

## Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

July 23.

**THE DEATH OF ST. BRIDGET.**—On the eve of St. Bridget every farmer's wife in Ireland made a cake called 'Bairinbreac,' and the neighbours were invited to a feast. The custom has been compared to that of the Hebrew women of burning incense, pouring out drink offerings, and offering cakes baked with their own hands to a female deity. Certain clay cakes of various forms recently found in the excavations at Beisan are conjectured to be such offerings in their ceremonial guise.

July 24.

**ST. MARY MAGDALEN.**—It was usually a part of the marriage contract among the peasants of Provence that a husband should visit the shrine of St. Mary Magdalene in the Grotto of St. Beaune, near Marseilles, with his wife in the first year of marriage, and even if the visit were not stipulated, neglect was a slight on the wife. A visit to a prehistoric monument, a shrine, or in Ireland a saint's "bed," is a widespread cure or preventive of barrenness.

**ST. DECLAN** (fifth–sixth centuries), Bishop of Ardmore and Patron of Decies, reputed, but probably incorrectly, to have been a disciple of St. Patrick. At his birth a globe of fire blazed on the house in which he was born. At one time he and his companion were borne in a magic boat which crossed the sea without sail or oar. Not only were his black (? iron) bell, which had been sent from heaven, and his vestments conveyed over sea on a floating rock, but this rock preceded his ship as a guide to Ardmore, where it floated ashore and afterwards served as one of the objects in his cult. On one occasion as many as eleven hundred persons crawled under it on his feast day to be cured of diseases and especially pains in the back. The pilgrims then washed in and drank of his well, and finally carried away a handful of the earth from his grave, to which magical properties were attributed.

**ST. BEOC, MOBHEOG, or DOBHEOG,** especially associated with the Island of Saints in Lough Derg, where was St. Patrick's Purgatory, a cave, entrants to which suffered grievous pain, but saw wondrous visions. Monuments such as St. Patrick's Bed and St. Beoc's Seat, as well as popular pilgrimages attended by large numbers, point to an early cult. St. Patrick's Purgatory was specially mentioned in the legislation under Queen Anne suppressing well-worship and similar customs. Similar caves are frequently mentioned, for example, that in which Grania and Dermot took refuge, on the Hill of Howth, and the one at Baltinglass in which Croghan disappeared. The references are to the characteristically Irish underground structures known as *souterrains*.

**ST. CHRISTINA,** a maiden of Tyre, aged eleven, whose father Urbanus enclosed her in a high tower in which he placed gold and silver gods and twelve servant maids in order that she might consume her time in worship and be free from the attention of ardent lovers. But she came to adore the god of the heaven she could see through her windows. An angel from heaven bade her not to fear, made the sign of the cross on her forehead, and left with her a loaf of white bread. A similar story is told of Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, high priest of On, who, despising all men, lived in a high tower, worshipping her gods of gold and silver until she saw Joseph, who taught her of the true God.

The story of the maiden who is shut in a high tower to preserve her from the attention of undesirable lovers is familiar in the folk-lore of many countries. The lover reaches the maiden finally by scaling the tower, or sometimes in the shape of a dove or an eagle. Zeus visited Danae as a shower of gold. Sometimes the damsel is impregnated by a ray of the sun, just as Christina's angel came from heaven. The mention of the sun connects the story with the well-known primitive custom of confining girls at puberty in darkened huts or veiling them from the rays of the sun.

July 25.

**ST. JAMES.**—In the "Manuale ad Usus Sarum" of 1555, a blessing on the new apples is prescribed for this day in a formula which refers to the punishment which followed the eating of the forbidden fruit by our first parents, and asks that by this solemn ceremony we may be enabled to eat of the fruits of the earth without harm. The priest is then to asperge the apples with holy water.

The blessing or purification of the apples is not solely due to a primitive fear of doing anything for the first time. Both the sin of the forbidden fruit and the blessing are connected with the breaking of a taboo. The ceremony is intended to divert the consequences which in the Bible story are made to follow the infraction of the taboo. New crops are full of spiritual influence which may be, or indeed is, harmful to man. They must not be touched until they have been rendered harmless. Either they represent the deity of the crop himself or they lie so peculiarly in his province as to be sacrosanct until he has been propitiated. The taboo is removed by a sacrificial meal of the worshippers or, when the personality of the god has been dissociated from the material crop, by libations and offerings or by a purificatory ceremony. This is the idea underlying all first-fruit offerings, harvest thanksgivings, and purificatory or dedicatory ceremonies. While the rogation ceremony renews and builds up the spirit or power of the deity in the fields and the crops, the harvest festival, in one aspect at least, breaks it down.

The popular cult of St. James at the famous shrine of St. Iago de Compostella in Spain appears to be a survival of a pagan cult associated with the prehistoric monuments in the neighbourhood. St. James is also associated with the cult of Our Lady of the Pillar at Saragossa, whose image is said to have been set up by him. This may indicate what was once a joint male and female cult.

July 27.

**THE SEVEN SLEEPERS,** who, suffering persecution under Decius, were walled up in a cave and awakened 372 years (actually 180 years) after under Theodosius. There are many versions of this story current in medieval times, in some of which the pagan origin is clear. William of Malmesbury records a belief that the sleepers turn on their sides when sorrow threatens.

July 28.

**ST. SAMSON** of Dol, in Brittany, a Welsh saint who spent some considerable part of his life in Armorica. His anger at finding Bretons dancing around a stone pillar on a hill, even when he was told by their chief that they were not practising magic, but amusing themselves, indicates the importance of the stone monument as the centre of pagan cults in early Christian times. The saint marked a stone near by with a cross, a frequent method of dealing with such cult objects. A variant places this incident in Cornwall.