

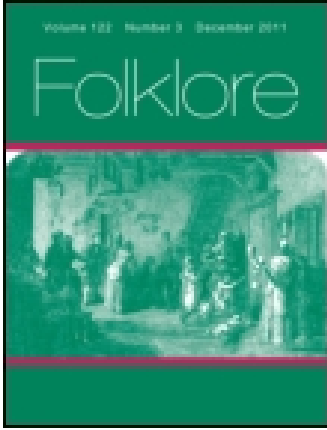
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Charlotte S. Burne

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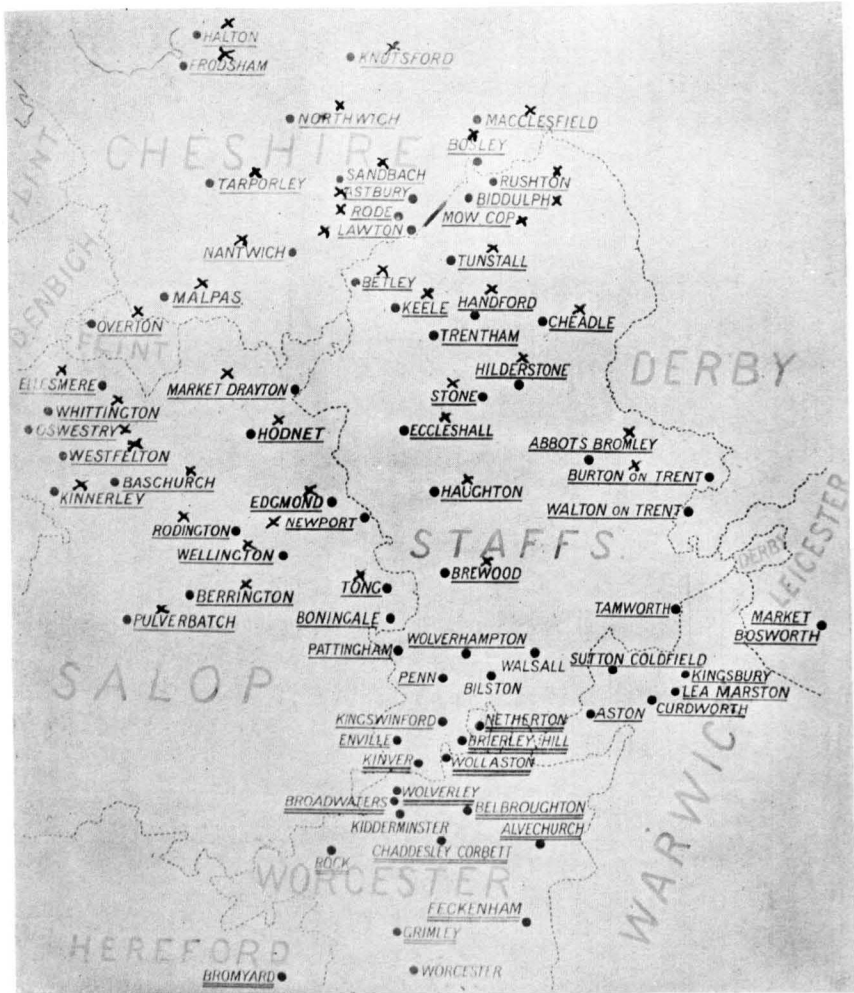
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MAP ILLUSTRATING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CUSTOMS OF SOULING, CLEMENTING, AND CATTERNING.

Names marked with a cross denote localities where Souling is practised.

Names underlined denote localities of Clementing.

Names doubly underlined denote Catterning.

SOULING, CLEMENTING, AND CATTERNING.

THREE NOVEMBER CUSTOMS OF THE WESTERN MIDLANDS.

BY CHARLOTTE S. BURNE.¹

AT the request of our President I am to bring to your notice this morning three customs—or rather three varieties of one custom—practised in the month of November in the counties of Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, and Worcestershire, and carried on in recent years within a few miles of the place where we are now assembled. The localities in which these customs have been recorded are marked on the map—Souling with a cross, Clementing with a black line, and Catterning with two black lines. You see that each occupies a well-marked area, and each “marches” pretty closely with its neighbours. Trivial though these customs are, and in the last stage of decay, yet nevertheless their history may serve to illustrate the general history of institutions—their growth and decay, the effect upon indigenous custom of the introduction of new ideas, and the result produced by the contact of cultures.

There is one point that is forcibly impressed on the mind by the study of calendar customs, and that point is that, to arrive at a true understanding of our ancient seasonal customs, we must first of all realize that each calendar fast or festival had its economic as well as its social and religious sides, and conversely its religious and

¹Read before Section II. (Anthropology) at the meeting of the British Association, Birmingham, 1913.

social as well as its economic side. We see this still in the case of Christmas, which brings Christmas holidays and amusements, Christmas services and charities (Christmas in the churches, as the newspapers have it), and also Christmas bills. Unless we grasp the fact of the many-sided character of the annual festivals of our forefathers, we cannot hope to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the observances connected with them. It is from this point of view that I would discuss the local November customs in question.

I need hardly take up your time by reminding you that the ancient Celts (and probably also the Teutons, but Teutons are out of fashion just now!) reckoned only two seasons in the year, and began it with the winter season in November, not with the summer season in May. This, obviously, is the practical husbandman's calendar, beginning the year with ploughing and ending it after harvest. Vestiges of this ancient reckoning are still traceable in Wales, in Scotland, and in the north of England, where houses are let and servants—especially *farm-servants*—are engaged for the year or half-year at the beginning of one or the other of these two seasons. And in the Isle of Man Sir John Rhys tells us (*C.Fl.*, 316) he has even known it seriously debated whether the 1st of January or the 1st of November is the true New-Year's Day.

There can, moreover, be little doubt that even in pagan times "November Night" was already an annual Feast of the Dead long before it was transformed by the Church into the two consecutive festivals of All Saints and All Souls—Hallowmas or Hollantide in popular speech. In most of the more Celtic parts of the island bonfires are still, or were but recently, lighted on the hills on Hallow E'en; and in Ireland the belief that the spirits of the dead are then abroad is still firmly held. In England it was customary to ring the church bells all night on Hallowmas Eve, till the practice was forbidden by an Order of Council

under Elizabeth. The Hallow E'en games and rites of divination with which Burns has made us familiar are still carried on in Scotland, and Irish boys still loot their neighbours' cabbage-gardens, making use of the lawless liberty so often permitted on the day or hour that marks the passage from one year to another, or from the old régime to the new. The position of Hallowmas as originally a pre-Christian New-Year festival, at once religious, social, and economic, may, I think, be taken to be established.

In the district shown on the map the solstitial quarters of the Julian and Gregorian Calendar have long superseded the ancient seasonal half-years as the dates for entering on or terminating service or tenancy. These latter still regulate the lighting of fires and the pasturage of cattle, but the only surviving *rite* observed at Hallowmas is that which we are now to discuss.

On either the 1st or 2nd of November—All Saints' and All Souls' Days—in Cheshire, North Shropshire, and North Staffordshire, children go from house to house singing, or rather droning out, a rhyming ditty, and begging for cakes, ale, and apples:—

“Soul, soul, for a soul cake!
Pray, good missis, a soul cake!”

“Peter stands at yonder gate
Waiting for a soul cake!”

Aubrey in 1686 speaks of seeing “the board” piled with flat round cakes—like the illustrations of the table of the shewbread in the old Bibles—which in his time Shropshire housewives were wont to set ready for all comers. Blount's *Glossographia* (1674) mentions the custom of doling *soul-mass-cakes* as extending from Lancashire to Herefordshire. This would include the area shown on the map, outside which I have not met with it,² except in isolated instances

² Evidence lately to hand shows that it extended into the Welsh districts adjoining Oswestry.

—viz. one at Monmouth,³ one near Sheffield,⁴ and one at Marton in Lancashire,⁵ which of course comes within Blount's area. But though I have not heard of any general dole elsewhere, yet cakes are associated with the festival in various places. At Whitby they were called *soul-mass loaves*, and were believed to be imperishable.

Aubrey records the "rhythm or saying" current in his day as:—

"A Soule-cake, a Soule-cake,
Have mercy on all Christen soules for a Soule-cake!"

which is clearly a reminiscence of the pre-Reformation practice of prayers for the dead. Blount states that the recipients of the dole returned thanks for the gift by the pious aspiration: "God have your soul, bones and all!" ("beens," *i.e.* banes, bones). Here, it is the soul of the living donor that is to be benefited by the dole. Several of the present-day versions of the Souling ditty allude to the blessing that will return to the giver:—

"Pray, good people, give us a cake!
For we are all poor people, well known to you before,
So give us a cake, for charity's sake,
And a blessing we'll leave at your door!"

But the following couplets, which Mr. G. T. Lawley, the historian of Bilston, heard there in 1857, droned out by a party of old women in grey or black cloaks, preserve a distinctly pre-Reformation form:—

"Here we be a-standing round about your door,
We be come a-souling, an' we bin very poor!"

"Remember the departed, for holy Mary's sake,
And of your charity, pray gi' we a big soul-cake!"

The Reformed doctrine, as readers of Macaulay know, never thoroughly leavened Staffordshire, where little groups

³ Miss Marie Meek.

⁴ B.F.M.

⁵ Porter's *Hist. of the Fylde*.

of hereditary Romanists exist even at the present day; and it was, in fact, at a Romanist house that the women were singing. I have not marked Bilston as a "souling" locality on the map, because Mr. Lawley, who was only a schoolboy at the time, cannot recollect the exact date on which he saw them.

In Cheshire the practice of souling seems to have been specially vigorous. Down to the later years of the nineteenth century we there hear of parties of young men—not children—going souling, singing a variety of songs, performing the Mummers' Play usually acted at Christmas, and taking with them a hobby-horse to enforce compliance with their demands. But elsewhere—that is, in North Shropshire and North Staffordshire—the practice is now confined almost entirely to the children; cakes are rarely provided, and the children content themselves with begging for fruit in a singsong peculiar to the occasion. Thus:—

"Soul, soul, for an apple or two,
If you've got no apples, pears'll do!
One for Peter, two for Paul,
And three for Him that made us all!
An apple, pear, plum, or cherry,
Any good thing to make us merry!
Up with the kettle and down with the pan!
Give us a good big 'un and we'll be gone.
Soul day, Soul!" (*Da capo.*)

The object for which apples were asked for was originally no doubt to use them in the games and divinations of the season, in which apples always played an important part, but they would be wanted above all for making the *lamb's-wool*, the bowl of hot spiced ale and roasted apples which, with the cakes, formed the special dainty of the festival. The men's souling songs were full of references to good ale. Here is part of one which I took down fifty years ago from

the mouth of a Shropshire labourer who had sung it not many years before :—

“ Here’s two or three hearty lads standing hard by,
 We are come a-souling, good nature to try,
 We are come a-souling, as well doth appear,
 And all that we soul for is ale and strong beer.

Go down into your cellar and there you shall find
 Both ale, beer, and brandy, and the best of all wine ;
 And when we have got it, O then you shall see,
 And when we have drunk it, how merry we’ll be !

I pray, my good missis, don’t tarry to spin,
 Look for a jug to draw some drink in,
 And when you are drawing, don’t let your heart fail,
 But draw us one jug of your bonny brown ale !”

Nearly the same set of words was sent me by the leader of the Abbot’s Bromley horn-dance less than a month ago.

So much for Souling. Now in *South Staffordshire* exactly the same custom, but without any mention of the cakes, is practised on St. Clement’s Day, November 23rd, and is called *Clementing*. This is not a modern innovation or a degenerate practice. The historian of Staffordshire, Dr. Plot, in 1686, noted that in the Clog Almanacks (probably the same now preserved in the William Salt Library at Stafford), “a Pot is marked against the 23rd November, the Feast of St. Clement, from the ancient custom of going about that night to beg drink to make merry with.” It is often called Bite-apple or Bob-apple Day, because the children hang the apples from strings, or put them in tubs of water, and catch them with their teeth. Further south, in *North Worcestershire*, the same custom is observed on St. Katharine’s Day, the 25th, under the name of *Catterning*. In both cases it has now passed into the hands of the children. The ditties resemble the Souling ditties, with

the omission of any allusion to cakes. Instead of "Soul, soul, for a soul-cake," we have

"Clemený, Clemený, Clemený mine!
A good red apple and a pint of wine!"

or:—

"Clemený, Clemený, year by year,
Some of your apples and some of your beer!"

Or again:—

"Cattern and Clemen' be here, be here,
Some of your apples and some of your beer!"

and so on to:—

"Up with the ladder and down with the can!
Give me red apples and I'll be gone!"

At all three festivals the exact words vary in different places, and the couplets which form the nucleus of the ditty are frequently interspersed with snatches of song appealing to the feelings of the hearers, such as:—

"Dame come down and deal your dole!
And the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

"We are not daily beggars that beg from door to door,
But we are neighbours' children whom you have seen before."

"The master and the missis are sitting by the fire
While we poor children are a-trudging in the mire.
The lanes are very dirty, our shoes are very thin,
We've got a little pocket to put a penny in!"

The last tag I shall quote seems more especially to belong to the Catterning ditty:—

"Roll, roll!
Gentleman butler, fill the bowl!
If you fill it of the best,
God will send your soul to rest!
If you fill it of the small
You shall have no rest at all!"

To which a Kinver correspondent adds :—

“ If you fill it from the well
God will send your soul to Hell ! ”

To turn now to the map (Plate XVI, p. 285). The places marked are those at which we know on good authority that the several customs are or have been observed within the memory of man.

The *Shropshire* notes were collected by myself and friends previous to 1885, (but Newport, 1912).

Cheshire, from printed sources (E.D.D., *N. and Q.*), by *Brand* workers.

North Staffordshire, by the Hon. Sec. of the Field Club, myself, and others, at various dates.

South Staffordshire, Mr. G. T. Lawley, myself, and others, at various dates.

Worcestershire, by Sir Richard Temple, through the local press, so lately as last autumn (1912). The accounts given by Allies and Noakes, the Worcestershire historians, 1840-50, mention no locality.

Observe the sharp boundary between the customs—Bonningale and Tong, Enville and Kinver, only three miles apart. The Enville ditty has been recorded on three different occasions : by “ Cuthbert Bede ” in 1856, by the parson of the parish in the eighties, and by the National school-master in response to Sir Richard Temple’s appeal last autumn (1912). The Kinver version has also been recorded at different times, and each time it celebrates both St. Clement and St. Catharine, while that at Enville mentions St. Clement alone, so we see that the forms are fairly constant.

The southern boundary of the custom seems to be reached in Worcestershire, for enquiry through the *Evesham Journal* last autumn only elicited from *Gloucestershire* an account of a dole of apples on the 1st of January, with a ditty quite unlike ours but

somewhat resembling the Devon and Dorset wassailing formula:—

“ Blow well, bear well !
God send 'ee fare well !
Every sprig and every spray,
A bushel of apples to give away,
On New-Year's Day in the morning ! ”

This is quite another matter. The object in view is the welfare of next year's apple crop, not the singers' enjoyment of the present festival.

From *Warwickshire* the only modern evidence is of *Clementing* at Aston and Sutton on the outskirts of Birmingham, but judging from the simile Shakespeare (*Two Gent.*, I. ii.) applies to a disconsolate lover, “ He goes puling, like a beggar at Hallowmas,” *Souling* must once have prevailed there.

Two points now suggest themselves. Why was the dole transferred from the earlier to the later date in this particular area? and why were these three festivals observed in this particular way at all?

The festival of St. Clement, the reputed successor of St. Peter as Bishop of Rome, must have been known in England from the time of the mission of St. Augustine, but it probably did not come into any prominence until the rise of the craft-guilds in the Middle Ages. The legend of St. Clement relates that he was martyred by being tied to an anchor and drowned in the sea, which afterwards retreated for seven days every year, far enough to disclose the body of the saint, still fastened to his anchor, lying in a marble tomb. Owing apparently to the incident of the anchor, he was adopted by the blacksmiths as their patron. His day is still celebrated by the blacksmiths of the south-eastern counties by dinners, songs, and convivial rites, in honour of “ Old Clem,” as they call him; and in East Sussex, the earliest seat of the iron trade in England, we

meet with the dole again, and even with the familiar refrain:—

“Cattern and Clemen’ be here, here, here!
Give us your apples and give us your beer!”⁶

The cult of St. Clement in the industrial district of South Staffordshire needs no further explanation. It is more difficult to account for that of St. Katharine of Alexandria. She was unknown in England before the twelfth century, when her legend seems to have been imported by the Crusaders. She was one of the chief of the virgin saints, in fact, only second in honour to St. Mary herself. The vision in which, according to her legend, she saw herself united to a Heavenly Bridegroom, caused her to be regarded as a kind of personification of the Church, and, together with her martyrdom by being torn to pieces by armed wheels revolving different ways, led also to her becoming a sort of “sex-patron” of unmarried women (*spinsters*). Dorsetshire girls are reported still to visit an ancient chapel of St. Katharine to pray for husbands, and St. Katharine’s Day was kept as a festival by Buckinghamshire lacemakers within living memory. In the days of the old Poor Law the tallest girl in the Peterborough workhouse was chosen queen on St. Katharine’s Day, and the whole party, gaily dressed, were taken round the town, singing a song with the burden, “A-spinning we will go!” And the ropemakers of Chatham and Rochester kept the day by carrying a girl decked as “Queen” Katharine round the town (*Dyer’s British Popular Customs*, s.v.).

I can only suggest that it was the employment of women in the nail and chain-making trades on the northern borders of Worcestershire (which is even yet not entirely discontinued) that led to the Catterning form of the doles. But as these trades are carried on in the extreme south of Clementing Staffordshire (only in the extreme south) as

⁶ *Folk-Lore Journal*, vol. ii., p. 321.

well as Catterning Worcestershire, this does not entirely account for it. The needle-making and fish-hook-making of North Worcestershire may have had some effect, and perhaps a custom of the cathedral body of Worcester, which we shall come to presently, may have influenced it. (There was also a local saint, the Blessed Catharine Audley, of Ledbury, Herefordshire, about whom legends seem to have been current in Worcestershire, and whose cult may have promoted that of her own patron saint.)

The special connection of doles with all three festivals remains to be considered.

The feast of Hallowmas was naturally shorn of much of its economic importance when the old agricultural seasonal calendar was superseded by the scientific solstitial and equinoctial quarters of the Julian year. Yet some matters of business still continued to be transacted at the ancient date. Indeed, when rents were paid in kind this could hardly fail to be so. They must be paid when crops are ripe, etc., and you cannot alter such dates at pleasure. Even so late as 1695 Bishop White Kennet tells us that the feasts of All Saints and of St. Martin were the times appointed for the payment of such dues as arose from the fruits of the earth. Now it is a matter of common knowledge that old-fashioned rent days always included some degree of hospitality shown by the landlord to the tenant, or by the tithe-owner to the tithe-payer. And in medieval days at least any sort of feast included a dole, or at least a distribution of the fragments to the poor. I take it that the doles of ale and apples were once part of a custom of this kind, and that they descend from the days when rents and tithes were paid in kind, and the beggar at the gate was admitted to a share of the feast. That the prayers of the poor might thereby be purchased for the benefit of the souls in purgatory, for whose welfare all men would at Hallowmas be specially concerned, would be an additional motive for liberality. This, I take it, is the early history of Souling.

There can be little doubt that the transference of the dole to St. Clement's and St. Katharine's Days, three weeks later, was due to economic causes. I need hardly point out that it mainly occurs in the industrial districts. As long as rents were paid in kind, they could be paid on the exact date on which they were due, but when trade developed and cash payments became customary, some spell of grace became necessary, for a man must get in his debts before he could pay his dues.⁷ Accordingly, the code of "Ordynances," or by-laws, of the borough of Walsall,⁸ drawn up about the year 1440, decrees that the "Mayer" shall render up his "accompts" in presence of some of his "bredren" every year on St. Clement's Day, and the wardens of the guilds—of which the borough could boast two—shall render theirs on St. Katharine's Day. Burgesses who had not paid their dues by St. Clement's Day were to be heavily fined. Within the memory of man the day was still called Clement's Accompt. The business concluded, apples and nuts were thrown from the windows of the Guildhall to be scrambled for by the crowd outside, who were also "amused by hot coppers scattered among them by Griffin the town crier" (*ibid.*, p. 429). The Grammar School boys were admitted into the Guildhall to scramble for apples thrown to them from the magistrates' bench. The Corporation "accompts" show that sums varying from £1 to £3 were annually spent in this way. The custom was only discontinued in the year 1860.

It is interesting to learn that the church of Walsall was formerly dedicated to All Saints, and that till it was pulled down and rebuilt in 1820 it contained four chapels, dedicated respectively to St. Mary, St. Nicholas, *St. Clement*, and *St. Katharine*. You will notice that the

⁷ Even to this day, in many country places, tradesmen only send in their accounts once a year, and country drapers and other small shopkeepers often offer wine to their customers when a bill is paid.

⁸ Willmore, F. W., *History of Walsall* (1887), pp. 165, 429.

Church allowed two more days' grace for payment than the State.

In Worcestershire we find indications of a similar system. The Dean and Chapter of Worcester also completed their annual rent audit on St. Katharine's Day, and were accustomed to celebrate the occasion by sending a bowl of mulled wine, called a Cattern Bowl, to every house in the precincts.⁹ (In this connection it may be worth while to mention that some of the more isolated places where we hear of Catterning were in early times the property of the see of Worcester.)

Before concluding, I must just mention a rather confused story told by a correspondent of *Gent. Mag.* in 1790. At Kidderminster, he says, on the annual election of the Bailiff, a "Lawless Hour" was proclaimed, during which the populace threw cabbage-stalks at each other in the streets. The new Bailiff then went in procession to visit the principal inhabitants, and was received at each house with showers of apples. No date is given, so I am unable to place the custom properly, but considering the locality one cannot but feel that it must be connected with the apple doles. At all events, it exhibits the beginning of an official year marked by gifts of fruit, and by scattering it over the new beginners.¹⁰

⁹ Brand, i., 412.

¹⁰ Since the above was written I have received the following additional notes, by the kindness of Mr. T. Pape of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and of my nephew, Mr. S. A. H. Burne :—

Newcastle-under-Lyme has been a corporate town since the time of Henry III., and the Mayoral election was held on the Tuesday after Michaelmas Day, from 1368 (the earliest of which there is any record) to the passing of the Municipal Reform Act in 1835, when it was changed to the Tuesday after November 9th. On the 25th January, 1910, a boy named Wheatley sued a firm of tradesmen in the local County Court. The newspaper report of the case states that on Tuesday, Nov. 9th, 1909, "plaintiff, in accordance with an annual custom observed at Newcastle on the day of the Mayoral election, called 'clouting-out day,' visited with a number of other boys the premises of tradespeople and residents in the expectation of having nuts, apples, etc., and sometimes

Taken by themselves these trivial little old customs may seem to have no more than a local antiquarian interest, and a mere equation of them with other begging customs elsewhere would not suffice to give them any anthropological value; but when we enquire into *When* and *Where*, as well as *What* and *How*, when we study them historically (as in Europe it is possible to study custom) and consider them in relation to their economic environment, they become, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate, an object-lesson in the effect of the contact of cultures. They exhibit an example of successive layers of imported culture superimposed on a groundwork of indigenous custom. We have first the ancient—I might almost say the prehistoric—autumnal celebration of the old and new year, probably always combined with a Feast of the Dead. Then we get the introduction of Christianity, transforming the pagan feast into the festival of Hallowmas. Next we meet with that combination of newly introduced subsidiary cults with newly organized and specialized crafts, which marks the

coppers, thrown into the street to be scrambled for. Plaintiff was burnt by receiving a red-hot copper down his sleeve." (He lost the action on technical grounds.)

Miss Muloch (Mrs. Craik), in her *Studies of Life*, published in 1861, thus describes the Mayoral election at Newcastle in her early days: "What a grand event was the first frost! which I have known come so early as the 9th of November—'Mayor-choosing day,' or 'clouting-out day'—which, by old town custom, was the very Saturnalia of play. All the children in every school or private house were 'clouted-out' by a body of young revolutionists armed with 'clouts'—knotted ropes—with which they battered at school-doors. All the delighted prisoners were set free. Woe be to the master or mistress who refused the holiday! for there would not have been a whole pane left in the schoolroom windows: and I doubt if even his worship the new Mayor would have dared to fly in the face of public opinion by punishing any 'clouter.'"

In the case of Newcastle we see the custom of doling apples, etc., divorced from all ecclesiastical associations and associated with the beginning of the municipal year and with the licensed holiday common at New-Year festivals, as the All Saints' doles were with the agricultural year and the St. Clement's doles with the trade-guilds' year. It thus falls into line with the Kidderminster Lawless Hour, and brings that into connection with the rest.

progress of civilization in the Middle Ages. Thus St. Clement and St. Katharine come into prominence, and especially into local prominence. Then comes the period of decay. The theological changes of the sixteenth century shatter the religious side of the kindly old customs, while simultaneously the centralizing despotism of the time crushes the guilds which did so much to maintain them; and the economic changes of succeeding centuries and of a civilization that is continually growing more and more complicated deprive the several dates, once so important, of any real significance. The old observances dwindle away, or are only kept up by "the most conservative part of the population, the children," wherever good-natured elders still allow them to benefit by them.

C. S. BURNE.
