

### Calendar of Customs and Festivals.

September 16.

**THE SAKAIA.**—The ancient Persians celebrated a festival called by Greek writers τὰ Σάκαια, the Sakaia, attributing to it a Scythian origin. Varying accounts are given of how it arose. It seems possible that it was of Babylonian origin. The festival of the Sakaia at Babylon, according to Athenæus, took place on the sixteenth day of the month corresponding to the Attic Boedromion (September). At this festival, Athenæus says, the masters were ordered about by the slaves, one of whom governed the house, and was clothed like a king. In the Persian festival a condemned criminal was clothed like a king and allowed to rule the land, drink and misconduct himself with the king's wives; but afterwards he was taken away, scourged and hanged. In the spring festival at Babylon the king's insignia were taken from him, his ears were pulled and his cheek smitten.

**THE ABBOT'S - BROMLEY (STAFFORDSHIRE) HORN DANCE.**—This dance takes place on the Monday following the first Sunday after Sept. 14. It is still recognised as a solemn ceremonial and is danced in all seriousness, although a certain amount of licence is allowed the buffoon. The accessories, the reindeer horns, the ladle, and the bow and arrow, hang all the year round in the church, and the dance starts in the morning from the church after receiving the benediction of the vicar. The dancers are twelve in number, one being a boy who carries the bow and arrow. There are two musicians, a fool, a hobby-horse, a Maid Marian with the ladle, and six dancers who hold the horns on their heads as they dance.

This dance has an unbroken tradition of four hundred years, but is of course much older, and, so far as appearances go, might well be descended from the horned dancer painted in palæolithic times on the walls of the cavern of Les Trois Frères at Ariège in the south of France. It is clearly closely related to the bear and other mimetic animal dances of the tribes of north-eastern Asia and North America. During the day the dancers cover a circuit of about fifteen miles, dancing at each house they visit, and finish up by dancing up the village street, while everyone watches from the house door to share in the good luck. Whether the dance is propitiatory, sacrificial, or a piece of sympathetic magic, is obscure. The circuit over which it is danced shows that it is intended to secure communal good luck. It is obviously a hunter's mimetic ritual, and is probably the most primitive of the survivals in Great Britain.

September 18.

**ST. FERRICOL, A.D. 304, saint and martyr:** a Roman tribune at Vienne who became a Christian. On refusing to sacrifice according to pagan rites, he was imprisoned. On the third day his chains fell from him and he escaped. He swam across the Rhône, but was captured and beheaded.

It was customary for the anniversary of this saint to be celebrated with great pomp at Marseilles. Triumphant arches were erected and the whole town and the ships in the harbour decorated with flags. Gardeners and butchers took a prominent part in the procession which took place, proceeding to various altars and resting places which were decorated with flowers. The gardeners carried wax tapers, green boughs, flowers, and banners. The butchers wore long cloaks, bonnets of sixteenth century type, and bore cleavers. They led a fat ox decked with garlands

and covered with a carpet on which sat a child as John the Baptist. The ox was led about for a week before the festival, bringing good luck to houses at which it left a trace of its visit. It was killed the day after the feast. Young girls representing nuns, saints, and the Magdalen, and boys dressed up as saints and priests, took part in the procession. The streets were strewn with flowers, which were also scattered on the bystanders. The procession proceeded to the port where all the ships were manned, and a special service of benediction took place.

September 21.

**ST. MATTHEW'S DAY.**—The Lord Mayor of London makes the annual presentation of a guinea to the two senior Grecians of Christ's Hospital, more familiarly known as the Blue Coat School. From an account given in the journal of Richard Hoare, Sheriff 1740-41, it would appear that the governors of the other hospitals throughout the city also attended on this occasion in the hall of Christ's Hospital, and after the service, speeches from the boys in commemoration of their founders, and the presentation of guineas by the Lord Mayor, and half-guineas by the Sheriff, an inquisition into the management of the hospitals by their respective governors was held, the City Marshal giving evidence. While this was taking place, the beades of each laid their staves on the floor and took them up only when the Lord Mayor had declared himself satisfied.

September 22.

At Beddinton a custom was observed of conveying in procession through the village a rabbit decorated with scarlet ribbons, while a hymn in honour of St. Agatha was sung—a ceremony traditionally dating from the first crusade. All men and young women who met the procession extended their first two fingers—a gesture familiar as a protection against the evil eye—and said:

“Gustin, Gustin lacks a bier.  
Maidens, maidens bring him here.”

**HARVEST.**—Water charms are sometimes found in connexion with the harvest home. In Hertfordshire the farmer drove the last load to the barn at full speed, while the people he passed pursued with bowls of water which they tried to throw on his cart. In the same county a scramble followed the making of the ‘dolly,’ and either the leader or the man who secured it in the scramble ran with it to the farmhouse and tried to get in without being drenched by the maid who stood ready to receive him with a bucket of water at the farmhouse door.

It was a common custom to appoint a leader of the reapers, the ‘Lord of the Harvest,’ who led in all the operations and in the ceremonial performances. In the Norfolk harvest home, previously quoted, there was also a second known as his ‘Lady’ who performed certain functions with him at the harvest supper, soliciting largess from the farmer's guests in disguise. It may be noted that in Bedfordshire the ‘dolly’ took the name of ‘Jack and Jill.’ A female character appeared at a later stage in the Norfolk supper, when one of the characters, donning female attire, was attacked by violent toothache, for which the doctor was summoned. He appeared riding on another as his horse, and the tooth, a piece of tobacco pipe, was extracted by a pair of tongs, which caused so much pain that the ‘lady’ fainted—a piece of buffoonery which, like the mumming plays, may hide something of more serious import, and be a faint remembrance of the human sacrifices of more primitive harvest customs.