

## Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

September 27.

ST. COSMAS and ST. DAMIAN, who are said to have been beheaded under Diocletian in Italy, have appropriated the cult of a deity connected with fertility. Sir William Hamilton, ambassador to the court of Naples at the end of the eighteenth century, recorded that at the church of St. Isernia it was the custom of Italian women to make votive offerings of phallic character to these saints to secure children. They are in particular the patron saints of physicians and surgeons, as well as of philosophers.

September 29.

GANGING DAY.—A septennial custom at Bishop Stortford, when a group of young men assembling in the fields chose one of their number as leader, whom they followed over fields, ditches, and places of difficult passage. All whom they met, whether male or female, were 'bumped,' two persons taking them up in their arms and swinging them against each other. The landlord of each inn they visited was bound to furnish them with ale and cakes. The night should be, and usually was if the weather permitted, spent in the fields.

MICHAELMAS.—The feast of St. Michael being the most important of the Church festivals which approximates in date to the close of the agricultural year with the harvest, a number of customs have come to be associated with it which either close the old or inaugurate the new season. Such are the choice and inauguration of the new officials of the community for the coming year, or the renewal of terms of tenure. These are often marked by some special observance, such as the chopping of a stick by the senior alderman present in acknowledgment of the service of a manor in Shropshire, or the presentation of the horseshoes and nails on behalf of St. Clement's in the London civic ceremonial. At Abingdon the streets used to be decorated with flowers and garlands hung on poles at the inauguration of the new mayor at Michaelmas; while at Nottingham a ceremony known as the Burial of the Mace took place in St. Mary's Church, when the mace was laid on a table in the vestry beneath sprigs of rosemary and bay before it was handed to the new officials.

That the election was a time of special privilege and the place of assembly of a special character—in early times such communal assemblies were held in temple or sacred grove—is perhaps indicated by the custom of Seaford in Sussex, where the freemen, after assembling in the town hall, retired to the gate-post of a field at one end of the town and there elected their mayor, in order, it was said, to be free from the influence of the jurats who were sitting on the bench in the town hall. The 'lawless hour' of Kidderminster (see Oct. 1) finds its parallel in the 'lawless court' of King's Hill in Essex, at which tenants did suit and service before cock-crow. There are other cases, such, for example, that at Roscarrock in Cornwall, in which service of tenure had to be performed before sunrise, a time which, sometimes, at any rate, appears to have been regarded as a 'lawless' hour.

The fair at Chichester which began on this day, and lasted for eight days, was another of the occasions on which civil authority was abrogated. Here it was delegated to the bishop, who collected all tolls. On one occasion he claimed, but without success, the right to hold the keys of the town.

Among customs of a more popular character, the late harvest of the north of Scotland is responsible in Skye and other islands of the west coast for the baking

of a huge cake on this date. Of this all the members of the family and any strangers had to partake. It was also customary, where conditions allowed, to hold horse races, and for the sexes to give one another presents. A curious custom of the island of Lingay mentioned in the early eighteenth century was that any one might steal his neighbour's horse the night before and ride it all day provided that he returned it unharmed. In Barra the women brought the horses and rode behind the men, it being a lucky sign if they fell off. They bore the expenses, and each brought a large bannoch made with treacle, butter, etc. In Skye it was the practice that the cavalcade should ride round the church, which is strong presumptive evidence of a religious and probably pagan origin.

The Michaelmas cake appears in Ireland, where the inclusion of a ring makes it a prognostication of the marriage before the next Michaelmas of the one who received the portion containing it. In the west of England also, Michaelmas was made an occasion for forecasting marriage. Girls gathered ripe crabs from the hedges and laid them out in the form of initials in a loft. The initial which best retained its shape on Old Michaelmas Day was that of the future lover or husband.

St. Michael's cake was also baked in Wales, where it was incumbent upon every member of the household to eat a share.

Many attempts have been made to explain the Michaelmas goose. Its origin as a Michaelmas dish has been attributed to Queen Elizabeth and the celebration of the news of the defeat of the Armada; but it is mentioned long before in the reign of Edward IV. As it is a dish eaten at this date in Denmark and in Germany, its origin is probably more universal. The name sometimes given of 'stubble goose,' and the fact that geese having been allowed the run of the fields after the harvest were then at their best, suggest that it was probably a convenient form for payment in kind, especially for dues and tenancy—a view which is supported by numerous references to it in this connexion—and hence became an appropriate and staple dish for the Michaelmas feast.

SNAKE WORSHIP IN SOUTHERN INDIA.—In Malabar the snake is held in special reverence, and in some corner of the garden of every respectable family is a little grove with a masonry platform on which are sculptured granite stones representing hooded serpents. Every evening a lamp is lighted and offerings of eggs, milk, and plantains are made after the lamp has been lit to invoke the serpent's aid.

Mannarsala in Travancore is well known for its serpent worship. Here in a grove live the snake king and queen with thousands of their followers in the form of snakes of granite. A priest is in attendance who is provided with a house in the grove. An annual festival, known as the Ayilyam festival, is held here in the months of Kanny and Thulam (September-October) when a large number of people assemble with offerings of gold, silver, salt, melons, etc. On the day preceding the festival something like three thousand Brahmins are entertained at the house of the priest. On the day of the festival the serpent gods are taken in procession to the house of the priest by the eldest female member of the house, and offerings of neerumpalum (a mixture of rice-flour, turmeric, ghee, water of tender coconuts, etc.), boiled rice, and other things are made to the serpent gods. It is said that the neerumpalum mixture would be poured into a big vessel and kept in a room for three days, when the vessel would be found empty, the serpents having drunk the contents.