

# Prognostics and Superstitions.

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It will be recalled that many of the German emigrants to our province were Palatines, or inhabitants of the beautiful Rhine valley, a country surpassingly rich in legends, sagas, and folklore; and where, although the Reformation had shed its benign light over the populace of that region, there still lingered more or less of the mediaeval superstition which had been rampant in central Europe for ages. The great majority of these emigrants were of the peasant class, who came here not only to escape from religious persecution, but with the avowed purpose of establishing homes and bettering their condition. Still, in whatever locality was fixed their humble habitation, whether in forest or in town; whether free or held in bondage as Redemptionists, one of their first cares was to erect here in the Western World altars of their faiths, so that they could worship God according to their consciences, no matter whether their tenets were judged by men as orthodox or separatist.

Most of these people had had but an ordinary parochial school education, such as was customarily imparted to a rural population at that period. Consequently, all were strongly imbued with the local superstitions of their race, which had been handed down from generation to generation for ages past. These superstitions and beliefs they naturally brought with them when they came to our shores. Settling in the fastnesses of the forest, often in isolated situations, having neighbors speaking what was to them

an unknown tongue, by location apart from all social intercourse, orthodox religious influences and teachings, or medical men, these simple-minded and devout people of sanguine temperament naturally fell back upon the old traditions of the Fatherland; at times, to cure minor ills or avert misfortunes, resorting to the use of incantations or conjuring formulas learned from some old magister or crone at home.

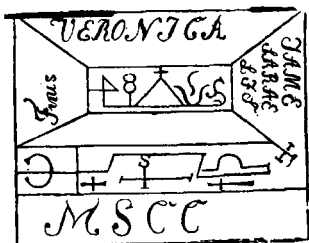
Then, again, the Irish and Welsh settlers, who were neighbors to the Germans, had superstitions and folk-lore of their own; and we soon find evidences of an intermingling of the Celtic, Cymric and Teutonic traditions and customs, these becoming engrafted upon each other until we have what in some cases may be called a strictly Pennsylvania folk-lore.

The superstitions, or Aberglaube, of the early German settlers entered into all domestic actions and the duties of every-day life. No matter whether it was the sowing of seed, the reaping of the grain, starting upon a journey, the curing of any disorder in man or beast, the birth or baptism of a child, a marriage or a funeral—in each and every phase of common life there was interspersed more or less of this Aberglaube. This was especially true of the settlers of Germantown and the Conestoga country, who were imbued with the notions of mystical religion, and with the speculations of Jacob Boehme and others.

It is but due, however, to the clergy of the Lutheran and Reformed churches to say that from the very first inception of the Reformation down to the present day they have consistently labored to stamp out this belief in signs, omens, superstitions, and prognostics.

But few people at the present day have any conception to what extent

these beliefs entered into the daily life of the settler. A few illustrations of these superstitions, beliefs and conjurations we here present, some of which were learned by the writer in his early youth, while the others were either gathered from contemporary manuscripts or were communicated by descendants of some of these pioneers, in whose families the traditions are kept alive down to the present day.



Auhangsee or zauber zettel supposed to abjure all evil spirits.

The Aberglaube of the early Germans may be said to have been divided into at least a hundred different forms, the scale running all the way from a simple belief in the efficiency of Bible verses promiscuously selected down to demonology itself. Perhaps the most common of these superstitions was what was known as Kalender aberglaube, or a belief in prognostics based upon the almanac. This was again subdivided into various departments, based upon the phases of the moon and other celestial bodies. This, however, is not to be confounded with the custom of astrology or the casting of the horoscope. To any person schooled in the art, the almanac became the guide and mentor for almost every function of daily life. First, it told us of the state of the weather for every day of the coming year; then it informed us what were to be the prev-

alent diseases, gave us the proper days for felling timber, taking purgative medicine, for bleeding and blood-letting, for cutting the hair, for weaning calves, children, etc. It gave the lucky days for sowing grain, the proper days for a merchant to speculate, and for other daily avocations.

A well-regulated German almanac of that day also contained a list of lucky and unlucky days in general, from which we learn that the latter were as follows:

January 1, 2, 6, 11, 17, 19.

February 10, 16, 17.

March 1, 3, 12, 15.

April 3, 15, 17, 18.

May 8, 10, 17, 30.

June 1, 7.

July 1, 5, 6.

August 1, 3, 10, 20.

September 15, 19, 30.

October 15, 17.

November 1, 7.

December 1, 7.

The oracle further informs us that (1) a child born upon any of these unlucky days would not live long, or would have a poor and miserable existence. (2) Any couple marrying upon one of these days would live in poverty and discord, and eventually separate. (3) When one goes upon a journey on these days he will return sick, or suffer bodily injury. (4) No animals are to be weaned, no one is take a bath, nor to sow or plant anything, as it will not flourish, do what we may. (5) Of these forty-two days five are especially unlucky, in which no journey is to be undertaken, viz.: March 3, August 17, September 1, 2 and 3. There were two days among the list which were far worse than the others, viz.: April 1, the day upon which Satan was expelled from Heaven, and December 1, that day upon which Sodom and Gomorra were destroyed. It was firmly believed that

any one who had a vein opened upon one of those days would surely die within a week. A child born upon either of the two days was sure to die an evil death, would never be old, and would live a life of shame in the world.

Less gruesome was the "Golden A, B, C," which foretold the fortune for the coming day. The method for using it was as follows: In the morning, when you got out of bed, you were first of all to take up your prayer-book, open it at random, noting the first letter upon the page, then reverently read the collect or prayer for the day; then by referring to the corresponding letter in the golden alphabet you will find your fortune for the coming day. As an illustration:

A. Great honor and friendship will come to you this day.

B. Animosity is in store for you; be vigilant.

C. Losses will meet you this day.

The rule was that if the letter augured well, you were to give thanks to God. If, upon the contrary, it denoted a luckless day, you were to pray to the Almighty to avert the impending danger. Then again, if thunder occurred in the month of January, it was supposed to denote high winds; if in February, much sickness during the year; if in March, heavy showers. And so on for every month of the year. The prediction by thunder was a favorite method of augury, and in many families a careful record was kept, so that the business of the farm could be shaped accordingly.

We now come to the uses of the almanac in phlebotomy, or blood-letting, a species of treatment applied at that period to almost every ailment the human race is heir to. No matter whether the patient suffered from a broken limb, a gunshot wound, tuber-

culosis, brain fever, dropsy, or simple indigestion—if the signs were right the barber-surgeon was at once directed to take so much blood from the sufferer. It was also the custom to be bled in the spring and fall, so as to keep well during the rest of the year, a custom akin to the one prevalent in the days of our youth, of being drenched with a “yarb tea,” a villainous decoction in which hoarhound, gentian and other bitter herbs predominated. According to the well-regulated almanac, there were for phlebotomy fourteen bad days in every month. Then we have one day designated as “good,” another as the “very best;” one “dangerous,” one “good in every case,” and finally one “very questionable.” To illustrate how the days were rated for this purpose we will but mention the following:

1. Bad, one loses his color.

2. Bad, causes fever.

23. Very good, prevents all sickness, and strengthens all the limbs of the body.

Much superstitious belief was also attached to the days from Christmas to Twelfth-tide or Epiphany, and great importance was placed on auguries based upon this period. Thus if the sun shone bright and clear

On Christmas Day—A lucky year.

On the 2d day—Dearth or famine.

On the 3rd day—Dissension.

On the 4th day—Measles and small-pox for children.

On the 5th day—Good crops of fruit and winter grain.

On the 6th day—A surplus of tree and field fruits.

On the 7th day—Good cattle pasture, but a scarcity of grain and wine.

On the 8th day—Much fish and wild fowl.

On the 9th day—Successful barter for the merchant.

On the 10th day—Dangerous storms.

On the 11th day—Heavy fogs and sickness.

On the 12th day—Serious war and bloodshed.

As to Christmas Day; if this falls upon

Sunday—It denotes a mild winter; spring, warm and moist; summer, fine, hot and dry; autumn, damp and wintry. Grain and wine will succeed, honey will be plenty. Sheep, however, will do but poorly; seed and garden fruits will crop well.

Monday—A winter neither too cold nor too warm; a good spring; summer, windy with much wine, but little honey as the bees are apt to die.

Tuesday—Winter cold; much snow; spring, good and windy; summer, wet; autumn, dry; wine and grain medium. Swine will die easily.

And so on throughout the week.

Then we have the various astrological signs of the almanac, which gave the proper days for cutting timber, etc.; also for taking medicines. So strongly was this belief seated in the minds of the populace that cases are known in which sick persons died, inasmuch as they persistently refused to take the remedy prescribed by the doctor until the signs should be right; and the delay proved fatal.

All seeding of grain and planting of fruit and trees was done according to the lunar signs in the almanac, a species of superstition which is still adhered to by many of our farmers.

Of all the planets, the moon was supposed to exert the greatest influence; thus it was believed that during the period of the full moon, crabs, oysters, mussels, and snails were always fatter than during the other

quarters; that flowers transplanted during the full moon always bloomed more double; that timber cut during the growing moon contained more sap than when cut during the declining quarters. Cattle slaughtered in the fulling of the moon were always fatter and gave juicier meat than when killed in the waning of the lunar orb. Calves weaned during the full moon gave cows of better milking qualities than those weaner at any other time. On the contrary, root crops must be set or planted during the waning moon, or they would run to foliage. Even eggs were supposed to be affected. Thus, if a goose was set during the new moon the goslings would be blind. An old proverb quaintly tells us, "Let him who hath but little money be careful that the new moon shineth not into his purse, or during that month his lack of funds will surely continue."

Witches gave our ancestors almost as much trouble as they did the Mayflower people, but here we were more merciful than the New Englanders and did not burn them. Nowhere were these broomstick gentry more active than among the live stock. They were always meddling with the horses. As soon as the old gray mare showed symptoms of being unwell, the witch doctor was called in to discover the character of the ailment. Not seldom did he find the mane tied up and knotted so as to form stirrups for the hags when they took their midnight rides in stormy weather.

Somehow, poor, timid, innocent bunnie has always been mixed up with our witchcraft lore, and often, no doubt, to his discomfort, if not worse. Did a man set out to buy a horse from an acquaintance a dozen miles away, there could be no worse augury attending the transaction than to have a rabbit cross his path. Few were brave enough



to fulfill their mission; nine times out of ten the intending purchaser would turn about and return to his home, deferring the intended purchase to a more propitious day.

What chemist ever discovered such a cheap and effectual method of putting acetic acid into a barrel of cider as our dear old forefathers in this country less than a hundred years ago? After the cider was put into the cask, it was only necessary to call up the names of three of the crossdest and sour-tempered old women in the community and in a loud tone of voice utter their names into the bung-hole, and immediately cork it up, to make the best and strongest vinegar in all the neighborhood. When now and then some female in the community was inclined to show an unnecessary degree of temper, her friends would jokingly remind her that she might waken up some frosty autumn morning and find herself in a vinegar barrel! The belief that a savage dog could be charmed out of harm by incantations was everywhere prevalent. All that was required to do this was to repeat certain words or verses, which I no longer remember, before entering upon the dog premises, and at the same time pull up a fence stake and reverse its position in the ground. These things done, the dog's mouth was sealed, and the visitor was relieved of all danger from the canine's teeth, until the reversed fence stake was again placed in its natural position.

Nor can that stupendous piece of twentieth-century credulity, whose "anniversary" we have celebrated during the present week, be overlooked in this enumeration. We, of course, refer to the belief that the marmot, commonly called the ground hog or wood-chuck, is able to forecast the

weather for six weeks ahead in case he makes his appearance above ground on Candlemas day. If then the sun is out and reflects his shadow, he realizes that winter is not yet over, and at once returns to his hibernations and prolongs it six weeks more, knowing that the blasts of winter will reign supreme meanwhile. Whence this folly had its origin it would be hard to prove, and yet the belief in this action on the part of the ground hog, in spite of its notorious absurdity, is almost universally prevalent in Eastern Pennsylvania to-day. How such a belief can retain its place among the twentieth century men and women is one of those marvels we will never be able to understand. Even many of those who deride the idea have an underlying belief in its truthfulness.



Auhangel, or zauber zettel, supposed to abjure all evil spirits.

Another of the firmly-rooted beliefs was that wheat set upon the day the St. Michael's moon fulls was safe from all rust and blight. In connection with the sowing of which we also have the following distich:

"From the new until the full sheen  
 Sow afternoon, and it will be clean;  
 From the full unto the new light  
 Sow mornings, and it will not blight."

With the peculiar sanguine temperament of the German peasant we may easily imagine the impression made upon him by such celestial phenomena as a solar or lunar eclipse, the aurora,

the rainbow, a mock sun or moon, to say nothing of the appearance of a comet. To the superstitious, an eclipse of the sun or moon portended great calamities, such as pestilence, dearth, famine, etc. The aurora symbolized lakes of blood, trampled grain fields, myriads of lances, spears, swords, and armed hosts opposing one another. In fact, it was thought to foretell war and sanguinary conflicts.

The appearance of a mock sun or moon also brought the fear of trouble and misfortune to the minds of the peasantry. On the contrary, the rainbow was a sign that the Lord, who showed his anger during the thunderstorm, now symbolized his reconciliation, and that little angels danced for joy upon the gorgeous celestial arch.

The climax, however, was reached upon the appearance of a comet. This celestial visitant never failed to inspire the greatest terror and dread in the minds of the populace, young and old. To them it appeared as a flaming sword, or a bundle of fiery switches, which were displayed in the heavens as a sign of divine displeasure and coming punishment. A comet was always believed to be a forerunner of war, pestilence, and plague, a belief that was strengthened by a series of strange coincidences during the latter years of the seventeenth century as comets appeared upon the sky just previous to the French invasions of Germany and the Palatinate, which caused so much misery and laid waste so much German soil. Few persons realize at the present day what a great factor the appearance of these comets was in stimulating the first German emigration to Pennsylvania.

It is difficult for us at the opening of the twentieth century to realize the wonderful signs and phenomena which appeared in the sky, distorted as

they were by the excited imagination of the superstitious observer, during the eighteenth century, both in Europe and Pennsylvania. These alleged wonderful appearances were frequently the subject of printed and pictorial descriptions, almanacs, and broadsides. Examples are occasionally met with in the newspapers and literature of the day. As an illustration, a translation is here presented of an announcement in Sauer's paper, "Die Pennsylvanische Berichte," published at Germantown, July 9, 1757. It describes a sight witnessed in that vicinity on May 6, 1757.

"It appeared toward evening as if two swords were in the sun pointing toward each other. Afterward it seemed as if a black ball came up behind the sun, looking like a sun undergoing a total eclipse. In the dark sun there appeared two crosses, above which a crown formed. Then were seen a number of human heads of a red hue; these were followed by an innumerable multitude of black human heads, all of which appeared in the heavens. Lastly, a great number of blue heads were added to the number; all of which now commenced to butt against one another.

"So dreadful was this sight that the beholders retreated into their houses. When they again ventured forth, the sun had set, but the apparition in the sky yet remained. It seemed as if all persons in the world must recognize them, they stood out so plainly.

"After the sun had set for some time, it seemed as if the human heads were not more than three feet above the earth; and lastly, as if they were only a few rods distant from the beholders. Finally the hosts separated, the black and blue departing toward the south, and the red-hued ones toward the north. The scene vanished, and it was night."

Something similar is to be found on page 122 of Christopher Marshall's diary. Under the date of August 21, 1777, which occurred in this City of Lancaster, Marshall says: "I was at Dr. Neff's, where James Webb, a mason, came for some medicine, who related that about four years ago, about six in the morning, he saw in the sky before the door the likeness of a great snake without a head, who, shaking his tail, made all about there to tremble, and at the same time fiery balls were seen to fly about German-town. This he interpreted was our present war, which we carried on without any head, and so we should come to nothing." This man Webb was a pronounced Tory.

An occasional specimen of the broadside is also found to have survived the present time. One, in the writer's possession, depicts the wonderful signs said to have appeared in the sky and remained there for forty-eight hours, on May 6 and 7, 1763. From all indications the specimen is an issue of the Ephrata press. The explanation is in the form of a rhythmical prayer, set to the melody of a popular hymn.

A synopsis of this explanation sets forth that this phenomenon was seen at Riga, in Liffand; also at Kirshberg, near Ehling, about ten miles from Dantzic. It tells that there first appeared a bunch of fiery switches, which beat about the heavens in a most barbarous manner until the very points became bloody. Next, four great swords came forth. They would come and go, clash together and shoot out like unto great tongues of flame; then followed a great coffin, from which arose a pyramid around which coiled a serpent. Three skulls completed the tableau. Suddenly a severe thunderstorm dispelled the scene, after which

appeared a youth robed in white, who admonished to penance.

Another and more pleasant superstition of the early German settlers was their belief in the virtues of the Domestic Benison or Haus Segen. This was a written or printed invocation, which was prominently displayed upon the walls of the living room, and in many cases recited daily as a morning and evening prayer. This Benison was usually a small printed sheet, but frequently ornamented or embellished with allegorical figures, frequently crude pictures, representing angels and symbolic flowers.

The best known, and, perhaps, the most widely circulated of these domestic invocations, consists of four verses and an invocation:

"In the three most exalted names,  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
That are praised by angelic choirs,  
Health—Peace and Blessing—Amen."

The first verse invokes the blessing of God upon the house and ground, the coming harvest and growing crops, that the cattle may increase, and that God, in His fatherly goodness, will protect house, estate, stable and barn from all mishaps, especially fire.

In the second verse it pleads that the glow of health may shine upon every cheek, on noble health, and prays for strength for our labor, and that neither hail nor storm may injure the tender blossoms, nor late frosts and early colds kill the fruit.

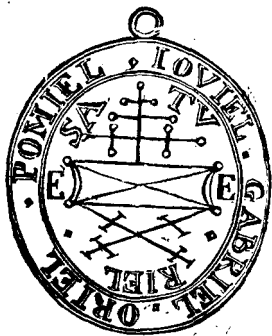
The third verse is a supplication that the blessed Redeemer extend His power and influence over the house and family, that everyone therein strive after virtue and live peacefully, so that all sin and wickedness be a stranger to this house.

Finally, the prayer asks that the Holy Ghost abide here and take up its resting place; bless our out and home-

coming, and in the end grant unto us a blessed death and receive us as heirs of Heaven.

Another curious specimen on this order is an Ephrata Broadside, one of the earliest issues of the Kloster press, certainly not later than 1743. This is known as "Eine Saule gegen die Bosen Rott." "A pillar of defense against the wicked rabble."

This was intended as a talisman, or protection against the Moravian brethren, who were at that time very active in preaching the Gospel of Christ throughout the province. As will be seen, this was set up with bold type in the shape of a pillar, with base and capital, resting upon a foundation formed of two verses from Holy Writ (First John 2: 18, 19).



Auhangsel worn around the neck by a plaited three-strand cord, made of hair taken from the tail of a horse at midnight, upon Christmas eve, insures a long life of wealth, power, strength and cheerfulness, prolonged youth and an easy death.

This belief in written and printed talismanic protection was, however, not confined to the German inhabitants, as we have one which gained a wide cre-

dence among the English residents; this was carefully guarded, copied and circulated, and even down to the present day it is to be found among some of the older families in Eastern Pennsylvania, the parents considering it an act of duty to make a copy of it for each of their children as they reach maturity. I have reference to what is known as the celebrated letter of Jesus Christ. The manuscript is contemporary with the provincial period; the printed one dates from about the second decade of the nineteenth century.

After which, I believe, the angel Gabriel is said to have carried the letter to Lady Cubass, whoever she may have been.

So, you see, there was a great incentive to copy this letter and push it along.

Copy of a letter alleged to have been written by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and found eighteen miles from Iconium, seventy-five years after our blessed Saviour's crucifixion, and transmitted from the Holy City by a converted Jew, and faithfully translated from the original Hebrew copy, now in possession of Lady Cubass' family in Mesopotamia.

This letter was found under a stone, both round and large, at the foot of the cross, eighteen miles from Iconium, near a village called Mesopotamia. Upon this stone was written and engraved, "blessed is he that shall turn me over." All that saw it prayed to God earnestly, and desired that he would make known unto them the meaning of this writing, that they might not in vain turn it over; in the meantime a little child about six or seven years turned it over, to the admiration of all present, and under the stone was written the commune of Jesus Christ in a letter, published by the angel Gabriel, ninety-five years



after the death of our blessed Saviour, and carried by a person belonging to Lady Cubass, and made public in the city of Iconium.

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**A Letter of Jesus Christ—Glory to God on High, and on Earth Good Will Towards Men.**

“Whoever worketh on the Sabbath day shall be cursed. I command you to go to church, and keep the Lord’s day holy, without doing any manner of work; you shall not idle nor misspend your time in decking yourselves in superfluous and costly apparel and vain dressing, for I have ordained a day to be kept holy, that your sins may be forgiven. You shall not break My commandments, but observe and keep them as written by My own hand. You shall not only go to church yourself, but your man and your maid-servant to observe My word, and learn My commandments. You shall finish your labor every Saturday at 6 o’clock in the afternoon; for at that time the preparation of the Sabbath begins. I advise you to fast five Fridays in the year, beginning with Good Friday, and so continue the four Fridays following in remembrance of the five bloody wounds I received for mankind. You diligently and peaceably labor in your respective vocations, which it hath pleased Almighty God to place you; you shall love one another with brotherly love, and cause them that are not baptized to come to church and receive the Holy Sacrament and be made members thereof; and in so doing I will give you many blessings, and comfort you in great temptations; and surely he that doeth to the contrary shall be cursed and be unprofitable; I will also send hardships of heart upon them, but especially upon them and more espe-

cially upon impenitent sinners, and unbeliev̄ers. He that gives not to the poor shall be unprofitable. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day, for the seventh day I have taken to myself; and he that hath a copy of this letter, and keeps it without publishing it to others shall not prosper, and they that publish it to others shall be blessed of Me, and, if their sins shall be in number as the stars of the firmament, and believe in this, they shall be pardoned. And if they believe not in the writing; and keep not My commandments I will send My plagues upon them, and consume both them and their children, and their cattle; and whoever shall have a copy of this letter and keeps it in the house, nothing shall do them any damage, neither pestilence, lightning or thunder shall hurt them; and if any woman be with child and in labor, if a copy of this letter be about her, and she firmly puts her trust in it, she shall be safely delivered of her birth. You shall hear no more of Me, but of the blessed Spirit, until the day of judgment."

PRICE 5 CENTS.

In conclusion, I will mention a few illustrations upon the exorcism of fire, which in its minor practice, known as fire-blowing or pow-wowing a burn, still has a firm hold in some of our rural communities.

The Ephrata Cloister buildings, it will be recalled, were all built of wood; even the large chimney flues were originally of that inflammable material, lined with clay or grout, as may be seen by a visit to the loft of the old Brotherhood-house, which is still standing.

It has often been a matter of surprise that during the whole history of the mystic community on the Cocalico

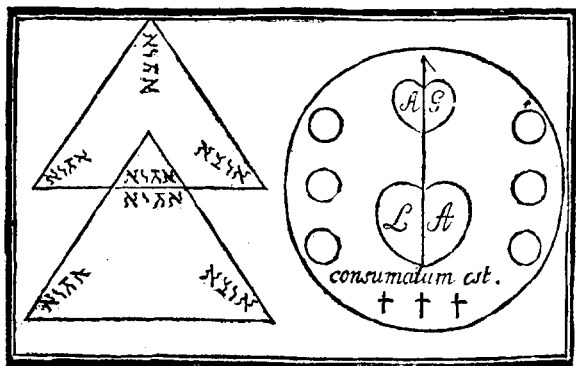
there was never any loss by fire among the buildings within the settlement proper; although, according to Sangmeister, several attempts were made to fire the buildings. There is, however, a record of two incendiary fires at the mill-seat of the Community, the first, upon the night of September 6, 1747, destroyed three out of five mills; the other in September, 1784, was extinguished without doing any material damage. This immunity from the devouring element has been attributed to the mystic ritual used by the Brotherhood, which was believed to control the element of fire.

During the early part of last century the belief in the exorcism of fire was almost as universal among the German peasantry in this Province as it was in the Fatherland. Various were the formulas, receipts, and Feuer-segen which, it was believed, would extinguish a conflagration. The means, however, employed by the Zionitic Brotherhood for the protection of the Cloister buildings were supposed to be both protective and preventive.

The procedure was as follows: A wooden plate or platter was taken, similar to the one used for sacramental purposes, still to be seen in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This was placed upon the communion table in the Saal, to remain there during a certain phase of the moon, until the proper day and hour arrived to give it the mystical inscription from which it was to derive its occult power and thereby ensure its efficiency. The only day upon which this power could be obtained was a certain Friday in the waning moon, and then only between the hours of eleven and twelve at night, using a new quill pen, also plucked from the goose at night during the decline of the lunar orb. The ink or pigment to be used

must be freshly made from gall-apples gathered from a gnarled oak in or near a graveyard. No iron was to be used in its preparation.

At the appointed time certain mystical incantations were spoken over the platter; then three circles were drawn perpendicularly on opposite sides of the plate; then a centre line was drawn, not extending to the edges, and at the top the line was curved so as to form a hook. Two hearts were then drawn so that one-half of each heart was upon either side of the line, the upper one being somewhat smaller than the other. On the left side of the upper heart was drawn the letter A, either in Latin or Hebrew characters. Upon the right side appeared the letter G. Upon the lower heart the letters L and A were placed in the same order. Below these figures were the words *Consumatum est*, and beneath were three crosses.



Used at the Exorcism of Fire.

The meaning of the inscription is as follows: The mystical letters A, G, L, A, by themselves denote nothing. To the initiate of the Zionitic Brotherhood they assumed great importance when properly used. The proper reading is from left to right, viz., A, G, L,

A, and represent four Hebrew words, Attah, Gibbohr, Leolam, Adonai; or, as rendered in German, Du bist stark in Ewigkeit HERR. (The Lord is strong and mighty in all eternity). The Latin inscription "Consumatum est" is the utterance of Christ upon the cross, "It is finished."

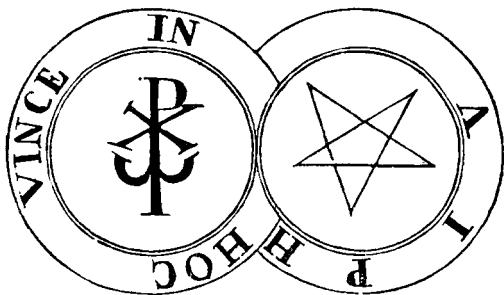
These plates were built in the walls or foundations of the houses. If the writer mistakes not it was at the four corners of the building. It is further stated that there is no case on record where any house or building thus protected ever became a prey to the flames. In the event of the burning of any building not thus protected the belief was that if a platter of this kind were thrown into the burning building in the name of God the fire would at once die out.

This was not the only method of conquering fire by conjuration. So firmly was the belief in Feuer-be-sprechung engrafted upon the popular mind that some persons who knew the ritual or formula were eagerly sought out by the German settlers to furnish them with the means of subduing any fire which might break out upon their premises.

In the Fatherland the Jews, gypsies, colliers and ash-burners were supposed to be in possession of the fire formulas. One of the commonest methods of the Hebrew exorcist was for the operator, in case of an outbreak of fire, to take a pan of live coals in his left hand and a can of water in his right. He would then place himself facing the burning building, staring fixedly at the fire, and repeat, in either Hebrew or German, by syllables, the second verse of the eleventh chapter of the fourth book of Moses (Numbers), "Da schrie das Volk zu Moses and Moses bat den Herrn, da verschwand das Feuer," "And the

people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord the fire was quenched." At the enunciation of every syllable the exorciser would pour some water on the pan of coals. The belief was that when these were extinguished the fire would also go out or be easily conquered.

Another method, and possibly the one most in favor, was by means of an amulet, or Feuer-zettel. This consisted of a piece of paper or parchment, upon which was drawn the shield of David; that is, a figure formed of two equilateral triangles, interlaced in such a manner as to give six angles, in each of which was written, in either Hebrew or Latin characters, the four mystic letters, A, G, L, A, or else the sacred name ADONAI.



Specimen of ahangsel amulet worn on the person, infallible against gunshot or stab wounds of any sort.

The sacred name or formula, it will be noticed, was introduced seven times into this figure. In case of a conflagration this mystic formula was to be quickly drawn, with chalk or charcoal, upon such buildings as were threatened, but had not yet ignited. According to an old tradition, it was by this means that the two mills of the Ephrata congregation were saved at the

time of the incendiary fire in 1747. To still the fire in the burning buildings the above-quoted verse, from Numbers, was to be quickly written on a wooden platter, paper or bread-crust, carried thrice around the burning building, and then thrown into the flames.

There was an Israelite in the Province, at an early date, who was particularly expert in the preparation of such amulets. Perhaps it was the same person who is noted in Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette, under date of August, 1735, as being his debtor for Crown paper to the extent of two shillings. Franklin there calls him "Levi, the Jew." Another curious fact connected with these Feuer-zettel was that, to insure efficiency, no money could be asked for them. The party who prepared them laid them upon a table; the receiver left the remuneration in its place, folded in a triangular piece of white paper. The implied understanding, however, was that if a sufficient sum was not left the charm would not work. The amount was usually one or two shillings.

Another favorite method for conquering the devouring element was by means of the so-called Feuer-segen. This was a rhythmical incantation, which could only be communicated from one person to another of the opposite sex, and then only under certain conditions, for it had to be done upon a Friday, full moon, at night, between the hours of eleven and twelve. As it could only be transmitted by word of mouth, and never by writing, the teacher and pupil stood at opposite sides of a table upon which lighted candles were placed; the left hand of each was laid upon the heart; with the right hand three crosses were struck over the breast at the end of

each line, the pupil repeating after his teacher as follows:

“Feuer, steh still, um Gottes Will;  
Um des Herrn Jesu Christi willen!  
Feuer, steh still in deiner Gluth,  
Wie Christus der Herr ist gestanden in  
seinem rosinen-farbnem Blut!  
Feuer und Gluth, Ich gebeut dir bei  
Gottes Namen  
Dass du nicht weiter kommst van dannen,  
Sondern behaltest alle deine Funken und  
Flammen.  
Amen! Amen! Amen!”

Translated into English it would read:

“Fire, stand still, for God's sake;  
For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake.  
Fire, stand still in your consuming flame,  
As Christ, the Lord, stood in His crim-  
son-colored blood.  
Fire and Flame, I command you, in the  
name of God,  
That you go not further from hence,  
But confine all of your sparks and flames.  
Amen! Amen! Amen!”

This fire-spell was, perhaps, the favorite one with the early settlers in Pennsylvania, and it has maintained itself even down to the present day. It was known as the Der Christliche Feuer-segen (The Christian fire conjuration), and was impotent in the possession of an Israelite. The method of using it was, in case of the outbreak of a fire, for the conjuror to hold two straws crosswise in his right hand and then slowly repeat the Feuer-segen, the firm belief being that so long as he held the crossed straws the flames could make no headway.

Various signs and omens were also thought to foretell the outbreak of a fire. Thus, when a dog howled, it was supposed to portend a fire. The omen most feared, however, was when a clock struck the hour during the tolling of a church bell. This was believed to be a sure sign of a conflagration during the next twenty-four hours within the sound of the bell. So firmly



was this believed that almost all sextons and bellringers were careful to avoid such a coincidence.

In the event of a barn or stable taking fire in some mysterious manner, such as where no lights or fire were upon the premises, the common belief was that it was caused by the ordinary horned beetle, which was supposed to carry with its claws upon its head live coals from the hearth in the house to the haymow or stable. Whenever no direct cause could be assigned for a stable fire it was invariably laid to this harmless insect.

The writer will now touch upon the bespeaking of fire, usually called "powwowing a burn" or "fire-blowing," a method of curing minor ills which still has a strong hold upon the credulity of the rural inhabitants in Eastern Pennsylvania. To prove the latter assertion it is but simply necessary to mention that within the last ten years a book of forms has been published for private circulation. The formula for "bespeaking" or "blowing" a burn, or taking out the fire, was a scriptural one, communicable only from one person to another of the opposite sex. We will close with an illustration drawn from personal experience.

When quite a small lad I was taken upon a visit to an old man in Flourtown, on the Springhouse pike, a short distance above Germantown. The immediate object of this visit was to obtain from him an old German folio Bible of family interest, and which is still in my possession. Boylike, after dinner I strayed from the house, and before long found myself in the village smithy, and, by some means or other, picked up a piece of hot iron. The result was a badly-burned hand. Running back across the pike into the house, howling as loudly as a strong pair of lungs would permit, everyone

in the house soon knew just what had happened.

Now, what to do was the question. Neither molasses, linseed oil nor lime-water was to be had upon the spur of the moment. So the old gentleman, who was a descendant from one of the old Kelpius community, suggested that he take me to an old woman in the neighborhood, who would besprech the burn and immediately take out the fire. A flip-penny bit was given me to leave on her table after the incantation was over. Well, the old woman was spare and thin, with very long bony fingers, a pair of brass spectacles perched upon her nose, and red tapes formed a garniture for her drooping eyelids. In fact, she was just what a child would picture to itself as a typical witch. Laying the burnt hand on the table, she immediately commenced making signs and crosses over the hurt with her long index finger, while she murmured her incantations—actions which, from the uncanny feeling excited in the lad, temporarily took away his thoughts from the injury. The howl stopped. This was taken as a sign that the charm was successful. The pain, however, soon returned, and the lad, struck with the ridiculous sight, broke out in laughter. This so incensed the old crone that she stated that before she could complete her cure something else was wanting. This something she wrote upon a piece of paper, in German characters, folded it carefully, and put it into the boy's pocket. It was not to be opened until he got home. Brought back to the house, the zettel was at once examined. It advised an immediate and thorough dusting of the lad's jacket with a pliable hazel or birch switch, well laid on, so as to teach him in future to respect old age and venerate a gray head. Well, he is glad to say this was not administered,

under the circumstances, and when the stage came along the boy was put aboard, with his injured hand tied up between two cakes of fresh smearkase, and, most assuredly, it was far more efficacious than the old crone's incantation.

However, there are hundreds of persons now living who will bear testimony in favor of the mystic pow-wow as a cure for burns.

The following is a translation of one of these forms. It is taken from an Ephrata manuscript of comparatively modern date, and is evidently a copy of a much older one:

“Depart out, Burn, and not inward;  
Be you hot or cold, cease your burning.  
God protect you, ———— (Here give  
the name of patient),  
Your blood and your flesh,  
Your marrow and bones;  
Your veins, be they great or small,  
Be preserved, in God's name,  
From Brand, both cold and warm.  
In the name of God the Father! God the  
Son! and of the Holy Ghost!”

The last line is to be repeated three times. At the close “Amen” is said. The sign of the cross is to be made over the burn or injury at each mention of the deity. Under the expression “cold brand,” gangrene or mortification is to be understood.

In passing judgment upon our German ancestors about their superstitions and beliefs in prognostics, it will be well to bear in mind the period in which they lived and their primitive surroundings and sanguine temperament, and, before we condemn them, leave us now in the twentieth century summon up courage enough to walk under a ladder, or, in arising in the morning, put down our left foot first.

JULIUS F. SACHSE.

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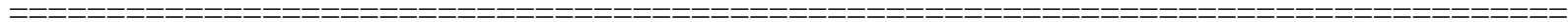
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