

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

August 30. ADDENDUM.

ST. FIACRE, hermit at Breuil, France (seventh century), venerated widely in France, Tuscany, Ireland, and Scotland. Born in Ireland of illustrious parentage, he early adopted a solitary life and, leaving Ireland, settled in the wood Broilum or Brodolum (now St. Brié) in the diocese of Meaux, where he healed the sick by the laying on of hands. He also devoted himself to gardening and became the patron saint of gardeners, who perform an annual procession in his honour on Aug. 30, both at Breuil and at St. Vaugirard in Paris, when both the churches are elaborately decorated with flowers. Few saints in France are more highly honoured, and pilgrimages are made to a large number of places at which his relics are reputed to rest. The deaths of both the Black Prince and King Henry V. are referred to interference with his relics, the latter dying of fistula, a disease with which the saint was especially associated. He was also concerned especially with the cure of gangrene, ulcers and tumours, and polypos. He is to be regarded as one of the most important of 'medical' saints. In Scotland he becomes St. Musset or Muffet by addition of the honorific "Mo."

THE "GREAT FEAST" OF ISLAM AND MUHARRAM.—The Moslem year begins with the month of Muharram, the holy month, corresponding to our month of August. It is closely connected with the Great Feast which is held in the preceding month. This feast, completing the year, is intended to remove the old evils of the preceding period. Preparations for the sacrifice are made by purification of the people. This is effected by various means, shaving the head, bathing, the use of henna, pilgrimages to shrines, the giving of alms, etc. Then follows the purification of the sacrificial victim, usually a sheep, but failing that, a goat, or even a bullock or small camel. The fact that in Morocco and Moslem North Africa the skin of the victim is often worn by a man suggests that the sacrifice symbolises the death of the old year, the victim being a scapegoat for the people, and the resurrection of the new year in the victim's skin. The next group of customs is concerned with the utilisation of the sacred character of the victim in various ways in divination and magic, and finally come the purificatory rites to remove from the people any spiritual influence pertaining to the sacrifice which might be harmful when they enter upon the new year.

Although all the month of Muharram is holy—any of the numerous magical practices connected with it is held to be efficacious throughout the whole year—the tenth day is particularly sacred and, rather than the first, may be regarded as New Year's Day. It is especially associated with the peculiarly Shi'ah rite of mourning for Hosein and Husain, the sons of Ali, who died on this day. The similar cult of Bâba 'Aišör in Morocco, a purely mythical being who personifies the old year, affords a reasonable presumption that the mourning for the sons of Ali is an Islamised version of rites connected with the death of the Old Year. At Fez, in a performance given nightly, a cardboard toy house resembles the "Tomb of Al-Husain" of the Shi'ah mysteries.

THE POLA CATTLE FESTIVAL.—The chief cattle festival of the Deccan and other parts of Bombay Presidency is held on the new moon of the month Sävan or Bhādon (July–September). In the Ahmadnagar District it is held in August, when the Kumbis

cover the cowsheds with tinsel paper or vermilion, tie tassels of fibre on the horns of the bullocks and decorate them with flowers, feed them with sugar, bow at their feet, rub them with sandalwood paste, and lay boiled rice before them. In the morning the herd is driven to the temple of the ape-god Hanuman and made to rush round it, the herdsman leading the way. In the Central Provinces an old ox leads the procession, carrying a wooden frame over which torches are fixed. A rope of maize leaves stretches across the way, which the ox has to break with its horns, when all stampede back to the stalls. In Berar, the cattle pass under the Toran or sacred rope dedicated to the ape-god, which is made of twisted grass covered with maize leaves. This rope is a prototype of the Toran, the wreath of maize leaves hung on the door of a bride and touched by the sword of the bridegroom when he comes.

September.

'RIDING THE FRINGES.'—A curious custom is recorded in Dublin, where it was known as 'riding the fringes' (? franchises), and in Cork, where it took place triennially at the beginning of September. In Dublin the Mayor and Corporation rode the bounds inland, and on reaching the sea-shore near Bullough, hurled a dart into the sea. This fixed the limit of maritime jurisdiction. At Cork the Mayor and Corporation put out to sea as far as an imaginary line between Poor Head and Cork Head, supposed to be the maritime boundary of the city. Then the Mayor in his official robes, attended by mace and sword bearer and other officials, went to the prow of the vessel and launched a javelin into the water. Regarded as an assertion of authority, the rite points to the worship of a sea deity—presumably Lir, the Celtic sea god, or possibly his son, Manannan.

THE ASHANTI YAM CEREMONY.—At the beginning of September a festival is held in Ashanti, known erroneously to Europeans as 'the Yam custom,' on account of the Yam harvest. It is a feast in which first fruits indeed appear, but as part of a propitiation of past kings of Ashanti and of the dead—a cleansing of the nation, and a purification of shrines of ancestral spirits, of the gods, and of lesser non-human spirits. Preparations for the feast began on a Monday eleven days before the actual festival. On the following Thursday week all sub-kings, chiefs, and office-holders began to assemble. The king and his retinue, preceded by the Golden Stool, informed the ancestral ghosts, gods, and spirits that the ceremony was about to take place by visiting the houses of all state dignitaries. He poured libations and made sacrifices before their doors, and at the shrines at the cross-roads and elsewhere in order. The festival lasted for several days, with a prescribed ritual for each day. On the afternoon of the Sunday, yams were placed by the king on the great fetish *Odwira Suman* and wine poured over it. In the evening the king went to a certain quarter of Coomassie and threw new yams to the spirits who had answered when called upon. On the Monday, the king, by striking an ox, before it was sacrificed, with the golden state sword, deliberately broke a solemn taboo and defiled a sacred shrine—an evil which was repaired the following day by the sacrifice of a sheep over the golden sword. On the following Friday the country was solemnly purified, beginning with the Golden Stool. But only after new yams had been sent to the shrines of ancestral ghosts, of gods and of non-human spirits, could the king, the chiefs, and the nation partake of the new yams of the harvest.