

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

September 30.

THE COURT OF FOOLS.—In the year 1381, at Cleves, "on the Day of St. Cumbert" was instituted an "Order of Fools" of which it was ordained that a court lasting seven days should be held at Cleves in each year on the first Sunday after Michaelmas, the time to be passed in conviviality and good fellowship. The members were to wear a fool in silver or embroidery on their coats under penalty of a fine, such fines to go to the poor, and amity was to prevail among them under pain of expulsion from the Court.

Another Society of Fools was instituted in Poland, also in the fourteenth century, but here the qualification was some act or habit of outstanding folly, according to the character of which office in the society was bestowed; for example, a man inordinately fond of dogs was made master of the hunt. The society rapidly assumed large proportions.

October 1.

At Kidderminster the inauguration of the annually elected magistrates used to take place on the first Monday after Michaelmas. The town hall bell gave the signal for the 'lawless hour,' when the people assembled in the streets and cabbage stalks and other missiles were flung about. At the end of the hour the bailiffs elect and Corporation in their robes with a band visited the retiring magistrates, and then quantities of apples were thrown from the windows of their houses.

October 2.

GOOSE FAIR.—Once an annual fair at Nottingham for the sale of geese from the fens of Lincolnshire. The Mayor of Nottingham customarily gave a feast of roast goose on the last day of his office. The fair will be held this year for the last time. A local festival known as 'Goose Fair' was held at Great Crosby, near Liverpool, each year, and coming at the end of the harvest served as the harvest home.

October 6.

ST. FAITH'S DAY.—A curious custom forecasting marriage is recorded from the north of England. Three maidens or widows share equally in the making and baking of a cake, each turning it three times in the cooking. When done, it is cut into three portions, and each divided into nine slices. Each slice must be passed through the wedding ring of a woman married at least seven years. Each then eats her nine slices of cake as she goes to bed, repeating a verse. She sleeps with the ring suspended above her bed and dreams of her future husband.

THE MAYOR OF MYLOR.—At Penrhyn in Cornwall, when the nuts were ripe, a nutting day was held in late September or early October. The rabble of the town went out to the woods early in the morning and gathered nuts, returning with green boughs. In the meantime the journeyman tailors repaired to the adjacent village of Mylor, where they elected one of their number, usually the wittiest, as 'Mayor of Mylor.' He was then carried back to Penrhyn in a chair shaded with green boughs in a procession headed by stout fellows with cudgels, torch bearers, two 'town sergeants' in cocked hats and official gowns, but bearing cabbages instead of maces, and the nutters in the rear. The procession marched to the town hall, where the 'mayor' made a burlesque speech outlining his 'policy.' The day ended with fireworks and bonfires on 'The Green' and 'Old Wall.' There was a popular tradition that a clause in the town charter required the mayor of the town

to yield up his authority to the 'Mayor of Mylor' on this night, and to allow the use of the official insignia of the town sergeants.

Similar mock mayors were elected in other parts of Cornwall. At St. Germans on May 28 a mayor was elected who was drawn round the boundaries in a cart. At Bodmin at the end of July a 'Mayor of Halgaver' was elected who dealt with minor and imaginary offences.

HARVEST.—Although the 'corn baby' represents the corn spirit, that spirit is not necessarily withdrawn from the remainder of the crop by its reservation. The sacrosanct character of the crop is unimpaired, and it is still dangerous to the devotees of the corn god: hence the Harvest Home and the first-fruit ceremonial. In the former the agriculturist does not merely rejoice at the gathering of the crop; he enters into a solemn communion with the deity by a sacrificial meal of which the substance of the deity is the material. The first-fruit ceremonies, in which an offering of the crop is made to the deity, remove the taboo arising from the sanctity which renders it dangerous until that quality has been neutralised. The special sanctity of the first fruits is shown by the fact that when eaten they must be taken fasting, just as the Christian fasts before Communion.

In Sweden the grain of the last sheaf was baked in the form of a little girl, and was then distributed to be eaten by every member of the household, while at La Palisse in France, a man made of dough was carried on the last load and then preserved until the close of the vintage, when it was broken up and eaten at a feast. In Lithuania, two hundred years ago, the new corn was eaten at the beginning of December at an elaborate ceremonial meal to which every kind of crop contributed and of which every member of the household partook, while a cock and hen of the year were sacrificed as an offering to 'god' and 'earth.' The first-fruit festival of the Creek Indians—the principal festival of their year—involved complete provision of new clothes, new utensils and furniture, new fire, fasting, purging, purification, and an offering of the first fruits to the fire spirit before the new crops could be touched. It will be noted in the "yam custom" of Ashanti, described in NATURE, Sept. 1, p. 334, not only were portions of the new yams given to the spirits, but the whole country had to be purified before the new yams could be eaten (for further examples see Frazer, "Golden Bough," abridged edition, pp. 479 sqq.).

As a parallel among primitive peoples to the rejoicing and horse-play of the peasant's harvest home may be quoted practices among the pagan tribes of Borneo. The women take cakes of the sticky boiled new rice and cover them with soot. These they endeavour to imprint on the faces and bodies of the men, who endeavour to retaliate. Drinking of the liquor made from the new rice and feasting are followed by dancing, in which some of the women dress as men carrying *padi* pestles. In one dance a woman leads holding a dried head, her followers being women dressed in war-coats. Another dance represents the departure of the spirit, and is a dramatic representation by three performers of the death of one of them who is restored to life by the Water of Life, which is supposed to be brought from the country traversed in the journey to the land of shades.

Part of the harvest ceremonial is a form of divination or good luck ceremony with four water beetles which are placed in a large gong filled with water. From their movements the good or ill success of the next year's crops is foretold. The aid of Laki Ivong to bring the soul of the *padi* to their homes is invoked.