

VOODOOISM.

A Remarkable Set of Ignorant and Superstitious Blacks Near New Orleans.

The Hideous and Weird Scenes with Which They Celebrate the 24th of June.

The Voodoo Queen.

The New Orleans correspondent of *The Nashville Union* writes: Those who are not thoroughly familiar with the cosmopolitan population that fills the ancient city will find it hard to believe that in the nineteenth century, with all our boasted enlightenment, the charms and spells of voodoo still have a powerful influence over the minds of many in this remote corner of the nation. To be sure, the superstition is most prevalent among the negroes, nearly all of whom are believers in the power of the "voodoo" man for evil, but there are many white people—of the least intelligent class, of course—who hold the charms of this peculiar evil genius in great awe.

The voodoo queen, Marie Leveau, died years and years ago, and since her demise the followers of the horrible faith have diminished in numbers, though the belief seems to have grown stronger in the breasts of those who survive. The tales that have been told of the weird scenes witnessed in the swamps on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain on the day sacred to voodoo—St. John's eve, the 24th of June—must not be all attributed to fancy, for that these scenes have occurred I can myself bear witness, having had ocular demonstrations of their truth.

The present queen of the voodoos is a little, shriveled old negress, a dwarf in stature and a monstrosity in malformation, who lives in a little hut in the swamp half a mile back from the road leading along the shores of the lake between Spanish fort and Metairieburg. Her name is Alice Lesouer, but her faithful followers call her only "the mother." In the midst of rags and squalor, in a room not six feet square, she lives the life of a hermit, none knowing of her existence save some half-dozen old darkies, men and women, who believe devoutly in her power as to do the nuns in the teachings of good Archbishop Leray. These humble believers carry food and drink at regular intervals to the mother, and at least one of them keeps guard in front of the hut night and day that the sacred presence of the queen may not be entered by unbelievers.

High revel is held by the voodoos on St. John's eve. Early in the evening, as the shadows of the live oaks are lengthening and the hooting of the owl mingles with the swish of the alligator as he tosses to and fro in the sluggish waters of the Bayou St. John, the followers of voodoo silently gather about the hut of old Alice Lesouer and prepare for the annual propitiation of the feared deity. Tradition tells of human sacrifices on these occasions; but tradition is not always reliable, and it has probably drawn the long bow on this subject. The voodoos are silent and quiescent; only a few of the younger ones are stirring, and these draw up a pirogue or canoe, from the bayou's surface, and unload lightwood knots tied into fagots, bottles of brandy, and dozens of small packages, done up in parchment, and anything but agreeable in odor. The last thing to be taken from the pirogue is an immense iron pot, holding probably ten gallons. The work is carried on slowly, and by the time the task of unloading the small boat is finished the night has worn to 11 o'clock, and the moon rides high in the heaven, casting a ghostly light over the swamps and making all things look unearthly. The pine knots are piled in circular form, the iron caldron placed upon them, and a match applied. As the fire begins to burn briskly the negroes squat about it in a circle, and begin a low, monotonous chant in a language that none but themselves understand. Fresh wood is piled upon the flames and the water in the pot begins to seethe and bubble under the heat. Suddenly the negroes rise to their feet as by one impulse, and just as the caldron boils the midnight boom of the clock in a far-away steeple is heard. With the sound a complete transformation comes over the voodoos. The door of the hut is thrown open, and, supported by two women as ugly, old, and misshapen as herself, the queen of the voodoos steps out into glare of the fire. The circle about the fire opens, and the negroes fall back until they all face the queen. She raises her hand, chatters a few words in the patois of French and Spanish known as "gumbo," and the negroes fall prone upon their faces. The queen steps up to the caldron, empties one of the bottles of brandy into it and sets fire to the liquid. As it burns with a blue flame, she breaks open one of the packages done up in parchment and slowly pours its contents into the brandy flames. A powerful, yet not disagreeable odor rises, and as it burns with a reddish green flame the queen shrieks out half a dozen words in "gumbo," which are echoed by the prostrate negroes. Jumping to their feet, the voodoos form a circle about the fire and the queen and, joining hands, begin a devil's dance that, for muscular exer-

tion and fury, is equaled by nothing outside of the cavorting or the fiends in the Inferno. Round and round they circle, throwing arms and feet in the air, throwing their bodies backward and forward and sideways until they appear to have lost all control of their muscles. With each motion they yell, scream, groan, and howl, and over all is heard the piping treble of the queen, who, like the others, dances about the fire in a satanic waltz. Worn out and exhausted, the negroes drop out one by one and lie down on the grass, rolling their eyes and twitching every muscle in their bodies. The last one finally succumbs, and the queen, too, sinks to the earth, and for a few minutes nothing but the affrighted bullfrogs disturb the solitude. As the voodoos recover they gather around the fire silently waiting for the queen to regain consciousness. When this comes she is taken in charge by the two old women who first attended her and seated on the ground a little distance away. The caldron is lifted off the fire, fresh fuel put on, and as the blaze again leaps upward a perfect representation of the witches' scene in "Macbeth" follows, only there are more than Shakspeare's number of witches, and some of these are of the masculine persuasion. One by one they approach the fire, and from the pockets of the men and from various portions of the apparel of the women are drawn forth all the articles that went to make up the hell-broth brewed to make Duncan's slayer king of Scotland. In very truth, "tongue of newt and spawn of frog" are there, with such other oddities as rabbits' feet, snails, alligator toes, snakes, spiders, and even human bones. These were cast into the fire by the negroes, and as they burn another mournful chant rises on the air and floats out across the bayou and lake to greet and startle the fishermen who lie at anchor off the light-house.

After all have offered up their sacrifices to voodoo, they seat themselves in a circle about the queen and silence falls upon the group. The fire is allowed to smolder, and its fitful flickerings reveal only the passing of bottles containing brandy from hand to hand, the queen taking her share with the rest. The liquor is evidently drugged for the occasion, for no boisterousness follows the copious draughts. A score of bottles are emptied, and one by one the blacks sink down in the damp earth and relapse into unconsciousness. The old queen follows the example of her subjects, and the soft gray dawn in the east creeps slowly up to the zenith, the sun rises on the still, motionless forms, and the rituals and weird scenes of St. John's eve are at an end, to be repeated the next year in the same form.

These memories have been raised by the recent death here of a young man, George A. Forschler, under what his friends solemnly assert was a "hoodoo" spell.

The young man had what appeared to be paralysis, his limbs were stiffened, and he declared that a train of cars were racing up and down in his head. The firm belief of the victim's friends and relations was that he was under the spell of some emissary of voodoo, who had buried some charm or fetish about his premises to kill him. When first taken sick his symptoms were merely those of a bad cold, and a physician was called in, but his medicine failed of effect. Then an old negro doctor was consulted, who, after diagnosing the case, declared that the man had "been given something to hurt him." On St. John's eve Forschler was sent for by the negro doctor to go to the lake and bathe, and he would be cured. The sick man was carried out to the lake, but the colored physician failed to appear. It was now determined to call in a medical man whose skill was extensive enough to combat the spell wrought by the voodoo. Another negro, Dr. Clapion was brought to him, and he emphatically stated with hesitation that the sick man had been "hoodooed." What followed is given in the exact language of Forschler's father.

"On the 25th inst., in the evening, I requested Mr. Clapion to see if there was anything like a voodoo fetish buried on the premises. Mr. Clapion examined the premises, and found that there was something buried under the house, and that it was necessary to cut the flooring to get at the buried fetish. This was done by one of my employes, and, after half an hour's work, Mr. Clapion caused the charm to show itself, and took it out. It consisted of a package showing red silk cord, wrapped around gold leaf, stuck full of large steel needles in all kinds of positions, the whole enveloping a bottle. Mr. Clapion took hold of the package and unwrapped it. The silk cord was of unusual length, fully sixty feet. The gold leaf was folded square in four folds, and the needles rudely represented the shape of a star. The bottle was uncorked by Mr. Clapion, who found it to contain a mixture of vinegar and gunpowder, with other substance whose nature was not ascertained."

The charm, or fetish, was carefully carried to the river, sealed up in a can and weighted with bricks, and deposited in the rapidly-flowing waters. For a time the patient improved, but Clapion declared that the fetish had been working evil so long that he could not overcome its influence, and sure enough the next day the man died.

Clapion thus describes his ancestry and his powers:

"I was the son-in-law of Marie Leveau, queen of the voodoos, who died several years ago. I learned at her house to exercise the power of the gift I had received, and since then I have studied the art. I never do harm to anyone, nor do I charge a cent for my services. When I am called I go and do not ask for recompense. My trade is that of house and sign painting, but if my services to heal the sick or accomplish some good act are needed, I am always ready. I do not profess medicine as a calling."

Every member of the dead man's family, as well as hundreds of his friends, believe that he met his death through a voodoo enemy's power, and they are talking of urging the authorities to institute a rigid search for the "murderer."

The most remarkable part of this affair is that the Forschler family are intelligent and educated. The dead man was a skilled pharmacist, and kept a drug store in the French quarter of the city.

Liabilities of Dog Owners.

A savage dog is a possession which demands from its owner extraordinary care. Knowing, or being in law presumed to know, the dangerous nature of the property he has in charge, the owner will be held liable for all damage, direct or indirect, which may be caused by such property. It has, however, been held that the fact that a dog is known to be savage, and that it has attacked animals, is not enough to make its owner liable to a man who is bitten by it, unless he can show that such owner had knowledge of the dog's propensity to bite men. A ferocious dog, accustomed to bite mankind, is a nuisance; and, if found at large, may be killed by any one. But he must not be killed on his owner's premises, unless about to attack some one. A dog not naturally savage will sometimes bite, and in such cases his owner's liability will depend on the facts of the case. If the dog, "to gain some private ends," has chosen to bite an unoffending man or beast, his owner must pay for it; but if a person will not "let a sleeping dog lie," or otherwise teases or provokes the animal and is bitten therefor, the dog's owner may invoke the doctrine of contributory negligence. A well-trained and good-natured dog may cause injury to persons or property; should he do so under direction of his master, the latter will of course be responsible.—*American Agriculturist.*

The Dark Shadow's Demands.
Matildy Snowball, a colored lady of Austin, hearing that Mrs. Col. Yergler needed a cook, applied for the position. On being asked what her terms were, Matildy replied with dignity: "I want a nicely furnished room to myself for de gentlemen what visits me. Dey am gentlemen from way back. Dey belongs to de hoe roley." "Anything else you want?" asked Mrs. Yergler. "I want Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday ter 'muse myself." "Is that all?" "No, indeed, dat an't all. Monday and Wednesday arternoons I goes out ter tend de regular meetin' of de Mystery Order ob de Seben Wise Yargins. Tuesday arternoon and Friday arternoons de Hallerluyter quire of de Blue Light Cullud Tabernaacle has rehearsals. I'se de soprano. I has ter be out mos' ob de day on Friday, because dat's de day I returns calls. My wages am \$12 a munt."

"And you stay away, more or less, five days in the week?" "Yes, mum." "Well, what I want to know is, how much a month will you charge if you stay away altogether?" "A moment later a dark shadow passed through the front gate of the Yergler mansion.—*Texas Siftings.*

Progressive Undertakers.
Two rival undertaking houses of Indianola are engaged in quite a competition and are "cutting prices" and offering other inducements to funeral parties at a lively rate. One of them publishes this squib in the *Advocate-Tribune*:
Johnston & McGowan have made prices on metallic caskets never before known in the county. Now is the time to buy.
The other house comes up smiling with the following puff:
Walt Richey has just bought a new hearse team, a pair of fine bays. They are showy animals, of good gait and carriage, excellent travelers, yet quiet, tractable and safe. A splendid team of roadsters, and especially adapted to an undertaker's business. Sam will hold the lines over them with a quiet pride as he goes about on his solemn mission.—*Des Moines Saturday Mail.*

A Terrible Revenge.
Dauber, the artist, has a private grudge against Bondclipper, the banker. Converting with a friend on this subject, Dauber remarked: "I'd like to play him some trick that would make him a perpetual object of ridicule."
"I tell you how you can do it."
"How?"
"Paint his portrait. That will make him squira."—*Texas Siftings.*



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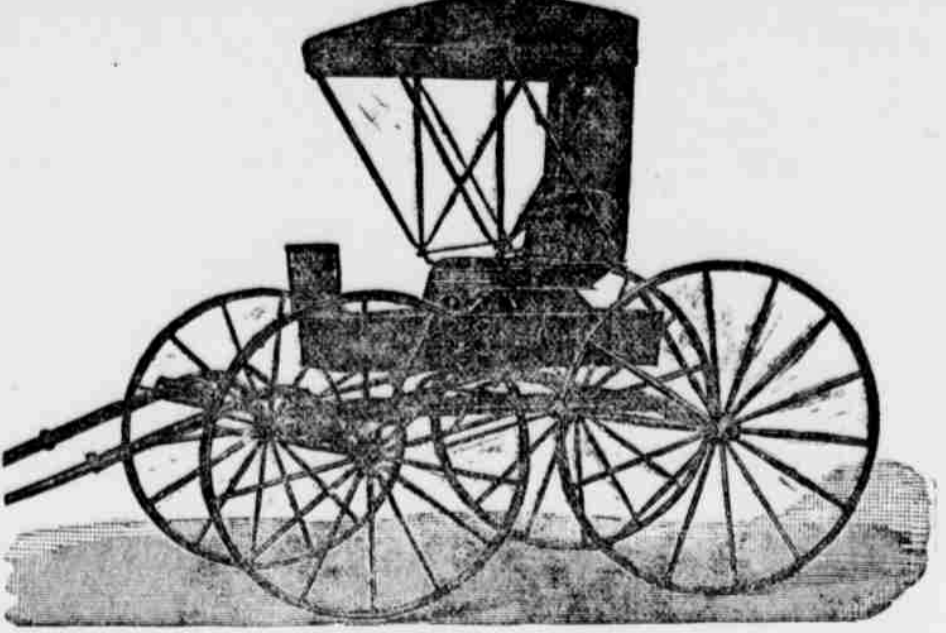
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