

Serial No. 1/4.

Course O.-A.

Box 1525, Los Angeles, Calif.

January, 1920.

Clouds Dispelled from Popular Customs.

*C. C. Zain*

Holidays are of two kinds; general and local. Local holidays are instituted to commemorate events that are important only to a limited group of people; to the inhabitants of a town, city or nation. Thus the day on which a nation first declares its independent existence, or on which a great statesman was born, may become a national holiday. The day on which an army attains victory may be made a local holiday throughout a certain district. And the day on which a genius was born may become a local holiday in the town in which he first saw light of day. Local holidays, like arbitrary symbols, have no meaning except to those immediately conversant with local facts. General holidays, however, are of a different order, and, like universal symbols, convey precise information to any person in any locality who is versed in natural law. It is of general holidays and customs I shall now speak.

These general holidays and popular customs have mostly been given to the present generation through the church. And while the same customs and holidays are observed by peoples of widely divergent views, yet each imagines the holidays and customs to be derived alone from its church, to be inseparably bound up with its particular religion, and to have no significance to peoples of different beliefs, all of whom it invariably looks upon as barbarians. But disconcerting as it may appear alike to the orthodox Taoist, Christian, Buddhist and Mohammedan, it is nevertheless true, as I shall presently indicate, that without exception our present-day general holidays have been derived from a still older and more universal religion, a religion based not upon theory but upon observed facts; THE RELIGION of the STARS.

Thus before the great cataclysm that sunk Atlantis, which is recorded in the Bible as the Flood of Noah, mankind lived on earth millions of years. By careful study and moral development it had reached a much higher knowledge of the laws governing the universe in their relation to the human soul than we of the present day. Celestial phenomena were carefully recorded; even as they were in Egypt, India, Chaldea, Mexico, and Peru, in prehistoric times. Not only was the influence of the planets upon man noted; but the various processes of soul-unfoldment and religious ideation were correlated to astronomical phenomena, and customs of observance were instituted. Hence a festival always was held when the celestial bodies occupied positions that indicated and symbolized certain stages of soul-unfoldment, or certain natural principles that should be followed in spiritual development. Also, popular customs were established to elaborate by their symbolism these ideas so essential to soul growth. As the subject is fully treated in Course VII it is not here necessary to give the conditions that led up to the loss of knowledge concerning the spiritual verities that our popular customs and holidays are instituted to symbolize. Suffice it here to say that present-day religions borrowed their symbolism and customs, without exception, from still older religions; and these from those that went before; until we find at their source the spiritual conceptions of an Astronomical Religion, a religion of natural law, which is destined also to be the Religion of the Aquarian Age; fully elucidated in our lessons as THE RELIGION of the STARS.

People are inclined to regulate their conceptions of the operation of natural law by preconceived ideas as to the eternal fitness of things. As it seems but just that man should possess free-will, and as superficially it appears to be contrary to free-will to be influenced by the planets, many people, including college professors, deny emphatically that the planets have any influence upon human life and destiny. But the Truth rests not upon how they imagine the universe should be conducted, but upon its actual operation. And those who scoff at astrology are almost without

exception those who have never studied the subject and have never put it to the test. For astrology may be proven true experimentally by any person of average intelligence who will devote a little time systematically to the study of the lessons of Courses VIII and X.

That astrology antagonizes free-will is a misconception; for only through knowledge of the forces that influence him can man become free from their compulsion. Even the seasons are caused by the movements of the heavenly bodies, are really Astrological Effects. For when the Sun passes into certain signs of the zodiac it is winter, into others it is summer, and into others it is spring. When the Sun passes from the southern zodiacal signs to the northern, about the 21st of March each year, there is a period of unsettled weather. At full-moon insane patients are more violent; and animals that are much persecuted feed at night by its light and hide during the day, and it is useless to hunt them except during the period near the new-moon, when they will be found feeding early mornings and late evenings. These are astrological influences that affect people and animals in groups. But there are other astrological influences that affect individuals, and we can no more hinder their operation than we can hinder the approach of winter. Yet knowing the approach of these conditions we can prepare to meet them adequately and overcome them, even as we prepare for winter. Astrological influences affect man only through environment, physical or astral, even as does winter. So, by knowing what forces will be brought to bear upon him he can shape his environment to take advantage of conditions. The mechanical details of how planetary influences reach man and influence him are fully explained in Course I.

Further, it is impossible to understand many of our popular sayings without some knowledge of astrology. Thus it is said of March; "If it comes in like a Lion it goes out like a Lamb, but if it comes in like a Lamb it goes out like a Lion." The student is referred to Course II for a more detailed explanation of signs, houses, planets, etc. Here I can only say that the annual cycle of the Sun which brings the seasons is divided into 12 equal parts called the signs of the zodiac, each sign being represented by a pictured constellation of stars. About the 21st of March the Sun enters the sign of the Ram, which is always called a Lamb when the Sun first enters it. Among the Jews and many eastern people this is the commencement, or birth, of the New Year. The first sign of the zodiac only becomes the Ram after the Sun has passed mostly through it, grown to full stature, as it were. Astrologers of all ages have also divided each sign of the zodiac into three equal portions. These are called decanates because each represents ten degrees of the zodiac along the path of the Sun. The first decanate of any sign is ruled by the sign itself, the second decanate by the next sign of the same triplicity, and the third decanate by the third sign removed of the same triplicity. The first decanate of the Ram is its own decanate, the young Ram, or Lamb. The second decanate has a sub-rulership of the Lion. On March 21st the Sun really enters the decanate of the Lamb, and on the last day of March really passes from the Lamb decanate into the decanate of the Lion. From the observation that the equinoctial period is always stormy, unsettled weather coming just before or after the 21st of March, these weather observations have been joined to astrological conditions that simultaneously occur. And when it is further explained that the astrological sign of the Lamb rules the head of man, and the Lion rules the heart, we perceive in it a religious significance also; for persons dominated by reason alone must learn sympathy and compassion; while those guided by the heart must cultivate the intellect.

Now the first sign of the zodiac, the Ram, is the exaltation, or greatest power, of the Sun; and the second sign, the Bull, is the exaltation of the Moon. The Sun has ever been symbolized by, and rules over, gold. The fabled Ram of the Golden Fleece really signifies the Sun in the Sign of the Ram. And the golden calf of biblical mention really signifies the entrance of the Sun (gold) into the sign of the Bull; for of course it would not be a full grown Bull when first entering, or born into, the sign. The new year is astronomically born when the Sun crosses the equator to the north and the days become longer than the nights. But the ancients considered, quite truly, that the new-born earth must have not only a father (the Sun), but also a mother (the Moon). Anciently the Sun was called Baal or Bel. Both Sun and Moon were held sacred in different parts of Ireland. In fact, Belfast is named after the old Irish

Sun-God, Bel. As all astrologers know, the color ruled by the Sun is orange; and the Orangemen of Ireland represent in a modern way the ancient faction who disregarded the worship of the Moon and paid homage to the Sun. Ireland as a whole, however, is ruled by the sign of the Bull, in which the Moon exerts its greatest power. The Druids of ancient Ireland are usually pictured as holding the crescent Moon in their hands. So also, as all astrologers know, green is the color ruled by the Moon. Therefore, the Irish who wear green represent in a modern way, those who before the advent of Christianity disregarded Sun-worship and paid homage to the Moon.

The Shamrock is not sacred because, as reputed, St. Patrick picked one to illustrate some theological point; but because it represents three trines united at a single point; union of body, soul, and spirit on all three planes of existence--physical, astral, and spiritual. The serpent is, and ever has been, the symbol of wisdom. It tempted Adam and Eve to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Before the advent of Christianity the inhabitants of Ireland understood astrology, as is recorded by the Roman conquerors, and commonly conversed with those who had passed to the next world. But St. Patrick drove the serpents, or true knowledge of natural law, from Ireland; though he was never able to eradicate its symbolism. This symbolism together with that of Masonry, is explained in detail in Course IV.

St. Patrick's Day is the 17th of March, at which time the Sun is in the last decanate of the dark, watery sign Pisces, the natural sign of imprisonment and orthodoxy. This decanate is pictured in the sky by the constellation Cassiopea, whose arrogant pride, according to Greek mythology, was the cause of the beautiful Andromeda (the human soul) being chained to the rock (materialism) for the monster Cetus (sensualism) to devour. The Irish, in celebrating St. Patrick's Day have chosen that day of the year which anciently was observed in honor of the darkness that precedes dawn, the pangs of labor preceding the birth of the Sun on March 21st. They thus celebrate their own mental imprisonment; but the Green holds forth hope of release later, through the Moon's rejuvenating power in the sign of the Bull.

The Moon anciently was called Astarte, which became Easter to the Saxons, and unwittingly now is called Easter. Easter Day commemorated the resurrection of the Sun-God long before Christian times. It is the Sun day after the full-moon after the Sun has passed into the sign of new birth, the Ram, or Lamb. It really signifies the redemption of man by woman, the redemption of woman by man, and the redemption of the world from winter through the offices of the united Sun and Moon. The Lamb of God (Sun in the sign of the Ram) now is able to redeem the world. That is, the solar forces impregnate the earth with life-giving warmth which germinates the seeds in the ground, and the cool magnetic rays of the Moon nourish and sustain this life as verdure, until finally it brings forth a bounteous harvest.

Shrove Tuesday precedes Easter and occurs just before Lent, while the Sun is still in the zodiacal sign of Man. It is a carnival (and carnival means "Flesh, fare thee well") in which pancakes play an important part. These pancakes by their form represent the disc of the Sun, and in pre-Christian times the Saxons offered the pancakes to the Sun as a sacrifice; in this manner signifying the desire to be forgiven their trespasses and to start a period of purification preparatory to a new life at the commencement of the vernal year. Fowls of various kinds figure in the games and feasts for the winged-horse constellation, Pegasus, belongs to this sign. The violent form of the sports indicates it to be a Mar's day, Tuesday.

Ash Wednesday, immediately following Shrove Tuesday, is the day on which the Saxons threw ashes on all they met, and placed ashes on their foreheads as a symbol of repentance for sins. Aquarius, the sign of the Man, in which the Sun sojourns at this time, is the sign of Knowledge, and it is only when man attains knowledge of good and evil that he can repent. The baptismal urn figures in this constellation as the cleansing influence prior to a new birth. Wednesday is a Mercury day, Mercury ruling intelligence and exalted in Aquarius, and shows the attainment of moral obligations. It is the custom in many places to take the effigy of a man, called "Jack 'o Lent," and shoot it full of holes, burn it, or throw it down a chimney; symbolical of the fate awaiting the soul that knowing right, yet follows the inversive path.

Thus commences Lent, a period of expiation and penance lasting during the time

the Sun passes through Pisces, the sign of sorrow and imprisonment, until it is reborn in the sign of the Lamb on Easter. The sign Pisces is pictured by two fishes, and at this time of year the food store is lowest, having been consumed during the winter and no new crops having as yet had time to grow. Therefore, it is often a time of dirth and famine to agricultural people. The herds are famished and too poor for food, and fish is the only available substitute. Lent also symbolizes the psychic purification and material privations that frequently must be undergone to attain spiritual illumination.

Palm Sunday, usually held the Sunday before Easter, is said to commemorate the reception of Christ into Jerusalem preceding his death. The Sun has triumphantly conquered the Vernal Cross, or is just about to do so, by passing into the sign of the Ram. Virgo, the constellation opposite Pisces, holds in her lifted hand a Palm Branch, symbol of victory. When Pisces sets, or dies, the harvest sign Virgo rises triumphant. Palm Sunday, therefore, is a day symbolizing the triumph of the Sun over winter, the human soul over matter—the harvest assured.

Maunday Thursday is the day before Good Friday. On this Thursday it is the custom of those high in office to wash the feet of the poor, similar to the practice at the Love Feasts of certain sects. The sign Pisces, from which the Sun emerges at the commencement of the astronomical year, rules the feet, and is a watery sign. It is ruled by Neptune, with Jupiter, the planet of Thursday, as co-ruler. The feet symbolize understanding, and the ceremony really signifies the understanding of the law of sacrifice of personal pride for universal good. Pisces is the sign of expiation, as is fully explained, with a vast amount of other occult information, in Course VI.

Good Friday is a corruption of Gottes Freytag, or God's Friday. It is dedicated to the suffering and burial of the Sun-God. Friday is the day of Venus. Venus rules Libra, the zodiacal sign of marriage. As Good Friday immediately precedes Easter, the Moon passes over the cross of Libra on which the Sun was crucified the preceding Fall and is in opposition to the Sun from the marriage sign. A cross is the marriage of two lines. In the zodiac it is the marriage of summer and winter, the solstitial colure and the equinoctial colure forming a perfect cross. This marriage of Sun and Moon just preceding Easter is clearly present on Good Friday—Friday, governed by Venus, being the day dedicated to affectional affairs. All over England Good Friday is ushered in by the cry of 'Hot Cross Buns', these being biscuits upon the tops of which is traced a cross. These cakes are called 'Bull Cakes' in many countries. They were anciently offered in Egypt, bous (buns) being the sacred ox, Taurus. They were offered to Astarte in Chaldea, to Ma by the ancient Mayas of America, were used as Passover cakes by the Jews, and have been found in the ruins of Herculaneum. The circle with the cross in it is even now used by astronomers as the symbol of the Earth; and the Bull, exaltation of the Moon, is the first earth-sign in the zodiac.

Saturday is a day of ill-omen, being ruled by Saturn, or Satan. To make the days of the year coincide with the 360 degrees of the zodiac it was a custom in ancient times to ignore the last five days before Jan. 1st. These days were given over to the Saturnalia, really a festival to the devil, and licentiousness and debauchery ran riot in some countries—as is well attested in the history of Rome.

Lady's Day is March 25th, on which day Gabriel is said to have announced the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. This day, however, was an Egyptian festival long before Christian times, and was mentioned by Athanasius before the birth of Christ was fixed by the church to have occurred on Dec. 25th. Being the fourth day after the vernal equinox, it really symbolizes the Sun's forces have become fully polarized to the new cycle—the earth, indicated by four (see Course VI. for significance of numbers), having received the immaculate rays of the Sun's forces from the summer zodiacal signs.

Eggs are always in evidence on Easter, not only in Christian nations, but also in the so-called pagan. Libra, where the Moon is at Easter, rules eggs and seeds. The giving of Easter eggs symbolizes the gift of the Sun and Moon to mankind, germinating and nourishing the seeds to prepare a bounteous harvest. There is also current the story of rabbit eggs. Lepus, the Hare, is the constellation picturing the first decanate of Taurus into which the Sun next moves. Taurus is the exaltation of the Moon, and rabbits, because of their prolific tendencies, are symbols of fruitfulness. The rabbits, therefore, also symbolize the procreative action of Sun and Moon to bring forth life.

In Course VII, I have already explained the origin and significance of the Jewish Passover and its ceremonies--fasting, eating bitter roots and unleavened bread, and daubing door-posts with blood--also the significance of circumcision. Therefore, I shall dismiss Easter with mentioning the custom in Ireland on midnight before Easter of clapping hands and shouting, 'Out with Lent', and rising before the Sun on Easter morning to 'See the Sun dance in honor of the resurrection'. Just what this resurrection signifies in soul-development is fully explained in Course III.

The next day after Easter is Easter-Monday. It is then the custom in some countries for the leaders of neighboring villages to choose sides and shoot for calf's head breakfast. The last decanate of the sign of the ram is Sagittarius, the Archer and Hunter. From this Sagittarius decanate the Sun passes into the beginning of the sign of the Bull--hence shooting for calf's head breakfast. In some other places the day is celebrated by a hunt. The first decanate of the Bull is pictured by a rabbit.

All Fool's Day is April 1st. The Sun has just entered the Lion decanate of the sign of the Ram. The sign of the Lion rules the heart. The Ram rules the head. People who are governed by their hearts alone, with no aid from the head, commit foolish blunders; just as Phoebus did when he asked to drive the Sun through the heavens and was precipitated by Jove (Sagittarius) into the River Eridanus, the constellation picturing the heart decanate of the Ram. This day is the feast of Huli in Hindoostan, where, as in other countries, people are sent on sleeveless errands to instill into their minds that they should use reason and not be led entirely by impulse.

May Day is the 1st of May, when the Sun reaches the Virgo, or Virgin, decanate of the first Earth-sign of the zodiac, the Bull. The Maypole represents the Sun, the center of the Solar system--as was well known anciently. The May Queen represents the Earth in a Virgin condition. The May Pole dance symbolizes the immaculate conception of the Earth by the Sun's rays, through which the seeds that have been planted in the dark soil are fructified to bring forth abundantly. The dancers represent the movements of the planets. In fact, the dance as performed by the descendants of the Mayas in Yucatan leaves no doubt as to what is meant in every particular. These aborigines clothe themselves in white to symbolize the purity of conception, even as in Ireland the participants wear white shirts. To symbolize the gift of the harvest that the Sun brings forth from the dark earth it is a custom to place baskets containing fruit or flowers during the night upon the doorsteps of neighbors. May Pole ceremonies are practiced in Europe and America, and anciently in India, Egypt and Peru.

Ascension Day is forty days after Easter; for the Sun passes into the Virgin decanate of Taurus before ascending to its heavenly home. The Bull is the sign of fecundity, and the Virgo decanate, of mental fecundity, for Virgo is a mental sign.

Whit Sunday is said to be kept in commemoration of the descent of the Holy Ghost. It is really a festival held in honor of the passing of the Sun from the sign of greatest fertility, the Bull, to the sign of the greatest mental activity, Gemini. The descent of holy power, therefore, in individual cases must follow the use of the fecundity of Taurus for mental and moral unfoldment. These methods are fully explained in Esoteric Psychology, Course V.

Christmas is the 25th of December. It was observed before Christian times, and is observed today by other than Christian nations, as the day of the birth of the Savior of the world; for the Sun having reached its most southern declination again starts north on that day, bringing the hope of a new dispensation of light and warmth. At the solstice on the 22nd of December the Sun passes from the sign of the horse to the sign of the goat; hence is said to be born in the house, or stable, of those Animals; for the stations in the heavenly map occupied by the zodiacal signs are called houses. At midnight of December 24th in all latitudes, the sign of the Virgin has just completely risen above the eastern horizon; therefore the Sun is said to be born of a Virgin. Santa Claus is the constellation Centaurus belonging to the middle, or Sagittarius, decanate of the home-sign of the Sun, Sagittarius, from which the Sun passes at Christmas is half animal, hence the reindeer. Santa's whiskers being those of the goat which sign the Sun now enters, portray his new virility. The gifts are those brought by the Sun due to its renewed strength, and anticipate the new harvest.

New Year's Day of the civil year is January 1st. Even as some nations wait for

the Sun to pass into Taurus in spring to celebrate the equinoctial year, so others wait for the Sun to enter into the Taurus, or second, decanate of Capricorn to start the New Solstitial year. This occurs Jan. 1st. New Year's Day not only celebrates the commencement of the Sun's journey back to the summer signs, but through Taurus, the Moon's exaltation, signifies also the efficient cooperation of the Moon in the event. Epiphany is the 6th of January. It means appearance, and the Sun has just reached the middle of the Taurus decanate of the earth sign Capricorn, and exerts its greatest fecundating power in so far as the winter season is concerned.

Ground Hog Day is the 2nd of February, after the Sun has entered the Gemini decanate of the sign of wisdom—the Man. It combines the foresight of Gemini with the unusual scientific knowledge of Aquarius. If the ground hog sees his shadow he concludes such premature clearing of the weather will be followed by storm.

Valentine's Day is the 14th of February. The word valentine is from the Norman galantin, meaning lover. The Sun on this day is in the Libra, or marriage, decanate of the sign of the Man; hence love missives and proposals are quite appropriate.

The meaning of Halloween can only be fully comprehended by a knowledge of astrological cycles that occur about every 13,000 years, bringing catastrophe by fire or flood. Let no one be alarmed, however, for the next such cataclysm is not due for nearly 2,000 years, and present-day calamity-howlers are entirely ignorant of astrological cycles or they would not make such dire predictions at the commencement of this glorious Aquarian Age. The details governing cataclysmic occurrences are to be found in Course VII

Halloween is a festival to the dead in every land of the world. When Atlantis sunk, nearly 11,000 years ago, the entire population of many countries perished in a single night. Taken from their bodies so suddenly many had difficulty in adapting themselves to the next, or astral, world. Some, for a time, were earth-bound, and these shades walked the earth. Atlantis sunk the last day of October, when the Pleiades occupied a certain position—as explained in Course VII—a position definitely observed in the ceremonies of various lands, which only start when the Pleiades are thus situated. On Oct. 31st the Sun is in the sign of death, Scorpio, and the white-sheeted figures and Jack o'Lanterns represent the astral forms of the dead that once walked the earth following the destruction, the latter symbolized by destroying property and doing as much mischief as possible on that night. To designate the same thing the Bushmen of Australia paint white stripes over their ribs and limbs to represent skeletons, and dance in the firelight. Among the people of many countries it is customary to place food on the graves of the dead. The French of Paris repair to the graves of their ancestors for lunch. People taken from the body violently often have all the cravings they had prior to death until they become accustomed to the new environment. At the time of the last world-catastrophe, when Atlantis sunk, mentioned as the Flood of Noah, many taken from their bodies still craved food. Those that escaped set food before the dead that they might draw from its aromas sufficient physical nourishment to still the craving. Halloween, the night of destruction, is followed by All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day, given to festivals commemorating the passage to the next life, and to prayers for the dead. The psychic laws and principles governing the relation of the dead to the living are fully explained in Course I.

And let no one without full experimental investigation scoff at the thought that prayers reach the dead, or ridicule spirit communion. Among the scores of scientific men who have investigated only to be convinced may be mentioned Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, Sir Wm. Crookes, and Sir Oliver Lodge; greatest scientists of the world. We hold no brief for spiritism, but we do assert it is possible to develop faculties by which man can communicate with the dead and also explore the region in which the so-called dead live and prove at first hand the continuity of life after death.

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