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SALT SEA YARNS.

Signs and Omens to Which the Sailor Grimly Clings.

A JOKE THAT PROVED FATAL.

Superstition and a Guilty Conscience Proved Too Much For the Norseman—A Bucket of Water That Stopped a Mysterious Wailing.

It is a well known fact that in the past the sailor was among the most superstitious of mortals, and even in these enlightened days there are a goodly number of old salts who cling tenaciously to their belief in certain signs and portents. Some, no doubt, of these superstitions have vanished altogether into the limbo of forgotten things, but there will always be a credulous few who will shake their heads solemnly and prophesy dismally if a knife is stuck in the mast or an albatross or a stormy petrel is captured and brought on board. The origin of some of these superstitions cannot be traced. Many of them have been handed down from father to son for a great number of years, with a touch probably added here and there, turning a comparatively ordinary story into a weird and mysterious legend.

The Finn is the most superstitious of all sailors. There are many of this race who still believe in the ominous portent of the phantom ship, the folly of starting a voyage on a Friday (a notion by no means confined to seafaring men), the low burning blue lights which are ghost spirits hovering near to give warning of approaching disaster and many other things, all of which

Fill the sailor's mind with murmurings
And speak to him of wrecks.

A story is told of a brigantine which numbered several extremely superstitious men among her crew. One night when there was no moon and a slight ground swell was running the watch, who happened to be the most superstitious of them all, heard an unearthly wailing coming apparently from the very surface of the sea. The mate and the helmsman also heard it, but the former lacked imagination, and, although he was certainly interested, he nearly blew the watch's head off when he ventured to suggest mermaids. The helmsman did not feel quite happy, but he had to stick to the wheel. The watch was pale with terror, but he kept silence owing to the mate's complimentary references to his courage and abilities. Slowly the sound began to move along the ship's side, becoming more and more agonized as it approached. This annoyed the mate, and, going to the side of the vessel, he waited until he had located the sound and then emptied a bucket of water over the rail. There was a gasp, then dead silence, and nothing more was heard that night.

When the watch went off duty he of course gave a detailed and lurid account of the incident to his shipmates, who listened, as he thought, in awed silence and then called on one of the audience for his version of the matter. This man, a Tyne-sider, who dearly loved a joke and had no respect at all for hoary superstitions, had conspired with his fellows to play a trick on the watch. On the night in question he had crept over the bows without a sound, carrying with him the ship's cat secured in a bag. Crouching under the stays, the joker let the cat's head out of the bag, which he tied round the animal's neck so that it could not escape. He then applied his teeth to the unfortunate animal's tail. Everybody knows the fearsome sounds an angry cat is capable of producing, and those to which a cat whose tail is being bitten gives vent are among the most hair raising. The sound was more or less regulated by squeezing the luckless beast's body. The mate's bucket of water was as unwelcome as unexpected and caused the Tyne-sider to beat a hurried retreat.

Not only is the origin of many sea superstitions "wropt in mystery," but also any logical explanation of cause and effect. It would puzzle any one to say why it should be unlucky for the ship's boy to whistle on the weather bow, except that it is generally unpleasant from a music lover's point of view for a boy to whistle on any bow at all.

On one occasion superstition and a guilty conscience caused a practical joke to have fatal consequences. The incident arose through one of the sailors, a Norwegian, boxing the ears of the ship's boy for the aforementioned crime of whistling on the weather bow. Not unnaturally the boy was annoyed and determined to pay the Norwegian out. Aided by two other sailors, a white shirt and some string, a very presentable "ghost" was arranged in the foc'sle on the night the Norseman was on watch. He was to be allowed only a glimpse of the "spirit" on entering the foc'sle, and it was then to vanish from view, being jerked by means of a string underneath the bunk of one of the jokers. Everything was ready, and the three conspirators lay in their bunks awaiting their victim. Unfortunately they all fell asleep, to be suddenly awakened by a loud cry from the Norwegian. He stood gazing at the "ghost," the dim light shed by the lamp falling on his ghastly face. The three were about to call out to him when he spoke. "No, no," he cried, "I did not mean to kill you, Morgan! Oh, mercy, mercy!" And he rushed madly from the foc'sle. Terrified, his shipmates followed him, but as they reached the deck they saw the Norwegian throw himself into the sea.—London Globe.

Porcelain.

Porcelain was discovered by an alchemist who was seeking a mixture of earths that would make the most durable crucibles.

The Teeth.

One of the commonest causes of bad teeth is that of taking very hot food. If you take a cup of very hot tea or coffee the enamel on the teeth expands, and breathing the cold air afterward causes it to contract. This alternate expansion and shrinking of the enamel work havoc with it, and when it cracks, as it soon does, the inner part of the tooth crumbles away in no time.

Tacitus.

Hume said that Tacitus was the ablest writer that ever lived and him self tried to model his style on that of the Roman historian.

To Color Mahogany.

The natural color of mahogany when it is too light may be deepened by applying a mixture composed of a half gallon of water, four ounces of madder and two ounces of fustic. Boil and apply while hot. While it is wet streak the grain with black. This will give new mahogany quite the coloring of old.

Rice.

Rice has been the staff of life for more than half the population of the world since beyond the beginning of recorded time.

The Town of Mothers.

The town of Leonberg, in Wurttemberg, is known as the "town of mothers," for there the mothers of Schiller and Kepler lived. On the walk of the old castle where the Magna Charta of Wurttemberg liberties was signed by Ulrich, the well beloved, tablets have been placed in honor of the mothers of the poet and the astronomer.

The Terrapin.

The terrapin lives largely upon crabs. He never eats his food, but bolts it. His favorite tidbit is the crab's claw, which he swallows whole with the greatest relish.

Dismal Swamp.

The Dismal swamp is a birds' paradise. It houses every conceivable kind, and they all sing, pipe or whistle all the time at the top of their lungs. In most places you are only occasionally aware of the multitudinous life going on in the trees. In the swamp you never forget it.

Breton and Welsh.

Armorican, the old language of Brittany, the ancient Cornish and Welsh—and, for that matter, Erse and Gaelic—are all closely allied languages, members of the Celtic group. Breton and Welsh are very much alike.

The Art of Dyeing.

Dyeing was practiced in Egypt as far back as 3000 B. C., and it may be assumed that it was practiced in still more remote times among the Indians, the Persians and probably the Chinese.

A Fearful Poison.

A single drop of hydrocyanic acid placed on the tongue of a big dog caused instant death. A half teaspoonful taken by a man will cause him to drop as if struck by lightning. There is no antidote.

The Chinese King.

The king is the favorite musical instrument in Chinese temples. In its most perfect form it consists of a number of large flat stones of different shapes and tones. The sound is that of a chime of bells and is singularly clear and musical. The stones are said to be a peculiar variety of basalt found in the mountains to the north of China.

Formosa.

The productiveness of Formosa is so great that it is believed that the present population of 2,500,000 could be raised to 10,000,000 without exhausting the fertility of the soil.

Infant Marriages.

Turkey perhaps offers more facilities for the marriage of infants than any other European country. Ottoman requirements are met if bride and bridegroom are old enough to toddle from the cradle to the altar and to understand the meaning of the ceremony of marriage.

The Coffee Plant.

Abyssinia is the original home of coffee, and the plant is still grown there in its native luxuriance and primitive abundance.

Japanese Books.

Japanese books all begin at what we should call the end and finish up where one would expect the title page to be. Footnotes, if any, are placed at the top of the page, and the reader inserts his bookmarker at the bottom. Strangest of all, a large full stop is placed at the beginning of each paragraph.

The Stage as a School.

The elder Pitt liked Shakespeare, but not the labor of reading plays. He enjoyed hearing them and once said that he had learned more English history at the theater than at the university.

A Queer African Tribe.

The Suk tribe in Africa work their hair into a kind of long shaped matted chignon stiffened with clay. This reaches almost to the waist. The Suks also wear a curious cape made of monkey skin rubbed soft. This cape is not worn for warmth or protection from the sun, but when it rains they put the cape over their heads to prevent the clay being washed out of their hair.

Literary Firsts and Seconds.

The youthful newspaper reporter who has visions of being a famous author is still wondering over the epigram made by a successful confrere when the latter noted his disappointment over the return of a manuscript.

"I thought sure," said the reporter, with a sigh, "that that confounded story would sell. It's good stuff, if I did write it, and I am certainly surprised that it came back."

The successful writer grinned and then placed his hand on the other man's shoulder.

"My dear boy," he said, somewhat grimly, "there are only two stages in the life of a writer. One is when he is surprised at getting his stories back and the second when he is surprised at not getting them back. You're in the first; I'm in the second. And there you are."

But the reporter is still wondering.—Philadelphia Times.

Escorted Her Anyway.

While Robert Browning and his son Barrett were living alone in Florence the son gave one afternoon an exhibition of his new paintings in the family drawing room. To Mr. Browning was assigned the task of meeting the guests. Late in the afternoon, when the room was well filled, there appeared at the drawing room door a woman whose face was familiar. Yet Mr. Browning could not recall her name, and he judged from her appearance that she was not an invited guest.

There was embarrassment on both sides for a moment, and then the woman said eagerly: "Oh, please, Mr. Browning, I'm the cook. Mr. Barrett said as I was to come and see his pretty pictur's."

Whereupon Mr. Browning, offering his arm, showed her about the room with all the attention that he could have bestowed upon a reigning queen.

The Rat and the Bulbs.

According to the French naturalist De Parville, a gardener planted one afternoon 250 tulip bulbs on a terrace, and next morning he noticed that the ground had been disturbed and that the bulbs had all been taken away. He was confident that rats had done the work, and, taking a spade, he began to dig in the hope of discovering their nest. Soon he unearthed a large female rat, which he killed, and after digging a few more minutes he discovered an underground chamber lined with hay and leaves and connected by a corridor with two holes, which were evidently used as storehouses, for in them he found the 250 tulip bulbs. This was remarkable, but more remarkable was the fact that they were neatly arranged in two rows and that not one of them had been gnawed or otherwise injured.

The Rhodum Sidus.

An amusing story told by Hood describes how a country nurseryman made a large sum out of sales of a simple little flower which he sold under the name of the Rhodum sidus. This charming name proved quite an attraction to the ladies, and the flower became the rage of the season. It was one of those freaks of fashion for which there is no accounting. At length a botanist who found that the plant was not an uncommon weed requested to know where the nurseryman got the name from. He elicited the following reply: "I found this flower in the road beside us, so christened it the Rhoo'm sidus."

The Purist Lost a Sale.

"I've just happened to remember that my wife told me to get a tin pan that will go under the icebox. Have you any?"

"No, sir, but we have some that can be shoved under the icebox. Won't that do just as well?"

"I think not, young man. My wife is a bit particular about my getting the exact thing that she tells me to get. I presume I can find it at some other store. Good day, sir."—Chicago Tribune.

Horse Sense.

During a heavy downpour of rain an Irish farmer sent his boy to a distant field to bring home a horse. Some time elapsed, and the messenger returned without the horse.

Father—Didn't Oi send ye for the horse, ye gamoch? Is your head in your brogues?

Little Boy (drenched to the skin)—Sure, he was standin' in shelter as dry as ye loike. Bedad, he knows more than the two of us.

Too Empty.

Bonne (morning of the second day out)—Come, old boy, let's go out on deck. Breakfast won't be served for half an hour yet, and a brisk walk on an empty stomach will do you good.

Klabber (feebly trying to smile)—Take a walk on yours, if you like, chapple. Mine is—is entirely too empty.—Chicago Tribune.

In Art Circles.

"That picture is by an old master," the owner stated proudly.

"Umph, umph," commented the critical visitor. "What was he master of?"—Philadelphia Ledger.

His Advice.

She (after the embrace)—Oh, how dare you! You have offended me. What shall I do?

He—Er—why not "turn the other cheek?"—London Tatler.

What Did It Mean?

A notice board in a Scottish kirk once bore, it is said, the following amazing sentence: "This church is licensed for the solemnization of marriages."

Listen to others, but do not blindly depend on them.