

SUPERSTITIONS OF THE SEA.

Omens of Good and Evil That Sailors Believe In.

There is probably no class of people in the world so full of superstitious belief as the average sailor, unless, indeed, it be the negroes of the south. This belief in omens of the sea is not confined alone to forecasslemen, but is to a greater or lesser extent shared by captains and mates. In conversation a few days ago with a grizzled-bearded and bronzed old mariner, who has trod the quarter-decks of ships as master for upward of a quarter of a century, a San Francisco Chronicle reporter broached the subject of the superstition of sailors. "Do sailors believe in omens?" said the captain, repeating the reporter's question, "well you can bet your starry topknots they do. They are the crankiest lot of men in the world, and you would be astonished to know what trifling matters sometimes causes them to give up going on a voyage. I have known sailors to predict the direst calamities to a ship because they happened to sneeze while going on board. Then again, if a vessel is delayed in port and does not sail at the appointed time, it is a bad omen, according to Jack's ideas. They have good omens too. A fair day when they ship is a good sign, and if the sun is shining brightly on the day they sail, it is a sign that the vessel will have a speedy and prosperous voyage. A baffling head wind leads sailors to believe that there is a Jonah on board, and they do all sorts of things, such as burning a piece of old sail or rope-yarn, and the throwing overboard of a sea biscuit to exorcise the evil effects of his presence, and when the wind does shift and becomes fair they attribute it to their sorcery, their good spirits return, and all goes merry until something else happens to disturb their fears.

"I remember an old fellow I once shipped at Liverpool for the voyage home to New York," continued the captain. "He was a veritable old sea-dog, and the crew at once set him down as a Jonah. He was called Liverpool Jack, and was the queerest chap I ever saw. He wanted the voyage prolonged as much as possible, and one day the men caught him in the foretop whistling for a head wind, and, sure enough, the following morning the wind shifted and came dead from the head. This, of course, necessitated the frequent tacking of the ship, and the curses of the crew were loud and long. That wind stuck to us for three days, and the crew decided to chuck Jack overboard, and I verily believe they would have carried their threat into execution had the wind not changed. Sailors also have an aversion to clergymen's sons, and if they know that one is on board a vessel they will not ship under any consideration. Why they dislike a vessel with a minister's son on board I have never found out, but it is considered one of the worst 'hoodoos' by sailors. Out at sea if, as is frequently the case, a shark follows in the wake of a vessel, it is a sign that some one on board will soon die, but it is one of the worst omens to kill it. Of all the seabirds what are known as a 'Mother Cary's chicken,' a dark bird somewhat resembling a gull, but about the size of a chicken, is held most sacred by the forecasslemen. Its presence foretells an approaching storm, and this sign hardly ever fails. A seaman would as soon think of swimming across the Pacific ocean as to molest one of the chickens. Then, again, it is bad luck, so sailors say, to kill the seagulls that follow ships out at sea, as they are considered the harbingers of good luck. If dolphins accompany the vessel, it is also considered a good omen."

A singular incident happened some years ago on board an American ship en route to this city. A few days out from New York a booby, a bird somewhat like a gull, but much smaller, alighted on the foretop, and one of the sailors went up and caught it. The booby was brought on deck, where it was attacked by the ship's dog. The animal flew at the bird,

which drove its bill down the dog's throat, and thus the two remained until separated. The booby was thrown overboard, and was not seen for some time, when suddenly it reappeared perched in the foretop again. A sailor went aloft and captured it, and it was brought down and taken into the forecassle, where the sailors held a trial, and the bird was sentenced to death. The executioner was the carpenter, and the unfortunate booby was beheaded. The dog disappeared after the encounter, but immediately after the bird had been killed it came on deck and began running around in a circle. This was continued for some time, when suddenly it made a dash for the stern of the ship and jumped overboard. Even the captain, a Boston man, was affected by the incident, and for several days the deepest sort of gloom prevailed among those on board, and some of the crew predicted some disaster before the end of the voyage, and none felt entirely easy until port was reached.

In addition to being superstitious sailors have queer names for things on ship-board. His bunk in the forecassle he terms his pew; he says "aft" for "abaft" and "forest" for "forward." The captain is known as the "old man," the carpenter as "chips," and the cook is the only man abaft and foremost that has the distinction of having his office mentioned in connection with his name, and he is referred to as Ben or Joe the cook. An old sailor is called "a whale." A drunken man is referred to as being "three sheets in the wind," no doubt because he staggers like a ship in a storm under shortened sail. As to the use of profanity, sailors are peculiar. They do most of their cursing in heavy weather, when sails are being furled and when the wind is howling through the rigging with terrific force. Take him in fair weather, however, and he is a mild sort of a person, seldom swears and cheerily braces the yards around to the tune of "Ye heave ho, a ho, for to Hongkong we will go."

Greeley's Casual Lunch.

Speaking of Horace Greeley, the anecdotes which have been going the rounds of the press about his wonderful powers of digestion, recall one of Parton's stories. Greeley was much interested in the log cabin campaign, and during it could think and talk of nothing else. One night he was invited out to tea. The hour came. All were present, but Greeley did not appear. After waiting a reasonable time, the rest of the party sat down and ate their meal. A half hour after they had finished, in came Mr. Greeley. He said nothing about being late, and apparently had forgotten about taking anything to eat. He sat down, and at once began to talk about the campaign. The lady of the house attempted to ask him if he had had his tea, but he brushed the question aside, and went on talking.

She went out and brought in a large cake basket, holding perhaps a half peck of doughnuts, rich and greasy, but not bad to taste; these she handed to Mr. Greeley supposing he would take one or two, and then pass them along. He took the dish mechanically, and placed it in his lap. He then took a doughnut and munched away unconsciously as he talked. This eaten he took another, and so went on eating and talking, to the surprise of all, until the half peck was entirely eaten up. As he finished the last one, the lady took away the dish, and I suppose on the principle that cheese is good for digestion, she put a plate of this in its place, Mr. Greeley talking all the time.

A moment later and his hand instinctively sought the cheese. He took it up, block after block, and before he had finished talking, the plate was empty. It was taken away quietly, and the person who witnessed the scene says he don't believe Greeley was either then or afterwards aware that he had eaten anything.

HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS.

Ancient Biblical Parchments Undergoing Examination in St. Petersburg.

A St. Petersburg telegram to the London Standard says: Dr. Harkavy has commenced the laborious task of collating his precious Hebrew manuscripts of portions of the Old Testament with the received text, and has already lighted upon variations interesting in themselves and significant of what may be expected when the comparison has extended to as many books as it at present covers verses. It will be seen from the following examples that where the texts differ the new reading is unquestionably superior to the old; and there is good reason to hope that the result of Dr. Harkavy's discovery may be very extensive emendations of portions of the Old Testament.

The parchments number fifty-one, and a close inspection shows that some are much older than others, for not only are the skins themselves in various states (which might be accounted for by accidents or exposure), but the characters employed vary considerably, showing a gradual approach to the square writing of ordinary Hebrew, to which, however, they are evidently anterior. The characters used in the most recent of them originated not later than the second century after Christ; and this is confirmed by the fact that some letters are almost identical with those known to have been used in Jerusalem in the first century before Christ. Others, again, are unlike any known form; while the *sha* approaches the Alt-Indisch, though the resemblance may be accidental.

The date of the manuscripts is another question altogether, and one which can not yet be determined. It seems hardly possible that a colony of Jews still exists employing a writing which points to their isolation from the rest of their race for some two thousand years; but Dr. Harkavy is convinced that there was such a colony once; and indeed, the phenomena presented by these manuscripts can not be otherwise explained.

As to the variations, they may be due, as the professor remarks, either to later corrections or to the antiquity and purity of the text; but in any case they promise to be both interesting and valuable. Thus, in Lamentations ii., 3, *ke* meaning "like," is left out before *esh*, meaning "flaming fire." In the fourth verse of the same chapter the omission of the same word alters the meaning of the first sentence from "He (the Lord) bent His bow like an enemy," to "The enemy hath bent his bow;" while the next sentence, owing to a similar omission, and the word *nitzal* being replaced by *hitib*, reads: "The adversary stretched forth his right hand," instead of, as in the authorized version, "He (the Lord) stood with His right hand as an adversary." In the sixth verse, instead of *vaygrass*, "despised," we have *vaygrass*, "crushed," or, as the same word is translated in Judges, "oppressed." The passage in Lamentations ii., 9, of the authorized version reads: "The Lord * * * hath despised in the indignation of His anger the king and the priest;" for which the newly-discovered manuscript would read: "The Lord hath crushed," etc. The seventh verse reads in the authorized version: "The Lord hath cast off His altar, He hath abhorred His sanctuary." In these MSS., *nier*, "abhorred" is replaced by *miggen*, a word translated in Genesis xiv., 29, "delivered," where the passage reads: "The most high God hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand." Finally, in Lamentations iv., 18, instead of *ssady*, we have *ssaru*; that is, instead of "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets"—"Our steps are restrained," etc., etc.

The work of photographing the manuscripts and publishing Dr. Harkavy's memoir will be undertaken by the Academy of Sciences.

The manuscripts were brought to the Black sea in a ship called the *Ekaterina Koupka*, by a sailor named Oria Bashan.

They were found by his father Alexander Bashan, thirty years ago, in the Island of Rhodes, after a great fire; but whether in a private house or in a synagogue is not known. Oria regarded them as an amulet and parted with them unwillingly.

The Name for a Girl.

If we granted the following request, which comes to us from Kentucky, we should do the baby referred to a poor service:

"Please send us some pretty name for a girl baby—something novel and uncommon—and you will much oblige a reader of the Sun."

Novel and uncommon, or merely pretty and fanciful names, are the ones of all others for you to avoid. You may make your girl an object of ridicule, and cause her mortification which will do serious injury to her disposition, if you give her some old and romantic name.

The old and simple and homely names are the best for girls—the names which have been borne by women for thousands of years, and which are both beautiful in themselves and sweet in their associations. There is a dignity about them which befits womanhood, while a great part of the fanciful names which have of late come into fashion, are inappropriate, except in the nursery, as pet appellations of babies.

There are a score of common names which are far better than any of those manufactured by romancers. They are all good, and all suitable, and because thousands and millions of women have been known by them, they are none the less attractive. Those which are most commonly used, are indeed, the most agreeable to the ear—like Mary and Margaret, Catherine and Harriet, Jane and Lucy, and Elizabeth. They are dignified, and their homeliness makes them all the more charming. Affection will never get tired of them. They will be as common a thousand years from now, as they were a thousand years ago, and as they are to-day.

We therefore advise our friend to give up his plan for distinguishing his girl by burdening her with some "novel and uncommon" name, and if she grows to be a sensible woman she will thank us for our refusal to assist him in finding such an appellation.—N. Y. Sun.

Alcoholization of Pigs.

Men of low intellectual endowment with a taste for strong drink will derive much comfort from the result of one of the latest experiments which, at the suggestion of the ex-brandy king of Sweden, the French temperance society has been making on the alcoholization of pigs. The experiments which were commenced in 1879 on a number of pigs of the so-called Anglo-Chinese breed have been continued ever since. Each pig was kept in a separate sty, but twice a day they were all fed together in an adjoining yard. Alcohol was mixed with their food, and after each meal they all fell into a deep sleep, but showed no signs of excitement, except now and then a slight muscular trembling. The difference of the effect of alcohol on human beings and pigs is believed to arrive from the smallness of a pig's brains, for the larger the brain the more dangerous the effect of intoxication. Hence, although the companions of St. Anthony may occasionally indulge in their taste for juniper, they are in no danger of being attacked by delirium tremens.

A woman found wandering the streets in Jersey City a few nights ago, when taken to a police station said she had been married three weeks, but had forgotten her husband's name. We have heard of a woman marrying \$500,000 and forgetting her husband's other name, but this Jersey City woman's defective memory is more remarkable, inasmuch as her husband was not worth a cent. Some women—and men, too—can forget a great deal in three weeks.