

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

April 15.

LOW OR WHITE SUNDAY.—Said by a seventeenth-century writer to be so called because in the primitive Church neophytes baptised and clothed in white garments at Easter Eve put off their white clothes on this day and were admonished to remember that they were made *low* as little children of Almighty God such as ought to retain in their lives and manners the memory of the Paschal feasts they had accomplished. An alternative was that it was the lowest or latest day for satisfying the Easter obligations.

In the Highlands of Scotland, 'Old Men's Easter' was a repetition of the Easter feast if on a lesser scale. In the Greek Church its popular observance is a continuation of the Easter festivity. In Macedonia on Easter Tuesday the people repair to the open country where the girls dance, in more or less ceremonial dances, and the youths amuse themselves with contests in shooting at a mark, wrestling, jumping, running, and the throwing of heavy stones. On the following Sunday, known as St. Thomas's Day, a similar celebration, but on a more elaborate scale, takes place. Prizes are given for the principal events—for running and wrestling a kid or a lamb, the winners in these events being acclaimed and marching off with their prizes over their shoulders to the accompaniment of shouts and the firing of guns.

It is evident that in the popular observances throughout Lent and at Easter we are dealing with festivals connected with both seed-time and the advent of spring which took place originally on no fixed date, but were observed at different times in different localities, or perhaps even on various occasions within the same community.

That the two classes of festival are not necessarily coincident or immediately consecutive appears in the popular religion of India. The Holi festival in veneration of fire and lights is a spring fertility festival celebrated in northern India in the month of Phālgun (February-March). Fire is lighted on the night of the full moon, fuel being taken from all the villagers for the purpose, or a tree is set on fire. Processions are made round the fire, men and women jump through the fire, and offerings are thrown into the flames. Foul obscenities of act and word are used, and sometimes there is a procession of a mock king—an Easter ceremonial which survived in Cornwall at Lostwithiel, but as a solemn observance. In contrast, the agricultural new year begins with a festival in later April, which is a time of great solemnity. Both plough and seed are consecrated, small portions of the latter being sowed ceremonially; and cutting the first sods in ploughing or digging—evidently an act of peril—are performed by a holy man. Among the Nagas the transplanting of the first five rice plants is done by the village priest, and a libation made. Such a solemn rite is almost necessarily made the occasion for mourning lost relations. Omens are taken of the coming harvest, and ceremonial contests such as mock fights or tug of war between the women and girls on one side and the men and boys of the village on the other, promote fertility or foretell the harvest.

Among the Malabars, in the earlier half of April, but usually between April 10 and April 14, the vernal equinox is celebrated, marking the agricultural new year. The first thing seen on Vishu day is an omen of fortune for the whole year, judicious prearrangement usually securing a desirable object. Presents of money are made to the junior members of the

family and the servants. The spade furrow is laid and an offering made to the elephant god. The Chāl is the most important of these agricultural ceremonies, though not now often observed. It demanded the services of a professional astrologer to fix the propitious time and place for cutting the first furrow. A new ploughshare was fitted and a handful of seed was thrown ceremonially into the first furrow. A coconut was cut on the ploughshare to foretell the character of the harvest, in accordance with the direction of the cut and the part at which the nut was divided. The actual seed is not sown until May.

April 17.

ST. PETER GONZALEZ OR ST. ELMO: *b.* in the town of Astorga in Spain, 1190, *d.* 1240. He accompanied King Ferdinand in the expeditions against the Moors and was present at the capture of Cordoba. Afterwards he went on evangelical missions among the degraded peasantry and among sailors. He is especially associated with the protection of the latter. In art he is represented as holding a blue candle, and the confraternities of St. Elmo carry blue candles in their processions. This is in reference to the *corposant* (*corpo santo*), the blue electric discharge which in the Mediterranean appears on the tops of masts of ships under certain conditions of weather, and is taken to ensure the safety of the ship.

Virtues have been added to St. Elmo to which he is not entitled in making him responsible for this light, for the belief is much older. Several other saints have had the protective light assigned to their province—St. Anselm of Lucca or St. Erasmus, names of which, it is suggested, St. Elmo or St. Telmo may be corruptions. Frequently the saint is duplicated, hence St. Cosmas and St. Damian or St. Crispin and St. Crispian, the last-named pair being especially connected with the protection of sailors and ships in the English Channel, and more particularly in Kent, owing to the proximity of the Goodwin Sands. St. Nicholas is also popular there for the same reason. The twin cult, and its association with maritime activities, however, antedates Christianity. The Dioscuri and other pairs of brothers, such as Romulus and Remus, from whom the name St. Elmo may really be derived by amalgamation, were specially connected with navigation and the protection of sailors as part of a great protective cult.

April 21.

ST. MAELRUBIUS OR MAELRUBHA, a member of the Clan Cinel-Eoghain of Co. Londonderry and a descendant of the famous Niall of the Nine Hostages. He passed over to Scotland, becoming a zealous apostle among the Picts and founding the church of Aporcrossan or Applecross in A.D. 672 or 673. He was patron saint of all the coast from Applecross to Loch Broom. His cult has evidently subsumed a number of local cults, and his name appears in a number of varying forms. Partly for this reason his festival has been identified with others occurring later in the year. His relation to paganism is suggested by his association with a well on Inis Maree noted for the cure of insanity, and by his patronage of several fairs in August and September. For neglect of his festival in August at harvest-time men's houses were burnt, while those of the men who observed it were preserved. The saint's influence has not waned. When the present manse at Applecross was building, the builder was warned in a dream to desist from using a fragment of the saint's tombstone. Later he was thrown from the scaffolding and his skull fractured on this very stone.