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Signs, Omens, and Portents in Nebraska Folklore

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SIGNS, OMENS, AND PORTENTS IN NEBRASKA
FOLKLORE

BY
MARGARET CANNELL

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
1933

PREFACE

For the material in the following study the writer is indebted to many informants, but especially to Dr. Louise Pound from whose collection of Nebraska folklore many of the beliefs were obtained. Much of the material was gathered by students in Miss Pound's classes at the University of Nebraska, particularly those in American literature, and the interest and generosity of these contributors is gratefully acknowledged.

The signs have been given *verbatim et literatim* as far as possible. They are recorded as originally reported unless slight changes seemed necessary for the sake of clearness.

MARGARET CANNELL

Lincoln, Nebraska

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INTRODUCTION

The signs, omens, and portents in the following collection have been reported by inhabitants of Nebraska and most of them are beliefs or sayings commonly known in the central western region. Although the list must be far from complete, it is probably representative of the bulk of current superstitions of Nebraskans. Informants have been persons from practically every part of the state, so that the beliefs presented are not limited to any particular region. No attempt has been made to indicate from what community the different signs were reported, since a sign which may be common in the Sand Hills may be equally well known in the southeastern corner of the state. Since mountain barriers do not separate the inhabitants of Nebraska into distinctive groups, and travel and communication are not difficult, lore of any kind cannot remain long isolated in the present day.

In the introductory paragraphs prefixed to the various sections some distinction has been made in the use of the terms *omen*, *portent*, and *sign*, and a definition of the meanings given them may be necessary in order to explain the inclusion of certain of the beliefs listed. The words *omen* and *portent* have been used in their common English meanings, an omen being an indication of some future event, while a portent is an omen of ill, a warning of the approach of evil or calamity. The word *sign* has been used according to the broader definition of Professor N. N. Puckett in his *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*¹ and thus includes various small magical practices and taboos.

The terms "prophetic sign" and "positive and negative control signs" have also been borrowed from Professor Puckett's terminology. The "prophetic signs" are causal relationships in which the human individual has no free play.² Beliefs of this variety are particularly common in weather lore and are represented by such signs as, "If the sun is red when it rises you may expect rain," and "Sun-dogs are a sign of a storm." The signs are merely observed, man has done nothing to

¹ Page 311.

² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

cause them and can do nothing to bring about or to avert the events they predict. He is a victim and must submit.

"Control signs," on the other hand, come within the power of man.³ Those of the positive type indicate pleasant or at least not unwelcome results of actions within human control, such as, "If you kill a spider it will rain," or "Plant leafy vegetables in the light of the moon to insure a good crop." Other positive control signs are divinations in which a rite is performed for the express purpose of discovering mysteries past, present, or future. Under this classification falls such a sign as, "Light a match. The direction in which the tip bends shows the direction in which your true love lives."

The "negative control signs" indicate the unpleasant results which certain actions bring about. They may be regarded as warnings not to do certain things and constitute a set of taboos.⁴ "If you pass some one on the stairs you will have bad luck," is another way of saying, "Do not pass any one on the stairs." The bad luck attendant upon signs of this nature may be averted simply by refraining from certain actions.

The task of classifying the signs and finding for them an orderly arrangement offered the difficulties to be expected in attempting to find logic in something which is essentially illogical. There is a constant overlapping of superstitions and superstitious sayings. Those which have been placed in one section might, when viewed from another standpoint, be placed quite as consistently in another. The classification is at best an inadequate effort to show some order and relationship in the beliefs, and must be admitted to be somewhat arbitrary.

There has been no consistent or thorough effort to trace the origin of the superstitions. Such a study would be endless and beyond the purpose of this collection. Only occasionally have comments been made as to the possible ancestry of certain of the signs, and these have been offered with the idea of suggesting the complexity of our heritage of folk beliefs rather than with any notion of proving definite origins

³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

or developments. It is of interest to remember that our signs and omens have come to us from probably every part of the world and are of inconceivable age, but it is not possible to analyze individual superstitions.

Nor has the attempt been made to discover exactly how much belief is placed in the lore preserved in Nebraska. Some of the signs are repeated with a seriousness which suggests a lingering trace of credulity, while others are commonly regarded with scorn or quoted with facetious intent. The fact that more than six hundred signs, omens, and portents have been preserved for us might at first suggest that superstitions are still fairly common. When we compare our collection with the thousands of signs which have been gathered in other parts of the country, however, we may be justified in concluding that folk beliefs are less current in Nebraska than in certain regions of the South and East.

I

WEATHER SIGNS

Weather signs bulk large in the folklore which has survived in Nebraska. Their number indicates the importance of rain and wind, heat and cold, to an agricultural state and suggests something of the anxiety with which the farmer watches the changes of the weather. By far the greater number of the signs listed here pertain to rain, a fact which may have some significance. In a region where drought is constantly menacing, the clouds, the moon, and even domestic animals are closely watched with the hope of finding in their appearance or behavior some promise of the desired moisture. Undoubtedly many of the signs are of European origin, but others are generalizations based on observation and experience. They represent an effort to find reliability and order in the behavior of winds and clouds.

As to the powers of domestic and wild animals to forecast the weather, there is disagreement even among naturalists. Many authorities deny to animals the prophetic powers with which they are so often credited. They assert that while some of the sayings referring to birds and animals hold good, quite as many do not. Other students of the problem maintain that there are few animals which do not afford timely and sure prognostications of changes in the weather. Whichever view may be correct, it is quite evident that animal signs have been regarded with some seriousness since so many of them have survived.

It is interesting to note that the greater number of weather signs are of the prophetic type. There are very few signs in this group which admit human control. Man has learned to submit to the caprices of the weather.

In view of the former importance of magical practices relating to weather and in particular those pertaining to the control of the rain,¹ it is somewhat surprising that such slight traces of them remain in the central western region. Only two of the signs (No. 5 and No. 23) in the following list

¹ Frazer, Sir J. G., *The Golden Bough*, pp. 60-83.

have a hint of the rainmaker's magic. The latter, with its use of the snake, suggests an interesting connection with a North Australian practice of killing a snake and singing over its body to bring about rain.²

1. If the rooster crows when he goes to bed,
He will get up with a wet head.
2. If the rooster crows in the night, it is a sign of falling weather.
3. Red sky in the morning,
Sailors take warning.
Red sky at night,
Sailors' delight.
4. Rainbow in the east,
Sign of a farmer's feast.
Rainbow in the west,
Sign of a farmer's rest.
5. At the beginning of the year, take a Bermuda onion, cut it into twelve equal parts, and sprinkle them with salt. The water drops which appear on the parts foretell the distribution of the rainfall throughout the months of the year.
6. When the rain crow calls, it is a sign of rain.
7. If it rains on Easter Sunday, it will rain on seven Sundays after.
8. If the sun is red when it rises, you may expect rain.
9. If your hair curls, expect rain.
10. To kill a spider is a sign of rain.
11. If the moon is tipped over, it is a dry moon; if straight, a wet moon.
12. If the new moon has one of its horns tipped toward the earth, the weather will be rainy until the moon changes again.
13. If an Indian can hang his tomahawk on the new moon, it will rain during the month.
14. Mackerel scales and mares' tails
Make lofty ships carry low sails.
15. Mackerel sky, mackerel sky,
Never leaves the ground dry.
16. Mackerel sky, mackerel sky,
Never long wet, never long dry.
17. If the sun shines when it rains, it will rain tomorrow.
18. Rain before seven,
Dry before eleven.
19. If it rains before ten o'clock, it will rain every day for a week.
20. Mare-tail clouds signify rain within three days.
21. If you can hang a powder horn on the new moon, it will be a dry moon; if not, it will be a wet one.
22. If the wind blows from the east for three days, it is a sign of rain.
23. When a snake is killed and hung up, it will rain. The higher the snake is hung, the harder it will rain.
24. When the Indians move their homes from a low place to the hills, it is a sign of thirty days of rain.

² Frazer, Sir J. G., *op. cit.*, p. 72.

25. The croaking of frogs is a sign of rain.
26. The rainbow is a sign the rain is over.
27. If the water pitcher sweats, it is a sign of rain.
28. If chickens seek shelter during a rain, the rain will be only a shower.
29. If chickens do not seek shelter during a rain, it will rain all day, or at least for some hours.
30. Domestic fowls oiling their feathers foretell rain.
31. If guineas cry in the afternoon, there will be rain.
32. Large drops of rain indicate that it will not rain long.
33. Evening red and morning gray
 Helps the traveller on his way.
 Evening gray and morning red
 Brings down rain upon his head.
34. If red the sun begins his race,
 Expect that rain will flow apace.
35. If the first of July it be rainy weather,
 'Twill rain more or less for four weeks together.
36. If the rain makes large bubbles on the ground, it is a sign the rain will be long and heavy.
37. If the leaves on a maple tree turn in the wind so that the white side can be seen, it is a sign of rain.
38. When the flies sting, expect a rain.
39. If flies try to get in, it is a sign of rain.
40. If a cat eats grass, it is a sign of rain.
41. If rain crows gather together in great flocks, it is a sign of rain.
42. If the smoke comes down, it is going to rain.
43. If a dog lies on its back, it is a sign of rain.
44. A dog sitting with crossed fore-paws indicates rain.
45. A cat washing its face is a sign of good weather.
46. If the sun sets clear, the next day will be fair.
47. If everything cooked for one meal is eaten, the next day will be fair.
48. If there is enough blue in the sky to make a pair of Dutchman's breeches, it is going to clear up.
49. If the smoke goes straight up, it is a sign of clear weather.
50. If barnyard stock romp and play, it is a sign of a change in the weather, usually of a storm.
51. If the smoke falls to the ground, it is a sign of a storm.
52. A ring around the moon is the sign of a storm.
53. If there is a ring around the moon, it will storm within three days.
54. If there is a circle around the moon, the number of stars within the circle indicates the number of days before the storm.
55. If the swallows fly close to one, it will storm.
56. If pigs gather straw, it is a sign of a storm.
57. When the wind is in the east,
 It's good for neither man nor beast.
58. When the cat runs about the house and plays, storms may be expected.
59. If your feet hurt, expect a change in the weather.
60. Rheumatic pains indicate a change in the weather.

61. A cat sleeping on its head is a sign of a storm.
62. Sun dogs are a sign of a storm.
63. If the tips of the ears of corn stick out of the husks, the winter will be light.
64. Ducks and geese flying north indicate warm weather; flying south, cold weather.
65. Many berries on kinnikinic portend a hard winter; few berries indicate a mild winter.
66. When the moon runs high up north, colder weather may be expected during the season than is usual.
67. If the new moon is first seen toward the south, the weather will be warmer; if it is first seen toward the north, colder weather is coming.
68. Many husks on corn are a sign of a cold winter.
69. If a cat sits with its back to the fire, cold weather may be expected.
70. When muskrats build extra large houses, there will be a hard winter.
71. When the ducks go south early, there will be a hard winter.
72. A January fog will freeze a dog. (The meaning is that colder weather may be expected to follow.)
73. If the moon is dish-shaped so that it will hold snow, it portends a hard winter.
74. If the moon is tipped so that it makes a shed, it indicates a mild winter.
75. Heavy coats of fur on animals portend a cold winter; light coats indicate a warm winter.
76. If February 2 is a bright day so that the groundhog can see his shadow, there will be six more weeks of cold weather.
77. If March comes in like a lion, it will go out like a lamb; if it comes in like a lamb, it will go out like a lion.
78. The weather of the first three days of December indicates the weather for the three months of winter.
79. If Christmas is white, Easter will be green; if Christmas is green, Easter will be white.
80. When there is an early Easter, there will be an early spring; when Easter is late, the spring will be late.
81. If flakes of snow are large, it is a sign that people in Scotland are picking geese.
82. Large flakes of snow mean that it is going to stop snowing.
83. Winter thunder bodes summer's hunger.
84. Thunder at night,
 Sailors' delight.
 Thunder at morning,
 Sailors take warning.
85. A green cloud is a sign of hail.
86. Frost may be expected six weeks from the time the goldenrod first blooms.
87. Frost may be expected six weeks from the time the locust first sings.
88. Expect frost six weeks from the time the cricket first sings.
89. Frost will come six weeks from the time the katydid first sings.

II

MARRIAGE AND COURTSHIP SIGNS

The survival of so large a number of marriage signs gives some hint of the vast number of superstitious practices which have clustered about the ceremony from remotest antiquity. Remnants of the oldest beliefs come to us but slightly disguised in the lore of marriage and courtship. It is quite obvious that but few of the signs are of the prophetic type. Most of them are definitely under human control, and a large proportion are of the nature of divinations.

Many of the rites performed in the effort to learn the identity of a future mate are carried out at any time, while a few, such as the throwing of the bride's bouquet, are directly connected with the wedding ceremony. The antiquity of such practices is suggested by the fact that a picture found in Herculaneum shows a sorceress at a wedding in the act of casting five stones, supposedly for the purpose of divining. Many of the charms and spells seem originally to have been used only at Hallowe'en, but curious or impatient lovers have become less meticulous in their observances and the ceremonies may be performed with effectiveness whenever information is desired.

Love divinations, known as "projects" in New England and as "trying tricks" in Canadian provinces,¹ are commonly called "telling fortunes" in Nebraska, and are practiced with varying degrees of seriousness, especially by young girls. The fact that most of the charms will reveal, not a future "mate," but a future "husband" or "the man you will marry," indicates quite clearly by whom the practices have been kept alive.

Perhaps we may not be justified in drawing from this fact any conclusions as to the relative credulity of love-lorn men and maids, nor may we be certain that feminine curiosity and care for the future are responsible for the existence of the greater number of signs by which a woman may learn her fate. Without attempting any interpretation, however, we must observe that so long as daisy petals may be plucked,

¹ Bergen, Fanny D., *Current Superstitions*, p. 38. 1896.

rails walked, and white horses counted, no maiden need wonder long about her future. With but little activity on her part everything conspires to reveal what is in store for her. She is directed at every turn. It is the destined man who is at a loss unless, independent of the aid of spells and charms, he is content to learn his fate by more direct if less subtle means.

1. If some one meets you and tells you that he did not know you, it is a sign that you are going to be married.
2. To fall or stumble going up stairs is a sign you will not be married for seven years.
3. If you sit on the table,
You'll be married before you're able.
4. If you sit on a table you will never be married.
5. If your initials form a word you will marry well.
6. If the lines in your hand form a letter *M* you will make a happy marriage.
7. It is good luck to be married on a bright sunny day.
8. A woman that loves a cat will be an old maid.
9. Rain on the wedding day indicates future tears for the bride, the number of tears being in proportion to the number of drops of rain.
10. The number of creases on the wrist shows the number of times one will be married.
11. If you receive two pieces of any kind of silverware, it is a sign you will be married.
12. If four people accidentally cross their hands when shaking hands, one of the four will soon be married.
13. Dishwater splashed on the apron indicates that one's future husband will be a drunkard.
14. If your shoe-string comes untied, your sweetheart is thinking of you.
15. If the bottom of a woman's skirt is turned up, and a kiss be placed on it, she will marry a widower.
16. If a hairpin is put inside a girl's shoe, the first man she speaks to is the man she will marry.
17. Walk ten rails on a railroad track and the next man you meet wearing a red necktie you will marry.
18. If you walk seven rails on a railroad track without falling off, the first man you meet you will marry.
19. Count nine stars for nine nights and the first man you shake hands with you will marry.
20. If a girl takes the last piece of bread or cake from the plate, her marriage will be postponed seven years.
21. Hang a wishbone over the door. The first man that comes in the door you will marry.
22. Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.
Sorry is the bride that the rain rains on.
23. Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.
Happy is the dead that the rain rains on.

24. If a girl sits on a chair while some one sweeps under it, she will be an old maid.
25. Change your name and not the letter,
Change for the worse and not for the better.
26. Where the cob-webs grow
The beaux will never go.
27. A bride should wear,
Something old, something new,
Something borrowed, something blue,
And a penny in her shoe.
28. The day of the week on which a marriage takes place indicates the future of the married pair according to the following rhyme:
Monday for health,
Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday the best day of all.
Thursday for losses,
Friday for crosses,
Saturday no day at all.
29. If you see the moon over your right shoulder, it is a sign you will see your sweetheart.
30. When a birthday cake is brought in it is placed before the girl having the birthday. She is to blow out the candles. If she blows all of them out, she will be married within the year. If not, the number of candles left burning indicates the number of years it will be before she is married.
31. When a newly married pair are leaving, if an old shoe is thrown after them, it will bring good luck.
32. A white satin slipper tied to the luggage of a newly married couple will bring good luck.
33. Rice thrown after a newly married couple increases the probability of their having children.
34. The girl who catches a bridal bouquet thrown by the bride will be the first girl to be married.
35. If you put a four-leaved clover in your shoe, you will marry the first man you meet.
36. If a man catches a girl under the mistletoe, he has a right to kiss her.
37. If a girl puts on a man's hat, it is a sign the owner of the hat may kiss her.
38. Marry in May,
The bairns will die and decay.
39. The color of the wedding dress indicates the future of the bride according to the following rhyme:
Married in gray, you'll go far away,
Married in black, you'll wish yourself back,
Married in brown, you'll live out of town,
Married in red, you'll wish yourself dead,
Married in green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in white, you'll always fight.
40. If a girl takes the last piece of cake or bread from a plate she will be an old maid.
41. If a girl takes the last piece of bread or cake from a plate she will get a million dollar man.

42. It is bad luck for a bride to cry at her wedding.
43. For good luck a bridegroom should carry his bride across the threshold.
44. It is bad luck to postpone your wedding date.
45. It is bad luck to take off your wedding ring.
46. It is bad luck to start the wedding ceremony late.
47. If you wish to get married, tie a string around the wedding finger and you'll soon have a husband.
48. If you are three times a bridesmaid, you will never be a bride.
49. Name the four posts of the bed the first time you sleep in it, and the one you look at first when you awake indicates the name of your future mate.
50. The first time you sleep in a new bed, name the corners of the room, and the first one you see in the morning will indicate the name of your future husband.
51. When you spend your first night in a house, name the four corners of your pillow. The corner that you look on first in the morning indicates the person you will marry.
52. Count and stamp ninety-nine white horses, then find a white mule making a total of one hundred animals. The first man with whom you shake hands will prove to be your future husband.
53. Count and stamp ninety-nine white horses and one white mule. The first man you meet will be your future husband.
54. On Hallowe'en throw an apple or potato peeling over your head, and whatever letter it seems to resemble when it falls will be the initial of your future mate.
55. On Hallowe'en throw an apple or potato peeling over your right shoulder, and whatever letter it seems to resemble when it falls will be the initial of your future mate.
56. A ring, thimble, and penny should be put in a birthday cake. The guest receiving the piece containing the ring will be the first one married. The one receiving that with the penny will be rich, and the one receiving the thimble will work for her living.
57. Put a penny, a ring, and a button in a wedding cake. The person receiving the piece with the ring will soon be married. The one who receives the penny will become wealthy, while the one who receives the button will be an old maid or a bachelor.
58. Two unmarried people pull a wishbone. Each makes a wish. The one getting the shorter will be married first, the other gets his wish. Place the short piece of the bone over the door and the first man or maid to enter is the destined one.
59. Look in a mirror at midnight on Hallowe'en and the reflection of your future husband will appear.
60. Pull a hair from your head. Curl it by drawing it through the fingers. Hold it up. The loose end will point in the direction of your future husband.
61. If a number of girls shake a black cat in a new quilt and the cat jumps out, the girl at whom the cat jumps is the next to be married.
62. Light a match; hold it upright. Whichever way the flame points is the direction in which your beau lives.
63. Light a match. The direction in which the tip bends shows the direction in which your true love lives.

64. Cut off the point of a piece of pie. Eat it last; roll it around the tongue three times. You will get a letter from your sweetheart.
65. Have some one snap and name your apple for some man friend. When the apple is eaten count the seeds to divine your future relationship, thus,
 One I love, two I love, three I love I say;
 Four I love with all my heart, five I cast away;
 Six he loves, seven she loves, eight they both love;
 Nine he comes, ten he tarries;
 Eleven he courts and twelve he marries;
 Thirteen they quarrel, fourteen they part;
 Fifteen they die with a broken heart.
66. The same rhyme may be used in plucking petals from a daisy or sunflower.
67. Look over your right shoulder at the new moon and repeat,
 New moon, true moon,
 I hail thee!
 Whosoever I dream of
 Shall wed me.
 The color of his hair,
 The clothes that he'll wear
 On the day that he weddeth me.
68. Count the buttons of a dress repeating the following rhyme. The word which falls on the last button indicates the occupation of your future husband.
 Rich man, poor man,
 Beggar man, thief,
 Doctor, lawyer,
 Merchant, chief.
69. Gather the edges of a rose petal and pop it on the back of the hand. If it pops loudly the person in mind loves you.
70. Pop a rose leaf which some one else has named for a boy, not telling you the name. If it pops loudly he loves you.
71. To find the initials of one's future husband, insert a key in the Bible at the Song of Solomon. Tie the book shut with the flat end of the key protruding. Two people then support the book by balancing it with their index fingers. Then one repeats, "My beloved is mine, and I am his: He feedeth his flock among the lilies. Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." If the Bible turns the first time the verses are repeated, the husband's name will begin with *A*. If it turns the second time, his name will begin with *B*, and so on.
72. The same procedure is followed as in Number 71. One person asks questions. If the Bible turns, the answer is "Yes"; if not, "No".
73. Name apple seeds and stick them to the face. The one that stays on longest indicates the person you will marry.
74. Think of your sweetheart as you pluck the petals from a daisy and repeat, "He loves me; he loves me not." The words on which the last petal is plucked show the state of his affections.
75. Name two apple seeds. Put them on a hot stove. If they hop together the people for whom they were named will marry.
76. It is bad luck for a bridegroom to see his bride before the ceremony on the wedding day.

77. If a girl names apple seeds for various men friends and sticks them to her face, the seed which stays on longest indicates the name of her future husband.
78. Light a match. If it burns entirely, your lover is true; if the flame goes out before the match is all burned he is faithless.
79. Take a man's name and a girl's name and cancel similar letters. Then count the remaining letters saying, "Love, hate, friendship, courtship, marriage." The word which falls on the last letter indicates the future relations of the pair.
80. Pull up a leaf of plantain, breaking it so that the fibers curl. The direction in which they point shows the direction in which your beau lives.
81. If a girl blows on the back of a man's neck, he will fall in love with her.
82. If you put a pod containing nine peas over the door, you will marry the first man who comes in.
83. Stub your toe, kiss your thumb,
 See your beau before one.
84. If you stub your toe and kiss your thumb, you'll see your beau before night.

III

DEATH AND BAD LUCK SIGNS

Signs of evil portent are among the most common of surviving folk beliefs in Nebraska. In number and currency they rival the popular omens concerned with weather and marriage and they are regarded with perhaps a greater degree of seriousness than signs of the latter type. Such a mass of superstitions having to do with death and bad luck hints at underlying pessimism in human beings. It suggests a preoccupation with the idea of death and a constant dread of inevitable calamity. Possibly thoughts of melancholy are not so pervasive as the signs might lead us to believe, and it is reassuring to note that open credulity has almost disappeared. The mere survival of the signs, however, is a poignant reminder of a fear-ridden past, and such modern taboos as those against counting cars in a freight train and turning in a funeral car are evidence that superstitions are still in the making.

There is much confusion in the signs. Those which are regarded as bad luck omens by many people have become portents of death to others. The shift may be the result of a natural tendency to make omens specific rather than to leave them merely general indications of good or ill fortune.

Many of the signs seem to be based on a rather obvious association of ideas. Funerals bring to mind the common fate of man. Almost any incident connected with a burial may be looked upon as a sign of another death or an impending disaster. The hooting of an owl has an ominous sound. It causes a shudder, inspires fear, and becomes linked with thoughts of future afflictions. Although the howling dog may not as in legend see the goddess of death,¹ he wakens with his mournful falsetto thoughts of gloom, and quite naturally may become to the superstitious a messenger of approaching distress.

Other signs indicate the connection between ignorance and fear, the tendency to look with dread upon the unknown, and

¹ Kelly, Walter K., *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-Lore*, p. 110. 1863.

to find in the unusual cause for anxiety. The most commonplace occurrence may become a menace, if it takes place at an unexpected time. When standards of appropriateness are violated, when the incongruous is noted, suspicion and fear are aroused.

If the cock crows in the morning, he is only the harbinger of guests, but if he lifts his voice at night, he is announcing a death. If the hen is contented to remain in her own realm, she is harmless enough, but if she tries to usurp the rights of her mate and crows, she is associated with evil, bad luck, and death. Birds which may be symbols of joy out of doors, become messengers of ill fortune if they fly into the house. Garden tools carried through a room, an open umbrella indoors, an unaccountable shiver, anything which partakes of the strange or unusual, may be sufficient cause for fear and becomes an omen of calamity.

In such signs the psychological basis seems obvious enough. In others the roots of belief are more difficult to suggest. Possibly the Romans are responsible for many omens associated with birds;² the belief in the ill luck attendant upon salt-spilling may come from the Jewish and pagan use of salt in sacrificial rites,³ and the fear inspired by breaking a mirror may be traced to the use of mirrors by magicians in sorcery,⁴ but the origin of many of the symbols seems lost to us entirely. Like the events they predict, they are obscure, and they are perhaps more interesting because of the element of mystery which surrounds them.

1. If a dog howls at night, it is a sign of the death of a friend.
2. If a dog sits and howls at the moon, it is a sign of death.
3. One death will be followed almost immediately by two more in the family or the neighborhood.
4. If a bird flies into the house, it is a sign of a death in the family.
5. If an owl hoots near the house, some one in the house will die within a short time.
6. If an owl hoots three times on the property of anyone, it is a sign that there will be a death in the family of the person who owns the land.
7. If you hear an owl hoot at night, you will soon hear of the death of a friend.

² Brand, J., *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, p. 701.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 670.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 673.

8. If a loaf of bread be found upside down, there will be a death in the family.
9. If a light on the order of a will-o'-the-wisp passes around the house, it is the sign of a death in the house within a short time.
10. If a mirror falls, there will be a death in the family.
11. If you break a mirror, there will be a death in the family within a year.
12. If two people in a family die within a year, a third death will occur before the year is out.
13. If a child is unusually bright and good, it will die.
14. If a cock crows at midnight, it is a sign that the death angel is passing overhead.
15. If you sneeze before breakfast on Sunday morning, you will hear of a death before the end of the week.
16. If lighted candles are placed at each plate, the person at whose place the candle burns longest will live longest, the one whose candle goes out first will be the first to die.
17. If a bird pecks at the window of a home, it is a sign of a death in that family within a year.
18. If a ticking sound is heard in the wall, a death may be expected in the family.
19. A sparrow flying around the house is a sign there will soon be three deaths in the family.
20. If you meet a funeral, there will be a death in the family.
21. The first person the cat looks at after washing its face will die soon.
22. If it rains into an open grave, another member of the family will die within a year.
23. If a baby cuts its upper teeth first, it is digging its own grave; that is, it will soon die.
24. If you look into a mirror at a funeral, you will be dead before the end of a year.
25. If three lights are accidentally placed on the table, it is a sign of a death in the family before the end of the year.
26. To carry a pan of coals through the house is a sign that there will be a death in the family.
27. Carrying a spade through the house forebodes a death.
28. A spade, a hoe, or a shovel should not be brought into the house. If they are, there will be a death in the family.
29. To carry a sharp instrument through the house is a sign of a death in the family.
30. If you open an umbrella in the house, some one in the family will die soon.
31. If you count the cars of a freight train, some one in your family will die.
32. If you count the number of carriages in a funeral procession, some one in your family will die soon.
33. If a person counts the number of cars in a funeral procession, he will cause a death in his family within a month.
34. After a funeral the first person to leave the graveyard will be the first to go back; that is, to die.
35. If you cross in front of a funeral procession, there will be a death in the family.

36. A funeral on Sunday means another death in a short time unless a wedding follows the funeral.
37. If you knock at your own door, some one in the family will die.
38. If a baby under a year old sees itself in a mirror, it will die before the year is over.
39. If you pass anyone on the stairs going in the opposite direction, there will be a death in the family.
40. If all the members of the family are not home at Thanksgiving, there will be one death in the family before the next Thanksgiving.
41. If a child is named for someone who is dead, he will die young.
42. A green Christmas makes a black graveyard.
43. To rock an empty rocking-chair forebodes a death.
44. If you break a needle while making a garment, you will hear of a death before the garment is worn out.
45. If a hen crows, there will be a death in the family.
46. To grieve over the death of a pet is a sign of a death in the family.
47. If a funeral procession crosses your path, you will have bad luck.
48. If it rains during the funeral procession, the relatives of the deceased will have bad luck.
49. It is bad luck to cross between the carriages of a funeral procession.
50. If a tug comes unhooked going to the grave, it is a sign of bad luck.
51. It is bad luck to count the cars in a freight train.
52. It is bad luck to turn around in a car, if you are a member of the funeral party.
53. Friday the thirteenth is an unlucky date.
54. It is bad luck to begin a job on Friday.
55. If a garment is begun on Friday, you won't live to wear it out.
56. If a garment is begun on Friday, you won't live to finish it.
57. Never cut out a garment on Friday, unless you finish it that day. Otherwise you will have bad luck.
58. It is bad luck to set out on a journey on the thirteenth.
59. If you break a looking glass, it means bad luck for seven years.
60. Don't sweep dust out of the door on Monday. It brings bad luck.
61. You must not sweep with a broom across the threshold after dark or you will sweep away your luck.
62. If you sweep dust over the threshold after dark, you are sweeping away your wealth.
63. Don't sweep dust out of the door on New Year's day. It is bad luck.
64. It is bad luck to move a broom.
65. When sweeping the floor, don't brush the broom against any one else or it will bring that person the worst of luck.
66. It is bad luck to carry ashes out after sundown.
67. It is bad luck to carry a hoe through the house.
68. Carrying a garden tool through the house is a sign of ill luck.
69. If you drop a fork, you will have bad luck.
70. If you drop a knife, you will have bad luck.
71. It is bad luck to spill the salt.
72. It is bad luck to have a picture hanging crooked in the house.
73. It is bad luck not to have the Christmas tree down by January 2.

74. It is bad luck to rock an empty chair.
75. It is bad luck to watch a person out of sight.
76. It is bad luck to tell any one "good luck".
77. Never walk under a ladder. It is the worst of luck.
78. It is bad luck to shut an open gate as you pass by.
79. If you see the moon over your left shoulder, you will have bad luck.
80. It is bad luck to carry a two-dollar bill.
81. If you pick up a pin with the head toward you, you will have bad luck.
82. The opal brings misfortune except to those born in October.
83. If the first person to enter your house on New Year's day is a woman, you will have bad luck for the year.
84. If Christmas day on a Sunday fall,
 A troublous winter we shall have all.
85. Wearing pearls is a sign of sadness or misfortune.
86. It is unlucky to seat thirteen people at the table.
87. If you put a garment on wrong side out,
 Do not change it back all day
 For that would drive your luck away.

IV

ANIMAL SIGNS

A great number of animal and insect omens have been grouped for convenience in the sections on weather signs and death portents. The following list contains animal lore exclusive of signs which fell naturally under those headings. The beliefs are, in general, superstitions concerning the good or bad luck which attends various animals and insects, with a few signs which give very definite information. The references are almost entirely to the familiar household pets or to the various forms of animal life common to every farm and garden.

Here, as well as in the signs dealing with the weather and death, it is the cat which enjoys the greatest reputation. Whether its position of importance is due to its mythological occupation of drawing the chariot of Frigg, the Germanic Venus,¹ may be doubted; and the fact that it was, according to a common European belief, often considered the embodiment of the corn-spirit² may have little to do with its present popularity. It seems probable, however, that its association with ill luck in many of the signs which have come down to us is the result of the belief that cats are the animals into which witches are usually supposed to have transformed themselves.³ Hence, they may be endowed with sinister powers and are to be shunned.

The dog, which holds a place in the household and on the farm of at least equal importance to that of his traditional enemy, sinks to a minor position in the realm of superstition. Although he, too, was sometimes the embodiment of the corn-spirit,⁴ and was even crowned at the Festival of Diana,⁵ he has lost caste and appears in only a few signs. He may be looked upon with some respect as a judge of character, but his ability to foretell future events is limited to his doleful howl-

¹ Fogel, E. M., *Beliefs and Superstitions of the Pennsylvania Germans*, p. 12. 1915.

² Frazer, Sir J. G., *The Golden Bough*, p. 453.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 657.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

ing before bad luck, and in only one sign is he associated with good fortune. The horse is likewise of little value as a prophet in the lore which remains to us. The magical properties attributed to him in Gaelic tales⁶ are lost and he is superseded by the foolish domestic fowls, the spider, and the cricket.

1. If a black cat comes into your house, it brings good luck.
2. It is bad luck for cats to come to your house, especially black cats.
3. If a black cat crosses your path, you will have bad luck. If it crosses back again, it will bring good luck.
4. If a white cat crosses your path, it is a sign of good luck.
5. If a black cat crosses your path, it is a sign of bad luck. If it follows you home, the spell is broken.
6. If a cat of any light color comes to your home, it brings bad luck.
7. It is bad luck to move a cat.
8. It is bad luck to kill a cat.
9. If a cat washes its face, someone will come.
10. If the cat washes its face in the sunshine, pleasant guests may be expected. If it washes its face in the shadow, unpleasant guests will come.
11. If a dog eats grass, it is a sign he needs a tonic.
12. If a dog does not like a man, it is a sign the man has a bad character.
13. A dog howling at night is a sign of bad luck.
14. It is good luck for dogs to come to your house.
15. If the inside of a dog's mouth is black, it is a sign he is well-bred.
16. If you stamp one hundred white horses, you will have good luck.
17. The number of times a horse turns over when it is rolling indicates the number of hundreds of dollars it is worth.
18. If a horse has four white feet, it is a sign he is a good horse.
19. If you see a white horse, you will see a red-haired woman.
20. If you stand on a crossing when a team crosses, you will have bad luck.
21. A whistling girl and a crowing hen
Always come to some bad end.
22. Whistling girls and a flock of sheep
Are the best things a man can keep.
23. Whistling girls and good fat sheep
Are the best things a man can keep.
24. Whistling girls and bleating sheep
Are the best things a farmer can keep.
25. Whistling girls and Merino sheep
Are the best things a man can keep.
26. A whistling girl and a crowing hen
Always end in the Devil's den.

⁶ Campbell, J. F., *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. 1, Introduction, p. lxxix. 1890.

27. Whistling girls and blind sheep
Are the poorest property a man can keep.
28. If a rooster crows at your back door in the morning, he is bringing you company that day.
29. If a rooster crows on the doorstep, it is a sign of unexpected company. One person is indicated by every crow.
30. If a hen goes around with a straw hanging to her tail, company may be expected.
31. If a bird flies into a room it brings good luck, the bigger the bird the better the luck.
32. If a bird flies into the house, it is a sign of bad luck.
33. A raven is a sign of bad luck.
34. If you kill a cricket, you will receive a letter from a friend.
35. If a cricket chirps in the house, your clothes will wear out in a month.
36. If you kill a cricket, you will have bad luck.
37. A cricket chirping in the house is a sign of good luck.
38. A cricket in the house brings good luck.
39. To kill a spider is a sign of bad luck.
40. If a spider crawls on you, you will have a new dress.
41. In order to find lost cattle, repeat the following words to a spider or daddy-long-legs:
Cow-hunter, cow-hunter,
Tell me where my cows are,
Or I'll kill you today
And bury you tomorrow.
The spider is supposed to raise one foot and point in the direction in which the cattle are to be found.
42. The first butterfly you see in the spring is the color of your new dress.
43. If a centipede gets into one's ear, it will leave him deaf.
44. If a green measuring worm gets on your dress and crawls, it is measuring you for your wedding dress.
45. If a green measuring worm gets on your dress and measures it, you will get a new dress.
46. If a green measuring worm gets on your dress, it will measure off the number of yards in your new dress.
47. If you kill a toad, your cow will give bloody milk.
48. If you play with a toad, you will get warts.
49. A dragon fly attaching itself to a fish line signifies good luck in fishing.
50. A fly in the house at Christmas is a sign of good luck.
51. When you see a lady bug, blow on it and repeat:
Lady bug, lady bug,
Fly away home,
Your house is on fire
And your children will burn.
If the bug flies off, you will have good luck.
52. If the locusts of a country have the letter *W* on their wings, that country will have war.

DREAMS

So mysterious is sleep and so interesting are the thoughts and images which may enliven it, that we can not wonder at the number of superstitious beliefs which cluster about the process of dreaming. In dreams there is a challenge to man's powers of explanation. He is impelled to find a meaning, obvious or veiled, in the experiences of his sleeping hours, and his efforts to interpret them have resulted in elaborate systems and formulas. There was Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* of the second century, and there is the dream psychology of today.

Among primitive people the doctrine of dreams is related to both religion and magic.¹ The belief in the divine origin of dreams is common, while reliance upon their prophetic character seems almost universal. Among the Greeks, if we may draw conclusions from statements in Homer, Pindar, and Aeschylus, dreams were looked upon as communications from the gods.² The Jews often credited Jehovah with appearing in "a dream of the night." There are the visions of Abimelech,³ and Jacob,⁴ and the dream of Solomon.⁵ To the Teutons dreams were significant but only as prophesies, there being no hint that they played a part in religion.⁶ Likewise, among the Babylonians and Egyptians dreams were regarded as omens. The American Indians attempted divinations from dreams, relying on special priests or medicine men for the correct interpretations.⁷

That dream omens still receive some credulity must be acknowledged when we remember that dream books are still published and sold, and that popular almanacs still contain a section on the meaning of dreams. Here there is no talk of

¹ Tylor, E. B., *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, pp. 121-122.

² Taylor, A. E., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 5 (1912), "Dreams and Sleep", (In Greek Literature), p. 30 ff.

³ Genesis, Chapter 20.

⁴ Genesis, Chapter 31.

⁵ I Kings, Chapter 3.

⁶ Phillpots, B. S., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 5 (1912), "Dreams and Sleep", (Teutons), p. 37 ff.

⁷ Spence, L., *ibid.*, vol. 4 (1912), "Divination", (American), p. 780.

the unconscious, of repressions, or of wish fulfillments. Dreams are interpreted according to traditional signs; complex analysis is unnecessary. It is lore of this type which is included in the following section. Its ancestry has only been hinted at, and its destiny may only be conjectured, but its present popularity cannot be doubted by one who gives any attention to surviving folk beliefs.

1. To dream of white horses is a sign of bad news or death.
2. To dream of money portends hard times.
3. To dream of teeth forebodes a death.
4. A dream of flowers is a sign of death.
5. A dream of a death is a sign of a birth.
6. A dream of a birth is a sign of death.
7. To dream of muddy water is a sign of bad luck or death.
8. If you dream of the dead, you will hear from the living.
9. If you dream that you speak with a deceased person, you will receive a letter from a person from whom you have not heard for a very long time.
10. A dream of a marriage is a sign of a death.
11. A dream of eating is a sign of future bothers or perplexities.
12. It is bad luck to dream of falling.
13. A dream of a bed is a sign of a death.
14. To dream of a child is a sign of a death.
15. To dream of combing your hair portends a death.
16. Count nine stars for nine nights, the ninth night you will dream of your future husband.
17. Sleep on a piece of wedding cake and you will dream of your future husband.
18. If you sleep six nights with a slice of wedding cake under your pillow, you will dream of the one you will marry.
19. If you sleep three nights on a piece of bride's cake, you will dream of your future husband. If you do not dream you will not marry.
20. If you dream of coffins, there will be a wedding in the family.
21. If you dream of a death, you will hear of a wedding.
22. Eat a salt cake before going to bed. Do not speak to anyone or take a drink of water. In your dream the man who brings you a drink will be your future husband.
23. If you dream of a wedding ring, you will be married within a year.
24. Whatever you dream the first time you sleep in a place will come true.
25. If one tells of a dream of a death before breakfast, it will come true.
26. Tell your dream before breakfast, and it will not come true.
27. Tell your dream before breakfast, and it will come true.
28. Friday night's dream on Saturday told
Is sure to come true be it ever so old.
29. If you dream the same dream three nights in succession, it will come true.

30. If you sleep on a piece of wedding cake, your dream will come true.
31. If you tell Saturday night's dream Sunday morning before breakfast, it will come true.
32. The dreams you have when sleeping under a new cover for the first time will come true.
33. It is good luck to dream of climbing.
34. A dream of rocks is a sign of good luck.
35. If you dream of a fire, you will have a quarrel.
36. To dream of fire is a sign of hasty news.
37. If you dream of combing your hair, you will lose a friend.
38. If you dream of a snake, it is a sign you have an enemy.
39. If you dream of a white horse, you will receive a letter.
40. Dreams go by contraries.
41. If you dream of snakes, it is a sign that a friend is betraying you.

VI

PHYSICAL SIGNS

The signs and omens in the following section are of several distinct types but since they all refer more or less directly to the human body, they have been grouped together. A number of them deal with character reading and represent popular fragments of the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and palmistry. A second type of signs exhibits the attempt to forecast future events by endowing almost every sensation of the body with meaning. Itching and burning of the eyes and ears are particularly ominous, and belief in such signs must be of great age. As far back as the time of Pliny the tingling of a person's ear was thought to denote that he was being talked about. Sneezing which might denote either good or ill fortune seems also to have held its position as an important sign over all the world, both primitive and civilized.¹

A third group of physical signs relates to prediction by means of various actions and appearances. The fingernails which play an important part in primitive superstition retain their place in a number of our signs. Significance is attached to the days on which they are cut, and sayings concerning the white spots under the nails survive in spite of the skepticism of such divination expressed by Sir Thomas Browne almost three centuries ago.²

Signs concerning the hair are equally popular. Those which suggest the proper time for combing, cutting, and singeing are reminiscent of savage beliefs concerning the dangers which ordinarily attend haircutting, and at least one sign (No. 45) suggests the old rites for the disposal of cut hair. Although the penalty for carelessly throwing away combings is only a headache in the sign known to us, there is in the notion a hint of the fear of sorcery which it was thought might be practiced on any severed portion of the body. The sign is probably a survival of the widespread belief in the sympathetic connection which persists between a man and anything which has once been a part of his person.³

¹ Brand, J., *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, pp. 650-653.

² *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, p. 276.

³ Frazer, Sir J. G., *The Golden Bough*, p. 233.

A few of the signs are closely related to cures. They indicate the definite physical results which may be obtained by eating certain foods or following certain formulas. Since they are not practiced against disease, however, they have been regarded as positive control beliefs and therefore included in this collection.

1. Big ears indicate a generous person.
2. Small ears indicate a stingy person.
3. A long nose indicates an inquisitive person.
4. A pointed nose indicates a meddling person.
5. Dimple in the chin,
 Devil within.
6. Red hair is a sign of a fiery temper.
7. Cold hands mean a warm heart.
8. If the eye-brows meet, they indicate that the person has a bad temper.
9. A deep hole in the back of the neck is a sign of courage.
10. Sneezes foretell the future according to the following rhyme:
 Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger,
 Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger,
 Sneeze on Wednesday, get a letter,
 Sneeze on Thursday, something better,
 Sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow,
 Sneeze on Saturday, joy tomorrow.
11. If you sneeze before breakfast, you will have company before you sleep.
12. If your left eye itches, you will be laughing. If your right eye itches, you will be crying.
13. If your left eye burns or itches, some one is talking evilly of you.
 If your right eye burns or itches, some one is speaking well of you.
14. If your left ear burns, some one is saying something good about you.
 If your right ear burns, some one is saying something bad about you.
15. If your left ear burns, some one is saying something bad about you.
 If your right ear burns, some one is saying something good about you.
16. An itchy nose indicates that a letter is coming.
17. If your nose itches, you are going to kiss a fool.
18. If your nose itches, company is coming.
19. If your nose itches, you will meet a friend.
20. If your nose itches, your friend is in danger.
21. If your nose itches,
 Somebody's coming with a hole in his breeches.
22. If your palm itches, you will receive money.
23. If the left hand itches, you will receive money. If the right hand itches, you will spend money.
24. If your left hand itches, you are going to get money. If your right hand itches, you are going to shake hands with some one.
25. If the lines in your hand form an *M*, it is a sign you are to have lots of money.

26. If your foot itches, you will walk on strange ground.
27. Cutting the nails on the various days of the week may indicate the future according to the following rhyme:
Cut them on Monday, cut them for health,
Cut them on Tuesday, cut them for wealth.
Cut them on Wednesday, cut them for news,
Cut them on Thursday, a pair of new shoes,
Cut them on Friday, cut them for sorrow,
Cut them on Saturday, a fellow tomorrow.
But he who on Sunday cuts his horn
Better that child had never been born.
28. He who on Sunday cuts his horn
Will live to rue the day he was born.
29. Pare your nails on Sunday, evil you seek,
For the devil will have you the rest of the week.
30. If you cut your fingernails on Sunday, you will do something during the week that you will be ashamed of.
31. White spots on the fingernails are given by the angels.
32. The white spots under the nails indicate the number of lies you have told.
33. If the white spots on the nails are working out, it is a sign of meanness going out. If the spots go in, it is a sign of meanness going in.
34. Counting from the thumb to the little finger, the white spots on the nails indicate friends, foes, letters (or presents), beaux, journeys to go.
35. A sty on the eye is a sign that meanness is working out.
36. Mole on your neck, money by the peck.
Mole on your arm, your husband will do you no harm.
37. Mole on your arm,
You'll live on a farm.
38. Comb your hair after dark,
Comb sorrow into your heart.
39. If you cut your hair at the new moon, it will grow.
40. If you singe your hair at the time of the full moon, it will grow.
41. If you trim the ends of your hair the first Friday of the new moon, it will grow.
42. If you wash your hair in the first rain of April, it will become soft, curly, and will grow rapidly.
43. If you pull a white hair, two, three, seven, or ten will grow in its place (according to various versions of the superstition).
44. If a person is worried or badly frightened, his hair may turn white.
45. If a bird gets your combings and puts them in its nest, you will have a headache.
46. If you shiver unaccountably, someone has stepped on your grave.
47. An unaccountable shiver is the sign of a hen walking over your grave.
48. If you get a long scratch, you'll take a long journey.
49. If you receive a scratch which leaves a scar, you'll have a ride before the scar is gone. The length of the ride depends upon the length of the scratch.
50. The number of times your fingers crack when you pull them shows the number of lies you have told.

51. If the fore-fingers are placed together and the ends turn outward, the person is dishonest; if they are straight, the person is honest.
52. If, when a person clasps his hands, he folds them with the right thumb on the outside, he is "boss" in the household, but if he folds them with the left thumb on the outside, his mate or future mate will be "boss".
53. Long fingers indicate musical capacity.
54. If two people bump heads, one of them will have a headache.
55. If you cry on New Year's day, you will cry a lot during the year.
56. If you weep on your birthday, you'll weep every day until your next birthday.
57. If you can keep from putting your tongue in the place of a lost tooth, a gold tooth will grow there.
58. Tangles in your hair are a sign the rats have slept in it.
59. A fever blister is a sign you have been kissed.
60. A blister on the tongue is a sign you have told a lie.
61. If a child is good looking when it is small, it will be homely when it grows up.
62. If a child is homely when it is small, it will be good looking when it grows up.
63. If a baby sleeps with its hands thrown up over its head, it is a sign it is thriving.
64. If a baby smiles in its sleep, it is a sign the angels are talking to it.
65. If a person sleeps in the moonlight, he will become blind.
66. If a person sleeps in the moonlight, he will become insane.
67. If you show a baby its reflection in the mirror before it is six months old, it will have a hard time cutting its teeth.
68. If you step over a child, it will stop growing.
69. If you laugh to excess early in the day, you'll cry before night.
70. If you eat crusts, your hair will become curly.
71. If you eat chicken gizzards, you will become good looking.
72. Before going to bed tie a string around the finger to keep freckles away.

VII

PLANTS AND CROPS

The lore included in the following section has been limited to signs and omens connected with plants and planting. Closely related to these superstitions is the vast field of folk-medicine in which herbs play so prominent a part. Beliefs of such nature have been omitted, since they could not be given adequate treatment in a study of this kind. A number of love divinations which employ flowers and fruits were listed in the section on marriage and courtship and are not repeated in the following list.

Several of the signs shade off into children's games. The dandelion, the plantain, and the clover are the favored plants. The popularity of the last named may be traced to the fact that the four-leaved clover was regarded as sacred in Germanic legend, but no doubt it is the commonness of the dandelion and plantain which accounts for their use in childish divinations. We can not believe that the young seers are influenced by the fanciful German story which describes the plantain as the embodiment of the spirit of the faithful maiden waiting for her lover by the roadside. Nor is it probable that they are concerned with the history of the name of the "lion's tooth" and puzzle as to whether it is derived from the appearance of the sharply pointed leaf or the white root. They are merely using the materials which are at hand and which generations of children have used before them. They have found a practical use for the weeds which crowd one another in the garden and along the country roads.

Although the signs which have to do with planting are discredited by scientific farmers, there is still a lingering tendency to regard them with some seriousness. The belief in the growth and dwindling of crops with the wax and wane of the moon is an astrological doctrine which has held its place with tenacity.¹ It is suggested in several of the signs. The very popular custom of planting potatoes on Good Friday is probably connected with the celebration of the old vernal festival of the dead and risen God. The idea may then be

¹ Tylor, E. B., *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, p. 130.

traced not only in Christian practices but in the Adonis ceremonies which were intended as charms to promote the growth and revival of vegetation.² Thus a belief connected with one of our most humble vegetables may have its origin in the romantic "Adonis gardens" of Greece and Sicily.

1. If a child blows the seeds off a dandelion in three breaths, it is a sign that its mother does not want it. If any remain she does.
2. Blow a dandelion top three times. If nothing is left, your mother doesn't want you. If two seeds are left she wants you at two o'clock, if three seeds remain she wants you at three o'clock and so on.
3. The number of breaths it takes to blow the seeds off a dandelion head tells the hour when the mother wants the child to come home.
4. Take a dandelion in seed and blow, saying, "She wants me." If all the seeds are not blown away, blow again saying, "She wants me not." Keep this up until all the seeds are gone and the last blow will tell whether or not the child should go home.
5. Children blow the seeds from a dandelion head. If they all go at one breath, the mother does not need the child. If more than one breath are needed to blow away all the seeds, the child is wanted.
6. If you hold a dandelion under your chin and the yellow reflects on the chin, it is a sign that you love butter.
7. If two people pull a leaf of plantain in two, the fibers which hang from either half indicate the number of lies the holder has told. The longer fibers are the big lies and the shorter fibers are the little lies.
8. When you break the stem from a plantain leaf, if strings show beyond the end, the long ones are the big lies and the short ones are the little ones that you have told.
9. To find a four-leaved clover is good luck.
10. If you find a four-leaved clover, put it in your left shoe and you will have good luck.
11. To pick a five-leaved clover is bad luck; but if you give it to another, it brings good luck to both giver and receiver.
12. Plant root vegetables in the dark of the moon to insure a good crop.
13. Leafy vegetables should be planted in the light of the moon.
14. Potatoes should be planted in the dark of the moon to insure a good crop. If planted in the light of the moon they will be all top.
15. Potatoes should be planted on Good Friday.
16. If you plant turnips the twenty-fifth of July,
You will have turnips, wet or dry.
17. Cucumbers should be planted May 23 so that insects will not eat the vines.
18. If a woman eats any kind of twin fruits, she will have twins.
19. If you thank a person for cuttings or "slips", they will not grow.
20. If you gently stroke a nettle,
It will sting you for your pains.
Grasp it like a man of mettle
And it soft as silk remains.
21. If corn leaves point up, it is a sign the corn is growing.
22. If you get a devil's darning needle in your clothes, you will sew for a living.

² Frazer, Sir J. G., *The Golden Bough*, pp. 341-345.

VIII

DOMESTIC SIGNS

Many signs which are based upon common domestic happenings are scattered through various sections, particularly those dealing with omens of marriage, death, and bad luck. They were so classified rather than in the following group because their concern was not primarily with household life and the significance of its events. The interest was in broader issues. It was not strictly confined to the intimate life of the home, to domestic tasks, and the prophetic powers of the humble utensils which play so important a part in the signs grouped together here.

Except for the beliefs concerning the dire results of Sunday needlework, and the few which point to disappointment and loss of friends, the omens listed here are rather cheerful in tone. They suggest the comfortable, if uneventful, life of the household in which signs of guests are looked for with concern, bubbles on the teacups are hailed as forerunners of wealth, and such minor idiosyncrasies as singing in bed are regarded as indications of flaws in character.

A number of the omens give evidence of the type of mind which enlivens ordinary tasks and finds interest in monotonous routine. To the matter-of-fact mind the utensil which drops during the process of table-setting or dish-washing is merely an evidence of clumsiness. To the more imaginative worker it has another meaning. First it becomes the precursor of a guest. Then the fancy leads to further interpretations. The age and sex of the guest are deduced from the particular type of the implement, and finally, the direction in which the tool points comes to reveal from what quarter the company is to be expected. The dropped dishcloth, too, becomes a prophet and there is a touch of humor in the idea that it indicates the approach of a poor housekeeper.

The domestic signs are no longer regarded with great seriousness. No expert in home economics is influenced in planning her schedule by baseless superstition. Her scientific training forbids belief, yet perhaps one may be justified in lamenting the loss of credulity. With a store of household

omens in her mind no woman should have found mere drudgery in her daily tasks. Her world was animated by well meaning informants. She knew when to prepare for guests, how to insure for future prosperity, and why she must not sew or iron on Sunday. Surely no modern conveniences or efficient methods can compensate for the loss of such assurance.

1. If you drop a utensil on the floor, company is coming.
2. If you drop a knife, a fork, or a spoon on the floor, some one is coming to see you from the direction in which the utensil points. A knife means a man or boy, a fork, a woman or girl, and a spoon, a child.
3. If you drop a spoon, a crowd is coming.
4. If a fork falls to the floor, a man will come from the direction in which the prongs point.
5. If a knife falls to the floor, a woman will come from the direction in which the blade points.
6. Go in the front door and out the back,
 And you will bring company to the shack.
7. If you drop a dishcloth on the floor, some one is coming to see you who is a dirtier housekeeper than you are.
8. If you drop a dishrag, a bigger slouch than you are is coming before the day is over.
9. Drop a dishcloth and an untidy person will make you a visit.
10. If a broom falls across the door, it is a sign a stranger will come.
11. If a straw falls out of the broom a stranger is coming.
12. If you take butter when you already have some, some one hungry is coming.
13. If you take a slice of bread when you already have one, some one hungry is coming.
14. Tea leaves floating on a cup of tea indicate that company is coming. Each leaf denotes one guest.
15. When you go visiting, if you enter at one door and leave by another, you will never return.
16. It is good luck for a man to enter the house first on New Year's day.
17. If the hem of your dress is turned up, a stranger is coming.
18. If you leave the bastings in a dress, it is a sign the dress is not paid for.
19. If you sew on Sunday, when you die you must rip all the sewing out with the end of your nose.
20. If you sew on Sunday, you'll have to do every stitch in hell with a red hot needle.
21. Every stitch you sew on Sunday you'll have to take out with your teeth in hell.
22. If you sew something on yourself, a lie is told about you for every stitch you take.
23. For every hour you iron on Sunday you will burn a day in hell.

24. If a pair of scissors dropped sticks in the floor, it is a sign you have an enemy.
25. If you drop your comb, you will have a disappointment.
26. If you look over your left shoulder into the mirror, you will be disappointed.
27. If you drop a comb, you will lose a friend.
28. If you rock an empty chair, you will have a quarrel with a friend.
29. Bubbles which collect when tea is poured are a sign of money.
30. If you consume at once the bubbles formed on the top of your coffee, you will come into the possession of money. The amount will be according to the number and size of the bubbles.
31. If there is a bubble in your tea cup and you can get it into your mouth before it breaks, you will soon be rich.
32. If you drop a piece of bread, the price of wheat is coming down.
33. If you cut thick slices of bread, you will make a good step-mother.
34. If you butcher a hog when the moon is shrinking, your meat will shrink when it is cooking.
35. If you sing in bed, you are lazy.
36. If you sing in bed,
 The devil will get you before you are dead.
37. Saturday's flitting
 Is a sign of short sitting. (Applied to moving.)

IX

WISHES

Although we may be indebted to older people for keeping alive much of our folklore, we must thank the children for preserving for us most of the beliefs connected with wishes and wish-making. It is they who remind us to wish on the first star, to save the wishbone, and to stamp white horses. The ceremonies which accompany wish-making have an important place in the child's life. They suggest the romance of the fairy tale and are surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery. Usually the wish must be kept secret if the rites are to be effective. The admonition, "Tell no one what you have wished", should be added to every formula.

Wishing horns which provide any wish when played upon may no longer be available, and magic rings which give the wearer power to obtain anything he may wish cannot be had in our prosaic world, but the child may be transported to a realm in which anything is possible, if he follows a given ritual, makes his wish, and keeps it secret. He is assured by the authority of tradition that under the proper conditions his wish must come true.

That children have not only preserved but added to our wish-making rules may be guessed when we discover such modern makeshifts as stamping Model-T Fords when white horses are scarce, and wishing under arc-lights regardless of the time of the moon. Wishes must be made, and some sanction must be found for expecting that they will come true. The picturesque wishing well of Wooler of Northumberland which exacts its toll of pins from the passers-by¹ has no counterpart in Nebraska, nor are stone wishing-chairs to be found,² but new sidewalks are not uncommon, loads of hay pass frequently down country roads, and not too rare are the occasions on which a piece of pie points in the right direction.

Ridiculous as are many of the ceremonies, and commonplace as some of the excuses for wish-making may seem, there

¹ Henderson, William, *Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*, p. 230. 1879.

² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

is a lingering hint of beauty and romance in others. The four-leaved clover, the new moon, and gleaming birthday candles may well offer temptation for trying a charm. The meteor, likewise, seems to deserve its place as an omen, and although the wishes made in our region when a star shoots across the sky may be harmless and personal, they indicate a trace of the same belief in the supernatural which prompts the Egyptian to mutter, "May God transfix the enemy of religion",³ as the light disappears. Like our other superstitions, our rules for wish-making have travelled from far countries. They have taken on new forms, but the same persistent desire underlies them all.

1. If you stamp one hundred white horses and say, "Give, give me good luck," and make a wish, your wish will come true. In stamping white horses a white mule counts for ten horses. A horse is stamped by licking the right thumb, touching the left palm with it, then striking the right fist on the place the thumb has touched.
2. When you see a white horse say, "Lucky, lucky white horse, one, two, three," and make a wish. Tap the forefinger of the right hand on the palm of the left hand when saying, "one, two, three".
3. When you see a white horse make a wish and say,
 White horse, white horse,
 Ding, ding, ding.
 On my way I'll find something.
 When saying, "Ding, ding, ding", hit the fists together with the right and left alternately on top.
4. If you stamp one hundred Model-T Fords and make a wish, your wish will come true.
5. When two people say the same words simultaneously, if they lock their little fingers and make a wish before either of them says a word, their wishes will come true.
6. When two speak the same word simultaneously, they must not speak another word but crook their little fingers together and make a wish. The silence may then be broken by the two saying alternately, "Needles, pins, triplets, twins." The thumbs are then put together and the first person says, "When a man marries", while the second answers, "His trouble begins."
7. When two people say the same word simultaneously they must crook their little fingers together and remain silent while making a wish. They then say, "Longfellow, Shakespeare," and pull. The one who succeeds in pulling the other's finger straight gets his wish.
8. If two people say the same thing in concert, the little fingers of their right hands must be locked, then the thumbs put together, and a wish made by each. One says, "Needles", the other, "Pins". Both say, "Thumbs". The wish will then come true.
9. Make a wish and open the Bible. If the Bible opens to a verse beginning, "And it came to pass," the wish will come true.

³ Lean, Vincent S., *Lean's Collectanea*, vol. 2, p. 280. 1902.

10. Make a wish, open the Bible at random, and whatever you read will be the answer as to whether or not you will get your wish.
11. To pick a five-leaved clover is bad luck, but if you make a wish and throw the clover over your shoulder, the wish will come true.
12. If you find a four-leaved clover, place it in your shoe, and make a wish, the wish will come true.
13. If you wish on a load of hay and look away, your wish will come true.
14. Load of hay, load of hay,
 Make a wish and turn away.
15. If you make a wish on a hay stack and do not look at it again, your wish will come true.
16. When you see the first star at night, make a wish and say,
 Star bright, star light,
 First star I've seen tonight,
 Wish I may, wish I might
 Have the wish I wish tonight.
17. When you see a meteor fall say, "Money, money, money," until the star disappears and you will have one hundred dollars for each time you say the word *Money*.
18. Wish while a meteor is falling.
19. Make the same wish for seven nights while standing under an arc-light, and your wish will then come true.
20. If the first time you see the new moon, you happen to look at it over your right shoulder, make a wish and it will come true.
21. When you walk on a new sidewalk for the first time, spit on it and make a wish.
22. If the hem of your skirt is turned up, you can make a wish and it will come true if you kiss the place where it turned up three times.
23. If a piece of pie served to you points directly toward you, cut off the point, place it aside and make a wish on it. Eat this last and your wish will come true. If the person who serves the pie to you consciously places it with the point toward you the charm will not work.
24. Walk ten rails on the railroad track without stepping off, make a wish, and it will come true. (The number of rails varies. It may be ten, seven, nine, or thirteen.)
25. When you put on any part of your clothing wrong side out, if you make a wish before you change, it will come true.
26. Make a wish for every pin you pick up.
27. If two people pull the ends of a wish-bone and it breaks, the person who gets the larger end gets his wish.
28. If you put a ring on the finger of a friend and wish at the same time, your wish will come true, if your friend does not take off the ring. It is permissible to tell your friend how long to wear the ring before it can be taken off.
29. Make a wish and blow three times on the lighted candles on a birthday cake. If the candles are all blown out, your wish will come true.
30. Turn your tea cup up side down and make a wish while turning the cup around in the saucer three times. If a tea leaf comes close to the rim of the cup, you will get your wish.
31. Make a wish the first time you kiss a new baby and your wish will come true.

X

EXORCISMS AND CHARMS

While exorcisms and charms may not, in the strictest sense, be classed as signs, their relationship to these superstitions is so close that they have been included in the following section. The exorcisms are connected with bad luck signs, and the charms may be regarded as positive control beliefs and hence a part of our subject.

In the narrowest sense, exorcisms are adjurations or rites for driving away evil spirits. We have broadened the use of the term to include any bit of magical practice used to ward off, not only evil spirits, but bad luck in general. The exorcisms in this list are usually rather simple rites used to avert the ill luck portended by some sign.

Charms and exorcisms may be considered identical in so far as both are used as protective and preventive measures, but the word *charm* has a somewhat more extensive meaning. Charms are used to insure protection against evil and also to bring about good fortune. In addition to the incantations and ceremonies connected with charms, is the practice of carrying various small talismans or amulets, and the reliance on mascots as bearers of good luck.

The oldest charms and exorcisms are closely bound up with the practice of sorcery, with ideas of primitive medicine, and with the belief in witchcraft. The ceremonies were used to end disease or ill fortune by casting out devils and witches and may be regarded as the matching of one kind of sorcery against another.

The remnants of the beliefs left to us are but faint reminders of the elaborate rites of the past. Although the ages of individual charms and exorcisms may not be determined, the idea back of them all must be of great antiquity. It represents something fundamental in human nature; that is, an instinct for self-protection and a desire to control the future. Material remains in the form of amulets are brought to light by excavations and from their testimony it is concluded that the use of luck charms is not confined to any single place or

period. It is universal and persists rather commonly even today.

There is little trace in the practices listed in this collection of the incantations which were an important part of ancient rites. In only a few of the charms is it necessary to repeat a short phrase in order to work the spell. The ceremonies have come to us much simplified, they contain little suggestion of their ancestry of sorcery and magic, and their efficacy may commonly be doubted. They still offer satisfaction, however, to those who are unwilling to play an entirely passive rôle in life. For such bold spirits there is pleasure in the thought that through the charm or exorcism one may become a contributor to destiny.

1. If a black cat crosses in front of a moving car, you should knock on wood or you are liable to have a puncture or blow-out.
2. If a black cat crosses your path when you are setting out on a journey, you must turn back and wait for another day to avoid bad luck.
3. If a black cat crosses your path, jumping over the track or path will break the bad luck.
4. To break the evil spell carried by a black cat, say, "Happy surprise is come to me," when you see the animal.
5. If a black cat crosses your path, you must catch it to avoid bad luck.
6. To avert the death which must follow the crowing of a hen, kill the hen.
7. If you forget anything and have to go back after it, be sure to sit down to keep bad luck away.
8. If you leave the house and have to come back, you must always sit down and rock before leaving again else you will have bad luck.
9. If you start out for some place and forget something and come back, you'll have bad luck unless you sit down and make a wish that you do not want to come true, before starting out again.
10. If you have to return to the house after starting somewhere, you may avert bad luck by sitting down on the stairs before starting the second time.
11. If you stumble, go back and walk properly over the obstruction, or you will have bad luck.
12. If you stub your toe, kiss your finger and you will have good luck.
13. One must step off a cross walk when a horse is passing over it or he will have bad luck.
14. If the hem of a woman's skirt is turned up, spit on it and she will have a new dress.
15. If you must change a garment which has been put on wrong side out, make a wish while you are doing so, to avoid bad luck.
16. If you spill salt, you must burn some of it or you will have a quarrel.
17. If you upset the salt, throw a little over your left shoulder at once in order to keep witches away.

18. In order that a friendship may not be broken because of giving a sharp or pointed article to a friend, have him pay a penny for it.
19. If two people walking together allow a tree to come between them, they must say, "Bread and butter," or their friendship will be broken.
20. If two people walking together allow a tree to come between them, they must say, "Needles and pins," or the friendship will be broken.
21. If two people say a word at the same time, instantly they must lock their little fingers or they will quarrel.
22. A ringing in the ear indicates that someone is talking about you; but if you wet your finger with saliva and rub it on your ear, the speaker will bite his tongue.
23. If you wear a string of beans around your neck, you will never have bad luck.
24. Mascots to ward off ill luck—goat, kitten, football.
25. A buckeye will ward off the evil eye.
26. A rabbit's foot worn about the neck brings good luck.
27. There is good luck in odd numbers, except 13.
28. The number 7 is a lucky number.
29. The left hind foot of a rabbit killed at midnight in the graveyard in the dark of the moon will bring good luck.
30. Carry a horse shoe for good luck.
31. Put a horse shoe over the door to keep witches out of the house.
32. On getting out of bed, put the right foot foremost for good luck.
33. If you see a white horse and spit over your little finger you'll have good luck.
34. To pick a five-leaved clover is bad luck. But if you spit on it and throw it over your left shoulder, it will bring you good luck.
35. If when you churn, the butter will not come, the witches cause the trouble; so heat a horseshoe or a poker and put it in the churn and it will drive the witches out.
36. Put salt on the stove to make the butter come when churning. It drives away the witches.
37. To keep witches away, tie up the head in newspapers at night.
38. If you make any sort of a boast, rap on wood, or ill luck will come.
39. To keep a person from asking for a drink at night, place a glass of water under the bed; do not tell the person, have faith, and he won't ask for a drink.
40. Walk around your chair to change your luck at cards.
41. To change luck at cards, take another deck, throwing the old one away.
42. Sit on a handkerchief to change luck at cards.
43. Crossing the fingers when playing tag makes you immune from capture.
44. If you cross your fingers, you can tell a lie with a clear conscience.
45. On moving into a newly built house, first carry into the house enough salt in your pocket to sprinkle lightly the four sides of every room, reading the Bible as you go. If you do this, you will have good luck in that house.

46. To find any lost article, first spit in your hand; then say, "Spit, spit spy, tell me where that (article) is or I'll hit you in the eye." Strike the spit with the first finger. The direction in which it flies indicates the direction in which to look.
47. To avoid the bad luck brought by a crowing hen, take her to the cross roads and let her go.
48. Pass a new baby three times around a table leg, to insure good luck.
49. If you drop a bite of food, you must pick it up and eat it because it is the "lucky bite."
50. On a child's birthday he should be spanked once for each year of his life, once for good luck, and once for growth.
51. After sneezing say, "God bless us," to bring good luck.
52. Spit on new shoes for good luck.

XI

MISCELLANEOUS SIGNS

Among miscellaneous signs are grouped sayings and beliefs that could not consistently be classified in any of the preceding sections. Although several related groups might be discovered in the list, none of them are large enough to justify separate treatment. A number of the signs have to do with friendship, several are connected with child life, while others stand alone, unassociated with other beliefs in this collection. Some of the most common and interesting signs are gathered together here. The list may be regarded as a catalogue of almost every kind of folk belief. Here are taboos and divinations as well as the simpler omens and portents. A taste or sample of each is offered.

Childish games appear as well as serious directions to the worried for finding solace or guidance in the Bible. Theatrical lore and signs suggestive of rural environment have places of equal importance in the collection. Sayings both serious and facetious may be found. Perhaps no other group is more indicative of the wide range of folk beliefs, the various attitudes with which they are regarded, and the prominent part they play in every-day life.

1. If you find a hairpin, you will find a friend.
2. If you find a crinkled hairpin, you will find a curly-haired friend.
If you find a straight hairpin, you will find a straight-haired friend.
3. If you lose a hairpin, you will lose a friend.
4. To draw a ring from a person's finger severs friendship.
5. If you give a friend anything sharp, it will cut the friendship.
6. When you see the first star at night repeat:
I see specks, specks sees me,
I'll see somebody tomorrow
I don't expect to see.
7. A raveling on your garments predicts a letter.
8. If a boy's shirt-tail hangs out, he has a letter in the post office.
9. It is good luck to put a garment on inside out.
10. If you see a pin and let it lie,
You'll need a pin before you die.
11. See a pin and pick it up,
All that day you'll have good luck;
See a pin and let it lie,
Before the evening you will cry.

12. See a pin and pick it up,
All the day you'll have good luck;
See a pin and let it lay,
You will have bad luck all day.
13. He that sings on Friday will weep on Sunday.
14. Sing before you eat,
You'll cry before you sleep.
15. If you sing before eating,
You'll cry before sleeping.
16. If you sing before breakfast, you'll cry before night.
17. Don't go into a group of people when you are eating or carrying peanuts with you, or it will cause a quarrel.
18. When a general pause comes in the conversation, it is a sign that the time is twenty minutes before or after the hour.
19. If you laugh when someone tickles your knees, it is a sign you like the boys.
20. If your initials spell a word, you will become rich.
21. No news is a sign of good news.
22. If worried open the Bible. The first verse the eyes fall upon will tell whether your worry is necessary or not.
23. If you step on a crack,
You'll break your mother's back.
Step in a hole,
You'll break your mother's sugar bowl.
Step on a nail,
You'll break your mother's pail. *Or,*
You'll put your father in jail.
24. It is good luck to find a penny with the head up.
25. If you meet a good looking woman in the morning, you will have good luck all day.
26. Pearls reflect the mood of the individual wearing them. If the lustre is bright, a happy mood is indicated. If the pearls are dull, a sad mood is indicated.
27. If you play solitaire, it is a sign you are playing with the devil.
28. You can tell what a child will be in its future life by placing before it the day it is one year old, a bottle, a dollar, and a book. If he picks up the bottle, he will be a drunkard; if he chooses the dollar, he will be a financier; and if he picks up the book, he will be a student.
29. The day of the week on which a child is born indicates its characteristics according to the following rhyme:
Monday's child is fair of face,
Tuesday's child is full of grace,
Wednesday's child is merry and glad,
Thursday's child is sour and sad,
Friday's child is loving and giving,
Saturday's child works hard for a living,
But the child that is born on the Sabbath day
Is blithe and bonny and good and gay.

The third and fourth lines may read--

Wednesday's child is full of woe,
Thursday's child has far to go.

30. If you clap at a dress rehearsal, the performance will be a failure.
31. If a dress rehearsal is poor, the performance will be good.
32. If you break the first brake,
 And kill the first snake,
 You'll do everything
 That you undertake.
33. Children divine the length of life by the following rhyme, repeated while skipping rope:
 Mother, mother, I am sick,
 Send for the doctor, quick, quick, quick.
 Doctor, doctor, shall I die?
 Yes, yes, yes, but do not cry.
 How many years before I die?
 One, two, three, etc., until he misses.

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