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Children of the Wind

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A National Calendar.

JANUARY 6.—Feast of the Epiphany. This high festival of the Church commemorates the Saviour's manifestation to the Three Wise Men of the East (who represented the Gentiles) through the guidance of a miraculous star. An old rhyme has it:—

"The Wise Men's Day here followeth,
Who out of Persia farre
Brought gifts and presents unto Christe
Conducted by a starre."

A curious legend says that the names of the Three Wise Men were Melchior, Balthazar, and Jaspas—supposed to have been Shem, Ham, and Japhet, who had fallen asleep in a cave and woke only at the Nativity of Christ, when they came with their offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, adored the new-born King of Kings in his crib at Bethlehem, and then returned to their cave to die. Another tradition says the Magi were baptised in Persia by St. Thomas the Apostle, and that they spent the remainder of their lives in the service of God. Their remains were said to have been discovered in the fourth century by the Empress Helena, translated to Constantinople, thence to Milan, where they rested until the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, having taken the city in the twelfth century, caused the skulls of the Magi to be conveyed to the Cathedral of Cologne, in Germany, where they are yet exhibited under the title of the three Kings of Cologne. The Church also celebrates the Baptism of our Lord on this day, and our own St. Aengus, noting the day in his *Felire*, says,

"'Tis not meet to asperse the perfect joy
Of the baptism of the great Son of Mary."

The names of twelve Irish saints are set down at the sixth of January, of whom St. Dimanus, who engaged in the paschal controversy (seventh century) is the most notable.

Twelfth Day is a more popular name for the festival, and dates back to the time of Alfred the Great, who ordained that the twelve days succeeding Christmas should be observed as holidays, of which Epiphany was the last. The twelve days are dedicated to the twelve Apostles, and in Catholic countries twelve lighted candles are placed on the Virgin's altar (which is found in every home), and the rosary recited, each member of the family mentally praying for some spiritual or temporal gift before the lights are extinguished. This probably explains the superstition that if you wish for anything while observing a star falling on Twelfth Night it will be granted. In Ireland twelve rushlights, which are considered lucky) are stuck in a dish of meal, and privately marked by each member of the family, the one that burns longest being supposed to have some lucky wish attached to it. The dish of meal is given to the first mendicant that approaches the house next morning. It was formerly the custom in parts of England for one large and twelve small fires to be lighted intended to represent our Lord and the Twelve Apostles. The fire which stood for Judas Iscariot came in for some hard kicking, and the ashes cast to the four winds of Heaven. Auguries for the ensuing year were drawn from the way in which the others burned. In some districts of England and Scotland merry parties are still held under the name of the Twelfth Cake Ball. Twelfth Day is also known as "Little Christmas," when the same kind of feasting as on its greater namesake (though on a more diminished scale) is renewed. The Irish peasantry say that at Epiphany the day lengthens to the extent of a "cock's stride" on the dunghill, and that in former times wise farmers were accustomed to hoard up or purchase all the provender they could procure if the day proved mild and warm, but if cold they gathered around the turf fire and congratulated themselves on the prospect of a mild spring. In France, also, the people remark that if the sun shines on the "King's Day," there will be two winters, and the inhabitants of the Rhine say, "At Epiphany the holy kings build a bridge or break one," meaning thereby that either a severe frost or sudden thaw is certain to ensue. The birth of one Irishwoman who displayed great literary abilities, and the death of another, is commemorated at the sixth of January. Mrs. S. C. Hall was born in Dublin in the year 1800. She published her first book—"Sketches of Irish Character"—in 1828. Ten

years later she issued her "Lights and Shadows of Irish Life," and in 1840 appeared her "Stories of the Irish Peasantry." "The Whiteboy" is said to be her best novel, and "The Groves of Blarney" her most successful drama. Mrs. Hall, with the exception of her husband, was the most prolific writer of the century, and in thorough sympathy with the people whom she depicted in her works. She died on the 30th of January, 1881.

Mrs. Ellen Forrester was born at Clones, County Monaghan, in 1828. Her poetry appeared in "The Nation," "Weekly Budget," and other journals. Her first published volume, entitled "Simple Strains," appeared about 1861. In conjunction with her own son, Arthur M. Forrester, she brought out "Songs of the Rising Nation" in 1869. She died on January the 6th, 1883, and was buried in Salford, near Manchester. Besides the son already mentioned Mrs. Forrester had two daughters (Fanny and Mary Magdelene), who published occasional poems in the weekly journals. Her brother, Bernard Magennis, published "The Red Hand and other Poems" in 1888.

[To be Continued.]

THE WAR.

Correspondents have rebuked me for saying anything in favour of the Boers and in commendation of the source of their strength, i.e., the Bible, at an hour like this, when they are slaughtering or being slaughtered by our fellow-countrymen. Though I do still think that the Bible is the fountain of their power, I think, too, that in an hour so tragical, thoughts of that kind may indeed be entertained, but not expressed, and that all comments of the kind referred to had best be withheld till the war is over.

Frankly, I confess I don't like this war, and I find that a great many of my readers and correspondents regard it, too, with a sort of horror. Still, on the whole, perhaps silence is the best.—Ed.

In an ancient war, one of the many savage contests between Erse and Dane, the sentinels of the former were sleeping, and the enemy creeping through the dawn of a Christmas Day to surprise them. Suddenly a wren flew up and perched on the resonant head of a drum. The sound awoke a guard, and saved the Irish from extermination. The memory of the brave bird's action is still kept green in Waterford and all over South Ireland. Processions of boys march from house to house, carrying bunches of evergreens on long poles and a stuffed or caged wren, singing:

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze;
Altho' he's little, his family's great,
I pray you, good lady, you'll fill in a trate."

A COMPLIMENT—AND A HALF!

First number to hand. Thanks and congratulations. Verily the "A.I.R." knows the Celt as Ferguson knew him, and as Keats knows him.—B.

After this, and coming from such a quarter—nameless here—the little paper might well stiffen its back and take the road stoutly and with confidence.—Ed.

CHILDREN OF THE WIND.

I hear the little children of the wind
Crying solitary in lonely places,
I have not seen their faces;
But I have seen the leaves edging behind
The little tremulous leaves of the wind.

FIONA MACLEOD.

ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

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