

# LOCAL SUPERSTITIONS.

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From time immemorial the educated world has been accustomed to regard the use of charms, talismans and exorcisms as superstitious and being confined only to savages and ignorant people, but from an examination of the various collections of such objects extant, notably those in the Museum of the Pennsylvania University and Metropolitan Museum of Art, it can be seen that the practice prevailed amongst the most civilized nations of the earth. The theory which seems to underlie them all is a notion of a kind of universal sympathy between all things in nature. "Like cures like" is not a new idea, and is the notion upon which most of the efficacy of charms depends; thus, "the hair of a mad dog is supposed to be good for its bite." If our blood is impure and out of order we should "wear a piece of hematite or bloodstone; for a sore eye carry an eye-stone."

Superstitious ideas and beliefs are, however, fast losing hold on the people, but yet, in certain localities, it is surprising how many beliefs exist. Some of the favorite superstitions of the country folks are "spooks" and witchcraft, and it is not uncommon to hear of witch doctors who perform certain incantations for the relief of persons supposed to be afflicted. By far the most popular belief is in "spooks" and ghosts. Whenever an old house, bowed down with the weight of years, acquires mysteriously some strange noises, or the shutters refuse

to stay closed, the verdict is immediately that the house is haunted.

For nearly a score of years an old log house, situated along the Manheim and Lancaster pike, near Mechanicsville, had the reputation of being haunted by spirits. Tradition states that the last tenants of the house were disturbed by strange noises, accompanied by the peculiar habit to which the doors and shutters were addicted, namely, continually banging or remaining open regardless of the precautions taken by the owner to fasten them. At any rate, this became so annoying that the family moved out, and the place has never found a tenant since, so an enterprising farmer nearby uses the house at present as a drying shed for his tobacco. How familiar to most of us is the old "spook house" that stood along the Grofftown road, near the present pumping station of Lancaster's water supply, and which a generation or two ago was a favorite picnic grounds.

### "Long Lost Friend."

In 1819 one John George Hohman, of Berks county, caused to be printed a small volume, called the "Long Lost Friend," which has gone through at least a half-dozen editions, so great being the demand for it. A Lancaster firm reprinted this book only two years ago, and copies are readily sold at fifty cents each among those of the rural districts of this county. Since the days of Saul, when that mighty man of Israel consulted the witch woman of Endor, the same mystic influence seems to sway the minds of men. The uncanny witches of Macbeth were not more potent than the individuality of some witch doctors in this county. They prospered everywhere with a serene complacency. At

Salem they burned witches at the stake for causing pöll-evil in horses, for enchanting cattle or bewitching children. When anyone is afflicted with an incurable disease which baffles the best medical skill, how often is heard the old familiar expression: "Take him to the pow-wow doctor." Hohman's book comprises 128 pages, including the index. The book is commonly known in this county as the "spook-book." An example from it is:

"To win every game engaged in.— Tie the heart of a bat with a red silken string to the right arm, and you will win every game at cards you play."

No scriptural comment or religious emblem is attached to this or any of the other injunctions. This is an example of the Hohman philosophy as it was expounded in the year of our Lord 1819. What a commentary upon our boasted advancement that it should have its votaries four score years later!

There are people in this county who will drive twenty miles to a witch doctor, and there are scores of people who believe that witch doctors have sold their souls to the devil and are in league with "Old Nick," and such people are consequently held in terror. Here are a few examples:

C—— R——, who died in this county a short time ago, was credited with having made arrangements with the old gentleman early in his life. The devil was always with him, took care of him and was known to frequently play cards with him. Finally the man died at his house alone, poor as a church mouse; but in his immediate neighborhood one can find people who will swear that they heard chains rattle and smelled sulphur on the night of his death.

B——— A——— built one end of E———'s stone barn in one day. Only himself was to be seen, but the sound of a legion of hammers was to be heard. He had been known to cut and put up twenty-one cords of wood in one day. He undertook a job of wood-chopping for an old man, which the proprietor expected to last two weeks; but he finished it in one day; and when he came to the house in the evening for his pay the old man ran off—afraid to treat with a man he firmly believed to be in league with his satanic majesty—and he finally paid him through a third party. No one knows of A———'s death, and it is hinted that the devil took him bodily.

### A Famous Case.

In 1695 John Roman and his two sons, of Chichester, Chester county, were reported to be students of necromancy and astrology. Concord Meeting of Friends censured them, and the case came before the Grand Jury of Chester county, Pa., where this return was made to the Court: "We, the Grand Inquest by the King's Authority, presents John Roman et al., of Chichester for practicing Geomancy according to hidden means, and divining by a stitch.

"WALTER MARTIN, Foreman."

In the same case another presentment was made: "We, the Grand Inquest, by the King's Authority, presents the following books: "Hidon's Temple of Wisdom, which teaches Geomancy, and Scott's Discovery of Witchcraft and Cornelius Agrippa, which teach Necromancy."

"WALTER MARTIN, Foreman."

The Court ordered as many of the said books as could be found to be brought to the next Court. The following verdict is the final one in the

case: "John Roman was called to answer the presentment of the Grand Jury of the last Court; he offered and submitted himself to the Bench; the order of the Court's that he should pay five pounds for a fine and all the charges, and never practice the Arts, but behave himself well for the future, and he promised to do so, whereupon he is discharged for this time."

On March 7, 1760, the Goshen Monthly Meeting of Friends (Chester county, Pa.) disowned Robert Jones for injury done to a poor woman, who was popularly believed to be a witch. He had driven her out of her house and otherwise abused her.

The Hon. J. Smith Futhey, in his history of Chester county, Pa., gives an interesting account of the trial of a reputed witch by lynch law in that county about 1760.

Dr. Christopher Witt, the last survivor of the celebrated Pietists of Germantown, Pa., one of the most learned and ingenious men in the colonies, physician, musician, astronomer, portrait painter and clockmaker, also practiced horoscopy and would as the occasion required cast nativities according to the position of celestial bodies, and he was wont to use the hazel rod in his divination. He died about 1765, at Germantown, Pa.

### **Curious Exorcisms.**

It was believed in Pennsylvania that rats could be exorcised, as the following paper, preserved by Judge Futhey, shows:

"Rats, I command you forthwith to depart my houses, barnes and premises and to go to Richard Joneses, a course Lyeing Between west and Southwest, where you will be accomodated well, and not Returne to this Premises on pain of death, and this shall be your sufficient pass."

The following exorcism, in the German language, was found in a very old house, lately torn down, on Madison alley, between Lime and Shippen streets, Lancaster:

“Bedfairies and all evil spirits, I forbid you entrance to my bedroom. In the name of God I forbid you my house and yard. I forbid you, in the Name of the Holy Trinity, my flesh and blood, my body and soul. I forbid you every nail hole in my house and yard until you have climbed all hills, waded all streams, counted all the leaves on the trees and all the stars in the heavens; until the coming of that precious day when the Mother of God gives birth to her second son. All this I do in the Name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

“ELLMAKER & BENZER.”

According to the Colonial Records, volume 1, two women were tried for witchcraft in this State. The accused persons, old women, were Swedes, Margaret Mattson, wife of Neel Mattson, and Yeshro Jacobson, wife of Hendrick Jacobson. While both persons were called before the Council, the first only seems to have stood a regular trial. Margaret Mattson lived on a plantation owned by her husband on the Delaware river, on the west side of Crum creek, in Ridley township, now Delaware county. She was long known in local legends as “the Witch of Ridley Creek.”

#### **Witch of Ridley Creek.**

She was first brought before the Council on December 7, 1683, no provincial Court having yet been organized in the colony, when her trial was set for December 27. On that day the accused appeared in the city of Philadelphia before William Penn, his Attorney General, a Grand Jury of twenty-one persons, all English appar-

ently, and a Petit Jury of twelve persons, one of whom, Albertus Hendrickson, was a Swede. The Grand Jury brought in a true bill, reporting in the afternoon. The indictment was then read to the accused. She pleaded not guilty, the Petit Jury was empanelled, the trial held, the Governor charged the jury, which retired, brought in a verdict, the prisoner was discharged, and the whole business was concluded that same afternoon, so far as Pennsylvania was concerned. The verdict was as follows: "Guilty of having the comon fame of a witch, but not guilty in manner and forme as shee stands endicted."

Nine years later, 1692, Massachusetts was for a whole year shaken with most horrible trials for this imaginary offense, until no person in that colony was safe from accusation. Nineteen persons were hung, and one pressed to death under heavy weights, while a great number suffered intolerable imprisonment. The whole population became infected with a craze concerning "witchcraft," the shame of which endures there to this day. In this matter the sober Quaker reached a righteous conclusion much quicker than the hasty Puritan.

In the southern portion of Northampton county there is a hill known as "Der Hexenkopf," or "Witches' Head," because it was there that their ladyships were supposed to hold nightly revels. In the early days of this county one S—— B——, a widow, was convicted of bewitching a man's horse and was given a year's imprisonment and stood six hours in the pillory.

Near Trexlertown, Lehigh county, a man named Weiler, and his family were supposed to have been be-

witched, and his daughters were, according to local tradition, turned into snakes for three months.

"Prawl's Hollow," a lonely place in Drumore township, this county, is haunted by the spirit of a peddler who was killed there; and old Lupin, who broke his neck on Fishing creek, can still be seen there of nights. There are several haunted houses that cannot be occupied; one that is often passed on pleasure drives not far from Lancaster, which was tried time after time, now has the windows nailed up and deserted. For a long time "Rockford," the home of General Hand, was reported to be haunted.

Only a few years ago Mrs. Sarah McBride, aged sixty years, of near Carlisle, was accused of necromancy and of having secured over \$500 from Edward Zug and his wife under promise to drive away witches that were pestering them; and less than a year ago a case was tried in this county in which the parties were accused of witchcraft.

There were many pow-wow remedies suggested for getting rid of warts on the hands, such as rubbing them with an old copper cent or with the milky juice of the milkweed. There was for years in Berks county a prejudice against wearing crossed suspenders, or "galluses," as they were commonly called—

"For an X is a 'hex' in funny old Berks,  
Of bad luck a token—the devil's own  
works,

When writ on a back by two cross  
gallows straps,

The safer suspender is one that ne'er  
laps."

One of the favorite means of counteracting the baleful influences of a supposed witch was to shoot at her imaginary form with a silver bullet.

Waterwitchery is still practiced,

that is, the endeavoring to locate water or metallic ores by the use of a "Y"-shaped twig of peach or hazel wood, the prongs of which were held in the hands, the end dropping when a favorable locality was reached.

### Omens Extant.

Some of the omens extant are highly curious, for instance:

To prevent hawks from catching chickens, heat the poker in the fire until it is red hot; then take it out and make a young lady whisper to it the name of her lover. The hawks will leave.

To put your left foot on the ground first when getting out of bed in the morning will surely bring bad luck.

Avoid meeting a tailor; to encounter one is an omen of ill.

If a cat runs across your path, start over again, or bad luck will follow.

To turn back after having started on an errand or trip will bring bad luck.

If you kill a snake, particularly a blacksnake, and hang it on a fence or on the limb of a tree, rain will come.

A snake never dies till sundown.

Witches tangle your horses' manes at night.

Carry a buckeye in your pocket and you will never have rheumatism.

Consult the almanac and see to it that the sign of the zodiac is Sagittarius before performing any surgical operation on man or beast.

Corn does best when planted under the Gemini; melons under Cancer; but never plant anything under Scorpio.

Rain on Friday, rain on Sunday; rain on Sunday, rain on Tuesday; rain on Tuesday, rain all the week.

Thunder on April Fool's day brings good luck.

Eggs laid on Good Friday or on Sunday keep longer than any other; but

butter made on Good Friday is never very palatable.

To kill a toad will bring you hard times.

Warts are caused by either touching a toad or by touching something over which a toad has hopped.

Should a bee, or any of its species, buzz about your room, you may expect pleasant visitors.

When a wild bird flies into the house its visit is intended as a warning of approaching evil.

Always lace your right shoe first. Good luck will follow.

To put on a sock or stocking wrong side out is an omen of evil.

Always allow swallows, blue birds, martins and mocking birds to build around the house. They bring good luck.

When dogs howl at night a relative or neighbor is about to die.

An ash leaf with an even number of spikes upon it will bring good luck if preserved.

To sow parsley is to sow discord in your family.

A cypress tree growing in front of the house causes many deaths in the family.

Never sweep a house after removing from it. This will cause sorrow to both yourself and the new occupant.

A stray cat brings luck. Never chase one away.

If you kill a cat evil will befall you.

A cat sleeping near the mouth of a sleeping baby steals the breath of the latter and will cause its early death.

When a sick baby smiles it is going to die.

A cow with her head pushed over the fence means that trouble is at hand.

Always plant bulbous plants, such as potatoes, when the moon is on the

wane; but plant other products between the new and the full moon.

The bottom rails of a fence built after the full moon will sink into the ground.

If the moon shines upon a sleeping person mental aberration will ensue.

Dogs bark at the sound of a bell or at music, in order to scare away the witches and spooks which the bell and the music attract.

If you cut your finger nails on Sunday, bad luck will come, cut them on Saturday you will see your sweetheart on Sunday, cut them on Monday, and you will have good luck.

If your hand itches, you will receive money. The itching of the left ear denotes that somebody is speaking evil of you, but the itching of the right ear implies you are being praised.

To dream of a snake means that an enemy is trying to harm you.

Should you dream of a death, you will hear of a wedding; should you dream of a wedding, you will hear of a death.

Dreams occurring after midnight invariably come true.

If geese splash their wings in the water it is going to rain.

When a cat runs wildly about the house rain is at hand.

The crowing of a rooster near the door is a sign that you are going to receive visitors.

If the first butterfly you see in the spring be a yellow one you will have much money before the year has passed.

Never spill salt—bad luck is sure to follow.

Bees do not make honey if any members of the family are addicted to swearing, nor will they work if kept uninformed of any death that may occur among your friends or in your own family.

The counting of chickens or lambs in the spring will cause ill luck.

When cows are restless bad news is at hand.

Always bury or burn a tooth which has been extracted. If a dog should get hold of the tooth a dog's tooth will grow in its place.

When a wren whistles around the house rain is sure to come.

If you kill a lizard in the spring the spring will go dry.

If a child cries on its birthday it ceases growing for a year.

### "Mammy" Henderson.

On April 6, 1876, an old woman died in this city who was blamed with all sorts of diabolical things. She not only put her spells on people, but their stock was made to suffer. Many an effort was made to counteract her work, and many a prayer was offered for her speedy death; but with the assistance of her art (as many believe) she lived to be over fourscore. I refer to "Mammy Henderson," or "Witch Henderson," as she was more commonly called. She died at the home of Mrs. Royer, on Plum street, who had kindly given her a home in her last illness. By some she was thought to be crazy, but in 1868 she was tried before our Court and acquitted of the charge of being a lunatic. Her home, a two-story brick house, was located on Walnut street, near Mulberry, and did not have a window-pane in it, all the glass having been broken out by wicked and mischievous persons. The fence was torn down and the whole building was in a "ram-shackle" condition. When the house was searched after her death there were found in it barrels of stones and brick-bats, which had been hurled through the windows and which she had gathered up and placed in barrels. There were also three or four bushels of dried

cakes and pies, the deed to the premises, \$53 in money, two beds and an old stove. The past history of the woman is veiled in mystery. She lived in the house on Walnut street as early as 1834, and in her early life peddled in the city and county. She is said to have come from Tennessee, but her maiden name is unknown, her daughter not even knowing it. She was married to a man named Henderson, a well-to-do man, with excellent connection, but not rich. He died about 1846. Her daughter she caused to be educated at a boarding school from when six years old until eighteen, when she married a man named Collins. The daughter met Collins at boarding school and married against her mother's wishes, for which act the mother never forgave her. "Mammy" Henderson was warm in her friendship, but bitter and unrelenting in her hatred of those whom she imagined had wronged her; notable instances of such hatred were the late Bishop Samuel Bowman and George K. Reed, the banker. Both of these gentlemen on several occasions were compelled to cause her arrest for heaping maledictions on their heads on the public thoroughfares. Judge Hayes caused her to be confined in prison for a few days and she roundly cursed him afterwards on more than one occasion. Though eccentric, she was harmless, and apparently a much-abused woman. She never harmed a creature, and the writer knows of several instances where she showed much pity for the injured. She nursed many a person in this city who had been afflicted with smallpox. As a nurse she is reported to have been faithful, intelligent and honest. She appears to have been not half as bad as she was painted, and, "life's fitful fever o'er," it is hoped that she rests in peace, her life here not having been a very peaceful one.

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