

## MICHAELMAS DAY

by Hamish Hendry

The 29th September is dedicated as a feast day in the Christian Church to St. Michael and All Angels. In the Bible the Angel Michael is mentioned several times, and always as a fighter, especially against Satan. Thus you find it stated in the Epistle of Jude that Michael the Archangel contended with the Devil regarding the body of Moses. In the book of the Revelation of St. John, again, you will find it written that there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old Serpent, called the Devil. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

You will gather from this that St. Michael always appears in the character of a warrior; and as the Christian Church accomplished a great deal of fighting, especially during the time of the crusades, it can easily be understood that the warlike Archangel was popular. In old pictures he is usually represented in a coat of mail, and with a short spear in his hand, hurling Satan downwards to the earth. John Milton, in his "Paradise Lost," makes full use of this conception of the Archangel, only that he puts a great and marvellous sword into his hand:

"The sword  
Of Michael from the armoury of God  
Was given him tempered so, that neither keen  
Nor solid might resist that edge; it met  
The sword of Satan, with steep force to smite  
Descending, and in half cut sheer; nor stayed,  
But, with swift wheel reverse, deep entering shared  
All his right side: Then Satan first knew pain."

In old times it was usual to have a saint or an angel for one's guardian, and as Michael, according to the Church, was both of these he was popular as a heavenly protector. But an earthly protector was also required, and thus it came about—whether by accident or intentionally I cannot tell—that magistrates were chosen upon Michaelmas Day. Thus you find that the Lord Mayor of London is elected on the 29th of September. This day is also one of the four quarterly terms; the day upon which many people pay their rent; and not always, therefore, a day of joy. In old times when the farmer took his rent to the lord of the manor it was usual for him to carry a fat goose in his hand as a present. From this practice it has established itself as a custom to have a goose for dinner on Michaelmas Day; another good reason is that geese, when fed upon the chance grain of autumn's stubbled fields, are always at their fattest and best. It is curious to note, how that, although a holy day or a holiday may have begun with the adoration of saint or angel, it usually survives for us in some form of eating. But you children, I am sure, do not object.

Source:

Hendry, Hamish. "Michaelmas Day." *Holidays and Happy Days*. London: Grant Richards, 1901. 82 – 85. Electronic.