

Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

November.

SEED-TIME IN ANCIENT EGYPT.—The sowing of the corn in ancient Egypt, which took place in November, was observed by the farmer, according to Plutarch, as a period of mourning and solemn observance. It was also at this time of the year that a feast of lights was held at night, and the death of Osiris was displayed as a mystery at the grave of the god at Sais. Frazer suggests that the 'Feast of Lights' may have been an 'All Souls' festival. The people mourned and beat their breasts in their sorrow for the death of the god, and an image of a cow made of gilt wood, with a golden sun between its horns, was carried out of its chamber. In Plutarch's day it was carried seven times around the temple. This was held to symbolise the search of Isis for the body of the god Osiris.

Plutarch also records that during the four days from the thirteenth to the sixteenth of the month Athyr (November) the people mourned for Osiris, when the image of the cow was swathed in black. Osiris was said to have been killed on the seventeenth of the month. On the nineteenth day the priests, accompanied by the people, went down to the sea carrying a shrine containing a gold casket into which they poured fresh water, whereupon the spectators shouted that Osiris was found. After that, vegetable mould was made into the shape of a moon and robed and ornamented. This represented the dead god come to life.

The ritual, as is apparent from the various accounts that have come down to us, varied from place to place. According to the account of the Denderah inscription, which describes the ceremonies of the Ptolemaic period, they lasted eighteen days, from the twelfth to the thirtieth day of the month Khoiak, and represented the death, dismemberment, and resurrection of Osiris. The ceremony began with ploughing by two black oxen, and the sowing of barley, spelt, and flax, and included a voyage of Osiris, attended by thirty-four images of deities in thirty-four tiny boats of papyrus, illuminated by three hundred and sixty-five lights. On the thirtieth day the effigy of the god was laid to rest in a sepulchral chamber, the effigy of the previous year having already some days before been removed and placed on boughs of sycamore. In a chamber of the temple of Isis at Philæ, the resurrection of Osiris was symbolised in a representation of the body of the god from which sprang stalks of green corn (see Frazer's "Golden Bough," Abridged Edition, p. 371 *fol.*).

November 23.

ST. CLEMENT, a follower and coadjutor of St. Paul, said to have been thrown into the sea with an anchor round his neck; hence his emblem of an anchor. On the sea retiring miraculously for a distance of three miles, his body was found within a stone chest in a chapel, and in commemoration the miracle of the retirement of the sea was repeated annually for a period of seven days. St. Clement's day in the popular calendar was regarded as the first day of winter. In medieval times it was the custom for children to parade the streets on this day. In Worcestershire boys went from house to house collecting pence and reciting verses in honour of both St. Clement and St. Catherine. Sometimes they were accompanied by men, who received gifts of cider and ale. This appears to be a relic of an older custom by which, on the night of St. Clement, house-to-house visits were paid for the purpose of drinking ale. In the Clog calendars the day was marked with a pot, as an indication of the character of the festival.

A similar procession of children asking for doles of cakes, a custom known as 'souling,' takes place in connexion with Hallowmas (see Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 and 2) and also in connexion with the feast of St. Katherine (Nov. 25). The customs still survive in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, and Warwickshire. 'Clementing' has been recorded in East Sussex, and in a proclamation of 1540 the custom of children making processions on St. Nicholas, St. Katherine, St. Clement, the Holy Innocents, and such like days, was forbidden.

It has been suggested that the economic aspect of the Celtic New Year on Nov. 1, when dues of agricultural produce were payable, has been transferred under Christian and ecclesiastical influence to the feasts of St. Clement and St. Katherine. Nov. 23, old St. Martinmas, was recorded in 1812 as still observed as one of the ancient quarterly periods of the year on which a few rents still became payable. In Walsall, in a code of 1440, St. Clement's day was the date for the rendering of the Mayor's accounts, the wardens of the guilds making up their accounts on St. Katherine's day. Down to a late date the day continued to be known as St. Clement's accompt, and apples and nuts were thrown from the Guildhall windows to the crowd. It is therefore probable that the ale given to the men and the apples given to the children are a relic of the entertainment frequently recorded as given to those paying dues.

St. Clement is the patron saint of blacksmiths, to whom he was known as 'Old Clem.' At one time his feast was celebrated annually in the dockyard at Woolwich by the election of one of the apprentices to serve as Old Clem. His face was masked, his head covered with an auburn wig, and he wore a long white beard. He sat in a large chair covered with bunting, with a wooden crown and anchor above it. A wooden anvil was before him, and in his hands he had wooden tongs and hammer. A mate with wooden sledge and others with banners and torches, battle-axes, etc., attended him. The party then formed a procession, Old Clem being shouldered, and paraded the town, visiting the residences of the officials of the dockyard and asking alms, the proceeds being spent in a supper.

MOCK MAYORS.—Mr. Frank H. Perrycoate of Polperro writes in reference to Mock Mayors in Cornwall (see *NATURE*, Sept. 29, p. 497), that he has recently found a note that on June 8, 1797, Sir Harry Trelawny paid William May 2s. for attending at Pelynt to prevent the Mayor's charring. Mr. Perrycoate suggests that this was a payment to the parish constable or an official for his services in preventing any riot or undue disturbance at the annual election of a mock mayor at Pelynt, a small agricultural village near Polperro.

Cornwall is not the only county in which the election of a mock mayor is recorded. At the beginning of the last century at Weston, a parish near Bath, such an election used to take place annually after a dinner, when the mayor entered the hall in full procession and, after the administration of the oath, an armed champion threw down a glove in challenge. Documents from the charter chest were recited, including the original charter, "granted by Julius Caesar." A similar election took place in connexion with the 'Renwick Mop' at Randwick, Stroud, on the Monday after Low Sunday, i.e. the second Monday after Easter. This latter was a water ceremony, the mayor being carried in a chair to a pool near a church, when he was lowered until his feet touched the water, while he and the bystanders were drenched with water.