

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

February 20.

COLLOP MONDAY: also, sometimes, Shrove Monday. The period of merrymaking and feasting before Shrove Tuesday and the beginning of Lent known as Shrove Tide or Carnival, as the latter name is intended to suggest, bade farewell to meat before the entry upon the Lenten or spring fast. In the north of England this survived in the custom of eating collops (slices of bacon or salted meat) with eggs as one of the dishes at dinner on the Monday before Ash Wednesday.

February 21.

SHROVE TUESDAY. The day for the confession of sins or shriving, also the day on which the merrymaking of carnival culminates. In England Shrove Tuesday was a holiday and occasion of merrymaking both before and after the Reformation. The summons to confession was by the ringing of a bell, which continued to be rung after the Reformation but was known as the Pancake Bell. In England the eating of pancakes and the tossing of the pancake in Westminster School are now practically the only survival of the Shrove Tuesday feast and its ritual.

As a holiday Shrove Tuesday was especially associated with the freedom of the apprentices and workers, who jealously guarded their privileges of "doing what they list." They also joined in the customary activity in searching out and carting women of ill fame and their male companions at this time. The licence permitted to the 'prentices may be compared with the privileges allowed school children in some parts of Scotland on this day, which are similar to those permitted at Candlemas. At Bromfield, in Cumberland, the scholars of the Free School used to bar out the schoolmaster for three days. The articles of capitulation specified the times of study and play in the coming year, and stipulated the immediate playing of certain games—a cock-fight and a football match.

Cock-fighting, one of the most popular of the amusements of Shrove Tuesday in England, was also practised in Scotland, especially by schoolboys. Cock-throwing or baiting (sometimes hen baiting) was also widely practised, when sticks were thrown at a cock tethered to the ground. Sometimes two metal cocks were used in a game in which missiles of lead were thrown at the cocks by opponents, each standing behind his own bird. Cock-throwing has been explained as an expression of the hostility of Saxon and Dane, or of our enmity with the French, but the cock is almost certainly a substitute for a human victim.

In Wales such hens as did not lay eggs before Shrove Tuesday were thrashed by a man with a flail, who received for his pains any hen which he killed.

Football was an important feature of the Shrovetide observance, and in nearly every town or village the streets were the scene of a vigorous and sometimes violent game. The contest was usually between two wards of the same town, or two towns or villages. In so far as it was a ritual observance, judged by analogy, it represents the struggle between winter and spring.

At Ludlow the contest took the form of a tug-of-war, attended by the Mayor and corporation. In other localities, matches at battledore and shuttlecock, especially between men and women, were played.

A curious and significant custom is recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in February 1779. The writer saw in a Kentish village a figure called a Holly Boy being burnt by boys. This had been made by the girls but stolen from them. In another part of the village the girls were burning an Ivy Girl which

they had stolen from the boys. The representation of the two sexes warrants the inference that the figures originally represented the male and female principle in Nature. Similar male and female figures appear in the processions which are found on the Continent at this and other times of the year. Sir James Frazer gives a number of instances. In the case of the processions on or about Shrove Tuesday, the significant feature is that the human figure, which is the central object of the celebration, is either torn to pieces or burnt. Sometimes in the latter case the fertility of the crops in the coming season is prognosticated by the height of the flames. In this custom of 'burying the Carnival,' it may be taken that the lay figure is the surrogate of a human victim who represented the god of vegetation. Similarly, the *boeuf gras* of the *Mardi Gras* celebrations in France is the spirit of fertility in flocks and herds.

In Roman Catholic countries the celebration of Carnival has generally survived with greater vigour than in the Protestant. Certain features are crucial. It is a period of freedom or licence. Disguise is worn which, like the skins worn by those who took part in the Lupercalia, may be either a protection against evil spirits, or an attempt at assimilation to the deity. Finally, there is usually some personification, human or animal, around which the festival centres.

February 22.

ASH WEDNESDAY. PULVER WEDNESDAY (*Dies Pulveris*). The opening day of the Lenten fast takes its name from the custom of marking each member of the congregation in church with the cross in ashes which have been blest by the priest. The ashes should be those of the palms used on Palm Sunday in the previous year. There is a reference to the practice in Anglo-Saxon times, but it was abandoned in England at the Reformation.

It is said that originally Lent did not begin until the following Sunday, but that Ash Wednesday and the succeeding days were incorporated in the observance to equalise it with the forty days' fast of Our Lord. It is, at least, true that after the solemn service of the day was over, the remainder was given up to merrymaking similar to that of Shrove Tuesday. Sometimes and in some places this included the procession, in which a figure was carried and afterwards destroyed. One such is recorded from Marseilles. Similarly, in England, Jack-a-Lent, a lay figure made from an old suit of clothes stuffed with straw, was carried in procession, pelted with sticks, and afterwards pulled to pieces.

In Germany it is said—the exact locality is not recorded—that the youths dragged the maidens, accompanied by a fiddler, in a cart until they reached some lake or river 'and there wash them favouredly.' Similarly, in England the Fool Plough, which formed part of the Ash Wednesday observances, and was drawn by youths while the girls sat on it, also ended its course in a pond—a piece of horse-play which had degenerated from a rain or fertility charm.

As usual on such occasions, children begged from door to door with an appropriate song, the custom being known as 'clacking,' from the fact that they carried pieces of wood which they clacked before the door, hoping to receive pieces of bacon for a feast. If they failed they stopped the keyhole with mud. It is also recorded that in the evening boys used to run along carrying firebrands and torches. In Dijon on the first Sunday in Lent, known as Firebrand Sunday, large bonfires were lit in the streets, a custom derived, it is said, from the practice of carrying lighted torches of straw to drive away 'badder' from the earth—in other words, evil spirits.