

### Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

#### August 5.

ST. JAMES' DAY (O.S.).—It has been suggested that the custom of resuming the eating of oysters on this day is to be connected with the use of their shell in the small erections of shells, pebbles, and flowers known as 'grottos' still to be seen on the pavements of London, for which gifts are asked by children with the request to 'remember the grotto.' These shrines have been attributed to the cult of St. James; but from the use of the shells and the importance of the oyster in British culture, as indicated by early references to British pearls, it might be inferred that the erection of the grotto marks an ancient propitiatory ceremony of a water deity upon whom such an important article in the early food supply as shell-fish was dependent.

#### August 6.

In Egypt, until recently, certain ceremonies were always observed at the cutting of the dams which released the waters of the Nile to flood the land. In Cairo this took place on some date between the sixth and the sixteenth day of August. These ceremonies marked the critical character of this period of the year for a country in which, in ancient as in modern times, the prosperity depended on an adequately high Nile. That this was recognised from the remotest times is indicated by the fact that these ceremonies were related to the heliacal rising of Sirius about the time when the river was at its lowest, and did not vary with the calendar, as did other religious feasts, which, owing to the inaccuracy of the Egyptian calendar even after the intercalation of five days in the solar year, completely traversed a year in the so-called Sothic cycle of 1460 years. The high antiquity of the cult of Osiris, the deity associated with the introduction of corn into Egypt, is evident from the fact that at the tomb of Osiris at Philae the number of cups filled daily with milk was 360, corresponding with the days of the year before intercalation.

It is evident that out of a fertility cult there grew a conception of the marriage of Isis and Osiris symbolic of the fertilisation of the land by the waters of the Nile. It is possible that at one time this conception had a more material representation in the sacrifice of a human being to the waters of the river. In the ceremony as it was performed in modern Cairo, a dam was constructed near the entrance of an ancient canal, which traversed the native quarter, just before the waters began to rise. On the outer side of this was erected a truncated cone of earth on the top of which a few grains of maize or millet were sown. This was known as the 'bride.' It was washed away by the rising waters a week or more before the dam was cut. This would support the tradition that it was once the custom to throw a maiden, gaily attired, into the waters to secure a plentiful flow of water.

In modern times money for which the people dive is thrown into the canal, and it is recorded by Seneca that at a place known as 'the Veins of the Nile,' near Philae, it was the custom for the priests to throw money and gold into the waters at a feast which took place at the rising of the waters. The 'wedding' of the Adriatic with a ring by the Doge of Venice and the Epiphany customs at the river-side in eastern Europe of the present day afford instructive parallels.

#### August 11.

ST. ATTRACTA, virgin and patroness of Killaraught, Co. Sligo. (Fifth or sixth century.) A saint whose acts (unauthenticated) afford sufficient ground for the conclusion that her legend enshrines a tradition of

some pagan goddess. Especially noteworthy are her foundation of a 'house of hospitality' at the junction of seven roads; the vigour with which she cursed St. Connall when he refused to allow her to erect an oratory near his church, and her slaying of the monster of Lugna, a dragon which was devastating the country of King Bec, whose troops she afterwards saved when pursued while on a raid, conducting them in the manner of Moses through the divided waters of a river.

#### August 12.

ST. MOLAISE OF LAISREN, patron of Innismurray, Co. Sligo. (Sixth century.) Beyond the record in the 'Feilire' of Aengus, the list of Irish saints, and an annexed scholion that he was "the son of Declain of Inis Muiredaig in the north," nothing is known of this saint. His probably true character is that of an embodiment of a pagan cult. The island with which he is associated is celebrated in Irish legend and further contains a large number of remarkable anti-quarian remains. These include a statue of the saint himself, which, significantly enough, is believed by the peasantry to be the work of Goban Saor, the traditional master craftsman of Ireland. In addition there is a stone fort or cashel of unmortared stone; the oratory of St. Molaise, a primitive structure with walls of remarkable thickness, a 'Church of the Men' and a 'Church of the Women,' surrounding the former being the Cemetery of the Men—in which no woman could be buried, but if she were her body was removed by unknown hands—a 'Church of the Fire' of the fourteenth century, but thought to stand on the site of an earlier structure, a number of 'hole stones' and rude font-like stone objects known as *bullaruns*, and two holy wells, that of St. Molaise being covered with a beehive-like structure of stones.

THE HARVEST.—Among primitive peoples, just as among the peasantry of civilised countries, the harvest is a time of sociability and rejoicing. Though the religious element may be present, it is sometimes unduly stressed by students primarily concerned with that particular aspect. An example among the American Indians of the south-west United States is the dance held in August, or so late as early September, by the Havasupai of Arizona, which in times of plenty is made the occasion of issuing invitations to the surrounding tribes of Hopi and Navajo, that they may share in the abundance and at the same time have an opportunity for trade. The feast may last for as much as three days and nights.

The dancing usually takes place towards evening as the day begins to cool, the earlier part being taken up with feasting, and on the third day with horse-racing, or in these days foot-racing, and trading. The children before the dance prepare a square, in the centre of which a pole is set up. As those who are to take part arrive they take up their station around the square, the women apart from the men. On the afternoon of the first day food is served out and an exhortation is addressed to the assembly by one of the chiefs. The dance, in which both women and men take part, circles around the chief, who stands in the centre facing the pole with a singer, usually, though not necessarily, a medicine man, who wears a coyote or fox skin pendent from his belt, has a broad band of brown paint across his eyes, and carries a drum. A peculiar feature of the dance is the function of a boy, disguised with a grotesque mask and grotesquely painted, whose duty it is to compel non-participants to join in the dance, beating the reluctant with switches. He appears just before or at midnight.