

ST. MARTIN'S GOOSE.

By J. M. E., C.S. Sp.

Few there are who have not heard of this subject, fewer still who could tell us something about it, but many, surely, who would like to know what the ancient Celtic and Gothic manuscripts say about it. The 11th of November, being a day sacred to the memory of the Great Thaumaturgus of Western Europe, seems to be an opportune day to broach the not uninteresting enigma; but, to speak of the goose meant no less to speak of the saint whose day we celebrate.

The name of Saint Martin is known and venerated everywhere. His feast has always been a most popular and high class one, both in the calendar of the Church, being usually celebrated with an octave, and in the calendar of the people, when popular rejoicings, festivals, sports, fairs, game shooting, and other pastimes were well calculated to mark in the minds of the people as a red-letter day the 11th of November. In many places the "Martini fairs" are held to this day, and in the legal calendar, on the continent, the "Martini Terms" are as well known as the "Hilary Terms" in these countries; and the peasants call our "poor man's harvest season" "Saint Martin's summer." There is still more than this about Saint Martin's feast-day, and rightly so; for, from Pannonia to Amiens, from Tours to Auxerre, from Cologne to Milan, great was Martin's reputation of sanctity, wonderful the fame of his astounding miracles. Saint Gregory of Tours, in the second Book of his History of the Franks, says that Saint Perpetuus, who succeeded Saint Martin in the See of Tours, established, about the year 480, a second lenten observance, consisting of three fast days in each week, from the feast of St. Martin to Christmas Day; this was called "Saint Martin's lent." And the first Council of Maccn, in 580, extended the same regulations to all monks, from the beginning of December to Christmas; this was the origin of the fasting regulations during the holy season of Advent.

The feast of Saint Martin was marked by the people in their social gatherings by certain "extras" at table, even as we do still on Shrove Tuesday; they, in particular, tasted the *new wine* as they sat round the traditional *Oie rotie*, as is seen in the Menu of these days:

On Saint Martin's Day,
Roast your Goose,
Pour out your Wine,
Call in your Friends.

So said the peasants of Aquitania in the 7th century; so said the Germans at Augsburg in the 17th century, as late as 1655, according to a local almanac of that year. But now comes the question: "What about Saint Martin's Goose?" This is undoubtedly a question of deep interest for every student of hagiography and archaeology, as will be seen. At first sight it is not easy to see what relation, if any at all, the bird, which saved the Capitol, and was roasted by our ancestors in honour of St. Martin, has or can possibly have with our Saint's person or his history. But it is true that such was the respect and veneration for the Great Apostle of Gaul that the people called many things, even animals, birds, &c., by his name; moreover, throughout the middle age the name of Saint Martin was a regular household word; so much so that in every flock of geese there was a "martin." The people believed that a great blessing would attach to animals, &c., called after the wonderman of Tours. Besides, his name was used as a bye-word to emphasise, or put stress on, an assertion; and we are informed that the Venerable Joan of Arc freely made use of the name of the soldier-bishop: "*Par mon sieur Saint Martin*," she would say, even as our neighbours, to our days, would say: "By George!"

History tells us, also, that in the course of his missions, in the province of Berri, Saint Martin was on one occasion suddenly surrounded by a swarm of "feathered bipeds," listening attentively to his discourse. This wonderful event had been foretold by Saint Ursinus, Bishop of that province. His people neglecting to hear his voice, he left them, saying that a day would come when their fowls would go to the sermon, and cry into their ears the truths which they refused to listen to. After the sermon St.

Martin gave the birds a feed of grain, blessed them, and bade them go their way, which they did in great order at his command. Whether any geese were amongst those feathery worshippers is not related; hence we could not say that it was on this account that the goose was introduced into the popular liturgy of St. Martin.

If we now consult the work of Lecoy de la March, a great French historian of St. Martin, we find that the goose has, indeed, no direct relation with the history of the Saint's life, although from time immemorial, "the goose" is found to be one of the "attributes," or "symbols" of our Saint and even "bore his name," but is merely connected with the festive celebration in honor of St. Martin. It is true, the inhabitants of Armorica, the Brittons, tell us that the geese who preserved the Capitol from the hands of the Barbarians, are said to have denounced Saint Martin's place of concealment when the people of Tours searched for him in vain in order to have him consecrated Bishop. All this would not, however, seem to be a sufficient warrant for the almost universal rejoicings carried on in honour of Saint Martin both in France and elsewhere on the 11th of November, year after year, century after century. In the opinion of modern critics the real reason for roasting—and, of course, eating—the traditional goose is: because this domestic bird, at this epoch of the year, is at its zenith, and also because the following season opened about this day with the chase of the wild goose. In fact, in many countries the 11th November was the day for "goose-shooting," a holiday pastime after the morning celebration in the church. In Paris, the pilgrims to the Shrine of Saint Martin-des-Champs bought their *piece de resistance* in a street adjoining the Priory, and called them "Rue aux Oies," to spend a nice evening at home on their return from prayer with their friends and guests, having "killed two birds with one stroke."

And if we enquire what was done in Germany in times gone by, we find that there the traditional festival of Saint Martin's Goose was observed with still greater fidelity than even in France. From this fact we may fairly conclude that the early Irish Missionaries likely connected with Saint Martin's festival the autumn sacrifices of the old German tribes. We find on the portal of the Church of Saint Martin at Worms the goose standing out in bold relief—as the Kilkenny cats in the capitals of the vestry doorway at Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel to immortalise a popular dictum. And at Martinsberg, a town which received its name from the Saint, a pair of colossal silver candlesticks of exquisite beauty and workmanship, adorned with the figure of the Holy Bishop of Tours, and bearing at the foot, by way of claws, three geese with their wings spread out, crossing each other two and two on the three facels of the base. England, Holland, Denmark, Hungary, and even Poland, worshipped in like manner the great Thaumaturgus of Tours; in London, in the very heart of the old city, no less than six large thoroughfares are called after him, whilst severed ancient rural towns in Ireland are called "Martinstown," to show that even in this remote island he was not forgotten. In France, the goose, as Saint Martin's emblem, is seen in the seal of one of the Canons of Tours of the XIII. Century, the bird touching with its beak the halo surrounding the Saint's head whilst he is in the act of dividing his mantle. It is evident that beneath the mysterious bird something more than a mere coincidence of season or date is hidden. Let us try to find what might be the reason.

To begin with Germany, it is supposed that there the traditional feast of Saint Martin's Goose goes back into mythology, where we find the goose to be the symbol of Mars, the god of war, who, in ancient headdress, is represented as a warrior, with a goose, as his attribute. Nay, more, under the Roman domination, the Germans, those at least who served in the imperial army, offered the goose in sacrifice to a god named, in Latin, *Mars-Thingus*, or *Tius*, *Tius-Things* in their native tongue; this mythical being was also their god of war. Now, as has been said, since in Germany the religious observances in honor of Saint Martin in general, and the festival of the goose in particular, seem to have been observed at all times better than elsewhere, it is not unreasonable to say that their ancient customs were simply, at some

period or other, transformed into festivals of a Christian character and appearance. The Church purifying what she could not easily suppress, and combining the popular feeling with the sanctity of her doctrine and rites. Still, this opinion might be considered by some rather hazardous, had we not certain historic traces which, we think, are topical reasons for maintaining such an opinion. We find, for instance, that in some dioceses in Germany, in the 16th century, open opposition was made to the celebration of Saint Martin's festival of the goose; that sermons were preached in which the matter was discussed at length, *ex professo*, and that certain moral theologians considered the case as a matter of conscience, since, in their treatises and dissertations, they asked the question—"an liceat Martinilibus anserem edere?" i.e., "if it be lawful to eat a goose on Saint Martin's festival?" Such a query necessarily supposes that the old custom of Saint Martin's traditional festival of the Goose had retained in the eyes of certain divines a somewhat Pagan shade or "flavour." And, indeed, that was so. For, in point of fact, in those places the people did not simply "diah up" a goose at their social gatherings on Saint Martin's Day, but, in accordance with certain ritualistic prescriptions, the people, whilst killing the goose, indulged in cruel sports and fortune telling. The goose's head was first cut off in a certain superstitious manner, then the entrails, the liver, and even the bones were examined, and certain prognostics read therein, recalling to mind the ancient sacrifices and superstitions of quite a heathen period and worship. It was, no doubt, for a similar reason that the Synod of Auxerre, in 590, condemned and forbade "certain practices" observed in honour of Saint Martin on the eve or "wake" of his feast: "*pervigilia quas in honorem domini Martini observant*." Most likely some practices of the kind must have given rise in Germany to the above mentioned casuistical thesis, or else the Church would not have found fault with an otherwise innocent social custom. Surely the festivals of Christmas and of Shrove Tuesday or Carnival were then, in the calendar of plenty, as to-day, feast days of double first-class eating and drinking; yet the Church has never forbidden this part of those social celebrations. We may now ask when and why the Germans have adopted Saint Martin of Tours as the patron of their armies, instead of their old gods of war, Mars Thingus and Woden? If we analyse the question we find, first, that *Martinus* is the diminutive of *Mars*, and secondly, that the heraldic emblems of Mars were also those of St. Martin—namely, the horse, the sword, and the mantle. Moreover, the Germans, when once converted, found in Saint Martin the model of the Christian soldier, filling such a function still at the time when he immortalised his name by dividing his mantle to share it with a poor beggar at the gates of Amiens, and they simply "baptised" the statues of their war god Woden, with horse, sword, and mantle, into so many Saint Martins, whilst the inhabitants of the southern German land replaced their ancient Celtic gods by new statues representing St. Martin on horseback, and dedicated the temples of their idols into Christian churches. Nor were these the only changes which the new religion effected. In Germany, as in Gaul, many springs and fountains, innumerable rocks and druidical monuments, formerly dedicated to the fairies, were, with the change of religion, called after St. Martin, in memory of favours obtained through his intercession, even as in Ireland they were called after St. Patrick, who had passed there and blessed

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them. Moreover, the autumnal and harvest feasts were soon, and quite naturally so, quite absorbed by and lost in the Christian festivals in honour of the new patron, whilst at the banquets the toasts to Woden, Thingus, and Thor were replaced by toasts to the memory of the Christian hero; in the legends and ancient *leodhs* (lays) Martin's name was substituted for the mythological names. As Woden of old, so now Martin pays mysterious visits, rewarding the children who are good and punishing the others, and he is honoured by torchlight processions, fireworks, etc., as Thingus was before him.

In France, from the earliest days of the monarchy, St. Martin's mantle, in the shape of a cope, was always borne, as a great and powerful relic, at the head of the army. No other origin could be assigned to the tight bond which connects so closely in the history of France the name of the illustrious Roman Legionary with the "War Office." Nor is the extension of his devotion due to the Merovingian Franks; the Gallo-Romans honoured him long before as a great benefactor of their nation. His sepulchre was glorious from the time of Sulpicius Severus, who was St. Martin's first panegyrist. Clovis and the Franks merely followed an established custom by humbly asking for inspiration, light, and strength at his shrine in Tours.

The changes which the Christian religion effected in the habits and manners of the people, in Germany as elsewhere, extended to the "sacrifice of the goose," heretofore offered to the god of war. Instead of trying to abolish a time-honored custom the Church sanctified it, Christianised it, as she Christianised the *menhirs*, by fixing a Cross—the sign of man's redemption—on top of them. This was an excellent tactic—once recommended by St. Gregory the Great, and by St. Sylvester, Pope before him, and of whom we read that when the first Christian Emperor declared the religion of Christ to be henceforth the official religion of the empire he (the Pope), on a visit to the Emperor at Constantinople, consecrated the old heathen temples into Christian places of worship. The sacrifice of the goose ceased with the Christian era, but the festival in honor of St. Martin, in which the "roasted goose" formed a prominent feature in the traditional menu of the day's banqueting, has been kept up with scrupulous fidelity on the Continent. Unfortunately, in our own poor country St. Martin's goose is practically unknown to-day. The reason is because for many long years back an earlier gale blows over the land—"the rent gale"—at Michaelmas tide, sweeping the poor birds wholesale from off the green fields to supply a stock of new feathers and other necessities of life in general for the incoming season of many needs and requirements.—*Irish Catholic*.

The tariff question is causing some strained relations between the United States and Spain, and it may be necessary for this country to resort to a retaliatory policy.

The polyglot petition against the use of liquor and deleterious drugs will be presented to Congress by the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union on February 17th.

Several cases of cholera are reported in Rosario, Argentina. Great precautions have been taken to prevent the spread of the disease.

Russia has placed a prohibitive duty of four and a half cents per pound on cotton.