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ITEMS OF GERMAN-CANADIAN FOLK-LORE.

SOME of these superstitions may be of English or Scottish origin, but they were all collected among German-speaking people. I have classified these items of folk-lore under various headings, and will begin with

DEATH SIGNS.

When the corn-shoots are of a whitish color.

When a white spider crawls toward you or your house.

If the cabbage-heads are white, or covered with white spots.

The howling of a dog is also regarded by the Germans as a death sign.

In whatever direction a star falls, there is sure to be a death, presumably the death of some relative or friend of the beholder.

RAIN SIGNS.

If you kill a toad (will cause rain).

When there are many women on the sidewalks in a village or town.

If a hen crows.

If it rains on Whitsunday, it will rain for seven Sundays in succession after that.

STORM SIGNS.

When geese fly high.

When the tea-kettle hums.

GOOD LUCK.

For good luck, the old German Catholics make the sign of a cross over or on a loaf of bread before cutting it.

BAD LUCK.

To sing at table.

To spill salt ; the evil may be counteracted by burning the salt.

To look into a mirror at night.

To leave a knife on the table after retiring.

To open an umbrella in the house.

To kill a spider that crawls on your person.

To sit on a table.

To hold a loaf of bread upside down while cutting it.

To draw the window-blinds before lighting the lamps.

To sing or whistle while lying in bed.

## THUNDER AND LIGHTNING.

If it thunders before breakfast, it will thunder again before supper-time. Some Germans believe that it is impossible to extinguish fire caused by lightning with water, milk being the only liquid that will do so effectually. I heard of an instance where a farmer's barn was struck by lightning, but instead of resorting to water he very foolishly carried the milk up out of his cellar, and poured it on to the flames, but, as may be expected, without extinguishing the fire.

A survival of the mediæval belief that the stone-age axes or celts were thunderbolts is still current among the Germans in the county of Waterloo. They are called *gewitter-stein*, or *gewitter* and *donderkeidel*, literally meaning "lightning stone," or "lightning" and "thunder wedge," — the latter appellation referring to the general form of these implements. They are supposed to cause the splintered condition of a tree struck by lightning. Another absurd belief these people have is that when one of these so-called *gewitter-stein* is taken, a string tied around it, and then put into the grate of a stove, it will prevent the lightning from striking the house. A still more absurd belief is that one of these stones may be tied to a string, and the string set on fire, yet the stone will not fall to the ground, although the string may be all charred and easily broken.

It is a common belief among the Germans that if you do any work on Ascension Day the lightning will always surround your home. I heard of a woman who made for herself an apron on that day, and after that the lightning always seemed to hover around her home. She mentioned this to a friend, who advised her — on the approach of a thunder-shower — to hang the apron on a stake in the garden. He did this, the lightning struck it, and burnt the fabric to a crisp.

## FOLK-LORE IN CONNECTION WITH OUR FAUNA.

To see a snake is "a warning of danger."

Some Germans believe that if they kill a snake, "it will take all the trouble out of the house."

If toads are killed, it causes cows to produce blood instead of milk. It is also said that if toads are handled they cause warts.

If a bat drops any of its excrement on top of a person's head, the hair will come out at that particular spot.

Some of the old German settlers believed — and even some of their descendants believe — that in the autumn, when the apples were lying on the ground, the porcupines (*stachel-schwein*) came and rolled themselves over them, their sharp quills or spines piercing and holding the fruit, after which the animals retired to the woods and ate them at leisure.

FOLK-LORE IN CONNECTION WITH OUR FLORA.

A rather peculiar superstition is connected with the common knotweed or smartweed (*Polygonum aviculare*), which is called *brennessel* by the Germans. The leaves of this plant bear conspicuous dark spots, which are supposed to be the blood of Christ, the plants having been, it is supposed, at the foot of the cross when He was crucified.

A certain plant, the English name of which, unfortunately, I cannot find out, but which is known by the Germans as *irren-kraut*, found in Canadian woods, if stepped upon is supposed to bewilder a person, and cause him to lose his way. An acquaintance told me that one day, about forty years ago (she was about ten years old at that time), she was sent by her employer into the woods to bring home the cows, and, having stepped upon one of these plants, she became so confused that she lost her way, and began to wander around the woods, always coming back to the starting-point. At length she emerged into a clearing, and saw, as she supposed, a neighbor's barns. Seeing a man in a field, she went to him, and inquired where her employer lived. As this was the man himself, he was amazed and thought she had gone crazy.

CURES.

Hair, when inclined to split, should be cut at full moon.

*A Cure for Fits.* — Take the blood of a black hen, and induce the patient to drink it.

To stop nose-bleeding, tie a string of red yarn around one of your fingers.

The skin of a white weasel worn about the person is said to be a preventive of rheumatism.

A cure for "side-stitch" is to spit on a pebble and throw it over your shoulder, and then walk away without looking back at it.

For sore throat, take the sock off your left foot, turn it inside out, and put it around your throat, and it will help to cure it.

If a bee stings you, do not let it escape, but kill it, and the wound will not mortify.

The calcareous body found in the head of the common crayfish is supposed by some to be useful in removing foreign substances from the eye.

A cure for a child's irritable temper is to take it and put it head first through the left leg of its father's trousers. I heard of a case where this was tried about two years ago.

To prevent blood-poisoning if you step on a rusty nail, take the nail and immerse it in oil or lard, then remove it and put it into the bake-oven, and there let it remain until the wound is healed.

A cure for lumbago is to lie down on the floor face downward, and have your wife tread on the afflicted part with her feet.

*A Cure for a Sprain.* — If you find a bone, take it and rub it on the sprain, and then throw it over your head, and don't look back at it.

*Toothache Cures.* — Give a child a bread crust, at which mice have gnawed, to chew, and it will never be subject to toothache. Another sure preventive is, after washing yourself, to wipe the hands with the towel first before you wipe the face. I know an old woman who practises this method, and she says that she has not been troubled with toothache for the last twenty years.

The brain-teeth (*hern-zähne*) of a hog, if carried in the pocket, are also supposed to prevent toothache.

*Wart Cures.* — Go into a house, steal a dishcloth and bury it under a stone; as the cloth rots, the wart will disappear.

Rub the warts with a piece of pork, and bury it under the eaves. Another cure is to take a potato, cut it in two, and rub one of the pieces on the wart; then wrap it in a piece of paper, and place it on the sidewalk, or other place much frequented by the public, and whoever finds and opens the package will get the wart. Another cure still is, if you have more than one wart on your hand, to get some person to count them and he will get them.

#### MOON SIGNS.

The Germans have also superstitions in connection with the moon, all of them, however, the same, or only slight variants of the current English superstitions, such as the proper time for sowing grain, killing of hogs, etc.

#### MISCELLANEOUS.

If you lose one of your teeth, and a hog finds and swallows it, a hog-tooth will grow in its place.

Spitting on the stove is said to cause sore lips.

When one of a child's eyelashes falls out on its face, take the hair and put it on the child's bare breast, and it will receive a present.

It is a common practice among some Germans here to put old shoes among the cucumber vines to insure a good crop of cucumbers. Certain times should also be selected for planting the seed. If planted in the sign Virgo, they are sure to bear false blossoms; and if in Pisces, you will get a good crop.

When the stove becomes red-hot, you may expect cold weather.

The rocking of a cradle, while the child is not in it, is said to cause the child to get the colic.

If a cat washes her face, you will receive visitors.

As late as the beginning of the seventeenth century, Paulus Zacchias, a famous physician, writes of the virulent poison of the hair of

cats. What may be regarded as a survival of this superstition is the belief that the hair of cats, if swallowed, will cause consumption.

If the mother (*mutter*) in a vinegar barrel is not strong enough, it should be replaced by a piece of paper with the names of three cross women or termagants, that live in the neighborhood, written on it.

The large excrescences sometimes found on the white elm, if touched, were supposed to cause cancer.

If a person has had a cancer, and another individual, in showing where it was located, puts his finger on the spot on his own person, he also will get the cancer there.

“*Was sich zweitte das dritte sich.*” Literally meaning, whatever happens twice will happen thrice.

Contrary to the hitherto accepted belief that thirteen is an unlucky number, the Germans set a hen with thirteen eggs to insure good luck.

It is unlucky to name an infant after its dead brother or sister; the child will die young.

An old German woman gave me the following recipe: Take the blood of a bat and bathe your eyes with it, and you will be able to see in the dark as well as you can in the daytime. She attributes her present keen sight to trying this formula.

To render yourself invisible at pleasure: steal a black cat, fill a kettle with cold water, and set it on the stove; put the cat into it, and put a lid on top of it, and then, despite the cries and struggles of the animal, you are to hold the lid firmly down on top of it until it is dead and boiled to a pulp. During the time, you are not to turn your head, whatever is happening behind you. When the body is thoroughly boiled, remove the lid and pick out the bones, and, placing them one by one between your teeth, look into a mirror, and when you get the right one, you will not be able to see yourself. Keep this bone, and whenever you do not desire to be seen, put it between your teeth and you will become invisible. The boiling of the cat and picking out of the bones must be done at midnight.

#### HALLOWEEN OBSERVANCE.

To see their future husband, the young women used to take one teaspoonful of flour, one of salt, and one of water, and mix them together, forming dough. This they made into a little cake, which they baked in the ashes of the stove grate. While eating this, they walked backwards toward their beds, laid themselves down across them, and went to sleep lying in this position. If they dreamed of their future husband as bringing a glass cup containing water, he was wealthy; if a tin cup, he was in good circumstances; and if he had ragged clothes and a rusty tin cup, he was very poor.

## A CHRISTMAS EVE CUSTOM.

On Christmas Eve a curious custom was formerly practised by the young women to find out the vocation of their future husband. A cup half filled with water was provided, and about midnight a small quantity of lead was melted and poured into the cup, and the lead upon cooling assumed a variety of forms, such as horseshoes, hammers, nails, etc., for a blacksmith; square blocks for a farmer; and if one assumed the shape of a coffin, the person who got it would not live very long. Strict silence was enjoined while the practice was in progress.

## WITCHES AND WITCHCRAFT.

The belief in witches and witchcraft, even at this late day, has not entirely died out.

On the last day of April the old German Catholics used to make a cross on the door to keep the witches out, with the names (or their initials) of three Catholic saints, — Caspar, Melicher (Melchior), and Balthazar.

An old woman told me that one day a witch came to the place where she was working, and asked for some food, which was refused her. She left, much incensed at this refusal, and as she passed down the lane she began calling the cows to her, meanwhile holding up three fingers. The farmer did not think much of the circumstance at the time; but when the women began to milk the cows, they found that on every cow only one teat produced milk, the other three blood. The following morning the same thing happened again, and the farmer, becoming alarmed, consulted an Amish witch-doctor, who cured the cow by a process of charming. The old woman related another witch story to me, which is equally absurd. One of her employer's cows became bewitched. The milk was thick every time the cow was milked. A witch-doctor was consulted, and he advised them to put the milk into a pan and set it on the stove to boil, then to give the milk a thorough whipping with a whip while it boiled. This was done. The cow was cured, and the witch's power was dispelled.

About twenty years ago there was an old woman living not far from here who was popularly regarded as a witch. She is said to have possessed the sixth and seventh books of Moses, and it was believed that she could transform herself into any animal she chose. She sometimes transformed herself into a cat, and prowled around her neighbors' premises.

*W. J. Wintenberg.*