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Superstition in Rural America

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(1) Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV, p. 339.

The question may readily be asked, "How does superstition arise?" The answer is not difficult to find for it is quite apparent that the practice of superstition, and magical arts in general, is based on ignorance. To the superstitious the occurrence of some striking phenomenon is the manifestation of the will of some omnipotent force. There results, then, a deification of the object in which such phenomenon is expressed as, for example, in Nature-worship. Likewise, an incorrect interpretation of occurrences in nature causes other superstitious practices resulting in the seeking after effects that are above and beyond the capacities of material causes. (2)

(2) Ibid., Vol. XIV, p. 340.

CHAPTER I

The Nature of Superstition

Superstition may be divided into four classes:

1) improper worship of the true God; 2) idolatry; 3) divination; and 4) vain observances including magic and occult arts. It is with the last type of superstition that this thesis deals and under this heading are included all those "beliefs and practices which, at least by implication, attribute supernatural or preternatural powers for good or evil to causes evidently incapable of producing the expected effects."(1)

(1) Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV, p. 339.

The question may readily be asked, "How does superstition arise?" The answer is not difficult to find for it is quite apparent that the practice of superstition, and magical arts in general, is based on ignorance. To the superstitious the occurrence of some striking phenomenon is the manifestation of the will of some omnipotent force. There results, then, a deification of the object in which such phenomenon is expressed as, for example, in Nature-worship. Likewise, an incorrect interpretation of occurrences in nature causes other superstitious practices resulting in the seeking after effects that are above and beyond the capacities of material causes.(2)

(2) Ibid., Vol. XIV, p. 340.

From the earliest ages, superstition as such has been known and recognized. It has been said that the discarded beliefs of the more learned and the more progressive in society have always formed the bases for the superstitions of those less advanced in science. As the mysteries of nature are explained by science through the development of science's various branches, the discoveries do not penetrate to the lower strata for a period of some time. The consequence is that the phenomenon of nature which the savants formerly recognized as such is now interpreted by the uninitiated as an expression of the will of some overruling power. Accordingly those who are acquainted with the first cause of the phenomenon call the other classes of society, which do not recognize the cause but which are conscious of the effects, superstitious. (3)

(3) Essays on Superstition, A. M. Grant, p. 91.

At various times in the course of history, different kinds of superstitions have been in vogue. There were the practices of wearing amulets; the belief in astrology; faith in omens; chiromancy or palmistry, divination by reading the lines of the hands; capnomancy, by means of the ascent or motion of smoke; captroptomancy, through playing cards; anthropomancy, by inspection of human viscera; belomancy, through shuffling of arrows; geomancy, or the tracing of lines of figures on the ground; hydromancy, the use of water; necromancy, or the evocation of the dead; oneiromancy, the interpretation of dreams; the use of philtres, potions, etc; and witchcraft. All of these were in use

during certain ages and then with the advance of civilization fell into disuse as the fallacy of each practice was discovered.

It must be recognized that magical acts and beliefs have always had a practical value. They are used "only as a means to an end." There is at all times some element of chance or incidence of fortune involved.

"Even in entirely modern forms of enterprise, the element of magic crops up."(4)

(4) Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 4, p. 621.

Typical of these modern forms of enterprise around which superstitions have developed are the gambling casinos, the race-track and the stage, the devotees of all these having their especial beliefs and practices in the efficacy of certain magical acts. Even among those who consider themselves enlightened there are found persons who "submit to Coue and Freud, to Jaeger and Kneipp, to sun worship, either direct or through the mercury vapor lamp."(5)

(5) Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 635.

And these are, of course, only other forms of superstitious practices.

Although it has been thought that primitive man is, as a rule, more superstitious than civilized man, it is found that when it comes to a matter of skills, the magical art has, in general, no hold. There are definite ways of making fire,

of fishing, of weaving and all the other accomplishments of primitive life deviations from which are scarcely ever attempted. For example, in the matter of fishing, the savage is acquainted with the best materials for making traps; he knows the most clever way of assembling the necessary materials so that the trap can withstand the greatest strain and the longest wear. But in making his device for fishing, he never depends upon magic. He depends upon his own acquired skill to make the trap as strong as he is capable of making it without recourse to the evocation of supernatural powers. The moment that the savage goes fishing, however, and the element of chance enters, a reversion to superstition takes place and the savage calls upon all the magical practices that he knows to help him to a successful catch. And here is wherein the superstitious practice has its utilitarian value.

In all of the other means of sustaining life, the primitive man, very much like his more civilized brother, is quite content to leave superstition out of sight until it comes to a matter of luck. Skill is his mainstay and reliance. Without it his chances of continued existence are slight thus it is a choice between achievement through knowledge or failure through ignorance. Life or death is decided by science which in this case is skill or lack of skill.

CHAPTER II

The Nature of Rural Superstitions

It has been definitely established that rural people are, in general, more given to religiosity than are urban residents. This has been true in all ages from the times of the Pharaohs even unto the present. The rural mentality is marked in this respect by the following: 1) the representation of the phenomena

"that are most closely connected with agricultural production and activities-phenomena that are important for the welfare of the agriculturist and whose influence he feels strongly and constantly-the earth and its fertility, vegetation, the sun, the rain, the wind, the productive power of the soil, the corn, the trees and the grass, the fertility of cattle, etc."(6)

(6) Sorokin, Zimmerman and Galpin: Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology, p. 358.

2) the peculiarly agricultural nature of the invocations, rites and ceremonies, typical of which is the harvest-ceremony of the American Indian; 3) the abundance of symbolism and imagery; and 4) the fact that agricultural beliefs

"have been generally animistic, indertimistic, and spiritualistic in character and rarely..... mechanistic, materialistic, and deterministic."(7)

(7) Ibid., p. 369.

It is also well known that secret societies, strongly

tinged with the mysterious and esoteric, find a rich response in the agricultural population. This is in direct contrast to the urban peoples who, because of the multiplicity of interests or varieties of opinion common to most cities, take much less stock in organizations which have some hidden purpose for existence. In this connection it is worthy of note that the farming and peasant class take much less readily to violent anti-nationalistic, anti-patriotic and similar movements whereas in urban territories these trends always produce a rich crop of followers. The traditional, the customary, the conservative, these are the characteristics of the rural population.

It is quite natural, then, that traits of religiosity and of spiritual life in general should be much less changeable in nature among the agricultural class. Although in America this reactionary spirit is found to be as strong as in rural sections of other countries, the rural type of religion reflects that heritage from the first European settlers who, dissidents and non-conformists in their respective native lands, brought to these shores that same feeling of heterodoxy which, in many or in most cases, was the cause for leaving the lands of their fathers. Here, accordingly, the traditional, while conserved and cultivated, is tinged with the unusual and the different in spiritual matters.

As has been noted above, the agricultural population has been marked largely by the influence of the environment as regards the predominant phenomena of the country, i. e., the temperature, the sun, the rain, the wind, etc. These phases of

nature are, of course, quite beyond man's control, but they are felt constantly by the farmer and peasant class. The means with which the ruralite works - horses and other animals - are living things for whose existence the owner is, in small part only, responsible. And the ends of his labor are, like its nature and his instruments, largely tinged with the chance element.

"In brief.....rural environment and occupational activities have been up to the present time, predominantly natural, organic, vitalistic, and undetermined by personal efforts."(8)

(8) Sorokin and Zimmerman: Rural-Urban Sociology, p. 438.

Consequently the rites and beliefs of the rustics have persisted in their adherence to the veneration of nature in its various phases. New cults, new theories, and new beliefs of a religious aspect seldom replace the old and conventional theories and beliefs of the rural peoples particularly when it comes to a matter of their especial fields of labor. This, too, has been true in all ages. In the several hundred years during which Rome, in securing control of the world, was carrying her civilization to all of the known world, it has been found that Rome was quite unsuccessful in extirpating the native religion and substituting therefor its own -- at least in the rural areas.

"The rural classes continued to cling to their native gods, beliefs, and rituals, while the urban classes accepted the

the yearly dec... foreign religions and especially the festivals
official cults of the Roman Empire."(9)
customs of which can be traced back to the early middle ages

(9) Toutain, J. F.: Les cultes paiens dans L'Empire romain,
p. 102.

In the history of rural religious beliefs and rites
it is found that tree-worship has always played an important
part.

"...tree-worship is well attested for all
the great European families of the Aryan
stock. It is probable that among the
Germans the oldest sanctuaries were
natural woods. Amongst the Celts the
oak-worship of the Druids is familiar to
everyone At Upsala, the old religious
capital of Sweden, there was a sacred
grove in which every tree was regarded as
divine. The heathen Slavs worshiped
trees and groves... Proofs of the prevalence
of tree-worship in ancient Greece and
Italy are abundant."(10)

(10) Frazer, James G.: The Golden Bough, Vol. II, p. 109.

The tree is identified with a spirit which is believed to have
power to give rain and sunshine, to make the crops grow, and to
make the herds multiply as well as to bless women with off-
spring. May Day and the Maypole are the present-day represen-
tations of this old belief.

Other beliefs which have survived until the present
in some forms are: the Corn-mother which represents the spirit
of growth and is usually exemplified by the last sheaf to be
cut from the field in the fall; the myth of Adonis which typifies

the yearly decay and revival of life; and the fire festivals customs of which can be traced back to the early middle ages and which are, in turn, the observance of customs that originated in a period long antecedent to the era of Christianity. Especially notable are the fire ceremonies of Hallowe'en, Christmas and the Eve of Twelfth Day as well as the Lenten and Easter fires.

"Most of the above rites still practiced date, no doubt, from an extremely early age in the history of agriculture. They are probably far older than Christianity, older even than those highly developed forms of Greek religion with which ancient writers and artists have made us familiar but which have been for so many centuries a thing of the past. Thus it happens that, while the fine flower of the religious consciousness in myth, ritual, and art is fleeting and evanescent, its simpler forms are comparatively stable and permanent, being rooted deep in those principles of common minds which bid fair to outlive all the splendid but transient creations of genius."(11)

(11) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 335.

In the superstitions practiced and believed in today, there are found, almost exclusively, aspects which treat of the principles of life and fertility which have been, are and will always be the primary motivating influences of life as long as the world lasts. The large number of magical beliefs in regard to the horse, for example, grew up because of the proximity of that animal to the farmer and because of the need which the human had for the brute. Without the horse much of

the work that was accomplished on the farm could not have been done. So too, with the other farm animals. They have been surrounded with superstitions of various kinds for they comprised a very essential part of the rural life. And it has been seen why the vast number of tree superstitions have grown up with the rural people, trees being so great a necessity in the life of the farmer. Other types of superstitions such as those centered around the passage of the moon, portents indicated by birds or by insects, the supposed effects of the efficacy of various homely medico-magical practices and the various other kinds of superstitious beliefs depend largely upon the principle of life and fertility.

In all of the above beliefs there is the great element of chance which, as has been said before, is so important a part of the farmer's life that he has become its devotee. He follows slavishly the beliefs of his forefathers who, through circumstances too varied to follow, pinned their faith and hope to some set of conditions which existed before or after the practice of some magical act. If the desired result appeared, the practice was infallible. If it did not appear, some higher power had intervened and the practice was still infallible. Thus, no matter whether the act turned out as it should have or not, it was still considered to have a certain potency. Witness, therefore, the many beliefs which are diametrically opposite in the appended list.

the forces of nature to worship them as a god. Particularly is this true in the matter of weather portents.

CHAPTER III

Superstition in Rural America

Superstition has clung more tenaciously to the resident of the rural areas than it has to the city-dweller. The reasons for this are many and diverse. Chief among them, however, is the fact that the rural type of mind holds more closely to the ideas of its preceding generation and in so doing cultivates, so to speak, the truisms, thoughts and credences of the generation which the ever-changing present supplants. Education, its quality and quantity, social contacts and range of interests are, of course, important factors in the development of the rural mind. That these are less available in rural areas than in urban areas is quite apparent to even the casual observer. Hence it is but natural that superstition continues to flower in the country areas to a much greater extent than it does in urban areas.

"No true evaluation of rural life would be complete without the consideration of magic, sorcery, soothsaying and prophecy... The farmer is fond of signs and prophecy, not only in the realm of meteorology but also in the realms of government and religion." (12)

(12) Hawthorn, Horace B.: The Sociology of Rural Life, pp. 256-7.

Working close to nature as he does, even being almost entirely dependent upon it, the farmer is quite apt to turn to the forces of nature to worship them as a god. Particularly is this true in the matter of weather portents.

"Numerous signs and superstitions about weather are current in farming... This, however, is not due solely to the lack of social contacts and the consequently narrower range of topics, but to the tremendous importance of seasons and weather in the lives of rural people....The reliance of the old-time farmer upon the almanac was proverbial, and his belief in signs, although sometimes exaggerated is by no means extinct. The point emphasized is that superstitions, signs and charms have greater influence among rural than urban peoples and that farming as an enterprise is influenced by the uncertainty of weather and seasons to such an extent that specious explanations and effects of this uncertainty have become wide spread among rural people."(13)

(13) Taylor, Carl C.: Rural Sociology, p. 145.

The mental attitude of rural people as influenced by the dependence upon nature is characterized by an innate conservatism, narrowness of outlook and an interest in things rather than in people. In fact, one author has called this type of mind (which he has found in urban areas to a very limited extent) the "Country Mind." (14)

(14) Holmes, Roy Hinman: Rural Sociology, pp. 191 et seq.

It may be considered a primitive kind of mental equipment nurtured by the type of work that the farmer does.

"Primitive problems, primitive systems of making a living and the exercise of primal nerve centers tend toward a primitive type of thought. The primitive man was kith and kin with nature. In his animism he peopled his universe of things with souls

and selves. Naturally, then, rural life is coloured with the mystic, the supernatural, and the personal. The power of God was connected with the drought, the flood and the hailstorm, which tended to make the farmer's religion one of supplicatory prayer, awesome fear, and fatalism. Animal worship, plant worship and nature-worship lurk in the sub-conscious levels of the rural mind in the form of a sort of personal attachment to animals and plants."(15)

(15) Hawthorn, Horace B.: The Sociology of Rural Life, pp. 256-7.

It has been thought that this persistence of superstitious thought in the rural areas is caused by a lower intelligence of the rural population. For some years the farmer has been said to possess an intelligence quotient lower than that of the city dweller. The truth of this is debatable, however, in that the tests by which intelligence is measured have been built by individuals of the city areas with the institutions and tools of the city as a background. A far more probable reason for this continued rural belief in various superstitions is the "lack of adequate educational facilities."(16)

(16) Sorokin and Zimmerman; Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology, pp. 231-61.

But whatever the reason be for the prevalence of superstition in rural America, a very large amount of belief in signs, charms and omens is found.

CHAPTER IV

Common Superstitions

The following tabulation of superstitions includes beliefs which have been discovered to exist in one or more of the United States in rural areas:

- "If an apple tree blooms out of season, there will be a death among the relatives soon.
- If when picking nettles you hold your breath, they will not sting you.
- If in sowing grain a piece of ground is missed, there will be a death in the family of the sower before the grain is harvested.
- Never thank any one for seeds, or they will not grow.
- An abundant crop of acorns signifies a hard winter.
- If you hold a buttercup under your chin, and the yellow is reflected, you are fond of butter.
- Ivy is an unlucky plant.
- To find a four-leaved clover is a sign of joy soon to follow.
- To find a clover with five or seven leaves is to find bad luck.
- A passion-vine in the barn-yard brings bad luck.
- To eat an apple that is left over a year on a tree will bring death.
- If the beet plants all run to seed, there will be a death in the family soon.
- If you plant an evergreen tree in your dooryard, one of the family will die when the shadow is large enough to cover a grave.
- If while riding horseback you carry a peach-tree switch it will bring bad luck.
- When a forked willow branch turns in the hand it is a sign of water in the ground at that place.
- If you peel an apple and do not break the peeling and then drop the peeling on the table, the letter it forms will be the initial of your lover.
- If you peel an orange and throw the peeling over your right shoulder, the initial the peeling makes will be that of your future husband or wife.
- If the fire crackles, it is a sure sign of news.
- If the fire sizzles, there will be a storm.
- If the fire crackles loudly, there is going to be rain.

If you let the fire die out, while cooking, your husband will be a lazy man.

If a young lady makes the fire burn well, she will have a good husband.

When the smoke goes straight up from the fire, it will rain soon.

It is bad luck to burn a tree which has been struck by lightning.

If you pick your teeth with a splinter taken from a tree that has been struck by lightning, you will never have a toothache.

The rainbow is the sign of good luck.

If a rainbow is seen in the morning, a great storm will follow.

Potatoes planted in the dark of the moon will give a good crop.

If you plant potatoes in the dark of the moon, they will all go to tops.

If you plant your potatoes in the light of the moon, you will have a good crop.

If you plant potatoes when the moon is full, you will have a good crop.

Roots and vegetables that produce in the earth should be planted in the down of the moon.

Vegetables that produce above ground should be planted in the increase of the moon.

If you roof your house in the decrease of the moon, the shingles will never warp or turn up.

Rail fences built in the dark of the moon will soon decay at the bottom.

Do not grub trees in the dark of the moon, because they will sprout again.

If you cut your hair in the new moon, it will grow better.

Cut the ends of your hair every new moon and it will grow better.

If a person's hair is cut on the Friday after new moon it will grow better.

If the hair be cut in the dark of the moon, it will be harsh and slow of growth.

Light hair will turn darker if cut in the dark of the moon.

Washing your hair in the new moon will make it grow.

If animals are butchered during the light of the moon, the meat will shrink when cooked.

If you kill a pig during the new moon, the meal will shrivel up in the fryingpan.

Meat killed in the beginning of a new moon will swell when cooked.

If a beef is killed in a full moon, it will shrivel when boiled.

Pork will not be good unless killed in the full of the moon.

Meat killed during the dark of the moon will shrivel when cooked.

Fish hung in the moonlight will quickly spoil.

If a person sleeps with his face in the moonlight, his face will become distorted.

The moon shining on a person's face when sleeping causes insanity.

If you let the moon shine on the face of a baby he will become insane.

If you wish a wish to the new moon it will come true.

When you first see the new moon, make a wish and it will come true.

If you see the new moon over your left shoulder for the first time and at the same time make a wish, your wish will be granted.

If you see the new moon over your left shoulder good luck will follow.

To see the new moon over your left shoulder will bring good luck for the rest of the month.

Seeing a new moon over the left shoulder is an indication that one will be married within a year.

It is good luck to see the moon over the left shoulder if you have money in your hand.

If you see the new moon over your left shoulder for the first time, you will have bad luck.

If you look at the new moon for the first time over your left shoulder and have some money in your pocket you will receive some more soon.

If you see the moon over your right shoulder it is good luck.

If you look at the new moon first over the right shoulder it will bring you good luck before it is full.

If you see the new moon over your right shoulder and have money in your pocket, you will have plenty while the moon lasts.

If you see the new moon first over your right shoulder and make a wish, it will come true.

To see the new moon for the first time full in the face brings hard work until the next new moon.

It is bad luck to sneeze while looking at the new moon.

If your hands are empty when you see the new moon for the first time, you will lose something you prize highly.

If you see the new moon for the first time and your hands are full, you will receive a

present that month.

If you look through the trees at the moon, you will have bad luck.

If you see the new moon through the bushes, it means bad luck and the reverse.

It is bad luck to see the new moon reflected in a mirror.

If trees are trimmed in the full of the moon, the trees will grow better and also yield better.

Brand a cow in the full of the moon and the scar will remain the same; brand it in the growing moon and the brand will grow much larger.

If the new moon is so placed in the sky that the two points are up, it is a sign of a dry month, for it is said that it will hold water. If the point of the new moon hangs down there will be rain soon.

If the new moon lies on its back, it is a sure sign that there will be rain that month.

(This is true because the Indian has a place then to hang his powder horn while he is at home. When the Indian cannot hang his powder horn on the horn of the moon he goes hunting.) A change of the weather is likely to accompany a change of the moon.

If it rains at one time of the moon, all the rain during the year will occur at the same time of the moon.

A ring around the moon means rain.

If there are rings around the moon, rain will come in as many days as there are rings.

The number of stars in the circle about the moon indicates the number of days before the rain.

If you wish on the evening star, your wish will come true.

If you wish upon seeing the first star that appears in the evening, the wish will come true. Speak to the first star out at night and tell your wish, and it will come true.

If you look at the first star in the evening and make a wish, not looking at it again, the wish will come true.

When you see the first star at night, look steadily at it while saying the following rhyme:

'Starlight, star bright,
First star I've seen tonight;
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight.'

Then make your wish and it will come true.
If you see a star falling it is an omen of

bad luck.

If you see a star falling, it is a sign that some one is dying.

If you see a star fall, you will soon hear of the death of a friend.

If a star falls, it is a sign that someone is dying and his soul is going to heaven.

If you wish when you see a falling star, you will get your wish.

If you see a shooting star and can make a wish before it has entirely disappeared, your wish will come true.

If you see a star fall and repeat the words "money, money, money," before it is out of sight, you will get some money.

If a star dogs the moon, it forebodes ill.

When a star falls, the direction it takes will indicate where a death is occurring.

If a baby's nails are cut before it reaches the age of one year, it will become a thief.

If you rock the cradle when it is empty, the baby will die.

If you tie a piece of buckskin around the baby's neck, he will never have the croup.

If a child does not fall out of bed before it is a year old, it will die young.

If a bird flies against a window, there will be a death in the family.

When a bird flies against the window, it is bringing a message.

If a bird flies into the window, it is an ill omen.

If a bird flies in at your window, it is followed by a death in your family.

If a bird flies into the house, a death will occur in the family within one year.

It is a sign of death if a bird flies down the chimney.

If you see a flock of birds circling overhead, it is a sign of rain.

If a bird sings at night, some one in the family will be ill.

If a bird gets a hair from your head and weaves it into his nest, your head will ache as long as the bird sets.

If you kill a bird that has young, you will be punished later by the young.

If a white pigeon roosts on the house, there will be a death in less than a year.

If a white dove cooes over your house, you will have bad luck.

If a white dove should light on your doorstep, it is a sign of death.

If a thrush sings through the day, it is a

sign of rain.

It is a sign of rain to see crows flying.

If a magpie crosses your path when you are starting on a journey, go back and commence again, or you will have bad luck.

Crows flying around a house indicate death or sickness which will soon follow.

If three black crows fly over your house, it is a sign of bad luck.

When the whip-poor-will frequently calls near the house, it is a sign of misfortune to the inmates.

It is good luck to see a flock of geese flying in the sky.

If a flock of geese fly over a house, there will be a death in the house.

When a flock of geese goes north, it is a sure sign of rain.

When the geese fly south, expect fall; when the geese fly north, expect warm weather.

If wild geese fly at night, it is a sure sign of rain.

Should a hawk fly over the house, it is a sign that someone is coming to stay.

Keeping ostrich-feathers in the house brings ill-luck.

If you see a buzzard's shadow, you will shake hands with a stranger.

If you hear an owl hoot, it means trouble.

If an owl hoots at you, it means bad luck.

The hooting of a n owl is a sign of death.

If an owl hoots around the house at night, it foretells death in the family.

If an owl comes into the house, bad luck will follow.

If you meet an owl, you will soon learn something of great advantage to you.

If the rooster crows, company will come.

A rooster crowing incessantly indicates company is coming.

It is good luck to have a rooster come to the door and crow.

If the rooster crows before the front door, you will have company.

If a rooster stands on the doorstep and crows before breakfast, a visitor is coming.

If the rooster crows at the back door, somebody is coming.

If the rooster crows on the back steps, you will have bad luck.

If a rooster crows at the front door, it means death or bad luck for seven years.

If a rooster crows on a fence or on a board, company is coming.

If a rooster crows on the gate-post, you will have company.
If a rooster crows on a fence, it will rain.
If a rooster crows on the fence, it is a sign of clear weather.
If a rooster flies on the roof and crows, the house will take fire soon after.
If a cock crows in the middle of the day, there will be a death in the family.
Rooster crowing at night, is a sign of death.
If a cock crows before midnight, storms are coming.
Roosters that crow in the middle of the night bring bad luck to their owners.
It is bad luck for a hen to crow.
If a hen crows, it must be killed, or it will bring bad luck.
It is a sign of danger for a hen to crow.
It is good luck for a black hen to cackle.
If the chickens preen their feathers after a rain, the rain is over.
If chickens walk about in the rain, it is a sign it will rain all day.
If chickens leave their shelter during the rain, it is a sign that it will rain for three days more.
Fighting hens foretell of lady visitors.
If a strange cat comes to your house, it will bring good luck.
If a stray cat comes to your house, it will bring bad luck.
If a stray black cat comes to your house, it will bring good luck.
If a black cat comes to your house, it will bring bad luck.
If a black cat comes to your house, it is a sign of death.
If a black cat comes to your house, all your girls will be old maids.
If a cat follows you, it will bring you bad luck.
If a strange cat follows you, it will bring good luck.
If a black cat follows you, you will have bad luck.
If a black cat follows you, you will have good luck.
If a black cat follows you home, bad luck is coming to someone in your family.
If a black cat follows you on a Friday night, bad luck will be the result.
If a black cat crosses one's path in front of him, he will meet with danger.
If a black cat crosses your path, you will

hear of bad news.
If a black cat crosses your path, there will be death in the family.
If a black cat crosses your path, you will have bad luck.
It is bad luck to take the cat with you when you move.
If you kill a cat, you will have bad luck.
If you kill a cat, you will have seven years of bad luck.
If you will a black cat, you will have seven years of bad luck.
If you kill a cat, the devil will be set free.
If you own a black cat, it will bring your family bad luck.
It will bring good luck to have a black cat.
If a black cat appears in a room at a wedding, it is a sign of coming trouble.
If a cat washes her face, it is a sign that company is coming.
If you see a cat washing her face, it is a sign of rain.
If a cat cries under the window, it is a sign of bad luck.
If you rub the end of a cat's tail on a sty, it will cure the sty.
The howling of a dog signifies bad luck.
If a dog howls at night, misfortune is at hand.
The howling of a dog is the sign of death.
The howling of a dog three times is a sign of death.
If a dog howls, it is a sign of death in the family.
If a dog howls all day long, there is sure to be a death in the family.
To hear a dog howl at night foretells bad luck, usually a death.
If a dog howls at night, someone is dying.
If a dog howls at night, a friend is dying.
If a dog howls, there will be a death in the neighborhood soon.
If a dog howls at night, one of your relatives is dying.
Dogs howling at the door are the sign of death in the family.
If a dog howls at night by your door, it is a sure sign of death.
If a person is sick, and a dog constantly prowls around the house and whines, that one will die.
If a dog howls at midnight when some one is ill, it means that the patient will die.
If a dog howls under a window in a room in which there is a sick person, it is a sign

that that person will die.
If a dog howls with his head toward the ground,
it is a sign of death.
If a dog howls with his nose up, it is sign of
fire.
If a dog rolls, it is a sign of company.
If a dog eats grass, it is going to rain.
If you creep between a cow's fore legs, she
will never lose a horn.
If your cow dies, you will have bad luck for
seven years.
If a white cow puts her head into the window
and bawls, some one in the house is going to
die.
If you meet a drove of sheep, you will have
good luck.
If you meet a drove of pigs, it will bring
bad luck.
If swine cross your path, it is a sign of bad
luck.
When the pigs squeal, it is going to rain.
If you see white horse, you will have good
luck.
If you see a white horse and make a wish,
you wish will come true.
If you see a white horse among a band of
horses, your last wish will come true.
If you make a wish when you see a spotted
horse, your wish will come true.
If the horse you see on Monday morning is a
white horse, you will have bad luck.
If a horse can roll over three times, he is
worth a hundred dollars.
If a horse rolls over before he has failed
three times, good luck will come to his master.
If you see a white horse, you will see a red-
headed woman.
If you see a white horse, a red-headed man will
appear.
If, when you see a white horse and a red-
headed girl, you make a wish, it will come true.
For every white mule you see, a red-headed
girl will appear.
If you see a red-headed girl, you will at the
same time see a white horse.
If you put a hair from the mane or tail of a
horse into water, it will soon turn into a
snake.
If you put a hair from the tail of a horse
into water, it will turn into a hair-worm.
If a white horse strays into your yard, one of
the family will die.
If you see a colt coming toward you, it is
a sign of good luck.

It is good luck to carry a rabbit's foot.
A rabbit's foot carried as a charm will prevent harm from befalling you.
You will have good luck if you carry the left hind foot of a rabbit.
If you carry the left hind foot of a rabbit in your pocket, you will never have rheumatism.
The hind foot of a rabbit when obtained in the dark of a moon brings good luck to the one who carries it.
If you find the left foot of a rabbit in a grave-yard, you will be married before Easter.
The left hind foot of a rabbit killed in a graveyard in the dark of the moon will bring good luck.
A rabbit's tail will bring good luck.
If a rabbit scampers across your path, it is a sign of future happiness.
If a rabbit runs across your path, it is a bad omen.
If a rabbit runs across your path, you will have bad luck unless you go back and start over again.
Rats are the forerunners of disease.
If the wood-rats build high, there will be a hard winter.
If you kill a frog, you'll have bad luck.
If you kill a frog, it will rain hard.
If you kill a frog, it will rain for three days.
If you kill a frog, it will make the cows give bloody milk.
When the frogs croak, it is a sign of rain.
A tree frog croaking is a sign of rain.
If a toad hops across your path, you will have bad luck.
If you handle toads, you will have warts on your hand.
If a toad hops across your path in front of you, you will have bad luck.
The toad carries a jewel in its head.
A 'sheep's eye-stone,' from a fish's head, is the luckiest thing in the world to carry with you.
You should keep the lucky bone from a fish's head for good luck.
If a cricket comes into the house, it will bring good luck.
If a cricket comes and stays around the hearth, it will bring good luck.
If a cricket sings in the house, good luck is sure to follow.
If a cricket sings in the house, there will be a death in the family.

It will bring bad luck to kill a cricket.
If you kill a cricket, it will bring you great misfortune.

The killing of crickets will drive peace and good fortune from the house.

If you kill a spider, you will have bad luck.
If you kill a spider, you will always be poor.
If you kill a spider, it will cause rain.
If you kill a black spider, it will bring bad luck.

If you kill a white spider, you will have bad luck.

If a spider crawls across the floor, it is a sign of good luck.

If a spider comes toward you, you will receive a letter.

If a spider drops down in front of you, you will get a letter.

If you see a spider on your clothing, you are going to get new garments.

If a spider drops near you, you are going to receive some money.

If a spider is found on one's clothing, a visitor will come.

Spiders are money spinners and bring good luck.

If you put a spider in a nutshell and tie it around your neck, it will cure a fever.

Spider webs found around the house are signs of bad luck.

If girls do not keep the house free from spider webs, they will never get married.

Cobwebs in the grass in the morning indicate rain before night.

If you step over a snake on the road, you will have bad luck.

If you step on the track of a snake, you will have bad luck.

It means bad luck to see a snake-track across your path.

If a snake crosses your path, it is a sign of death.

If you kill a snake, its mate will bite you.

To kill snakes is a sign of good luck.

If you kill a snake at the beginning of the year, you will conquer all your enemies during the year.

If you wear rattle-snake rattles in your hair, they will prevent you from having the headache.

If one looks intently at a snake, his eyes will become like a snake's eyes.

To hear wolves howl at night when one is ill brings bad luck or death.

An opossum which has been killed on the ground

should not be cooked with sweet potatoes, for harmful results would follow.

It is bad luck for a bat to come into a room at night.

If a bat comes into a room, it is a sign of death.

If a black animal crosses your path, you will have bad luck.

When the fur of foxes is thicker than usual, the winter will be especially cold.

If a bee comes into the house, a stranger is going to come.

Bees will leave their hives when one of the family dies.

If a bee flies in at a window, and about the room, it is a sign that a letter from a distance will be received containing news.

When the 'death-watch' ticks, it is a sure sign of death.

If you see a skeleton moth flying about the house, it is a sign of death in the house.

If a butterfly alights on you, it is a sign of a letter.

Frost will occur within six weeks after hearing the first katydid sing.

The insect which is called the devil's darning needle can sew up your ears.

If you catch a daddy-long-legs, and ask him for the cows, he will point the direction in which you are to find them.

If an ant-heap gathers in your house, it signifies coming wealth, but you may destroy the next.

Three chairs accidentally placed in a row mean death.

If two chairs accidentally come back to back, a visitor will come.

It is bad luck to rock an empty rocking-chair. A visitor will come if a chair is upset.

If a circle of chairs is left standing unconsciously, the first person to enter the circle will die.

It brings trouble to upset a chair.

If you tip over a chair, it is a sign that you will not get married that year.

If you whirl a chair around on one leg, it will bring you bad luck.

If a child whirls a chair around on one leg, he will have a whipping before night.

If one sits on a table, he will not be married that year.

If a girl sits on a table, it is a sign that she wishes to be married.

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The clock will stop the night before a person dies.

If the clock strikes twelve while you are at table, you will hear of death.

If you break a mirror, misfortune will come upon you.

If you break a mirror, it is a sign of a death in the family.

If the mirror be broken, there will be a death in the family within the year.

If you break a mirror, you will have bad luck.

If you break a mirror, you will have seven years bad luck.

If a baby looks into a mirror before it is a year old, it will die within a year.

If you hold a mirror over a well on the first day of May, you will see something very unusual.

If you drop the scissors and the points stick into the ground, it is the sign of good news.

To carry a hoe, rake, or spade through the house will bring bad luck.

To bring a hoe in the house is a sign of death.

If any kind of a farm tool, such as a hoe, spade, rake is taken through the house, it signifies death in the family.

A hoe carried into the house will bring about the death of a member of the family within the year.

To carry a hoe, spade, or shovel through the house indicates that some evil will befall some member of the family.

To bring an ax into the house is a sign of death.

Carrying an ax through the house will cause some member of the family to die soon.

If one takes farming implements into the house, he should take them out the same door to prevent bad luck.

If a hoe is taken into the house, it should be taken out through the same door or some accident will befall a member of the family.

If a hoe or shovel is carried through the house, unless it is immediately carried back again through the same door, it portends death in the family.

If you find a horseshoe, you will have good luck.

If you find an old horseshoe, it will bring you good luck.

If you find a horseshoe with the point turned up, you will have wealth.

To find a horseshoe is good luck if the points are turned toward you.

To find the same horseshoe twice brings bad luck.

If you find a horseshoe with a nail in it, it is a sign of good luck.

If you find a horseshoe without any nails in it, do not touch it or it will bring some disaster upon you.

To find a horseshoe in the middle of the road means goodluck.

Picking up a horseshoe brings good luck.

If you pick up a horseshoe by the two ends it will bring good luck.

Bad luck will follow if on finding a horseshoe you do not pick it up.

If you hang a horseshoe over your door, you will have good luck.

Hang a horseshoe over your door with ends up and it will bring good luck.

If you hang a shorseshoe over the door, peace will attend you.

If you find a horseshoe and hang it up, you will have good luck.

It is good luck to find a horseshoe, and when you nail it up be sure the open part of the shoe is upward, so that the good fortune will not pour out.

Throwing a horseshoe over your shoulder and not turning back to look brings good luck.

If you find a horseshoe and throw it over your left shoulder without turning to look back it will bring good luck.

Seeing a load of hay brings good luck.

A wish made on seeing a load of hay will come true.

Wishes will come true if wished upon seeing a load of new hay.

If you wish on a load of hay and watch it until it is out of sight, the wish will come true.

If you make a wish while looking at a load of hay, it will come true, provided you do not look at the hay again.

If you see a load of hay, make a wish, and then turn away so as not to see the hay again, your wish will come true.

Never plow a field or sow a crop on Friday.

At twelve o'clock on New Year's eve the cows get down on their knees.

Cows stand on their heads at twelve o'clock on New Year's eve.

If the first lamb you see in the New Year is facing you, you will be prosperous throughout the year.

If the ground-hog can see his shadow on the second of February, it is a sign it will rain

for six weeks. ^{Plant on Monday for good luck.}
If a maid looks into a well on May Day morning, she will see her husband's image.
On the first day of May arise before the sun is up, and without looking behind you or speaking to any one, go out into a rye-field, wash your face in the dew from the rye and wipe it with your bare arm. This will cause all the freckles to go from your face to your arm. Oxen talk in their stalls at twelve o'clock on Christmas eve.
If you go out to the stalls at twelve o'clock on Christmas eve, you will see the oxen on their knees in prayer.
In shelling peas, if you find a pod containing nine peas, hang it over the door. The first man that walks through the door will marry you.
If you will name an apple and apply the following count to its number of seeds, you will get a true answer: (1) I love; (2) I love; (3) I love, I say; (4) I love with all my heart; (5) I cast away; (6) he loves; (7) she loves; (8) they both love; (9) he comes; (10) he tarries; (11) he courts; (12) he marries; (13) they quarrel; (14) they part; (15) they die of a broken heart.
If you will pull the petals from a daisy, repeating as you do 'He loves me', 'He loves me not', the last petal will reveal the truth.
If you secretly split a bean, and then rub each half in the blood of a wart, and bury the bean, when it rots the warts will disappear.
If you will bury a rooster's comb, your warts will disappear. (17)

(17) Dresslar, Fletcher Bascom: Superstition and Education, pp. 9-143.

From various other sources we have evidences of different superstitions which still retain their holds on the minds of the rural people. For example, in Kentucky the following beliefs are widely accepted:

"Sow turnips on the 25th of July, wet or dry to insure a good crop.
If you have a fruit tree that will not bear, drive a peg or nail into it and you will make it bear.

Set the first hen on Monday for good luck.
Plant corn when the sign is in the arms.
Sow grass always in the light of the moon.
If a tree is struck by lightning the fire
may be put out by milk, but not by water.
If beans are planted in the afternoon they
will drop the bloom.
If you turn a cow dry on Sunday her calf
will be born in the daytime.
If you buy a horse and change his name,
you will have bad luck. (18)

(18) Thomas, D. L. and L. B.: Kentucky Superstitions, p. 143,
et seq.

Despite the increase of the fund of scientific knowledge relating to the agricultural profession, such periodicals as the Agricultural Almanac continue to be published and their advice widely accepted. In a recent issue of the above one finds the following admonitions:

"The days of the month in which the moon sign coincides with the sun sign the influence of the sign is supposed to be greatly intensified. The first day the moon is in a sign is better than the second, and the second than the third. Those who know the importance of these laws are ready to plant at the proper time knowing that seeds planted in a scanty sign, a scanty crop will follow; if planted in a fruitful sign, a full crop will follow. The time to plant the garden is when the earth is in a good sign, and the day to plant is when the moon is in the sign.

The time to harvest is when the sign is right.

Timber cut in the old of the moon in August will not be eaten by worms nor snap in burning, and will last much longer than if cut at any other time.

The hair should be cut on the increase of the moon if you want a thick head of hair; on the decrease if you want the reverse.

If you shear sheep in the increase of the moon their wool will grow again better and stronger.

Poulterers, butchers and meat dealers should not kill when the moon is waning, during which period all dead matter tends to shrink, decay and decompose; this is the reason why meat sometimes shrinks on boiling and does not keep well. If butchered in full of moon or a little before, pork will not only be better but will also swell up and enlarge in boiling.

The roofs of houses and barns and other buildings should be shingled and wooden rail fences staked when horns of the moon point downward, as fences then will not sink into the ground.

All sorts of trees should be grafted and pruned when the moon is on the rise.

Timber cut when the moon is full or rapidly increasing in her light will be full of sap, soft and spongy, and will not last, as it will soon become worm-eaten or destroyed by rot.

Timber cut when the moon is dark or during the decrease of its light in the month of February will be durable. (19)

(19) Agricultural Almanac, 1926.

In Sorokin, Zimmerman and Galpin's Source-Book we find more magical beliefs and practices of the farmer in America:

Concerning Children

Rocking an empty cradle causes cholera.
Stepping across a child causes it to cease growing.

A cat will strangle an infant by sucking its breath.

A child will receive lofty thoughts if a louse is placed upon its head and it is carried to the upper story of the house before it is nine days old.

Cure slobbering by passing a live fish through the child's mouth.

Cure pleurisy by passing a baby under the table.

Blisters on the tongue are caused by lies, and may be cured by cutting three short sticks, rubbing the blisters with them, and

burying them in manure; and doing the same with three more sticks on the two following days.

Whooping cough may be cured by administering milk stolen from a neighbor's cow.

Croup is cured by administering goose grease and molasses or applying a pokeroot and vinegar poultice to the feet, or onion juice and honey.

Sore throat is cured by mixture of onion juice and sage tea or wearing a sock around the neck.

Strawberry and elder-blossom tea are given for fever, mare's milk and sheep cherry tea for measles.

Mumps may be cured by rubbing against a pig trough.

Concerning yards, barns, and farm animals.

'False tongue' of colt suspended on the barn will make the colt easy to catch.

To kill barn swallows causes cows to give bloody milk.

Concerning Crops

Cabbage should be planted on the 17th of March to make it head well.

Cucumbers must be planted before sunrise in the morning or bugs will get them.

Wheat must not be cut before the full moon, as it will not be fully ripe.

Transplanting parsley causes death.

Burning husks, etc., cause black fungus.

Disturbing vinegar while apples bloom turns it to cider.

Cereals germinate more rapidly when planted during the waxing of the moon.

Grain ripens faster when the moon is waxing.

Beans readily pole if planted when the horns of the moon turn up.

Plant early potatoes when the horns of the moon are up or they will grow too deep in the ground.

Plant late potatoes in the dark of the moon. For abundance, plant when the moon is in the sign of the twins.

Pick apples in the dark of the moon or they will rot.

Make wine in the dark of the moon.

Make vinegar in the light of the moon.

Marry in the light of the moon.

Move in the light of the moon.

Spread manure when the horns of the moon
 turn up.
 Cut hair on the first Friday after the new
 moon.
 Cut your corns during the decrease of the
 moon.

Concerning Omens.

A bird entering the room, the neighing of a
 horse, and the breaking of a looking glass
 are signs of death.
 If the dishwater boils, the girls will never
 marry.
 If two persons comb one person's hair one
 will die.
 Sweep the house after supper and you will
 never be rich.
 Friday's night dream told on Saturday is
 sure to come true.
 Spilling salt indicates a quarrel.

Concerning weather signs.

Thunder late in fall is followed by warm
 weather; early in spring by cold weather.
 If ears of corn burst open, there will be
 a warm winter; if tightly incased, a cold one.
 If muskrats build nests, a cold winter
 follows.
 If fields are covered with weeds in the fall,
 a hard winter follows.
 Rainbow at night is the sailor's delight, Etc.
 Evening red and morning gray sets the
 traveler on his way, etc.
 Chickens crowing after ten at night bring
 storm on the morrow.
 Hogs fighting among themselves foretell
 storm.
 When chickens seek shelter from a storm, it
 will not rain long. (20)

(20) Sorokin, Zimmermann and Galpin: Source Book, pp. 366-69.

CHAPTER V

Persistence of Superstition

The persistence of these beliefs is traceable to the survival of heathenish practices as well as to the causes noted in the first chapter. This is well put by Chambers in speaking of the medieval world:

"Half a dozen centuries of Christianity had failed to purge the obscure survivals of heathenism in the rustic blood....The traditional beliefs and customs of the medieval or modern peasants are in nine cases out of ten but the Detritus of heathen mythology and heathen worship, enduring with but little external change in the shadow of a hostile creed. The conversion (of the rustics) in Europe to Christianity was a much slower and more incomplete process than the ecclesiastical chroniclers state. It was so even on the shores of the Mediterranean. But there the triumph of Christianity began from below (from the masses)But even in these lands of the first ardor the old beliefs and the old rituals died hard. How could this but be more so when Christianity came to the peoples of the West: for with them conversion was hardly a spontaneous, an individual thing. As a rule, the baptism of the king was the starting point and motive for that of his followers; and the bulk of the people adopted wonderingly an alien cult in an alien tongue imposed upon them by the will of their rulers. Such a Christianity could at best be only nominal. Ancient beliefs are not so easily surrendered. A vast body of practical heathenism survived in all essentials beneath a new faith which was but skin-deep. Instead of an eradication of the heathenism, Christianity itself was forced to be 'heathenized.' This is well shown by the letter of Gregory the Great to St. Augustine. In his first letter he commanded a complete suppression of idols and their fanes, but later on he wrote (June, 601): 'Do not, after all, pull down the fanes. Destroy the idols; purify the buildings with holy water; set relics there; and let them become temples of the true God. So the people will have

no need to change their places of concourse, and where of old they were wont to sacrifice cattle to demons, thither let them continue to resort on the day of the saint and slay their beasts, no longer as a sacrifice, but for a social meal in honor of Him whom they now worship.'"

Is it remarkable then that superstitious beliefs have retained their domination over the rural mind? These magical practices of which some are enumerated above are but the heritage of the ages. As evidence of the way in which this phenomenon (persistence of past beliefs in the face of violent opposition) operates, one may examine present-day Russia where the government has attempted to extirpate religion substituting in its place atheism. It has been found that in the rural areas, practically no progress has been made at all in the endeavor to replace the Christian religion with atheism and communistic materialism. In the cities the movement has been rather successful - in fact so successful that in December of 1930 *Isvestia* (the official Soviet Organ) could report that only 5 per cent of the urban workers retained a belief in Christianity while from 18 to 80 per cent of the peasants continued in their ways of worship.(21)

(21) Literary Digest, January 15, 1924, p. 30.

(22) Elements of Rural Sociology p. 214-5.

There is, then, reason to believe that it is principally a matter of heritage for the farmer to put his faith in

It would seem, then, that the prevalence of so much superstition in rural America is caused by one or both of two things: cultural heritage or mental equipment. That the intelligence of the rural stock is inferior to that of the urban is a highly debatable point. While the results of mental tests indicate this as we have seen, those tests have been prepared by persons with urban backgrounds for those of urban backgrounds.

Those other studies which are based on recognition of achievement as evidenced by inclusion in lists of eminent men - notably the works of Cattell, Clark and Thorndike - do not necessarily prove that the intellectual capacities of the farmer are inferior to those of the city dweller. As Sims says:

"It is entirely possible that the lists of eminent men are compiled in a way to favor the city. The basis of selecting those who appear in Who's Who tends to be by occupation with a strong bias in favor of those of the city. Able farmers are rarely included. Many of them, however, are fully equal in ability and achievement to numerous city men who are counted among the eminent. The farmer may remain mute and inglorious because it is not the fashion to count his calling among those whence comes greatness. Moreover, most data on this question do not allow for the difference in age grouping between country and city, which unrecognized puts the country at a disadvantage."(22)

(22) Sims, N. L.: Elements of Rural Sociology, pp. 284-5.

There is, then, reason to believe that it is principally a matter of heritage for the farmer to put his faith in

his superstitions. As Taylor has said, the life of the farmer is so closely related to nature in its most vital aspects that there is small wonder that in his dependency on nature he has come to venerate it to the point where it assumes personality. (1) This personality then takes on the various manifestations of superstition and magical beliefs to which the ruralite pledges his unswerving faith, causing, thereby, the inhabitants of the rural areas to be accused of believing in these esoteric practices far more than their city brethern.

However, developments in method of the last generation of farmers tend strongly to show that the scientific level of tradition is being reached in contrast to the superstitious.

"This portion (the scientific method) of the tradition is growing. It is being wrought out by experimentation and research in the agricultural colleges and experiment stations maintained for that purpose. From them it is being passed on to the farmer; thus much headway has been made in modifying agricultural methods. However, as yet the growing surface of the maintenance mores is but a thin coating of static custom. Only the few have so far entered into the new and better heritage that is being offered. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that the American farmer is capable of becoming a scientific farmer, that he can effect alteration and improvement in his ways. In truth, it is apparent that in the last analysis he will respond to change as readily as any other occupational class."(23)

(23) Sims, N. L.: Op.Cit., p. 343.

While not all writers in the field will agree abso-

lutely with Sims, it is to be hoped that his thesis shows the tendency of present-day farming in America. For only when the American farmer comes to realize that the scientific level is infinitely superior to the magical level of method will rural life in the United States reach that state of advancement which urban life, for the most part, now enjoys.

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