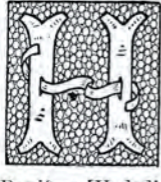


SUPERSTITIONS OF HALLOW-E'EN

BY ALICE C. WILLARD



HALLOW-E'EN is the evening preceding *Hallow-day*, or *All Saints' Day*, which is celebrated November 1st, in honor of the conversion, in the seventh century, of the Pantheon at Rome into a Christian place of worship. Pope

Boniface IV dedicated this day to the Virgin and all the martyrs.

Popular superstition has given the thirty-first day of October a peculiar character of its own, no other day of the year having so many and such strange customs attached to it. Witches, devils, fairies and disembodied spirits walk abroad on that night; charms and divinations attain their highest success with all and any who wish to try them. Although in some parts of the United States and Canada the *Hallow-e'en* customs are sometimes observed by young people, north England and Scotland may be said to be the birth-place and home of *Hallow-e'en* festivities. The customs of this night are much alike wherever they are practiced. Nuts and apples are always in great demand, and enormous quantities of them are consumed. In the north of England *Hallow-e'en* is sometimes called "nut-crack night." Nuts are useful for another purpose than the one they are usually put to. The maiden who wishes to know which of her lovers is faithful puts two nuts on the bars of the grate, naming them after her lovers. If either nut cracks, or flies off the grate into the fire, that lover will prove unfaithful; but if either nut blazes or burns, the lover is faithful, loving and true.

Another way is to place two nuts on the grate, naming one for the lover, the other for herself. If they burn together quietly, all will go smoothly and well in the courtship and marriage; but if they start away from each other, the hoped-for happy ending of the courtship will never occur.

Apples are used in several ways on *Hallow-e'en*, the two most popular being, perhaps, the attempting to take a bite out of an apple suspended by a string from the ceiling without touching it with the hands; and ducking for apples in a tub. This last feat is much more difficult to perform than it at first appears to be. The tub is full of water, the apples, with and without stems, floating temptingly on the top. It does not look as if it would be at all hard to pick one up with the teeth. But at the first attempt to seize it the tantalizing apple ducks its head under water, only to show its blooming cheeks on the opposite side of the tub a moment later.

In Scotland the first ceremony of *Hallow-e'en* is the pulling, by each of the young people, of a stalk of kale. Each must pull the first stalk he comes to in the garden. Its being big or little, short or tall, straight or crooked, will foretell the size, shape and height of the future husband or wife. The amount of earth that clings to the root will indicate the fortune or dowry.

Another superstition tells us that if one will take a candle, go alone in a dark room and eat an apple before the looking-glass, the face of the future husband or wife will peep over the shoulder, and we can plainly see the reflection of it in the glass.

Still another superstition, which is quite common in Scotland and Ireland, and is mentioned by Burns in his *Hallow-e'en* poem, was told to me years ago by a young Irish girl, who firmly believed in it. She said it was customary in the part of Ireland where she had lived for a girl to go alone at midnight on *Hallow-e'en* to the nearest kiln, taking with her a ball of blue yarn. Keeping hold of the end, she throws the ball over into the kiln-pot, then winds the yarn into a new ball. As she nears the end, some one will hold the yarn and prevent her from winding any more of it. She then asks, "Who holds?" and in answer a voice will give the Christian and surname of her future husband. I asked Katie, my informant, if her lover held the end when she tried winding the yarn, and she replied in an awe-struck tone that he did; but frankly admitted that it frightened her so that she dropped the ball and ran home without waiting to ask, "Who holds?"

Burns tells of a *Hallow-e'en* custom. Take three saucers; fill one with clean water, one with inky or foul water, and leave one empty. Blindfold a person and lead him to the dishes, where he dips his left hand into one of the three. If by chance he touches the clean water he will marry a maid; the black water a widow; and the empty dish signifies that he will live and die a bachelor.

Children born on *Hallow-e'en* are said to be able to see and converse with fairies, witches and other supernatural beings, which reminds me that I once went to a delightful impromptu and informal *Hallow-e'en* birthday party. The invitations were sent by telephone and messenger on the very morning of *Hallow-e'en*, and all arrangements and plans for the evening's enjoyment were made on short notice. The rooms were lighted by candles instead of gas; pumpkin jack-o'-lanterns stood in unexpected places about the halls and rooms. The mantels were stacked with brightly-polished apples, and fancy dishes of nuts and raisins, grapes, oranges, figs, dates and home-made candies were set everywhere about the rooms, and every one was expected to help himself to anything he wanted at any time. Apples were suspended from the gas fixtures, the "luggies three" were there, and quarts of chestnuts with which to discover, at the hard coal fires in the grates, whether lovers were true or not. All the old customs which were practicable in modern parlors were tried. The festivities ended with a dance, and at half-past eleven we turned our faces homeward, to arrive in time to see, if possible, some of the strange sights which are supposed to appear on *Hallow-e'en* at "the very witching time of night."