

## THE CIRCLE AND THE CROSS.

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### CHAPTER XXVI.

#### SECULAR USES OF THE CHURCH.

*Secular Uses inherited from the Pagan Barrow—Gregory's Letter to Mellitus—Christianity's Compromise with Paganism—Relics the medium of the Compromise—Funeral Feasts—Bull-feasts of St. Cuthbert, etc.—Agapae—Churches and Inns, why associated—Songs, Dances and Games in Church—Beltane Fires—The Sun-wise Turn—Booths built for Church-feasts—'Anatomy of Abuses'—Games in Churches—Prohibitions of the same—Fives, Morris, Hastiludia, Cock-fighting, Racing, etc.—'Gamelands' and 'Playfields'—Meaning of 'Plaistow'—Fairs and Markets in Churchyards—Fairs held at Night—The Church as School-house—The Church-door as Notice-Board—The Church as scene of Elections—Church-Towers as Armouries.*

Among the oddest facts in ecclesiology is the variety of alien uses to which have been put the parish church and churchyard in the British Isles. Even to-day where a village feast survives it centres about the church, and commonly coincides with the patronal festival. The church-door is still the official notice-board of the Government in all matters relating to local taxation, poor-law relief, public health, and even military service. The church is still to some considerable extent an educational institution, and the affairs of the parish were until very lately still in part directed by parson and churchwardens assembled in vestry meetings. Here and there are survivals—or revivals—of things seemingly yet more irrelevant—dancing and singing, May-games, feats of strength, annual football matches, rush-bearings, and what not; and there is the fullest evidence for happenings even less accordant with modern notions of propriety—feasting and drinking and mummary of the most irreverent kind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See especially Sidney Webb, *English Local Government*, vol. i, and Addy, *Church & Manor*, chaps. viii-x, xvi.

Some writers have tried to explain these facts by supposing that the Church has gathered to herself the control and direction of various activities with which originally she had nothing to do—that there has been a transfer to the church and churchyard of all these unrelated matters. There was, in the vast majority of cases, no such transfer at all. The business, the fairs, the games, etc., were associated with the churchyard because that was a barrow, and there they had grown up. On the same soil, and out of the same barrow, later grew up the structural church which inherited all that had belonged to the barrow. There was no other transfer than must necessarily happen in the devolution of an estate from one generation to the next. For almost every one of all these seemingly non-ecclesiastical happenings there is to be found an analogue in what is known of paganism and the pagan barrow.

Pope Gregory counselled Mellitus not to destroy the pagan places of worship in Saxon England, but to compromise by converting them, when possible, into Christian churches. He goes on : ‘ And as it is the pagans’ custom to sacrifice numbers of cattle to their false gods, it were well to leave them some part of even this custom. Thus, on dedication days, or on the anniversaries of those blessed martyrs whose relics are there laid, let them build their booths of boughs around what is now a church, but was erstwhile a pagan shrine, and let them celebrate their accustomed feasts, but in godly fashion, killing and eating the victims no longer to the honour of devils, but to the glory of God, and of their fulness rendering thanks unto Him who is the giver of all things. In this way, while there be left to them some of the outward forms of their pleasures, they may the more readily find strength to understand things spiritual. It is, I doubt not, impossible to separate their stubborn hearts from all such things at one stroke.’<sup>1</sup> He illustrates and justifies his counsel of compromise by the case of the Israelites.

This precious record tells us that the Saxons, like the Celts, expressed their religious instincts in feasts ; that these, like modern patronal festivals, came round annually ; that they were held at fixed spots which were regarded in

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *H. E. I.*, xxx, § 74. This chapter is omitted in the Saxon Version.

the same light as shrines or other *loca consecrata*; that in default of any roofed building to accommodate the feasters, booths were built for the occasion round the *locus consecratus*; and that Pope Gregory strongly advised that one and all of these practices should be assimilated to Christianity. And this is precisely what happened, not only with the customs mentioned, but with a large number of other practices associated with such *loca consecrata*.<sup>1</sup> Christianity no more dared bluntly to quash such immemorial practices than it dared immediately to denounce the immemorial fashions of burial itself. Very gradually it modified both. It forbade cremation, and fortunately for Christianity neither in Celtic Ireland nor in Saxon England was cremation a fixed practice. It discouraged isolated burial in individual barrows, and encouraged the use of common graveyards. It discouraged the burial of grave-furniture with the dead, but could not suppress it all at once; indeed it never succeeded in suppressing it completely. It sought only to give to the customs of paganism a new consecration. Very hesitantly it curbed and very slowly it modified now one, now another relic of paganism; but not to this day has it succeeded in extirpating them all.

These pagan customs were one and all connected with the grave. Therefore the new faith must likewise concern itself greatly with the grave—with the mortal *reliquiae* of the faithful at any rate, and preferably with those of some notable one amongst these. Here was yet a reason the more for placing relics of the saints and martyrs in each newly consecrated 'church.'

Teutonic funeral-feasts are repeatedly condemned in the decrees and canons of the Church, which denounced them as a form of *sacrilegium*.<sup>2</sup> The priests themselves were frequently as guilty as their flocks, offering sacrifices of bulls and goats.<sup>3</sup> The Brehon Laws of Ireland mention

<sup>1</sup> Lingard was perfectly justified in saying (*Anglo-Saxon Church*, ii, 48) that the Greek and Roman Christians did not scruple to retain many customs which had been in use with their pagan ancestors.' When he goes on 'and these customs the Anglo-Saxon converts received from the missionaries,' he was making an assumption as baseless as unnecessary. The paganism of Celts and Saxons had quite enough of such customs

of its own, and had no occasion to borrow any from Rome and Greece.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. *Capitularies* of Carloman (*anno* 742, 743, etc.), *sacrificia mortuorum*; *de sacrilegio ad sepulchra mortuorum*; *de sacrilegio super defunctos, id est, dadasas*. See *Archaeologia* xxxv, 259; Keyser, *Northern Antiquities*; Greenwell, *Brit. Barrows*, p. 10; Bright, *Lectures*, pp. 71, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Zacharias to Boniface, *Ep.* 71.

precisely similar 'devil-feasts.'<sup>1</sup> Horses also were favourite victims, and various decrees prohibited the eating of horse-flesh. Within a few yards north and south of the church of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, were found two considerable pits filled with the bones of horses,<sup>2</sup> possibly the relics of such feasts.

At Kirkcudbright in the twelfth century there were annual bull-feasts on the occasion of the fair (St. Cuthbert's Day, March 20), and the necessary booths were erected by the villeins.<sup>3</sup> Mackinlay<sup>4</sup> points out that, as St. Cuthbert died in 687, this was not a case of the mere survival of a pagan custom upon its native site, but an instance of the deliberate transplanting of such a custom to a new and Christian site; and Professor Baldwin Brown<sup>5</sup> calls it 'either a remarkable coincidence, or a fact in social history of no little importance.' Bull-baiting was practised on St. Cuthbert's Day at Stirling down to 1529,<sup>6</sup> and there were bull-feasts in Ross-shire in honour of St. Maelrubha also as late as the sixteenth century. The old Yorkshire woman who 'thanked the Lord she had always buried hers wi' 'am,' was voicing the sentiment of her forbears long prior to the days of Christianity. The bones of the victims of such feasts are a feature in many unquestionably pagan barrows.<sup>7</sup> They were indeed the immediate ancestors of that abundant eating of 'funeral baked meats' which amongst certain classes customarily follows a funeral, in Lancashire and Yorkshire particularly, and which has elsewhere been refined into 'cake and sherry.' They were the ancestors also of the church-ales of the Middle Ages, which periodically turned God's House into a tavern, its wardens into professional brewers. Not very remote was the feeling which laid 'food-vessels' with the dead, and which, within the last half-century, led another Yorkshire woman periodically to place a saucer of milk upon a relative's

<sup>1</sup> Willis Bund, *Celtic Church of Wales*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> One of these was at a spot called Wanbarrow, popularly explained to mean Woden's Barrow.

<sup>3</sup> *Boldon Book*, ad init. Seebohm, *Village Community*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Mackinlay, *Pre-Reformation Church*, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> *Arts*, i, 274.

<sup>6</sup> *Proc. S.A.S.* x, 668. The old English sports of baiting bulls, bears, etc., took place usually on Sunday afternoons (Smith, *Festivals, Games, and Amusements*, p. 226). The Tutbury bull-running occurred on the Feast of the Assumption, and the bull was loosed to its tormentors at the gate of the Priory (*ibid.*, p. 228). At Oxford the bull-ring was close to the communal church of St. Martin in Carfax.

<sup>7</sup> Mackinlay, p. 140.

grave. The milk was intended for the dead man's ghost, although presumably the cat got it.

Feasting was a part of religion irrespective of burial-rites.<sup>1</sup> It survives alike in Scottish Beltane-feasts and in the association of high-living with Christmas-tide and New Year. In various parts of the world various viands are as necessarily associated with the different Calendar festivals as in England are pancakes with Shrove-tide, roast goose with Michaelmas, and hot-cross buns<sup>2</sup> with Good Friday. Canons of the Anglican Church under dates as late as 1571 and 1603 are levelled against the practice of using the churches and churchyards for 'feasts, banquets, suppers, church-ales, and drinkings'; and in 1639 the parishioners of Berrington, Salop, were still accustomed to hold a feast in their church at Easter-tide. Even in 1750 the kirk of Stenness, Orkney, was still the scene of an annual feast which lasted, with eating and drinking and dancing, as long as the supplies brought by the participants held out.<sup>3</sup> Herein is to be found the sufficient explanation of the seemingly incongruous association of inns with churches. There was a time when the care of the soul and of the body were alike centred in the graveyard. Evolution presently differentiated the two, and provided one with the roof of a church, the other with that of an inn. The modern tendency is to thrust the inn further and further away from its ancient site, but in scores of our towns and villages it still holds its ground cheek by jowl with the church.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Feasts in churches were forbidden as early as 363 by a Canon of the Council of Laodicea. These were the *agapae* of the Greek Church, commonly attending the *natalicia* (i.e. anniversaries of the deaths) of the martyrs, etc. Similar feasts were the usual concomitants of *encaenia* (feasts of the dedication) of 'churches.' The enemies of Christianity made the excesses attending such feasts the ground for attacks upon the new faith, and St. Augustine was compelled to admit that they had reason on their side. A Canon of the Council of Chalons (650) forbids the license which allowed 'companies of women singing filthy songs at the dedications of basilicas and the feasts of martyrs' (Bingham, *Christian Antiqs.* Bk. xx, vii, § 10; Labbe, *Concilia*, vi, 391). The Saxon name was '(Church) Wakes,' the German *Kirchenweibe*, dialect *Kyrwi* or *Kylwi* (Hospinianus, *de Festis*, cited by Bingham, *loc. cit.*).

<sup>2</sup> For similar customs in pre-Christian Rome and Tarentum, see Warde Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, p. 161, and Sir Arthur Evans in *Journ. Hellen. Studies*, vii (1886), p. 44. In Serbia it was the custom to keep annually the 'Slava-day' of the family, when were served various special cakes, one of which was termed *Kolyivo*, literally 'something which has been killed with a knife,' obviously symbolical of an original bloody sacrifice. *Kolyivo* is prepared only for those saints who are believed to be dead, not for those who are believed to be still living, such as St. Elias (Petrovitch, *Serbia*, p. 255).

<sup>3</sup> Addy, *Church and Manor*, pp. 330-333.

<sup>4</sup> This association of church and inn has been explained as a late development arising out of the need of refreshment after early communion taken fasting, and especially after this when (as was customary) it followed upon a wedding ceremony. This doubtless



Feasting inevitably entailed singing ; this as inevitably led to dancing ; and out of the last would be developed various forms of athletic exercise.

As connected with funeral-feasts songs would in the first instance be merely the expression of grief, or panegyrics of the dead and his ancestry. In Greece this feature developed in the long run into the homiletic splendours of Greek Tragedy and the choric odes with their ceremonial dances round the altar-tomb ; in the more matter-of-fact Roman it took shape in the funeral oration and the display of the *imagines*. In Irish *Aenachs* it came to be an opportunity for the compilation and perpetuation of a sort of history of the tribe, of the clan, or of the nation. It survives to-day only in the 'keening' at an Irish wake, in the coronachs of Gaelic grief, and in the long-drawn chanting of hymns wherewith a Welsh or Highland bier is borne over the hills to some remote burial-ground. A canon (no. 24) of Aelfric forbids the singing of 'pagan' songs at Saxon funerals. In Ireland, as in Greece, it promised at one time to produce a dramatic art, but this promise was not fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> There are traces of a similar promise in England, as when in 1197 it was found needful to prohibit 'spectacles' in the churchyard of Bury St. Edmunds. In this country the mystery and miracle plays of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries were probably encouraged by the Church partly as a means to overbear the traditional dramatic elements associated with pagan funeral ceremonies. 'At the funeralls in Yorkshire,' wrote Aubrey, 'to this day . . . some play at cards, some drink and take tobacco. They have also mimicall playes and sports, e.g. they choose a simple young fellow to be a judge, then the suppliants (having first blacked their hand by rubbing it under the bottome of the pott) beseech his Lordship and smutt all his face.'<sup>2</sup> The very Easter-fires and Beltane-fires are but survivals of pagan ritual, which are to-day associated with various dates in the Christian calendar—Easter, St. John's

had much to do with perpetuating, if not actually reviving, a far older association of the two. 'Among the early Christians Sunday was so especially a day of joy and gladness that all fasting on it was prohibited, even during the great annual fast of Lent' (Smith's *Festivals*, p. 126). That national

institution, the Sunday sirloin, has therefore a sound historical authority.

<sup>1</sup> Wood Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths in Ireland*, i. pp. 314, 386.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by E. Peacock in *Instructions to Parish Priests*, note on l. 1465.

Eve, and Halloween. The Yule-fire and the blazing Christmas pudding are just as pagan in their origin, and almost as near extinction.

Hundreds of barrows have yielded the traces of funeral fires, and not a few have yielded what would seem to be the relics of funeral-feasts. Of the songs there can be no survival save in traditional use,<sup>1</sup> but the dancing or something very like it has left more concrete evidence. The floor of the 5-ft. ditch which surrounded the barrow at Whatcombe, Blandford, was observed to be 'smoothed and polished into a perfectly well-defined track' by human feet circling round the burial-mound,<sup>2</sup> and a similar ditch around the timber-built peristalithic circle at Bleasdale, Lancs., was carefully floored to serve as a processional way.<sup>3</sup> The great barrow near the church at St. Weonard's, Herefordshire, was until lately the scene of annual morris and maypole-dances,<sup>4</sup> the maypole itself representing possibly the pillar-stone which had marked a grave. At North Ronaldshay and at Bernera, in the Orkneys, it was the custom to dance about a pillar-stone. These pillar-stones 'may have been to the ancient Picts what the parish kirk is to the modern inhabitants—a place of worship, where they devoutly assembled under the canopy of heaven to offer their devotions to the sun-god.'<sup>5</sup> It is not needful to drag the sun-god in: pillar-stones frequently mark graves, but probably even when not sepulchral they were frequently *foci religionis*.

The 'sun-wise turn'<sup>6</sup> about a *locus consecratus* was, and is, a prominent feature of Celtic rituals. At Croagh Patrick the devotees' pilgrimage is completed by performing the turn seven successive times about three small circles at the foot of the hill<sup>7</sup>; and the name of these circles—Relic Mhuire—declares them to be barrows. The old custom of carrying a corpse sun-wise about the church

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Scott has reconstructed and preserved one such song ('A Lyke-wake Dirge' in *Border Minstrelsy*), of which another version is quoted by Peacock, *l.c.*

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Lancs. and Chesb. Antiq. Soc.*, xviii (1900).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Essays on Archaeol. Subjects*, i, 58 sqq.

<sup>5</sup> Spence, *Sketland Folk-Lore*, pp. 88, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Various called the *deisul*, *desiul*, *dessil* and *turas*. It is 'the way the wine goes round' at table, and the way the cards are dealt. It is followed by the officiating bishop and clergy by direction of the Church herself, whenever a new church or new churchyard is consecrated. See Daniel Rock, *Church of Our Fathers* (1850), III, ii, pp. 181, 182; Martin, *Description of Western Isles*, pp. 116, 85, 247, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Borlase, *Age of the Saints*, p. 47.

at Dipple (ch. xxii) is merely the continuance of the pagan ritual upon a Christian site.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Ancren Riwele* (c. 1225) one of the petty sins to be confessed is that of 'going to the dancing in the church-yard.'<sup>2</sup> Six centuries later canons were issued against morris-dancing in the churches, 'Powles' Dance' was a recognised institution, and when Aubrey wrote the Minster of York was the accustomed scene of a riotous revel. Until lately the parishioners of Painswick, Glouce., used to join hands and go dancing round their church (St. Mary's) once a year.<sup>3</sup> The practice was known as 'clipping the church,' and was observed in localities as wide apart as Burbage in Derbyshire, Warminster in Wilts., and Guiseley in Yorks., W.R. (St. Oswald's).<sup>4</sup> On the north side of the church of Llanpumsant, Carm., used to stand a chapel, of which it was reported in a Visitation of 1710 that the clerk 'did never know any use made of it, except that on Sundays in wet weather the country people resorted thither to dance.'<sup>5</sup> The very name of 'revels' (French *reveiller*) reminds one that these were originally the vigils of departed saints, 'ful of songe and ful of daunce.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The pagan character of the rite is proved by its being expressly forbidden in *Capitularies* of Charlemagne. It was in fact known as the *cursus paganus*. The superstition is not confined to the Western world: it is referred to by Ovid and others. See other references in Borlase, *Antiqs. of Cornwall* (1769), p. 128. It was the dying command of a lady of the manor of West Woodhay, Berks., that her coffin, before being laid in the adjoining graveyard, should be borne thrice round the manor house, presumably 'widdershins,' for the lady had a sore grievance against her husband. This was in the eighteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Titus MS., *Ancren Riwele*, 318, *code i ring i chirche y eard*. For this sense of 'ring' the N.E.D. cites Douglas, *Aeneis* (1513), iv. 37, 'ringis and dancis mony a rowte.' So Spenser, *Shepherd's Calender* (1580), *October*, v. 53, 'al were Elisa one of thilke same ring.' One MS. of the *Ancren Riwele* reads *code ooe pleouwe ine chircheie, bibeold bit, and oðe wrastlinge, and oðer fol geomenes*. For the meaning of *pleouwe* ('play'), cf. the famous 'plays o' Peebles,' which were held 'at Beltane,' dancing being a principal item of the programme.

<sup>3</sup> They subsequently went through the

streets in procession shouting something which had been rationalized to 'High Gates,' and thereafter adjourned to feast on 'puppy pie.' At the present day these *paganiae* are reduced to a procession in church on the Sunday nearest to 19th Sep. (Feast of the Annunciation, Old Style).

<sup>4</sup> The custom is said to be especially associated with dedications to St. Oswald (5th August), but at Warminster it fell on Shrove Tuesday.

<sup>5</sup> *Inventory Carmarthenshire*, no. 541.

<sup>6</sup> For a number of Continental examples of church-dancing, some still surviving, see E. K. Chambers, *Medieval Stage*. At Echternach in Luxembourg the date is Whitsuntide and the dancing is performed by a procession as it moves from the doors of the church of Echternach to the tomb of St. Willibrord (*ibid.* i, 163). At Limoges 'the people used to dance round in the choir of the church' of St. Marcel (Smith, *Festivals, Games and Amusements*, p. 232). King James I issued a royal proclamation that 'our good people be not disturbed, letted, nor discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as dancing, either for men or women . . . May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances, and the setting up of



As the Saxons built booths for their pagan feasting, so did the Britons for their paschal celebration before the 'Alleluia Victory' (ch. xvi), and the *Boldon Book* shows us the same thing become a manorial custom of the twelfth century. Booths were erected for the fourteen days' session of the annual Althing of Iceland,<sup>1</sup> and the travelling booths which yet wander about England from one fair or feast or market to another, are the highly developed descendants of the originals built of boughs and greenery.<sup>2</sup>

The close association of all such activities with the church and the churchyard is emphasised in the following passage from the *Anatomy of Abuses* of 1583 (p. 93):—

'Thus thynges sette in order, they have their Hobbie horses, dragons, and other Antiques, together with their baudie Pipers and thunderynge Drommers, to strike up the Deville's Daunce withal. Then marche these Heathen companie toward the Churche and Churchyarde, their Pipers pipyng, Drommers thonderyng, their Stumpes dauncing, their Belles iyingling, their handkerchefes swinging about their heades, like madmen, their Hobbie horses and other monsters skyrmishing amongst the throng; and in this sorte thei goe to the Churche (though the Minister bee at Praier or Preachyng), dauncing and swingyng their Handkerchiefes over their heades in the Churche, like Devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise that no man can heare his owne voice. Then the foolish people, thei looke, thei stare, thei laugh, thei fleere and mount upon formes and pewes to see these goodly pageauntes solemnized in this sort. Then after this aboute the Churche thei goe againe and againe, and so forth into the Churcheyarde, where thei have commonly their sommer Haules, their Bowers, Arbours, and banquettyng houses set up, wherein thei feaste, banquet and daunce all that daie and (per-adventure) all that night too.'

Sir David Lyndsay describes similar scenes in Edinburgh, when :

'They beir ane auld stok image through the town  
With talbrone, troumpet, schalme, and clarioune . . .  
With preistes and freris in processiou,  
Siclyke as Bel was borne through Babilone.'

May-poles' on Sundays and other holidays, provided these were not allowed to interfere with Divine service (Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes*).

<sup>1</sup> Above, ch. vii.

<sup>2</sup> The Jews and the Romans had the same practice.

Herein is the ancestry of all the pleasant 'pomp and feast and revelry' of May-games, still especially prominent—and indeed recrudescent—in the Celtic West, in Somerset and Devon.<sup>1</sup>

In some of the Western Isles of Scotland the dance took the form rather of a military ride, both sexes being mounted. At Kilbar<sup>2</sup> they rode three times about St. Barr's church on the patronal day (September 27), a performance at once recalling the rides about the graves of Patroclus, Anchises, and Beowulf.

Irish *Aenachs* were accompanied by sports and games of whatever kind might be locally in vogue. So were the later lych-wakes<sup>3</sup> of Yorkshire and the wakes of Lancashire and of Ireland. Aubrey mentions card-playing and the mock-assize, and the game of hot cockles. These however were indoor amusements. Outdoor sports of every kind were customary features of every *Aenach* and every churchyard. The wrestling is mentioned in the *Ancren Riwele* (p. 54, n. 2), and John de Pontissara,<sup>4</sup> Bishop of Winchester (in 1295), forbade all such *lucte*, along with dancing and *ludi spectabiles*. In Myrc's *Instructions to Parish Priests* are mentioned other sports :—

'Castynge of ax-tree and of ston  
Sofere hem þere to use non ;  
Bal and bares and suche play  
Out of chyrchegeorde put away.'

A gloss on this passage, of a date somewhat later than the text, reads : 'Daunsyng, cotteyng, bollyng, tenessyng, hand-ball, foot-ball, stoil-ball, and all manner other games out churchyard.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Addy, *Church and Manor*, pp. 338-9, on the 'Midsummer Game.' The ceremonial crowning of a May Queen amidst dancing and games took place on 20th June, 1919, in the churchyard of St. Botolph's Bishopsgate, London.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *Description of the Western Isles* (1703), p. 99. The same writer repeatedly mentions the like performance on St. Michael's Feast Day. In the Isle of Harris it included bare-back races (p. 79).

<sup>3</sup> The Anglo-Saxon equivalent of 'vigil' and 'revel,' the all-night watching of the corpse (*lic*). In the shortened form 'wake' it is still in use for the local fair or holiday ('holy day' of the patronal saint), as at

Oldham Wakes in Lancs., and Compton Wake at Compton Abdale, Gloucester.

<sup>4</sup> *Reg. of John de Pontissara*, i, 210, 225.

<sup>5</sup> *Instructions to Parish Priests*, vv. 334-7. 'Bares' is the game of casting the bar, still popular in the sixteenth century. The stone, upwards of 100 lb. in weight, was, like the parish top, a part of the apparatus of every village and was kept in the church. One is still preserved in the church at Llanwddyn (Lake Vyrnwy), Mont.; cf. *Reliquary*, 1896, p. 159. 'Cotteyng' is the game of quoits. The old English game of stool-ball is now again vigorous in Sussex, where it had never wholly died out.

Even the game of fives originated in ball-playing against the walls of churches, and Elias Owen instances churches in the Vale of Clwyd, of which the walls are scored with lines and marks for the game. Eton and Rugby have each developed rules of their own, conditioned by the architectural features of their several chapels, but it would seem that neither has the right to pose as the first inventor of the game. A contemporary description<sup>1</sup> of 1746 speaks of 'a dozen lusty fellows playing tennis against the tiles of the church' at Diserth, Radnorshire, 'and as many playing fives against the steeple (tower).' The 'nine-men's-morris' was sometimes played in the church, and flat stones marked out with the necessary lines and holes for this or some similar game have been found in the churches of Hargrave, Northants., and Sempringham, Lincs.<sup>2</sup>

One hears even of *bastiludia in coemeterio*: Bishop Adam de Orleton of Winchester (*ob.* 1345) expressly forbade them.<sup>3</sup> The word is generally understood to mean tournaments, but there was perhaps hardly room for such things in the average medieval churchyard.<sup>4</sup> Possibly the reference is to some such game as that of tilting at the quintain.<sup>5</sup>

Until 1850 or thereabouts the circular churchyard of Penmachno, Carn., 'was used as a public playground, and had as many as seven stiles into it.' The last statement helps one to understand how easily the old-time regularity of the circular garth might be distorted and lost.<sup>6</sup>

A peculiarly popular form of sport amongst the Celts was that of cock-fighting. It was a pre-historic taste, for cocking-spurs have been found in the *debris* of the lake-village at Meare. A cockpit—a shallow circular depression 24 ft. in diameter—is visible to this day in the churchyard of Pennant Melangell, Mont., and the association of this sport with the Sabbath-day meeting at church was in Wales maintained until the last century, as also in Cumberland. There is a cock-pit in the churchyard at How Gill. The pit was commonly on the north side 'as being less

<sup>1</sup> See *Reliquary* 1895, p. 136. Such games were usually played against the north wall of the building, because there were fewer doors and windows on that side, and fewer graves in this part of the garth. The scores were scratched upon the wall, and may be seen here and there.

<sup>2</sup> Murray's *Guide to Northants.*, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson's *Codex* (1761), i, 191.

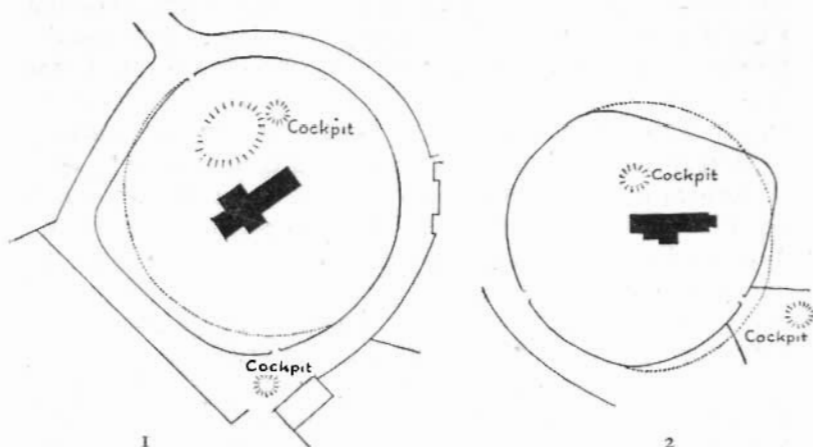
<sup>4</sup> See Ducange *s.v.* *bastiludium*.

<sup>5</sup> Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes* (1810), pp. 104 *sqq.*

<sup>6</sup> Hughes & North, *Old Churches of Snowdonia*, p. 118.

sacred,' and when at last decency had altogether barred it from the garth, another was frequently made immediately outside, as at Pennant Melangell, and at Llanfechain in the same county, and again at Llangelynnin, Carn.<sup>1</sup>

Different forms of sport took precedence at different spots at different periods. At Merryn in Cornwall, until very recently, the special game was hurling. Earlier generations had cultivated manlier forms of exercise, such as running and leaping, horse-racing and wrestling, and



CHURCHYARDS OF (1) LLANFECHAIN (BEFORE 1888) AND (2) PENNANT MELANGELL (1896), MONTGOMERYSHIRE, WITH EARLIER (INSIDE) AND LATER (OUTSIDE) COCKPITS.

there was probably a time when the sports took even more dangerous forms, such as combats involving the risk of actual bloodshed. The case of the survival of footraces at Cnocan has been cited above (ch. xvij). Borlase remarks<sup>2</sup> the survival of horse-racing round the dolmen in Giants' Ring, co. Down, and similar may be the origin of the great horse-fairs at Woodbury Hill, Dorset, and at Yarnbury, Wilts. Crayke in Galtres, a spot peculiarly associated with St. Cuthbert, was until the eighteenth century the scene of one of the largest race-meetings in Yorkshire, the prize taking the strange shape of a little golden bell.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> *Reliquary*, 1896, p. 154. In some parts of England at the present day the north side of the churchyard is regarded as being 'not in the sanctuary.'

<sup>2</sup> *Dolmens of Ireland*, p. 907.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson's *Camden* (1772), i. 179. The race-meetings were discontinued before 1772. For Crayke, see above, ch. xv. The

Easter games at The Kirk, Kirkby Ireleth (ch. xxiv), are another case. There is something more than mere coincidence in the resemblance between such cases and that of the Greek Olympic Games or that of the *Circus Maximus* in Rome. Stone-circles in Wales, it will be recalled, are frequently called *Meini Campau* (ch. xx.), 'Play Stones.' In a field in the parish of Orton, Westmorland, were lately to be seen the remains of a large peristalithic barrow or cromlech. The field is to this day called 'Game-lands,' because it was the scene of annual sports associated with the barrow. At Holne, Devonshire, is a 'Ploy Field,' the property of the parish, and the scene erstwhile of an annual 'Ram-feast' on May-day. In the centre of the field is a pillar-stone, at which the ram was despatched and roasted. The festival was attended by the usual dancing, wrestling, and similar sports.<sup>1</sup> At Donington, Lincs., where was once a small chapel of St. Bartholomew, the patronal day used to be celebrated by strewing the chapel's floor with rushes, and after service adjourning 'to a piece of land known as the "Play Garths," where . . . the remainder of the day was spent in rustic games.'<sup>2</sup> Near what Stukeley named the 'Arch-druid's Barrow' at Rollright, Oxon., he remarked 'a square plat, oblong, formed on the turf,' whereon annually, upon a certain date, 'the young men and maidens customarily meet, and make merry with cakes and ale. And this seems to be the remains of the very ancient festival here celebrated in memory of the interred.'<sup>3</sup> A yearly revel used to be held in the parish of Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, Notts., the rendezvous being a tumulus known as Cross Hill, presumably a Christian *ciric* which had failed to make good, and conceivably the original burial-place of the community before the creation of the parish *ciric* at some date after 750. Annually on Good

annual fair at Clachan St. John's, a village in the parish of Dalry, Kirkcudbright, is popularly known as 'Clachan Race.' A good many modern race-meetings seem to be the survivals of old fairs, e.g. that of Brighton: the Grand Stand is set close beside a now destroyed camp on White Hawk Hill, and White Hawk Fair was, in the eighteenth century, the great event whereof the races were but one incident. See Erridge, *Hist. of Brighthelmston* (1862), p. 285.

<sup>1</sup> Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore*, pp. 32, 163. According to one view this ceremony represents a survival of the old feast of the *Terminalia* ('Beating the Bounds'), and the custom of sacrificing a victim at each boundary-mark.

<sup>2</sup> *Curiosities of the Church* (W. Andrews) p. 56. At Playden near Rye, Sussex, was again a Hospital of St. Bartholomew (*V.C.H., Sussex*, ii. 104).

<sup>3</sup> Abury, p. 13.



Friday there was a similar revel—dancing, rustic games, etc.—about a great barrow at Hove, Sussex, which ceased only when the barrow was destroyed in 1857.<sup>1</sup> The same date was marked by similar meetings on Chilswell Hill, near Oxford, and St. Martha's Hill, near Guildford.<sup>2</sup> The more usual date was Easter Monday, as at Kirkby Ireleth. Both dates point back to the immemorial spring-feast of humanity, the festival of the Saxon Eostre. To this day certain children's games are regularly associated with certain definite seasons, and even cricket is no exception: the 'season' begins on Easter Monday. An antiquary who notes the coming and going of battle-dores, hopscotch, and the like, might almost dispense with any printed almanack. The names of 'Play Garths' and 'Play Field' recall that of Plaistow, which still figures thrice in the *Gazetteer*, and was at one time very much more frequent.<sup>3</sup>

As *stow* commonly denoted a place of burial, a barrow (ch. xxiv), and as barrows, whether anhistoric (as at Orton and Holne) or Christian (*i.e.* churchyards) were the traditional scenes of the village revels and games, Plaistow (for *pleg-stow*) presumably meant originally a barrow<sup>4</sup> which was the scene of such revels. In old documents the name usually has the definite article (*e.g.*, 1271 La Pleystow = Plaistow in Essex), just as has 'church.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sussex Arch. Coll.* ix. 120. This was the 'Amber Cup Tumulus.'

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, *Byways*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> It is frequent still as a local name in Herts., Essex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Berks. and Hants., but in the rest of England is less common, if not altogether unknown in some counties. *Domesday* has a *Pleistou* in Shirwell, four miles N.E. of Barnstaple, Devon., and there is one instance in Herefordshire, possibly not a genuine old name. In Warwickshire it is disguised under the form of Plestins. Kent has also a Plaxtol, and records of the county furnish the intermediate forms Playstoll, Pleystole, and Plevstool. These Kentish instances, Canon Scott Robertson thinks (*Arch. Cantiana* xiii, 216, 341), took their name from medieval miracle-plays here performed; but the name itself is older as its occurrence in *D.B.* proves.

<sup>4</sup> Possibly barrows which were admitted to be non-Christian? It is a curious fact that no Plaistow is an *old* parish, though some of them were ancient chapels.

<sup>5</sup> As the A.-S. Glossaries give *pleghus* ('playhouse'), there can be no doubt about the initial syllable. Otherwise, on the analogy of most other *stow*-names, one would incline to seek a personal name therein. T. G. Roberts (*Place-Names of Sussex*) postulates the personal name Plega to explain the place-name Playden, Sussex, but Plega does not figure in the *Onomasticon*, although derivatives are common. The Glossaries equate *pleghus* with *theatrum*, but there is no evidence that the Saxons knew anything of structural theatres. There is plenty of evidence that they knew and frequented open-air 'play-places,' and there is great probability that they took over many of these direct from the Celts. How explain otherwise the case of the revels at the Amber Cup Tumulus, for example, or that of St. Weonard's (p. 53), both of which appear to have been pre-Saxon burial-places? Later, it would seem, a village benefactor might give a *plaistow* without reference to any pre-existing spot or any particular shape, just as nowadays one gives a parish

It is as easy to understand how here and there a burial-place, pagan or Christian, should come to be named from the 'play' therewith associated, and should retain the name to the present day, as to understand the admitted fact that, out of all the vast number of burial-places which were the scenes of fairs, one only should still keep the name of Chepstow; or, if we include also those which bear the name of Chipping, a total of eight in all.

The Irish *Aenachs*, invariably held at the graves of heroes and kings, came ultimately to be fairs where goods of all kinds were bought and sold. So in Greece the Olympic meetings came to be the most important commercial events of their age, even as in Jerusalem the Temple became the haunt of dealers and money-changers. It was the same everywhere and for the same reasons. In this country the churchyard, and subsequently in many cases the actual church, became the scene and centre of every great fair.

The market of Balquhiddier used to be held in a haugh 'where there are seven stones remaining of a circle which appears to have been about 30 ft. in diameter.' The patron saint was Angus, whose name still clings to a knoll overlooking the scene of the market.<sup>1</sup> St. Columba's fair at Kingussie in Strathspey was held at Clach-Chollum-Chille, 'Columba's Burial-ground.'<sup>2</sup> The spot is spoken of as the hallowed site of the old church of Kingussie, 'but there is no church there now.' The fair was held 'partly within and partly without the graveyard,' which means merely that the fair had outgrown the narrow limits of the burial-place. At Kelso in Roxburghshire an annual fair was held on the spot (St. James' Green) reputed the site of a long-vanished church of St. James. A fair used to be held on All Saints' Day in the church and churchyard of All Saints, Northampton. At St. James', Bristol, an arrangement

recreation-ground or cricket-field. There is a case in White, *Antiquities of Selborne* (Letter X): Sir Adam Gurdon and his wife Constantine give (1271) to the Priory and Convent of Selborne 'a certain place (placea) called La Playstow in the village aforesaid.' It was a level area near the church, about 44 yds. long by 36 yds. wide, a rectangular plot with an old oak in the centre, and in White's time it was called 'The Plestor.' There is a 'Chapel of

Playster' or 'Chapel Plaster,' in Ditteridge, Wilts. The building, which was already desecrated in Aubrey's time, was of the primitive type with a western bell-cote, and dated apparently from about 1460-80. It stood near the junction of six roads, 'at the end of Corsham Ridge.' See Aubrey's *Topog. Collections for Wiltshire* (Devizes, 1862).

<sup>1</sup> Mackinlay, p. 12, citing *Proc. S.A.S.*, xxi, 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

was made in 1374, by which the parish minister was to be supported by a moiety of the profits arising from the fixing of pales or anything else penetrating or occupying the soil of the churchyard at the fair annually held there on the feast of St. James.<sup>1</sup>

The churchyard of St. John's Chapel, Laughton-en-le-Morthen, Yorks., is of unusual area, and was the scene of one of the largest fairs in the country.

The great fair at Christ's Kirk in Kennethmont—'Chrystis Kirk o' the Green'—was actually held at night.<sup>2</sup> When it is realized that the fair was in origin nothing but a 'revel' or 'wake,' the fact ceases to be in any way surprising.<sup>3</sup> These patronal festivals were the *Consualia* of their communities, and like the *Consualia* (chap. vi) they long outlived all memory of their meaning.

In days when the churchyard was still an unfenced barrow only, and commonly the topographical centre of the village, it was the natural place to choose for a market or a fair, affording a most convenient stance for the traders and their booths. It was in fact the most public place to be found, and in Scotland one still hears the expression 'do it at kirk-door,' i.e. *coram populo*, the reference originally being not to the porch of the church, but to the gate of the churchyard. The decline of such churchyard fairs goes *pari passu* with the movement towards giving to the churchyard a decent and permanent fence. Nevertheless

<sup>1</sup> Baldwin Brown, *Arts*, i. 274. The proceeds of such fairs were a valuable perquisite. A fair was held until recently at Michaelmas about the parish church of Eastbourne. [The dedication to St. Mary is probably late and mistaken.] The lord of the manor, coveting this source of revenue, obtained license to hold a second fair, which he astutely fixed for St. Matthew's day, a week before Michaelmas, thus cutting out the older fair, the proceeds whereof had gone to the rector. At Norwich the rival claims of the Benedictine Priory and the townsmen to the control of the fair held at Tomblands and the revenue thence arising, led in the upshot to a positive civil war, the storm of the fortified priory, the burning of part of its church (now represented by the Cathedral), and the excommunication of the towns-folk for some four years (1272-6). Tomblands lies just without Ethelbert's Gate, one of the gates of the Priory. It

derives its name from its having once belonged to the Abbey of St. Michael in Monte Tumba (Mont St. Michel).

<sup>2</sup> It began at sunset and ended an hour after sunrise next morning. From this it was known as the Sleepy Market. About 1759 the proprietor of Rannes, who was lord of the fair, *changed it from night to day*, but the people were dissatisfied and *neglected it altogether* (*Proc. S.A.Scot.*, lii, 164). The fact provides a curious parallel to the case of the fair at Cnocan.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Norman Lockyer (*Stonehenge*, 2nd Ed., p. 447) has something to say of the identity of such fairs with ancient *gorseddau*. We learn from Homer (*Iliad* xxiii. 217-8) that it was usual to burn the dead at night in Achaean Greece, as it was in Rome (ch. xxv). All the sovereigns of England prior to Queen Victoria were buried by night, and so late as 1919 a Sussex Yeoman was, by his own desire, buried at night-time.

the habit of holding all fairs upon such *loca consecrata* was too inveterate to be lightly extinguished. A statute of Winchester (1285) enjoining 'that henceforth neither fairs nor markets be holden in churchyards,' was but one, and not the first,<sup>1</sup> of a long series of similar enactments. A second was issued by the Synod of Exeter in 1287, and a third by Archbishop Thoresby in 1363. The *Lincoln Episcopal Registers* provide many illustrations of the habit and of the difficulty of suppressing it. 'Dalderby in 1302 wrote to forbid the market in the church of Ingoldmells. Gynwell in 1360 issued a general prohibition against the selling of wares and the holding of sports and games in churches and churchyards. In Bokyngham's rule the prior of Holland was denounced for holding a market in a church; and an order of 1392 forbade the selling of merchandise within the conventual church of Stainfield.'<sup>2</sup> The habit was not dead even in the days of Henry VIII. To this day the local fair or feast, if it survives at all, is so generally associated with the patronal day that, in many cases of dubious dedications, the date of the local revel may be taken as the criterion whereby to distinguish between the genuinely old and the adventitious claimant. Many of the greater fairs were known simply by the Saint's Day, e.g. Bartlemy's, Michaelmas, and Tawdry (i.e. Saint Etheldreda's) Fair at Cambridge. Such a thing as a fair without a corresponding saint would seem to have been at one time as unthinkable as an *Aenach* without a burial-place.

The practice of using part of the church as a school-room is too well known to call for illustration. It was commonly the porch or the tower which were so used, but there was nothing but sentiment to prevent worse desecrations; at St. Alban's the Lady Chapel became a school, and in some cases the western half of the building (nave) was walled off and used as the parish school-room. In very many cases a school-house was ultimately built apart from

<sup>1</sup> Markets in churches and churchyards were explicitly forbidden on Sundays by the *Law of the Northumbrian Priests*, but in *D.B.* it is mentioned that the town of St. Germans, Cornwall, kept its fair in *die Dominica*. Ellis (*General Introd. to Domesday*, i, 253) cites Matthew Paris as protesting against the habit, which prevailed 'all over England,' and also prints a petition (of 1595)

for its suppression, which alleges that at that date it still prevailed 'in Wales and the Marches.' Such an entry as that of *D.B.* ii, 418 (of the manor of Aspella), in *eadem tertia pars ecclesiae et tertia pars feriae*, suggests that the presence of a church commonly implied the occurrence of a fair.

<sup>2</sup> *V.C.H. Lincolnshire*, ii, 33, where the references are given.

the church, but still within the garth, as at Old Alderley in Cheshire (early seventeenth century); and in other cases there is reason to think that a pre-existing building, originally erected to be a duplicate church or chapel, was appropriated for the purposes of a school, as at Carew in Pembrokeshire. At Tideswell, Derbyshire, it would seem that the Elizabethan Grammar School stands upon what was once part of the churchyard. Such facts bespeak a direct descent from the days when the stone circle was the scene not of pagan ritual only, but also of instruction, whereof the modern Sunday-school is the later and more seemingly daughter.

In hardly any of these various uses of the modern church is it less difficult to recognise continuity than in the practice of using the door of the building as a public notice-board. The explanation offered by Walter Johnson<sup>1</sup> is that it arose from the fact that 'the church-porch was pre-eminently the spot for discussing parish business, because it formed a convenient shelter and halting-place for worshippers . . . a most appropriate rallying point for the transaction of business.' But there was business to be transacted and proclamations to be made for long centuries before there was any church-porch. Proclamations were made from immemorial antiquity at the barrows of the dead, the *agger tumuli* of Vergil, the *cnoc* of an Irish *Aenach*, the law-hill of Northern Britain; and they were naturally made also from the Christian barrow, the churchyard. That evolution presently offered a convenient church-door upon which a written notice might be fixed, and later still offered a spacious porch which had all the publicity of a parish room,<sup>2</sup> was but a happy accident. Analogous was the use of the church-door, or of some convenient tree in the garth, as a 'keeper's tree' for the display of slaughtered vermin.

Lastly the officials of the community were customarily elected in the church, as for example the mayors of Grantham, Boston, Salisbury, Sandwich, Fordwich and Northampton, and the bailiff of Lydd. At New Romney

<sup>1</sup> *Byways*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> It offered sometimes further conveniences. Thus in the porch (a small one) of the church of Marystowe, Devon, is a

fire-place and chimney. The usual explanation advanced, that the provision was for the comfort of the parishioners on cold or wet Sundays, is scarcely sufficiently profound to convince.



election takes place at a particular altar-tomb in the the south aisle of the church.<sup>1</sup> The election of the mayor of Brightlingsea, Essex, takes place annually in the belfry of the parish church. Even members of Parliament were sometimes elected in the church of the borough, as in the case of New Shoreham in Sussex.

In all these varied uses there is to be seen only legitimate survival, for without doubt the same things, or their equivalents, were habitually done at the barrows of paganism in Britain. There is nothing at all which can be called usurpation until in the fifteenth century we find the parish church used even as the village armoury.<sup>2</sup> In earlier days this had probably been unthinkable, and again and again the earlier codes implicitly preclude anything of the kind. The *Law of the Northumbrian Priests* and the *Canons* (xvii, cv) of Ecgbert laid heavy penalties upon the priest who came into church, *i.e.* within the churchyard, with weapons. So did the *Laws of Howel Dha*. The law forbade the Druid to bear arms. The Saxon Coifi declares his apostasy from the faith of Woden by mounting a steed and seizing a lance; and he defiles the sanctuary of his race at Godmundham by flinging into it the lance (ch. xxi).

In the *Paston Letters* (no. 978) is an account of a raid made by the Duke of Suffolk upon the village of Hellesdon in Norfolk, in 1465, when the 'gere' taken out of the 'stepell' by the raiders included 'ix sheffe arwys, ix bawys, ij hand gones, ij chambers for gonnys, ij mallys of lede, ij jakkes (coats of mail),' and 'a stokke-gonne with three chambers.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *Byways*, p. 143 referring to *Notes and Queries*, ser. 10, xii, 148, and *Arch. Cantiana*, xiii, 141-2. The tomb was erected expressly for this purpose so late as the year 1622.

<sup>2</sup> Even when the church is not expressly mentioned as used for an armoury, the churchwardens were still responsible for the proper provision of arms. Thus at Bright-helmston at the end of the sixteenth century they had to provide '4 barrels of powder, 40 round shot, and 10 chain-shot for every great piece' (Erridge, *Hist. of Bright-helmston*, p. 35).

<sup>3</sup> For other examples see Johnson, *Byways*, pp. 157 sqq.; Addy, *Church and Manor*, p. 396, and references. It is to be noticed that the weapons and armour were

kept not in the church proper, but in the steeple (*i.e.* tower) or in a room over the porch. There was a tacit conviction in mediaeval times that neither the porch nor the tower was sacred in the same degree as were nave and chancel. This was particularly the case with the tower, which is frequently specified as a thing as much apart from the nave as was the chancel. This, and the fact that the priest frequently had his dwelling-place either in the tower or over the porch, are matters which explain each other. It was ruled in the present year (1928) that a suicide in the tower of a church did not necessitate the reconsecration of the building, 'because the tower is no essential part of the church.' In provincial Sweden the customary name of the church porch

When the church had come to be the parish armoury it was a natural development to use the churchyard as an archery-ground. Hence in Queen Elizabeth's time it was statutory that archery should be there practised 'on Sundays and holy days'; and in the reign of James I it was ruled that no person might participate in the 'lawful games in the churchyard' unless he had previously attended the Sunday service.

is *vakenbus* (*vapenbus*), 'Weapon-house,' before entering the building (Earle, *Deeds of Beowulf*, p. 120).