

ALL HALLOW'S EVE

by Hamish Hendry

The night of the 31st October has a character peculiar to itself, and to you children it has some ceremonies that possess special interest. In England it is known as All Hallow's Eve; while in Scotland, where its customs are most varied and remarkable, it is known as Halloween. It is the Eve of All Saints' Day, but there is little or nothing connected with the popular practices of that night that suggest Christianity. On the contrary, they suggest some old pagan worship and a mysterious impish world that holds high carnival for that one night. Many of the customs and rites connected with this revel—described vividly and amusingly by Robert Burns in "Halloween"—are not known to the Scots people of the present day; but some few of them are still practised, even in England.

Nuts and apples become of great importance upon All Hallow's Eve. The nuts are not for eating—although that were probably a wise use to which to put them—but to play a mysterious part in deciding the fate of lovers. For this purpose two nuts are dropped into a bright red fire, side by side, and the name of the lad and lass, whose fates are to be decided, is given to each nut. The nuts themselves give the decision. If they burn quietly together then all is well; but on the other hand, if the nuts (or one of them) jump out of the fire, then things will go ill with the two lovers. Here is how Burns describes the practice:

"The auld guidwife's weel-hoordet nits
Are round and round devided,
And mony lads and lasses fates
Are there that night decided:
Some kindle, couthie, side by side,
And burn together trimly;
Some start awa, with saucy pride,
And jump out ower the chimlie
Full high that night."

Apples have a quite different use. On Halloween they are placed in large quantities in a big tub nearly full of water. The apples are then stirred round vigorously, while the boys and girls, each in turn, try to snatch an apple from the water, not using their hands, but their teeth alone. Sometimes one has to dip one's head right down to the bottom of the tub in chase of a big apple, and that is rather a chilly experience, as I am able to testify. The modern plan of dropping a fork into the tub, over the back of a chair, may spoil, just a little, the apples that are impaled, but it is a good preventative of a cold in the head—the usual result of ducking for apples.

There are many other customs connected with Halloween, some of them mysterious and uncanny, which you will learn by and bye. But these two, the burning of nuts and the hunting of apples will do you no possible harm. On the contrary, where there is a lot of you children present, they will give much innocent fun and laughter.

Source:

Hendry, Hamish. "All Hallow's Eve." *Holidays and Happy Days*. London: Grant Richards, 1901. 86 – 91. Electronic.