also customary to fling flowers and garlands into the fires, while the people, young and old, circled round the blaze with merry antics and gleeful songs. Great processions were also formed to visit the woods and bring back green boughs wherewith to decorate the houses on St. John's Eve. The boughs were hung round doors and windows with joyful shoutings, in recognition of the prophecy that many would rejoice at the birth of John the Baptist. [74]

Midsummer's Eve was regarded as a time when the strangest things might easily happen. That is probably the reason why Shakspere called his play "A Midsummer Day's Dream," and make Puck and the other fairies play such pranks with the mortals that they found wandering out-of-doors. It used to be a common belief in Ireland, and the superstition still lingers, that on this night the souls of all sleeping people left their bodies, and went wandering into strange places, sometimes never to return. To avoid this dangerous possibility it was usual to keep awake during that night. But to keep watch did not always prevent the watcher from having gruesome experiences. In England it was quite a prevalent opinion that if you sat in the church porch all St. John's Eve you would see the spirits of those who were soon to die in the parish come and knock at the church door. [75]

There were various other superstitious practices and beliefs associated with Midsummer's Eve—most of them weird and heathenish—which you will read about when you grow older. They belong to a time when people were very ignorant, and therefore very credulous. Happily, we are forgetting all these foolish beliefs; and for my part I find Midsummer's Eve interesting and beautiful because the light is slow to fade from the sky, because the wild roses make a pleasant scent in the lanes, and because the nightingale from the copsewood brims the darkness with melodious joy.

ST. SWITHIN'S DAY. [76]

In Europe there are various saints who are supposed to have had some influence upon the weather; France has its St. Médard, and England has its St. Swithin. Our actual knowledge of this old English saint is very scanty, and the grounds upon which he has been associated with dry and wet weather are of dubious origin. We are told that St. Swithin was a monk in the Old Abbey of Winchester, and that because of his zeal he became prior and then bishop of that See. We are told, also, that he erected numerous churches, while his piety and learning were such that Egbert, King of Wessex, gave him his son and successor to educate. As was usual with good men in those days, many miraculous deeds were attributed to St. Swithin, and finally he died in the year 862 A.D. He was buried in the churchyard at Winchester, in a humble spot of his own selection.

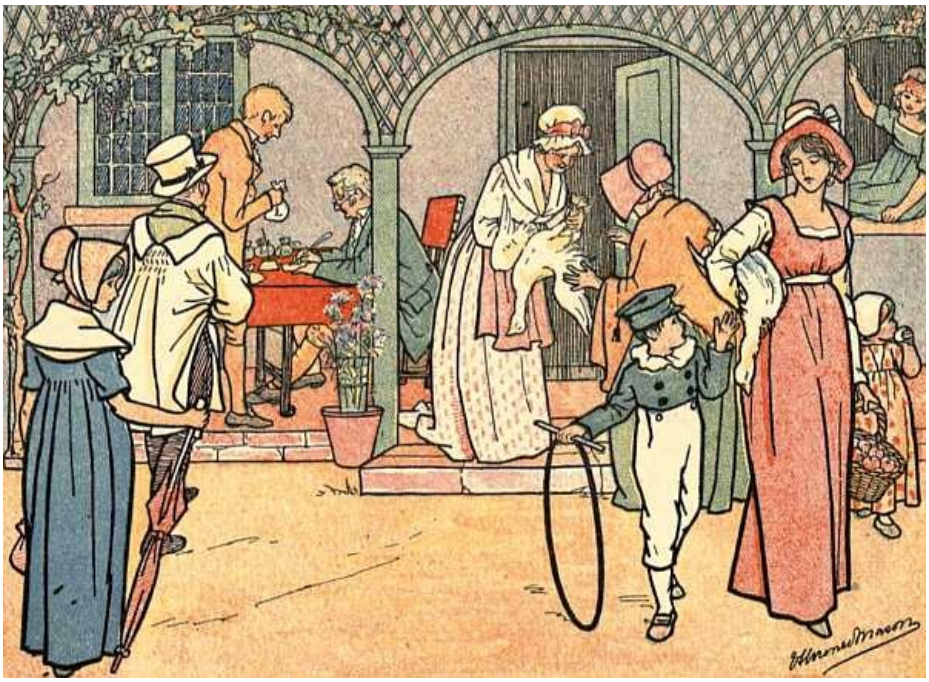
More than a hundred years afterwards the clergy of the diocese of Winchester thought that the [79]
Saint deserved more honour than a grave under the dripping eaves of the Cathedral. Accordingly, they arranged to remove the body inside with great ceremony, and the date selected for this event was the 15th July. Thereafter this day was regarded as St. Swithin's Day because, if we are to believe popular legend, he objected to have his body removed from the humble place in the graveyard chosen by himself. In order to give outward and visible sign of his displeasure violent rains descended on that 15th of July, and the torrent continued for forty days, so that the ceremony of removing the Saint's body was delayed, while the clergy of the diocese were thus rebuked for their presumption. Hence there grew up the popular belief which finds expression in the old rhyme:

> St. Swithin's Day, if thou dost rain,
> For forty days it will remain:
> St. Swithin's Day, if thou be fair,
> For forty days 'twill rain nae mair.

There is, of course, no truth in this old adage, although there are some people who still profess to believe in it. The men whose business it is to watch the weather day by day and write down all they observe, will tell you that it does not matter in the least, as far as the rain of the following [80]
forty days is concerned, whether it is wet or dry on the 15th July. It is even very doubtful whether the ceremony of removing the Saint's body was marked by any special downpour of rain; the fact is not mentioned by the chroniclers of that time. Like many other things connected with holidays and holy days this legend regarding St. Swithin has its origin, probably in the heathen times that preceded Christianity. That would account, at least, for the curious fact that there are several rainy Saints in Europe.

MICHAELMAS DAY. [83]

The 29th September is dedicated as a feast day in the Christian Church to St. Michael and All Angels. In the Bible the Angel Michael is mentioned several times, and always as a fighter, especially against Satan. Thus you find it stated in the Epistle of Jude that Michael the Archangel contended with the Devil regarding the body of Moses. In the book of the Revelation of St. John, again, you will find it written that there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old Serpent, called the Devil. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.



You will gather from this that St. Michael always appears in the character of a warrior; and as the Christian Church accomplished a great deal of fighting, especially during the time of the [84] crusades, it can easily be understood that the warlike Archangel was popular. In old pictures he is usually represented in a coat of mail, and with a short spear in his hand, hurling Satan downwards to the earth. John Milton, in his "Paradise Lost," makes full use of this conception of the Archangel, only that he puts a great and marvellous sword into his hand:

"The sword
Of Michael from the armoury of God
Was given him tempered so, that neither keen
Nor solid might resist that edge; it met
The sword of Satan, with steep force to smite
Descending, and in half cut sheer; nor stayed,
But, with swift wheel reverse, deep entering shared
All his right side: Then Satan first knew pain."

In old times it was usual to have a saint or an angel for one's guardian, and as Michael, according to the Church, was both of these he was popular as a heavenly protector. But an earthly protector was also required, and thus it came about—whether by accident or intentionally I cannot tell—that magistrates were chosen upon Michaelmas Day. Thus you find that the Lord Mayor of London is elected on the 29th of September. This day is also one of the four quarterly terms; the [85] day upon which many people pay their rent; and not always, therefore, a day of joy. In old times when the farmer took his rent to the lord of the manor it was usual for him to carry a fat goose in his hand as a present. From this practice it has established itself as a custom to have a goose for dinner on Michaelmas Day; another good reason is that geese, when fed upon the chance grain of autumn's stubbled fields, are always at their fattest and best. It is curious to note, how that, although a holy day or a holiday may have begun with the adoration of saint or angel, it usually survives for us in some form of eating. But you children, I am sure, do not object.

ALL HALLOW'S EVE. [86]

The night of the 31st October has a character peculiar to itself, and to you children it has some ceremonies that possess special interest. In England it is known as All Hallow's Eve; while in Scotland, where its customs are most varied and remarkable, it is known as Halloween. It is the Eve of All Saints' Day, but there is little or nothing connected with the popular practices of that night that suggest Christianity. On the contrary, they suggest some old pagan worship and a mysterious impish world that holds high carnival for that one night. Many of the customs and rites connected with this revel—described vividly and amusingly by Robert Burns in "Halloween"—are not known to the Scots people of the present day; but some few of them are still practised, even in England.

Nuts and apples become of great importance upon All Hallow's Eve. The nuts are not for eating—although that were probably a wise use to which to put them—but to play a mysterious part in [89] deciding the fate of lovers. For this purpose two nuts are dropped into a bright red fire, side by side, and the name of the lad and lass, whose fates are to be decided, is given to each nut. The nuts themselves give the decision. If they burn quietly together then all is well; but on the other hand, if the nuts (or one of them) jump out of the fire, then things will go ill with the two lovers. Here is how Burns describes the practice:

"The auld guidwife's weel-hoordet nits
Are round and round devided,
And mony lads and lasses fates
Are there that night decided:
Some kindle, couthie, side by side,
And burn together trimly;
Some start awa, with saucy pride,
And jump out ower the chimlie
Full high that night."

Apples have a quite different use. On Halloween they are placed in large quantities in a big tub nearly full of water. The apples are then stirred round vigorously, while the boys and girls, each in turn, try to snatch an apple from the water, not using their hands, but their teeth alone. [90] Sometimes one has to dip one's head right down to the bottom of the tub in chase of a big apple, and that is rather a chilly experience, as I am able to testify. The modern plan of dropping a fork into the tub, over the back of a chair, may spoil, just a little, the apples that are impaled, but it is a good preventitive of a cold in the head—the usual result of ducking for apples.

There are many other customs connected with Halloween, some of them mysterious and uncanny, which you will learn by and bye. But these two, the burning of nuts and the hunting of apples will do you no possible harm. On the contrary, where there is a lot of you children present, they will give much innocent fun and laughter.

GUY FAWKES' DAY. [93]

There is another name for this day; it is sometimes called Gunpowder Plot Day, and that name informs us how it happened that the 5th November became famous in English history. That was the day upon which a few Catholic gentlemen, over-zealous for their religion, determined to destroy King James I., and the Houses of Lords and Commons, by means of gunpowder. It was a gentleman named Catesby who conceived this murderous plot, and he was joined by several other conspirators. The most famous of these, although he can scarcely be regarded as the most guilty, was a gentleman called Guy Fawkes who had fought bravely with the Spanish army in Flanders. He was brought over to England in order to carry out the plot, and like all the other conspirators he took a vow of secrecy.

In itself the plot was very simple. The conspirators hired a house near to the building where Parliament met, and their intention was to dig an underground passage-way between the two [94] buildings, and to prepare under Parliament House a large mine charged with gunpowder. They found difficulties, however, in carrying out this scheme, chief of these being the thickness of the wall through which they had to pierce. Eventually, the digging of this underground passage-way was abandoned, because the conspirators found that they could hire a cellar right under the House of Lords. This would be far more convenient, they thought; so they hired it from a coal-dealer, and put thirty-six barrels of gunpowder into it. The barrels were carefully covered with faggots, and in the month of May, 1605, all was ready to blow the King and his Parliament into the air.

But Parliament did not meet until the 5th November, and by that time the secret had leaked out. There have been great differences of opinion regarding the manner in which the plot was revealed. It appears, however, that a mysterious letter was sent by Mr. Francis Tresham, one of the conspirators, to his brother-in-law Lord Monteagle, warning him regarding the coming disaster. This letter is said to have led to a search in the cellars under Parliament House, but it is quite probable that the plot was revealed in a more direct manner. In any case, the gunpowder [95] was discovered in the cellar, and beside it was Guy Fawkes. He was arrested on the early morning of the 5th November by a Westminster magistrate and a party of soldiers. When the other conspirators heard that the plot had failed they fled into the country, but the most of them were captured, tried for high treason along with Guy Fawkes, and with him were hanged as traitors in St. Paul's Churchyard.

For many years after this plot was discovered the 5th day of November was kept as a national holiday, and the people expressed their patriotism and their Protestantism in huge bonfires, with shoutings and the ringing of bells. Also, it was regarded as the proper thing on this day to parade a scarecrow effigy of Guy Fawkes, which was finally burned as a warning to traitors. Now the day is only remembered by boys who are bent upon a frolic, for this old rhyme has lost much of its significance:

> Remember, remember!
> The fifth of November,
> The Gunpowder treason and plot;
> There is no reason
> Why the Gunpowder treason
> Should ever be forgot!

LORD MAYOR'S DAY. [96]

In London the 9th of November has been regarded, for many centuries, as a day of special importance. It is Lord Mayor's Day. That is to say, the new Lord Mayor of the City of London, who was elected by the freemen of the City Guilds on Michaelmas Day, goes in his state coach to the Law Courts to be "sworn into" office by His Majesty's judges. Until recent times the Law Courts

were situated at Westminster, and in old Westminster Hall some of the greatest trials in English history took place,—such as the trials of Lord Cobham, Strafford, and Warren Hastings. Now the Law Courts are situated in the Strand, near to the spot where stood Temple Bar.

The Lord Mayor of London has still a certain amount of authority within the City bounds, but nothing like what he used to possess. At one time, indeed, in his capacity of Head of all the great trade guilds, he was more powerful than any of the king's nobles, and in London he exercised [99] almost as much authority as the king himself. From this you will understand that when he, in the old times, journeyed from the City of London to the City of Westminster it was a great occasion, because the Lord Mayor was in truth a great man. The stately pageants wended to Westminster on Lord Mayor's Day both by coach and water-barge; glittering pageants that had a real significance. In many cases they were devised by clever play-wrights, and their glories recorded in the verses of the poet laureates.

In the year 1616 Sir John Leman, of the Fishmongers' Company, was Lord Mayor, and part of his pageant was a fishing-boat with fishermen drawing up their nets laden with living fish which they distributed among the people. This boat, set upon a wheeled stage, was followed by a dolphin with a youth on its back; then the King of the Moors, with six tributary kings on horseback; then a lemon-tree (the Mayor's name was Leman) laden with fruit and flowers; then a bower adorned with the names and arms of all members of the Fishmongers' Company; then an armed officer, with a representation of the head of Wat Tyler; lastly there was a great car drawn by mermen [100] and mermaids, and on the top of it was a victorious angel, with a representation of King Richard surrounded by figures that symbolized all the royal virtues.

Some of the Lord Mayor's pageants were even more splendid than this one. Gilded chariots, giants, bowers wreathed with flowers, men in armour, full-rigged ships, satyrs, bannermen—these things, and many other fanciful contrivances, found a place in the Lord Mayor's procession. And this procession still forms a part of London life, but it has lost all its significance; and a great deal of its interest, even as a show. On the 9th day of each November the Lord Mayor's gilded coach, with a few mounted soldiers, the heralds, the aldermen in coaches, the City firemen, and a few symbolical cars block the traffic of London from east to west. It is not an occasion of great historical interest, yet it still draws great crowds, for your true Londoner loves a procession that goes to the sound of brazen music. The Lord Mayor's Show is also—just like a circus procession—beloved of all boys and girls.

ST. ANDREW'S DAY. [103]

In this little book you have already been presented to three patron saints. There was St. David, the patron saint of Wales; St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland; and St. George, the patron saint of England. Now we come to St. Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland, who is honoured by Scotsmen on the 30th November in each year. The first mention of this Saint is in the New Testament where he, with his brother Simon Peter, became a disciple of Christ, after having been a disciple of John the Baptist. After the death of Christ this first disciple of his became a

missionary in many lands. From tradition we learn that St. Andrew travelled and preached the gospel in Scythia, Thrace and Asia Minor. Finally, we are told that he suffered martyrdom for the Christian faith at Patræ, in Achaia. The cross on which he died was in the form of an X, and that is now known as the St. Andrew's cross. [104]

But how did this Saint come to be connected with Scotland? Well, the story told is this: There was once a monk who lived in the fourth century called Regulus, or Rule, who brought the bones of St. Andrew from Constantinople—where they had been deposited in a church by the Emperor Constantine—and buried them near the sea on the east coast of Scotland. There he built a church, and round the church there gradually gathered a little hamlet. In course of time, the hamlet became a City with a cathedral and a university, and in your geography books you will find it called St Andrews. I am not sure that I can ask you to believe all this story, for it is only a monkish legend. But at least part of it is true. If there was no such monk as Regulus, there is certainly a very pleasant city called St. Andrews, in which there is a building called St. Rule's Tower.

Here is another sure thing that I can tell you. There is an Order of Knighthood called the Order of St. Andrew, although it is more often called the Order of the Thistle. It was created by James II. in 1687, and it includes the King and sixteen knights. The insignia of the Order consists of a gold collar composed of thistles interlaced with red; the jewel is a figure of St. Andrew in the middle of a star of eight pointed rays; and the motto of the Order is *Nemo me impune lacessit*. This is a motto which Scotsmen carry with them all over the world. [105]

All over the world, also, Scotsmen keep in remembrance two days; and on these days they meet together to express love of the old home. One of these days is the 30th November—St. Andrew's Day. Curiously enough, it is not a holiday in Scotland, nor do the people there hold it much in remembrance. But when a Scotsman goes into a strange country—though it be no further than London—he begins to think a very great deal of his homeland, and all the ill things he said of it when he lived there are quickly forgotten. Bleak and barren it may have been to them once, but when Scotsmen meet on St. Andrew's Day, or on the birthday of Robert Burns, they discover that Scotland is the most lovely country in the world. This is just as it should be. I hope that all you children, wherever you may travel, will keep a great love for the land where you were born.

CHRISTMAS EVE. [106]

Of all nights of the year there is not one that is more anxiously awaited by young people than the night that precedes Christmas. Then begins the great festival of the year; the festival in honour of the birth of Christ; the festival that reminds us of the Child born in a manger, of the shepherds near Bethlehem watching their flocks by night, and of the angels that sang of peace and goodwill to men. It is the most joyous of all holiday seasons; prepared for long before, and remembered pleasantly long afterwards. This is true of England to-day, and it was even more true of the England of the olden times—as you will find if you read Sir Walter Scott's poem of *Marmion*:

"England was merry England, when
Old Christmas brought his sports again.
'Twas Christmas broached the mightiest ale;
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft would cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year."

At midnight on Christmas Eve the bells are rung, and in Roman Catholic churches the first of the three masses is celebrated,—Christ's masses. But although this is a Christian festival there are curious customs observed which take us back into the old heathen world. There is the miseltoe bough, for instance, which you hang up in the hall; and there is the Yule log. The old Druids had a feast at this season—the time of the winter solstice—when the chief Druid cut the miseltoe from the oak-tree, where it grew, and divided it among the people, who hung it up over their doorways as a charm to bring good-fortune. Then, again, the Yule log is a relic of the ceremony in which the Norsemen lighted great bonfires in honour of their gods. To bring home the Yule log on Christmas Eve is not so common as it used to be, but it deserves to be remembered as one of the most joyous of old English customs. [109]

So, also, are the carols, the waits, the mummers, and the games of Christmas time. Some of these games and mummeries were a little too boisterous for our modern taste, probably because they had their origin in the heathen Saturnalia of old Rome. But we still love to hear the waits tuning up on a clear frosty night, the game of snap-dragon is still a noisy joy, and the carol-singers are still welcome. I am sure you like that old carol which begins: [110]

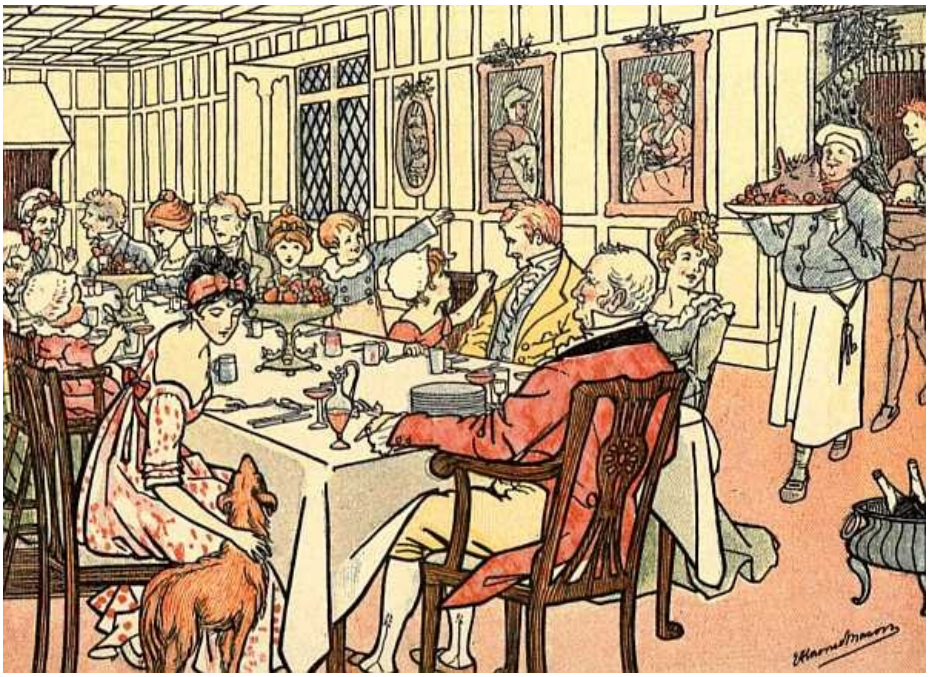
"God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray."

But probably the best thing you children like about Christmas Eve is the ceremony of hanging up your stockings in expectation of all the things that are to come to you from the wallet of Santa Claus. That is the great event. Some of you, I believe, try to lie awake until Santa Claus comes with the fruit and the toys. But that is never a success. All the best gifts come to us when we do not peep and watch.

CHRISTMAS DAY. [113]

On Christmas Day, in most households, the children are the first to make themselves heard. There are shouts of wonder and glee from the nursery bedrooms when it is discovered that Santa Claus has actually paid his long-talked-about visit, and that he has brought in his wallet just the

things that were desired. The shouts of one awakens all the others, and the chatter is great as the children rush about displaying their new-found treasures to one another. This morning the nursery rules are disregarded, because Christmas comes but once a year. Children are permitted to run upstairs and downstairs in their night garments; to skip about and laugh and chatter; and even to appear late at the breakfast table. It is more than likely, indeed, that the breakfast itself will be late, for the grown-ups in most households are usually as excited as the children. But it is Christmas Day, a day of joy for everybody. All the old stiff rules are relaxed for this happiest day of all the year. [114]



Yet the church must not be neglected, nor must it be forgotten that Christmas is a sacred festival. To do honour to the Babe Jesus that was born in a manger at Bethlehem—that is the real meaning of the gladness of Christmas Day. So all you children should love to go to the church in the forenoon. It will be pleasant for you in many ways, especially if the air is clear, with a touch of frost in it, and the winter sun shining brightly. In any case you will find that the service in church, like the church itself, is brighter on Christmas Day than at ordinary times. You will like to see the old church trimmed up with holly and holly-berries; you will join in the cheerful Christmas hymns with more than your usual heartiness. It will be pleasant for you to think that all over the world, men and women of every nation are doing honour to One who was once a child like yourselves.

Then it is home to dinner, a real Christmas Dinner. I do not suppose that you will dine with a boar's head on the table, or that you will be permitted to taste a peacock stuffed with spices and sweet herbs. These were two of the dishes that figured in the good old times, but they have long been discarded. Yet the Christmas goose is still popular, and in almost equal favour is the roast beef of Old England. With you children, however, the plum-pudding and the mince pies and the fruit will be in most demand. How many helpings? I dare not say how many, for Christmas Day brings its own appetite, but you must try—just a very little—not to be greedy when the pudding comes in ablaze. [115]

Because greediness is ugly, and also because Christmas does not end with dinner-time. There is the evening with its romps, its games, its dances and its Christmas Tree. It is the Christmas Tree, probably, that will give you most pleasure, with all its glittering ornaments, its coloured flags, and its lighted candles. This is a pleasure which English children, in the old times, did not share, because the Christmas Tree for children was only introduced to this country in the reign of Queen Victoria. Indeed, the whole tendency nowadays is to make of Christmas a children's holiday. This is well; because by so doing—by making the lives of all children, and especially all poor children, brighter at this season—we shall give most honour and praise to the Babe that was born in lowly Bethlehem.

BOXING DAY. [116]

When people are in a good humour—and everybody is supposed to be in a good humour at Christmas—they find it easy to give little gifts to their relations, friends, children and servants.

On Christmas Day these gifts are given to friends and the children of the household, but on the day after Christmas the servants and dependents obtain their share of the gifts in what is called a Christmas Box. Hence the 26th December has come to be recognized as Boxing Day. This is a very old custom, and probably it has its origin in certain customs that were observed by the Romans during the Saturnalia. At that season presents were distributed to all, and for one day, at least, the Roman slaves received the gift of freedom. That was a good custom.

It was wise for the early Christian Church to adopt this method of giving presents at Christmastide, but the custom has lost some of its wisdom by use. The art of giving wisely is a very difficult art; almost as difficult as the art of receiving wisely. At Christmas time this becomes very plain to us, and it is especially obvious to us on Boxing Day. Many of the gifts bestowed on that day are bestowed with a grudge, and received as a matter of right. That is not as it should be, for all pleasure is lost when a gift is bestowed in a stingy spirit, and taken with a thankless hand. I feel sure that you children do not give or receive your Christmas boxes in that manner. If you have any little gift to bestow upon the people who do you a service throughout the year, you will do it cheerfully. And if any one gives you a little gift, do not turn it over and over looking at all sides, but accept it with thankfulness and a cheerful countenance. By so doing you will find that Boxing Day is one of the most pleasant days in all the year. [119]

For a London child there is an interesting event that always happens on the 26th December. The pantomimes begin upon Boxing Day. Your old friends the Harlequin, the Clown, the Pantaloon bounce upon the stage with all their old antics and most of their old jokes. But the more ancient the jokes are, I think you like them the better. When I was a boy I liked to see the Clown play tricks upon the policeman, and startle innocent people with a red-hot poker. I am sure that you feel just like that to-day, and that you laugh as heartily as I did. There is nothing better than laughter; and throughout England, in every playhouse, a great tide of laughter begins upon Boxing Day. [120]

And now we have reached almost the last day of the year, and quite the last page of this little book. Since New Year's Day we have travelled together, and I have tried to explain to you the meaning of the various Holy Days and Holidays. I have tried to make the explanations interesting, and not exactly like the dull books that grown-ups read. But I am not sure that I have succeeded; holidays are stupid things when they are set down in print. It is far better to take them just as they come along, and enjoy the good things they bring. Holidays are like the pictures in a dry book. When I was a boy I sometimes skipped the reading and enjoyed the pictures. You can skip the reading in this book if you like.

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