

From

Ghoulies and Ghosties

Good Lord  Deliver Us
—Old Scottish Litany

THE one night of the year when devils and witches are abroad on their baneful midnight errands—that is Hallowe'en. On that night each year a maze of queer superstitions and rituals arising far back in the days of Druidism was once observed all over the British Isles. Unfortunately these traditional customs have not survived the materialism of modern times, except for traces appearing each year in the more remote parts of the British Isles.

The curious charms and spells employed varied greatly, even from county to county, but one in which apples, nuts and ale played a prominent part, seems to have been almost universally observed. The entertainment portion of all Hallowe'en activities consisted chiefly of "bob apple," or the art of endeavouring to secure with the mouth alone an apple suspended from a beam or floating in a tub of water, and of course drinking and feasting. Every house abounded in the best viands that could be afforded, while apples and nuts were devoured in abundance. The nutshells were burnt and from the ashes many strange things were foretold. In this rural sacrifice of nuts propitious omens were sought touching matrimony. A girl wishing to know if her lover was faithful, placed two nuts on the bars of the grate, naming them after her lover and herself. If the nut representing the lover cracked or jumped, he would prove unfaithful. If it began to blaze or burn he had a regard for the person making the trial; while if both lay still and burnt together it prognosticated a happy marriage or a hopeful love.

Fire appeared to play a big part in the ritual designed to protect mortals from the evil machinations of witches and other ghostly enemies. In Lancashire, for example, it was once believed that witches assembled on Hallowe'en to do "their deeds without a name" at their general rendezvous in the forest of Pendle, a ruined and desolate farmhouse, known as the "Malkin Tower" because of the awful purposes to which it was devoted.

This superstition led to a ceremony called "lecting the witches." It was believed that if from eleven to twelve o'clock at night a lighted candle burned steadily while being carried about over fells and hills, it had so far triumphed over the evil power of the witches who, as they passed to the Malkin Tower, would employ their utmost efforts to extinguish the light. If this was

so, the person whom the candle represented might safely defy their menace during the season. If by accident, however, the light went out, it was an omen of evil to the luckless wight for whom the experiment was made.

In Aberdeen, at the conclusion of various magic ceremonies around the hallows fire, the male members of a family would mount guard over it, for neighbours would often clan together, either from humour or pique, for the purpose of scattering certain fires. The resulting battles were often highly entertaining.

In North Wales there once existed a similar custom in which every family for about an hour at night made a great bonfire in the most conspicuous place near the house. When the fire was almost extinguished everyone would throw a white stone into the ashes, having first marked it, and, after saying their prayers while circling the fire, they would retire. It was believed that, if in the morning any one of the stones were missing, the person who threw it in would die within a year.

That even Royalty, as late as 1874, participated in the revels and customs of Hallowe'en, is shown by the following extract taken from the "Guardian," dated November 11 of that year:

"HALLOWE'EN was duly celebrated at Balmoral Castle. Preparations had been made days beforehand, and farmers and others for miles around were present. When darkness set in the celebration began, and her Majesty and the Princess Beatrice, each bearing a large torch, drove out in an open phaeton. A procession formed of the tenants and servants on the estates followed, all carrying huge torches lighted. They walked through the grounds and round the Castle, and the scene as the procession moved onward was very weird and striking. When it had arrived in front of the Castle an immense bonfire, composed of old boxes, packing-cases, and other materials, stored up during the year for the occasion, was set fire to. When the flames were at their brightest a figure, dressed as a hobgoblin, appeared on the scene, drawing a car surrounded by a number of fairies carrying long spears, the car containing the effigy of a witch. A circle having been formed by the torch-bearers, the presiding elf tossed the figure of the witch into the fire, where it was speedily consumed. This cremation over, reels were begun, and were danced with great vigour to the stirring strains of Willie Ross, her Majesty's piper."

Endless curious love divinations were always practised on Hallowe'en. Even snails were used for this purpose. They were placed on an ash-covered hearth, and it was thought that in their crawling they would reveal the initials of the lover's name. In a poem of some sixteen stanzas, entitled "Hallowe'en," Robert Burns mentions no fewer than ten different ways in which a man or woman might see as in a vision, or at all events learn something about, their future partners in marriage.

In the South of England if a girl had two lovers and wished to know which was the more constant, she produced two brown apple kernels and stuck one on each cheek, after having (Concluded on page 17.)

In this country very little is known of old English traditional customs such as those of Hallowe'en—so called because it is the vigil of All Saints' Day, which falls on November 1. In the following article are outlined a few of the old superstitious rites and love divinations once practised by all classes on this occasion.

Arrangements have been completed for the broadcasting from 4YA of a Hallowe'en concert, to be given on October 31 in His Majesty's Theatre, Dunedin, under the auspices of the Dunedin Burns Club.

