

OMENS ON WARSHIPS.

SUPERSTITIONS WHICH GOVERN OLD SALTS OF THE NAVY.

Hoodoo and Spells Which May Work All Sorts of Evils on Board and Which Must Be Carefully Guarded Against the Tattooing Habit.

The most picturesque superstitions of the seas are those which govern a modern man-of-war. Every old salt in the navy believes in hoodoo and spells which may work all sorts of evils on his ship and must be carefully guarded against.

The powers of a ship's hoodoo commence before the ship has entered the water. It is a generally accepted superstition that if the first blow which is struck the keel brings sparks the ship is destined to suffer from a raking fire from the enemy.

The old time practice of stealing a piece of wood and imbedding it in the prow for good luck is, of course, impossible in the case of steel ships, though it is considered lucky to have a piece of stolen wood on board.

Another old superstition is satisfied by placing a silver coin in some crevice of the fighting top of the mainmast or some place below decks where it touches the steel mast. Originally it was a very common custom to imbue a silver coin, and preferably a Spanish coin, in the wooden steps near the mast.

Figurheads have been in high favor with sailors from remote antiquity. Originally they were carved to represent some god or saint. Even today a sailor would hesitate to sail on an iron-clad without such protection.

The ceremony of launching a ship is merely a concession to an old superstition. The various formalities of ship christening have been followed with little variation for centuries.

In the early days of shipbuilding it was the custom for the captain and the crew to eat their first meal stowed away in the mold loft. Their meal invariably consisted of eggs and sulphur. From this custom has come the present day practice of providing cakes and wine for the crew. And the old libation which the priests used to pour over the prow of the ship as she slipped into the water has been replaced by the breaking of a bottle of champagne.

The modern man-of-war dashes into the water with flags waving from every masthead. In order to gratify this old superstition it has been necessary to expend hundreds of dollars for the christening of a single ship. But no one begrudges this extravagance. In a way it is necessary.

The good or ill luck of certain days is still a belief among the sailors. Friday is a day of ill omen, and Sunday is usually a lucky day.

A superstition about women is a relic of the old belief in witchcraft. It is thought that a woman by throwing sand in the air on shipboard can produce violent storms. Not many years ago some women who traveled on English warships were tortured during a storm to make them quit the waves.

These barbaric beliefs, however, are partially compensated by the superstition which sailors have held for centuries that beautiful children bring a blessing to a ship. The Neck was a handsome boy with golden curls. It is said that he is always accompanied by a black lamb and carries with him a golden harp. Our old salts have especial confidence in a ship which is christened by a child.

The average sailor is superstitious about the ringing of the ship's bells. In olden times the bells were blessed before they were used. At present, if a mistake is made in striking the hour, the sailors insist that the bells at once be struck backwards to break the spell, and if by any chance the wind should catch the bells and swing them all the way around, or if they strike nine bells, it is believed that it will be the last of that ship.

All good warships go to the "shores of Fiddler's Green" as a final resting place. Just where this mythical harbor is situated no geographer has yet decided. It is in every way the antithesis of "Davy Jones' locker." A warship which goes down in battle with her flags flying, as occurred several times during the civil war, goes to "Fiddler's Green."

The tattooing habit is, of course, very common in the navy. It is believed that an arm or a leg decorated with the design of a gun or a sword or some such design will never be lost in battle.—San Francisco Call.

A Real Utterance.
Dunwich, Moreton bay, Queensland, consists of about 1,000 inhabitants. In four years there have only been two births and two deaths.

There are no streets, no omnibuses or trains, no soldiers, no police, no shops. There is a beautiful theater, and every one is admitted free. Clothes are free, and so are food and lodging. Very few do any work, and there are no hotels. Very little money is required, and medical attendance is free.

There is a lockup, but that is not used. There is also a postoffice, and if short of money the letters are stamped free. There is also a free hospital and library.—London Tit-Bits.

A Demand For a Waistcoat.
At Strathfieldsaye there are (or were) llamas. A good story is told of the Duke of Wellington that years ago the first llamas brought there were shorn and a waistcoat made for the duke, but a late frost set in, and they had to make flannel waistcoats for the llamas instead of their own wool.—Notes and Queries.

It is estimated that there are no fewer than 70,000,000 Europeans who wear wooden shoes. Baswood is ordinarily employed for sabots, but willow is the best material.

When She Took Her Time.
"Is your wife a rapid reader?"
"Yes, unless I'm waiting for the page."—Chicago Record.

CONTRASTS IN NAPLES.

Only a Step From Royal Magnificence to Crowds of Half Naked Workers.

One of the strangest contrasts in Naples is to walk from the royal palace, with its fine marble staircase, up the new Corso Re d'Italia and to climb into the steep streets around the Church of San Soverino a Sodo.

These streets are the dwelling places of the dyers, and one steps from regal magnificence into a crowd of seminaud people, who are busily dipping great hanks of cotton or wool into seething cauldrons. As elsewhere, the work is carried on in the street, and little streams of water—red, yellow, brown and black—pour over the rough stones and gather in multicolored pools, while on low benches against the walls women are washing clothes, standing in the dirty, soapy water that splashes over from their tubs.

The passerby walks heedlessly through the dye and soapuds, while the children find pleasant occupation in throwing mud of every variety of color at anybody who chances to be wearing light colored garments. It is a veritable feast of color from the merely spectacular point of view, but a visit to these streets leaves a bodily as well as a mental impression.

Very often in the depths of these sordid alleys one comes across a forgotten old palace, built when carriages were unknown, its great court of honor crowded with booths, its vast halls filled with a heterogeneous collection of men, women and children, fowls, goats, sheep and occasionally a donkey, all living together in the happiest proximity.

The massive old walls are hidden beneath centuries of dirt; the wood-work has, for the most part, disappeared; the rooms that once knew the revels of Angevin nobles now shelter the hapazard existence of lazzaroni.—Ludgate.

FUN IN THE FOOTNOTE.

A Popular Librettist Couldn't Withhold a Joke on Prospective Bride.

W. S. Gilbert does not retain all of his humor for use in his librettos. In the early days of his success, when Gilbert and Sullivan were considered by managers as the "sure winners" in the comic opera field, a young woman who was a member of one of the "Pinafore" companies wrote to Gilbert telling him of her approaching marriage with a young man of good position and family.

Gilbert congratulated the young woman and expressed the hope that her future might be prosperous and happy. Only a little more than a month passed, and another letter from the same girl reached him, in which she stated that her engagement with the young man had been broken and that she had accepted another suitor.

He replied that he had every confidence in her judgment and again expressed his hearty wishes for her welfare. It was almost two months after that that Gilbert received a third letter from the same girl, who informed him that young Lord — had proposed and that she had accepted him after breaking her engagement with No. 2.

Gilbert's humor could no longer withstand the temptation, and he wrote, "I desire to congratulate you on your approaching marriage with"—Here he placed an asterisk and in a footnote added:

"Here insert the name of the happy man."

This is probably as characteristic a piece of humor as any that appears in his "Bab Ballads" or in his works for the stage.—New York Press.

Wonderful Pumping Engines.

The standard attained by the performance of modern pumping engines is pretty high, as was illustrated by an incident which occurred not long ago here in New York, where some large pumping engines that had recently been set up and were working at rather high speed and almost absolutely without noise were inspected by an expert in such matters who hailed from an interior city. He remarked, "Well, those engines work very nicely now, but wait until you get to pumping water at that speed and then you will hear something from them probably."

His astonishment may perhaps be imagined when it was demonstrated to him that they were at that moment pumping water and had been continuously doing so for 48 hours.—American Machinist.

They Help One Another.

A singular custom prevails among the Tartars or Kurds. If a man gets into difficulties—that is, loses his cattle or other movable property—he pours a little brown sugar into a piece of colored cloth, ties it up and carries one such parcel to each of his friends and acquaintances. In return he is presented, according to circumstances, with a cow or sheep or a sum of money. He is thus at once set on his legs again. The same method is adopted when a young man wishes to marry, but is not in a position to satisfy the parents of his intended bride in the matter of the "bushy"—that is, marriage dowry. Only in this case he does not go round himself, but sends a friend or a servant.

Japanese Fireworks.

In Nagasaki, Japan, there is a fireworks maker who manufactures pyrotechnic birds of great size that when exploded sail in a lifelike manner through the air and perform many movements exactly like those of living birds. The secret of making these wonderful things has been in the possession of the eldest child of the family of each generation for more than 400 years.

No Cause For Commiseration.

"Poor Dobbies! They say he got a pair of beautiful black eyes lately. I feel sorry for him."
"You needn't. He got a very handsome girl with them."—Short Skits.

Funny Toothache Cures.

Before the days of dentists, and when people generally believed in the value of charms, there were ever so many mysterious ways of preventing toothache.

One of these was to dress the right side of the body first—right stocking, right shoe, right sleeve, right glove. A favorite plan in Scotland was to draw a tooth, salt it well and burn it in full view on glowing coals. In Cornwall many save their teeth by biting the first young fern that appear.

The custom of catching a common ground mole, cutting off the paws while the little creature still lives, and wearing them, is traced to Staffordshire, England. Some people who are fond of exercise believe that walking 12 miles—no more, no less—to get a splinter of the toothache tree that grows particularly well in Canada and Virginia will drive away the worst ache and pain that ever tortured a poor tooth.

The belief that toothache is caused by a worm at the roots is prevalent in many parts of the world; hence this cure: Reduce several different kinds of herbs—the greater variety the better—to a powder. Put a glowinginder into this powder and inhale the incense. Afterward breathe into a cup of water and the worm will be gone forever.

Extraordinary Drinks.
Of the many extraordinary drinks regularly consumed the blood of live horses may perhaps be considered the most so. Marco Polo and Carpini were the first to tell the world of the practice of the Tartars and Mongols opening the vein in their horses' necks, taking a drink and closing the wound again. As far as can be seen this has been the practice from time immemorial.

There is a wine habitually consumed in China which is made from the flesh of lambs reduced to paste with milk or brained into pulp with rice and then fermented. It is exceptionally strong and nutritious and powerfully stimulating to the physical organism.

The Laplanders drink a great deal of smoked snow water, and one of the national drinks of the Tonquinese is arrack flavored with chickens' blood. The list would scarcely be complete without mention of absinthe, which may be called the national spirituous drink of France. It is a horrible compound of alcohol, anise, coriander, fennel, wormwood, indigo and sulphate of copper. It is strong, nasty and a moral and physical poison.

Snow Trade in Sicily.
The principal export from Catania is snow, in which a most lucrative trade is carried on in Malta and parts of southern Italy. It is collected during the winter in hollows in the mountains and covered with ashes to prevent its thawing. It is brought down in panniers on mules to the coast at night. The revenue derived from this source is immense and renders the Prince of Paterno one of the richest men in Sicily. Snow is the universal luxury from the highest to the lowest rank and is sold at the rate of 4 cents for 30 ounces. The poorest cobbler there would rather deprive himself of his dinner than of his glass of "acqua gelata."

It is extensively used in hospitals and a scarcity of it would be considered almost as great a misfortune as a famine, and would occasion popular tumult. To guard against such accidents the government at Naples has made the providing of it a monopoly, the contractors being required to give the amount of 60,000 ducats, which sum is forfeited if it can be proved that for one hour the supply is not equal to the demand.

The Savage and the Birdcatcher.
A gentleman who went out with Stanley to Africa took with him a number of birdcages, in which he hoped to bring back some specimens of the rarer birds of the interior. Owing to the death of his carriers he was obliged to throw away the birdcages with a number of other articles. These were seized by the natives in great glee, though they did not know what to do with them, but they eventually decided that the small circular cages were a kind of headgear, and knocking off the bottom, the chiefs stratted about in them with evident pride. One chief, thinking himself more wise than the others and having seen the white men eat at table out of dishes, thought they were receptacles for food and took his meals from one, ceremoniously opening and shutting the door between each mouthful.

Jack Tar at a Christening.
A sailor went up to the font to have his baby baptized. Sailors as a class claim little stock in babies, and, naturally enough, this one presented the infant feet foremost.

"The other way," said the minister, and, accordingly, Jack turned the infant upside down.

"Excuse me," said the clergyman, "I mean the other way." So back came the embryo foretopman to the first position, to the discouragement of everybody.

"Wind it, Jack," said the nautical assistant, and with an "Aye, aye, sir," Jack promptly turned the baby end for end, and it was duly christened head first.—"On a Man-of-war."

A Literary Slip.
One of the most literary of the London evening papers makes the following startling announcement: "A complete set of hydrants and fire appliances will be arranged, and the stage is to be fitted with a double asbestos and steel fireproof curtain, controllable by one man. The latter is designed to be one of the largest in London—namely, about 80 feet wide and 50 feet deep."—Glasgow Times.

First Caricature.
Probably the first caricature in manuscript is to be found in the Egyptian papyrus in the British museum, where the lion and unicorn are represented playing a game of draughts.

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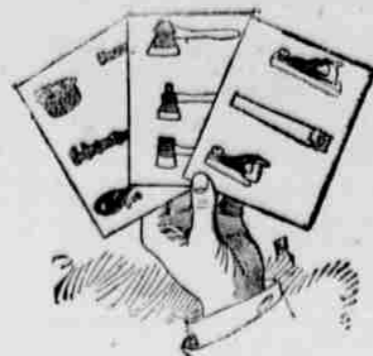


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