

POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS

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POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS

CHAPTER I

“WHAT A STRANGE THING IS MAN”

THAT great scientist, Charles Darwin, used to tell a story against himself. He was arguing with a friend upon that most difficult question: Reason against Instinct. He maintained that Reason should always be able to control Instinct.

They were in the London Zoological Gardens at the time, so Darwin went to the Serpent House and pressed his face against the glass partition that shuts off the poisonous snakes. One of the snakes objected to this apparent intrusion and struck sharply, with outstretched tongue, at Darwin's cheek. In spite of himself the scientist jerked his head back, out of a danger that he knew did not exist. He turned at once to his friend and admitted frankly that his earlier arguments were wrong—that Instinct was more powerful than Reason.

It is exactly the same with Popular Superstitions—they form out mental instincts, and for tens of thousands of years, they have swayed our Reason. The great war has somewhat coarsened us and made us less sensitive to danger, but until a few years ago, not one person in fifty would have passed under a ladder. Reason was powerless—Superstition or Instinct warned them that it was unlucky, and that was enough.

If we look back a few centuries, we find that summary Justice was originally content with a handy tree for the purpose of removing a malefactor—as in the case of many recent American lynchings. But trees are not found in the streets of a town, so our resourceful ancestors used a ladder. This could be erected against any convenient wall, and in any street—the rope was slung over one of the rungs; the offender “removed,” and all trace of the summary administration of Justice was easily cleared away.

As in the case of lynchings, many an innocent man was hanged before trial, and any attempt made by a passing stranger to go under the ladder was resented as an attempt at rescue. All law-abiding citizens made it a rule to keep well away from a ladder when propped against a wall.

There can never be any progress, mental or physical, that is not based upon the experience of those who have gone before. Just as a child is always asking “why,” so primitive man endeavoured to find out the meaning of all the many wonders around him. When he could not explain, he satisfied himself and his children by inventing a “fairy tale,” and it is these primitive attempts at education that form the Popular Superstitions of the ages, many of which are very vigorous to-day.

Without any question, the most powerful impulse in the world—apart from the questions of the preservation of one's own life and the propagation of the species—is the universal dread of serpents and snakes. Most of these are quite harmless—yet all are feared.

Is there in the whole world a more wonderful sight—for those of us who understand—than a young kitten, about as big as your doubled fist, with arched back and raised tail in imitation of the dreaded serpent, while “hissing” at a big dog, twelve or twenty times as big as that helpless little baby, whose very life depends upon the dog's superstitious dread of a serpent.

Yes, Doggie's Reason tells him that it is only a harmless kitten, a mere mouthful, but—well, it might be a serpent, you see, so Doggie decides that discretion is the better part of valour.

In just the same way, we all know that there can be no harm in passing under a ladder—still, you never know! So most of us choose the gutter and go happily on our way.

It may be interesting at this point to explain that the word Superstition comes from the Latin—Super, above; Stare, to stand. Those who escaped in the old hand-to-hand battles were called “superstites”—that is, they were “standing above” the slain. It is therefore a very appropriate word for those primitive beliefs that still stand in the great battle that is being waged by Reason.

It is a curious fact that most of the widespread Superstitions of to-day have changed their character—they have survived because they have had new ideas grafted upon them. They remind us of the old farmer who wore “the same pair of boots” for twenty years—there had been new soles, new heels, new uppers, new laces, or course, but they were still the same pair of boots.

Probably the most universal of all Superstitions is that concerning the Horseshoe, in spite of the fact that the metal shoe is comparatively modern. Yet the original belief goes back for millions of years and is based upon the most primitive of all religious beliefs, the veneration of the natural generative principle.

The earliest mysteries that confronted Humanity were birth and death, light and darkness—of these, birth and darkness were by far the strangest. When a person died, he was no further use to the community, and although Humanity wondered, it was seldom afraid of death. The natural relaxation of the muscles causes a peaceful expression upon the face of the Dead, and though mankind did not understand what had happened, they could see for themselves that all was well.

But in the case of Birth, it was vastly different! Here was a problem that must be studied, for they could see the babe grow into the child, the youth or the girl, the man or the woman—the fathers and mothers of further babies, in an endless circle. When gold was first worked, the simple endless band of soft metal seems to have been used universally as the marriage emblem, for the custom is of vast antiquity, and is also practically world-wide.

Yet it is a curious fact that, even to-day, it is still a superstition, for the ring is not an essential part of the legal ceremony, and it is only from custom that the bride wears the ring at all—she need not do it, but very few brides would dare to go against such a universal custom!

Although based upon a very primitive superstition, the wedding ring, the simple circlet of Eternal life, is one of the most beautiful customs of our day.

After all, practically every civil and religious ceremonial is based upon some old superstition. Take for instance the veneration shown to the bones of Saints—this custom is based upon a very primitive blunder. When early man discovered that the bones did not disappear, he came to the not unnatural conclusion that the Self, or Soul, what we should call the Ego to-day, resided in the bones after death.

It has been said that Man’s curiosity is in excess of his capacity, and that can hardly be contradicted. Not only do we still hold bones to be sacred, but we dread the breaking of a mirror. The original mirror of primitive woman was the local stream, wherein she could see her own moving reflection. The great Scientists of those days could only explain this wonder by assuming that some portion of the Ego was transferred to the water. Consequently an enemy—or a jealous rival—would throw in a stone, in order to break or disturb the image and thus cause harm to befall the original of the reflection.

It is not by any means five hundred years ago since this self-same idea was carried out by the

necromancers of the day, who made wax images of the person to be injured, and then stuck knives or pins into the anatomy, expecting in this way to damage the health of the original.

So when we crack or break a mirror, we instinctly dread the ensuing misfortune, because some primitive, and almost certainly naked, woman believed that the reflection in the water was really her soul.

In later centuries, Crystal divining was developed, and this was added to the prevailing superstition—it was asserted by the Seers that the breaking of the glass meant that your Fate was so awesome that the gods dare not let you see it, and so broke the surface of the glass. This is an interesting case of a superstition surviving, because of its adoption by a somewhat similar belief—like the old farmer's wonderful boots.

Apart from the wondrous mystery of Birth, the next strangest impulse of primitive man must have been his dread of the dark. Animals appear to accept light and darkness as natural phenomena, and show their disturbance only when they come at some unusual time, such as an eclipse. But with the development of reason, Man began to wonder why it should turn dark at night. Many were the extraordinary explanations given—including huge dragons that swallowed the sun every evening.

But the dominant factor was always the dread or fear of the darkness, which in those days meant un-ending terrors for helpless Man. Living on the edge of the dense forests, or in caves stolen from some absent beast, the darkness of the night must indeed have been a ghastly time of nightmare! It is well known that a large proportion of young children show this same instinctive dread of the dark, and cannot sleep unless there is a faint light in the room.

In most cases this disappears—or is forgotten—before the child reaches its teens, but cases are known where it has persisted for life! It is no use arguing that there is no more danger to-day at night than in the day-time—the old dread is there!

A very similar example of a persistent primitive terror is the dread of lightning, which is really very prevalent among adults. It dates from the very early days before Mankind had taken to the caves, as a first rude homes. Yet it is undoubtedly a ghastly horror to those unfortunates who inherit the old dread—the extreme terror being due entirely to Man's lack of knowledge as to the cause, for what could not be explained was invariably dreaded by primitive humans. It is an interesting fact that there is a widespread belief that no one is ever hurt by lightning when asleep!

This simply means that such people do not know at the moment that the storm is raging—hence they feel no dread! A similar belief, not so widespread and obviously not quite so primitive, is the idea that lightning will not strike a house when a fire is burning on the hearth. I knew a delightful old lady of seventy who invariably lighted a fire—day or night, summer or winter—when a thunder storm started. By the hearth she would sit in simple faith! Dear old soul, who could blame her or wish to disillusion her!

Naturally there are many superstitions associated with birth and death, which will be dealt with in a separate chapter. But beyond this ghastly dread of the dark, we find hardly any superstitions—there are a few things that are unlucky if done after dark, but these seem to be based entirely upon physical mishaps. Thus it is unlucky to take eggs into or out of the house after dark! In the days of unlighted streets (and rooms) and of rough uneven paths, it must have been very unlucky to carry eggs after dark!

There are, however, many superstitions connected with stumbling, but these belong to a very different class. They are, in fact, medical in their origin.

Now it is obvious that primitive man had no real power of medical diagnosis—there were only three conditions known: You were well, you were ill, or you were dead! Stumbling was no looked upon as a sign of ill-health, which it really is; yet it is obvious that if a primitive hunter was suffering from “liver” or “tummy-ache,” and happened to stumble at a critical moment, the chances were that he would not return to the bosom of his family. Like the well-known “young lady from Riga,” he would probably finish the journey inside a tiger.

It is interesting to note that stumbling upstairs is generally considered fortunate, though some people do not actually make this difference. Here again it is clear that stumbling down would almost certainly mean into danger, whereas stumbling up might lead to safety.

Probably, however, it is a survival of the old law of reversal, which persists to-day in the recognised interpretation of dreams. Primitive Man early learnt to think in couples—man or woman, child or adult, day or night, alive or dead. We find this law in many superstitions, and it seems likely that the good fortune associated with stumbling upwards is merely because it is not stumbling downwards.

As already stated, there was no medical knowledge in those days. If someone was smart enough to discover that a certain plant eased fever, that some leaves were useful in preventing blood poisoning in a wound, that a special herb had tonic properties—well, they kept their knowledge to themselves because it meant an easy life. In just the same way to-day, the vendors of patent medicines do not give away their secrets, but content themselves, as did the Witchdoctors of old, with assuring us that if we suffer from pain anywhere, then theirs is the drug that can heal us.

Now dreams are probably not a normal condition of the brain; they worry us in sleep, when Reason is for a time resting. It is not believed that wild animals dream. We shall probably be safe in assuming that Primitive Man did not often dream, but that when he did, it was a case of nightmare—something supremely horrible.

Now if you were a primitive vendor of patent medicines, you would naturally be chosen by your neighbours when they wanted an interpretation of their latest nightmare. It would not pay you to frighten customers away, and as you really knew nothing whatever about the subject, it was quite easy to make use of the well-known law of reversal. So Man and Woman was assured that all dreams must be interpreted contrariwise, and so it remains to-day, although our dreams have become merely glorious adventures and are no longer nightmares.

In connection with this matter, it might be as well to point out that the ill-luck associated with a falling picture is usually assumed to correspond with the broken mirror—some physical ill to the person whose portrait thus falls. I am, however, of opinion that there is another origin for this widespread superstition—I believe it is associated with the supporting nail, but I will touch upon this in the next chapter, where nails must be considered in connection with Horseshoes.

Before leaving these semi-medical superstitions, I must mention the tingling of ear or cheek. Obviously there must be a physical reason for this—certainly it is not a daily occurrence, but most of us have felt it in some form many times a year. As a rule, the burning or tingling is in the ear, not the cheek, and is almost always on one side only,

It is usually asserted that at such times someone is thinking about you—which may or may not be true, of course. If the right ear tingles, then the thoughts are kindly, if the left, then it is something unpleasant—another case of the law of reversal.

It is usually held that the Right is lucky, the Left unlucky, and in the same way, the course of the sun

was considered fortunate. All strict Mohammedans pass dishes according to the way of the sun, i.e., from East to West. If passed otherwise—by strangers— they politely refuse to partake of that dish. Similarly it is a firm superstition that you should stir food in the same way, if it is to prove beneficial.

Incidentally I might mention the Irish belief that if you stir with a fork, you will stir up sorrow! No doubt this suggests improperly stirred or prepared food, and consequently a careless wife in addition to an attack of indigestion.

Another example of the law of reversal is seen in the dropping of a knife or a fork— this signifies the arrival of a stranger. Now off hand one would be inclined to associate the knife with a man and the fork with a woman, but the superstition reverses this.

Apart from the questions of birth and death, light and darkness, Man's next earliest questionings would be about the Moon—not the Sun ! For the Sun we have always with us, although it may mysteriously disappear for a few hours every day. Still man sleeps; so why should not the Sun !

But with the Moon, it was different—fear, deadly fear crept in as Man watched the growth and subsequent disappearance of the Moon. Obviously the Moon was alive!

After all, how could it be otherwise with such primitive folk? They could watch the gradual growth of their babies up to full maturity—but there it ended. Now the moon not only grew up with startling rapidity, but he—or she—could “ungrow” again and become young once more. Here indeed was the elixir of life.

But the fables that became associated with the Moon, because of its power of growth, were more of the nature of fairy tales than of superstitions. We have endless legends in every language in the world, but hardly any superstitions. True, it is unlucky to see the new moon first from inside, but this primitive belief almost amounts to homesickness—the craving of the early caveman in his risky shelter, for the greater safety of the open space, which he dare not face at dark of night.

Many of us to-day, in the midst of our busy cities, still feel this almost irresistible craving for the open space. We never clothe it with words ; it is a naked unashamed craving for Nature.

Beyond this craving, the only superstitions connected with the Moon concern her rapid and ever-repeated period of growth. Primitive man held strongly to the belief that any important enterprise should be started with the New Moon in order to ensure success. Journeys were arranged for these fortunate dates, and—very many centuries later—when calendars were first used, they were always eagerly consulted for that most fortunate of all months of the year—the blessed month that contained two New Moons !

The next stage in Man's progress along the Ages would be the struggle against cold, due to tribal wanderings as the numbers increased. There are not many superstitions connected with nakedness, however, though there are plenty of them concerning dress, which will be dealt with in a later chapter, for the sake of clearness and conciseness.

But in connection with nakedness, there is a very curious and interesting survival, limited to certain isolated districts in its original form. In Russia, much of the country's prosperity depended upon its grain crop, and when the fields were parched and needed rain, the peasants would harness a nude woman to a plough, which must be driven by two maidens (unmarried women), similarly attired. But after the harnessing, nobody must watch the operations, or no 'luck would follow.

This at once recalls the Lady Godiva story, where the woman's return to nature is supposed to bring

good fortune. This craving for a return to nature is shown in many ways ; for instance it is a wide-spread belief that good health follows a return in late life to the district where one was born. This of course is only the skin-clothed Caveman's craving for a return to the simple life of the Open- hence the naked woman harnessed to the plough, which no doubt, nude woman and all, formed the earliest method of farming.

I shall deal later with Nursery Rhymes and Fairy Tales, but it is important to point out that many Fairy Tales relate to the giving up of a beautiful unclothed woman, generally the Princess, to a dragon. In some cases, she forms a meal for the monster, but as a rule she is only his victim, and after a series of adventures, she is restored to her adoring parents.

All this is typical of what must have been the dream-matter of the Cave period—the woman merely returns to the conditions of life from which the tribe had recently emerged, and typifies the unclothed human's struggle against the monsters of the period, and the successful adoption of happier surroundings. Many fairy tales indicate these early struggles in some form or other. The elder brothers struggle aimlessly, and it is left to the third son to reach safety, after the family has been almost wiped out of existence. The Princess he marries represents the easier life that now stretches before the tribe.

In Servia they have another custom of a somewhat similar character, but not quite so primitive in form. The Plough is omitted and a touch of artistic delicacy is introduced—the primitive caveman is disappearing! Here a naked girl is covered with leaves and flowers by her companions of the village. Then she dances through the district and over the fields—in this way, she is supposed to ensure a good crop!

Here we see the origin of our May Queen festivities, where the chosen girl is still decked with flowers by her envious companions. But to-day it is only a pretty childish custom, and few, if any, May Queens realise that they are supposed to be responsible for the season's rainfall, and thereby the prosperity and happiness of the district.

It is worth noting that almost every woman indulges in some new finery at about this period—but not as a rule for the sake of producing the rain needed by the crops!

There is, however, a widespread superstition that it is very lucky to see a naked person bathing—of course this must be an accident; luck never works by pre-arrangement, or the Serpentine would be full all day long with luck-bringers.

While touching upon bathing, I might mention that it is considered unlucky to bathe the feet first. This is explained by the fact that the feet are below the head and therefore inferior; but as a matter of fact, the superstition is medically sound—the head should always be moistened first or there is a grave risk of headache, due to blood-pressure. Cramp at sea is often caused in this way, though strictly speaking it is not cramp at all.

It will be seen that Fear is at the back of most superstitions, and it is obvious that it must have been one of the earliest of all instincts. When combined with ignorance, its power was limitless; to-day some of this ignorance is passing away and with it go many of the old superstitions. Yet its power is still immense, though we no longer believe in Black Magic and White Magic—Black, of course, was the kind that was intended to harm someone, whereas White was beneficial, though still, more or less, of the devil.

But the whole power of these mediaeval charms and sorceries lay in the wish—it was a species of subconscious hypnotism. A woman carried a love charm and believed herself irresistible to the man

she fancied—it often succeeded, simply because the damsel made herself specially fascinating! It is a strong belief in our own powers that makes us really strong.

No doubt the worthy sorcerers of old knew this quite well; at any rate it was always clearly understood that a charm would only be effective for the one person, and could not be passed on. This, of course, was good business in itself, for it meant a second fee; but the curious fact remains that it is still universally believed that it is unlucky to part with a gift.

Not only so, but it is obviously very unlucky to make a gift of anything that can harm—here we have Black Magic at work instead of White. If Jones wants to get rid of Smith, he goes to a Sorcerer—or he did so in the good old days—and procures something to do the trick without bringing disaster upon himself. Obviously one way of doing this was by making a gift of some dangerous article, not properly understood by the luckless Smith. The gift itself formed a useful alibi and removed all suspicion from the donor, while there was every likelihood that Smith would soon be removed elsewhere—where did not matter.

To-day Black Magic survives in the superstition that it is unlucky to give anyone a knife, a pin, a needle, or anything that could cause harm. But fortunately our mentality is very elastic. The man who would never, under any circumstances, give his chum a penknife, willingly accepts a penny in exchange! It is no longer a gift!

Following up the gradual development of Mankind, after crude skins for clothes—or about the same time—would come the discovery of Fire, that wonderful element about which we know nothing to-day beyond its existence and its power. After all, what is Fire, and why should friction produce flame?

No doubt, the harnessing of Fire as a slave of Man would be due to some disastrous mishap, such as a forest fire. The survivors of the tribe would come back in keen distress, and would find the welcome—but feared—embers in many isolated spots. It seems certain that tribal fires were kept perpetually alight in the early days, and that it was long after before Man discovered how to produce heat and fire by means of friction.

There are no real superstitions concerning fire, probably because it was far too dangerous, and the ordinary brainless man or woman of the tribe was kept carefully away from it. For this purpose it was made sacred.

Of course we all know the trick of looking for “faces in the fire.” This is not due to imagination, but to the curious shading off of the flame, which renders delicate modelling quite possible. But the domestic fire on the hearth is far too modern to carry any special superstitions, though it is generally considered unlucky to rake out all the fire overnight. This idea evidently came from very primitive days, thousands of years before there was a hearth, and when fires were merely open heaps.

But although there is this curious lack of superstition connected with fire itself, it is quite certain that it forms one of the powerful factors of the Horseshoe cult, through the intimate connection of the shaped metal with the sacred fires of the gods. But of that I shall speak later.

Although the hearth, as such, has no special superstitions, there are a few connected with the door of a house—which, of course, would be in existence, in some rude form or other, thousands of years before the hearth was a possibility.

For instance, it is generally considered unlucky if the front door does not face the street! I have not been able to trace this superstition back to any probable origin, and can only suggest that it may

have arisen from a supposed lack of candour and honesty on the part of the man who thus attempted to cloak his goings-in and comings-out in secrecy.

This is quite possible, as many superstitions are based upon simple philosophy of that sort. For instance you should always close a door with your face to it—clearly this is intended to avoid a “good-bye” stab in the back!

Of the same character is the sensible remark that “One who cannot swallow a pill easily may be sure of a long life.” This of course refers to many “pills” besides medical ones.

Another of this kind is the universal superstition that “Ill-luck always follows ill-mirth.”

CHAPTER II THE CULT OF THE HORSESHOE

THERE is no superstition so popular and so broadcast to-day as the luck of the Horseshoe. This is not due to any special feature, but is the accidental result of many small circumstances; for the Shoe owes its great and undoubted fascination to its association with Fire, with Iron, with Horses—to a slight extent with the number Seven. It is connected with the most primitive of all religions, the worship of the Sex organs, and with Christianity.

It is the number of associations that cling to the Shoe that give it such a firm hold on our imaginations; if one link were swept away, the Cult could not perish, but would still cling to us and to our lives with a most tenacious grip.

We must go back a long way if we wish to trace this superstition through the ages. It is uncertain when Man first learnt how to utilise fire, but as soon as he could do so, he added it to his religion, which up to then had been Phallicism—or Phallism as it is sometimes called for simplicity.

There was nothing wrong in this veneration of birth and its mysteries; indeed we moderns might be all the better if we gave more thought to this wonder of wonders. Fox-hunting, and shooting have their uses, undoubtedly; still there is no getting away from the fact that although Man has learnt how to destroy life prematurely, he has not the faintest idea how to create it.

It is the wonder of wonders of the universe, yet it is such an everyday incident that no one stops to think about it at all.

It is one of the admitted peculiarities of all forms of worship, even the Christian religion, that they have invariably made use of much that they found ready to their hands; merely altering it slightly to fit their own purposes. This is due to the fact that Converts are more easily made and retained if you do not ruthlessly destroy their original beliefs, but bend them in a better direction.

Now in Phallism, a certain amount of darkness was necessary in their temples, or places of worship, which were supposed to represent the womb—we keep this element of semi-darkness in our modern churches. It is this sacredness of the womb that can be traced in the throwing of the slipper after the departing Bride, as an indication of her new importance to the community. There are several other superstitions or customs connected with the shoe, but these will be dealt with when I treat of marriage superstitions—which are many.

But this association with marriage of the woman's shoe—for it is never a man's shoe that is thrown!—is clearly seen in the nursery rhyme of the "Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe." It is, of course, highly probable that women wore some protection for their feet long before man; though it is generally admitted that she remained naked for many generations after Man, the Hunter, donned the skins of fallen beasts, as a protection for his heart and lungs in the chase or in war. His hands and feet were not protected till long after this.

So on to the primitive worship of Sex was added the element of Fire, and soon after this came the age of metals, which naturally were always closely associated with the sacred Fires, by which they were worked.

The discovery of metals must have made a staggering change in the life and habits of Mankind! Humanity has never been supreme from a physical point of view, and is subject to more diseases and illnesses than any of the lower animals.

When his very existence depended upon a few roughly chipped stones, which he used for hunting his food, making his clothes, killing his enemies, and of course for defending his home, he must have lived in a state of momentary peril and uncertainty.

Any tribe armed with weapons made of metal must have appeared as demi-gods to their bewildered neighbours. Raids would be easy—desirable women could be carried off, slaves would be plentiful. Naturally any metal-armed tribe would keep the secret to themselves ; but every now and again a slave would escape and make his way back to his own people, or some bold stone-savage would take his courage in his hands and run off with a maiden from the rival tribe.

In this way the secret would gradually spread, until at last the use of metal became general.

In the meantime, dogs and horses were domesticated and the cultivation of the land became a recognised industry. It is impossible to say whether dogs or horses were acquired first, as, naturally, there are no records. But it does not seem at all probable that Primitive Man would tackle such a revolutionary affair as the domestication of wild animals of his own initiative. For Man was a coward, first and last.

Now the dog is a nomad like Man himself, and it seems to me quite likely that this animal attached himself to Man in order to pick up what he could get. Man realised his possibilities as a hunting companion, as the dog was swift, yet not really dangerous. So Man, ever a Socialist at heart, would allow the dog to assist at the hunting, and then carefully take possession of the titbits.

Assuming such a course of events, the capture and use of horses would naturally follow —and with the horse, cultivation would become more general than when women drew the plough, rain or no rain! With the advent of Iron, ploughs would be shod and “farming” would be an accomplished fact.

It is believed that Iron came from India some four thousand years before Christ. But in all probability it was not the first metal in use, though scientists have used its name for the great age of metals. Bronze and Copper are mentioned in the Books of Moses quite frequently, but there are only a few isolated references to Iron, which must, therefore, have been more scarce, or at any rate less regularly used. Bronze of course is a mixture of Copper and Tin, both easily worked.

But because of its wonderful powers, Iron was worshipped and considered one of the gifts of the gods. Some people say that Fire and Salt were the greatest gifts to Man—I doubt it, and should substitute Fire and Iron. It was only as part of his food that salt was really valuable to Man, and it is really wonderful how easily the human system adapts itself to a new food or a change of diet.

It might have been unpleasant at first, but certainly not vital, if Man had been obliged to do without salt—but the advent of Fire and then Iron changed the primitive savage into a civilised being. It was only when metal made cultivation simple that Humanity settled down for good—or evil—and finally abandoned its former roaming life.

Incidentally, while speaking of metal, it is worth noting that old boundary posts used to be made of iron, and these were touched, as a sign of truth, just as the modern boy will “touch wood”—the change from iron following the crucifixion, in recognition of the Cross of wood.

But we have not yet reached our lucky Horseshoes!

With the domestication of horses, it was soon discovered that their hooves gave way under the added strain of the change to hard ground after springy turf. The first effort to avoid this deadly wear

and tear took the shape of clumsy boots—much like Man's own—which were roughly fastened by means of sinews taken from dead animals.

No superstitions apply to these "boots," no doubt because they were not worn regularly, being far too clumsy—they were only intended for use during working hours. We still see the same old boots in use for horse-drawn lawn-mowers, for cricket grounds and tennis courts ; but the all-conquering motor is gradually driving them into the limbo of the past. They are, however, still in use in Kew Gardens.

Following this clumsy makeshift, a flat leather pad was used, and was fastened to the hoof, but not upon it, as is the case with the metal shoe. It may be wise to explain here that the hoof is not the foot of the horse. It is the isolated middle toe of its foot, bent so that the horse walks upon the surface of the nail—in other words, the hoof is really a thickened nail, which explains why nails can be driven into it, when fixing a metal shoe. This does not hurt any more than it hurts you to cut your nails ; but care must be taken to avoid the quick.

This little bit of veterinary knowledge took many years to penetrate Man's brain; but when he did at last grasp this important truth, then metal shoes were inevitable.

It is obvious, therefore, that these early shoes must have inherited an immense accumulation of sacred or lucky association.

I will mention first the association with the lucky number seven, because, frankly, I do not myself believe in it. It would be an obvious source of luck if one could accept it, but before we can do that we must assume that Man used the uneven set of Nails on purpose. This seems to me a serious difficulty, because no other superstition has ever been deliberately built up in such a way.

Man's object was to benefit his horse by fixing a more or less permanent protection on the hoof. If four nails down the side served this purpose, he would naturally finish off the job by putting four down the other side. But when ponies became more generally used, three nails each side were found sufficient for the shoe. Here then is the natural explanation of the modern Shoe, with four nails on one edge, and three on the other. Some brilliant genius—probably by a careless accident—mixed up the four-nail shoe and the three-nail size, and evolved the odd seven-nail arrangement. But eight-nail and ten-nail shoes are seen more often than the odd seven, and I once possessed a twelve-nail shoe from a magnificent cart-horse.

I will leave the "lucky seven" superstition and glance over the many other superstitions that naturally settled round this wonderful metal shoe.

In the first place, it was closely associated with the sacred metal and the sacred fire. Many were the superstitions connected with Iron! Owing to its terrible power in early warfare, when first brought into use, the warriors—in order to bolster up their own fighting reputations—spread the view that even ghosts could not face Iron. This remained a fixed belief for many centuries, and bits of iron—closely resembling nails—were driven into the walls of houses as a protection.

When similar "nails" were used for fixing the shoes on to the horses, a staggering sensation must have been caused. For generations Man had known and dreaded the pain and mutilation caused by similar bits of metal, yet so wonderful were these new Shoes that when nails were driven through them, the horses felt no discomfort at all!

If we wish to study popular Superstitions, we must do our best to realise the actual conditions of the days in which they originated. We think nothing of shoeing a horse nowadays—we do not even trou-

ble to think why the nail does no harm. But to these earlier generations, with their keen personal knowledge of the wounds caused by this sacred metal, it must indeed have been a veritable miracle that the horse was not ruined for active work.

The credit was naturally given to the luck of the Shoe. So lucky was the metal considered that, until quite recently, the extreme top of the roof in many a country house was finished off with a squared Iron railing. I remember that my father's house was so finished—the railing was quite useless, as it was inaccessible without a ladder! Yet there it was, crowning the house— as the architect forgot to put any stairs inside from the first to the second floor, one begins to wonder at that strange animal Man.

It was also a popular custom to slip a piece of iron in one of the pockets of a new suit—for luck, of course! Your clothes were supposed to wear better and for a longer period.

There was another peculiarity about Iron that must not be overlooked—when first brought into use, Man knew nothing about manufactured articles. This no doubt added to its renown.

I have already spoken about the superstitions following the fall of a picture—my own idea is that this is based on the assumption that the iron nail has ceased to be lucky, as far as that particular person is concerned.

It is claimed that iron Shoes were introduced from Greece in the fourth century; anyhow they are practically absent from ancient art, which suggests that they were not used for the horses of wealthy people, but only for agricultural animals. Yet some three centuries before Christ, Iron was known as the Devil's Bone in Egypt—naturally it would be considered very lucky to find such a valuable! We still hold this pleasant belief, though the actual value of such a find to a modern man—or woman—is less than nothing.

According to R. M. Lawrence, a Russian tradition says that man first tried to eat iron then he boiled it and roasted it. Afterwards he beat it with stones, as he would tough meat, in order to crush and soften it. In that way, the malleable nature of the metal was discovered, but some unfortunate human must have suffered horribly from indigestion.

It was a wedding custom in mediaeval France that the bridal ring should be a bent horseshoe nail.

When a modern Egyptian returns from a pilgrimage to Mecca, he fastens a branch of aloe above the entrance of his house as a proof of his religious zeal. May not the Horseshoe originally have been nailed to our doors in order to show our dear neighbours that we were wealthy enough to possess such a valuable animal as a horse? It seems to me to be just the sort of thing our ancestors would naturally have done, when inclined to "swank."

In Ireland, iron has always been held in great esteem as a luck-bringer; indeed the name itself is said to be derived from Ironland. According to an old Cornish belief, iron, when thrown overboard, enables mariners to land on a rocky coast with safety, even in a rough sea. Apparently the effect is similar to that of oil, but I fail to see how such a superstition came to be associated with this metal.

Mrs. Coutts (afterwards Duchess of St. Alban's) was a great believer in the power of the horseshoe! The steps at Holly Lodge were composed of beautiful blocks of white marble, while on the highest step were fastened two rusty and broken old horseshoes, which Mrs. Coutts and her husband had found on the road!

These pieces of rusty iron were nailed on the threshold of their lovely home in order to avert evil

from them, and also to bring them good luck, as the most fortunate and protective shoes are those that have been found by their users.

In some countries, however, it is considered that the luck lies only in the first shoe cast by any particular horse.

The case of Mrs. Coutts shows that the Shoe is supposed to possess a double power—that of averting evil and of bringing good fortune. This variance has been the cause of much argument, but the truth of the matter is obvious. The luck is not inherent in the shoe as a shoe—it is entirely owing to the curious shape, in addition to its intimate relationship with Fire, Iron and the Horse. It is, in fact, the most complicated bit of popular Superstition ever known, because so many ancient beliefs have been piled upon it.

Fire was sacred, so the Shoe became sacred; Iron was fortunate, so the Shoe also secured this. The Horse was sacred—at any rate, in most countries—so this again was added, but the real secret lies in the peculiar shape. The arch is used in all buildings, and is universally respected for its simple strength. It is the shape of the heavens and also of the rainbow, both of extreme importance in early religious beliefs. Horizon to horizon was looked upon as equivalent to eternity, but early man's notions of distance—and of arithmetic—were extremely crude.

I remember being on holiday in the Lake District one summer, and asked a cottager's little girl if it was possible to climb a certain hill. "What! Up to the sky?" she asked in awe. Well, primitive man's mind was no more developed than that, and he was always very keen on symbolism—which is exactly the same thing as the "make-believe" of modern children.

In this way the Horseshoe irresistibly reminded Man of the crescent Moon. Now it is lucky to begin any enterprise at the time of the New Moon—here again was an additional form of luck thrust on the Shoe, for it became the symbol of a perpetual lucky New Moon! Moon worship is, of course, very ancient.

Again the curious shape of the Shoe at once suggests the halo seen around the heads of Saints. More good luck! The halo itself is probably a relic of Moon worship, adopted by the early Christians just as they adopted the darkened Temples of Phallism. We must remember that a Half Moon was placed on the head of certain Egyptian deities—obviously the forerunners of the modern halo.

Apart from this appeal to Moon worshippers the Shoe must have made a powerful grip of the heart in the case of Serpent worshippers, for their symbol has always been a bent serpent. It is really most remarkable how this curious Shoe fits in with so many ancient forms of worship, for it was accepted as a symbol of the womb by the Sex worshippers.

Here we have three ancient forms of religion all able to claim the wonderful Shoe as a symbol of their worship! But in connection with Phallism, it will be essential to go into the superstition of the Evil Eye.

At the present day, this belief is very general among all classes and is spread all over the world—apart from this, it is somewhat unique among popular superstitions. Put briefly, the idea is that a perfectly innocent and inoffensive person may possess the Evil Eye; in which case, mischief will surely befall you if they happen to look at you. They may do this in a perfectly friendly manner, yet they cannot avoid harming you.

One of the Popes, venerated for his piety and his holy life, was however stated to possess this infliction. All those who came in contact with him armed themselves with charms, which they pointed at

him in order to avert the evil, while taking care that the beloved Pontiff should not see or realise what they were doing. This case is historical and shows how strong a hold this superstition has upon the popular imagination.

The charm invariably used to counter this evil has been a long pointed article, something like the first finger, held out alone in the act of blessing. On the Continent it is usual to carry a bit of pink coral, and the colour is worth noting for its strong suggestion of Phallism. But anything similar answers the purpose, and it has even been claimed that the steeples of our churches are intended as charms against the Evil Eye. Certainly they have no apparent purpose, other than adding dignity to the building.

Very few people know that Steeples were originally built by the side of the primitive places of worship, not upon the buildings themselves, as is done to-day. Here we have crude Phallism, with the Steeples as emblems of good luck and fruitfulness.

The curious character of this curse of the Evil Eye lies in the fact that it is always found connected with some good-natured and otherwise innocent person. Among all Oriental people it is held that you should never praise a baby, a horse, or anything of value, lest at the same time you should harm through the power of the Evil Eye. It has even been claimed that some men could cause pregnancy in a maiden by this means—quite unknowingly, of course.

There are many references to the Evil Eye in the Bible, in the Talmud, and in Virgil, and it was a real terror in those days. Not only did it affect children and adults, but also animals—horses were considered peculiarly sensitive to this influence. Of course there were no veterinary surgeons in those days, and Man probably failed to realise that animals were subject to illnesses, just as he was himself. So every time a horse was out of sorts, it was put down to the Evil Eye!

Among the Arabs, it was the Camels that suffered in this way, as was only natural, and in all Eastern countries Red ribbon was considered a charm and a safeguard—but, of course, Red as a colour is very becoming to the women in the East, though it may not be kind to suggest that vanity had anything to do with the matter.

But the real charm has always been the pointed finger or stick, the branch of pink coral, and similar articles. This dates back to the first dawn of human intelligence, and is associated with Phallism or Sex worship.

“We can understand how Early Man stood in awe of the mysteries of Nature, speculating in his crude fashion as to the source of life. The generative organs were the obvious physical basis of procreation, therefore they were venerated.” (“Customs of Mankind.”)

This pointed amulet or charm had a religious origin, and it seems to me probable that this superstition of the Evil Eye has changed its nature in the course of the ages. This would explain its curious association with people of good intentions, whereas the vast bulk of such superstitions are obviously connected with evil. That evil should result from good is difficult to explain—still more so when the charm used is the Phallus, the age-old symbol of Sex worship.

My idea is that the original possessors of the Evil Eye would be described to-day as “in the blues,” or “down in the dumps,” or even “fed up with it”—that the evil was wrought upon their own persons and not upon others, except indirectly. Then the priest would produce the Phallus and point it at the person, thus suggesting that he or she should live a normal healthy life and beget children, as Nature had intended.

I see no other possible explanation for the peculiar and indeed contradictory nature of this superstition and the marked character and shape of the charm used. The Old Testament, and the Bible generally, is full of exhortations to the people to beget children, as of course it should be, as that is the highest and most unselfish impulse in all Nature. I take it, therefore, that the cult of the Evil Eye, in its modern changed form, is merely a continuance of Phallism.

The curious shape of the Horseshoe caused it to be seized upon as a charm against the Evil Eye—it had two pointed ends instead of the usual one of the pink coral charm, but it was principally, if not entirely, as a symbol of the womb that it secured such world-wide popularity.

It is worth noting that the outstretched finger, one of the earliest charms against the Evil Eye, is now often doubled, in imitation of the Horseshoe. Point out the first and fourth fingers, while bending the thumb and the other two fingers under the palm, and you at once have a serviceable, though rough imitation of the Shoe. This sign is freely used to-day.

There is one other source from which the Shoe gained much renown, though only for a short time. It was fixed sideways to the door by many of the early Christians, as a sign to the initiated. In that position, the Shoe represents a crude capital C, the initial of the adored Christ. Casual passers-by merely took it for the oft-seen Shoe and were content to leave it at that!

It will easily be seen that the curious shape of the Horseshoe enabled it to be used for many purposes, and this piling up of honours led to some contradictions, as was only natural.

Some people claimed that the Shoe should be nailed to the door points upward ; others believed that the points should be down as a symbol of the horizon, the great Eternal. The first school maintained that if you used the Shoe with the open end downward, your luck would run out. The second school retorted that any one looking up at the Shoe from below—as they would in normal circumstances—would see the two points, potent charms against the Evil Eye.

There is another school of opinion which claims that the Shoe should be affixed flat—probably on the step or on the threshold, as in the case of Mrs. Coutts. There was indeed a prevalent ancient Saxon belief that witches and devils must come inside your house before they could harm you, and that the Shoe on the door prevented this, as they dare not pass that holy sign. In fact, no evil spirit dare face Iron in any form—in Russia, oaths were taken on the anvil in preference to the Bible. Highlanders take oath on dirk or sword, as the most binding oath known. Probably this accounts for the popularity of the Smithy in Gretna Green elopements! The young lady was taking a risk, but was wise enough to take care to tie her lover up by an oath on Iron—on the anvil.

In addition to the bit of coral, the pointed finger, and the horseshoe, it was usual to keep horns and antlers as a charm against the Evil Eye. Even the skulls of oxen and other horned animals were fixed on sticks and placed in the fields to protect the crops against the Evil Eye. To-day we use the well-known Scarecrow, but “he”—why is it always a male?—is merely a caricature of the real thing.

The Horseshoe is still the conventional emblem on Hindu Temples, as the symbol of the womb, and a similar design, obviously a relic of Sex worship, guards the entrances of ancient temples in Mexico and Peru. It is also found on Phoenician tombs, and on houses in ancient Babylonia. These devices have been called Horseshoes by some writers, but obviously they date back long before such Shoes were known! They are in fact representations of the womb, and it is from them that the Shoe has secured so much reflected glory and reverence.

In Mexico have been found stones of a similar shape, relics of ancient tribes, long extinct—these were probably natural stones, selected as sacred because of their shape.

We have not yet done with the “luck” of the lucky Horseshoe, for it also gains much renown by its close and intimate connection with the Horse itself, and it should be noted that a donkey’s shoe carries no such luck.

But the horse was a sacred animal in early days, though it quickly degenerated and became the outward and visible sign of social position. If you possessed a horse, you were a sort of primitive millionaire, a pre-historic Rothschild! Even five-and-twenty years ago, the possession of a carriage and pair stamped you at once as Somebody—middle-class folk never ventured beyond the comfortable one-horse brougham.

The tail of the Horse was always a sign of exalted position, and is seen on the headdress of some of our regiments to-day.

Without doubt, the legend of Christ’s birth in a stable stimulated popular superstition, but it was well established many centuries earlier.

White horses were used for religious purposes, no doubt because of their scarcity. Modern breeding has altered all that, though we still have a rare cream used by our King. But in prehistoric days a white horse must have been an extreme rarity. In the first place, Nature does not often turn out freaks of any sort, and when they do occur, they are far too conspicuous to live for long in the struggle of the Wild! Last spring I had a white sparrow in my garden—it was a glorious little thing, but what chance had it of life? Within a week, I gathered its feathers from the turf; such glorious opalescent feathers they were.

But like my poor sparrow, white horses also suffered for their colour—they were used for religious sacrifices among the Teutons, Tartars, in Persia, Russia, Scandinavia, and elsewhere. The sacrifice was a curious spectacle—the unfortunate animal was thrown on its back by means of ropes tied to its legs; it was held in that position while its heart was torn out! Poor Beastie!

There are representations of White Horses, done in chalk, on the hill-sides of South-West England—at Wantage for instance. No doubt these were connected with religious sacrifices in early days.

Tacitus tells us that White Horses were used for Divination by the early Teutonic races, but unfortunately he gives no particulars as to the method employed.

Horses are very sensitive to change of temperature and are highly nervous; they sweat easily. Hence the old superstition that the Pixie took them out at night through the keyhole—and galloped them madly until dawn! This sweating is not necessarily a sign of physical tiredness, but is largely nervous, just as Man himself breaks into a sweat on hearing any tragic news.

A horse’s harness is still decorated with brass designs, originally intended to ward off the Evil Eye! It is, however, considered unlucky to remove the shoes from a dead horse, though the hooves are often used for drinking cups or for ink-wells.

I may perhaps explain that bad dreams are known as Nightmare through symbolism—the Night Mare was a fabulous animal in the form of a female monster, that roved about at night.

It was an old superstition that you should wish when you saw a white horse—in olden days this was equivalent to saying that you might never see one again!

The great Nelson had a Horseshoe nailed to the mast of the “Victory!”

CHAPTER III NUMBERS AND DATES

THERE is Sex in Numbers—they are male or female!

According to all ancient lore, the odd numbers are masculine, the even are feminine; in addition, the male numbers were almost invariably fortunate ones, while the female were more or less neutral. A notable exception is number Thirteen, but that is a fascinating study in itself, and is certainly not the fault of the much abused number.

If we could rely upon the early sorcerers, all kinds of medicines should be taken an odd number of times, and one must not forget that even to-day most doctors prescribe a dose three times a day, after meals, although most of us take four or even five meals a day. Still there it is—three times a day, after four or five meals.

A curious custom in Cornwall for curing whooping cough was to pass the child nine times under and over a three year old donkey. This was infallible—but when it failed, the blame was laid upon the age of the donkey! In the East, when bitten by a scorpion, the old remedy was to walk nine times round the walls of your native town. The virtue of this cure, without any question, lay in the stimulating exercise.

Another early mathematical cure was to poke a sty on the eyelid with nine grains of barley—once with each grain. Then repeat the process with seven, five, three and one—when the sty will disappear! Or at any rate it ought to do so.

This belief in the lucky nature of the odd numbers is of great antiquity and is very widespread. It is referred to by Virgil and by Pliny among others. The Chinese pagodas, or sacred towers, always have an odd number of storeys, being from three to thirteen storeys high. They are intended to influence the general good luck of the district. In Siam also the superstition holds general sway—every house must have an odd number of rooms, windows and doors—every staircase an uneven number of steps!

To gain some insight into the mysteries of numbers, we must go back to primitive Man, to a period when numbers were unknown. Then, one day, a particularly brainy individual discovered that it was possible to count upon the fingers! What an epoch-making discovery this must have been, in spite of the fact that it went no further than one hand—or the number Five.

To this discovery we owe all our scientific knowledge, all our wonderful chemistry, our glorious music, our airy talks about Mars and its inhabitants—everything in fact that demands accuracy. We even owe the National Debt to this ancient juggler with figures.

It is very curious, but an obvious fact all the same, that Man did not at first count upon both hands; apparently the right hand would be used to count off the fingers of the left. This is proved by the Roman numerals, still in use with some slight modifications. Thus we have I finger; II fingers; III and IIII fingers, though the four single strokes is going out of use nowadays. For five we have the whole hand, with the thumb stretched as far as possible in one direction, and the fingers close together—in other words, a rough V. You will find that one side of the V is always thick, for the fingers, the other thin, for the thumb! It represents the left hand, outstretched, with the palm downwards.

In addition to this curious bit of picture numeration, I may mention that the Greek word for “count” really means “Five” —at any rate, the two words are obviously from the same root. Not only this, but the same word is used for “Hand” and for “Five” in Siam, Tibet, and among many savage peoples.

So we may safely take it for granted that Five represented the full extent of Man's arithmetical knowledge for many generations.

There is, however, a further indirect proof of this in the fact that many fables and legends were woven round these five numerals—but when we examine the higher numbers, there is very little, sometimes nothing at all. Indeed when we reach thirteen, all such primitive Romance is conspicuous only by its absence!

Before discussing the individual numbers, we will continue the series of figures a little further. We now find that in the Roman numerals Six is merely Five and One, and so on, until we reach what is known as X—which is really two V's set point to point. In other words Ten is merely two Five's.

The same simple—indeed primitive-idea is then followed, right up to one hundred, with the notable exception of Eleven and which have distinctive names of their own. It is impossible to overlook this stupendous fact—the distinctive names stop at Twelve and have never been carried beyond that point, except by means of such odd words as Score, Hundred, Gross.

We are forced therefore to the conclusion that Man was unable to count beyond Five for many generations, but that a most notable advance was made when he went at a bound up to twelve. This is generally supposed to mean that he used the ten fingers—and then actually calculated Eleven and Twelve mentally. This was a stupendous advance, but probably he “thought” of his two feet, the left foot for Eleven, the right for Twelve. At any rate, the Hebrew word for Eleven is derived from Thought, which suggests that it was clearly recognised as being beyond the fingers.

The use of the compound Three-Ten for Thirteen is so very general all over the world, that it seems clear that to the primitive mind of early Man it had no real meaning—he stopped at Twelve. So persistent are these old instincts that, even to-day, we stop at “Twelve Times Twelve” in our school multiplication tables, though there is absolutely no reason whatever why we should do so, except for our inherited instinct that it was, and therefore still must be, the utmost limit of mathematical thought.

Thirteen, therefore, was not used as a number, but as a vague word meaning anything beyond Twelve. To the untutored savage, as to the animal mind of to-day, anything unknown conveyed an immediate sense of danger. Thirteen was not really an unlucky number, but a fateful one—a number full of vague and unimaginable possibilities, and therefore a number to be avoided by any peace-loving man.

This curious point is amply proved by the many superstitions that cluster round this number, for they are all based upon the number itself. In the majority of hotels, for instance, there is no room bearing this number, and the visitor who sleeps in the thirteenth room slumbers quite peacefully because it bears the number 14 on the door. The ill-luck, you see, is not attached to the room, but to the number, which carried to the savage mind such dreaded fear of the Unknown. Possibly that may have been a million years ago, but the fateful character still clings to the number.

Yet the baker's dozen has always been popular—because it was originally introduced as a dozen and not as Thirteen! Again, it has always been deemed lucky to be born on the Thirteenth of the month.

In the journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, it is noted that the Savaras have names for the numerals up to twelve only. Mr. H. G. Wells suggests that the Thirteen superstition is due to the fact that Man was fascinated by the easy and facile manner in which Twelve can be split up—three times four, twice six and so on. Thirteen cannot be divided at all, he points out, and for this reason obtained a bad name. But this suggestion overlooks the fact that Man's mind was then in a very

undeveloped state, and that these pretty possibilities of multiplication and division could not possibly have been thought of until centuries later. Besides he ignores this curious fact that Twelve is the final numeral to carry a separate and distinctive name; that the Savaras have not even now got beyond that stage and have no name for our Three-Ten compound.

It seems only too abundantly clear that Thirteen is not an unlucky number, but a Fateful number—one to be dreaded and avoided because no Man could fathom its immense possibilities!

Many people believe that the superstition about sitting thirteen at table dates from the Last Supper and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That is not possible, for the idea goes back centuries earlier; but it does seem clear that this world fatality gave the idea new life and sent it bounding forward along the years to come. As a matter of fact, this was not an isolated case of sitting thirteen at table, for Christ and the chosen disciples worked together regularly every day, and must, surely, have risked the fateful Thirteen many thousands of times.

In China it is considered lucky to sit eight at a meal, but in most districts seven is esteemed the most fortunate. The late Field-Marshal Lord Roberts—“Bobs” to all of us—often stated that on New Year’s Day, 1853, he was one of a party of thirteen who dined together at Peshawar, on the Afghan frontier. Eleven years later all were still alive, although they had participated in the ghastly carnage of the Indian Mutiny. So there cannot be much ill-fortune there!

In Turkey and Persia, the word for Thirteen is seldom used; instead they use a phrase meaning “much more” or “nothing.” The highly superstitious American Negro is quite indifferent to the fatalism of this unlucky number—probably he was never mathematically curious!

Now let us consider the early ideas concerning the numerals and notice the sharp cleavage between Five and Six, Thirteen and upwards.

One is always considered Male and as there is no other number before it, they looked upon it as typical—or symbolical—of God, of the Creation, of Life. It was a lucky number and ensured importance, as all other numbers must of necessity start from it.

Two naturally was Female, by the law of reversal—one of the very oldest of our instincts. It was considered a mental number, not because women in those days possessed any brains, but because it was considered a difficult number to deal with. For instance when added or multiplied together, the result is the same! This must have caused great uneasiness to our early arithmeticians.

Being Female, by virtue of the law of reversal, it was at once noted that it consisted of two equal parts—two Ones in fact—so it was dedicated to Love, and from that we get our common saying that marriage makes two people one—in other words, it takes two single Ones to make the figure Two, the emblem of marriage unity.

In connection with the question of lucky odd numbers, the Roman King, Numa Pompilius, is said to have added days to certain months in order to make an odd number. He would have been asking for trouble if he had arranged the calendar in Thirteen lunar months, although that is the easiest and most natural division of our year. Primitive attempts were made in this obvious direction, but all came to grief—possibly because the necessary calculations were beyond Mankind at that period. Thus we find months containing four weeks of seven days, seven weeks of four days, six weeks of five days, and five weeks of six days.

In consequence of the failure of these attempts, the lunar month fell into disrepute.

Besides representing Love, the number Two was symbolical of Nature—but here we must remember that to Primitive Man, nature really meant Sex. He realised that there were pairs in everything—man and woman, day and night, heat and cold, wet and dry, and so on. In fact, the law of reversal is based on the figure Two—if you are not one thing, you must be the opposite.

The number Three has invariably been used in religious thought—apparently because it was the sum of Male and Female, and thus formed the natural and only basis for Sex worship. Each successive wave of religion has invariably built itself in by making use of the prominent ideas used by its predecessors. We have the Hindu Triad—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, as well as such trios as the Three Graces, the Three Fates, the Three Furies, Faith, Hope and Charity, the inevitable Three Wishes of our fairy tales—even the exploded theory that a drowning person sinks three times!

In the East, the Third day of the new moon is the first and most fortunate day of the month!

Four was the sacred number of the Pythagoreans, and represented Endurance, Discovery. The sacredness of Three lies in its symbolism of Fruitfulness, because of the union of Male One, and Female Two. It has survived as the fortunate number because of this fact, whereas Four was a materially fortunate number—good results depending upon effort.

It is the doubling of the spiritual luck of Three with the worldly good fortune of Four that gave such vital importance, later on, to the number Seven.

Five was the end of all things originally, much as the even Twelve was later on, when Man's mental powers had developed. But Twelve was an even number, and Five was five in existence, of course, so the Dozen never secured much veneration.

Five was considered magical, and was largely used as an amulet by the early Greeks and Romans. In Roman marriages, Five tapers or candles were used, and guests were always introduced in groups of Five. There are Five Articles of Belief in the Mohammedan Faith—Five wise and Five foolish virgins; and other Jewish references to the number.

So far Man felt secure, but when his powers of counting improved and he was able to realise twelve separate possibilities, his imagination appears to have failed him. Six was considered a doubtful number. I have been asked why it was not a lucky figure, being the double of the sacred Three, but we must remember that Primitive Man counted on his fingers, so Six was to him Five and One, not twice Three.

Now Five and One were both splendid numbers, but as the new combination made an even number—never really lucky!—Man was puzzled. So he merely called it “uncertain”; it might be lucky of course, but then again it might not!

But Seven was obviously all right! Here Man felt quite comfortable—it was a combination of the lucky Three and Four, and was it not the first odd number of this wonderful new series? Of course, it was lucky—how could it be otherwise. Did not the changes of the Moon become noticeable every seventh day! The Sun was constant in its ways, so it was no use to Primitive Man, but the varying Moon gave him his first chance of building up a definite and periodical year.

Yes, Seven was a wonderful number. The Goths adopted seven gods—and thus named our week-days. There were three male and four female—thus again the luck goes to the man! It was a sacred number among the Persians, Assyrians and Chaldeans. It was also very prominent among the Hebrews—they required seven witnesses to an oath; seven victims were offered in sacrifice—not perhaps very lucky for the victims, though no doubt the community duly approved.

According to astrology, Man's years were divided into Seven parts, governed by the Seven planets. The first was Infancy, four years, ruled by the Moon; then came Childhood, ten years, governed by Mercury; Youth, eight years, over which Venus presided; Adolescence, twenty years, ruled by the Sun, when Man attains his full strength and vigour; Manhood, fourteen years, under the dominion of Mars, a bad star, when Man becomes angry, impatient and avaricious; Old age, twelve years, governed by Jupiter; and finally Decreptitude, ruled by Saturn.

The number Seven occurs more than three hundred times in the Scriptures, in matters of importance. God created the world in six days and rested on the Seventh—the Seven fat and Seven lean kine—the Seven priests to bear before the Ark Seven trumpets of rams' horns—and many other similar allusions.

In connection with children, the number Seven was considered of the utmost importance. The seventh son was considered to make his way in the world, while the seventh son of a seventh son was a natural doctor, being supposed to have an intuitive knowledge of the art of healing; even performing wonderful cures by touch alone. The seventh daughter of a seventh daughter was not so fortunate, but she was supposed to have second sight and was much sought after in this respect.

Seven removes was the limit of recognised relationship among the Jews.

Eight was apparently a characterless number—it was noted as the “evenly even” number—that is, it could be halved into four, another even number, and this again into two, a further even number.

Nine, however, was another powerful number, for it was recognised as being the triple sacred figure—Three multiplied by Three! It was venerated in the East, and is found constantly in primitive medicine, as in the case of the whooping-cough cure already given. It is somewhat curious that our present-day family physicians ask us to repeat “ninety-nine” while they ponder over our serious condition.

Other odd numbers figure in this way, such as the “Seven sage leaves for Fever.”

There was also a very curious superstition about our individual lives—that we were either Nines or Sevens! This means that either every seventh year or every ninth year would mean a crisis in our lives, according to which number controlled our particular destiny. There appears to be a good idea behind this superstition, but it should not be limited to those two figures only, and should ignore our childhood.

Start from the first really big event in your life, and work out for yourself the figure number that controls your good years and your bad years—they may not be the same figure.

Ten represents Eternity, and is frequently used in the Old Testament and by the Hebrews to signify any large number, not easily realisable by the common people. It must, therefore, at one time have been the limit of Man's progress, but probably not for long—the break from five to ten would be followed quickly by the addition of Eleven and Twelve — and the fateful Thirteen. Now Man realised Twelve as a definite number, which was not quite the case with Ten originally.

There are no superstitions connected with Eleven and Twelve, which is in itself a significant fact.

Thirteen was generally considered to be a lucky factor in the case of Love, though I have found no reason for this superstition. Possibly marriage itself was looked upon as a venturesome experiment, so, on the general principle of Like cures Like—or set a Thief to catch a Thief—it was expected that

Master Thirteen would assist the little winged god, Cupid!

It has been suggested that it was chosen by the Ancients because it was the age of puberty; that may have been so, of course, but nowadays, in the East, maturity is reached at a much earlier age, and even under English law to-day a “woman” of twelve can legally marry a “man” of the mature age of fourteen.

In Scotland, Thirteen is known as the “Devil’s Dozen”—a title characteristic of the worst associations of this much abused number.

I have already made reference to the question of Thirteen sitting at table together. But the Romans considered that the fatality followed the number whenever and for whatever purpose thirteen people gathered together.

Beyond Thirteen, numbers are absolutely ignored by superstition! This obviously suggests that Twelve—with the fateful Thirteen to represent any and every number above the even dozen—remained for a very long period the limit of Man’s powers of calculation, at any rate among the general bulk of the people.

Turning now to the calendar, which followed long after the advent of number Twelve, we find that Friday has always had as bad a reputation as Thirteen. In a Saxon manuscript, only some eight hundred years ago, it was seriously stated that “Whoever be born on Friday or its night, he shall be accursed of men, silly and crafty and loathsome to all men, and shall ever be thinking evil in his heart, and shall be a thief and a great coward, and shall not live longer than to mid-age.”

It is most difficult to realise that such an extraordinary belief was general at such a recent date!

Friday, however, like its companion in misery, Master Thirteen, is generally considered a lucky day for lovers. This opinion finds favour among the hard headed Scots, among whom the great proportion of marriages are celebrated on that day. It was, in early times, the favourite day with the Jews, but this was probably due to a natural desire to have the sacred marriage rites performed just before their Sabbath, and thus associate the ceremony with the service in the Synagogue on the following day.

In Germany, however, it was also considered the most fortunate day for courtship and marriage, and unless a bride first entered her new home on that day, domestic strife was sure to follow!

Friday is the Sabbath of the Moslems, and in Egypt it is blessed above all other days. Among the Mohammedans it is the most popular for commencing any risky enterprise, including making a new garment!

But in most countries, and in most ages, the day was reckoned one of ill omen, and is frequently referred to as the Witches’ Sabbath. In Ireland it is a dreadful day, and the true native of the South is always very careful not to open his door to a stranger on that day—it might be the Devil himself, you see, as he can take human shape on that day of days.

According to a Shropshire saying, “If you hear anything new on a Friday, it will add a wrinkle to your face.”

The Magyars begin no fresh work on that day, for it is certain to go wrong and cause trouble. Neither do they give out any milk on that day, for fear it should impair the cow’s capacity and usefulness!

The Tyrolese have a saying: "Whoever is born on a Friday must expect sorrow"—which no doubt generally comes true! They also regard it as great folly to marry on such a doubtful day. In France also the dislike of Friday is very prevalent, and no new piece is ever started on a Friday at any of the many French theatres.

In Normandy they also believe in the bad luck of this slandered day, but they are clever in this way—those who wish to water their wine or cider, and thus turn an honest penny, do it on Friday, as they believe that on any ordinary day, the mixture would turn sour, and thus betray them.

In Alsace, both Wednesday and Friday are unlucky! What a gay time the good people must have. But of the two, Friday is a long way the more disreputable, for it is the great day for witches.

Napoleon was notoriously superstitious so was Gambetta, who regulated all his business affairs by means of carefully calculated "auspicious hours."

It was an early custom in England to hang malefactors on this evil day, and for a long time this was also done in America, and the day was frequently referred to as "Hangman's day."

In Hungary, if your birthday falls on a Friday in any year, you should cut a piece from one of your cast-off garments, rub a few drops of your own blood on this—and then burn it. By this means, you destroy all the ill-luck that would, otherwise, have befallen you during the next twelve months!

The Sicilians are also a very superstitious race—the owner of a house will not allow a new tenant to take possession on a Friday. They also say that "he who laughs on Friday, will weep on Saturday."

But the most startling of all the superstitions connected with Friday is that the criminal statistics actually show that hardly any thefts take place on that unlucky day! The belief is very strong and widespread that a crime committed on such a fateful and ill-omened day is certain to be speedily punished.

There is also a world-wide belief that Friday is either the "Fairest or the Foulest" day of the week! It is also generally held that any continued spell of weather will change on a Friday; while fisherfolk hold that "as Friday, so is Sunday"—as far as weather is concerned.

Under such a multitude of superstitions, is it any wonder that so many people believe that Eve tempted Adam on a Friday—naughty Eve!

This trick of attributing to poor old Friday all the disasters that have ever befallen Mankind is a very general one—in addition to Eve's "indiscretion," as I may call it, Friday is popularly, but not historically, supposed to have seen the murder of Abel, the stoning of Stephen, the Crucifixion, the Massacre of the Innocents by Herod, the flight of the children of Israel through the Red Sea, the Deluge (of course!), the Confusion of Tongues at the Tower of Babel, and many others, right up to William Tell and the other Apple!

Give a poor dog a bad name, and you might as well hang it!

In the early days of Sex worship, Friday was dedicated to Love; later on to Venus—the name itself is derived from Freyja, the goddess of Love. This lady's character would not stand the strain of the Divorce Courts! She was, however, abandoned by her husband, and now spends her time in weeping.

The Fish was an emblem of Freyja, and as such was associated with the worship of Love. It was

offered by the Scandinavians to their goddess, on the sixth day of the week, i.e., Friday. I have already pointed out that many primitive customs were “adopted” by the early Christians, in order to make life easier for their converts—this was a case in point. Fish has been accepted by the Catholics as the correct diet on their sixth day fast.

Unfortunately this worship of Love on the Friday of each week gradually developed — or degenerated—into a series of filthy and indecent rites and practices.

Here then we have the obvious clue to the Day’s bad name—no decent man would be associated with such practices!

Friday started its career as a good day, almost a sacred day—and in many countries, it is still the day of all days for lovers. Then love degenerated into lust, and now the day is universally shunned!

The other days of the week have no very well-known superstitions connected with them—Sex worship was the religion of the time, so Friday is the only day around which any legends have been associated. There are, however, several days in the year that have a special significance—for instance, the superstition concerning the First Foot on New Year’s Day. It is generally said that a man brings luck, a woman trouble.

The difficulty here is that at various times, and in various lands, there have been quite a number of New Year Days! Does the superstition allow such treatment, or are we distinctly on the wrong track on January the first?

There is no satisfactory explanation for the common fooling on the 1st of April, now rapidly dying out. The custom came to England from France, where it appears to have started. It has been suggested that it is owing to a change made in France in 1564, when New Year Day was “shifted” to the 1st of January! Annoyed over this interference with a popular festival, sober citizens started sending the local officials on false errands, and then taunted them with the fact that it was the 1st of April! This seems highly probable. So if you are young enough to enjoy this old-time bit of nonsense, remember that you are doing it because you object to having New Year Day in the middle of winter, instead of at the opening of spring—which surely was its proper and natural position.

I have already touched upon our May-day celebrations and the practical purpose behind the choice of the local Queen. Midsummer is really a lovers’ festival, and will be dealt with later, when reviewing all the general superstitions connected with marriage.

Christmas, as such, does not go back far enough to possess many superstitions, but you should be careful to burn by fire any holly or similar decoration, and not throw it away, or misfortune will surely befall you. The luck of the Mince-pie, also, is not generally understood—it does not mean a month of good fortune for each one you eat; they must be eaten at separate houses, and must be consumed within the sacred twelve days, from December 25th to January 6th.

But apart from these general festivals, the early Egyptians had a number of recognised “lucky days” in their calendar, while the Persians went so far as to divide the whole year into Good, Indifferent, and Bad days.

In West Africa, it was formerly the custom to divide the year into nine periods of about forty days each—these were subdivided into periods of 19 good days, 7 bad, 7 good, and 7 bad in each forty days. On the whole, therefore, they counted about 126 bad days in the year—roughly four months out of the twelve when it was not wise to work, or start any new enterprise!

Our early Saxons, however, went by the Moon! The twelfth day of each moon was specially good for farmers; the thirteenth was bad for everybody; while the fourteenth was good for marrying. The other days were, apparently, of no special significance. In Siam they have a very similar method; with them, however, the eighth and fifteenth days of the moon are sacred, and on them no work of any kind must be done. This looks like two Bank-holidays each month, and might be introduced as a companion to our childish "Summer-time" Act. Surely instead of "pretending" to alter the Sun, it would be more statesmanlike to extend the scope of the present Early Closing Act, and make all offices and businesses close one hour earlier between the 1st of April and the 30th of September—thus leaving people free to start work when they choose.

CHAPTER IV ANIMALS

THERE are not a great number of superstitions connected with animals, probably because Man was a coward, and kept away from them. They concern Birds principally—which suggests that they arose while Man still herded on the outskirts of forests, and before the Cave Dwelling period.

Certain Birds were deemed of bad omen—others were good and friendly. It is not surprising to find that birds of black colour were not approved—Humanity was gradually emerging from the darkened woods into the open, and all that it meant for their timid adventures into the great Unknown.

The Raven had by far the worst character of all, and after him came the Crow, who was, no doubt, mistaken for his larger cousin. All black birds would seem alike to Man whose bumps were certainly not those of observation. It is only of comparatively recent years that people have realised that the Wren is not the female Robin, and this age-old belief is still held in some remote country districts. These two birds, the Robin and the Wren, are solitaires, and are not seen in pairs except in the nesting period—when they are not seen at all except by careful observers.

The Raven, no doubt, obtained his bad name through his manner of feeding, for he devours the young of other creatures. Later on, Man himself developed cannibalistic tendencies, but that, of course, was quite another story. The bird was lonely in its habits and in its abode, which again suggested mystery to Man, to whom loneliness was equivalent to death.

The Rook also got a bad name, but in some districts only—no doubt it would be classed with the disreputable Raven and condemned unheard. It is always safer, in cases of doubt, to hang the culprit first, and try him after-wards—it avoids so much miscarriage of Justice. The Rook is not carnivorous, however, and there does appear to have been some recognition of distinction between the birds.

The Owl has always been a bird of ill repute, obviously because of its night flying habits—"late hours" has always been the unforgivable sin with Man, even up to the present generation. But of course this was an essential precaution for the safety of the family—when the stone was rolled up to the door at the first approach of darkness, it was a distinct danger to remove it, merely because some member of the family was out late, sweethearting or otherwise.

Here again the bird is a solitary one, and a flesh eater.

But the white Owl was held sacred in India. This raises the important question of Colour, which must indeed have played an all-important part in the life of Primitive Man. It may even be questioned whether Man's first intelligent existence began before or after the advent of Flowers—but we do know that the vast bulk of vegetation, apart from huge forest trees, would be ferns, horse-tails and many giant grasses and rushes near the banks of streams. In fact, it is due to Primitive Man's early struggles in the brackish, marshy districts that we still retain our useless and curious craving for Salt, with which I shall deal fully later on.

So any animal that showed colour must have been a veritable god to these simple-minded folk, for the huge beasts around them, mostly of the giant Lizard or Mammoth type, were of a dull slate grey or neutral brown—the elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus are survivals from this weird period. The elephant may continue in existence, as he is a useful beast and is partly domesticated, but the others are fast dying out, as they have long outlived their day.

The Magpie has always fascinated man, obviously because White, the sacred colour, forms a permanent part of his foliage—there are very few black and white animals known even to-day; indeed both extremes, Black or White, are rare, except in domestication. We know that Black in Nature is only a very very dark Brown, and that White is the absence of all colour; but that is only a useless though interesting bit of Science. The real puzzle is why the two extremes should be found on the one animal or bird?

Why should the colour stream only affect certain areas? If the animal has no colouring material in its system, we can understand matters; but when it has a great excess in certain parts, and none at all in others, we are at fault. Another curious colour puzzle is the question of grey, which we know to be a mixture of Black and White. But if Black is due to an excess of brown colouring—and this can easily be proved when a black cat is unwell, when it goes “brown” very quickly—and White is due to the absence of brown colouring, then a mixture of these conditions ought surely to produce a medium brown of some sort. But this never happens!

We can produce a Black horse, a White horse, a Grey horse—even a Black and White one; but we cannot produce a Grey cat! We have a Blue puss, really a slate colour, and the Chinchilla or so-called silver greys, but a true Grey, obtained by the blending of black and white seems at present impossible, for the Blue and Chinchilla were not bred that way.

The Magpie, therefore, carries neither bad nor good luck in himself—apparently it depends upon the number of birds you see. Now the Magpie is not a gregarious creature and is usually seen in pairs or alone. The old superstition has come down to us in the form of a doggerel rhyme, and perhaps has suffered slightly owing to “poetical licence,” as will be seen,

One means anger, two brings mirth,
Three a wedding, four a birth.
Five is Heaven—Six is Hell,
But Seven’s the very De’il’s ainsel.”

In many districts it is held that if you see one Magpie it means Sorrow, so we can take our choice. In many cases the sorrow might follow the anger, or someone’s anger might cause our sorrow. Anyhow the two ideas appear to be mixed up inextricably. All agree that “Two brings Mirth,” which is fortunate under the circumstances. But it is widely held that Four indicate a death, not a birth. Obviously this was a puzzle for our Poet Laureate, so he adopted Birth as giving the better rhyme! In such ways our Youths are taught!

The Lapwing is considered to carry bad luck—but only in Scotland, so we need not greatly worry about it.

Among the luck-bringing birds, the best known are the Robin and the Swallow — both highly esteemed for hundreds of thousands of years.

When you see the first Robin of the year, you must make a wish. If the bird flies away before you have decided upon what you want — well, you might as well go to bed till the following New Year, for all the good you’ll do that twelve-months! In some districts, it is the first Robin in spring, which in the olden days was the same as New Year. But the dainty Redbreast is a regular winter companion of our gardens, so you may as well make things as certain as they can be in this unsatisfactory but decidedly superstitious world.

The Swallow has always represented Hope, rather than any special “luck,” for is he not the token that summer is with us once more? I need not go into the wonderful migration question — it would

be quite out of place — but without question, Swallows do return to their old nests, in some most mysterious way! How they do it so unerringly, the good God alone knows.

This is not conjecture; birds have been “ringed” and therefore we know for certain that they do return, year after year. It speaks well for Primitive Man, in spite of his many faults and failings, that this charming little creature has always been revered. It is an age-long superstition that it is a disastrous thing to destroy a Swallow’s nest — so it should be, if justice there be in the world to-day.

Our quaint friend the Cuckoo is also a luck-bringer — according to Man. But here his judgment was at fault, or the bird has sadly degenerated. Personally I am inclined to blame the bird, as the American Cuckoo invariably behaves itself in the matter of rearing its own youngsters. There is a curious — and much derided — superstition to the effect that anyone finding a Cuckoo’s nest will certainly be widowed—or widowered, if I may coin the word.

It has long been held that this is “meant sarcastic”; but certain Cuckoos, in other parts of the world, do build nests, like all decent birds should do.

If, when you first hear the Cuckoo call in the spring, the sound comes to you from the right, you will have a lucky year. But kindly superstition casts a veil over what happens to the unfortunate birds—always much smaller than the Cuckoo herself—in whose nests the Cuckoo lays her eggs. Presumably it is equally unlucky for them and their own nestlings if the Cuckoo calls to them from left, or from right.

Make no mistake about it, the young Cuckoo does undoubtedly murder the real nestlings—he gets his immature wings under the smaller birds, and jerks them out of the nest, one by one, where they are killed upon the ground below. Then this callous young criminal feeds upon the many nice fat worms and other titbits, intended for the fosterparents’ own youngsters.

Our English Cuckoo presents a most fascinating puzzle!

The Stork also is a friend of Man, the bird being notoriously devoted to its young, and therefore closely associated with birth in many early fables and legends. The Dove and Pigeon share various fortunes, some people holding them sacred, others disliking them extremely. There are many kindly folk who will not have a dove near the house, yet it has always been closely associated with religion in connection with nunneries.

But the bird above all round whom superstition has built her romance is undoubtedly the Peacock! Like the mysterious Cat, the Peacock is only partially domesticated; both are independent creatures, and although they have consented to associate with Man, they have never been in subjection like the Dog. The ages do not appear to have changed the bird in the slightest—he is the same gorgeous blaze of colour to-day that he was ages ago, even before the days of Solomon. Nor does climate appear to affect him at all.

The Peacock is certainly a most gorgeous bird, and it is worth noting that the feathers do not fade but retain all their original beauty. In India the bird was always held in high esteem, and was indeed sacred. In the well-known picture of “The Last Judgment” the angels are represented with wings of peacock feathers.

The fact remains that very few Western people would allow a feather to be brought into the house—it is dreadfully unlucky, they say. So it used to be, without question, for the bird was truly sacred and anyone stealing a feather from the Temple would soon have found torture and death—in all probability his whole family would have been massacred and his home burnt or razed to the ground.

It has always been considered fortunate to see the first Lamb of the season, face to face—it is not good if the little creature has his tail towards you!

The Spider again has always excited Man's curiosity, and is considered lucky all over the world—at least, if not actually lucky, it is considered unfortunate to injure or kill them, which perhaps is not quite the same thing. It is, however, deemed to be lucky if you see one in the evening!

Much fear is often shown in connection with the Earwig. This appears to be modern, and to be due entirely to ignorance—the “Ear” in the name is not the human one, but the buds of flowers. The word “ear” is still used in the case of corn, and that is the type of ear intended.

The Butterfly is probably a late-comer into the world; there is no superstition attached to it beyond the fact that it is lucky for you if the first you see is a white one. In England this is almost invariably the case, but not of course in the East. It is obviously a colour superstition, pure and simple, White being sacred.

There are a number of superstitions concerning Bees, but these are largely modern, and deal with the keeping and handling of them, rather than to the Bee itself as a living possibility. But you should never sell them, if you have any respect for your own future, though no one knows exactly what is expected to happen to the reckless person who does so. But you can, of course, exchange them for something useful—in which case, apparently, the spell does not work.

The superstitious Russian will not eat Crabs—they were made by the Devil, not by God.

The unfortunate Toad has always been abused—and I am afraid tortured. What chance had an ugly creature against the ignorant superstitions of Primitive Man, and no one would call the poor beast handsome! One of the mildest of the many horrible superstitions is that we should at once throw a stone at it! Poor creature, it has God's work to do, and does it well.

The Snake, however, was worshipped in the East—a curious state of affairs, obviously due to its mysterious power of making itself invisible—as it appeared to our remote forebears! It was always feared, of course, but it was certainly safer to worship such an unusual beast, one that could walk without legs! Yet the Snake has legs—though they are inside his skin!

The Hindu also considered the Rat sacred—for the same reason, that he had the uncanny power of disappearing! It is only of recent years that we have come to realise that almost all wild animals appear much larger than they really are, because the thick fur or coat makes such a difference. A long haired (so-called Persian) Cat looks nearly twice the size of a short-haired one, yet the skeleton will be found exactly the same.

Puss herself has had a varied and somewhat exciting career at the hands of Humanity. At first worshipped and kept in the temples, her body embalmed just as a King's, she was later deemed the familiar of the witch and was callously burnt alive, the populace rejoicing at the sight! Poor Man, what a strange thing he is!

A Black Cat for luck! But there must not be a single White hair on Puss. “Ranji” was a great believer in this, and claimed that twice in succession the timely appearance of a Black Cat was instrumental in winning a County Cricket match for Sussex.

In early days, the Cat was the object of much religious worship; their mummified remains are found in many tombs, and there was even a special cemetery for them in the early days of Egypt.

But that does not explain why our luck should be confined to the Black Cat. Well, the Egyptian Cat was a sandy colour, and it was tabby marked or barred. An all-black Cat was a great rarity, seldom seen in a generation, and therefore something to be talked about—a landmark in one's life!

No doubt an all-white Cat would have been a still greater rarity, because in a state of nature, Puss does not favour white. This colour—or lack of colour—has come to us during domestication; it is not a characteristic of Puss, and when originally developed, it was always accompanied by physical weakness of constitution—generally with deafness, for some strange reason.

But Black Cats and Skulls have always been associated with witches—the most powerful weapon for spells of all sorts being the skull of a Black Cat, that had been fed on human flesh!

Under the Egyptians, the male Cat was likened to the Sun, and the female to the Moon, and they held a very enviable position. In case the home caught fire, Puss was always the first to be saved—and in those hot Eastern countries, fires were not uncommon.

Yet in some countries, a Cat is always thrown into a new house, before any human enters—the idea being that the first living creature to cross the threshold will be the first to cross it dead!

In Russia, a Cat is put into a new cradle in order to satisfy any evil spirits that may be waiting there for the baby!

A Black Cat is said to bring luck—if it comes to you of its own accord, not, of course, if you bring it to the house. In India it is considered unlucky to hear a Cat mew when you are starting on a journey—you must at once return and find out what the animal wants. If Puss is not satisfied, you will have no luck on that journey. It is also considered very lucky if a Cat kittens in your house. Naturally, in the Far East, Puss lives a wilder life, so this event does not often happen, and obviously it speaks well for the kindness of heart of the householder. In England, Puss seldom goes outside to rear her babies.

It is believed that the tail of a Black Cat, if rubbed over the eye, will effect a speedy cure of a sty. It is more likely to remove any dirt, if the patient's face has not been washed properly!

It is also considered very fortunate if you take the family Cat to church—may I add, if you can! Also remember that a bought Cat is no good for catching mice.

There are also a few ridiculous superstitions concerning the way Puss washes. If she licks her foot and passes it over the left ear, it means the advent of a stranger. Unfortunately, every Cat does this several times a day! We are also solemnly told that if a Cat licks its tail, it foretells rain. What weather we may expect!

If, out of doors, a strange Black Cat crosses your path to the right, it means good luck; if to the left, it is bad. Here again the Far East is indicated, where Puss roams about most of the time.

In the West of England, it is considered that “May Kittens” are useless. This is a curious idea, for which I can find no justification.

There are very few superstitions concerning that friend of Man, the Dog—no doubt because he was essentially an outdoor sporting companion. They were supposed to be able to see ghosts or spirits—a belief that is very firmly rooted to-day. In addition, it was considered lucky to be followed by a strange dog. This superstition supports my contention that the Dog first became domesticated

through attaching himself to Man—not the reverse.

I have already dealt with the Horse in connection with the Cult of the Shoe, but there always were many superstitions concerning our friend, the gee-gee. Here again we find the sacred colour White is brought into association, for it is generally—but not invariably—considered fortunate to see, or to own, a white or piebald Horse. In Devon, it is unlucky.

Tacitus tells us of the sacred White Horses, which were harnessed to the sacred chariot, drawn about the country, and attended in state by the priests. This appears to explain the contradiction as to luck, for it would naturally be fortunate to meet one of these sacred animals when on their task of blessing the countryside. Yet, apart from such a recognised and open meeting, it might have been dangerous for a mere civilian to have anything to do with what concerned only the priests.

It is rather curious that we should also find this mixed element of luck in connection with Horses with white stockings—really white feet, of course. Obviously it suggests a cross with one of the sacred animals, and should therefore be fortunate. But it is, of course, impossible to deal with superstitions from a logical point—they are founded upon such casual and faulty observation.

The old superstition is that if a Horse has one white leg (i.e., stocking) you should certainly keep it yourself. If it has two, then give the animal to a friend. If it has three or four, then it is no good and you should sell it at once—obviously to someone who is more ignorant than yourself. But it still is a large part of horse-dealing that you should sell what is no use for yourself, or your friend!

CHAPTER V FLOWERS, FRUITS, AND TREES

THE importance of Flowers and Fruit to Primitive Man lies in the fact that they formed the earliest calendar, and gave him a clue to the seasons and the ordered progress of Nature. Calendars, as such, came late in Man's development.

As it is impossible for such delicate structures to be preserved in the geological strata, we cannot say definitely when Flowers first beautified the world. In the earliest days all was green, and of a somewhat similar nature to our modern ferns, which generate by means of inconspicuous spores. The development of the germ takes place outside the parent fern, instead of within the ovary, as is the case with flowers.

But Primitive Man must have welcomed the flowers, if only because they broke the monotony of the landscape, and there are two very prevalent superstitions—rather beautiful in their way—that show his appreciation. We are told that it is very unlucky to refuse a flower if asked for one; and that you should be careful of your dealings with anyone in whose hands flowers fade quickly.

We are often told that animals can instinctively tell those people who can be trusted—apparently the Flowers also have this gift of the gods.

Another world-wide superstition runs to the effect that certain flowers are unlucky if brought into the house, and many thousands must have offended in this way, before they learnt the hidden meaning of their acts. Lilac is, perhaps, the best known of these, but there are, in reality, quite a number of such plants, all of them apparently harmless as well as beautiful.

Thus, we find on the list Heather, which surely must find its way into millions of homes every autumn. Apart from this, White Heather is invariably considered an emblem of good fortune, and is always accepted in that spirit. But of course it is protected by the sacred colour.

Then again you must not bring the first Snowdrop into the house! This, however, hardly falls into the same class, as it only applies to the earliest blossoms at a time when our gardens and hedgerows are generally bare and uninteresting. Possibly it has something to do with the seeding arrangements of the plant, as Snowdrops, unlike most bulbous plants, will grow readily from self-sown seed.

There is another possibility to be considered in this case—the Snowdrop in garden cultivation has an unpleasant knack of disappearing, absolutely and entirely! You may have a splendid show of leaf and bloom—or only a poor one, as the case may be—yet next spring there will not be a vestige of green, nor of the bulbs, should you search the beds!

This trick is well known, and I have had the experience myself on several occasions, but I can offer no clue as to the cause. It may, however, explain the superstition, as Primitive Man, if faced with this problem, may have decided that the bulbs were sulking because they had been robbed of their blooms.

May blossom is another that must not be taken indoors! Here again we are robbing Nature of one of her early glories, for it is surely the hedgerow's first real sip, of spring. There are many wild flowers in bloom from January onward, and the Gorse on the commons is always early, but Gorse is a difficult plant to shift to a garden, whereas May is to be found everywhere.

But please treat it as an outdoor gift from the gods—you are not intended to be selfish and keep it from the wayfarers who may pass your gate. That is the true meaning of the superstition.

We must also remember that Red May had medicinal values in olden days, that were particularly useful for those travellers who might be passing. In cases of sprain or dislocation, a strong twig is taken—about a yard long—and split evenly from end to end. The pieces are then held by two men, with clean hands, while a third man waves his hands over the split twigs.

If all is done correctly, the twigs appear to be endowed with life, for they rise up and approach each other until they touch. A piece should be cut at once from the point of contact and bound firmly to the sprain.

Of course, if all this does not happen, then something has gone wrong—perhaps your hands were not quite clean!

Again, you must on no account take Box flowers indoors, or death will follow them.

In line with the superstition about Snowdrops is the belief that you must never take a single Daffodil into the house—it must always be a bunch. No doubt this arises from the fact that the bulbs spread freely, so where Nature has been bountiful and generous, Man dare not be mean for fear of offending the gods.

It was also considered unlucky to bring Broom in flower into the house—this also is a plant of the commons, and therefore the property of the whole community. It does not easily transplant, even when grown in nursery gardens specially for the purpose.

But perhaps the most unexpected of all is the simple wayside Thyme! It is true that it fades very quickly, within an hour or so as a rule, so that may explain matters.

There are the flowers that you must avoid if you wish to make a floral offering to a friend or to an invalid. They are not unlucky in themselves, remember—the misfortune lies in the fact that they have been taken indoors.

There are, however, quite a number of flowers that are considered unlucky in themselves—our ancestors, credulous folk, were warned that these “belong to the Devil.” Most of them, naturally, are wild flowers—a few have a nasty smell, others are poisonous. Yet many are freely cultivated in our gardens, so that, all unknowing, we are simply asking Old Nick to come and make merry with our bodies and our souls.

Taking the garden plants first, we have that glorious but untidy plant, the Red Hot Poker! Here again we have a plant that frequently refuses to grow, but what a glorious sight it makes when it decides to behave! On the other hand, the Ox-eye Daisy will grow everywhere and spreads quietly but assuredly and without crowding out other occupants.

Yet how it hates the Privet! As a matter of fact very few plants will grow near the privet, which covers the surface of the soil with thousands of small rootlets. It is a greedy plant, and would be happy in a world by itself.

The Globe-flower and the Bell-flower are two more garden friends that belong to the person-who-shall-be-nameless, yet they are found in almost every cottage garden. Toadflax and Snap-dragon are also generally popular, while Clematis is seen everywhere. It is another of those nasty plants that give endless trouble, for its twigs are so brittle that it is always risky to touch it.

There is a long list of wild flowers! It includes the Night-shade, a deadly poison, with attractive

berries that cause the deaths of many children every year—a fit plant for Satan. Among the others, I find Shepherd's Needles (not Shepherd's Purse, of course), Convolvulus, Sun Spurge, Scabious, House-leek, Common Spurge, Herb Paris, Plantain, Yarrow, Parsley, Stitchwort, Red Campion, but not, apparently, the White Campion, which may be protected by its sacred colour. Then there are the Wild Arum, Wild Garlic, Ground Ivy, Fumitory, Aconite, Hemlock, and Ragwort—that puzzling plant that is never found twice alike!

I am sorry to report that opinions differ about the Yew and the Horse-Chestnut, for some people call them lucky, others unlucky. So you can please yourself with a clear conscience.

It is worth noting that the early botanists appear to have lacked imagination—when we see such words as Horse, Cat, or Dog tacked on to a plant, then we must look out for trouble. For instance, the Horse-Chestnut is not a horse, nor is it a chestnut. But it was supposed to look like the real chestnut tree, so it was promptly labelled Horse-Chestnut. It is the same with the popular Cat-Mint, which is not a cat, nor a mint, but somewhat resembles the real Mint, to an uncritical eye.

Now I will turn to the happier aspect of the subject and study the flowers and plants that were considered lucky. I will start with the ever-popular Mistletoe, always a favorite among those of us who wished to be kissed, or those who merely wish to kiss.

It is stated that the Mistletoe was at one time a tree, but that it was very naughty, so the high gods punished it. That is why it has to look on while pretty girls are being kissed! It was, a sacred plant with the Druids, in its present form, so it is just possible that the kissing custom is merely a degraded form of a religious betrothal at the altar.

It is worth noting that although the plant can only grow upon the rough bark of some tree, yet it is not in any sense a parasite, nor does it damage the vigour of the host in any way.

I suppose the Violet would be a close competitor for popular favour in this group of lucky plants—who does not love the violet! In many parts of Germany, as with the Greeks, this modest but beautiful flower was used to decorate the Bride's bed!

Most people know that this flower was associated with the great Napoleon, but that callous soldier had no love for flowers. When he left for Elba, in the days of his failure and disgrace, he told his intimates that he would return with the violets, which he did, at the end of the following March! It was his followers, not Napoleon himself, who associated the flower with his name, for it was not prudent to refer to the fallen god except in some such round-about fashion.

I should like to take the Rose next—often called the Queen of flowers, but unfortunately, although always popular (largely because of its scent, of course), it was never considered a lucky flower. This may seem strange when we remember its immense popularity and its exquisite range of colour, but it was not known to Primitive Man as it is to-day. It is essentially a flower of cultivation.

The Water Lily is the only other well-known flower that appears on the list, and that is easily explained by the apparent mystery of its growth on water, without roots or branches!

There are a few wild flowers included, however, and these include the handsome St. John's Wort, often seen in our gardens, and also many herbs, such as Wormwood, Fennel, Honesty, Aloes, Black Hellebore, Rue, Rosemary, Alyssum, as well as the Yellow Dead Nettle, Herb Bennet, Avens, and Crane's Bill. There is, of course, a Red Dead Nettle as well as a White one, but the sacred colour apparently does not apply in this case, and the more uncommon Yellow was chosen. It is indeed popularly known as Archangel.

I must point out that the poor Devil is not supplied with any trees, but there were several that were looked upon as lucky, or as possessing powers of a supernatural character.

The Oak was, of course, worshipped by the Druids, but there are several kinds of Oak, even in England, and it was probably the Evergreen Oak that bore the sacred character—no doubt because it was considered Evergreen. Of course the year's leaves do fall, but they persist through the winter, so the new leaves give the tree the appearance of being evergreen.

There is also the Holly, so popular at Christmas-time from its supposed association with Jesus. But of course it was a sacred tree long before the crucifixion. In addition, there were the Birch and the Rowan, and one is forced to conclude that these were chosen for purely artistic reasons, as they are both beautiful examples of Nature's handiwork.

The Rowan was so-called from the exquisite colour of its bark—that is Roan; while the delicate tracery of the slim and graceful—almost feminine—Silver Birch is always a delight to the eye.

It is often said that the Rowan, the Elder, the Thorn (May) and the Holly were all held sacred because of their bountiful harvest of berries, believed to be the provision made by the gods for the feeding of the birds during the winter. There is an old superstition, very much alive to-day, to the effect that a heavy crop of red berries means a white (and severe) winter.

This, of course, will not stand critical examination, for in the very nature of things, berries, as seeds, must be the result of the weather that is now past, and cannot in any way depend upon the future. It is, however, an interesting fact that Nature has a trick of evening-up the weather. However unevenly the rainfall may be distributed, the total fall for twelve-month after twelve-month varies very little.

In the same way it is most usual for a fine warm summer to be followed by a sharp winter, a mild summer by a mild open winter. The heavy crop of berries is actually due to the warmth of the summer, but the type of summer that produces them is usually followed by the sharp winter noted by the ancients.

Besides being sacred to the Druids and to the Celts, the Oak was a favourite tree for open-air preaching. This was not directly due to the sacred character of the tree, but to the natural spread of the branches—in the Beech, for instance, the lower branches almost always bend towards the ground, and in consequence they are not suitable as shelter for a number of people.

To fell an Oak tree was considered most unlucky—strictly speaking, you ought to wait till some well-disposed storm uproots the tree for you.

I have not included the Yew and the Horse-Chestnut among the lucky trees, but my own feeling is inclined that way—merely because no single tree is included definitely in the Devil's list. Without doubt the association of the Yew with our churches and graveyards would create a natural prejudice; it would be looked upon as the associate of death.

In older days it was undoubtedly held sacred—that is, in the days long before there were any churches at all. The truth is that the early churches were built near the Yew—it was not the tree that was planted in the churchyard.

These trees have been known to live for over nine hundred years, so the probability is that the church was built near them because they were a symbol of immortality.

Nothing can be said about the Horse-Chestnut, however—it has never been associated with religion; it is no use for food, except for pigs; it is certainly a most graceful tree, but it has no special colouration of the bark, as in the Rowan and Birch. I prefer to treat it as a sacred tree, simply because there is no other tree in the list of the unlucky ones of the Vegetable Kingdom.

In the early days of Botany, our scientists appear to have been greatly impressed by the importance of the Virgin Mary—we have a most curious and fascinating list of plants associated with her. There are the Lady's Smock, Mantle, Garters, Laces, Nightcap, Thimble, Tresses, Hair, Bedstraw, Comb, Looking-glass, Seal, Cushion, Fingers, Glove, Ear-drop, Candlestick, Slipper, and a few vague ones. Truly a wonderful assortment!

But none of these were in any way sacred or lucky—they were merely named after the Virgin and her very human articles of attire.

But certain plants and other things were definitely associated with the old heathen deities, the best known of these being the Lady Bird and the Strawberry, now dedicated to the Virgin Mary. As I have already explained, the heathen temples were converted into Christian Churches, and all the old associations were taken over as well. For instance, the old calendar contained a large number of unlucky days, upon which the people did not care to work—these were all converted into Saints' days. It was ridiculous—our ancestors were told—to refuse to work because these days were unlucky, but it was a sign of faith to idle on them because they were associated with these holy names.

The Elder was supposed to be safe from lightning because the Cross was made from its wood.

There is a beautiful metaphor in use among the Brahmins to the effect that "The Sandal tree perfumes the axe that lays it low." On the other hand, the popular phrase "not worth a curse," really means "not worth a cross"—it refers to the Nasturtiums of our gardens, which scatter their seeds all over the place and manage to make a very obvious nuisance of themselves.

There are not many superstitions about fruit—the Pear is generally considered lucky, and the Apple unlucky. This has no reference to the legend of the Garden of Eden, for we must remember that the wild apple is closely akin to the crab type and is eminently unfit for human consumption.

There is an old saying that, in order to keep a husband, you must "feed the brute." There is a lot of sound truth and philosophy in this, for indigestion is the curse of most of our physical and mental efforts. Now the wild pear is edible, so it is easy to understand why the apple was considered unlucky, or in other words, a bringer of misfortune. Primitive Man must have eaten the one for the other, long before he realised that they were distinct fruits.

It is a curious fact that the pear tree itself is not safe for climbing, as the wood snaps so easily. Whereas the apple tree is quite safe. Always warn children against climbing a pear tree!

In Austria, it was the custom to cut an Apple on St. Thomas's night. If the seeds were even, it foretold marriage. If one of the seeds was cut through, it meant trouble; if two, then death or widowhood. Superstition does not tell us what would happen if three or four seeds were cut—it always falls short at these interesting points!

In many countries, it is customary to place an apple in the hands of a dead child—I presume this is intended to symbolise Innocence.

There is one version of the Garden of Eden story which states that there was no serpent there at

all—it was Eve's bare legs, as she climbed up the Apple tree, that led to Adam's fall.

Naturally there are many curious superstitions of a medical character connected with plants, and it would be impossible, as well as useless, to go into these—all are based upon error and ignorance. Early medicine was based upon what was known as Signature, or resemblance—thus a heart-shaped leaf was considered a specific for anything wrong with the heart, yellow for jaundice, and so on.

To cure lumbago, you had to use a paste made of pounded shamrocks, mixed with butter and salt! This was rubbed all over the afflicted back, but the paste must not be rubbed off till the cure was perfected. Probably the butter and salt were useful! A porridge, advised by Dianecht, chief physician of the Tuatha-de-Danans, has been handed down through the centuries. It is a certain cure for such ailments as cold, phlegm, sore throats and the like. It consists of hazel-buds, dandelion, chickweed, and wood-sorrel, all boiled together with oatmeal.

In old Aryan days, the fern was supposed to possess wonderful powers of healing—but as I have already pointed out, there was very little vegetation apart from ferns, so it merely amounts to plenty of green food.

Another old superstition that is strongly held to-day is that when a Bay tree withers in your garden, it means a death. Strangely enough, this happened in the case of my own father—the Bay tree in my garden withered suddenly, and without visible or obvious cause. My father was perfectly well at the time and was not living with me; yet he died under my roof a few weeks later.

It has always been held that the blooming of flowers or the ripening of fruit out of season foretells death or disaster of some sort.

There are many flowers associated with weddings, but I will deal with these in the chapter devoted to marriage and its superstitions. There is also some superstitious lore affecting the weather, for much of which there is, no doubt, a sound foundation, for Primitive Man was far more subject to the changes of weather than we are to-day—at first naked, then in dark and cheerless caves, it is only within quite recent years that the bulk of Mankind has been rendered weatherproof.

The best known bit of weather-lore is, no doubt, connected with the Oak and the Ash. The actual wording differs in various countries, of course, but the underlying idea is always the same.

“If the Ash is before the Oak,
Then there'll be a very great soak.
But if the Oak before the Ash,
Then expect a very small splash.”

Superstition also tells us that the Mulberry tree is a certain foreteller of the weather. “When the Mulberry trees shoot, there will be no more frost.” I have found this very reliable myself, but unfortunately this handsome tree is found in very few gardens, whereas it is fairly common in the East. I test my tree each spring in Kew Gardens, which is easily accessible for all Londoners.

I should also like to correct the common blunder connected with the old doggerel rhyme—

“Ne'er cast a clout
Till May is out.”

This has nothing to do with the calendar month of May, which is purely the invention of Man himself.

It refers to the Hawthorn—the wild May of our Hedgerows, which, like the Mulberry tree, is a splendid judge of weather!

CHAPTER VI COLOURS

MANKIND has always been attracted by colour, and without question it makes a strong appeal to many animals and insects also. Experiments have been made with bees which prove that they possess a sense of colour.

On the other hand we must not overlook the fact that many people are born, even in the present century, without any colour sense at all—to them, the world appears a uniform grey tint. At any rate, that is how they themselves describe it, but having no sense of colour, their so-called “grey” may be anything. In all probability it is a dull lifeless slaty shade of green.

But the fact that our sense of colour need not be inherited proves that for a very long period Man must have lacked this wonderful addition to Life’s pleasures. At that early period, animal life was, no doubt, similar to the elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus and alligator in colour, while vegetation consisted of huge ferns and grasses. Probably there was no blue sky even, for the temperature was higher and the atmosphere would be misty above the salty brackish marshes.

We may assume that the sky cleared first of all—for Man has always held that Blue was the most fortunate of all colours, though White has invariably been the sacred one—if I may call it a colour for the sake of simplicity.

During the period of night, if that be one of rest, Nature does a lot of repairing. Hence no doubt the curative value of black in all old superstitions. If the tail of a black cat be rubbed over the eye, it will cure a sty. Again, if some wool from a black sheep be placed in the ear it will cure earache; and so on in many other ways with black horses, black dogs, crows and other birds.

A black horse was supposed to be able to see fairies and other mystical folk invisible to mortal eyes—the crow, however, has always been associated with black magic and sorcery, perhaps for a similar reason, that it could see its master’s “Familiars.”

The gipsies still believe that a black horse has second sight.

It is interesting to note that the Hindu Bazaar shopkeepers will not sell anything white or black after dark—apparently the idea is that evil spirits would have some hold on the purchasers, and the shopkeeper did not wish to be mixed up in anything uncanny. There is in everyone of us a strongly noted dislike to be associated with anything tragic or unpleasant—hence the dislike for haunted houses, or for sleeping in a room where a recent death has taken place. Many people will not travel on a train that carries a corpse, and the railway companies insist that the coffin must be delivered to them well in advance of starting time.

There is also a strong dislike felt in connection with removing a body from water—a reward is generally paid for the body of anyone found drowned, but most people instinctively hurry off to seek further assistance, on the principle that there is safety in numbers.

White, however, was held sacred, and it may have been felt almost a desecration to trade in anything of the sacred colour, at that period of the day when evil was dominant—for evil has always been given the dangerous hours of Darkness, owing to the deeply rooted fear of the night, that has been handed on for hundreds of thousands of years, to our youngsters of today!

It is a curious fact, and may interest our women, that White has always been used for night-dresses, because our sleeping bodies are then at the mercy of the spirits—mostly evil ones, of course!

Fancy coloured pyjamas are popular, nowadays, but the age-old superstition has an immense hold upon us still.

Without doubt, the popularity of White for the Bride is due to the same cause—she should wear no other colour for the first twenty-four momentous hours; after that, apparently, it does not particularly matter what colour she wears, for superstition has nothing to tell us.

It was strongly held for thousands of years that every coloured article worn or carried by the Bride meant one year of trouble—not necessarily at the start of her married life, of course, but somewhere vaguely in the future.

White flowers are still the most popular, but some of the more dainty of our modern cultivated tints are now used.

It was also held that only white or grey horses should be used for the journey to and from the church.

Apparently Grey has always been coupled with White—it is essentially a man-made colour, produced by blending various quantities of white and black. Nowadays a dark blue is often used in place of black—thus giving us many new and delicate mixtures of “blue-gray.” An attempt has been made to differentiate between “grey” and “gray” —many artists claiming that the old spelling should only be used for mixtures of white and black; the other form being reserved for those tones where some other colour has been introduced. No doubt this is correct, but it is beyond most of us.

White animals have always been held sacred—such as horses, of course, but also such unlikely creatures as Owls and Butterflies.

In China, White is used for mourning, but it is not possible to say whether this is due to the fact that it is the sacred colour, or because it was supposed to make us invisible to evil spirits. It is probably the latter, as the Chinese are great believers in spirits, and heaps of them!

In this connection, it is interesting to recall the old belief that a broad white ribbon, worn round the body, would prove a cure for rheumatism! The evil spirits who were busy tormenting your poor bones, would no longer see you, and so you would escape. Possibly it might assist in an attack of lumbago, as it would be, more or less, on the spot, and so would protect from cold.

White has always denoted purity, and it is an interesting fact that no game cock has white feathers—if seen, they indicate a cross breed in birds. This explains the giving of a White Feather as an indication of cowardice —it is a modern taunt and suggests that your parents (or grandparents) were not all they should be—that you are a cross breed, and not of clean birth. Naturally it has nothing to do with White, as the sacred colour.

Black, on the other hand, was generally used for the inferior servants, and was used as mourning among the Romans—from whom we take the custom. It was a sign of pseudo-modesty, and an acknowledgment that, in the presence of Death, we were inferior creatures. It is not, strictly speaking, worn as a mark of respect for the dead, though many people believe so.

The great Napoleon dreaded Black and never allowed those around him to wear it—he once ordered the Queen to retire, “and dress yourself decently,” as he politely expressed it, because she was wearing a black costume. This snub was made in public. Children also have an instinctive, but very marked dislike for black.

The various colours have always had a superstitious use in connection with astrology, the planets not only having a number but a particular colour attached to each.

Those born within the influence of a particular planet should cultivate the use of this favourable colour, and no doubt this idea is as sound and as valuable as most other superstitions. No more, no less, of course.

But the curious point to remember is that modern medical science now gives a curative value to colour, especially in dealing with the nervous and the insane.

Seeds germinate rapidly under the influence of violet and blue rays, but flies and other insects do not like these colours.

The taciturn and melancholic become gay and talkative under the influence of red—it is, of course, a question of vibration, and the nerve force of certain types is unable to grasp the higher vibration of certain colours without a distinct mental strain.

The number of vibrations required per second to produce the blue and violet shades is nearly double that required to produce red tones. So the change in the melancholic individual is easily understood.

The ancients must have realised the connection between colour on the one hand and healthy pleasant conditions on the other. There is so much colour in nature that it was certain to take a prominent place in their beliefs.

Primitive Man held that it was fortunate to “smell” Red roses, but not White ones! There must have been some reason for this curious belief, of course; either Red roses were at first very rare, which is possible, as the normal wild rose does not show much colour; or else the early White roses were seldom scented—in which case, of course, you were merely wasting your time, or acting a lie, when you sniffed at a White rose.

It seems, indeed, almost certain that Red must have been a rare colour in early nature! There is an old superstition that Blue was lucky, Green healthy, Pink meant something unusual, but Red indicated wealth.

Pink, of course, indicated a fine day, at a period when the weather was nearly always “awful”—this meant fresh meat for the larder, and new clothes for the housewife, if she had reached the stage of wearing any.

This pleasant anticipation is still connected with Pink.

Obviously Green would be deemed healthy, for the early Caveman always felt a keen longing to get back to the open, as I have already explained. Caves were not ideal dwellings at the best of times, and with a perpetual fire of sappy twigs always burning at the entrance, and no other outlet of any sort, we can easily understand that Man considered Green a healthy colour. How he must have longed for the sweet open air!

Green was used for mourning by the Sioux—not as a sign of grief, of course, because they firmly believed that the dead were far happier than the living—it was Nature’s colour, the colour of the beautiful new leaves in spring, and to them it typified Hope and Gladness.

It is an interesting fact that actors, as a rule, dislike wearing anything Green—not because it is

unlucky in any way, but because the colour belongs to the Fairies, who might resent its use by mums and actors.

Blue represented heaven, and was probably the first colour seen by Man, apart from the dull early monotones. It has always been considered lucky, and is the one colour that a Bride is allowed to wear, according to popular superstition. "Something Blue," we are told in the old doggerel, and among the ancient Israelites, Blue was the colour of Fidelity.

It is, however, most important to remember that these early colour names hardly apply in this commercial and scientific age—the Blue of superstition, and of Primitive Man would be a Pale Blue, a sky-blue, certainly not deeper than forget-me-not colour. Any dark Blues in nature would be dumped with Black, and indeed it is almost entirely a man-made shade.

Think for a few moments and endeavour to recall anything of a dark blue colour that is not purely artificial—you will not find it among animals, rarely among birds or flowers. In the case of birds, of course, it is not a natural colour but is largely metallic in origin—it is a reflected colour and not a true one. Among the few flowers the deep blues of to-day were generally purple originally.

Blue plates were placed in Moslem tombs, in order to protect the dead from evil—it was a lucky colour, and is still the prevalent colour for pottery of all sorts in China and the Far East.

Red, I have said, stood for money, and it has always been a kingly colour. The so-called "Royal Purple" is really a beautiful deep red shade, not at all like the purple of everyday life.

Red has always been associated with passion, no doubt because it is the colour of blood—and in early days, blood-letting naturally followed when the sexual passions were roused.

We find that superstition connects wisdom, reserve, calmness, dignity, and the like qualities with Black; whereas sensuality, quarrelsomeness, obstinacy, want of self-restraint and others go with Red.

It has no real connection, of course, but it is amusing to note that the modern damsel freely indulges in Rouge, when she is out for slaughter! In early days, it signified also Courage or Hatred—which of these does the painted flapper represent?

In China, as a safeguard from evil spirits, charms of various kinds are tied with Red string, and are written on Red paper, or printed with Red ink. I have already spoken of the use of Red ribbon against the Evil Eye; similar beliefs are those of tying a Red thread to a child's cradle, or making for it a wristlet of Red silk.

Red feathers have always been popular as a decoration for the hats of women, and also red fruits such as the Cherry.

The Robin has always been highly esteemed because of his unusual, but delightfully charming, red breast feathers. It is a peculiar, and somewhat uncommon shade, as a matter of fact, as is the Primrose, which stands alone among flowers. There is a lemon shade of Hollyhock, which is, of course, man-made, but no other natural flower to match the Primrose.

Yellow flowers were supposed to keep away the Fairies, according to a Manx superstition—this was not considered wise, though not necessarily unfortunate. Those who liked the colour, as in the Sunflower, used to plant them in some angle, or corner of the garden—thus leaving the kindly Fairies plenty of room for their innocent, and beneficent, amusements.

In Egypt, the deeper yellows, really what we should call Orange, signified Death, as in the case of the gloriously tinted autumn leaves, which, by the very fact of their death, prepare the way for spring.

In Turkey, Violet was used for mourning purposes. It is important to remember that purple and violet are among the highest of the colour vibrations; no doubt many eyes could not distinguish the nicety of the colours and so they would be classed as “night” shades and treated as the Romans treated Black. These very dense colours were considered spiritual, a mystery, something verging upon the Unknown.

Many people treated it as emblematic of passion, in the sense of Suffering—or even Truth and Loyalty. For those who have keenly sensitive colour sight, the Violets and Purples are lovely shades, but to very many people they merely appear dull and lifeless —because their own eyes cannot properly see them.

This is a most important point in dealing with colour; strictly speaking, no two people see a colour just alike. I remember once, when in Leeds, seeing a woman dressed in an all-blue arrangement. Owing to faulty colour vision, she had combined no fewer than fourteen different shades of blue—all matching, as she herself thought.

So if you are fond of any particular colour, and your neighbour does not see “eye to eye” with you concerning it, always remember that it is due to the simple natural fact that she does not “visually” see it exactly as you do.

Green was looked upon as Evil in Scotland in the old days, but here again we must make allowance, for it would obviously be a somewhat conspicuous colour on their heather clad hills—and the Scots were by nature great fighters. The old feeling of Clan encouraged this, and consequently, though Green is freely used among the Tartans, it is always a dark shade. Indeed in some cases, keen eyes are needed to distinguish it from black.

But in most other countries, it was a good colour—not fortunate, perhaps, or lucky, but a comfortable colour for those who did not mind doing an honest day’s work. In the case of sensitive or highly strung people, it is very restful for brain and nerve.

Green always meant Satisfaction—not satiety! It is a blending of blue and yellow—tenderness and wisdom is by no means a bad mixture, after all. It signifies permanence, reliability, freedom from bondage and restraint, new life, a useful and active old age. It is the colour of the Nature lover and the man of peace.

Blue, as the primitive people knew it, was of the sky—a pale or medium tone. There are not many flowers of the forget-me-not tint. The phrase “In the Blues,” as representing depression, does not refer to this old-time clear blue, but to the deep purples. I have already explained that to a defective vision, as in sickness or ill-health, these dark shades appear almost black. They are of very high vibration, and consequently they are tiring shades for the eye unless one is really physically fit.

In ancient Turkey, Blue was the sign of mourning—to them, it was an emblem of peace, not of grief, or a false depreciation of ourselves, as is the case with Black.

Yellow is naturally a stimulating colour, and in olden days was considered emblematic of the Sun. For this reason, it was assumed that it would not be welcome to the Fairies, who invariably prefer dusk or dawn—the gentle half-lights.

It is a colour that stimulates mental activity, and in its Orange tones is both healthy and emotional. It does not, however, carry the taint of lust in its emotion, as with Red. In these warmer tints, it signifies jealousy or even Treason.

Red—the colour of blood—is known medically to excite; it is characteristic of life and movement; it is essentially provocative.

From the “lust” of Red, we pass to the innocent sensuousness of Pink; Orange with its healthy and wholesome feelings, to the wisdom and intelligence of Yellow; Green gives us hope, animation, versatility, and so to the truth, constancy and composure of Blue; music and ideality of Indigo, and the devotion, religion, success and renown of Purple.

Drab was always an occult colour; no doubt our early wizards realised, as our modern military men do, that drab or khaki is an excellent colour for making people “invisible” even at a short distance.

The old idea of the human “aura” was that each individual threw off a coloured emanation, peculiar to himself, and by this “aura” you could know a man, if you had, or could employ, eyes that could see. It was supposed to extend some two feet from the body, and possibly modern dress may have arrested the development of it. The human body was originally clothed with fine hair, but this has practically disappeared under the stress of modern conditions. So perhaps our “aura” may be disappearing—with our useless appendix.

CHAPTER VII WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND CLOTHES

IT is certainly somewhat surprising that there are not more superstitions concerning Humanity itself. There are plenty, of course, that apply to the three great mysteries that we have to face—birth, marriage, and death, but it will be simpler to deal with these under separate headings, thus keeping them together.

From among other superstitions, the most interesting are those that relate to our clothes!

In a few cases, these are contradictory—for instance, it is said to be unlucky to make a present of a pair of new shoes; while on the other hand, we are assured that such a gift prolongs the giver's life. It may be claimed, of course, that this would be a selfish gift, made so as to benefit ourselves, not the person who receives the shoes.

It is possible that this is the reason, but from very early times, a shoe was recognised as a confirmation of a bargain—in the East, it was usual to remove a shoe on such occasions. It might, therefore, be held that the gift of new shoes was a quiet hint that you intended to ask a favour in return, and were anxious to ratify the bargain in advance. The young wife's kiss has been utilised in that way by most of our humorous artists.

Again, the shoe was looked upon as symbolical of the womb, and such a gift might be treated as an insult in consequence.

Another superstition ran that it was wise to give a pair of new shoes to a poor person once in your life, otherwise your spirit would certainly go barefoot after death. This also may have influenced the persistent superstition that this gift of shoes was unlucky, because it might be held that you looked upon your friend as "a poor person," by whom you might profit in the life to come.

Another interesting superstition was that it was unlucky to walk in one shoe! No doubt this would date from the days of sudden danger—try it, some day, and you will soon realise that it is by no means easy to travel quickly in this fashion.

I remember straining my ankle slightly on one occasion, and a nasty pain in the hip developed. The doctor laughed, and said that it was nothing—owing to the strain, I had been walking unevenly and this had taxed certain muscles seldom used. In just the same way, we are forced to walk unevenly if we are wearing only one shoe.

It is considered lucky for a Bride to marry in old shoes, and this is specially alluded to in the well-known doggerel—"Something old, something new." But on no account should a Bride give away her wedding slippers! What will happen to her, I cannot say, because the old superstition goes no further, but obviously it would be something painful—like Gilbert's boiling oil bath.

There is another curious point that I may as well raise here, while discussing shoes, although it has nothing to do with them—at least in any direct way. We are told that the Bride should put on her garters last; but may a mere man ask what she is to do about her shoes?

We are also assured that if your Stocking comes down, someone you love is thinking about you. But superstition does not explain which is cause and which is effect. Does the keen thought bring down your stocking, or does the fall of the stocking cause the thinking? Also what would happen—, or what has already happened—if any other intimate garment made an untimely public appearance?

What a pity it is that superstition nearly always stops short at such interesting points!

But if, when you are pulling on your stockings, your toes accidentally go into the heel, then you may certainly expect a letter.

It is considered unlucky to “cross-button or hook any article of dress—that is, fasten the button or hook into the wrong receptacle. We are also told that if a girl’s petticoats are longer than her skirts, then her father loves her more than her mother does! This is probably due to the obvious commonplace that if a mother was really fond of her daughter, she would certainly see that the girl was properly turned out.

There is a widespread superstition that if a woman, when she retires to rest on Midsummer Eve, fastens the garter from her left leg round the stocking she removes from the right leg, then she will dream of her future husband. Quite possibly, of course, she may have the fortunate man in her thoughts at the time—if so, the charm is quite likely to work.

There is an old Jewish superstition that although you put on the right stocking first, you should begin with the left shoe, so that a right-hand article can be put on last of all. There is a somewhat similar superstition to the effect that it is unlucky to finish off one leg completely, before you begin the other. There is, of course, a clear distinction, but the main idea is the same, that you should finish on the right.

If you put on your stockings wrong way out, it is considered very fortunate; but of course it must be by accident—or Fate!—as you cannot artificially arrange luck to suit yourself. Of course, you must always start with the right stocking, as already indicated. It is not necessary that both stockings should be reversed.

Another similar superstition is that if you have a bad morning, you should return home and put on your underclothing wrong way out! It is important to notice that this is not the same as arranging your luck beforehand—in this, and in several similar cases, it is done to change your luck, not to force it. You may, for instance, merely change it from bad to normal—it by no means follows that such a change of garments will bring good fortune—it merely stops the bad luck!

An important point to be remembered is that you should never mend a garment while wearing it—this brings great misfortune! It certainly suggests slovenly workmanship; and of course the possibility of pricking yourself and thus drawing blood. I remember seeing such a case when the few drops of drawn blood ruined a delicate blouse. So be careful!

Women may be interested to know that if you can get hold of a Bride’s garter, and wear it, you will yourself soon be married.

Another philosophical superstition runs that dirt will not come out of clothes in the dark! I fancy there is much sound commonsense in this.

I have already pointed out the superstition that luck will go with you if you put a piece of Iron in your pocket. In some countries the belief is rather more open than this—you should never put on any new garment empty; that is, without something in one of the pockets.

It is also believed that the clothes of the dead do not wear long—in other words, that they wear out very quickly. In all probability this is due to the fact that you are forced to wear them, and therefore take less care of them than if you were wearing new clothes. Very few people, I imagine, would wear such garments from choice—it is generally a case of necessity, of economy due to the extra

expenses of the moment.

As might be expected, all these superstitions concerning our clothes cluster round our womenfolk—except, no doubt, with regard to the empty pockets. I may be excused, perhaps, for pointing out that the interesting custom of presenting a pair of white gloves to the judge at a Maiden Assize—that is, where there are only civil and no criminal cases on the list—dates from Saxon days. Judges, by law, are—or were—not allowed to wear gloves at all. This was a privilege claimed by the King, and it was feared that the judges would get “swollen heads” if, while representing the King’s Majesty, they were allowed to ape all his privileges. So, although they represent the King, they are not allowed to wear gloves.

Turning now to ornaments, also a woman’s peculiar subject, the following superstitions should be noted. Amber is always considered lucky—possibly because it is so often washed up on the beach, and was, therefore, in early days a possibility for the woman of the people, as opposed to the aristocracy.

The Cat’s Eye is claimed to be a great luck bringer in India—it is a very peculiar stone, of course, and its unusual appearance would no doubt puzzle the ancients, who would not know what to make of it. So it was prudent to be civil to it!

Coral, as already pointed out, was principally used as a charm against the Evil Eye. Nowadays we are all familiar with coral in lumps, often closely resembling a sponge—as scientifically, it does—but these specimens are due to divers. Originally the only coral known was in the shape of small pieces thrown up on the beach—broken off from the mass owing to some fight, or other struggle, under the water.

These pieces were generally of pink coral, and resembled small twigs—a few inches long and about the bulk of an ordinary lead pencil.

Jade was lucky—it was the only green ornament known, except the Emerald, and has always been most highly prized in the East, particularly in China.

The Opal is another gem of curious character, as weird and peculiar as the Cat’s Eye but far more beautiful, owing to its varied flashes of colour. At one time, it was considered a most lucky gem, and apart from other qualities, it was supposed to indicate the owner’s state of health, much as is the case with the pearl. It was considered to consist of all the other gems

But the Pearl is of animal origin, so it is not at all unlikely that the health of the wearer might affect it especially as it is generally worn on the exposed flesh. Not so with the Opal, which is found in shallow mines in rocky districts, much as coal is found, and is dug out “in lumps.”

However, when the Opal drifted to the West, it became associated with misfortune—this change was probably due to the fact that it is very brittle and must be treated gently. This of course would be well known in the East, but might lead to the casual destruction of many fine gems in strange hands.

The Ruby is another gem that is supposed to vary in colour according to the health of the wearer—this must be an impossibility because the depth of colour depends entirely upon the amount of mineral deposit contained in the crystal. As this was imprisoned by Nature at a heat that Man cannot imitate as yet, it is hardly likely that the varying temperature of a woman’s blood could in any way affect it.

The Topaz is considered a good stone, and signifies both money and friends—it is a comparatively

cheap gem and is generally of a good size. The beautiful Turquoise, as would be appropriate for its heavenly colour, is supposed to heal quarrels!

The wonderful Pearl is the only animal-made gem, and is generally considered emblematic of Tears. It is not as a rule used for engagement rings, though it is very popular in “ropes” for the throat. But the Eastern mind has now realised that what the shell-fish does to suit himself, he can be made to do to please man, so before long the market will be flooded with real pearls, made to order, so to speak. Then their value as gems will be gone!

The Diamond, of course, is the most popular of all—it is also the hardest and the coldest! To the Eastern mind, the wonderful sparkling colours that spring to life as the gem is moved, represent imprisoned glories. From the most remote periods, it has symbolised conjugal affection—Courage in the man, Pride in the woman.

Regarding women themselves, we are told that if a dog runs between a woman’s legs, it is a sign that her husband—or father—is going to whip her. In all probability it shows that the man is in a bad temper, and that the wise dog is in a desperate hurry to get out of the way. Still, there it is!

We are also told that it is a good sign if you meet the same person twice while you are out on business, but it must be both while going and returning.

There is also that delightful, but misunderstood, superstition about tying a knot in your handkerchief. This is really intended as a charm against evil—any sprite who may be watching your steps is certain to be intrigued by that unexpected and unexplainable knot, and he—or she—will be so busy over this little matter that you will go your way in peace.

Nowadays it is only used as a jog to one’s memory!

It is also recognised as a sign of bad luck all day if you stumble before breakfast.

There are a few well-known superstitions connected with knives and pins—sharp instruments that might easily cause wounds, and thus land the donor into trouble. If a knife is lent to you, be very careful to return it in the same way as offered—if your friend holds the blade and offers you the handle, as he should, you must return it in the same fashion.

You should always pick up a pin, if you see one lying on the ground! This is another delightful bit of Eastern philosophy—it is better that you should bend your back for something useful rather than for nothing. It is a reversal of the Boy Scout idea of one good deed a day—in the East it is assumed that you cannot reasonably expect to get through the day without bending your back to some trouble or other, so they arrange matters as easily as they can for themselves!

It is, of course, quite wrong to give a pin to anybody—it is your obvious duty to place it casually on the table; then if your friend happens by chance to pick it up and use it—well, no harm is done! Otherwise it would lead to a quarrel and the loss of your friend.

A knife or a pair of scissors should never be given as a present—they must always be sold. In the same way, you should never give an empty purse to a friend, or they will never be blessed with money as long as they use it.

I have dealt fully with the vexed question of cracking a mirror, but I may mention that in Sweden it is considered very unlucky to look in a mirror by candle-light! One can easily realise that an accident might befall in olden days, with an unguarded candle. The holder would naturally be more con-

cerned with the pleasing reflection in the glass than with other matters, and a slanting candle might lead to the setting on fire of one's clothes.

The reflected soul is the cause of the trouble with the cracked mirror, and no doubt the same idea lies behind the old superstition that bids us cover up the mirror in a room containing the Dead. It is done so that the soul may have an easier flight to the Hereafter, and not be detained on earth within the mirror.

There was a curious superstition in existence to the effect that Venetian glass cracked when poison was poured into it! This delightful bit of imagination was no doubt spread by the retainers of those noble families who were in the habit of poisoning their neighbours. It was such an easy way of proving that the death must have been caused by natural processes.

It is stated that it is unlucky to see a stranger undress—presumably the dread, here, is that one might be accused of stealing his money or valuables if anything untoward happened.

In the Torres Straits, blood is given to boys to drink, “to make him no afraid!” This suggests the “blooding” of the novice by Fox-hunters.

Turning to the question of our features—always a most fascinating subject—we are told that “meeting eyebrows never know trouble.” This refers to brows that join across the top of the nose—the root of the nose, in reality. It is, however, generally accepted as accurate, and not as a discredited theory, that when the eyebrows meet, after turning downwards to the nose, that the person in question is not truthful. It is probable that the superstition refers to this, for a liar is seldom in trouble, being able, as a rule, to struggle out of many minor difficulties far more easily than would a truthful person.

We are also warned that a kiss on the nose causes trouble, and that an “upside-down” kiss is unlucky. This “upside-down” kiss sounds curious, but I presume it would be made by someone leaning over our shoulder. At a time when a stab in the back was quite common among so-called friends, it might easily be dangerous to allow anyone to approach so close to us while we were off our guard.

There is a widespread old saying that you should not let children kiss each other before they can speak—it turns, presumably, upon a possible premature development of the affections in advance of the intellect.

If baby cries long, he will live long—at any rate, he will probably develop good lungs, which goes a long way towards ensuring old age.

By the by, the “Bogie” with which our childhood used to be cursed is a word derived from the Slavonic “Bog”—the name of the Supreme Being! Children may be interested to learn that toothache can be cured by wearing round the neck a tooth taken from a corpse. I should prefer a visit to the dentist!

Another medical tip is that water should be taken from a stream running due East, if used for an Eye-wash, and that it is most effective if secured when the sun's rays first fall upon it.

Still continuing to deal with the “happy home,” you should know that it is unlucky to “violate the Table.” This must originally have had reference to the presence of a stranger in the home, for hospitality was a thing that was never abused. I recall that vivid story of the thief who, in the dark, picked up something and put it to his lips to find out what it was. It proved to be a lump of salt! As the man had “tasted” it, he at once left the house, empty-handed. This is, of course, an Eastern story—our

native thieves are not so courteous.

From this superstition, we get two variations—that it is unlucky to put a pair of shoes on the table, and also to sit on the table, unless one foot is touching the ground!

Of course the feet are considered “inferior” in the East, hence the bad luck that follows the violation of the hospitality of the table by placing shoes upon it.

Women are also warned that it is lucky to make the Bed at bed-time! Obviously this ensures a full ventilation, and presumably a more restful night. But remember that it is unlucky to “sleep across the boards”—this means that the bed should be placed lengthwise with the floor-boardings.

An old doggerel tells us that you should sleep with your head to the North for short days (i.e., life); to the South for longevity ; to the East for riches; and to the West for travel. Apparently, one cannot sleep oneself poor, which is a great consolation.

Many modern doctors, however, hold that the head should certainly be to the North for sound sleep—this appears to be a contradiction, but I suggest that the old doggerel has been misunderstood. The original wording is “cause one’s days to be shortened.” This might easily mean by sound and long sleep, the taunt being against laziness, and not affecting life at all.

There is an old superstition that we can revive the fire by placing the poker across the top bar, in the form of the Cross. In reality this quickens the draught!

A sudden spurt in the fire shows that a stranger is coming—this would easily be caused by the opening of a door!

It is unlucky if knives are crossed at table—but they must not be touched by the person who has crossed them; some one else must do it.

There are a few superstitions concerning food—for instance, you should always eat fish towards the head. When you have eaten an egg, you should break the shell—this is generally done by driving the spoon through the bottom end.

The old belief was that witches could use the unbroken shells as boats, and thus cross running water—always a difficulty with the spirits of evil!

When you cut bread unevenly, it shows that you have been telling lies—presumably it is a sign of some unexplained emotion. By the by, Boun (the modern Bun) was the Dame of a consecrated bread, of great antiquity, purchased at the entrance to the Temples.

If a loaf of Bread parts in the hands of an unmarried woman, it shows that there will soon be a quarrel in the family. Obviously it would be caused by a hasty or irritable movement.

Two people should not stir a pot! This clearly dates from the days of frequent poisonings, but nowadays it does not apply to Christmas puddings, for in that case it is considered imperative that every member of the family should assist in the stirring. My good mother invariably insisted on this, and always arranged her day in accordance with the family doings.

The act of eating has always been a sign of faithful dealing between host and guest, but in some districts it is considered so sacred that the marriage feast is the only time when the man and the woman eat together. The idea is that you thus acquire a living connection with your host, something

after the style of a blood-brotherhood.

Coloured Eggs were usual at the time of the Solar New Year, about the end of March, of course. But, as already explained, the Church took over many existing pagan customs and merely adapted them to their own use. In this case, the Christian Eggs were coloured Red, in memory of the blood of Christ, but the love for the many coloured eggs was too strong to be kept down.

It is considered unlucky to pour additional water into a glass that already holds some. Truly the women of old gave themselves a vast deal of unnecessary trouble! This seems curious, as they already had enough in so many other ways. I have mentioned the use of a naked woman to draw the plough and secure a good harvest. Another little job that was entrusted to them was while the men were absent at war.

“An old historian of Madagascar (1685) informs us that while the men are out at the wars, the women and girls cease not day and night to dance. They believe that by dancing they impart strength, courage and good fortune to their husbands and brothers.” (Burne’s Handbook of Folklore.)

Our women and girls did much the same thing of recent years! It is wonderful the grip these old superstitions have and how unexpectedly they crop up.

I will round off this chapter by quoting that Carpzon, a witch hunter of the seventeenth century, boasted that he had sentenced (query, carried out the sentence upon) fifteen thousand women to be burnt to death!

CHAPTER VIII MARRIAGE

IN primitive days, Mankind was divided into tribes rather than Nationalities—a custom still seen in the Scottish clans and the North American Indians. It was always held advisable to marry outside your own tribe; to remain content with a daughter of your own people suggested cowardice—the greatest vice and failing known in those days.

It is, of course, impossible to say when the ancients first discovered the danger of inbreeding, or the marriage of close relations. It must have been by observation based upon their stock, after horses and cattle had been domesticated. The introduction of “new blood” would make such a marked difference that Man could not fail to be struck by the fact. This knowledge was undoubtedly at the back of the custom of going outside for a bride—and that meant carrying off the woman by force.

Naturally this often proved a failure—the woman might not be so very desirable, after all, for there was little time for choice. In consequence, a system of barter was established—a case of wealth versus strength which has persisted almost to the present day. In fact, it is still far too frequent and is not discouraged by public opinion—the girl who “makes a good marriage”—that is, who sells herself for the highest price obtainable—is generally envied by her companions and associates.

The honeymoon custom clearly suggests hiding the stolen woman—she was kept vigorously secluded for a time, and after that, she would generally settle down contentedly to her fate.

Naturally, such early marriages went through without any real ceremony, but with the introduction of barter or purchase, this was altered, and much superstition came to be built around the marriage rites.

Among the Babylonians, a thread was taken from the clothes of both bride and bridegroom; these were tied together—hence our modern reference to “tying the knot.” It really is wonderful how tightly these old customs have fixed themselves into our lives!

It has always been held unlucky for two sisters to marry two brothers, and popular superstition tells us that there is only a certain quantity of luck to be had, and that both couples cannot have it. One of the two marriages is expected to prove unfortunate. As a matter of fact, in primitive times a man was expected to take over a dead brother’s widow, and it has always been held to be bad for the children for a woman to have marital relations with two brothers. Many bitter tears have been shed over the “Deceased Wife’s Sister” question, principally because women have failed to recognise—or to admit—that there is a vast and essential natural difference between the child-begetter, and the childbearer.

The mere fact that a man marries two sisters cannot in any conceivable way affect the children ; but the reverse is not a pleasant custom and should be discouraged, as it was by the ancients.

There is an old superstition that it is unlucky to be married on your birthday! I fail to find any reason for this. It is, however, a very good omen when the birth dates of husband and wife fall on the same day of the same month, but not on the same day of the week—in other words, they should not be exactly the same age. A further superstition tells us that if the birthday months are far apart, it is unfortunate—this, of course, is based upon astrology, and is due to the fact that the temperaments would probably clash badly, thus causing constant quarrelling.

It was also held lucky if the wedding party consisted of an even number of people, in spite of the fact that odd numbers are generally the lucky ones. It might be assumed that the presence of the

minister would render the total number an odd one, and there is much in this idea. But it was more probably due to a desire for the presence of an equal number of friends or supporters from both sides—if one party predominated, there might be trouble!

Friday, as already explained, was always considered a good day for love affairs, and was at one time a very usual one for ceremonies.

As for the wedding day itself, the most persistent superstition tells us that “Happy is the Bride whom the Sun shines on.” No doubt a fine day does improve our spirits, but the real reason for this belief lies in the fact that all early marriage ceremonies took place in the open air—generally at the Church door, and not inside the building.

The old and much beloved superstition is a case of reversal—it must have been unfortunate for the bride if it rained, therefore, by reversal, it was considered lucky if the Sun shone on her. It was, I believe, in the reign of Edward VI. that the custom was altered, and the rites performed under cover.

This explains the persistent superstition that it is unlucky if there is an open grave in the Churchyard—the open air marriage would actually be taking place in the same enclosed space, which would be repulsive. To-day, though the bridal ceremony takes place elsewhere—that is, within the building—it is usual to place planks over any open grave in the adjoining yard.

It was also held a bad omen for the bridal couple to enter the Church by one door, and go out by another. Here again we see the clashing ceremonies, for that is the custom at a burial service, where the coffin is taken out by a different door.

Snow on the wedding day is considered unlucky in the West of England, but in most districts it is looked upon as a good sign. We must remember, however, that in such a district as Dartmoor, snow can be a ghastly danger to life.

Another amusing belief runs that it is unlucky if the bridal party, on the way to Church, should meet a Priest, a Policeman, a Doctor, a Lawyer, or any one who is blind! What a curious mixture! A rival priest might have caused trouble in the days of bitter religious faction, when they thought nothing of burning men and women alive, in public, because of a difference of opinion about some minor observance! But the others appear to be modern additions to what might at one time have been a very real danger.

There is a very strong objection to May marriages, yet surely it is one of the brightest months of the year, and full of the promise of spring. But among the Romans it was considered sacred to the old, and therefore was always avoided by young lovers. Nowadays we do nothing special for our parents during this month, but the old avoidance remains a vital factor in our social life.

The custom of throwing rice on the bridal couple is a time-honoured institution, though paper confetti is now used instead—a great improvement from every point of view. Many a bride must have been rendered uncomfortable by rice getting down her clothes!

In the primitive days of Symbolism, the slipper was looked upon as equivalent to the womb—hence its use at weddings. The rice also was a sex symbol, and completed the pious hope in the happy possibilities of the union.

But rice was not always used, though something else was invariably substituted—there have always been the two different things thrown after the young couple.

In Eastern countries, the Rice crop invariably meant life or death to the people of the district; it was to them the only possible symbol of fecundity. In some parts of India, the bridegroom stands, on the day of the wedding, in a basket made of bamboo, by the side of the bride, who stands in another. He then takes up a basket of rice and pours it over her head. This forms the wedding ceremony. The costume worn by the bride is probably a very scanty one.

In the days of Henry VIII.—that confirmed widower, as he has been described—corn was used instead of rice. In fact, in many districts, ears of corn were worn by the bride, and these are supposed to have been replaced by the wedding cake. Originally this cake was something very like our modern “shortbread,” and was broken into pieces on the bride’s head! Here again we have a most remarkable survival—the Indian bride over whose head a basket of rice is poured, and the Western bride upon whose head the early wedding “cake” is broken. In Persia, raisins were thrown, while in Russia it was hops.

The throwing of the Shoe is not confined to weddings by any means, though the symbolism is different. In the East it formed part of the usual transfer of any property, and Jews used to confirm any sale or exchange by the removal and gift of a shoe or sandal. The custom reached the Jews through the Egyptians—the priests and worshippers in many places have had to remove their shoes or sandals before entering any holy place, thus the act itself gradually gained a religious character, much like affixing a seal to a document to-day.

There is also the old custom of fixing an odd shoe to the door at childbirth, and the superstition that if a dog comes to you with an old shoe in his mouth that it means luck.

In other days, the throwing down of a shoe or a gauntlet indicated a claim to ownership. Again shoes were thrown after Queen Victoria when she first entered Balmoral in 1855. In many sea-coast towns, a shoe is thrown after the boats—to ensure a good catch of fish.

In Germany one of the bride’s shoes is thrown among the guests—also as an emblem of good fortune, much as her garter is prized by women.

In all these cases, the shoe should be thrown so as not to hit any one—which upsets the luck! Even to-day, the shoe is thrown at the bridal carriage, not at the young couple themselves.

Unfortunately in some districts, the father gives one of the bride’s shoes to the new son-in-law—who promptly spansks her with it, presumably to show the change of ownership!

It is usually assumed that the presence of the Best-man and the Bridesmaids is a relic of the days of capture—they are supposed to represent the friends of the two parties, endeavouring to prevent the possible abduction of the unfortunate woman. This is very doubtful. Under Roman law, ten witnesses were necessary to a marriage—nowadays it is only two, but the extra crowd still turn up and make themselves as useful and as ornamental as they can.

Superstition wisely ignores the Bridegroom altogether—he is merely a scarecrow to keep others away from the central figure in the drama. It is true that we are warned that a man never wives and thrives in the same year, but this is a business maxim, pure and simple. We are also told that the poor man must not attempt to see the bride on the bridal morning, until the ceremony begins.

I cannot say what would happen to him—or to her—as superstition stops at this point. But obviously this belief applies equally to the Bride, so for all intents and purposes the bridegroom can safely be ignored—at least on the wedding day itself. He is not allowed to pay the fees—the best-man sees to that.

We are told that if the younger sister marries before the elder, the latter must dance barefoot at the wedding. This recalls that delightful story of Cinderella, which certainly seems to have been written in support of it—the elder sisters are quite unable, whatever their efforts, to secure the necessary shoe for Cinderella's wedding.

The Bride, however, should be very careful not to look at herself in the mirror after she is fully dressed! This superstition clearly embodies the old belief that part of oneself goes into the reflection, and it would be a very bad start for their life together if the bride failed to give the whole of herself to her future husband. However, she can evade this—so we are told—if she leaves off one shoe or one glove. In that way, she would complete her toilette afterwards, and thus avert any misfortune.

It is considered lucky if the household Cat sneezes on the eve of the wedding—that is, a few hours before the ceremony.

In some of the Northern parts of the Continent, it is usual for brides, on the way to the Church, to carry bread, which they break and scatter. Humans are not supposed to touch these crumbs, but if any birds come and pick it up, it is a good sign for the woman's future happiness. Here again we have a touch of philosophy—it is intended to show her tender heart and compassion. Yet in reality it is a sham and a lie, because it is done to order, and not upon impulse.

In Japan, her room is not swept for a few days after the departure of a bride, lest her luck be swept out also. This may possibly be done in order to assure her that her old home is still open to her in case of unhappiness. Neither bride nor groom ever wear any purple, lest the marriage be soon dissolved. It is a colour that quickly fades in the East!

Most people know the old doggerel about the bride's clothes: she should wear

“Something old, something new,
Something borrowed, something blue.”

There are doubts about the third of these, for it varies in different parts of the world. The “something old” should either be her slippers or another bride's garter, or handkerchief. The “something blue” is the only exception allowed to the age old rule that a bride must wear no colour—it must of course be heaven's own blue, no other shade.

But the “something borrowed” is sometimes varied to “something golden,” or even “something stolen,” and is obviously the weak spot in the doggerel. Probably the other three reach us from very ancient days, while the doubtful third item is a recent addition in order to balance the “poem.”

It is interesting to note that—until recent years—the Bulgarian women only washed their whole person once in their lives—the evening before marriage. The two bridesmaids were expected to look on; they also were naked, but they were not allowed to bathe.

The bridal veil dates from the days of Sex worship, and is supposed to screen the bride from the view of any strangers.

It is generally considered unlucky to wear satin for a bridal gown—I can trace no reason for this, nor do I see anything against it but a natural dislike for “swank.” Silk is now used, but has probably become popular because it is softer, and therefore drapes better.

After the ceremony, the Sussex bride is robbed of all her pins by any single women present, but not

by the bridesmaids—superstition does not tell us what happens to the bride's clothes afterwards. Presumably this daring theft should take place while she is changing before her departure. The word "Honeymoon" refers to the feasting after a marriage, and not strictly to the young couple at all—it was general to use a fermented liquor made from honey, until the next new moon after the marriage ceremony. So by their absence, the happy couple really have nothing to do with the honeymoon, although in olden days they would have remained in the husband's home and would have been the central figures in this prolonged rejoicing.

The bridal orange-blossom is comparatively modern, and, I am afraid, is another instance of swank. It came from abroad, and was popular because it showed that "no expense" was being spared for the momentous occasion.

Originally myrtle was used, just as the laurel wreath was general for crowning any person high in popular esteem. In Europe generally, Rosemary was long a popular bridal wreath; Hawthorn with the Greeks, Hazel with the Romans—the Orange-blossom was used by the Saracens.

In early days, brides wore fetters on wrists and ankles, after they had been "sold" to their future owners—hence the popularity of bracelets, for it was considered a slur if a woman could not find favour in the sight of some man. Our humorists still ridicule the old maid!

It is still popularly held that no one but the husband should remove the wedding-ring, which of course was only natural under the circumstances. We give this belief a more romantic explanation, but the superstition dates from the days when the Bride's ornaments were a sign and a proof that she belonged to the husband.

The wedding-ring appears to have been part of the earliest civilisations known to us, but I have dealt to some extent with the ring when discussing horseshoe nails—once used in place of the simple gold circlet.

It is an old superstition that it is lucky to sprinkle salt on the floor of a bride's room; and when she retires to rest, she should place her stockings on her bed—in the form of a Cross!

Midsummer's Eve was always smothered with superstition for those in love! There were many ways of consulting the Fates.

You could arrange your shoes like a T for True Love—and then comfortably go to bed and dream of your future lord and master.

Another plan was to write the letters of the alphabet on bits of paper; then you put these in a basin of water face downwards, overnight. It was during the dark hours that the Fates worked, so in the morning, you would find that one or more of the slips would be face upwards!

This method suggests some delicate juggling on the part of the young damsel concerned—for, of course, none of these practices were ever followed by mere Man, who has always been thankful to accept what the good gods sent!

CHAPTER IX BIRTH AND DEATH

ALL things considered, there are not a very great many superstitions concerning either birth or death; though these two great mysteries must have stirred profoundly the minds of Primitive Man. Even to-day we know absolutely nothing about either of these happenings! Probably early Man was far too frightened—at any rate over that strange cessation of life that we know as Death.

It has, however, generally been believed that children born at three, six, nine, or twelve o'clock could see much that was hidden from others. This seems to me to be quite a probable belief, for I myself was born at six o'clock in the morning! Moreover I was a May child, and it was always held that such youngsters were not strong. This was due, as with May weddings, to the dedication of the month to aged people.

However, in my own case it was certainly true, for, till well out of my teens, I was hardly ever out of the hands of the doctor.

Another popular belief is that you will be born, or will die, hard, except at the ebb-tide. In some districts, however, the superstition runs that you cannot be born easily except at high-tide, nor die peacefully except as the tide goes out.

Mothers are warned that they should pull on the baby's clothes over its feet, or it will not grow up healthy. This dates from the belief that the feet are inferior to the head, and must be covered first.

When you visit a new-born boy baby, you should kiss it—this means good luck for you, not for the baby. Apparently the girl baby can be left to look after herself, as far as kisses are concerned.

Also remember that baby should walk before he—or she—or it—talks, but of course it should cry at baptism.

A child born with teeth is said to be selfish! On the contrary, if it is born with the hand open, it will certainly prove generous. It is also claimed that if a child first clasps anything with the left hand, it will not be fortunate in life. I imagine that this is figurative—its grasp upon things that matter will not be so firm.

Another curious superstition is to the effect that a child's right hand should not be washed for a month after birth!

We are also told that it injures the child's growth if it is allowed to sleep upon bones—this is probably quite correct, as in the case of the lap or the arm, where there would always be grave danger to the soft spine from the essential hollow spaces.

It is, of course, unlucky to weigh a newborn baby—it is a gift from the gods, and it is most ungrateful to criticise a gift!

A boy should favour his mother—a girl her father. There are, no doubt, sound physiological reasons for this old superstition.

After birth, the child's first journey must be upwards, or it will never do any good in the world! Naturally if the youngster is born on the top floor, this little difficulty is got over by the nurse or mother standing on a chair, with baby in her arms, before venturing downstairs.

Many of these fateful old superstitions are very obliging in this way!

A child should not be named after a dead brother or sister—it must surely be obvious that the high gods do not approve, so why worry them a second time!

“No moon, no man!” So goes the old belief, and it is bad for the baby who is born at or near the new moon, for he will never do any good in the world.

A boy and a girl baby should never be christened at the same time—they will be deadly rivals for the favours of the spirit world. This superstition resembles in character the one concerning the marriage of two couples at the same time—both cannot be happy.

Finally a mother should not give away all her baby’s clothes—or she will soon need them again for another child. I do not know if this charm works backwards—superstitions are very obliging, but they never allow you to arrange your own luck, though in certain cases you can control, or stop, bad fortune. Still, if any one is anxious for another child, they might do worse than try.

* * * * *

For some unexplainable reason, any unusual action of certain living creatures is supposed to foretell death—or at any rate disaster. There was often a perfectly natural cause for this—for instance, the presence of a wild beast would disturb many small animals or birds long before Man became aware of its approach. Then again, many animals appear to be conscious of earth tremors far in advance of anything that can affect Humanity.

On the evening of the first German air-raid over London, my pet Cat showed early signs of fear and nothing that I could do would comfort him. Some twenty minutes later, the first bomb was dropped! It seems to me obvious that, in some way, hardly by hearing, he felt the vibration of the coming machine. During the raid, he was perfectly normal, and watched peacefully from his perch on my shoulder, out in the open street. It was in advance that he was terrified.

Many of these Nature warnings, however, appear quite trivial to us to-day, but thousands of years ago, it was a very different matter.

A bird tapping at the window—a robin coming into the house—a cock crowing after midday—these simple happenings hardly seem to justify their ancient interpretation as signs of a coming death.

Then we are told that if a folded cloth is opened out and the creases show a diamond, that again indicates death.

If fruit trees blossom out of season it clearly shows some atmospheric change, or some very unusual weather—yet why death?

Another old superstition runs that if there is a death locally during the twelve days following Christmas, there will be twelve deaths in all! A curious case at Hilton parish is quoted as a proof of this—but surely one solitary case in all the centuries is hardly sufficient for modern reasoning.

There is also a persistent, and well spread belief that if you shiver for any non-apparent cause, somebody is walking over your future grave.

Probably the most persistent of all such superstitions concerns the howling of a dog at night. It was, of course, firmly believed that the dog and the horse—and no doubt many other animals—could

“smell” the presence of death.

No doubt this first arose in the days when wolves and other wild beasts roamed freely about, when the howling of the semi-domesticated dog would naturally give warning of the near approach of some of his own remote kin, not so well disposed towards Man. In such cases, there can be no doubt but that death did frequently follow the howling by night.

But the curious thing is that there are many authenticated cases on record where dogs and cats have shown in advance keen signs of distress several hours before Death put in an appearance. There may, of course, be some subtle chemical change in the tissues which they can scent, and this seems the only possible explanation of a most curious phenomenon.

Birds of prey will not attack a sleeping individual, but they will swoop down upon a corpse, coming from long distances as soon as life is extinct. This can only be due to scent.

There is an old negro superstition that if a sick person calls for any one who is dead, then Death is very near. This appears to have a sound physiological foundation, for we know that in feeble old age, recent memories appear to be wiped out, and the mind reverts to early scenes once more.

A similar, but more general superstition runs that the last individual whose name a dying person calls will be the next to die. There is no foundation for this, as it would probably be some dear one; in fact, it looks like a perversion of the negro superstition just quoted.

In Denmark, it is held that a corpse must not be buried in the clothes of a living person.

Among the poor, a neighbour is expected to touch the corpse, in order to show that there is no ill will. At one time, it was believed that no murderer dare touch the corpse of his victim—but that belief would hardly stand to-day. Another superstition runs that you should kiss the face of the Dead, in order to avert any further misfortune.

An old superstition tells us that a death will be easier if the doors and windows are open—no doubt, this would make the feeble breathing easier, and therefore more peaceful.

If a dead body remains limp, another death will soon follow!

Never run at a funeral, nor throw a Rose into the grave. But it ensures good luck if you give something to eat to those who come to a funeral—obviously this means that you should be courteous enough to acknowledge the honour they do to the Dead.

It has always been considered a bad sign if a grave turfs itself—that is, if the grass is allowed to grow upon an untended grave. Obviously it shows a lack of affection. In the same way, it is unfortunate if the headstone is erected too soon—it is a case of get it over as quickly as possible!

The Australian aboriginals plaster themselves over with white clay, to prevent Death from seeing them—this suggests a very possible origin for the wearing of mourning clothes: an attempt to trick Death. Some primitive people painted themselves black for the same reason—that it would make them invisible to the evil spirits around at the time of Death.

It has also been suggested that mourning shows a fear of pollution—some primitive people going so far as to discard clothing altogether at these times. It is certain that the custom is a very old one, but there is no clear indication as to the original idea involved in this change of clothing, except as an attempt at disguise.

But as Primitive Man knew little of illness, and far less of pollution, it seems probable that it really was an attempt at disguise, so that the evil spirits should not recognise them as belonging to the afflicted family !

CHAPTER X FISHERFOLK, CARD-PLAYERS, ACTORS AND MUSICIANS

IT is notorious that sailors, all over the world, are extremely superstitious—but this appears to be a nameless dread of anything out of the usual. Until the discovery of wireless telegraphy, those who went down to the sea in ships were, practically, isolated from the rest of Humanity between port and port.

We can easily understand that anything beyond their normal experience would disturb them. For one thing, sailors are absolutely dependent on their own company—in olden times, for weeks together. If one of their number happened to be an obstinate type, and at all self-opinionated, the others would follow his narrow lead, and in that way idly expressed opinions would soon become rooted beliefs, and would be passed on as such.

Many of these sailor superstitions are comparatively recent—a few go back to early Man; not, of course, to really primitive sources, like so many of our popular superstitions, but still far beyond history.

One of these early superstitions is the throwing of a shoe after a boat to assure good luck—as already pointed out, this really meant fecundity, and therefore, in a secondary sense, good luck.

Many sailor superstitions concern the Moon, which must have been a real blessing to these lonely mariners during the hours of darkness. All these are probably very ancient, and it is not always easy to discover any reason for them.

Sailors dread a new moon on Saturday, or a full moon on Sunday. One can explain the former, because in these early days, Friday was dedicated to love, which was supposed to increase with the increase of the moon. So a new moon falling on a Saturday would probably mean a very dissipated Friday—making the most of it—and thus be disastrous for the vessel. But I fail to see what harm could fall if the full moon came on a Sunday, which has only been a sacred day within historical times.

Another “moon” superstition was to the effect that “as many days as the moon is old at Michaelmas, so many storms of rain before Christmas.” Sailors may be able to say if there is any truth in this belief—it would not be possible to verify it in any way.

Stones with natural holes in the centre were tied to the bows of boats—these were known as Holy flints. Here we obviously get another form of the symbolism of the womb, which, through fecundity, begets luck.

Again, most fishing boats carry a bit of Iron as a mascot—I have fully gone into the sacred character of this metal.

All sailors dread a corpse, and no doubt in ancient days illness and death at sea must have been real dangers. The illness might be infectious, about they knew nothing—apart from anything else, it left the crew short-handed, and therefore in danger. We must also remember that the earliest voyages were real adventures—Man did know something about the dry land; he knew nothing about the water, except that his comrades died if they fell into it.

In the East it would be impossible to keep a dead body on board more than a few hours, but it must have been terrible work throwing their comrade overboard, with no knowledge of what would become of his Soul, or his Ego.

From this dread rose the sailor's fear that if he saved a stranger from the sea, he was raising up an enemy who would do him an ill-turn before long. For all he knew, this stranger might be some evil spirit in the body of a dead man!

But it is impossible to say why sailors dread a whistling woman! Whistling was supposed to draw a breeze, and therefore danger, but why the woman?

Perhaps it simply means that they resented feminine interference.

It is true that sailors did not like to have a woman on board, and this can easily be understood. In those primitive days, passion would be strong and easily roused, so the presence of a woman meant quarrelling and blows. No doubt this explains why they like a birth on board ship—it is merely another variation of the same idea, and apparently removes all danger of any quarrelling over the woman.

While on this vexed question of the woman, it is rather interesting to find a superstition to the effect that if you beat your wife, you will be lucky in your fishing!

Of course you must not do it on purpose—it must be a normal quarrel, not a forced one. I have already mentioned the lucky results that follow a naked woman harnessed to the plough—this other superstition appears to have a similar basis, for we are told that it is extremely fortunate if you draw blood! Obviously the woman would have to be naked, or very lightly clad indeed—possibly her night-clothes, as fishing boats often set out at night—or else a normal marital whipping would not draw blood from the body of a strapping well-built woman.

That word “strapping,” by the by, strongly suggests that healthy men and women were supposed to be those brought up on the strap.

It is considered unlucky to pull a boat out of the water stern first—probably this is a philosophical way of rebuking laziness, because a boat bows-on would be less likely to be lifted by the tide. It is also unlucky to ask a fisherman if he has had a good catch—it suggests that you doubt whether he is in favour with the gods, and therefore, by the law of reversal, that he must have done something wrong.

I have already spoken of the sailor's superstition as to the effect of the tide upon birth and death. There are, of course, many superstitions, now amounting to a regular ceremonial, at the launching of a ship of any kind. Champagne is one of the modern innovations, but it all dates to the days of a living sacrifice, offered in exchange for the favour of the high gods.

The fishing boats are regularly blessed each season, and in many districts the nets are “salted” in order to ensure good luck for the ensuing year. This certainly seems a needless waste of salt!

Another sailor custom was to fasten a wreath of flowers to the mast, which was left till their safe return to port—here, apparently, is the origin of the more modern flags.

The early superstitious ceremonials that accompanied the “Crossing of the Line” have degenerated into rough horseplay. At one time they were genuine, and included worship and living sacrifice—but originally they were not confined to the Line, nor to any other imaginary place. It was done when passing a great many places, some of these being well-known head-lands, thus showing the mariner that he was in safe waters again—other places were Temples on land, when these were visible from sea.

It is an interesting fact, proving the intense hold that these ancient superstitions have upon our daily life, that all Naval salutes are given in odd numbers—for luck! The minute gun is the only even numbered salute.

In Spain, it was considered unlucky if a sailor's wife put her broom head upwards while her husband was at sea! They also considered it unlucky to step on board ship left foot first, or to step back to shore in that careless fashion.

Wednesday is considered an unlucky day at sea—but I do not know why.

You should never point with your finger at a ship at sea—it means ill-luck for those on board. You should use the whole hand!

It is generally considered unlucky to fish every day of the week—this again is a philosophical superstition, and is intended as a rebuke for those who are selfish and greedy, or dissatisfied with what the gods are doing for them.

White stones are rejected as ballast by sailors—I presume this is a touch of the old idea that white is a sacred colour and that it would amount to rank blasphemy to use such stones for such a purpose!

Another curious colour superstition among sailors is that a black cat is lucky, but that two change the luck! Poor Puss!

Another sensible superstition of the philosophic order is the belief that it brings bad luck if you swear while fishing. What unlucky mortals we landsmen must be!

Birds coming on board a ship at sea must not be chased or taken—they are in the care of the high gods and should be left alone. You yourself will assuredly need assistance before long if you interfere with these winged little strangers.

Images have long been used to decorate the prows of vessels of all sizes—originally most of these were naked women, who are apparently luck bringers according to popular belief.

When a vessel earns a name for bad luck, it is not easy to get good men to sign on. There are many well-known and authentic cases where the name of the vessel was changed but the ill-fortune continued. Airmen nowadays are very superstitious, and it certainly is strange that so many fatal accidents should have occurred on the thirteenth of the month. Very few airmen will now ascend on that day. A really extraordinary series of such accidents occurred in March, April, May, July, August, September and October 1912—in May, two men were killed in distinct accidents. This sequence of fatalities continued in the January and February of 1913, but after that it ceased, because the men refused to run the risk. The January fatality was a double one.

There are, naturally, countless superstitions about the weather, but these are generally very technical and would lack interest. But sailors strongly believe that the weather changes at, or about, the new moon and the full moon. It has, of course, long been held that the moon influences the tides, and it is quite likely that it may affect the wind.

We will leave our Salt friends, and look at the card-players and gamblers, who are very superstitious as a rule. The worldwide belief in the luck of the novice is well known. You simply leave yourself in the hands of the gods, and you will be all right.

Many gamblers at the Continental Casinos make a rule of following the bids of newcomers.

There is a very old superstition that the hand that contains the Four of Clubs will be an unlucky one. A slight variation of this—possibly an addition to its power—is the belief that the first person to receive this fateful card will be unlucky all through the sitting.

It is also considered unlucky to play cards under your own roof—there is a subtle suggestion here that you might not play fair! Also, you should never play cards on a bare table. Obviously a polished surface would cause cards to slip about and might in that way cause unpleasantness, so the result is that we invariably use special tables for card playing— tables with a nice green cloth let in as part of the top! This avoids the nuisance of playing on a loose cloth.

How easy it appears to be to get round this momentous superstition!

It is unlucky to play cards when a dog is present, so we are told. This again suggests unfair play, and a possible resort to “brute” force.

To change your luck at cards, blow through the pack while you are shuffling! It sounds quite easy, does it not?

You can also walk round your chair or round the table, but this would not look very dignified, I am afraid, though I have often done it as a youngster! You can, if you prefer it, turn your chair half round, and then sit astride. This is a simple and natural action for a man, but what about our up-to-date women bridge-players? I doubt if it would appeal to them!

There is, however, an even simpler method—you merely sit on your handkerchief!

I will add a few warnings for careless players, and then they must trust to Chance, or purchase some infallible charm at a shop.

You should never pick up the cards with your left hand, nor must you pick them up one at a time—both actions are sure to result in bad luck.

It is also unfortunate to play across the grain of the table, but I do not know how this could be applied to the green-baize-topped card tables, which have neither nap nor visible grain. One could hardly turn the table upside down in order to see which way the grain goes—yet what else is there for one to do?

Please also note that it is most unlucky to sit cross-legged when playing cards. Unfortunately with the advent of knee-length skirts, nearly every woman has unconsciously adopted this habit—apparently she no longer knows what to do with her legs, and so, quite instinctively, proceeds to cover one up and hide it from view.

There is another superstition at the gaming tables, not known to every one, but old players will always remove their gold if some one else stakes silver on the same square.

The modern craze for bridge has introduced a multitude of erratic mascots among the women players who greatly favour Eastern images—probably made in Birmingham to meet the special demand.

Finally you should never lend money to an opponent—this is not a matter of trust, nor is it because you are thereby tempting them to play beyond their means; it is considered that you are playing

against yourself, and cannot therefore expect to prosper.

Actors also are very superstitious folk, but it is a modern profession, so the beliefs have not the foundation nor the keen interest of those ideas that date back for hundreds of thousands of years.

Most actors dislike yellow—it seems obvious that there is a sound artistic objection to this colour, for it must inevitably be affected by the glare of the footlights. Very few people outside the profession itself realise the startling difference between what an actor wears and what he appears to wear. The audience actually see a living picture, but they view it from a distance that is quite artificial, and it is physically impossible for them to adjust this change mentally.

In consequence of this peculiarity, an actor has to wear clothes that would appear “loud” and startling viewed at the usual distance. This question of the proper focus has to be considered, and without doubt yellow is a bad colour for the purpose.

You should never whistle in an actor’s dressing-room! As with the sailor, it is supposed to bring trouble and unpleasantness.

Musicians have very few superstitions—obviously this also is a modern profession, though centuries older than that of the stage. I only know two such fanciful beliefs—you should never keep a fiddle in the house if no one in the family can play it!

There is sound common-sense in this, as any violinist can tell you. The tone of the fiddle, and therefore its value in cash, depends upon the free vibration of the wood. If a fiddle is kept unused, it rapidly deteriorates and loses value. Many will quote the wonderful violins made by Stradivarius, but in nearly every case these have been kept regularly in use. One unused Strad fiddle was very inferior in tone.

Finally, if you are a musician, and are interrupted in the performance of a piece of music, do not resume the same piece, but start something fresh.

There is sound common-sense in this belief also, but it affects the player himself. His nerves have been keyed up for a particular emotion or effect. When this has been broken up, he is not likely to recapture it a second time. That is why most singers give a fresh song when encored, though obviously the audience wish to hear a repetition of the song that has caught their fancy!

It takes a really great artiste to repeat a song or a piece of instrumental music. Few can do justice to the song, or to themselves, if they attempt this!

CHAPTER XI

SALT

WE have no historical record of the origin of the custom of using salt as a condiment, but there appears to be only one possible explanation.

When Man left the forests, or more probably was driven from them by animals that were stronger physically, he would of necessity keep to the rivers and streams—not only for the sake of the water supply, but also in order to find his way about more easily. A river or stream can be seen from a great distance, and when once reached, Man had but to follow the bank.

These streams were always in brackish marshy districts, so it was inevitable that both food and drink would be saturated with salt. Still they meant life, and Man has never lost his liking for articles of food that are strongly salted.

No doubt a certain amount of Salt is useful, possibly essential, to life; but it is equally certain that most people eat far too much. It is probably the cause of most complaints such as rheumatism, and few of us escape that nowadays.

Many people cannot eat food unless it is heavily impregnated with salt—they say that it is tasteless, whereas, in reality, they have no sense of taste left, and can only sense this age-old brackish flavour.

In Italy, in early days, it was considered an insult for a man to offer salt to the wife of a friend—it was equivalent to a suggestion of “friendship” of a doubtful character.

The Holy Water of the Roman Catholic Church is prepared by blessing salt and water separately; then the salt is dissolved in the water and the mixture is once more blessed. In some countries, sea water is used for sacred purposes.

In the thirteenth century, blocks of Salt were actually used as money—they weighed about half-a-pound and were worth, roughly, seven farthings! The modern working-man, with his after-war wage, would need plenty of big pockets for these at the end of the week’s work. Even the dole would take some carrying.

The ancient Egyptians believed that Salt excited the passions. They were a very clever race, and evidently doubted its value as a part of Man’s dietary.

We are told that we should always carry some Salt in our pockets when we set out on important business—it should, however, be carried in the hand when we pass from room to room in the dark. This notion comes to us from Morocco.

According to popular Norwegian belief, you will shed as many tears as may be needed to dissolve the Salt that you may have spilled! Be that as it may, spilling salt is generally deemed an ominous, or at least an inauspicious sign. Salt is often associated with Friendship because of its lasting quality—it preserves things, and in consequence it was usually presented to guests before any other food, or placed ready on the table, to signify the abiding nature of friendship. It is unlucky to help another person to Salt.

The earliest Biblical mention of salt appears to be in reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—it is stated that King Abimelech sowed salt on it, the phrase being used to show a complete ruin.

In Eastern countries, Salt was invariably placed before strangers as a pledge of goodwill. I have already recorded the case of a well-known Persian robber who, after looting the palace of a Prince, stumbled over something which proved to be a lump of salt. He had accidentally tasted it while putting his fingers to his lips, and at once left the palace without his booty.

In Hungary, it was long the custom to sprinkle, with salt, the threshold of a new house, so that no witch or evil thing might enter. In Wales, Salt is the first thing taken into a new house when moving.

The Hindus have the curious idea that if Salt is good, sweet must be evil; so the vendors of sweet-meats among the youngsters provide their small customers with a pinch of salt to counteract the evil but enjoyable effects of the sweets.

Among the Ancients, working people were often paid in part or in full in Salt, hence the word salary, from salarium. But the Latin word Sal appears to represent Wit when used in the masculine; the Sea when used in the feminine; and Salt when used in the neuter.

It is curious in this connection to remember that the French when speaking of lack of point or wit, say "There was no salt in that"; while "A salted epigram" signifies something brilliant and cutting.

Many of us know the phrase "salting a Mine," a technical phrase used when a fictitious appearance of value has been given to a mining property.

In the East, at the present day, compacts of importance are ratified and confirmed by salt, and the Sepoys, during the Mutiny, were largely restrained because they had sworn their loyalty, by their Salt, to the English Queen.

Gipsies also use bread and salt to confirm an oath, while among the Jews the covenant of Salt is the most sacred possible. So also with the Arabs—indeed it would seem to be a practice of special significance among all wandering tribes. In Denmark, in the sixteenth century, oaths were taken on salt.

No doubt this has arisen from the great difficulty they experienced in obtaining this necessary article; hence its marked importance in their lives.

Spilling salt therefore was always a great misfortune, and often the signal for an act of outraged hospitality. It is difficult, however, to explain the general custom of tossing the spilled salt over the left shoulder, unless we accept the ancient belief that evil spirits were always behind our left shoulders—the good angels on our right. So that the salt tossed over the left shoulder would naturally go into the eyes of the evil spirit, and prevent him, for the time being, from working us any evil.

Apropos, one may mention that in Burma, the natives at certain festivals throw food over the left shoulder in order to propitiate the Evil one.

A saltiness is necessarily associated with tears, which are always slightly saline, and in certain parts of Yorkshire, it is held that every grain spilled means a tear to be shed. In New England, indeed, the particles must be thrown on the stove (and not over the shoulder) in order to dry up the tears.

In many places, one can still hear the old couplet, "Help me to salt, help me to sorrow," while in Russia and Italy, in particular, salt is never directly offered by one friend to another, or by host to welcome guest.

In some districts of Scotland, it was usual to carry salt round a new-born child, to keep away any evil spirits that might take advantage of its weak condition. A belief exists that a Witch or Evil Spirit must first count the grains of Salt, and they never have time enough to do it!

The peasants of the Hartz Mountain believe that three grains of salt in a milk pot will keep the witches from the milk, and it was a custom in Scotland some years ago to put salt on the lid of a churn.

We all know that it is easy to catch a bird if we first put some salt on its tail, and we generally explain this by saying that of course we could catch it if we got near enough for the salting. But it is not intended to be a catch of this kind, otherwise any substance would do as well as salt. The saying arose owing to the universal belief in the magical properties of Salt.

CHAPTER XII SNEEZING

THE learned English prelate, Alcuin (735-804), expressed the pious opinion that sneezings were devoid of value as auguries, except to those who placed reliance on them. Yet sneezing has always been burdened with superstitions from the time of the ancient Egyptians onwards.

One cannot help being struck by the worldwide prevalence of sneezing superstitions; indeed, the apparently independent origin of such customs among nations very remote from each other, and their prevalence from time immemorial, furnishes striking evidence of the essential similarity of human minds.

In Scotland, it has been maintained that idiots are incapable of sneezing, and the power to do so has been deemed evidence of the possession of a certain degree of intelligence.

It was a Flemish belief that a sneeze during a conversation or a bargain proved that what you said was the truth—which was very satisfactory for the sneezer.

The Chinese believe that a sneeze on New Year's Eve means bad luck through the coming year.

The Japanese hold that one sneeze means that someone is praising you; two show blame; whereas if you sneeze three times, you are merely ill.

When an American Indian falls sick and sneezes, he believes his illness to be the work of some spiteful spirit. When he gets well, he changes his name, so that the Demon may not know him again.

A pious Brahmin will touch his right ear when he sneezes—evil spirits are believed to enter the body by the ears, and the object of protecting the ear with the hands was to prevent their gaining admission. This also accounts for covering the open mouth with the hand when yawning!

Speke and Grant, the African explorers, were unable to discover any trace of religion among the natives of equatorial Africa, except an ejaculation (apparently a prayer) whenever a person sneezed.

In France, in earlier days, a sneeze was greeted by the removal of the hat; when the paroxysm was over, the sneezer formally returned the salutes of all present.

In England also, in the seventeenth century, a sneeze was saluted by the removal of the hat. Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter in 1627, wrote that a man no longer reckoned among his friends those who failed to uncover when he sneezed.

The Siamese have a peculiar idea of their own—that the gods are continually turning over the pages of the Judgment Book and when they come to the page relating to any particular person, that individual invariably sneezes. Their salutation therefore is—"May the judgment be favourable to you."

Those worthies, the Egyptians, regarded the Head as the Castle in which Reason abode, and revered any function connected with so notable a portion of the body. With them, the portents connected with sneezing depended principally upon the position of the moon with reference to the signs of the Zodiac.

Homer, in the *Odyssey*, mentions a Princess who prayed to the gods for the speedy return of her husband. Scarcely was her prayer ended, when her son sneezed! This was regarded as a sign from

the gods themselves that her prayer was granted.

Once while Xenophon was addressing his soldiers, some one sneezed. The great general remarked that Jupiter had been pleased to send him a special sign that their cause was a righteous one.

Sneezing was usually considered unlucky in Wales, but in Europe generally it was deemed auspicious, unless overdone. If a man sneezed more than three times, for instance, it was a sign of bad luck. In central Europe there was a popular belief that three sneezes indicated the presence of four thieves around the house. But no explanation is given as to what would happen if five thieves came, nor any reference to that well-known band of "Forty Thieves."

In more modern times, the Welsh belief of ill-luck has prevailed, and it is a very general custom among Italians, when a person sneezes, to say "God be with you." This arises from the belief that when the "Self" or "Soul" leaves the earthly body for a short time, its going and returning are marked by sneezes, hence the universal salutation!

There is, in Germany, a quaint bit of country lore about unfortunate enchanted sprites, who hide under a bridge and sneeze in the hope that some pious passer-by may say "God bless you!" and thus remove the spell!

It is popularly believed that if a newborn child sneezes, it is safe—obviously this involuntary act would start the lungs healthily and thus be beneficial for the child.

Yawning and sneezing are both curious physical actions, and are not fully understood. We cannot sneeze by any mental effort of our own; it is entirely sub-conscious. But strangely enough, we can make ourselves yawn, either by watching some one who is yawning, or merely by consciously thinking about it.

A yawn apparently is Nature's effort at obtaining a full supply of oxygen; why then should we yawn merely because some one else is doing so? Yet it is frightfully catching—person after person will start yawning if once you begin, yet your own effort may be due to the fact that you deliberately thought of it by way of a bit of nonsense.

Superstition tells us that sneezing between noon and midnight is good, but not the reverse—and also that it is connected with our Soul or Spirit. But in what direction I cannot say.

As with so many other popular superstitions, the right is lucky, the left unfortunate—this applies, of course, to the direction in which you jerk the head when sneezing.

Should you start sneezing while you are dressing, it is a very unfortunate sign. You may as well go back to bed, for evil will overtake you unless you do so. It seems to me quite possible that it would indicate ill-health, or being over-tired—the sneezing is so obviously due to the momentary change of temperature.

If a Cat sneezes, it is lucky for the household. Personally I fancy Puss might have other views, but I certainly have often known cats to sneeze when not in the least out of health. There is a distinct difference in the sound of the concussion—I have also noticed this in the case of Human beings. The sneeze that indicates a cold or a chill is a wet sneeze, if I may call it so—the other is a dry-sneeze. The difference can certainly be detected when one gets to know the two apart.

In the days of Good Queen Bess, there was an elaborate chart concerning Sneezing—it would appear as if it were a popular amusement of the time!

Two or four sneezes were lucky, we were told by these wise-acres. A solitary sneeze, or three, would be deemed unlucky, while more than four was considered “doubtful”—in other words, they could not make up their minds as to what it might mean.

If two people sneezed at the same time, it was considered very fortunate!

Strangely enough, though we were solemnly told that a single sneeze was unfortunate, the same code informs us that one sneeze on Monday meant a good week! Two were bad—apparently our wise-acres could not make up their minds.

Later on, they made matters still more uncertain by informing all good citizens that one sneeze on Sunday was bad, but that a couple would be fortunate.

It will, perhaps, be wise to leave the matter in their skilful hands!

CHAPTER XIII NURSERY RHYMES AND OTHER ODDMENTS

THE mind of Primitive Man was like that of a young child—he was always wondering “why,” and could never satisfy himself. Even to-day, the beliefs of the present displace those of yesterday. The Sun, the Moon, the Tides, why the grass withered and grew again—these were the earliest Fairy Tales with which Man delighted his women and his children.

As there were no books and no educational methods in use, everything depended upon personal knowledge; even to-day it is quite usual to “explain mysteries to children by means of story or parable—it was just the same in the earliest days of the race, and some of these mystery stories have persisted through the ages; slightly altered and extended, but retaining all the essential points of the original.

Take for instance “Jack and Jill,” with its delightful alliterative title. Here we have the story of the Tides, which were believed to go up and down hill—early man’s idea of the shape of the Earth! The Tides go up the Hill to fetch water—then they came tumbling down again. But that is not all—they roll down one after the other!

“Little Red Riding Hood” represents the Sun, while the old Wolf is that terrible bogey, the Darkness, that lies in wait in order to swallow the poor innocent Sun every day of its life. They worshipped the Sun—and why not, when we consider all that it meant to them!—and looked upon it as one of the High Gods, yet they also believed that it was swallowed by a terrible monster time after time, escaping, it is true, but never learning wisdom! Note the association of bed-time with the Wolf!

Jonah was only swallowed once—I don’t suppose he risked it again! By the by, the “whale” of the story is merely a general term for a huge sea monster. In fact, this big mammal cannot swallow anything bigger than a herring—I am told that we humans could swallow a chop without hurting our throats, so we could just as easily swallow Jonah as could a whale. But don’t make the experiment with either—the chop certainly would cause much civil war inside you.

In the days of “Jack and the Bean Stalk,” trees were supposed to reach to the sky, more or less—it was not a magical beanstalk, though it led to some very fine adventures. The story appears to be in the nature of an “autobiography,” as told by the Oldest Inhabitant, while recalling the days when he and his people lived among the branches of the trees.

According to Aryan sources, the Fairy Tale of Cinderella illustrates the Dawn of Day. Labour must be done, tasks carried through—then come the full glories of the midday Sun! The envious Sisters are clouds that endeavour to obscure the glory of the heavens.

Of course in most Eastern countries, it is far too hot at noon to do any work—it is then that one rests and tells Fairy Tales!

But some of these wonder stories are undoubtedly modern, and as a rule political—one could suggest in story what one dare not say openly. “Little Jack Horner” is political, and dates from the time of Henry VIII., and his countless wives. The Plum was, of course, the attractive “pickings” secured by a Court favourite, who, quite naturally, transferred the property in question in a corner—that is, he did it by trickery and not in the open.

Most Fairy Tales, as indeed nearly all stories for youngsters, contain what we are pleased to call a moral—this is, generally, hard work and patience. No wonder there are such countless numbers of these stories, for we have not yet learnt the lesson!

After everybody else has failed—generally represented by the two elder brothers, but not always—the forlorn hope sets out and faces difficulty after difficulty. Do such manly efforts ever fail? Of course not! The Princess need not be a woman—she merely represents the glorious ideal after which you have been striving, no matter what that ideal may be.

It is important to remember that from the earliest dawn, right up to the present generation, Man has always been the fighter, the food-winner, the conqueror of endless difficulties—while Woman has been that Godblessed creature, the bearer of children.

This one essential fact has dominated everything Man has touched! In Music, it is found in the riot of his emotions; in Art, it is the naked woman who forms his masterpiece! In Fairy Tales the Princess is the reward of those who faithfully toil at the daily tasks.

* * * * *

Besides the popular superstitions already discussed, there are many others that are interesting, besides vast numbers that are purely local and of no importance. As these do not fit into the groups I have given, I am including them under the general heading of “Oddments,” which they are indeed.

It was a prehistoric belief that green rings in the grass were made by Fairies while dancing—modern science has proved that this is actually correct, but the fairy in question is really a fungus that affects the growth.

A crooked pin was sincerely believed in as the best agent for dropping into Wishing Wells if you wanted a truthful result. It is impossible to suggest the slightest justification for such an idea, even if we accept Wishing Wells and the like as possessed of the powers of an oracle. Indeed it would seem that a crooked pin was a very valueless gift to offer—possibly it was not intended as a gift, but as a stimulus to the interest or curiosity of the sprite in charge. This is the only reason I can suggest.

Never burn egg-shells, or the hens will not lay! Naturally this old belief is no longer respected in this go-ahead century, for we do not keep hens ourselves, but buy all the eggs we require, so it does not really matter to us if the other person’s hens lay or not.

When eating, if you miss your mouth, it is a sign of an illiess. This was probably medically correct in most cases! Conveying food to the mouth is not an act of the reasoning powers, but is purely and essentially what is called an “automatic” action. When these go wrong in any way, our nerves are overworked, and an illness is quite probable.

Naturally it applies to many other automatic actions as well, but this one was seen easily and therefore was noted in preference.

If you upset your chair when rising from it, you have been telling lies. This may easily be true in many cases, for it would be a proof of agitation.

The Sun always shines on Sunday—little or much! This is a very general belief, apparantly, and is not intended as a catch. For naturally the Sun is almost certain to shine somewhere, little or much, every day of the year. It is intended to apply locally, and is an interesting little bit of weather lore.

Everybody knows the old doggerel about the red sky at night!

“A red sky at night is the shepherd’s delight,

A red sky in the morning is meant as a warning”

or words to that effect, for it varies greatly.

Naturally most of our English weather conditions reach us from the ocean, that is from the West, for land and hills tend to break up cloud and wind formations. Now the sun sets in the West, and if the air is clear of moisture the light will be a rosy red. Hence we may expect a fine day to follow. This red light is reflected on the clouds in the East—that is, those that have already passed over us, and can affect us no more.

But in the morning, the sun has changed his position and the light now falls on the clouds to the West. These are coming towards us!

There is a natural tendency in our atmosphere to alternate between sunshine and shower—it is the varied duration of these alternating periods that makes what we call “weather.” Rainfall, if at all heavy, seldom lasts for more than a few hours continuously—it is the quick succession of several such periods that make up a wet day.

There is a widespread superstition that “Rain at seven, means fine at eleven,” and this is largely largely correct in practice.

A popular calendar superstition is that whatever happens to you on New Year Day shows the run of your luck for the following year. But, as I have said before, New Year has been shifted several times! If there is anything at all in this, it would apply most correctly at the end of March—the old form, which is really the beginning of spring. Undoubtedly everything does alter about that period—our health, our hopefulness, our energy, all are affected by the change in Nature.

But equally clearly it would cover a period of several days, varying according to our sensitiveness. There is a somewhat similar superstition that gives twelve days, one for each month, and it seems to me that a blending of the two would be ideal. Why not watch the first twelve days of spring, and see how they affect you and your prospects?

If the Sun goes to bed soon after rising, it foretells rain—going to bed clearly indicates being hidden by cloud.

In Bavaria, they say that profanity increases the number of Mice! Naughty Miss Mouse—she evidently enjoys bad language!

Nine hairs from the cross on the back of a she-donkey, when worn in a silken bag round the neck, will cure a sore throat. Probably a silken scarf would answer just as well—it is very warm and comforting in bad weather.

In Italy it is considered unlucky to sleep under a Walnut tree! I see no reason for this, unless the wood is brittle and therefore a branch might fall on you.

Ambitious maidens should secure Dandelion heads, when in seed—you blow on them as hard as you can, and see how many efforts are required to puff away all the fairy fluff made by the dandelion. Each puff signifies a year’s wait! If you are not in a hurry, well, you need not blow your hardest and best, of course.

A Rainbow in the West shows further rain—in the East, then you may expect fine weather.

Throw an orange pip on the fire, ladies—if it bursts, “He” is all right ; if it is burnt, look out for trouble. This is a very safe and reliable test, as it only applies to men, so our wives and sweethearts need have no fear.

Fridays and Sundays are bad days on which to cut your hair or nails—or, of course, to allow any one to cut them for you. Friday was the ancient Sabbath, dedicated to the Goddess of Love. The idea behind these superstitions is that you are flouting the gifts of the gods. If cut during the waning Moon, they will not grow so fast.

This seems to offer a chance for cleanshaven men—if shaved during the waning Moon, the beard should not prove so vigorous. It would mean a thin time for barbers!

A weird superstition was firmly believed in some few years ago—and may be to-day, perhaps—that the mummy of the priestess Amenra, in the British Museum, could put a curse on those who stared at it in idle curiosity. Roses have been placed on the coffin lid by visitors anxious to placate the annoyed Dead—much to the annoyance of the officials.

As a matter of fact, the mummy itself is not there—only the dummy, or mummy cover. The trouble was started, so it is said, by the late W. T. Stead, in 1889—he held very advanced views upon the question of the Spirit World.

The laying of Foundation Stones is really an act of human sacrifice, but the living individual is replaced by the “ransom”—of coins and other articles—deposited in the hollow space, that would certainly have held a living human a few centuries ago.

Candles, too, have had many responsibilities thrust upon them. They should be lighted at birth, at a marriage, and at death—in order to keep off evil spirits. The waving of a candle flame indicated the presence of a spirit in the room, and it is generally asserted that a collar of tallow round the wick is a sign of the death of some one in the house.

Also if a candle refuses to light, it is considered a sign of a coming storm—this no doubt might be due to moisture in the air, a natural phenomenon of which humans are not so actively conscious, though it affects many animals and birds and plants, and therefore gives rise to much useful weather lore. The moon is supposed to affect the weather, and also to control the luck of those who see it; in many English rural districts to-day, the people bow or curtsy to the new moon.

A whistling woman and a crowing hen are two of the most unlucky things in the world for those who come across them. The usually accepted explanation of this superstition is that when the nails for our Lord’s Cross were being forged, a woman stood by and whistled.

No one should comb the hair at night, though there seems to be no objection to the use of the brush. But rough combs, naturally, would be in use hundreds of years before brushes, and possibly the scattered combings might act as scent for night prowling hungry beasts.

Nor should any one cut his or her own hair—curiously enough this does not signify ill luck to the individual, but he or she will prove an unlucky person to meet!

If your hair, when thrown on the fire, will not burn, it is a sign that you will live to be drowned.

Baking also came in for much superstitious ceremony—indeed one cannot easily imagine so important an event being free from these curious beliefs. If a little flour or meal is left on the table, after the last loaf or cake is ready, it must not be returned to the bin or meal chest, but should be knead-

ed into a small additional cake and given to a child.

If bread, when being baked, should happen to break, a hungry stranger will come to share it. It is not good to count the loaves or cakes after a baking—they will not last.

In Berks, it is believed that fits can be cured by wearing a ring made from the metal of five silver six-pences, procured from as many different bachelors, who must not know for what purpose the coins are to be used. In the same district there is a firm belief in the efficacy of a string of blue beads, or a piece of uncooked bacon for the curing of colds or sore throats—they should be hung round the neck.

To remove warts, though in a somewhat selfish way, I am afraid, tie up some pebbles in a bag with a piece of silver money and throw it on the road; whoever finds the bag and keeps the money, to him the warts will go!

For a sore throat, tie a thread of scarlet worsted round the throat and also round each wrist—this is believed, in Ireland, to be very effective.

We still have our hair singed, in the fond delusion that burning makes it grow thicker and prevents the ends from splitting, though unfortunately no one can tell us why it should have this desirable result. Is it really a relic of the old Negro superstition that loose hair or the cut ends could be used in Witchcraft against us. They made a practice, therefore, of burning and thus destroying the hair while still on the head.

For a final example of superstition I will give the custom of the Chinese, who throw thousands of pieces of paper into the sea when friends sail—each piece containing a prayer.

Their faith, apparently is not great, but surely one prayer of the many must catch the eye of some kindly and beneficent god.

And then—all's well!

Many women are interested in the proper gems for each month; the idea is that those born in the month should wear these gems, so as to ensure luck. Strictly speaking each month should be divided into three sections—the two middle weeks carry the strict luck symbols of the month, while the last week joins the first week of the next month as an in-between sort of temperament.

Thus people born between the eighth and twenty-fourth of January should carry the Garnet; those born between the twenty-fifth of January and the seventh of February can carry either or both the indicated gems—the Garnet and Amethyst. So it goes through the full year.

The details vary slightly in different parts of the world, but principally as concerns the flowers—the following list is generally accepted for Europe:—

Jan. : Garnet—Snowdrop ..Constancy
Feb. : Amethyst—Primrose ..Sincerity
Mar. : Bloodstone—Violet ..Courage
April : Diamond—Daisy ..Purity
May : Emerald—Hawthorn ..Hope
June : Moonstone or Agate—Wild Rose or Honeysuckle ..Health
July : Ruby—Lily ..Passion
Aug. : Sardonyx—Poppy ..Conjugal Happiness
Sept. : Sapphire—Convolvulus ..Repentance
Oct. : Opal or Amber—Hops or Golden Rod ..Loveableness
Nov. : Topaz—Chrysanthemum ..Cheerfulness
Dec. : Turquoise—Holly ..Unselfishness

Some superstitious readers may notice that this book contains thirteen chapters. Should this fateful, but not unlucky, number unsettle their nerves, there is a very easy method by which they can put things right.

Let them begin again at Chapter II!

THE END