

DYER THOMAS THISELTON

DOMESTIC FOLK-LORE

Thomas Dyer

Domestic folk-lore

«Public Domain»

Dyer T.

Domestic folk-lore / T. Dyer — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	12
CHAPTER III	17
CHAPTER IV	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

T. F. Thiselton Dyer

Domestic folk-lore

PREFACE

For the name "Folk-lore" in its present signification, embracing the Popular Traditions, Proverbial Sayings, Superstitions, and Customs of the people, we are in a great measure indebted to the late editor of *Notes and Queries*— Mr. W. J. Thoms — who, in an anonymous contribution to the *Athenæum* of 22nd August, 1846, very aptly suggested this comprehensive term, which has since been adopted as the recognised title of what has now become an important branch of antiquarian research.

The study of Folk-lore is year by year receiving greater attention, its object being to collect, classify, and preserve survivals of popular belief, and to trace them as far as possible to their original source. This task is no easy one, as school-boards and railways are fast sweeping away every vestige of the old beliefs and customs which, in days gone by, held such a prominent place in social and domestic life. The Folk-lorist has, also, to deal with remote periods, and to examine the history of tales and traditions which have been handed down from the distant past and have lost much of their meaning in the lapse of years. But, as a writer in the *Standard* has pointed out, Folk-lore students tread on no man's toes. "They take up points of history which the historian despises, and deal with monuments more intangible but infinitely more ancient than those about which Sir John Lubbock is so solicitous. They prosper and are happy on the crumbs dropped from the tables of the learned, and grow scientifically rich on the refuse which less skilful craftsmen toss aside as useless. The tales with which the nurse wiles her charge asleep provide for the Folk-lore student a succulent banquet — for he knows that there is scarcely a child's story or a vain thought that may not be traced back to the boyhood of the world, and to those primitive races from which so many polished nations have sprung."

The field of research, too, in which the Folk-lorist is engaged is a most extensive one, supplying materials for investigation of a widespread character. Thus he recognises and, as far as he possibly can, explains the smallest item of superstition wherever found, not limiting his inquiries to any one subject. This, therefore, whilst enhancing the value of Folk-lore as a study, in the same degree increases its interest, since with a perfect impartiality it lays bare superstition as it exists among all classes of society. Whilst condemning, it may be, the uneducated peasant who places credence in the village fortune-teller or "cunning man," we are apt to forget how oftentimes persons belonging to the higher classes are found consulting with equal faith some clairvoyant or spirit-medium.

Hence, however reluctant the intelligent part of the community may be to own the fact, it must be admitted that superstition, in one form or another, dwells beneath the surface of most human hearts, although it may frequently display itself in the most disguised or refined form. Among the lower orders, as a writer has observed, "it wears its old fashions, in the higher it changes with the rapidity of modes in fashionable circles." Indeed, it is no matter of surprise that superstition prevails among the poor and ignorant, when we find the affluent and enlightened in many cases quite as ready to repose their belief in the most illogical ideas.

In conclusion, we would only add that the present little volume has been written with a view of showing how this rule applies even to the daily routine of Domestic Life, every department of which, as will be seen in the following pages, has its own Folk-lore.

T. F. Thiselton Dyer.

Brighton, May, 1881.

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND INFANCY

Value of Superstitions – Lucky Days and Hours of Birth – The Caul – The Changeling – The Evil Eye – "Up and not Down" – Rocking the Empty Cradle – Teeth, Nails, and Hands – The Maple and the Ash – Unchristened Children.

Around every stage of human life a variety of customs and superstitions have woven themselves, most of which, apart from their antiquarian value, as having been bequeathed to us from the far-off past, are interesting in so far as they illustrate those old-world notions and quaint beliefs which marked the social and domestic life of our forefathers. Although, therefore, many of these may appear to us meaningless, yet it must be remembered that they were the natural outcome of that scanty knowledge and those crude conceptions which prevailed in less enlightened times than our own. Probably, if our ancestors were in our midst now, they would be able in a great measure to explain and account for what is often looked upon now-a-days as childish fancy and so much nursery rubbish. In the present chapter it is proposed to give a brief and general survey of the folk-lore associated with birth and infancy, without, however, entering critically into its origin or growth, or tracing its transmigration from one country to another. Commencing, then, with birth, we find that many influences are supposed to affect the future fortune and character of the infant. Thus, in some places great attention is paid to the day of the week on which the child is born, as may be gathered from the following rhyme still current in Cornwall: —

"Sunday's child is full of grace,
Monday's child is full in the face,
Tuesday's child is solemn and sad,
Wednesday's child is merry and glad,
Thursday's child is inclined to thieving,
Friday's child is free in giving,
Saturday's child works hard for his living" —

a piece of folk-lore varying, of course, in different localities. By general consent, however, Sunday is regarded as a most lucky day for birth, both in this country and on the Continent; and according to the "Universal Fortune-teller" – a book very popular among the lower classes in former years – "great riches, long life, and happiness" are in store for those fortunate beings born on Sunday, while in Sussex they are considered safe against drowning and hanging. Importance is also attached to the hour of birth; and the faculty of seeing much that is hidden from others is said to be granted to children born at the "chime hours," *i. e.*, the hours of three, six, nine, or twelve – a superstition found in many parts of the Continent. There is, too, an idea prevalent in Germany that when a child is born in leap-year either it or its mother will die within the course of the year – a notion not unknown in our own country. Again, from time immemorial various kinds of divination have been in use for the purpose of discovering the sex of an infant previous to its birth. One of these is by means of a shoulder-of-mutton bone, which, after the whole of the flesh has been stripped clean off, must be hung up the last thing at night over the front door of the house. On the following morning the sex of the first person who enters, exclusive of the members of the household, indicates the sex of the child.

We will next turn to some of the countless superstitions connected with the new-born child. A highly popular one refers to the caul – a thin membrane occasionally found covering the head at birth, and deemed specially lucky, as indicating, among other things, that the child will never be drowned. It has been, in consequence, termed the "holy" or "fortunate hood," and great care is

generally taken that it should not be lost or thrown away, for fear of the death or sickness of the child. This superstitious fancy was very common in the primitive ages of the Church, and St. Chrysostom inveighs against it in several of his homilies. The presence of a caul on board ship was believed to prevent shipwreck, and owners of vessels paid a large price for them. Most readers will, no doubt, recollect how Thomas Hood wrote for his early work, "Whims and Oddities," a capital ballad upon this vulgar error. Speaking of the jolly mariner who confidently put to sea in spite of the ink-black sky which "told every eye a storm was soon to be," he goes on to say —

"But still that jolly mariner
Took in no reef at all;
For in his pouch confidingly
He wore a baby's caul."

It little availed him, however; for as soon as the storm in ruthless fury burst upon his frail bark, he

"Was smothered by the squall.
Heaven ne'er heard his cry, nor did
The ocean heed his *caul*!"

Advocates also purchased them, that they might be endued with eloquence, the price paid having often been from twenty to thirty guineas. They seem to have had other magical properties, as Grose informs us that any one "possessed of a caul may know the state of health of the person who was born with it. If alive and well, it is firm and crisp; if dead or sick, relaxed and flaccid." In France the luck supposed to belong to a caul is proverbial, and *être né coiffé* is an expression signifying that a person is extremely fortunate. Apart from the ordinary luck supposed to attach to the "caul," it may preserve the child from a terrible danger to which, according to the old idea, it is ever exposed — namely, that of being secretly carried off and exchanged by some envious witch or fairy for its own ill-favoured offspring. This superstition was once very common in many countries, and was even believed by Martin Luther, if we are to rely on the following extract from his "Table Book: " — "Changelings Satan lays in the place of the genuine children, that people may be tormented with them. He often carries off young maidens into the water." This most reprehensible of the practices attributed to the fairies is constantly spoken of by our old writers, and is several times mentioned by Shakespeare. In the speech of Puck, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act ii., sc. 1), that jovial sprite says of Titania's lovely boy — the cause of quarrel between the King and Queen of Elfland: —

"She never had so sweet a changeling."

In the *Winter's Tale* (Act iv., sc. 4) the Shepherd, on discovering the babe Perdita, tells the Clown, "It was told me I should be rich by the fairies. This is some changeling." As a preservation against this danger, sundry charms are observed. Thus, in the North of England, a carving-knife is still hung from the head of the cradle, with the point suspended near the child's face. In the Western Isles of Scotland idiots are believed to be the fairies' changelings, and in order to regain the lost child, parents have recourse to the following device: — They place the changeling on the beach, below high-water mark, when the tide is out, and pay no heed to its screams, believing that the fairies, rather than allow their offspring to be drowned by the rising waters, will convey it away and restore the child they had stolen. The sign that this has been done is the cessation of the child's crying. In Ireland, too, the peasants often place the child supposed to be a changeling on a hot shovel, or torment it in some other way. A similar practice is resorted to in Denmark, where the mother heats the oven, and places the

child on the peel, pretending to put it in; and sometimes she whips it severely with a rod, or throws it into the water. The only real safeguard, however, against this piece of fairy mischief is baptism, and hence the rite has generally been performed among the peasantry as soon as possible after birth.

Another danger to which the new-born child is said to be exposed, and to counteract which baptism is an infallible charm, is the influence of the "evil eye;" certain persons being thought to possess the power of inflicting injury by merely looking on those whom they wish to harm. Although this form of superstition has been gradually dying out for many years past, yet it still retains its hold in certain country places. It is interesting to trace this notion as far back as the time of the Romans; and in the late Professor Conington's translation of the "Satires of Persius" we find it thus laughably spoken of: – "Look here! A grandmother or a superstitious aunt has taken baby from his cradle, and is charming his forehead against mischief by the joint action of her middle finger and her purifying spittle; for she knows right well how to check the evil eye." Confining ourselves, however, to instances recorded in our own country, we find that, even now-a-days, various charms are practised for counteracting the baneful influence of this cruel species of witchcraft. Thus, in Lancashire, some of the chief consist in spitting three times in the child's face, turning a live coal in the fire, exclaiming, "The Lord be with us;" whilst in the neighbourhood of Burnley "drawing blood above the mouth" was once a popular antidote. Self-bored or "lucky stones" are often hung by the peasantry behind their cottage doors; and in the South of England a copy of the apocryphal letter of our Lord to Abgarus, King of Edessa, may occasionally be seen pasted on the walls. In many places, when a child pines or wastes away, the cause is often attributed to the "evil eye," and one remedy in use against this disaster is the following: – Before sunrise it is brought to a blacksmith of the seventh generation, and laid on the anvil. The smith then raises his hammer as if he were about to strike the hot iron, but brings it gently down on the child's body. This is done three times, after which the child is considered certain to amend. This superstition survives in Cornwall; and the late Mr. Hawker, of Morwenstow, a noted authority on such topics, tells us that two-thirds of the inhabitants of the Tamar side firmly believe in the power of the evil eye. In Scotland this piece of folk-lore has prevailed extensively from time immemorial, and one of the charms to avert it is the "gold and silver water." A sovereign and a shilling are put into water, which is sprinkled over the patient in the name of the Trinity. Again, in the Highlands of Scotland, ash-sap is given to new-born children, because, in common with the rowan, that tree is supposed to possess the property of resisting the attacks of witches, fairies, and other imps of darkness. The Irish think that not only their children but their cattle are "eye-bitten" when they fall suddenly sick.

Among other important items of folk-lore associated with birth may be mentioned the popular belief that a child should go up in the world before it goes down. On leaving its mother's room for the first time, it is considered absolutely necessary that it should be carried *up-stairs* before it goes *down-stairs*, otherwise it will always keep low in the world, and never rise in after-life either to riches or distinction. When, however, as often happens, the mother's room is on the top storey, the nurse overcomes the obstacle by placing a chair near the door, on which she steps before leaving the room. In Yorkshire it is further stated that a new-born infant should always be placed first in the arms of a maiden before any one else touches it. It has been aptly questioned by Mr. Henderson, in his "Folk-lore of the Northern Counties," whether we may not trace in this practice an outgrowth of the mediæval belief that the Virgin Mary was present at the birth of St. John the Baptist, and received him first in her arms. Some, too, will never permit an infant to sleep upon bones – that is, the lap – a piece of folk-lore founded on some degree of truth; for it has been pointed out that it is undoubtedly better for a child to support it throughout its whole length, than to allow its head or legs to hang down, as they might probably do if the infant was sleeping on the lap. Again, there is a common idea that a baby and a kitten cannot thrive in the same house; and should, therefore, as is not unfrequently the case, a cat have kittens at the time of a birth, these are immediately either destroyed or given away. Few nurses, also, can be found courageous enough to weigh a young child, from a superstitious

conviction that it is unfortunate so to do, the child often dying, or, at any rate, not thriving afterwards. Equally unlucky, too, is it considered to rock baby's empty cradle, it being an omen of its death – a belief which also prevails in Scotland. The same notion exists in many parts of the Continent, and the Swedish folk tell us that it should be avoided, as it is apt to make the child noisy and given to crying. It is also deprecated on another ground, that it is ominous of another claimant for that place of rest – a piece of folk-lore which the Sussex peasantry express in the following rhyme: —

"If you rock the cradle empty,
Then you shall have babies plenty."

Many consider it a bad sign when the first tooth makes its appearance in the upper jaw, denoting, it is said, that the child will not survive its infancy. Whilst speaking of teeth, it may be noted that they occupy an important place in the folk-lore of infancy. Many readers will no doubt recollect how the Duke of Gloucester, in *3 Henry VI.* (Act v., sc. 6), when describing the peculiarities connected with his birth, relates that —

"The midwife wondered, and the women cried,
'O Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!'
And so I was, which plainly signified
That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog."

In Sussex it is still customary for little children to wear a necklace of beads made from the root of the peony, as this is supposed to act as a charm in assisting the cutting of their teeth. In the same county, too, the peasantry have a great dislike to throwing away the cast teeth of young children, believing that should any be accidentally found and gnawed by an animal, the child's new tooth would exactly correspond with the animal's which had bitten the old one. Once more, in Scotland and the North of England, when the first teeth come out, sundry precautions are taken, to make sure that the fresh ones may be sound and healthy. One of these consists in filling the cavity with salt, after which the tooth must be burnt, while the following formula is repeated: —

"Fire! fire! burn bone;
God send me my tooth again."

This practice exists in Sweden, and likewise in Switzerland, where the tooth is wrapped up in paper, with a little salt, and then thrown into the fire. The teeth, however, are not the only objects of superstition in infancy, similar importance being attached to the nails. In many places, for instance, it is considered imprudent to cut them till baby is a year old, and then they should be bitten off, or else there is a likelihood of its growing up dishonest, or of its being, as the Sussex peasantry say, "light-fingered." Anyhow, special attention is to be paid to the day of the week on which the child's nails are cut, if there be any truth in a well-known proverb —

"Better a child had ne'er been born,
Than cut his nails on a Sunday morn."

The same warning is given in Germany, and if it is disregarded, it is said that the child will be liable to stammer as it grows up. A curious Northumberland belief affirms that if the first parings of a child's nails are carefully buried under an ash-tree, it will turn out in after-life a capital singer. It is also a popular fancy in nursery folk-lore that the child's future career in this world can be easily augured from the little specks on its nails, a species of palmistry still extensively credited by even

educated persons, and one, too, not confined to infancy. Again, the infant's tiny hands are not free from superstition, and here and there, throughout the country, there is a notion that for the first few months after its birth the right one should remain unwashed, the reason assigned for this strange piece of eccentricity being that it may gather riches. According to another idea, children born open-handed are said to be of a bountiful disposition. In Scotland, too, great attention is paid as to which hand a child uses when taking up for the first time a spoon to eat. If it should happen to be the left, then, alas! he is doomed to be an unlucky fellow all through his life. Indeed, as far as we can judge from the numerous items of folk-lore still in vogue, it would seem that the early period of infancy, in one way or another, furnishes countless opportunities for ascertaining what kind of life is in store for the child in years to come, almost every trivial action being regarded as indicative of something or other that shall befall it. Although many of these ideas may seem to us in this nineteenth century apparently senseless, yet it must be remembered they are frequently survivals of primitive culture, and are interesting as having been handed down to us from the distant past. According to an old superstition, parents desirous of securing long life for their children should pass them through the branches of a maple. A few years ago one of these trees had long been resorted to for this purpose in West Grinstead Park, and as soon as a rumour spread through the parish that it was about to be demolished, quite a consternation prevailed in the neighbourhood. Similar properties are supposed to belong to the ash, weakly infants that do not thrive being drawn through a cleft in its trunk. This charm, as performed in Cornwall, is thus: – A large knife is inserted into the trunk of a young ash, about a foot from the ground, and a vertical opening made for about three feet. Two men then forcibly pull the parts asunder, and hold them so, whilst the mother passes the child through the cleft three times. The ceremony does not end here, as the child has to be washed for three successive mornings in the dew from the leaves of the "charmed ash." This supposed magical property of the ash has an additional interest, when we consider that some thousands of years ago our ancestors regarded it as one of their wonder-working trees, and associated it with some of their oldest traditions. At the present day, too, it is the subject of an extensive folk-lore, to which we shall have occasion to refer [in a succeeding chapter](#).

Again, if a baby frets and does not appear to thrive, it is supposed by some to be "longing." Thus, a Sussex nurse one day said to a lady, "Baby is so uncommon fretty, I do believe he must be longing for something." When asked what he could be longing for, she replied, "Something that his mother longed for, but did not get, before he was born, and the best way to satisfy him would be, I think, to try him with a brandied cherry, or some hare's brains." This piece of superstition, however, is not confined to Sussex. Once more, in addition to the popular notion that cats suck the breath of infants and so cause their death – one, indeed, without a particle of truth – there is another in which poor pussy is the victim, an illustration of which we quote from "Rambles in an Old City," by a Norfolk author: – "Not long since a woman, holding quite a respectable rank among the working classes, avowed herself determined to 'drownd' the cat as soon as ever her baby, which was lying ill, should die. The only explanation she could give for this determination was that the cat jumped upon the nurse's lap as the baby lay there soon after it was born, from which time it ailed, and ever since that time the cat had regularly gone under its bed once a day and coughed twice. These mysterious actions of poor 'Tabby' were assigned as the cause of the baby wasting, and its fate was to be sealed as soon as that of the poor infant was decided. That the baby happened to be the twenty-fourth child of his mother, who had succeeded in rearing only four of the two dozen, was a fact that seemed to possess no weight whatever in her estimation." This strange antipathy to our domestic animal no doubt took its origin in the old belief that the cat's is one of the numerous forms which witches are fond of assuming, and on this account, in days gone by, poor pussy was oftentimes subjected to gross ill-treatment at the hands of the ignorant classes. At the present day, in Germany, there is a deep-rooted belief that witches, when bent on doing mischief, take the form of a cat, and many stories are current of their frightening their victims by appearing as "the nightmare;" or, if dishonestly

disposed, of their drinking their neighbour's beer. Returning, however, again to the subject of our present chapter, there is a superstitious fancy in the North of England that it is unlucky to walk over the graves of unchristened children, which is vulgarly called "unchristened ground," the person who does so rendering himself liable to catching the fatal disease of the "grave-scab." This complaint, we are told by Mr. Henderson, "comes on with a trembling of the limbs and hard breathing, and at last the skin burns as if touched with hot iron," in allusion to which an old ballad tells us —

"And it ne'er will be cured by doctor on earth,
Tho' every one should tent him, oh!
He shall tremble and die like the elf-shot eye,
And return from whence he came, oh!"

There is, however, a remedy, though not easy of attainment — "It lies in the wearing a sark, thus prepared: — The lint must be grown in a field which shall be manured from a farmyard heap that has not been disturbed for forty years. It must be spun by Habbitrot, the queen of spinsters; it must be bleached by an honest bleacher, in an honest miller's mill-dam, and sewed by an honest tailor. On donning this mysterious vestment, the sufferer will at once regain his health and strength." Unfortunately the necessary conditions for the successful accomplishment of this charm are so difficult, that he must be a clever man who can fulfil them. In the South of England, on the other hand, we do not find the same dread attaching to the graves of still-born children. Thus on a certain occasion, when one of the Commissioners of Devonport complained that a charge of one shilling and sixpence should have been made upon the parish authorities for the grave and interment of a still-born child, he added that "when he was a young man it was thought lucky to have a still-born child put into an open grave, as it was considered to be a sure passport to heaven for the next person buried there." According to another superstitious notion, if a mother frets and pines after her baby when it is dead, it is said that it cannot rest, and will come back to earth again. Various stories are on record of children thus visiting their mothers after death, an instance of which we quote from the "Dialect of Leeds: " — It appears that soon after the birth of the mother's next child, the previous one that had died entered her room with eyes deeply sunken, as if with much weeping, and on approaching the bed, said, "Mother, I can't rest if you will go on fretting." She replied, "Well, lad, I wean't fret any more." He then looked upon the bed and said, "Let's luke at it, mother!" She turned down the coverlet and let him look at her new-born babe. "It'll die," he said, and vanished. These, then, are some of the boundless dangers and difficulties that are supposed to beset the beginnings of life; and, taking into consideration the importance of that momentous crisis, when a fresh actor is introduced upon the world's great stage, it is not surprising that this event has, in most ages and countries, been associated with divers superstitions, and given rise to sundry customs, each of which has helped to invest man's entry into this world with all that grandeur which such a solemn occasion requires.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD

Nursery Literature – The Power of Baptism – Confirmation – Popular Prayers
– Weather Rhymes – School Superstitions – Barring out.

It must not be supposed that childhood has no special folk-lore of its own. It is, in fact, of a most varied kind, many of the old traditionary beliefs and practices associated with the nursery being relics of what the Scandinavian mothers taught their children in days of long ago. The familiar fairy-tales of our own childhood still form the nursery literature in most homes, and are of unusual interest as embodying not only the myths and legends of the ancient Aryan race, but their conceptions about the world around them. Thus, for instance, the well-known story of "Cinderella," like many others of the same character, such as "Jack the Giant Killer," or "Beauty and the Beast," are to be found in almost all countries, and although the versions differ in some respects, yet they point to a common origin at a very remote period. Indeed, it is curious that there should still exist among the children of the nineteenth century an undying love for these survivals of Aryan literature, couched in such graceful and simple language that few modern compositions can be found to equal them. In reading, therefore, about the dwellers in Wonderland, the young mind is unconsciously taking in primitive notions about the workings of nature as seen in the succession of day and night, the changes of the seasons, and so on. In the story of "Cinderella," we have the ancient nature-myth of the sun and the dawn, representing the morning sun in the form of a fairy prince pursuing Cinderella, the dawn, to claim her for his bride, whilst the envious clouds, her sisters, and the moon, her stepmother, strive to keep her in the background. It would, however, take too long and require a book of itself to discuss the history and meaning of these fairy tales which so delight the childish fancy, and exercise such a wholesome influence, inculcating some of the noblest sentiments and loftiest teachings of the founders of our race. Referring then more particularly to the superstitions connected with childhood, we would, first of all, briefly speak of those relating to certain outward circumstances, which are believed to affect more or less the child's welfare in life.

Thus, it is a deep-rooted belief that a child never thrives until after its baptism; and in cases of illness the clergyman is more often perhaps sent for by the poor from a belief in the physical virtue of the sacred rite itself, rather than from any actual conviction of its religious importance. Indeed, how much potency is supposed to reside in baptism may be gathered from the countless superstitions with which it is associated, the omission of this rite being attended more often than not with fatal results. Hence it is frequently performed as soon as possible after birth, one reason being, as we have already seen, that so long as the child remains unbaptised it is thought to be at the mercy of ill-disposed fairies, and subject to the influence of the evil eye. According to another popular fancy, not confined to our own country, should a child have the misfortune to die unchristened, it is doomed either to flit restlessly around its parents' abode, or to wander about in deserted spots, daily repining over its hard and unenviable lot. In Germany, tradition says that such children are transformed into that delusive little meteor known as the will-o'-the-wisp, and so ceaselessly hover between heaven and earth. On one occasion, we are told of a Dutch parson who, happening to go home to his village late one evening, fell in with no less than three of these fiery phenomena. Remembering them to be the souls of unbaptised children, he solemnly stretched out his hand and pronounced the words of baptism over them. Much, however, to his terrible consternation and surprise, in the twinkling of an eye a thousand or more of these apparitions suddenly made their appearance – no doubt all equally anxious to be christened. The good man, runs the story, was so terribly frightened, that forgetting all his good intentions, he took to his heels and ran home as fast as his legs could take him. In Lusatia, where the same superstition prevails, the souls of these unhappy children, which hover about in the

form of will-o'-the-wisps, are said to be relieved from their unhappy wanderings so soon as any pious hand throws a handful of consecrated ground after them.

In Scotland, to make quite sure of baptism being altogether propitious, it was deemed highly important that the person entrusted with the care of the child should be known by common report to be lucky. She was generally provided with a piece of bread and cheese, which she presented to the first person she met as an offering from the infant. If the party readily accepted and partook of the proffered gift, it was undoubtedly a good omen; but if refused it was considered tantamount to wishing evil to the child. Hence the future destiny of the little one was often augured from this superstitious ceremony, which, by-the-by, is also practised in the West of England, but the events of its after-life only too often belied the weal and woe predicted for it. Again, it is thought highly necessary that the child should cry at its baptism, or else ill-luck will sooner or later overtake it, the idea being that, when the child screams and kicks, the evil spirit is in the act of quitting it; its silence, on the other hand, indicating that it is too good for this wicked world. An amusing little episode in illustration of this curious superstition is related by Mrs. Latham, in the "Folk-lore Record: " – "I was lately present at a christening in Sussex, when a lady of the party, who was grandmother of the child, whispered in a voice of anxiety, 'The child never cried; why did not the nurse rouse it up?' After we had left the church she said to her, 'O nurse, why did not you pinch baby?' And when the baby's good behaviour was afterwards commented upon, she observed, with a very serious air, 'I wish that he had cried.'" In the same county it is considered unlucky to divulge a child's intended name before its baptism; and the water sprinkled on its forehead at the font must on no account be wiped off. Whilst on the subject of baptism, we would just note that in former years peculiar curative properties were supposed to reside in water that had been used at this rite, and on this account it was employed for various disorders. It was also regarded in Scotland as a preservative against witchcraft; and eyes bathed in it were rendered for life incapable of seeing ghosts.

It may not be inappropriate to allude here to the superstitions relative to confirmation, following in due time, as this rite does, on baptism. In Norfolk, for instance, it is considered unlucky to be touched by the bishop's left hand; and in Devonshire, also, where a similar notion prevails, young people look upon his right hand as the lucky one, and should it not be their privilege to receive it, they leave the church much disappointed. In some of the northern counties, we are informed that the unfortunate recipients of the left hand are doomed, then and there, to a life of single blessedness. This is not the only species of superstition belonging to confirmation, for instances are on record of persons who, although confirmed in their early life, have again presented themselves for confirmation in their old age, under a conviction that the bishop's blessing would cure them of some bodily ailment. It is related that, at one of the confirmations of the venerable Bishop Bathurst, an old woman was observed eagerly pressing forward to the church. A by-stander, somewhat amazed at her odd conduct, and struck with her aged appearance, inquired if she was going to be confirmed, and, being answered in the affirmative, expressed his astonishment that she should have procrastinated it to such an advanced time of life. The old woman, however, resented his reproof, replying "that it was not so; that she had already been bishopped seven times, and intended to be again, it was so good for her rheumatism!"

In some cases the prayers taught by the poor to their children are curious. Thus, a popular prayer, formerly in use, and not yet forgotten, is evidently a relic of Roman Catholic times, having been handed down from a period anterior to the Reformation. As the reader will see, the version below contains a distinct appeal to certain saints for their intercession with God on the child's behalf: —

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed I lie upon;
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels at its head,
One to watch, two to pray,

And one to bear my soul away;
God within and God without,
Sweet Jesus Christ all round about;
If I die before I wake,
I pray to God my soul to take."

It has been pointed out that it is very singular that this prayer should have survived the great change which took place in religious opinion in the sixteenth century, and that it even still remains in use. There are many variations of it, and the following two distiches obtained from Lancashire are quaint, having been written, it has been thought, by the Puritans, in ridicule: —

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Hold the horse that I leap on.
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Take a stick and lay upon."

A Lincolnshire clergyman, anxious to learn something of the nature of the prayers said by the children of the agricultural poor, visited some of their cottages a few years ago in the evening, and listened to the little ones as they said their prayers. The concluding portion, he tells us, was always intercession for relations, but the form it generally took was peculiar. In the first place, it was not, as is the case with the more educated classes, "Pray God bless father and mother," &c., but "Pray for father, pray for mother, pray for brothers and sisters," and so on. In certain cases, through carelessness and rapidity, the words had degenerated into "Pray father, pray mother," &c. There can be no doubt that originally the prayer was this: — "Pray for father;" then a *Pater noster*, or an *Ave Maria*, or both, would be said; then "Pray for mother," &c. After the Reformation, as time went on, the constant repetition of the *Pater* and the use of the *Ave Maria* would gradually die out with the change of religious ideas, and thus the prayer would assume its present form, "Pray for father, pray for mother."

Referring, in the second place, to the superstitions of children, we find an immense number of curious rhymes on various subjects used by them throughout the country. While many of these have, no doubt, been taught them by nurserymaids, a great part, as Mr. Chambers has pointed out in his "Popular Rhymes of Scotland," may be thought to have taken their rise in the childish imagination during that familiar acquaintance with natural objects, which it is one of the most precious privileges of the young to enjoy in rural districts. Besides, too, we must not forget that children seem to have a peculiar love for all natural objects, often finding pleasure in looking at some wayside flower, or in watching the movements of some tiny insect, which in after-years do not bring them the same interest. The fact, indeed, that the young mind is a true admirer of nature in all probability accounts for many of those pleasing rhymes which constitute much of the child's folk-lore.

Some of the charms, for instance, used to influence the weather are curious, and it is worthy of note that these, in many cases, are not confined to childhood only, but are frequently found in the mouths of our peasants. Thus the child's appeal to rain for its departure has become a general charm, and is familiar to most readers: —

"Rain, rain, go to Spain,
Fair weather, come again."

Aubrey considers this rhyme of great antiquity, and says that "it is derived from the Gentiles." Often in summer-time, when a thunder-shower interrupts some out-door game, one may hear a chorus of young voices shouting —

"Rain, rain, go away,
Come another summer's day."

Or, as other versions have it, "Come again on washing-day." The appearance of a rainbow is generally, too, the signal for various marks of dissatisfaction on the part of the young, who, besides entreating it to vanish as soon as possible, frequently try to charm it away. This they do by placing a couple of straws or twigs crossways on the ground, and so, to quote their phrase, "cross out the rainbow." Another way is to make a cross of two sticks, and to lay four pebbles on it, one at each end. Again, some of the rhymes relating to snow are highly quaint, the following being repeated when it makes its first appearance: —

"The men of the East
Are picking their geese,
And sending their feathers here away, here away."

When, however, boys wish the snow to go away, they sing: —

"Snow, snow, give over,
The cow's in the clover."

Thunder, in the North of England, is called by children "Rattley-bags," and during a storm the boys are in the habit of singing: —

"Rowley, Rowley, Rattley-bags,
Take the lasses and leave the lads."

There is a rhyme which is often repeated by the juvenile folks in the north and midland counties upon seeing the new moon, which, perhaps, may have an indirect allusion to its supposed lucky influence: —

"I see the moon and the moon sees me,
God help the parson that baptised me!" —

containing, evidently, a congratulation upon their birth. Boys, too, have a curious saying respecting the reflection of the sun's beams upon a ceiling, which they term "Jack-a-dandy beating his wife with a stick of silver." If a mischievous boy, with a piece of looking-glass, throws the reflection into the eyes of a neighbour, the latter complains "he's throwing Jack-a-dandy in my eyes."

Passing on to other charm-rhymes connected with natural objects, there are a very numerous class relating to the animal creation. In evening-time, for instance, when the dew begins to fall, boys are fond of hunting the large black snails, on discovering which they exclaim: —

"Snail, snail, put out your horn,
Or I'll kill your father and mother i' th' morn."

This charm, however, is not confined to our own country, but under a variety of forms is found on the Continent. In Scotland, too, children prognosticate the coming weather from the movements of this little creature: —

"Snailie, snailie, shoot out your horn,

And tell us if it will be a bonny day the morn."

School-life, again, has its customs and superstitions, many of which have been transmitted from generation to generation; and childhood, indeed, would seem quite incomplete without them. Thus, according to an odd notion universally accepted in days gone by, and still received with implicit faith, if the master's cane is carefully nicked at the upper end, and a hair inserted, it will, as soon as used, split immediately to the very tip. In school-games, the usual antipathy to odd numbers is found, and a child is easily persuaded to give away a marble to make the number even. A kind of divination, also, is still frequently employed by boys to settle matters of difficulty, such, for example, as who shall be the leaders in a game, the choice of partners, and other details which are deemed of equal importance. The mode of procedure is this: – A long stick is thrown into the air, and caught by one of the parties. Each one then grasps it hand over hand, and he who succeeds in getting the last hold is the successful party. Mr. Henderson says that an odd expression was formerly connected with the lending a knife among boys for the cutting up of a cake or other dainty, the borrowers being asked to give it back "laughing," *i. e.*, with some of the good things it was used to cut.

Among the many old school customs, we may close our present chapter by mentioning a popular one known as "barring out," upon which, it may be remembered, Miss Edgeworth has founded one of her instructive stories. The practice consisted in "barring out" the masters from the scene of their educational labours, the agents in this ceremony being the pupils of the school. It was an occasion of no small disorder —

"Not school-boys at a barring out,
Raised ever such incessant rout."

Addison is reported to have been the leader of a barring out at the Lichfield Grammar School, and to have displayed on the occasion a spirit of disorderly daring very different to that timid modesty which so characterised his after-life. So much, then, for the folk-lore of childhood, a subject indeed full of interest, and possessing a worth far beyond the circle of its own immediate influence, inasmuch as even the simplest nursery jingle or puerile saying has often been found of help in proving the affinity of certain races, and has an ethnological value which the student of comparative philology would be slow to underrate in his task of research.

CHAPTER III

LOVE AND COURTSHIP

Love-tests – Plants used in Love-charms – The Lady-bird – The Snail – St. Valentine's Day – Midsummer Eve – Hallowe'en – Omens on Friday.

No event in human life has, from the earliest times, been associated with a more extensive folk-lore than marriage, which is indeed no matter of surprise, considering that this is naturally looked upon as the happiest epoch – the *summum bonum* – of each one's career in this world. Hence, to write a detailed account of the charms, omens, and divinations, as well as of the superstitions and customs, connected with marriage, including its early stages of love and courtship, would require a volume for itself, so varied and widespread is this subject of universal interest.

In the present chapter, however, have been collected together, in as condensed a form as possible, some of the principal items of folk-lore connected with love and courtship, as we find them scattered here and there throughout the country. Commencing, then, with love-divinations, these are of every conceivable kind, the anxious maiden apparently having left no stone unturned in her anxiety to ascertain her lot in the marriage state. Hence in her natural longings to raise the veil of futurity, the aspirant to matrimony, if she be at all of a superstitious turn of mind, seldom lets an opportunity pass by without endeavouring to gain from it some sign or token of the kind of husband that is in store for her. As soon, too, as the appointed one has at last presented himself, she is not content to receive with unreserved faith his professions of love and life-long fidelity; but, in her sly moments, when he is not at hand, she proves the genuineness of his devotion by certain charms which, while they cruelly belie his character, only too often unkindly deceive the love-sick maiden.

In the first place, we may note that love-tests have been derived from a variety of sources, such as plants, insects, animals, birds, not to mention those countless other omens obtained from familiar objects to which we shall have occasion to allude. At the outset, however, it may not be uninteresting to quote the following account of love-charms in use about one hundred and fifty years ago, and which was written by a young lady to the editor of the *Connoisseur*: —

"Arabella was in love with a clever Londoner, and had tried all the approved remedies. She had seen him several times in coffee grounds with a sword by his side; he was once at the bottom of a tea-cup in a coach and six, with his two footmen behind it. On the last May morning she went into the fields to hear the cuckoo; and when she pulled off her left shoe, she found a hair in it the exact colouring of his. The same night she sowed hempseed in the back yard, repeating the words: —

'Hempseed I sow, hempseed I hoe,
And he that is my true love,
Come after me and mow.'

After that she took a clean shift and turned it, and hung it on the back of a chair; and very likely he would have come and turned it, for she heard a step, and being frightened could not help speaking, and that broke the spell. The maid Betty recommended her young mistress to go backwards, without speaking a word, into the garden on Midsummer Eve, and gather a rose, keep it in a clean sheet of paper without looking in it till Christmas Day, it will be as fresh as in June; and if she sticks this rose in her bosom, he that is to be her husband will come and take it out. Arabella had tried several other strange fancies. Whenever she lies in a strange bed, she always ties her garters nine times round the bed-post, and knits nine knots in it, saying all the time: —

'This knot I knit, this knot I tie,

To see my love as he goes by,
In his apparel and array,
As he walks in every day.'

On the last occasion Mr. Blossom drew the curtains and tucked up the clothes at the bed's feet. She has many times pared an apple whole, and afterwards flung the peel over her head, and on each occasion the peel formed the first letter of his Christian name or surname."

Referring to the use of plants in love-charms, they are very numerous. One popular one consists in taking the leaves of yarrow, commonly called "nosebleed," and tickling the inside of the nostrils, repeating at the same time these lines: —

"Green 'arrow, green 'arrow, you bear a white blow,
If my love love me, my nose will bleed now;
If my love don't love me, it 'ont bleed a drop;
If my love do love me, 'twill bleed every drop."

Some cut the common brake or fern just above the root to ascertain the initial letters of the future wife's or husband's name; and the dandelion, as a plant of omen, is much in demand. As soon as its seeds are ripe they stand above the head of the plant in a globular form, with a feathery top at the end of each seed, and then are without any difficulty detached. When in this condition the flower-stalk must be carefully plucked, so as not to injure the globe of seeds, the charm consisting in blowing off the seeds with the breath. The number of puffs that are required to blow every seed clean off indicates the number of years that must elapse before the person is married. Again, nuts and apples are very favourite love-tests. The mode of procedure is for a girl to place on the bars of the grate a nut, repeating this incantation: —

"If he loves me, pop and fly;
If he hates me, live and die."

As may be imagined, great is the dismay if the anxious face of the inquirer gradually perceives the nut, instead of making the hoped-for pop, die and make no sign. Again, passing on to insects, one means of divination is to throw a lady-bird into the air, repeating meanwhile the subjoined couplet: —

"Fly away east, and fly away west,
Show me where lives the one I like best."

Should this little insect chance to fly in the direction of the house where the loved one resides, it is regarded as a highly-favourable omen. The snail, again, was much used in love-divinations, many an eager maiden anxious of ascertaining her lover's name following the example of Hobnelia, who, in order to test the constancy of her Lubberkin, did as follows: —

"Upon a gooseberry bush a snail I found,
For always snails near sweetest fruit abound.
I seized the vermin, home I quickly sped,
And on the hearth the milk-white embers spread;
Slow crawled the snail, and, if I right can spell,
In the soft ashes marked a curious L.
Oh! may this wondrous omen lucky prove,
For 'L' is found in Lubberkin and Love."

Three magpies are said to prognosticate a wedding; and in our rural districts the unmarried of either sex calculate the number of years of single blessedness still allotted to them by counting the cuckoo's notes when they first hear it in the spring.

Some days are considered specially propitious for practising love-divinations. Foremost among these is St. Valentine's Day, a festival which has been considered highly appropriate for such ceremonies, as there is an old tradition that on this day birds choose their mates, a notion which is frequently alluded to by the poets, and particularly by Chaucer, to which reference is made also in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: —

"Good morrow, friends, St. Valentine is past;
Begin the wood-birds but to couple now."

Thus, the Devonshire young ladies have a fancy that on St. Valentine's Day they can, if they wish, make certain of their future. If so disposed, they go into the churchyard at midnight, with some hempseed in their hand, which, after they have walked round the church a certain number of times, they scatter on either side as they return homewards, repeating a certain charm. It is supposed that the true lover will be seen taking up the hempseed just sown, attired for the ceremony in a winding-sheet. Another species of love-divination once observed consisted in obtaining five bay leaves, four of which the anxious maiden pinned at the four corners of her pillow, and the fifth in the middle. If she was fortunate enough to dream of her lover, it was a sure sign that he would be married to her in the course of the year. Again, some young people would boil an egg hard, and, after taking out the contents, fill the shell with salt, the charm consisting in eating the shell and salt on going to bed at night without either speaking or drinking after it. A further method of divination was practised in the following way: — The lady wrote her lovers' names upon small pieces of paper, and, rolling them up in clay, put them into a tub of water. The first that rose to the surface was to be not only her Valentine, but, in all probability, her future husband.

Another time, which has been equally popular from time immemorial for such superstitious practices, is Midsummer Eve. People gathered on this night the rose, St. John's wort, trefoil, and rue, each of which was supposed to have magical properties. They set orpine in clay upon pieces of slate in their houses, under the name of a Midsummer man. As the stalk next morning was found to incline to the right or left, the anxious maiden knew whether her lover would prove true to her or not.

Hallowe'en, again, has been supposed to be the time, of all other times, when supernatural influences prevail, and on this account is regarded as a night of sure divination in love matters. All kinds of devices have, therefore, been resorted to at this season, and in the North of England many superstitions still linger on, where this festival is known as "nutcrack-night," from nuts forming a prominent feature in the evening feast. Once more, Christmas Eve is well known to love-sick swains and languishing maidens as an excellent day for obtaining a glimpse into futurity. Numerous are the spells and ceremonies by which this is attempted. Thus in some places, at "the witching hour of night," the young damsel goes into the garden and plucks twelve sage leaves, under the belief that she will see the shadowy form of her future husband approach her from the opposite end of the ground. In trying this delicate mode of divination great care must be taken not to break or damage the sage-stalk, as should this happen serious consequences might ensue. The following barbarous charm was also much practised in days gone by: — The heart was taken from a living pigeon, stuck full of pins, and laid on the hearth, and while it was burning, the form of the young person's future partner was believed to become visible to mortal eye.

Friday has been held a good day of the week for love omens, and in Norfolk the following lines are repeated on three Friday nights successively, as on the last one it is believed that the young lady will dream of her future husband: —

"To-night, to-night, is Friday night,
Lay me down in dirty white,
Dream who my husband is to be;
And lay my children by my side,
If I'm to live to be his bride."

There are numerous other modes of matrimonial divination which still find favour in the eyes of those who prefer the married state to that of virginity. Thus the seeds of butter-dock must be scattered on the ground by a young unmarried girl half an hour before sunrise on a Friday morning in a lonesome place. She must strew the seeds gradually on the grass, saying these words: —

"I sow, I sow!
Then, my own dear,
Come here, come here,
And mow, and mow."

After this she will see her future husband mowing with a scythe at a short distance from her. She must, however, display no symptoms of fear, for should she cry out in alarm he will immediately vanish. This method is said to be infallible, but it is regarded as a bold, desperate, and presumptuous undertaking. Some girls, again, make a hole in the road where four ways meet, and apply their ear to it, with the hope of learning of what trade their future husband is to be. It is unnecessary, however, to illustrate this part of our subject further, for the preceding pages amply show how varied and extensive are the omens and divinations connected with an event without which life is considered in the eyes of most persons incomplete. Although these may seem trivial and often nonsensical, yet they have often exercised an important influence over that period of anxious suspense which intervenes between courtship and marriage, often tantalising and damping in a cruel manner the hopes of many an ardent lover.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE

Seasons and Days propitious to Marriage – Superstitions connected with the
Bride – Meeting a Funeral – Robbing the Bride of Pins – Dancing in a Hog's Trough
– The Wedding-cake – The Ring.

In selecting the time for the marriage ceremony precautions of every kind have generally been taken to avoid an unlucky month and day for the knot to be tied. Indeed, the old Roman notion that May marriages are unlucky survives to this day in England, a striking example, as Mr. Tylor has pointed out in his "Primitive Culture," of how an idea, the meaning of which has perished for ages, may continue to exist simply because it has existed. That May with us is not a month for marrying may easily be seen any year from the list of weddings in the *Times* newspaper, the popular belief being summed up in the familiar proverb, "Marry in May and you'll rue the day." Some of the numerous reasons assigned for the ill-luck attaching to this month are the following: – That women disobeying the rule would be childless; or if they had children, that the first-born would be an idiot, or have some physical deformity; or that the married couple would not live happily together in their new life, but soon become weary of each other's society – superstitions which still retain their hold throughout the country. In spite, however, of this absurd prejudice, it seems that in days gone by May was honoured in feudal England as the month of all months especially congenial to lovers. Most readers are no doubt acquainted with the following stanza in the "Court of Love: " —

"I had not spoke so sone the words, but she,
My souveraine, did thank me heartily,
And saide, 'Abide, ye shall dwell still with me
Till season come of May, for then truly
The King of Love and all his company
Shall holde his feste full rially and well,'
And there I bode till that the season fell."

On the other hand, June is a highly popular month for marrying, one reason perhaps being that the earth is then clothed in her summer beauty, and that this is a season of plenty. At any rate, this notion may be traced up to the time of the Romans, and thus when Ovid was anxious about the marriage of his daughter, he —

"Resolved to match the girl, and tried to find
What days unprosp'rous were, what moons were kind;
After June's sacred Ides his fancy strayed,
Good to the man and happy to the maid."

Among the other seasons admitting or prohibiting matrimony may be mentioned the following, contained in a well-known rhyme: —

"Advent marriages doth deny,
But Hilary gives thee liberty;
Septuagesima says thee nay,
Eight days from Easter says you may;
Rogation bids thee to contain,

But Trinity sets thee free again."

Equal importance has been attached by some to the day of the week on which the marriage is performed. Thus Friday, on account of its being regarded as an inauspicious and evil day for the commencement of any kind of enterprise, is generally avoided, few brides being found bold enough to run the risk of incurring bad luck from being married on a day of ill-omen. In days gone by, Sunday appears to have been a popular day for marriages; although, as Mr. Jeaffreson, in his amusing history of "Brides and Bridals," remarks, "A fashionable wedding, celebrated on the Lord's Day in London, or any part of England, would now-a-days be denounced by religious people of all Christian parties as an outrageous exhibition of impiety. But in our feudal times, and long after the Reformation, Sunday was, of all days of the week, the favourite one for marriages. Long after the theatres had been closed on Sundays, the day of rest was the chief day for weddings with Londoners of every social class." The brides of Elizabethan dramas are usually represented as being married on Sunday. Thus in the *Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio, after telling his future father-in-law "that upon Sunday is the wedding-day," and laughing at Katharine's petulant exclamation, "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first," says: —

"Father, and wife, and gentlemen, adieu;
I will to Venice; Sunday comes apace:
We will have rings, and things, and give array;
And, kiss me, Kate, we will be married o' Sunday."

Among the Scottish people, we are informed by the Registrar-General, there is a peculiar fondness for marrying on the last day of the year. Indeed, there are more marriages in Scotland on that day than in any week of the year, excepting, of course, the week in which that day occurs. Thus, in the year 1861, the returns give the number of marriages in the eight principal towns as averaging about twenty-five a day, exclusive of Sunday, as marrying is one of the things not to be done on this day in Scotland. On the 31st of December, however, in the same towns there were between 400 and 500 marriages. Curious to say, too, in Scotland, Friday seems to be considered a lucky day for weddings; for Mr. Watson, the City Chamberlain of Glasgow, affirms that "it is a well-established fact that nine-tenths of the marriages in Glasgow are celebrated on a Friday; only a few on Tuesday and Wednesday; Saturday and Monday are still more rarely adopted, and I have never heard of such a thing in Glasgow as a marriage on Sunday."

Leaving seasons and days considered propitious for marriage, we find, in the next place, a number of superstitions associated with that prominent and all-important personage on such an occasion, the bride. Thus it is above all things necessary that the sun should shine on her — "Blest is the bride that the sun shines on!" — a notion, indeed, which, it has been suggested, had a practical application in years gone by when marriages were celebrated in the church porch. A wet day, at such a time, was a serious matter, especially as our forefathers had not the many contrivances of modern times for preservation from rain. Whereas, now-a-days, young ladies when alluding to being married speak of "going to church," formerly they spoke of "visiting the church-porch." After prevailing for centuries, this ancient usage was discountenanced, if not actually abolished, by the ecclesiastical reformers of Edward VI.'s reign, who "ordained that the performance of the binding ceremony should take place in the body of the church." Referring again to the bride, it is deemed absolutely necessary by very many that she should weep on her wedding-day, if it be only a few tears, the omission of such an act being considered ominous of her future happiness. It is, too, the height of ill-luck for either the bride or the bridegroom to meet a funeral on going to or coming from the church, for if it happen to be that of a female, it is an indication that the bride will not live long, and if it should be that of a male, then the bridegroom is doomed to an early death. In the North of England there is a strong prejudice against a marriage taking place while there is a grave open in the churchyard. In many parts of the

country, also, special care is taken that the bees are informed of a wedding, and as a mark of respect to them their hives are decorated with a favour. In Sussex a bride on her return home from church is often robbed of all the pins about her dress by the single women present, from a belief that whoever possesses one of them will be married in the course of a year. Much excitement and amusement are occasionally caused by the youthful competitors for this supposed charm; and the bride herself is not unfrequently the victim of rather rough treatment. According to another piece of superstition, the bride, in removing her bridal robe and chaplet at the completion of the marriage ceremonies, must take care to throw away every pin worn on this eventful day. Evil fortune, it is affirmed, will sooner or later inevitably overtake the bride who keeps even one pin used in the marriage toilet. Woe also to the bridesmaids if they retain one of them, as their chances of marriage will thereby be materially lessened, and anyhow they must give up all hope of being wedded before the following Whitsuntide.

Again, in some parts of Yorkshire, to rub shoulders with the bride or bridegroom is considered an augury of a speedy marriage; and a piece of folk-lore prevalent in the neighbourhood of Hull is to this effect: "Be sure when you go to get married that you don't go in at one door and out at another, or you will always be unlucky." Cuthbert Bede, in "Notes and Queries," records an instance of a similar superstition that occurred at a wedding in a Worcestershire village in October, 1877. He says, "The bride and bridegroom at the conclusion of the ceremony left the church by the chancel door, instead of following the usual custom of walking down the church and through the nave door. One of the oldest inhabitants, in mentioning this to me, said that it 'betokened bad luck,' and that she had never known a like instance but once in her life when the married couple went out of the church through the chancel door, and the bride was a widow before the twelve months was out."

Alluding briefly to other superstitions associated with marriage, we are told in the North of England that she who receives from the bride a piece of cheese, cut by her before leaving the table, will be the next bride among the company. In Yorkshire, too, when a newly-married couple first enter their house, a hen is brought and made to cackle as a sign of good luck. The old Roman practice, also, of lifting the bride over the threshold of her husband's home, had its counterpart in Scotland within the present century, it being customary to lift the young wife over the doorstep, lest any witchcraft or evil eye should be cast upon and influence her. Indeed, we are informed that the same practice prevailed in the North of England some years ago – an interesting survival of the primitive superstitions of our ancestors.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.