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THE AUGUST HOLIDAY IN
ANCIENT EIRE.

Although there is little enough in the four annual holidays sacred to St. Lubbock that suggests a religious origin, they are all, in some degree, the successors of festivals which were formerly celebrated at various seasons of the Church's year. Three of them follow closely upon the great festivals of the Church, while the August Bank Holiday nearly coincides with the old quarterly festival, held in honour of the first fruits of harvest. Its original object is recorded by its English name, "Lammas," a word of Saxon derivation, meaning "Loaf-mass;" but the holiday itself can claim a far greater antiquity, being the successor of an ancient Pagan festival held at the same season, and with the like intention. Its survival is due to that policy, marked alike by wisdom and charity, which was pursued by the early fathers of the Church, notably by St. Patrick and St. Gregory the Great. These did not seek to quench the smoky wick of heathen piety, but rather chose to feed it, and to blow it into clearer flame, enlisting into the services of the Christian Church many of the pagan celebrations which were harmless, or even beneficial, in their tendencies. Of such was the festival of the first fruits, held in waning summer, not in Celtic, or even European, lands only, but in most parts of the world.

In Eire, the name Lughnasad still preserves some record object of the festival, which was held in honour of the sun god Lug, one of the most striking figures among the divinities of the Tuatha De Danann. This cult was celebrated in many parts of Eire by an *oenac*, modern *áonac*, which is commonly translated "fair," but combined with the business and pleasure incident to a fair on the largest scale—such as was held, during the middle ages at Frankfort, Stourbridge, and many other places, and subsists, even in these days, at Nigni Novgorod—contests, athletic and poetic, like those of ancient Greece, and various high functions of state analogous, in some sort, to those of an Oriental Durbār.

The chief of these August festivals was held at Tailltin (barbarised into "Telltown") in Meath. The name, like most Irish names, is explained by a legend, which derives it from Taltin, daughter of Maghmoir, King of Spain, whom Eochaid, King of Eire, married. Taltin became the foster-mother of Lug, in one of his avatars, and the god after her death, preserved her memory in the name of her burial place, where he instituted in her honour funeral games, or, in Irish phrase, a "fair of lamentation."

This legend, like many of its class, is probably a comparatively late invention—maybe it would be fairer to call it an application of an unattached

legend—intended to satisfy man's usual craving to know the wherefore of names and things. Nevertheless, it reveals, clearly enough, the true origins of this and similar festivals in all lands. King Maghmoir takes his name from his kingdom, which is more than the "Great Plain" beyond the Western Ocean. This the naivete of a primitive Euhemerism identified with Spain, but it is really the *Tir na mbeo*, the other world whence issue and whither return all forms of life; the *gran mar del essere*. Hence the connection of the underworld, involving the cult of the dead and of the powers of darkness, with the gods of sun and harvest.

The *oenac* of Tailltin lasted for a month; 15 days before and 15 days after the first of August, or Lug's Day. The proceedings were similar to those to be described hereafter, especial prominence being given to horse races, of which Lug was the reputed inventor. This calls to mind the horses of the sun, though it is at least as probable that this was merely one of the many inventions for which the Gael would be indebted to Lug as the Culture God.

Another important August *oenac* is described in an old poem, given by O'Curry in his "MS. Materials of Ancient Irish History," and taken by him from two extant MSS., the Book of Leinster, compiled circ. 1150, and the Book of Ballymote, compiled at the end of the 14th century, both from much older documents.

Here we learn that on the Calends of August, in every third year, the princes and nobles, bards and scholars of Leinster, with their wives, and also the clergy of the province, would repair to the Hill of Carman, in the Co. Wexford, on one side of which was a great cemetery. Here presided the King of Leinster, "with his royal robe about him, and with golden helm on head, for the kings never wore their royal diadems, save on the field of battle only." This graphic note of an old writer is significant of the chivalrous spirit of ancient Eire.

The celebration lasted for seven days, each of which was devoted to its own especial functions. The first day opened with Divine Service, conducted by the saints and clerics of Leinster; and probably this substitution of Christian for Pagan rites was the only substantial alteration which the festival had undergone from time immemorial.

Then followed a great state assembly, like those which nations of any civilisation, have been wont to hold at some period of their history, for the transaction of the like business. This was the proclamation of kings and queens, the denunciation of sacrilege and crimes committed (including, probably, the outlawry or reconciliation of offenders), the promulgation of laws, the settlement of disputes, and the pacifi-

cation of feuds. It is probable that this proclamation of laws did not include much legislation, properly so called, but consisted chiefly of special edicts, together, possibly, with the recitation, for better remembrance, of parts of the customary law, which, as interpreted by the Brehons, with an uncertain amount of modification by the princes and clergy, constituted the body of Irish law. It seems doubtful, too, how far the assembly possessed the right of voting, or deliberating, upon the royal edicts, but we may be sure that these did not always pass without a searching criticism. In some cases, too, it was customary to draw them up previously, and submit them to proper councils.

The *oenac* was also a great commercial event, three markets being held thereat, one of food, one of cattle, the third being "a great market of the strangers from the Greeks, wherein are gold and goodly raiment." Hence we see that the extensive foreign commerce of Ireland to which Tacitus alludes in the first century A.D., was still in existence, several centuries after date.

The remainder of the festival appears to have been given up to diversion, which, however, was by no means destitute of serious, and even religious, significance. Horse races and athletic contests of various kinds were held, among which the noble ladies had a separate day and place allotted them for their own sports, a notable anticipation of a very modern fashion, if, indeed, anything, except machinery, be modern.

Literary vied with athletic contests. Bards and poets recited their tales and poems, wherein were recorded the national history and traditions, the genealogies of the chiefs, and popular legends of love, and war, and enchantment.

Nor was diversion pure and simple forgotten. Cooking and feasting abounded, and the *oenac* was frequented by minstrels of every kind, fifiers, pipers, and violers, bone players and chain shakers, players of trumpet and horn, cruit and timpan. Buffoons was there, "a babbling mob in painted masks, roaring and bellowing."

As with other national assemblies of the kind, full protection was conferred for the time being, upon the persons and property of those attending it. A breach of this rule, not only by violence and outrage, but even by the execution of legal process, such as arrest or distraint, was visited with death, without option of fine or composition, a punishment of rare severity in ancient Eire, where the death penalty was most infrequent.

The feast was invested with so sacred a character, that the neglect of it was supposed to entail upon the inhabitants

of the province sloth, and cowardice, and premature old age, under kings devoid of geniality or kindness, hospitality or truth. If, however, it was celebrated with all proper rites, the reward was abundance of corn and milk, lakes full to overflowing, a life of ease, tranquillity and prosperity, under the rule of kings and nobles addicted to righteousness.

The official celebration of the Fair of Carman appears to have ceased in the year 718; that of Tailltin lasted to Norman times; but the people long preserved some relics of these festivals, for at Tailltin, at any rate, the season was celebrated with rustic games down to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

G. S. B.

Dear G. S. B.—You have forgotten that amongst the penalties threatened in the poem against those who should neglect to celebrate the Fair of Carman were—"melancholy and early greyness."

—Ed.

TO IRISH PROTESTANTS.

We have now come to a dividing of the ways. The floods of Nationality are rising in this western fringe of Europe, and we must see that we float and are not submerged. And not only must we see to that, but we must take a leading part in the fight for Nationality such as men of our faith have always done in every land. The spirit of the decentralisation, of individual judgment and individual characteristics has been our proudest inspiration ever since the rebellious nations broke down the spiritual tyranny of Rome. Even in Ireland, the national feeling has within the last 100 years been kept alive almost entirely by Irish Protestants. But those same Irish Protestants were men of exceptionally strong character, whose sturdy and independent spirit enabled them to shake off the Great Enchantment that has so long obscured our eyes and lamed our energies. The majority of men and women of our faith in Ireland have lain in a hopeless lethargy and torpor. They have dreamed away their days in a shiftless, aimless manner while the awakening of the nations went on all over Europe. They have looked east, and lost sight of the ground under their feet. They have been blinded by religious prejudice against their Catholic fellow-countrymen. They have made a gulf between themselves and those who should have fought side by side with them in the national fight. They have artificially cultivated a sense of kinship with another land, a land where pride of race is the leading trait of the national character, a land whose example cannot be followed but by those who have a pride of race of their own.

Let the cry of "Ireland a Nation"

not alarm you. It is a cry of hope and energy. It is a watchword that survives and must survive every other while the configuration of these Islands remains. Make that cry your own. Do not fear for your religion or your freedom. Do not be frightened by the bogey of a Catholic Ascendancy. Do not be misled by self-styled "Leaders" into believing that Ireland can ever be an appendage of Rome. A nation which is strong enough to decentralise itself from England will not voluntarily centralise itself upon Italy. The enchantment of the Vatican will never be more powerful than the enchantment of London. There is enough of the spirit of the old Culdees remaining in our native priesthood to resent any denationalising influence from outside. The Irish priest as a burner of Irish books and MSS. is a thing of the past. The priest has become a Nationalist through the spread of the national awakening of Europe. You need not fear for your religion. Ireland has no national religion which could encroach upon your own. The religion of the majority of Irishmen is centred outside Ireland. Its connection with nationality is an accident, which might easily have happened otherwise, and may yet happen otherwise if Rome sees fit. Religion and patriotism are two powerful sentiments, but of the two, patriotism is the stronger. Our Catholic fellow-countrymen have the inspiration of Faith and the inspiration of Country. Many of us have only the former, some of us have neither. That is a sure sign of decay and impotence. Many of the strategic positions placed in our hands by an unjust ascendancy have gone, because nationality has come into its own. Let the others go too. We do not want strategic positions against our natural allies. Let us make straight for an Irish Ireland. We can make a bee-line for it. Our natural ally, the Catholic patriot, is hampered by his spiritual guides, and must await their sanction before he begins to read his Irish primer. He will welcome our unfettered enthusiasm, and will be inclined to follow our leadership as that of a man who puts the good of his country above the comfort of his own little soul.

Do not wait for the Gaelic League. It is a much advertised body which has done good work and has roused others to do more. Do not listen to its unauthorised spokesmen. They are a nuisance which every organisation must up with. But make yourselves as Irish as you can in every way. Begin the process of de-Anglicisation in your own selves. By-and-bye, this country of yours will assume a fairer aspect in your eyes. The Irish Sea will be no longer to you what the Bhosphorus is to the Turk. You will help to build the Irish nation, the proudest and greatest task

you could be engaged in. Do you hesitate? Do you still look eastwards, with fear in your eyes lest the sea run into blood? Be not afraid. Beyond the eastern waves there is rising a new Wales, and also a new England, not the vampire, which sucks the life-blood out of smaller nations, but the kindly Elder Brother who sees in the promise of an Irish Ireland a prospect of a nobler and more English England.

Ir mure,

Cú na Mapa.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,

I wrote those "incidents," or whatever they are, somewhat hastily, but surely 'tis your printer that puts the captain of the old emigrant ship standing on a prop (PROP) I have seen a goat standing on a couple of inches of marble in the "black quarry," near your place, but this captain of mine is an artist at such jobs. No wonder, and with his eye on something else, he thought little about old Cassidy. God bless you; print the other sketches, and make us all famous.

R. E.

Dear R. E.—You must remember that things of the kind are a feature of the "A. I. R." I began in the first number with a "matted tear," and have kept up the supply since with great steadiness.

—Ed.

THE FOUR MASTERS.

I can readily believe what you say about "A. I. R.," it has such delightful ideas about the improvement of the country. "The Annals of the Four Masters" are disappointing, are they not? I had often longed to know what they were like; but in the whole there is the enthusiasm which vivifies all true endeavour.

G.

Yes, dear G., the Annals are certainly a little dry; but is not their dryness a set off to the juiciness and luxuriance of the rest? The Four are certainly not four butterflies. I would suggest your reading them aloud with a full and sonorous intonation as an excellent exercise for the organs of sound. Seriously I would.—Ed.

It is exciting to hear of your "new venture." I can hardly congratulate you on a "Consultative Committee," which will give you the doubtful benefit of its advice. I have a pretty clear notion of where your chance will be. It will be in the work of Gaelicising the Irish Protestants and new comers generally. Yours should be a fighting paper, directed as much against Anglicisation as against Romanisation. A strongly National note should be struck which should be acceptable to both Fenian and Unionist, without bending the knee to either.

But I must check myself in the very process of giving advice which I condemned.

Ir tura an fear!

Le meap mór,
Eamonn MacAulann.