

crested moon. This slit was held apart by main force, whilst the mother passed the naked infant through nine times. The slit was then bound up. If it closed perfectly the child would become healthy.

It was our good fortune to see this charm worked with even a more elaborate ritual—a ritual eminently suggestive. We were staying at a farm house in the wilds of Dartmoor. One evening the farmer told us that the “ashen-charm” was to be worked next morning on a neighbor’s child. Before sunrise we were up and away across the moor, knee-deep in heather, to a distant valley, slumberous beneath the shadow of a mighty tor. A clear brooklet, with music of its own, sang over ochreous pebbles, or stayed its waters in many a silent moss-edged pool to play dalliance with the luxuriance of ferns. Beside the brook a level sward reached to a little spinney. On arriving we found we were not the first. Beside the brook stood seven lads, each with a ram’s horn in his hand. Within the spinney a young ash tree had been chosen; two stalwart yeomen had taken the limbs, where they bifurcated, and had rent the trunk in twain. Facing the East, and opposite the cleft, an unmarried woman stood, and facing her on the other side of the tree, was another unwedded woman. Round the tree seven little heaps of the last year’s leaves had been piled, and by each heap was an attendant virgin. The longdrawn shadow of the hill lay over all: at the first glint of sunlight falling over the mighty tor upon the waters of the brook, the seven lads filled their horns with water, and advanced into the spinney; the virgins lit their heap of leaves; and the mother handed her unclad babe to the eastward maiden at the tree. She passed it through the cleft to her companion, who, taking it, handed it round the tree, from right to left, to her *vis-à-vis*. This was done seven times. The lads then poured the water from their horns upon

the ashes of the leaves, and made a paste of them. With a little of this the baby’s brow and eyes and mouth were anointed, and it was then taken home. The remainder of the paste was smeared upon the cleft trunk, which was then bound together with leathern thongs. If the tree recovered from this treatment the child would become hale and hearty.

It is almost impossible to trace the origin of these charms. Some are so ridiculous as to make one despair entirely of finding even a glint of reason for them; in others, such as the last, we can trace faint vestiges of the old sun and fire worship. Each superstition has been varied from generation to generation—receiving here an accretion and there another; and, handed down by word of mouth, has necessarily undergone perpetual variation as memory failed, or imagination enlarged.

Absurd as these charms seem to us now, there was a time, and that not very long ago, when they received as much credence as we give now-a-day to the most approved medical treatment. Nay, even yet, some of them are implicitly believed in. Over and over again we have been assured by the “Antients” of the hamlet, that they had practised the charm, whatever it might be, and it had rarely failed. What explanation is one to find? Did imagination have in olden days more potent influence upon disease than now? That would hardly apply to children of tender years, unless the imagination acted vicariously through their parents or friends. Or were the old-time folk more easily deluded? But could they be deluded on so vital a question as recovery from disease and accident? The whole matter is of absorbing interest, but our space is run out and, as we have before stated, our intention is not to discuss the origin or reasonableness of such superstitions.

J. R. POCKLINGTON.

BOSTON WIT-HYDROPHOBIC.—The Talk of the Day. Mrs. A.—“I hear that the Montmackingtons are going to spend the winter in Paris.” Mrs. B.—“Indeed? You surprise me! When were they bitten?”

STREET NUISANCES.—Dogs, and bipeds who “smoke” on the sidewalks.

ADVANTAGES OF MATRIMONY.—According to M. Lagneau, a well-known statistician, after 22 years of age married men live longer than bachelors. Among every 1,000 bachelors there are 38 criminals, among married men 18 per 1,000.