

## Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

June 17.

ST. MOLING LUACHRA, Bishop of Teach Moling, now St. Mullins, Co. Carlow (late seventh century, *d. circ.* 696), a descendant of the Leinster royal line. The interest of the legends and cult of the saint lies in their very evident connexion with earlier pagan belief. The saint settled at Rosbrock—'Badger Wood,' an ancient name for Tegh Moling—a place also associated with Finn MacCumhaill. St. Moling is said to have built here the first mill in all Ireland, and in a time of scarcity to have initiated the use of rye for food among the inhabitants. He spent many years in irrigation work with his own hands, and acted daily as a ferryman over the River Barrow.

St. Mullins, situated on the banks of the Barrow near the confluence of one of its tributaries, later became a place of considerable strategical importance. It was the site of a round tower and was a point of defence of the English Pale. The story of the saint's activities as ferryman, his association with milling, the cultivation of rye, and irrigation work, the name 'Badger Wood,' probably a sacred grove, and the existence of a dun or tumulus near by, point to this locality having been a stage on an early line of communication which became an important centre of pagan belief and culture.

The famous artificer Goban Saer is said to have constructed an oratory of oak for the saint, and several stories are connected with the building work of St. Moling. He is also associated in legend with both trees and stones. He lived for seven years in the hollow trunk of a tree, and one of the miracles which took place at his intercession was the transport of a huge oak felled by his workman to the banks of the Barrow to enable it to be cut up. The nature of the story points to this having been a sacred tree. He also shared in the allocation of the wood of the great yew of Lethglen felled by St. Molaise. When his great irrigation channel was completed, after many years of work, all those present waded through it against the current, and the saint undertook to intercede for all who did likewise in after days. This continued to be the practice of all the many pilgrims of both sexes who resorted there in after times, thereby obtaining remission of their sins and relief in illness. It continued to be the practice to walk barefoot through the traditional channel when it had become overgrown with thorns. On one occasion St. Moling cast the dead body of a young man into this channel, whereupon he came to life and swam about, though unable to swim before.

Pilgrims to St. Mullins venerated the saint by saying two prayers each of the nine times they circled on their knees in the largest of the buildings around a great stone on which the saint was said to have celebrated mass, placing a pebble on the stone for each round. They then deposited a leaf in the window of the inner shrine under which the altar had once stood and kissed the stone beneath before they resumed their shoes. The churchyard was much used for interments, and it was the custom to follow the practice, of pagan origin, of bearing the corpse around the churchyard before interment. Both legends and practice point to a survival of a pagan cult.

St. Moling was the patron saint of Leinster, and in particular of the royal Kavanagh clan, who were always buried in his churchyard. He is said to have negotiated the abrogation in favour of Leinster of the Borumha tribute to the High King of Ireland, which was afterwards reimposed in the eleventh century by Brian, known, in consequence, as Boru.

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June 23.

ST. JOHN'S EVE—MIDSUMMER EVE.—The summer solstice was the most important of the festivals of the year among the Aryan peoples. The most significant survival of its observance is the wide-spread custom of the midsummer bonfire or need fire. In Celtic Britain the importance of the fire festivals of May 1 and Hallow-e'en point to a different calendrical system; but, either by transference or by superposition, the midsummer observances in the British Isles duplicate the May fire festival.

Under the Christian Church, the popular observances at midsummer have been connected with St. John the Baptist, but there can be no question as to their derivation from earlier pagan custom. Certain rites of Adonis, for example, of which Frazer thinks a survival is to be found in customs connected with St. John which are found in Sardinia and Sicily, were observed in June. There was at Rome a midsummer saturnalia celebrated by slaves and plebeians. It was specially connected with the fire-born Servius Tullius, and was in part a water and flower festival. It is also significant that the Mohammedan Berbers of Algeria and Morocco still observe traditional midsummer customs analogous to those found elsewhere, although this date does not appear in the Moslem calendar.

The turn of the year, when the sun has attained its zenith, is for a primitive people a critical period. Frazer, indeed, has suggested that the midsummer observances may have been intended to strengthen the sun as his power begins to wane. The part played by water in many of them may be taken as an index of the anxiety of the people for the prosperity of the harvest now at hand. The apparent combination of spring and midsummer in the fact that in Sweden St. John's Eve is the day for the observance of the maypole festival, in association with the practice of jumping through fires, may be due to climatic conditions; but in some parts of Russia the death and resurrection of Kupalo, which takes place on this date, is also associated with both fire and water. A straw figure dressed in woman's clothes with necklace and floral crown, and a tree felled for the purpose named Marena (winter or death), are the central figures of the festival, the straw figure being carried by couples as they jump through the fires. On the next day the figure is stripped and thrown into a stream. Frazer quotes a number of similar customs from various localities in Russia which take place between the feast of St. John and the end of the month.

It is significant of the critical character of this period that it should be regarded as a time for divination. By a familiar process of inversion, the measures originally taken to avert a contingent evil or secure a benefit become a forecast of the event. This is especially to be seen in the widespread customs associated with St. John's Eve, which foretell the character of the future partner in marriage, for example, by means of a looking-glass, in which the form of the future husband will appear looking over the inquirer's shoulder, as in Scotland and in Greece, or by placing it under the pillow, as in the Balkans, when it will affect the maiden's dreams. In Russia, the Balkans, Greece, and many parts of Europe, the white of egg, or melted wax, thrown into water, are believed to be equally efficacious, by the symbolism of the forms they produce in solidifying. In England the 'dumb cake,' made, baked, and broken by two and placed under their pillows by a third, brought the desired vision to the three diviners. In Wales spinners made a garland of nine different kinds of flowers. Walking backwards they tried to throw the garland on a tree. The number of times it fell to the ground foretold the years they would remain unmarried.