The Medieval Year - May
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May begins with the feast of the Apostles Phillip and Jacob, followed closely by Crouchmass (or the celebration of the finding the Holy Cross, one of two holidays regarding the Cross). I would be remiss if I failed to note that the beginning of May (in some parts of Ireland, and the Irish dominated parts of Scotland and Wales) held the festival of Beltaine, the beliefs about which are not actually as nailed down as most modern books would suggest, nor as universally practiced - but do seem to include the lighting of bonfires and driving herds between them.

However, Bringing in the May, Maying, the overall community celebration of May and festivals of the beginning of Summer were fairly common across most of northern Europe. These were frequently acted out in games, making and distributing garlands (women) and bringing gifts of greenery (men), and of course, licentious revelry and May-poles (from as early as the 1300s). Numerous May carols survive describing these festivities. It should be noted that local villages did not hold “May Day” rituals necessarily on the 1st of May, but frequently when local tradition held that the first of May actually was.

Another May celebration occurs for the two days after Whitsunday, called the Whitsun holidays (Whitsunday, otherwise known as Pentacost, the day the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, 50 days after Easter). And 2 days after Whitsun, the local Church frequently sponsored an Ale, or community Beer bash with religious plays, fund raising, processions, summer games and more licentious revelry.

I should at this time mention Rogation Days, the major of which was in April, about the 25th, the lesser taking place on the Thursday, 10 days before Whitsun, called Ascension Day (or the Day that Jesus bodily ascended into Heaven). On Rogation Days, the Cross was removed from the Church, and as part of a procession of the entire community, was carried all around the parish, along with a lot of praying, cross blessing, and so on.

The Sunday after Whitsun is Trinity Sunday, and Corpus Christi is the Thursday after that, upon which many plays were held

Tusser, Thomas. *Five hundreth pointes of good husbandrie*, 1586

“At Phillip and Jacob, away with the lambs;
That thinkest to any milk of their dams;
At Lammas leave milking, for fear of a thing,
Lest (requiem seternam) in winter they sing.
To milk and to fold them, is much to require,
Except ye have pasture to fill their desire;
Yet many by milking (such heed do they take)
Not hurting their bodies, much profit do make.
Five ewes allow to every cow, make a proof by a score,
Shall double thy dairym or trust me no more:
Yet may a good huswife that knoweth the skill,
Have mixt or unmixt, at her pleasure and will.

... Be sure thy neat have water and meat;
From bull, cow fast, till Crouchmas be past;
From hiefer bull bid thee till Lammas bid thee,
Leave cropping from May to Michaelmas-day.
Thy brake go and sow where barley did grow;
The next crop wheat is husbandry neat.
Fine basil sow in a pot to grow;
Watch bees in May for swarming away."