

LUCK IN ODD NUMBERS.

One of the most ancient and universal prepossessions or beliefs is that which imputes luck to odd numbers. Thus the poets, taking advantage of the popular superstition, have given peculiar prominence to the numbers three, five, seven, &c.; and from the earliest times to the present, good housewives would never think of putting any but an odd number of eggs under a hen or goose; indeed, we have heard it asserted that the sitting-bird would surely break one of the eggs or kill one of the chickens rather than bring an even number of little ones into the world. The precocious author who wrote the well-known epitaph—

"Here lies good Master Duck,
Whom Samuel Johnson trod on;
If he had lived it had been good luck,
For then we should have an odd one,"

carries the superstitious notion from the eggs to the ducklings; and in Devonshire and Cornwall it is considered to this day a very lucky thing to possess an odd number of children, sheep, fowls, &c. A little child in Redruth, in the latter county, was born with six fingers on each hand, and during the cholera year it died. It was indeed the only male child who died of the pestilence in that town; and both mother and father—the latter a stalwart copper-miner and leader of the choir in the old church—were accustomed to declare that "they were not surprised, for it had six fingers on both its hands, and it was born at twelve at night; and you know there's no luck in evens."

Not to mention the Egyptians and Hebrews, of whose partiality for odd numbers many illustrations might be given, we may just refer to a few instances in which the ancients evinced their predilection in favour of odd notions. In the Grecian mythology there were three graces, three syrens, three furies, three fates, seven wise men, nine muses, &c. The gods, Virgil tells us, delighted in odd numbers; and Pythagoras, the philosopher, is particular in ascribing great virtue to the number three. Every Greek city had an unequal number of gates and temples. Theocritus, the Syracusan poet, divided his flocks into unequal numbers, and we learn that among the Greeks

and Romans, dinner tables were three-sided, and the guests congregated in threes and fives. At a Roman funeral, three handfuls of sand were scattered over the corpse, just as, in our beautiful service for the dead, three handfuls of earth are thrown upon the coffin when the minister pronounces the solemn words—"Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

The Roman markets were held every ninth day, the people were numbered every five years; and Vegetius, in his treatise on "Military Affairs," tells us that the fosse around a camp should not be less than nine feet or more than seventeen, but that whatever the width, it should always consist of an unequal number of feet. Indeed, it is remarkable how frequently, both in ancient and modern times, unequal numbers have been said to possess particular virtues. Thus we have the "mystic numbers"—nine, seven, and three—in a variety of combinations. In the ceremonies attendant upon the proper observance of Allhallow Eve the number three is paramount, and every schoolboy knows that "the third time is lucky." In all matters of superstition the number three is the especial favorite. When the three witches in *Macbeth* meet in the cave, and dance around the boiling cauldron, do they not sing

"Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd,
Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined?"

It is not necessary to adduce further instances of this universal prepossession in favour of odd numbers; but the question naturally arises—whence this apparent love of units before duals, of odds above evens? We will endeavour to explain. It will be admitted, we think, on all hands, that in every state of human existence, gentle and simple, savage and refined, there is in the mind of man a love of gambling. It is a hard sentence to pronounce, but unfortunately a true one, nevertheless; and it has been said that the love of gambling is one of the lines of demarcation which separates man from the brute. We need not, just now, instance the wide-spread rum which this propensity has worked among civilized communities, for the lower the state of man the more fully and completely do we find him addicted to games of chance. Well,