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# FIRE WORSHIP IN BRITAIN

BY

T. F. G. DEXTER, Ph.D., B.Sc., B.A.

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T. F. G. DEXTER, Ph.D., B.Sc., B.A.

“The Past never wholly dies. Memories of paganism, faint perhaps but wonderfully persistent, are with us still, and take us back to a dim and distant past compared with which our earliest written history is a thing of yesterday.”

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1931

# The New Knowledge Series

(1/- net each)



1. CIVILIZATION IN BRITAIN, 2000 B.C.
2. THE PAGAN ORIGIN OF FAIRS
3. THE SACRED STONE
4. FIRE WORSHIP IN BRITAIN

## SYNOPSIS OF SERIES

Scholars are now in general agreement that the Britons who opposed the Roman Invaders possessed an archaic civilisation of no mean order. The problem upon which Scholars are not yet agreed is: Whence was this Civilisation derived?

Dr. Dexter, following the lead of Professor G. Elliot Smith, Professor Sir Arthur Keith, Mr. W. J. Perry, the late Dr. Rivers and other scientists, is of opinion that this culture was introduced into parts of these islands by "Easterners" (some probably Egyptians), who were here searching for pearls and gold (to them sacred things) as early as 2000 B.C. Later, other "Easterners" came for tin to harden their copper and convert it into bronze.

This theory, which is not yet accepted by the orthodox archæologist (and what new theory is ever readily accepted by the Orthodox?), has many sound arguments in its favour, as is clearly shown in the development of the subject.

Dr. Dexter is of opinion that the History of these Islands should commence, not with the Roman Invasion, but with the coming of the builders of Avebury, *circa* 2000 B.C.: further, that in the history of our civilisation too much importance has been attached to the influence of the Saxon and of the Celt, to the neglect of the "Easterner" and of the "Primitive."

He commences by taking a subject which has received but scant attention from the archæologist and the folklorist—*The Origin of Fairs*. He *proves* that most fairs are pagan, not Christian, in origin, and establishes a strong presumption that some of them date from the Bronze Age or, perchance, even earlier. Now fairs imply organisation—co-operation—civilisation, and are witnesses of an early civilisation, perhaps of more than one early civilisation, in these Islands.

The Easterners who introduced an archaic civilisation here appear to have been devotees of the cult of stones and of the sun. The evidence of stone-worship is more apparent than that of sun-worship; so "The Sacred Stone" is taken first, and interesting instances are detailed of former *and present* beliefs in living, healing and magic stones.

Reviewing the evidence so far obtained, instead of a Britain wholly given to barbarism before the Roman occupation, we envisage parts of Britain as peaceful, contented, prosperous, civilised, with much trading at home and abroad. So we have been "a nation of shopkeepers" from time immemorial! We also call up an intensely religious Britain, full of many and diverse cults, of such great antiquity and of such high esteem, that the Christian Church had, willy-nilly, to incorporate some of them. Religion and culture were once practically synonymous, and as the late Professor Robertson Smith said: "If we wish to know any religion thoroughly, we must learn all we can about the religions which preceded it." So, if we desire to appreciate to the full the origin and development of culture in Britain, we must learn about the gods once worshipped here and the ritual connected with their cult. Paradoxical as it may seem, the dark and dead past may be made to illumine the living present.

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## EPITOME

THE knowledge of the *use* of fire universal (1)\* Heaven the mythical source of fire: hence its sacredness (2, 3). The ancient tribal fire (4). Need-fires (5). Late survivals of fire-worship (6-8).

FIRE FESTIVALS. Four dates of fire-worship (9). *Samhain*, now All Saints (10-11). Pagan practices of Samhain Eve or Hallowe'en (12-15). *Beltane* (1st May), pagan rites, human sacrifices (16, 17). The May-pole and Jack in the Green (18-20). Beltane connected with both fire and water, closely akin to ancient man (21, 22). Beltane Eve (23). *Lughnasad* (1st August) (24). *February Fires*: how absorbed by the Church (25). *Midsummer Fires*, wide distribution (26). Midsummer Eve (27-31). Why the pagan Midsummer Day became the Christian St. John's Day (32). *Christmas Fires*, once in open air (33). Human sacrifices (34). Christ not born on 25th December, which was originally a mid-winter festival in honour of Mithras (35). Why the Scotch keep New Year's Eve in place of Christmas Day (36). Mannhardt's theory that pagan fires are mock suns (37). Attitude of Church towards fire-worship (38, 39).

FIRE GODS. Eastern and Celtic fire-gods (40, 41). *Brid* (42-44). Her conversion into a saint (45). *Aed*, converted into St. Aedan (46). *Erc*, made into St. Ercus (47, 48). *Tin, Tan*, cumulative evidence as a fire-deity (49, 50). Tan becomes St. Ann (51, 52) and St. Anthony (53-58). *Gool (Gol, Col)*, a fire-god and SS. Gulval, Gluvias, Wol and Colan (59-65). *Cliar* and St. Cleer (66). The Clavie (67).

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## FIRE WORSHIP IN BRITAIN

1. MAN has been defined as an animal that can make a fire. The definition may not be quite accurate, for, while there are no men who do not know the *use* of fire, there would appear to be some who know no way of *making* it; and if among these peoples the tribal fire should unfortunately be extinguished, some members of the tribe are deputed to get a fresh light from a neighbouring tribe.

2. The discovery of the way to make fire has been described as the most important step in progress ever made by man, and that step was taken so long ago that all the accounts of the discovery of fire are manifestly mythical. Thus fire is nearly always stolen from heaven by a supernatural being, a demi-god or a wondrous bird: in Greek myth it is Prometheus; in Breton folk-lore a golden-crested wren.

3. From its movement, warmth, and appearance of life, fire, under the influence of animism, would have been regarded in times long, long ago as a living thing, a spirit, a god. Undoubtedly fire was a holy thing, a deity to ancient man; indeed, it is so regarded by some races (and they are not all savages) to-day.

4. The lucifer match has made the production of fire easy, but to ancient man, who generally obtained his fire by the friction of two pieces of wood, the production of fire must have been a somewhat difficult process, particularly in wet weather. So, in primitive times there was a practical reason for preserving tribal fires with religious care—the difficulty of rekindling them. Certain persons in a tribe were accordingly deputed to see that the tribal fire was kept burning. Hence the Vestal Virgins of Rome, and hence also another reason for the sacredness of fire.

5. Flame propagated from one fire to another seems to have been considered to have lost its sacred properties, but fire made afresh by friction was regarded as particularly hallowed.

So, in Celtic lands at Samhain (1st November), all fires had to be extinguished, and the Druids produced new fire by friction. This new fire, called *teine-egin*, *tin-egin*, "forced-fire," was regarded as particularly hallowed, and the people rekindled their own fires from the newly-made, consecrated fires. Much the same rites prevailed among the Teutons, who called the fire *nied fyr*, *not-feuer*, that is, "forced fire," "fire produced by force," e.g. by the rubbing together of two pieces of wood. Similar rites are or were practised by the Greeks, Romans, Chinese, and by the Indians of Central and Southern America.

6. The use of need-fire persisted in England down to the memory of living man, and need-fire was last made in Westmorland in 1848, when it was produced by the friction of nut-wood, and cattle were driven through the smoke as a charm against disease.

7. On the Continent as late as 1875 fire-rites were practised in the Bavarian highlands, while according to Wood-Martin, who wrote in 1902, "the Irish peasantry even still regard fire as the great preservative against witchcraft, for evil spirits have no power except in the dark."

8. The best evidence of the late survival of Fire-worship, however, comes from Brittany, where, according to Le Bras, who wrote in 1879, the parishioners of Montreff, on the eve of their Pardon, assemble round a huge pile of combustible material built by the head of a family which has an hereditary right to the privilege. No one but a virgin may light the fire, and when it is in full blaze, the sick are carried to the spot to receive the healing virtues of the wondrous fire, which is blessed, not by the parish priest (who is not allowed to take any part in the proceedings), but by the oldest man in the village, who recites over it "The Prayer of the Fire." At the end of the ceremony, stones are placed around the glowing embers, and the dead are believed to sit on these stones during the night to enjoy the heat. Now all this is undiluted heathenism, reminiscent of 1879 B.C. rather than of 1879 A.D.

9. A date just mentioned, 1st November, was the New Year's Day of the ancient Celts. The Celtic year had originally only two seasons, Winter, which commenced on the 1st of November, and Summer, which began on the 1st of May. These two dates, called respectively Samhain and Beltane, were the great times for Celtic Fire-Festivals. Later on, the year

was divided into four parts, and hence we get four dates of Fire-worship :

- 1st November (Samhain).
- 1st February (Oimelec).
- 1st May (Beltane).
- 1st August (Lugnasad).

10. We will now examine each of these periods in some detail.



Fig. 1.

A GUY. ABOUT 1820.

(From a contemporary woodcut.)

**SAMHAIN.**—Of the four fire festivals, Samhain, the most important, seems to have corresponded with the Greek Chalceia, an ancient Feast held approximately on the last day of October, in honour of Hephæstus, a fire god, and also with the great Egyptian Feast of the Dead, when the slaying of Osiris was commemorated, and when “gardens” of barley were planted in confident anticipation of his resurrection.

11. Fires on the 1st of November appear to have once been general over Western Europe, but they have long died out in England. Perhaps the last flickering fires of the 1st of November

were transferred to the bonfires of Guy Fawkes' Day, on the 5th of the same month. But Guy Fawkes' Day is itself now nearly forgotten, so a contemporary woodcut is given of a guy (Fig. 1), and the picture will probably call up half-forgotten memories in the minds of the greybeards among our readers.

12. The Celts, like other primitive peoples, at first reckoned their times by nights rather than by days, and so attached more importance to the eve of a festival than to the festival itself. We shall therefore not be surprised to find Samhain Eve esteemed of more importance than Samhain itself. The Christian All Saints or All Hallows has taken the place of the heathen Samhain, but Samhain Eve is still celebrated in All Hallows Eve or Hallowe'en, and certain practices on All Hallows Eve seem to be pagan rather than Christian in origin. The memory of Hallowe'en lingered long in Scotland; indeed, it is not yet extinct. Sir John Sinclair says that in 1793 at Logierait, on Hallowe'en, blazing faggots were carried round the village, and that the same practice prevailed at Callander and at Kirk-michael, all in Perthshire. Similar rites were practised in Aberdeenshire, and Dr. MacCulloch, writing in 1911, says that he himself has seen the Samhain Eve bonfires in the Highlands.

13. The Rev. J. M. McPherson, in a paper read before the Anthropological Section of the British Association in 1928, stated that at Hallowe'en down to about the middle of the nineteenth century the Braemar Highlanders made a circuit of the fields with lighted torches to ward off evil spirits and to ensure fertility in the coming year. He also supplied the interesting fact that the Hallow Fire was designed "to burn the witch," who at Balmoral assumed the form of the effigy of a hideous old woman—a most interesting piece of information, because we seem to have here distinct and late reference to the memory of human sacrifice at Hallowe'en.

14. Feasting is intimately associated with most holy-days, Christian or pagan, and we find Samhain Eve no exception to the rule, for nuts and apples were then consumed in immense quantities; indeed, Hallowe'en is still called "Nutcrack Night" in the North, and the Scotsman will recall the lines from Burns:

"The auld guidwife's weel-hoordet nits  
Are round and round divided,  
And mony lads' and lasses' fates  
Are there that night decided."

And it must be noted that bobbing for apples was a favourite diversion amongst the youngsters (Fig. 2).

15. Hallowe'en was a "creepy," eerie sort of time, when anything might happen. Popular belief ascribes to children born on Hallowe'en the power of holding converse with supernatural beings, a belief of which Sir Walter Scott makes use in *The Monastery*. The shees (or underground fairy palaces) of Erin were always open at Samhain, and the superstition that the fairies are abroad on Samhain Eve exists at the present day



Fig. 2.  
BOBBING FOR APPLES ON SAMHAIN EVE.  
(From an old woodcut.)

in Ireland, Scotland, and in Wales. "On November-eve," says an old Welsh proverb, "there is a bogey on every stile," and a Scotch goblin named Samhainach still appears on Samhain Eve. Hallowe'en is clearly a relic of pagan times. There is little or nothing in the Church festival of All Saints which could have originated many of the ideas connected with it.

16. BELTANE, on the 1st of May, was the second great fire festival. In Cormac's Glossary (of tenth-century date) we read that the Druids lighted fires on May-day in honour of the god *Bel*, and that cattle were driven through or between the fires as a preservative against disease.

17. A Parish Minister of Callander, Scotland, tells us that "at Perth at the end of the eighteenth century, upon the first day of May, all the boys in the township meet on the moor; they cut a table in the green sod of a round figure by casting a trench in the ground of a circumference to hold the whole company. They kindle a fire and dress a repast of eggs and milk . . . they knead a cake of oatmeal which is toasted at the stone. They . . . divide the cake into . . . portions. One of these portions is daubed with charcoal, and all the bits are then put into a bonnet and



Fig. 3.

## MAY DAY DANCE IN ENGLAND.

(From a book printed at the Hague, 1698.)

One of the Dancing Women is carrying a Sun and Fertility Symbol on her head.

drawn by each blindfold. . . . Whoever draws the black bit had . . . to leap three times through the flames," and according to Sir James Sinclair he is spoken of as "dead" for the rest of the ceremony.

Here we seem to have an instance of the folk-memory of a human sacrifice; indeed, Sir James Frazer considers that the traces of human sacrifices at Beltane are clear and unequivocal.

18. Beltane seems in Cornwall to be connected more especially with the cult of fertility. Mr. Richard Edmonds, writing in 1845, says that

“In Cornwall on the 1st of May, about daybreak, parties of young persons accompanied with music go into the country . . . and return soon after sunrise with flowers and green branches. With these they formerly adorned the May-pole and danced round it (Figs. 4, 5). . . . The last that remained in the neighbourhood stood at Marazion about thirty years ago.”



Fig. 4.

## MAY DAY GAMES.

Dancing round the May-pole, the Hobby-horse, the May Queen, etc.

Continuing his account, Mr. Edmonds gives us the following valuable details of what happened in 1845, for he says that

“In the Isles of Scilly, the May-pole is still preserved and annually decorated” (Fig. 5).

And, returning to the neighbourhood of Marazion, he adds :

“Throughout this day, and for two or three weeks afterwards, there is an incessant blowing of horns” (Fig. 6).

## FIRE WORSHIP



Fig. 5.  
PLANTING THE VILLAGE MAY-POLE.  
(From an old French print.)



Fig. 6.  
MAY DAY AT KING'S LYNN, NORFOLK.

(From an old woodcut.)  
Note the May Goddess Christianised into the Virgin Mary or the May Queen: also the boys blowing horns.



Fig. 7.  
JACK IN THE GREEN.  
(From an old print.)



Fig. 8.  
SWEEPS CELEBRATING MAY DAY.  
About 1820.

This is all very pretty and innocent, but the May-pole is not Christian, and the blowing of horns is a distinctly heathen rite, designed to awaken the god of fertility from his long winter sleep.

19. May-day celebrations seem to have practically disappeared in London and the larger towns, but up to a few years ago the London chimney-sweeps used to parade as Jacks in the Green (Figs. 7, 8). It is puzzling to explain why chimney-sweeps should have clung so long to May-day festivities, and it *may* possibly be that we have here a faint folk-memory of the former connection of Beltane with fire.



Fig. 9.

MAY-POLE BEFORE ST. ANDREW UNDERSHAFT.

20. With regard to May-day celebrations, we may note that an especially famous May-pole in London was the one near St. Andrew Undershaft (Fig. 9). But such celebrations in London have disappeared for over a century. About a generation ago May-pole festivities had all but ceased in rural England, and most, but perhaps not quite all, of the May-poles we now see are revivals, not survivals, from pagan times.

21. In Cornwall and elsewhere water and rain charms seem to have taken the place of Beltane fires on the 1st May. Thus Mr. Richard Edmonds writes :

“Near Portreath there is an ancient ceremony of bathing in the sea on the first three Sundays in May; whilst in the parishes near Penzance, persons having weak or diseased children take them to Madron Well . . . on the first three Wednesdays in May, an hour before noon, and dip them three times into the water, in the hope of restoring them . . . to health and strength.”

Couch in his *Polperro* (p. 153) says that on May-day the village boys go about singing “The first of May is dipping day,” and avail themselves of a licence which the season confers to dip or well-nigh drown anyone who has not the protection of may stuck in his dress. In this connection it may be noted that on May-day in Burmah the men and women douse everyone they meet with water—yet another of the many links between Cornwall and the East.

22. It seems strange to us that water should sometimes take the place of fire at fire celebrations, but fire and water, such opposites to us, were closely associated in the mind of ancient man. Three examples must suffice. The sun-gods, Oannes in Babylon and Ra in Egypt, daily rose out of the waves, and according to the Rigveda, Agni, the greatest of fire-gods, was discovered in the bosom of the waters.

Man of old knew that sap, a fluid like water, was stored in the tree, and he supposed that fire was another fluid likewise stored in the tree. The idea that heat was a fluid lasted long. As late as 1787, Lavoisier, the founder of modern chemistry, thought heat was a fluid, and it was not till 1798 that Count Rumford disproved the idea.

So in some things we have not been long in advance of primitive man. We are too apt to regard the reasoning of ancient man as childish and illogical. In reality, ancient man reasoned hard and reasoned well, but so many of his premises were wrong: hence the childlike character of some of his conclusions.

23. On the Continent the rites of Beltane were much akin to those of Samhain, and Samhain Eve has its counterpart in Beltane Eve, sometimes known in Teutonic lands as Walpurgis Night, when fires used to be lighted in Tyrol, Bohemia, Moravia, and elsewhere for the purpose of burning witches. The burning

of witches is happily now extinct, but the fires are still kindled for the purpose of "driving away the witches." Thus the ritual remains, the more awful part has been dropped, and a new and innocent reason substituted for what was once apparently a sacrificial fire.

24. LUGNASAD.—Dr. Joyce says: "The Irish-speaking people all over Ireland still call the first of August *Lugh-nasadh*, 'Lugh's Fair'"—evidence that the day was once sacred to the sun-god Lugh or Lug. But the observance of the day would seem to be older even than Lug, for a great Egyptian festival, probably to Isis, commenced on that day.

There is much that is pagan, little that is Christian about the celebrations on 1st August, but the Church made the best of things and converted it into Lammass Day. The Sunday after Lammass Day is in Ireland known as *Domnach Crom Dubh*, "Black Crom's Sunday," which looks like a heathen festival, but the Church was equal to the occasion and made it the anniversary of St. Patrick's destruction of the idol Black Crom. Still, much remained outside the Church, unincorporated and undestroyed, e.g. the peculiar observances once practised by shepherds in Lothian and in Wales, and the indecent behaviour (now happily obsolete) on Snaefell in the Isle of Man.

25. THE FEBRUARY FIRE FESTIVAL has all but disappeared, and the only relic of fire worship on 1st February would seem to be the not yet extinct custom in Wales of burning furze on that date. The Church apparently succeeded in suppressing nearly all heathen fires on this date by transferring some of the celebrations to St. Bridget's Day (1st February), to Candlemas Day (2nd February), to St. Blaise's Day (3rd February), and to the Lenten fires still to be seen in Belgium, North France, and parts of Germany.

26. We will now deal with two fire festivals which are solar in character and which seem to have been brought by "Easterners" from Eastern climes, namely, the Midsummer and the Midwinter (or Christmas) fire festivals.

MIDSUMMER FIRES were once celebrated over the whole of Europe at the time of the Summer solstice, that is, Midsummer Eve (23rd June) and Midsummer Day (24th June), and the custom still survives in Brittany, Provence, Greece and a few other parts of Europe. But Europe is not the only scene of Midsummer fires, for the practice of kindling bonfires at this season is widespread among the Mohammedans of North Africa,

and the evidence seems to point to a non-Aryan origin of the rite. Sir J. G. Frazer remarks that the celebration of Fire at Midsummer (a date dependent on the sun) among Mohammedans (who measure time by the moon) is remarkable, and "seems to prove that among the Mohammedan peoples of Northern Africa, as among the Christian peoples of Europe, the Midsummer festival is quite independent of the religion which



Fig. 10.  
SETTING THE WATCH ON ST. JOHN'S EVE.

the people publicly confess, and is a relic of a far older paganism." Mohammedanism did not succeed in suppressing this heathen cult; neither did Christianity, but the Christian Church did succeed in incorporating these heathen fires into the festivities connected with St. John's Eve (Fig. 10), St. John's Day, St. Peter's Eve, and St. Peter's Day.

27. The Eve of Midsummer Day, like Samhain Eve and Beltane Eve, was regarded as more important than Midsummer Day itself, and we will now pass to some comparatively late

references to the fires of Midsummer Eve, otherwise known as St. John's Eve.

Dr. Borlase in 1754 says of the fires on St. John's Eve and on St. Peter's Day :

"At these fires the Cornish attend with lighted torches, tarr'd and pitch'd at the end, and make their perambulations round their fires, and go from village to village, carrying their torches before them."

A correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* writes that in 1782 he "was entertained at a house in Ireland and beheld the most singular sight in Ireland, which was the *lighting of fires in honour of the sun.*" He proceeds :

"I saw on a radius of thirty miles all around, the fires burning on every eminence which the country afforded. I had further the satisfaction in learning, from undoubted authority, that the people *danced round the fires*, and at the close went through these fires, and made their sons and daughters, together with their cattle, pass through the fire, and the whole was conducted with religious solemnity."

28. Later in the eighteenth century we find definite records of bonfires on Midsummer Eve in Northumberland, Cumberland, Gloucestershire, and Devonshire.

29. The Rev. John Buller, Vicar of St. Just in Penwith, Cornwall, writes in 1842 :

"On Midsummer Day the ear is still saluted by sounds resembling the discharge of platoons of musketry . . . proceeding from holes bored in rocks, which being loaded with gunpowder are discharged in succession; and on the same day a new flag is displayed on every mine, and the night is ushered in with festivities, and bonfires blazing on many of the eminences."

He rightly considered these practices to be vestiges of ancient fire-worship.

Mr. Richard Edmonds in 1845 says :

"It is immemorial usage in Penzance and the neighbouring towns and villages, on Midsummer Eve, to kindle bonfires and torches. . . . St. Peter's Eve is distinguished by a similar display. . . . On these eves a line of tar-barrels . . . is seen in the centre of each of the principal streets. On either side of this line men and women pass up and down, swinging round their heads heavy torches

. . . the flames of some of these almost equal those of the tar-barrels. . . . Viewed from the bay the shores present an animated appearance, there being scarcely a village along the coast without its bonfire. . . . When the fires are almost spent, a great number of men and women . . . used . . . to join hand in hand, forming a long string, and run through the streets playing 'thread the needle' . . . and oftentimes leaping over the yet glowing embers."

William Bottrell, in his *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall*, published in 1873, says that

"Forty years ago on Midsummer Eve . . . very old people in the west country would hobble away to some high ground whence they obtained a view of the most prominent high hills. . . . They counted the fires and drew a presage from the number of them." He proceeds: "There are now but few bonfires to be seen on the western heights; yet we have observed that Tregonan, Godolphin and Carnmarth hills, with others far away towards Redruth, still retain their Baal fires." And concludes: "We would gladly go many miles to see the weird-looking yet picturesque dancers around the flames on a cairn or high hill-top as we have seen them forty years ago."

30. Sir J. G. Owen, in his *Guide to the Isles of Scilly*, published in 1897, writes: "Among the customs of the Scillonians is that of lighting bonfires . . . on Midsummer night." Dr. Joyce, in 1913, states that he himself saw in Ireland cattle driven between fires at a fire festival, either on the eve of the 1st of May or of the 24th of June, unfortunately he does not say which, while D'Arbois de Jubainville says that the custom of lighting fires on St. John's Eve is still observed in Paris (Fig. 11).

31. Like Samhain and Beltane, Midsummer was connected with mystic rites. According to Wood-Martin, writing on Irish folklore in 1902:

"A small piece of charcoal, taken from the site of a bonfire on St. John's night, and sewed up in the clothes of a woman, preserves her against fairy plots, or from abduction by the 'good people'; whilst a live coal is considered to bring luck to the house in which it ignites the new fire on the family hearth."

Aubrey tells us that in the seventeenth century Midsummer Eve was called the Witches' Night, and, according to Cornish

folk-lore to-day, the witches of West Penwith meet on Midsummer Eve at Zennor to renew their vows to their Satanic Master, and anyone touching the Witches' Rock there nine times at midnight is proof against being "ill-wished" during the ensuing year—undoubted folk-memories of pagan Saturnalia and pagan charms.

32. As we have already remarked, fire and water were once intimately connected (§ 22): so we find water playing a conspicuous part in the rites of Midsummer Day, which, says



Fig. 11.  
DANCING ROUND THE MIDSUMMER BONFIRE.  
(From an old French print.)

Sir James Frazer, "explains why the Church, in throwing its cloak over the old heathen festival, chose to dedicate it to St. John Baptist."

33. CHRISTMAS.—There are indications that Christmas was once an outdoor festival—evidence of its importation from warmer climes. The Carrying of the Holly Tree on Old Christmas Day at Brough, Westmorland (Fig. 12), seems to point in that direction, but Pennant gives us something more conclusive. He states that

"In parts of Gloucestershire on Old Christmas Day all the servants of every particular farmer assemble together in

one of the fields that has been sown with wheat; on the border of which in the most conspicuous or most elevated place they make twelve fires of straw in a row; around one of which, made larger than the rest, they drink a chearful glass of cyder to their master's health, and to success of the future harvest, and then returning home, they feast on cakes made of carraways, etc. soaked in cyder, which they clame as a reward for their past labours in sowing the grain."



Fig. 12.

CARRYING THE LIGHTED HOLLY TREE ON TWELFTH NIGHT (OLD CHRISTMAS DAY)  
AT BROUGH, WESTMORLAND.

Some Christmas customs seem reminiscent of Druidism; for example, on Old Christmas Day in Herefordshire as late as 1822 no person could borrow fire, but had to purchase it with some trifle or other; for instance, a pin.

34. Christmas is the Midwinter fire festival, now held within doors and not without, and at Christmas we are all "fire-worshippers." The Christmas Yule Log is "the winter counterpart of the Midsummer bonfire within doors instead of in the open air" (Fig. 13).

According to Miss M. A. Courtney :

"When open chimneys were universal in farm-houses the Christmas stock, mock or block (the log), on

which a rude figure of a man had been chalked, was kindled with great ceremony."

Mr. Richard Edmonds in 1845 states :

"I will notice . . . one other Christmas custom observed . . . within the last thirty or forty years. On the decayed stump of an old tree was painted or carved the figure of a very old man called 'Old Father Christmas' . . . and this was always burnt on Christmas Eve."



Fig. 13.

BRINGING IN THE YULE LOG ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

In the light of the incident just mentioned of the "burning of the old witch" at Beltane, there is little or no doubt but that the "rude figure of a man" chalked on the block and mentioned in the first extract is a substitute for a human sacrifice. It is interesting to note that in the second extract the sacrificial victim has become "Father Christmas," a good example of the way in which an ancient practice adapts itself to new conditions, for "Father Christmas" is a comparatively recent importation—from Germany—and dates from about the time of the Prince Consort.

35. It is perhaps needless to observe that the 25th of December cannot be the anniversary of the nativity of Jesus

Christ, for at that date, the height of the rainy season in Judæa, shepherds would not have been watching their flocks in the fields by night. December 25th was the day of the celebration of the birth of Mithras, "a date which the Church found it politic to adopt for the Christian celebration of Christmas." St. Augustine practically admits this, for, speaking of Christmas, he says: "With good reason do we celebrate our Lord's birth on that day, not because the Sun is then born, but because it is the day of the birth of our Lord who created the Sun." Just as the heathen fires of Midsummer Day were lighted in honour of St. John the Baptist, so the day of the birth of Mithras became the day of the celebration of the birth of Christ.

36. During the Commonwealth the English Parliament ordered that "no observation shall be had of the five-and-twentieth day of December, commonly called Christmas Day; nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon that day in respect thereof." Calvin condemned Christmas as a pagan and a Romish festival, and the post-Reformation Scottish Church forbade its observance. A sort of compromise seems to have been reached by transferring some of the Yuletide celebrations to New Year's Eve, and now New Year's Eve is the great festival among Scotsmen in all parts of the world. Sir Arthur Mitchell writes in 1880 that the custom of carrying fire round houses, fields, etc. on the last night of the year still prevails in some parts of Scotland. He rightly surmises that the ceremony was designed to secure fertility and that it is a survival of fire-worship. We may further surmise that we have here some of the old Yuletide fire celebrations deferred till the end of the year. Sir Arthur concludes by saying that those who look upon the ceremony as a meaningless frolic and who are ignorant of the origin of the custom "could not suddenly neglect it without a certain nameless feeling of uneasiness and apprehension."

37. In concluding this part of our subject we may observe that Mannhardt thinks that fire festivals are sun-charms or magical ceremonies intended to secure a proper supply of sunshine for men, animals, and plants. He further considers that the custom of carrying lighted brands round the fields for the purpose of ensuring their fertility clearly shows these fires to have been mock suns.

38. When Christianity came westward the pagan cult of fire was too powerfully installed to be dislodged: so the Church pursued its usual policy—it incorporated or ignored what it

could not suppress. We have already seen how the February fires were almost entirely incorporated, while the dates of the August, Midsummer, and Midwinter fires became Lammas Day, St. John's Day, and Christmas Day respectively. But there still remained the Beltane and the Samhain fires. The new fire at Beltane perhaps became the Easter New Fire—an undoubted Celtic importation into the Roman rite. As Neogeorgus says,

“On Easter Eve the fire all is quencht in every place,  
And fresh again from out the flint is fetcht with solemn grace,”

and the production of fire from flint points to the Stone Age and to the great antiquity of the cult of fire. But much of the pagan Beltane (*e.g.* the May-day celebrations) remained unabsorbed by the Church.

That part of Samhain which was related to the cult of the dead was absorbed into the ritual of All Saints and All Souls, but the fire celebrations of Samhain were too firmly fixed in favour to be suppressed, too blatantly heathen to be incorporated into Christian ritual, and so remained outside the Church, ignored and unincorporated.

39. Both Sir Isaac Newton and Jacob Grimm deal with the question of the absorption of heathen beliefs and ritual by the Christian Church.

Sir Isaac Newton observes that

“the Heathen were delighted with the Festivals of their Gods, and unwilling to part with those ceremonies,” and that the Church, “to facilitate their conversion, instituted annual Festivals to the Saints and Martyrs: hence the keeping of Christmas with ivy, feasting, plays and sports came in the room of the Bacchanalia and Saturnalia; the celebrating of May Day with flowers, in the room of the Floralia; and the Festivals to the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and divers of the Apostles, in the room of the solemnities at the entrance of the Sun into the signs of the Zodiac in the Old Julian Calendar.”

Grimm in his Introduction to his *Teutonic Mythology* writes:

“The festivals of a people present a tough material, they are so closely bound up with their habits of life that they will put up with foreign additions if only to save a fragment of festivities long loved and tried. In this way . . . the Anglo-Saxons down to a late period retained the heathenish Yule, as all Teutonic Christians did the sanctity

of Eastertide. . . . As faithfully were perpetuated the name and in many cases the observances of Midsummer. New Christian feasts, especially of saints, seem purposely as well as accidentally to have been made to fall on heathen holidays. Churches often arose precisely where a heathen god or his sacred tree had been pulled down, and the people trod their old paths to the accustomed site; sometimes the very walls of the heathen temples became those of the church, and cases occur in which idol images still found a place in a wall of its porch, or were set up outside the door, as at Bamberg Cathedral there lie Slavic heathen figures of animals inscribed with runes. Sacred hills and fountains were rechristened after saints, to whom their sanctity was transferred. . . . It could not but happen . . . that . . . the Old, not wholly extinct, should half-unconsciously get interwoven with the irrepressible New. . . . Here we find Christian material in a heathen form, there heathen matter in a Christian disguise."

40. Having considered the six great fire festivals (Samhain, Christmas, Oimelc, Beltane, Midsummer, Lughnasad) in some detail, we will now endeavour to discover something concerning the fire-gods celebrated on those days. And at once we encounter a difficulty—that of finding a fire-god who is a fire-god and nothing else. Agni of Hinduism (Fig. 14) and Atar of Zoroastrianism would seem to be the only fire-gods, pure and simple. Most if indeed not all of the other fire-gods, so called, partake of the nature of hearth-deities, or productivity-deities, or sun-gods.

41. Survivals of fire-rites among the Celts would lead us to think that they had fire-gods, and we have documentary evidence in support of our conclusion. One instance must suffice. In the *Tripartite Life of Patrick* (p. 374) we read that Laegaire's Druid charged the saint with having fire for a god, an accusation which seems to show that fire in St. Patrick's time was worshipped as a god in Ireland. So we are encouraged to look for fire-gods in Celtic lands, and we speedily find some whom we will proceed to consider.



Fig. 14.  
AGNI, THE HINDU FIRE-GOD.

42. BRIGIT (Brig, Briid, Bride or Brid) was the great Celtic goddess of fire and of fertility. She is still the guardian of the hearth in the Gaelic home, and when the fire is "covered" for the night, so that the "seed" of the fire may stay in the peat till the morning, a prayer is sometimes even now addressed to her. But her famous fire, tended by nineteen maidens, was at Kildare. An Archbishop of Dublin in the thirteenth century made an abortive attempt to suppress Brid's sacred fire—an indication that the fire was heathen and not Christian in origin.

43. Indeed, Brid's day, 1st February, was the date of one of the great pagan fire festivals. But Brid was not only a fire-goddess, she was also a goddess of fertility. Martin Martin in 1675 describes the following ceremony connected with Brid's day, observed in his time in the Western Islands of Scotland.

"The mistress and servants of each family take a sheaf of oats and dress it up in women's apparel, put it in a large basket and lay a wooden club beside it, and this they call Briid's bed; and then the mistress and servants cry three times, 'Briid is come,' 'Briid is welcome.' This they do just before going to bed, and when they rise in the morning they look among the ashes, expecting to see the impression of Briid's club there; if they do, they reckon it a presage of a good crop and prosperous year, and the contrary they take as an ill omen."

The discerning reader will see indications of phallism in this strange ceremony, and so we find Brid as the Aid-woman who assisted the expectant mother, and the bed incident just narrated was apparently converted into the legend that Brid aided the Virgin in her labours by making a bed for her.

Moore says that Brid or Bride was remembered in the Isle of Man in the eighteenth century, especially on 1st of February, when housewives invited Bride into their homes, repeating in Manx: "Bride, Bride, come to my house, come to my house to-night; open the door to Bride, and let Bride come in."

Sir David Lindsay mentions an image of "Sanct Bryde, weill carvit with ane kow," and St. Bride's Well in Kildrummy, Aberdeenshire, was famous for curing diseases in cattle: indeed, St. Bride is thought by some to have displaced an older milking goddess.

44. The Brigantes, a people of North England, probably had Bride or Brig as their tutelary deity, and inscriptions found

in Britain reading DEO SANCTO BERGANT . . . , BRIGANTIA, NYMPHA BRIGANTIA, and BRIGANTIA SACRUM point to the cult of this famous goddess.

45. Brid was undoubtedly the greatest goddess of the Celts. Too powerful to be deposed, the Church had to make the best of things and converted her into a saint, sometimes called St. Bride, sometimes even St. Brigit or Bridget. Now St. Bridget was probably a real personage, but the Christian Bridget has absorbed so much of the pagan Bride that some competent authorities have seriously doubted her existence. One example must suffice. The Celtic rite of dedication of a church was different from the Roman rite of Appellation, and required the presence of the founder on the spot. As Miss Arnold-Förster observes: "St. Bridget never crossed the Irish Channel, yet England can show some twenty dedications in her honour," and we would add the fact that Wales can show about eighteen more. A real puzzle to the saint-lorist or hagiologist, but to us no puzzle at all. It is reasonable to suppose that there were once in Britain pagan temples erected in honour of the goddess Brid, and St. Bridget is merely a Christian substitution for the pagan Brid—an example of the way in which a Christian saint sometimes absorbs some of the things really belonging to a pagan deity.

46. AED, according to Cormac, was a fire-goddess, and C. Plummer states that *Aed* means "fire." The Irish St. Aedan (*Aed-an*, Little Aed, Dear Aed) has his feast on 31st January, the eve of 1st February, a fire date. Aeddan Foeddog is a reputed saint and the founder of Llanhuadain or Llawhaden in Pembrokeshire, but the name *Aed-an* and the fact that the feast of the parish is on 31st January, that is, the eve of a fire festival, would seem to show the true origin of this "Saint."

The parish of Advent in Cornwall was in 1327 called Ad-wyn, which may be *Aed-wyn*, "Holy *Aed*," and this supposition is strengthened by the fact that down to quite recent times the popular name for the parish was St. Tain or St. Tane, a name which contains the root *tan*, *taen*, "fire" (§§ 49 ff.).

The fire-god Aed, Aed-an, apparently became in Christian times the "traitorous Aedan" of the Welsh Triads, and in Pembrokeshire, as we have just seen, he is reputed to be a saint. This spurious St. Aedan is sometimes called St. Aidan, and is thus confused with St. Aidan, a genuine seventh-century saint and the great Apostle of the North. The genuine St. Aidan

has his feast on 31st August, a date in no way connected with fire-worship. The spurious Aidan or Aedan has his on the eve of 1st February, a pagan fire festival.

47. ERC.—According to the Exeter Episcopal Registers St. Ercus or St. Erc is the patron saint of St. Erth, a Cornish parish not far from St. Ives. Leland calls the saint St. Erth, while in Bacon's *Liber Regis* he appears as St. Erghe.

William of Worcester in the first half of the fifteenth century records the parish feast on 31st October, Samhain Eve, a date undilutedly pagan (§§ 10-15), and the feast is now held on the Sunday nearest All Souls' Day (2nd November), doubtless a concession to modern custom, but still too near the pagan Samhain to be indisputably Christian.

So in our perplexity we turn to the Hagiologist. *The Book of Saints* (with the *imprimatur* of the Roman Church) bluntly says that St. Erth is not included in the Roman Martyrology. *The Acta Sanctorum* is unkindlier still: it omits him altogether—and *The Golden Legend* is equally unkind. Both the Rev. S. Baring-Gould and Miss Arnold-Forster essay accounts of this "saint," and in them there is only one thing missing—history. Indeed, Miss Arnold-Forster confesses that "in the absence of all real knowledge very bold conjectures have been hazarded."

48. May we add to the "very bold conjectures" of the Hagiologists? According to Professor Anwyl, Erce or Erge was an Iberian god whose name occurs once in an inscription. Cormac says that *Erc* means "heaven": Pictet compares *erc* with the Sanscrit *arks*, "ray, sun." There are several Ercs in Irish legend, and one of the earliest was associated with the *fires* of Tara—an ancient connection between Erc and fire. So we begin to wonder if Erc may not be an old pagan fire-god and not a Christian saint at all. His original feast-day, Samhain Eve, gives colour to the idea. There is no legend of the Cornish St. Erc, and the Rev. S. Baring-Gould confesses that "when Erc came to Cornwall we do not know." Neither do we, but the presumption is that Erc was in Cornwall long before the Christian era.

49. TIN-IA (TIN-A, TIN, TAN, TEN) seems to have been originally a god of fire who, like so many fire-gods, became a sun-god. Tinia was the supreme deity of the Etruscans, analogous to the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter. We find him the centre of the Etruscan god-world, the power who speaks in the thunder and descends in the lightning; and he is figured

on Etruscan monuments and ornaments with the thunderbolt in his hand (Fig. 15).

50. *San Tan* is the Breton name for the holy fire, and although we can find no direct evidence either in Brittany or in Britain of a fire-god, yet, as we shall shortly see, there is cumulative evidence of such a god with a name which may be rendered Tin or Tan, a god whose name seems to be living still in *tind-er*, in *tand-sticker* ("fire-sticks"), on Swedish match-boxes, in



Fig. 15.

AN ETRUSCAN MIRROR SHOWING TINIA, THE ETRUSCAN FIRE AND SUN-GOD. Tinia is the central figure. Note his name in Etruscan characters, written from right to left.

*Tind-les*, the name given as late as the end of the eighteenth century to small fires lighted in Derbyshire on the Eve of All Souls' Day—a date near Samhain (§ 10), and in *Tawnle*, the name of a fire once lighted with great ceremony in Ayrshire. In Gaelic, "fire" is *teine*, and in Inismurray, off the coast of Sligo, is a ruined church called TEMPULL-NA-TEINEAD, "Church of the Fire," where was formerly a hearth (Fig. 16) on which fire had burned for generations.

All these facts point to Tin, Tan as a fire-god, and we will proceed to collect yet more evidence.

51. The district around Avebury in Wiltshire is full of pagan remains, and among these remains we find an eminence called St. Anne's Hill (Fig. 17). Many Christians doubt the existence of St. Anne, but granting that there was such a person, what is she doing in this very heathen *milieu*? There are five prehistoric tumuli on St. Anne's Hill, which on 6th August is the scene of a fair popularly called Tan Hill Fair. The fair is held within the octave of a fire festival, and it may well be that Tan, the



Fig. 16.

TEMPULL-NA-TEINEAD, INISMURRAY, WITH THE SACRED HEARTH IN THE FOREGROUND.

sacred fire, was originally celebrated on and near that day. A fair held on Tain Hill, Ross-shire, on 1st August would seem to support the surmise.

The hill near Avebury just referred to evidently has two names, a pagan one, Tan Hill, and a Christian one, St. Anne's Hill. Similarly, there is a *St. Ann's* Chapel on the top of Tan Hill, Midhurst, Sussex. Again, in the parish of Dale, Pembrokeshire, there are the remains of an old lighthouse, which according to local tradition occupied the site of a chapel in honour of St. Anne. But we much doubt this St. Anne. Tan—San Tan—

St. Tan—St. Anne are easy transitions, and that lighthouse at Dale is probably on the site of a heathen beacon lighted for the guidance of mariners and in honour of the god Tan, who has apparently been Christianised first into St. Tan, and afterwards into St. Ann. We shall very shortly deal more fully with the god Tan and his beacon fires.

52. An examination of the churches and chapelries of pre-Reformation foundation dedicated in honour of St. Anne confirms the idea that the Christian St. Anne is the successor of the heathen fire-god Tan. To this end let us take Miss Arnold-

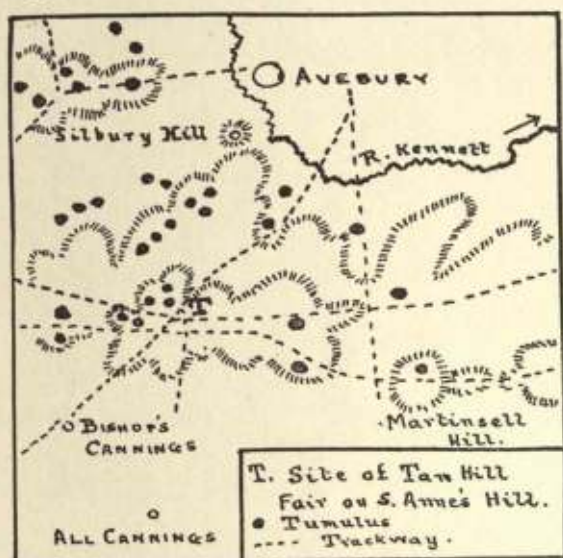


Fig. 17.  
SITE OF TAN HILL FAIR, WILTSHIRE.

Forster's *Church Dedications*, William Owen's *Book of Fairs*, and a good County Atlas. From *Church Dedications* we learn that there are thirty-five churches and chapelries with St. Anne as patron, and the use of the County Atlas enables us to locate at least thirty-two of them. The *Book of Fairs* tells us that twenty-three of these have fairs on dates of fire festivals held either in or near these parishes, for we must recollect that we are dealing with a time long anterior to the creation of parishes. St. Anne's Day is on 26th July, and according to current opinion, we should expect to find these fairs held on 26th July or within the octave of that date. But what *do* we actually find?—Not one of these fairs on St. Anne's day and only three within the octave! The

rest are clearly dependent on pagan fire dates—one more proof, if another were wanted, that fairs have little or nothing to do with saints and their days. So Tan and his fire festival can be traced in seventy per cent. of the parishes with St. Anne as Patron. The fact is, the god Tan was there long before the Christian St. Anne was thought of.



Fig. 18.

CHURCH OF ST. ANTHONY IN KERRIER (MENEAGE) NEAR LANTINNEY, WHENCE IT DERIVES ITS NAME.

53. In Worcestershire erysipelas is known as Tantony's Fire, and Tantony is supposed to be St. Anthony. But what has erysipelas to do with St. Anthony? *Tan*, "fire," has, however, much to do with the complaint, and we will now endeavour to show a connection between Tan and St. Anthony very similar to the one just established between Tan and St. Anne.

54. There are three churches called St. Anthony or Antony in Cornwall—St. Anthony in Meneage (or Kerrier), St. Anthony in Roseland and Antony East near Saltash. The Feast of St. Anthony in Meneage is now on "the morrow of Christmas Day," that is, it is dependent upon Christmas Day, and in pagan times was prob-

ably held on 25th December, the mid-winter fire and sun festival (§ 33). Near the church is a spot called Lan-tinn-ey (Fig. 18), and Lan-tinn-ey reminds us of *Tine-a*, the Etruscan fire and sun-god (§ 49). There is nothing wildly improbable in the thought, for the Etruscans were intrepid seamen (Figs. 19, 20). *Lan-tinn-ey* means "the enclosure of the fire," and the name may point to the spot in which the sacred beacon fire was kept for the convenience and safety of Etruscan and other navigators.

55. This St. Anthony is on a promontory on the western bank of Falmouth Bay just outside the entrance to Falmouth Harbour. On the opposite bank, on the eastern side, and at the entrance to the harbour itself, is another St. Anthony, generally known as St. Anthony in Roseland, also on a promontory, with distinct traces of an old earthwork upon it (Fig. 21). It may be that we have here another *Lan-tinn-ey*, "Enclosure of the Fire," and this surmise receives support from the fact that



Fig. 19.

AN ETRUSCAN MARINER  
HOLDING A RUDDER.

(From an Etruscan sarcophagus.)

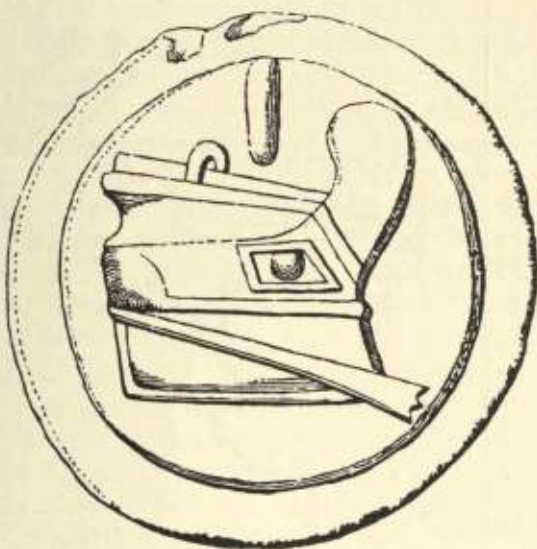


Fig. 20.

THE PROW OF AN ETRUSCAN SHIP.

(Enlarged from an Etruscan coin.)

there is to-day a lighthouse on the point, for it would seem that man of old, like man to-day, saw the necessity of a beacon-light on this promontory.

Falmouth Harbour may be the *Val-uba* of Ptolemy, and an astragalus of tin (Fig. 22) of ancient but uncertain date, found in the harbour, would seem to show that Falmouth Harbour—one of the finest harbours in Britain—was known in ancient times. It may be that beacon-fires were once kept burning on the two promontories to indicate the entrance to Falmouth Harbour.

56. Near the western arm of the Tamar is the parish of Antony, sometimes called Antony East to distinguish it from

## FIRE WORSHIP



Fig. 21.  
SKETCH MAP OF FALMOUTH HARBOUR.



Fig. 22.  
AN ASTRAGALUS OF TIN, FOUND IN FALMOUTH HARBOUR.

[Photo. G. Penrose.]

the two Anthonys just mentioned. The patron of Antony East is St. James, not St. Anthony, and the parish is called Anton, Antone, not only in the Exeter Domesday but also throughout the Exeter Episcopal Registers. The name of the parish is clearly secular and it may be pagan, for we may expand Anton into Lan-an-Tan, compare it with Lan-tinney (§ 54), and regard the name as a possible indication of another sacred beacon-fire in a sacred enclosure on a navigable river.

57. Mousehole is one of the most ancient ports of Cornwall, and near it on a headland once stood a chapel of St. Anthony, which probably replaced a pagan beacon-fire.

58. The most famous of the saints named Antony was St. Anthony the Great, the desert recluse, who had nothing whatever to do with Cornwall. Neither had any of the other saints named Antony or Anthony, over a score in number. There is not one in the score with his feast on 26th December, the date of the Feast of St. Anthony in Meneage (§ 54). The Cornish Anthonys just noticed would seem to be but clerical equations for the fire-god Tin, Ten, Tan in his sacred enclosure.

59. GOOL, GUL, GOL.—There are doubts as to the identity of the saint of Gulval, a parish in West Cornwall. On the strength of an identification with St. Gudwell, who is venerated in Brittany and at Ghent, a stained-glass window to his memory has been placed in Gulval Church. So, according to this stained-glass window, St. Gulval is a man. But *The Cornish Church Guide*, published under the ægis of the Church in Cornwall, gives a woman, St. Wolvela, as the patron. It would thus seem that the Cornish hagiographers, so far from knowing anything about the saint of Gulval parish, are at variance regarding such an essential as the sex of the saint. And *The Book of Saints* makes no mention whatever of a saint named Gulval. But the fact that the feast of the parish is on the Sunday nearest to 12th November (Old Samhain Day) gives more than a hint of a possible pagan origin of the saint of Gulval.

60. Not far from Falmouth is a parish named St. Gluvias (Fig. 21) with its feast on 1st May, a date of fire-worship (§ 16). The *Acta Sanctorum* does not record a St. Gluvias, and we find the Revs. S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, in their *British Saints*, writing: "The Cornish St. Gluvias of whom nothing is known is probably the same as Glywyd Cermyw." Wild conjecture instead of fact is all these two hagiographers can give us about St. Gluvias!

61. There is a Scotch saint variously known as St. Wol or St. MacWoloch, whose feast is on 29th January and whose fair is on 30th January, *i.e.* the eve of 1st February, a fire festival (§ 25). The Bollandists confess that they know nothing about him.

62. To sum up. Nothing whatever is known of these three saints, Gulval, Gluvias, Wol, except that their feasts are on pagan fire festivals—a hint that we may perhaps learn something about them if we look to pagan rather than to Christian times.

63. Commencing with Gul-val we may note that the meaning of *val* is uncertain, but *val* reappears in *Mor-val*, and we know that *Mor* means “sea.” Can we ascribe any meaning to *Gul*? There would seem to be a similarity between *Gul-val* and *Gluvias*, for *Gul* by metathesis (or change of letters) could become *Glu*: also between the names *Gul*, *Wol*, for *g* can become *w*: *e.g.* in Cornish, *goon*, “moor,” sometimes becomes *woon*.

So we may provisionally assume that *Glu* and *Wol* are only variations of *Gul* or *Gol*. The root *Gol* appears in *Gol-ow* (Cornish), *Goul-ou* (Breton), *Gol-eu* (Welsh), all meaning “light.” The same root appears to be found in *Gwawl*, the yellow-haired youth of Celtic myth whose name is considered to mean “light” and who is the opponent of *Pwyll*, the ruler of the underworld and of darkness. Few will deny that *Pwyll* and *Gwawl* are early mediæval, mythical representatives of pagan gods of darkness and of light respectively. Concentrating our attention upon *Gwawl*, and turning to the East, the source of most early knowledge, sacred or profane, we discover an Assyrian goddess called *Gool-a*, the female energy of the sun, frequently represented by the six or eight-rayed disc so often seen on Assyrian monuments.

64. In mid-Cornwall not far from Newquay is a little parish called St. Colan with a patron saint of the same name. The only account we have of St. Colan is a sixteenth-century Life written in Welsh. In this wondrous, and, be it noted, late, account, St. Collen or Colan seems to be a sort of knight in search of adventure who is brought into contact with *Bres* (called *Bras*), *Gwyn ap Nudd*, and other mythical personages or heathen deities. He seems also to be a cotemporary of Julian the Apostate, of King Arthur, and of the mediæval knights! Moreover, he is an Abbot of Glastonbury!! The Rev. S. Baring-Gould calls the *vita* a “romantic legend.” We would venture to denominate

it a tissue of impossible absurdities. And, dismissing this nonsense, we would in all seriousness ask: What has the Hagiologist to tell us of the real history of St. Colan? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Indeed, the only *fact* he can tell us is that St. Colan's festival is on "the Sunday after the first Thursday in May," that is, it is dependent on 1st May—Beltane, a thoroughly pagan date (§ 16).

65. So perchance we shall find something about "St." Colan if we turn our thoughts towards paganism rather than towards Christianity, and proceeding on these lines we resolve Colan into *Col-an*, "Little Col," "Dear Col," and Col is a possible variant of Gol, the name of a fire-god. *Col* is Old



Fig. 23.

THE HURLERS.

(Drawn by J. Norden, *cir.* 1580.)

English, *Colan* is Cornish for "coal," "charcoal," and it is likely that the fire-god *Col* gave his name to coal, just as Tan, Tin gave his to *tin-der* (§ 50). Again, *colley*, Worcestershire dialect for "soot," seems reminiscent of the god Col. Yet again, in Cornish, *col-widben* means "hazel-tree," and as *widben*, *gwidben* means tree, and as in ages long ago the wood of the hazel was especially valued for the production of fire, we may render *col-widben* as "fire-tree."

Reviewing the evidence, there would seem more reason to connect *Col-an* with a fire-deity than with any saint in the Christian Calendar.

66. CLAR.—St. Cleer in Cornwall has several relics of undoubted antiquity, and among them we may cite the Stone Circles called the Hurlers (Fig. 23) and the Trethevy Cromlech (Fig. 24). The Rev. S. Baring-Gould is "very uncertain" about the patron of this parish, while Miss Arnold-Forster places

St. Cleer among the "Doubtful Dedications," and writes: "The saint who gave his name to the parish of St. Cleer, near Liskeard, is unquestionably not the founder of the Poor Clares. We must look farther back than that." Yes: we will "look farther back," farther than Miss Arnold-Forster ever dreamed of—to the period of the Hurlers, a word which may have in it the Cornish *heul*, "sun," and which may point to sun and fire-worship. [The reader will recollect that the Hurlers were men turned to stone for playing ball on a *Sun-day*.]

The *Cornish Church Guide* tells us that the Feast of St. Clarus was on 4th November—fire-worship once more. The earliest recorded name of the parish is St. Clair, a form which reminds us of Ciar, a name given to lighted wisps carried round fields

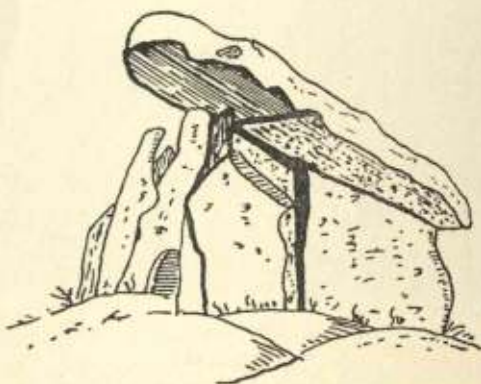


Fig. 24.

TRETHEVY CROMLECH.

(Drawn from a sketch made by Norden, *cir.* 1580.)

in some parts of Ireland on Midsummer Eve, a date which makes us wonder if Ciar may not be the name of a fire-deity who gave his name to the Cornish St. Cleer.

67. CLAVIE.—"The Burning of the Clavie" at Burghead in Elginshire on New Year's Eve is a custom of undoubted antiquity, demonstrated by the fact that no *iron* hammer may be used in the construction of the "barrel" called the Clavie. We have records that the Church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries condemned the practice as "idolatrour and sinful"—indications of its heathen origin. The custom is, however, still observed on Old New Year's Day (which took over many Yuletide observances, § 33), and the following account from *The Times* of 13th January, 1930, is of interest because of the evidence

of superstitions still attached to the Clavie, and because the Peterkins seem to be the modern representatives of the pagan priests who once presided at the ceremony.

### “ BURNING THE CLAVIE ”

“ During the observance on Saturday at Burghead, on the Moray Firth, of the ancient custom of ‘ burning the clavie,’ a stove collapsed, and the tar sprayed in all directions. A sheet of flame sprang 50 ft. into the air, and a rivulet of burning pitch ran down the hillside, setting the grass alight and scattering the crowd. . . . Although the hilltop was alight at several points, girls and women joined in the final scramble for the charcoal relics, which are supposed to keep witches and spirits away. Mr. Peterkin and his late father between them have filled the rôle of ‘ skipper ’ at the ceremony for the past hundred years.”

On the Clavie, one note more. Clavie—Glavie—Gluvi-as. Was the beacon-fire once burnt at Gluvias (§ 60) called the Clavie?

68. As the result of our investigations we have discovered several pagan fire-gods, and we have incidentally found several Christian saints (of whom we give a selection in the Table below) apparently connected with them.

Saint.	Present Feast.	Further Identification of this Feast.
AEDAN	31st January	Eve of 1st February (Oimeic).
ANTHONY or ANTONY	26th December	“Morrow of Christmas.” Probably held originally on the Mid-winter pagan feast, 25th December.
BRID	1st February	Oimeic, a pagan fire festival.
CLEER	4th November	One of the days of the Samhain festivities which commenced on 1st November.
COLAN	Sunday after first Thursday in May	Dependent on 1st May (Beltane).
ERCUS	31st October	Samhain Eve.
GLUVIAS	First Sunday in May	Dependent on 1st May (Beltane).
GULVAL	12th November	1st November (O.S.), <i>i.e.</i> Samhain.
WOL	29th January. (Fair 30th January)	Near 1st February (Oimeic).

69. To make matters even more clear we will now give a Table (compiled from the one just given) showing these nine

“saints” and the pagan feasts apparently connected with them.

Pagan Feast.	Date.	“Saints” Celebrated.
Samhain . . .	1st November	Cleer, Ercus, Gulval.
Mid-winter (Christmas)	25th December	Anthony.
Oimeic . . .	1st February	Aedan, Brid, Wol.
Beltane . . .	1st May	Colan, Gluvias.

70. The feast of a saint is generally reputed to be held on the anniversary of his death, that is, of his birth into a new life. Strange to say, the nine saints just given all die on pagan fire-dates. And they all seem to have names connected with pagan fire-gods. I have written “seems” because Philology is a fickle jade, and we cannot be *quite* sure that all our identifications are correct. Still, they are not likely to be *all* wrong. Now, I would ask: Why do these nine “saints” all seem to have pagan names and why do they all die on dates connected with pagan fire-gods? Nine instances are more than mere chance will account for. Nothing happens without a cause. What is the cause of this surprising mortality among these saints on heathen fire festivals? In the absence of an answer, I will essay one. Because these so-called “saints” are not saints at all, but pagan fire-gods who have been converted into saints. The proper *milieu* for these pagan gods is that mysterious period between the building of Avebury and the coming of Christianity. They have no real place in the Christian era, and history has been distorted by taking them out of paganism, giving them a Christian environment and calling them saints.

71. The conversion of heathen gods into Christian saints is typical of the policy of conciliation and incorporation pursued by the early Church. The Venerable Bede, who died in A.D. 735, gives us an early and an excellent example of this policy. He quotes a letter written by Pope Gregory in A.D. 601 to an Abbot named Mellitus, at that time on a missionary journey to Britain, and in this letter, instinct with wise statesmanship, the Pope observed that “it is impossible to efface everything at once from obdurate minds,” and so he counselled moderation, and advised the Abbot not to destroy those heathen temples which were well built, but to cast out and utterly destroy the idols therein, purify the buildings themselves with holy water, and thus convert them “from the worship of devils to the service of the true

God." He further advised that sacrifices, once made to idols, should in future be offered "to the Giver of all things."

72. Pope Gregory was not initiating but merely carrying out the policy of at least one of his predecessors, for the great St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430), nearly two centuries before, had said practically the same thing :

"Christians ought not to reject a good thing because it is pagan. God is the Author of all good things. To continue the good customs which have been practised by idolaters, to preserve the objects and the buildings which they have used is not to borrow from them; on the contrary, it is taking from them what is not theirs and giving it to God, its real owner. Such things may be consecrated directly for His worship, or indirectly in honour of the Saints, but always to His greater glory."

73. Boniface IV, the successor of Pope Gregory, continued the policy of converting heathen temples to Christian worship, and we find Anastasius, his librarian, writing in the following strain :

"Has not everything in Rome, formerly heathen, now become Christian? Have not all the temples of the false gods been changed into churches of the saints? Has not the temple of Apollo been converted into the Church of the Apostles? Has not the temple of Castor and Pollux been made the Church of Cosme and Damien? Is not the Pantheon, formerly the temple for all the idols, now the Church of the Virgin and of the Saints?"

74. Thus heathen buildings were adapted to Christian uses, and heathen ritual was incorporated into Christian worship. When a heathen temple, dedicated to a certain god, was converted into a Christian church, what could be easier than to displace the name of the heathen god by that of a Christian saint somewhat similar to it in sound? If no Christian saint could be "equated" with the heathen god, what could be easier, when the heathen temple was Christianised and when the heathen rites were incorporated into Christian ritual, than to Christianise the heathen god and make him into a saint?

Bede, who may have obtained his information from Anastasius (§ 73), tells us that the Pantheon at Rome, in heathen times dedicated, as its name implies, to "All the Gods," was Christianised into the Church of "All Saints." If "All Gods"

could become "All Saints," we may be sure that "some gods" became "some saints": unobserved, some gods crept into the crowd of saints and got themselves inscribed on the roll of martyrs when they had no right to be there.

75. There was in the early days of Christianity far more contact between heathenism and Christianity than is commonly supposed. The incorporation into Christianity of some of the good things in heathenism (and heathenism had its good points) was the policy of the Church. The utter destruction of everything pagan was not practical and was not attempted. So some heathen fanes became Christian temples; some heathen rites, Christian ritual; some heathen gods, Christian saints.

Incorporation, not destruction, was the policy of the Church, and we see the results of this policy of incorporation in many things, really heathen, but nevertheless accounted Christian to-day. Thus the lives of some (but by no means all) of the Celtic saints are in part only the tales of the old gods told anew, and it is these tales which cause the shallow man to scoff and the thinking man to think more deeply still.

76. Many Christian saints are undoubtedly real personages: some, however, as we have just seen, are pagan deities disguised as saints: some, mere figments of the mediæval brain.

77. I have just written *mediæval* brain. But the *modern* brain conceives its saints, and the process of spurious saint-making is going on among us at the present day, as witness accounts in the *West Briton* (a weekly paper widely circulated in Cornwall) of 10th July, 1930, and in the *Falmouth Packet*, the next day.

## CORNISH SAINTS

### PICTURESQUE TABLEAUX AT MABE

A delightful series of tableaux, "Living Pictures of Cornish Saints," was given in Mabe Women's Institute, on Friday, by local actors in aid of Mabe Church bell fund. Each scene was prefaced by an explanation of the legend by the Vicar of Mabe, who said the tableaux were the idea of two ladies.

Tableau number three depicted St. Kea's coming to the Roseland, where he built a hermitage, and *the fourth was of St.*

## FIRE WORSHIP

*Ruth, the woman saint, who always wore a red cloak*, coming towards Redruth well.\* Thus Redruth got its name.

Commenting on this strange account, we may observe that the mediævals had no need to invent a saint for Redruth: they had one—St. Uny. But St. Uny has faded from people's memory, and here we have some moderns inventing a saint for Redruth—St. Ruth, who wore a red cloak! Could human fatuity go farther!!

\* The italics are not in the newspaper accounts. A note on the meaning of Redruth will be found on p. 48.

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#### ADDENDUM: NOTE ON REDRUTH

There are two derivations of Redruth. According to the first, Redruth is said to have been once written *Tre-druth*, "The Town (*tre*) of the Druids" (*druth*)—the popular derivation, almost certainly incorrect. The second renders *Redruth* as "Red Ford," *ruth* meaning "red" (cf. William *Rufus*), and *red* being an Anglicisation of *rit*, "a ford." There is no doubt whatever that Redruth is a Celtic word, and in both explanations the Celtic order is recognised, the noun coming first and the adjective second, but in the derivation in the *West Briton*, an English order is given to the component parts of the word, Red-ruth, which is supposed to be named after a St. Ruth who wore a red cloak!





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