

# SOME SURVIVING SUPERSTITIONS By Charlotte C. West

The other day a lawyer declared to his protesting friend that, unless he entered the Fourteenth Street subway station in New York from the extreme eastern side, the day would not be propitious; argument was useless; he knew what to expect from experience. A physician in New York has a patient who will not consult him in his morning hours, because, he says, the sun is inimical to him at that time; he always calls in the "6 to 7" hour and declares the sun is without power over him then, as that was his natal hour. Although a rational man in all other respects, he entertains this superstition in all seriousness. He also confessed to me one day that he always puts on his right stocking first—"for luck."

Who can explain this bias on the subject of hours, and right and left stockings? Or the countless other beliefs that crop up on all sides in every-day life, and with which we are so familiar? May it not be that these are survivals from past ages, when, for one reason or another, cosmic laws were carried out that found their expression in acts similar to those mentioned?

That this is indeed the case, and that superstitions possess a vast and universal interest, is proven by the tremendous amount of investigation into the subject now being conducted by many scientists.

A noteworthy little book by a celebrated anthropologist, just published, brings out the value of superstitious beliefs in the establishment and maintenance of law and order. Thus, for instance, the belief is still prevalent in many countries that the ruler occupies his exalted position by divine right, and, lower down in the scale, that he is possessed of superior wisdom, and is in direct communication with a supernatural being.

Again, a superstitious fear of punishment or of discovery, prevents theft in this day. Among savages it is common for the accused to say: "If I stole the thing may I speedily die." And who among us has not at some time heard a similar utterance? It is a custom in certain barbaric sections for one who has been victimized to exclaim: "May fire blast the eyes of the person who has stolen my bananas." And do we not express the same superstition when we say: "That money will never do him any good," or "Murder will out," apropos of any underhanded dealing whatsoever?

Ancient Greeks believed that the soul of any man who had just been killed was angry with his slayer and would trouble him, and so arose the custom for even an involuntary homicide to exile himself for a certain length of time. Most of us are acquainted with the story of Orestes, who lost his reason after killing his mother, and who recovered it after biting off one of his own fingers, thereby entering into a blood-covenant with her soul and so "laying the ghost."

This belief of the soul's return is universal among the Chinese—an absolutism altogether beyond the comprehension of western minds—affecting their morals and entering profoundly into their entire lives. Today we frequently hear of the involuntary surrender of a homicide, sometimes years after the deed was committed, because the self-accused man is haunted by his victim's ghost.

In many sections of the world the belief still exists that departed souls take up their abode in trees. As recently as 1890 a sacred larch-tree in the Tyrol was thought to bleed whenever cut. Furthermore, the woodsman's steel entered his own flesh to the depth of the wound he inflicted on the tree, and that this self-inflicted wound would not heal before the tree itself had recovered.

To this day the Koreans say that the souls of those who die of plague, or by the way-side, or of women expiring in childbirth, invariably enter trees.

Likewise, the mountaineers of New Guinea believe the spirits of their ancestors live also in the branches of trees. That is why these simple folk dedicate to arboreal shrines their strips of red and white cotton or baskets of fruit. The custom still pursued in many parts of the world of planting a tree on the roof of a newly-built house has its origin in this same superstition. It is believed that the spirits residing in the trees used in the house will thereby be appeased.

In many civilized countries, strange superstitions exist regarding one's portrait or photograph. Thus, among some classes of Germany, it is said that if you have your portrait painted, death is sure to follow shortly; also, that a photograph imbibes your soul. The Russians say that if a silhouette is taken death results within the year.

In the western part of Scotland the belief reigns that one never has a day's health after being photographed.

A well known savant in New York expresses the belief that there is something in this. He states that in his case, and in others with whom he is personally acquainted, given almost invariably became estranged.

This seems to be a contribution from that extraordinary class of soothsayers and fortune-tellers, the gypsies, who are so overwhelmingly steeped in superstitious lore.

The story is told by an artist who attempted to sketch a gypsy girl. "I won't have her drawn out," exclaimed an aunt; "I told her I'd make her scrawl the earth before me if ever she left herself be drawn out again."

"Why, what harm can there be?" was asked.

"I know, there's a fizzle (charm) in it. There was my youngest, that the goryja drew out on Newmarket Heath, she never held her head up after, but wasted away and died."

Who has not heard of the belief that the "ghosts" step forth from their portraits and stated occasions?

One of the most famous stories in ancient history is that 400 years after the battle of Marathon, there were still heard on the battlefield the neighing of horses and the shouts of soldiers; and apropos of this battle, Plutarch stated that several soldiers saw the apparition of Theseus, there, fighting for the Greeks.

Descendants of the hardy Norsemen still believe that the old viking spirit broods over the land; and in a recent book Dr. Van Dyke calls attention to this when he speaks of "feeling" the history of Constantinople hanging over the city.

However, the belief in ghosts and apparitions has been credited to all ages.

Everyone knows the story told by the celebrated Dr. Abercrombie, of a gentleman who was frequently annoyed in his study by the visits of a little old woman in a black bonnet; and, much nearer home, in times more recent, a similar story was current with one of our most eminent physicians as hero. One very stormy night he was disturbed in his study by the moaning of a child. Repeatedly he went to the outer door and saw nothing but darkness and driving rain. At length he fixed the door slightly ajar and returned to his study. Then the moaning ceased, and there passed through the room the figure of a little girl, rudely clad and wearing a small shawl over her head. An illusion? Most likely.

The awe and fear with which natural phenomena were regarded in the early days, accounts for the superstitious beliefs still held by many seamen. Ancient works are teeming with fancies current to this day. Waterspouts were looked upon with great terror, and later on mariners used to discharge artillery at them to hasten their fall. During the voyages of Columbus, it was the superstitious practice, when a waterspout was encountered, for one of the ship's company to kneel down, holding in one hand a knife with a black handle, and read the Gospel of St. John. No sailor of the old school would think of going to sea without a black-handled knife.

Electrical storms at sea are still shrouded in superstitious mysteries to ignorant sailors, and "fantom lights" are known as Jack Harrys in honor of him who is supposed to have sailed the first man fooled by them. Many with fear and awe, and consider it the worst of omens. The mystery of a specter or fantom ship is now easily explained by the natural phenomena called mirages, but nothing could induce a sailor to view the spectacle as other than a sign of impending danger.

Birds play a great part in good and bad auguries at sea. The albatross is regarded as

a harbinger of good fortune, and has been immortalized as such by Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—whereas the magpie is a bad omen.

A friend of Sir Walter Scott, traveling by coach to London, entered into a conversation with a respectable-looking seaman, who remarked: "I wish we may have luck in our journey; there's a magpie."

"And why should that be unlucky?"

"I can't tell you that, but all the world agrees one magpie bodes ill-luck, two are not so bad, but three are the Evil One himself. I never saw three magpies but twice, and once I nearly lost my vessel, and afterward I fell from my horse and was hurt."

Many seamen still believe in water-spirits or sprites. In Bohemia the fishermen are afraid to assist a drowning man for fear of giving offense to the water-sprite.

A beautiful Norwegian legend states that a mariner wished to bring a cake to the Spirit of the Sea on Christmas Day. He found the water heavily frozen, and not wishing to return with his offering, made a hole in the ice. This, however, was not large enough for the cake, but suddenly a tiny, lily-white hand arose, seized the cake, and quickly disappeared. Thus originated the Norwegian compliment, "Your hand is like a water-sprite."

The poet Southey, whose imagination loved to revel in the superstitions of the deep, observed that many a good ship lost the tide that leads to fortune by starting on Friday. We know that Friday is almost universally regarded as an unlucky day, and that this superstition is based upon the Crucifixion.

Seating thirteen at table dates from the Last Supper, when one of the guests proved himself so arch a conspirator and hypocrite that, his act has rung through the corridors of time, filling millions with dread of the number thirteen. During the past winter a noted after-dinner speaker refused to seat himself at a little banquet discovering that there were thirteen. An extra plate and guest had to be furnished before this well known man permitted himself to be dined.

Perhaps, of all superstitions, the most romantic duster about charms and amulets. Every one believes in a mascot.

Only the other day a lady sent a charm to the King of England, that he might win the Derby. The mascot brought him luck, and he graciously returned the compliment by having a jeweled duplicate made for her.

Solomon is said to have possessed a ring containing spirits that were capable of doing marvelous things. The wearing of a different jewel each day in the week—a fad or superstition affected by many fashionable women today—dates back to Apollonius of Tyana. Mme. Blavatsky, the famous theosophist, also believes in a different luck stone for each day. Her series runs thus.

Sunday, the ruby, and crysolite; Monday, selenite, pearl, opal; Tuesday, amethyst, blood-stone; Wednesday, agate, jade, olivin; Thursday, emerald, sapphire; Friday, turquoise, lapis, lazuli; Saturday, onyx.

Emperor William of Germany has a ring with a curious history, which is the talisman of the Hohenzollern family. The legend runs that, since the time of the elector, John of Bradenburg, every ruler of the house of Hohenzollern, has, when dying, handed a small packet to his successor. This packet contains a ring set with a large black stone that was dropped by an enormous toad upon the bed of the elector's wife after the birth of a son. The stone was preserved and set in a ring by Frederick the Great.

"Toadstone," so called, was a favorite of witches and astrologers, and it was generally believed that they were attracted from the heads of the old toads in their dying moments. These stones were sometimes set in rings and kept in families for centuries. They were thought to be powerful agents against witchcraft and poison.

Napoleon Bonaparte possessed a ring around which several superstitious stories are woven. He is said to have received it from a priest during his invasion of Egypt. In 1814, at the time of his abdication at Fontainebleau, and after his unsuccessful attempt to poison himself, he is said to have observed to Dr. Corvisart, "I was not meant to die. I did not think it my talisman," indicating the ring. This ring was subsequently given to Queen Hortense and played a role in the life of the prince imperial. Napoleon III. wore it constantly, and upon his death it was offered to the prince, who refused it. As is well known the prince met a mysterious death in Zululand in 1879.

From Napoleon Bonaparte to Oom Paul is a far cry—but one touch of superstition makes the whole world kin. Many years ago the wily Boer bought from a half-breed woman a meerschaum pipe, to which she ascribed the power of fortune-telling. She predicted, incidentally, that three important events in Kruger's life would be followed by accidents to his pipe. Well, early in 1881, before the independence of the Transvaal was modified, the stem came to pieces; just before the Jameson raid, he chipped a piece from the bowl; and shortly prior to his departure for the Bloemfontein conference, the pipe fell upon the floor and was shattered to fragments.

Kruger, to his dying day, was convinced that there was more than coincidence in all this; and, it must be confessed, that many of us in our heart of hearts, would agree with him.

We all of us, in one form or other, have meerschaum pipes of our own.—The Scrap Book.

Early Attempts at Air Flight

Aerial navigation is no new aspiration of man. Long before Christopher Columbus sailed into Western seas and discovered the vast continents of the New World mediaeval scientists had given attention to the problem of conquering that other element which still defies the skill of man, but which, the world is beginning to believe, will be as navigable as water before the twentieth century wanes.

A famous Augustine monk, known to history as Albert of Saxony, who lived in the fourteenth century, was the first man on record to define the primal principles of the science of aeronautics. His ideas were followed up by a Portuguese named Francisco Mendon, who, however, made no material contribution to the science.

Late in the seventeenth century came Francis Lana with a proposal to navigate the air by means of a boat raised from the ground by means of four hollow balls made of thin copper, from which the air had been exhausted. Here was the germ of the navigable balloons which the Germans today are trying to work out to perfection in the form of dirigibles.

In the middle of the eighteenth century Cavendish made the notable discovery that hydrogen was nearly eleven times lighter than ordinary air, and this for a while revolutionized the methods of ambitious aeronauts.

Hardly had this idea been promulgated than an Edinburgh man named Black, made practical experiments with bags filled with hydrogen. These rose rapidly to the ceiling of his sitting-room, and thereby demonstrated the utility of air bags for mounting into space. A dozen years later two brothers arose who might well be styled the Wilbur and Orville Wright of the eighteenth century. These were Joseph and Stephen Montgolfier, who produced the first air balloon, this being a large silken bag filled with heated air. With this new form of balloon they made an ascent at Annonay, in France. It was in one of these Montgolfier balloons that a daring aeronaut, named Tyler, made an ascent at Edinburgh on a summer's day in 1784, to the amazement of a considerable crowd.

About the same time a woman, named Mme. Thible, won distinction by being the

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first of her sex to make a balloon ascent. The first balloon ascent was not made in England till a month later, and four months afterwards the first ascent from Irish soil was made from the Ranelagh Gardens in Dublin.

Having thus learned to rise and descend in the air in safety the aeronautical adventurers next sought to travel through the air, and the overseas passage naturally proved an irresistible fascination. It was so long ago as 1785 that the aerial voyage across the Straits of Dover was first negotiated—and with success. Two balloonists, Blanchard and Jeffries, made the ascent at Dover, and aided by favorable winds were wafted across the Channel to Calais, where they safely alighted at a spot not far from the scene of M. Blieriot's great and successful feat.

Years passed without the feat being repeated, and in 1812 a balloonist, named Sadler, who had established a reputation with many successful expeditions overland, tried to cross the Irish Channel. This time he failed and fell into the sea near Holyhead harbor. He was picked up all right, but he seems to have made no further attempt to cross the water in so frail a bark. Just before Queen Victoria came to the throne a still more daring essay in aeronautics was made by the building of a big balloon, named the Nassau. A stoutly-built car to hold three persons and the famous Vauxhall Gardens, then one of the most popular resorts of Londoners.

The secret of aerial navigation was still undiscovered, however, and the balloon being rudderless, the voyagers were entirely dependent on unknown air currents, which carried them right across the sea into Germany; and after being in the air for eighteen hours the adventurous aeronauts safely descended at Weilburg, in Nassau—the very province after which their balloon was named.

Fifty years ago there was exhibited to the Academy of Sciences in Paris a model of an aerial ship fitted with the screw device for propulsion. But this invention never got beyond the "model" stage. It was also in 1859 that four Americans, filled with the same fever to conquer the air, traveled in a balloon car from St. Louis in the south to Jefferson in the

north, a distance of nearly twelve hundred miles. When they set foot to ground again all four were nearly dead, so exhausting had been their experiences aloft.

In 1867 the Irish Channel was again safely crossed by means of a balloon, the passage being made from Dublin to Westmorland. At this time, too, the science of aerial navigation was placed on a definite basis with the establishment of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain, one of the foremost promoters being the Duke of Argyll.

The most sensational endeavor in the story of aero-navigation was the proposal of one, Professor Wise, to cross the Atlantic from New York to Liverpool in a balloon. For this purpose he constructed two balloons of different sizes, arranged after the fashion of a modern bi-plane. These had a joint lifting capacity of 15,000 lbs. But the idea was found impracticable in working, and Wise decided to venture the voyage with a smaller balloon and with a lifeboat in attendance. But he never got out to sea, for a storm burst, compelling a hasty descent, and the professor narrowly escaped with his life.

## HECKLING STUBBS

Governor W. R. Stubbs, of Kansas, went to Chicago not so very long ago to appear at a hearing on Kansas railroad matters given by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

The railroad lawyers heckled the governor a good deal, but he was calm and smiling under it and made a succession of speeches on his ideas of the cost of railroading in Kansas, a proposition on which he was well informed, as he had built railroads for many years before he went into politics.

"Now, Governor," asked one of the lawyers severely, "isn't it a fact that you were advised to come here solely for the effect your testimony may have on your political ambitions?"

"No," replied the governor; "in fact, I had no such advice."

"Do you mean to say the people with whom you talked this over did not advise you to come here?"

"Yes, sir. The only people I talked with about it were advised against my coming."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer; "and who were they, please?"

"My wife and daughter."—Saturday Evening Post.

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## Some Quaint Old Negro Proverbs

Old negro proverbs are peculiarly quaint. A writer for the New York Sun recently contributed the following collection.

Better let well alone.

Live learn, die, and forget all.

Des so de tree fall des so it lie.

Hard times set in de road for yo' both gwine and comin'.

What's comin's comin'; up de road or down de road, you can't travel pas' it.

You may save all yo' das, but you can't save yo' life!

You can turn de stream around, but you can't twist it back.

Some sayings have reference to certain superstitions of the race, for instance:

Tain't no good to kill de crane after he done fly over de roof er de house and call fer a corpse, and Wiekierin' mares don't hatter ax de road to de cabin whar de ole folks live, or None but a fool'll hang a horseshoe on de limb of a belted tree.

It is an old belief that it is a death sign for some member of the family dwelling in the house over which a crane flies, uttering his doleful note, which to the negro ear spells Corpse! Corpse! Corpse!

The whickering mares are little brown birds known by that name to the plantation hands. They are said to fly in flocks, and to come about a cabin only when some old dweller therein approaches death. At such times they fly and whicker anear and cannot be driven away.

A horseshoe hung on a tree is said to make it grow fast and bear fruit.

Of the rapid passage of time we have these:

Day's short as ever, time's long as it has been.

Day's des a arm long, you can reach clean across it.

Some odds and ends of wisdom are garnered in these:

Mistakes ain't haystacks, or dar'd be mo' fat pones dan dar's.

Burn up de ax-helve dat can't hold up de blade.

Let de flat iron rust dat puts cat faces on de cloze.

Don't fly so high dat you light on a candle.

Trouble follers sin as sho' as fever follers a chill.

Fire don't crack a full pot.

Des hold up yo' end er de beam and de world'll roll on.

De fool'll hang a horseshoe on a dead man's do' for luck.

A fool 'n' his ways  
Like a donkey 'n' his neigs—  
Des like sense to gaze  
And graze.

Will' bird swell de woods in de midst er de gyarden.

That we grow wise with labor and sorrow  
The following sayings teach:

Troubles is val'able; every bile on yo' flesh is wo'th good five dollars to you.

Workin' in de cotton-patch ain't easy.  
Dry bread a'tn' greasy!  
Others treat of the better part of content:  
De laziest man can make de biggest firp.  
A po' ride is better'n a proud walk.  
A banker sweet 'taters is roast and fire and cloze—us set all day and food 'em, and don't need to go outdo's.

Fifty year work won't put as much gol' in yo' pocket as de moon'll put in one-half hour of a summer night!

Tarryin' ain't carryin', and it's heap easier work—des let rabbit stop long 'nough in de run to lick his hind foot and de dogs can't catch him dat trip.

## MOONSTRUCK?

(An Evening Reverie)

Three English cats and a small French chat,  
And the white moon-silver sailing,  
A small French chat and three English cats,  
Out there by the garden railing.

Were it three French chats and an English cat,  
And the white moon silver sailing,  
And not three English cats and a small French chat.

Over there by the garden railing,

Would it seem quite a different scene to me,  
With the white moon silver sailing?  
No, I fancy it's much the same I should see  
Over there by the garden railing.  
(He goes to bed.)  
—H. Macintosh.