

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

September 12.

Winchester fair, once one of the great fairs of the British Isles, exemplifies the customary surrender of civic authority. The keys of the four gates were surrendered to a magistrate appointed by the bishop.

September 14.

HOLY ROOD OR HOLY CROSS DAY.—In Great Britain the day is specially associated with nutting. It was the custom of Eton that a holiday should be given for nutting on this day. In the Highlands of Scotland the night succeeding Roodmas was called 'the Night of the Holy Nut.' It was a popular belief that on this day the devil went nutting. If on the night before Roodmas it were wet, it was said that "the deer took his head wet into the rutting season," and there would be a month of fine weather and the farmer need have no fear for his crops.

September 15.

FESTIVALS IN ANCIENT MEXICO.—In the latter part of August or early in September a festival was held in honour of 'the Mother of the Gods,' when a woman clad in the ornaments of the goddess was sacrificed. Her body was immediately flayed and a young man dressed in the skin, with the exception of the skin of the thigh, which was worn by another man as a mask, who called himself the Maize Goddess, and the 'daughter' of the Mother of the Gods. A similar sacrifice in honour of the maize goddess took place on Sept. 15. This was in part a purificatory ceremony, as it was preceded by a fast of some days, at the end of which a woman personating the Goddess of the Lepers was sacrificed. It was also in part a fertility ceremony, as the blood of the 'Maize Goddess' was sprinkled over corn, fruits, the image of the goddess, and the walls of the room in which the sacrifice took place. A procession followed the sacrifice, which was headed by a man dressed in the skin, clothes, and ornaments of the 'goddess.'

HARVEST.—In the primitive agricultural year the two solemn festivals of the spring sowing and the harvest of late summer correspond to the observance of the opening of summer in May and the beginning of winter in November in the pastoral year; and just as the winter festival is associated with the cult of the dead, it is sometimes found that a part of the harvest observance is a propitiation of departed spirits. It marks the end of the old and beginning of the new year.

Owing to the conservatism of the peasant and the vital character of the operations with which they are connected, harvest customs long retained features more readily to be identified as survivals of primitive belief than almost any other groups of folk practices. Their importance among the heathen was early recognised by the Church, though they were sometimes thought to have been borrowed from the first-fruit ceremonies of the Jews, and notwithstanding the aversion from pagan practices, some of the ritual, for example, such as that of *Vacuna*, to whom Sabine rustics sacrificed at the end of harvest, was countenanced in the Christian thanksgiving—"chaplets of corn which She (the Roman Church) suspends on poles" and "offerings . . . on the altars of her tutelary gods." Indeed, a puritanical writer of the seventeenth century censures as a breach of the second commandment "the adorning with garlands or presenting unto any saint whom thou hast made special choice of to be thy patron and advocate, the first-fruits of thy increase, as corn and grains and other oblations."

It is a custom widespread throughout Europe that the last sheaf of corn to be cut should have a special name, should be woven or tied into a special shape, should sometimes be cut by a special person and with special ceremony, and usually be preserved for a year or more. Sometimes the grain from this special sheaf is mixed with the seed corn of the next sowing. This is the spirit of the corn known as the 'corn' or 'kern baby,' 'corn maiden,' 'corn mother,' 'corn dolly,' and so forth. The spirit is sometimes known by an animal name such as the 'hare,' for reasons apparent to anyone who has watched the cutting of corn in a hare country, or the 'mare' in Hertfordshire, where the last sheaf was cut by the harvesters throwing sickles at it. An interesting blend of Christian and pagan observed a few years ago in northern Italy consisted of a corn baby on a small stool or platform surrounded by a circle of twelve other corn babies.

Some significant ceremonies are recorded when the corn baby had been cut. In North Devon, where the figure was known as a 'neck,' a ring was made. The reaper in the centre held the neck in his two hands near the ground, while the others, taking off their hats, lowered them to the ground, then all cried "the neck" in harmony. As the central figure raised the neck they lifted their hats slowly above their heads to the full extent of their arms three times, and then changed their cry to "wee yen."

This circle—an act of adoration—reappears in certain East Anglian customs. In Norfolk any stranger entering the field during harvest operations was approached by the leader with a demand for 'largess.' If a gift was received the largess was 'holloed' by all the reapers standing in a circle around the giver with their arms holding their sickles extended towards him. They then shouted three times at the command of their leader, who stood on any elevated post near by. Largess given at the harvest supper—the 'Horkey Supper'—by the farmer's guests was holloed in similar fashion, the central figure holding a *gulch* of ale and a horn, the circle all holding each other's hands. At the blowing of the horn the clasped hands were elevated as high above the head as possible without losing the hand-clasp. Three whoops then followed and all drank of the ale in turn.

That the blades of corn last cut were regarded as a person was shown not only by the semblance of the human form into which they were woven, but also by the way in which they were treated after cutting. In Perthshire 'the maiden' was entrusted to the most personable of the girls, who bedecked it with ribbons. In Kent it was the business of the women to deck the 'ivy girl,' which was composed of the finest corn the field produced, with paper trimmings cut to resemble cap, ruffles, and handkerchief, etc., of point lace. In Northumberland the 'harvest queen' was an image which was appraised in great finery with a garland on its head and a sheaf of corn under its arm and a scythe in its hand. This was carried out of the village on the concluding day of harvest, and fixed to a pole in the field. There it remained all day and was carried home at night when the reaping was finished. In the Cotswolds at the beginning of the last century, a gaily decked girl, who apparently represented the goddess of the harvest, rode on the first of the horses bringing home the last load.

The last load generally, though not always, carried the corn baby, and was usually gaily decked. Its ceremonial character was emphasised in Gloucestershire. It came from the farthest field, and it should be the smallest, not topping the rail, so that women and children might ride on it. By taking it from the farthest field it was ensured that its beneficial influence should cover the greatest stretch of ground.