



## Oxfordshire Village Folklore (1840–1900).

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*Errata in Former Paper.*—In the original paper, under Fig. 77 (*Pl. V.*), read “N. S. de las Angustias” instead of “S. Angustias.”

In the last paragraph of the notes on *Spanish Votive Offerings*, the statement as to the purpose of the small silver objects there referred to is incorrect. These objects are not offerings made before the granting of a request for intercession; each is a symbol (*escudo*, i.e. scutcheon) of the Virgin of a certain locality, and is to be worn upon the special dress assumed in certain cases in the fulfilment of a vow made to that form of the Virgin.

W. L. HILDBURGH.

#### OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE FOLKLORE (1840-1900).

I AM writing this account of old customs, charms, and superstitions from recollections of what I have myself seen and heard in the village of Long Handborough, and of what I have been told by my mother, who was a native of the neighbouring village of Barnard Gate and whose memory would go back to about 1840. The few notes from other sources I have carefully distinguished. As I have tried to make a full record of the local folklore known to me, naturally many items appear in it which are very familiar in other places, but the repetition seems necessary for the sake of completeness. As so much of my material is widely spread, no attempt has been made to note the numerous parallels in other counties.

Long Handborough is about three miles from Woodstock, and about eight and a half miles from Oxford. It is usually called Handborough ('Amborough in dialect), except when it is necessary to distinguish it from Church Handborough, which is about a mile distant.

The inhabitants of the villages in Oxfordshire consisted of the 'gentlefolk,' the 'respectable people,' and the 'poor folk.' The word 'respectable' did not apply in any sense to the conduct of those persons, but only to their social position. The 'gentlefolk' were usually the squire, if there was one, the clergyman, and

perhaps a few others. The 'respectable people' were all others above the position of labourers, who were the 'poor folk.' The countryman had his rules of manners and etiquette, which were never broken. He took off his hat to nobody; he touched it with his forefinger to the 'gentlefolk,' but never to the 'respectable people.' He addressed the 'gentlefolk' as 'Sir,' and his employer invariably as 'Master.' Only the principal inhabitants and the large farmers were termed 'Mr. So-and-So'; all the others were called 'Master So-and-So,' as was the married labourer himself. Some of the more old-fashioned farmers used 'thee' in speaking to their men, but it would have been an intentional insult for the men to say 'thee' to their master, or to any superior. A labourer would say to his employer,—“What be I to go at, master?” and the master would reply,—“Thee go up in the Roslin-house ground, and rake arter cart” (that is, rake up the loose corn behind the wagon, in carrying corn).

The phrases used in driving horses I always thought interesting. Some carters would keep saying almost continuously to their horses,—“Come hayther, come hayther, *wut!*”<sup>1</sup> “Het up, Jolly!”<sup>2</sup> “Haw wut, Smiler!” “Come here *up*, Dumplin!” “Haw, haw, haw” was said encouragingly, and I took it to mean,—“All is going well, keep on as you are going.” The four horses in a team were (and still are) called the Forrust, Lash-horse, Body-horse, and Thiller. The first horse was seldom called by his name, but, if he was not pulling fairly, or was looking carelessly about him, the driver would call out “Forrust,” when he would instantly prick up his ears, and attend to his work.

The question of women's rights presented no difficulty to the countryman. He had no doubts whatever upon *that* subject. He said,—“A 'ooman's aulus sarved well enough if 'er yent knocked about.” Some even went a little further. A friend of mine told an old labourer that some man in the village had been ill-treating his wife, and he replied,—“He unly gin 'er a slap 'o the 'ead, and that dun't 'urt no 'ooman!”

<sup>1</sup> A call to a horse to come towards one; hence to turn to the left side, on which the carter walks when driving without reins.

<sup>2</sup> Go to the right or off side away from the driver. Cf. '*heit*, scot! *heit*, brok!' in Chaucer's *Freres Tale*. (N.B. Initial *h* is never pronounced.)

There was an old man in the neighbourhood who remembered seeing a man sell his wife in Witney market. He said it was quite lawful if her husband "took her to market in a halter." She only realised the sum of five shillings !

The language of the people abounded in proverbs and similes ; most of them are very expressive, and need no explaining, and some of them are probably very old. I will give here a few of the sayings most often used :

" Women and linen look best by candlelight.

Bread is the staff of life, but beer's life itself.

The greater the sinner, the greater the saint.

The man's the head, and the woman's the neck, and the neck turns the head.

Bachelors' wives and maids' children are always well taught.

The sharper the storm, the sooner it's over.

Self first, then your next best friend.

A creaking door hangs long on its hinges, [said of an invalid who lives to be old].

You can eat apples and nuts, after any sluts.

Little children make your head ache, and big ones make your heart ache."

Speaking of children,—

" When you've got one you may run,

When you've got two you may goo,

But when you've got three you must stop where you be."

Old people would solemnly tell children to work hard at school, for—

" When house and land are gone and spent,

Then learning is most excellent."

" If you stop till the day of resurrection, I shall stop till the day after, [said to a wife who goes to fetch her husband from the public-house].

A salve for every sore, [an excuse for everything. I once saw this saying in a very old manuscript in the Bodleian Library].

Every tub stands on its own bottom.

Like the old woman's dish-cloth, looks better dry than wet [said of clothes that are a bad colour in the wash-tub].

Too high for the stirrup, and not high enough for the saddle.  
Trying to keep one's dish upright, [to make both ends meet].  
The boy has gone by with the cows, [spoken of lost opportunities].

Every generation gets weaker and wiser.

I'll please my eye if I plague my heart, [said by a man who marries for beauty only].

To see which way the cat jumps, [to see how things will turn out].

To put all the bells on one horse.

The nearer the church the further from heaven.

I'd rather have a knave than a fool.

To be poor, and to look poor, is the devil all over.

A bellowing cow soon forgets her calf, [said of people who grieve noisily].

It must be a man or a mouse, [a master or slave, usually spoken of husbands].

I'll win the horse, or lose the saddle.

The golden ball never goes up but once.

In and out like a dog at a fair, [said of people or children who keep going in and out of doors].

As peart as a maggot.

As scarce [pronounced *skees*] as snow in harvest.

As snug as a bug in a rug.

Like a crab in a cow's mouth, [said of a small quantity of anything].

As pleased as if the pot was on.

Slipping about like a cat in pattens."

There were many nursery rhymes current in the neighbourhood, and the old grandmothers would keep little children and babies amused for hours by crooning ditties like the following:—

" My good Mrs. Bond, what have you got for dinner?  
Beef in the larder, and ducks in the pond.  
Dilly, dilly, dilly, dilly, come and be killed,  
For the gentlefolks are coming and their bellies must be filled."

" The man in the moon was caught in a trap  
For stealing the thorns out of another man's gap.  
If he had gone by, and let the thorns lie,  
He'd never been a man in the moon so high."

" Pit a pat, pit a pat, baker's mán.  
 So I do, master, as fast as I can.  
 Pit it and pat it and mark it with B,  
 And put it in the oven for baby and me."

" Dance a baby diddy,  
 What shall a mammy do wid 'ee,  
 Sit 'ee in her lap, and give 'ee some pap,  
 And dance a baby diddy."

" I'll tell you a story about Jack a minòry  
 And now my story's begun,  
 I'll tell you another about Jack and his brother,  
 And now my story's done."

" Christmas is acoming and very glad am I,  
 For I can go to your house and have some Christmas pie.  
 I don't mean a magpie that sits upon a house,  
 And I don't mean a crab pie that isn't worth a louse,  
 But I mean a mince-pie stuffed full of plums,  
 That I can put my fingers in and sweetly [*pronounced sweetülie*] suck  
 my thumbs."

" Once upon a time, when birds made rhyme,  
 And monkeys chewed tobacco,  
 When old hens took snuff, to make them puff,  
 And little pigs run to see the fun,  
 And couldn't think what was the matter."

" This pig got in the barn,  
 This eat all the corn,  
 This said he wasn't well,  
 This said he'd go and tell,  
 And this said,—weke, weke, weke,  
 Can't get over the barn-door sill."

[This was said taking hold of the baby's toes each in turn.]

" That's my lady's knives and forks,  
 That's my lady's table,  
 That's my lady's looking-glass,  
 And that's my lady's cradle."

[This was said interlacing the fingers upwards at the first line, then downwards at the second line, putting together the two fore-fingers at the third, and the two little fingers as well at the fourth line].

My mother knew an extraordinary number of old rhymes, ghost stories, and charms, many of which I remember, and which it seems to me may be of some interest to lovers of folklore.

I will begin with a charm called "Trying the Dumb Cake," by which a girl could see her future husband. It must be done on Christmas Eve, and should be carried out in complete silence. First, a dough cake must be made and placed on the hearthstone, and the maker must prick her initials on it, the door being carefully left open, as something terrible would happen if the spirit came and found it shut. She must then wait in perfect silence till the clock strikes twelve, when her future husband will walk in and prick his initials beside hers on the cake, and then walk out again. An old lady once told me that a girl in this way brought her future husband, who was a soldier, into the room, and in passing through the doorway he broke his sword in two. The girl picked up the broken piece and kept it. After she had been married to him some years, in turning out her trunk she came across it, and showed it to her husband, and he was so angry he could hardly forgive her. He told her he suffered dreadful agonies during the time she forced him to appear, although he did not then know the reason. A woman once told me that in her youth she and a friend tried the 'Dumb Cake,' but, just before the clock struck twelve, the dog jumped up and began to growl, and they were frightened and spoke, and so the charm was broken.

Another way to make your future husband appear, was to take hemp seed to the churchyard at twelve o'clock at night on Christmas Eve, and sow it going along, saying while doing so,—

"Here I sow hemp seed that hemp seed may grow,  
Hoping my true love will come after me and mow."

The hemp seed immediately grew up, and your future husband came behind you and began to mow it. You must move very quickly or he might cut your legs off with his scythe. I have heard girls recommended to try this rather ghastly proceeding, but I never heard of one who did so!

If you wished to dream of your lover, you must pin your garters to the wall and put your shoes in the shape of a T, and before getting into bed say the following lines,—

"I pin my garters to the wall,  
And put my shoes in the shape of a T,  
In hopes my true love for to see,  
Not in his apparel nor in his array,  
But in the clothes that he wears everyday."

If I am his bride to be,  
 If I am his clothes to wear,  
 If I am his children to bear,  
 I hope he'll turn his face to me.  
 But if I am not his bride to be,  
 If I am not his clothes to wear,  
 If I am not his children to bear,  
 I hope he'll turn his back to me."

After saying this, you must get into bed backwards, and not speak afterwards.

If you wished to know if your lover was constant, you must gather four long blades of grass (called 'lovelaces') and hold them in your hand. Then tie them together in four knots, two at each end, saying while you do so,—

"If you love me cling all round me,  
 If you hate me fall off quite,  
 If you neither love nor hate  
 Come in two at last."

If the grasses form a ring, he is constant; if all the knots come undone, he hates you; if they come in two pieces, he is indifferent.

There was also a method of finding out the initials of your future husband, known as the "Bible and Key." You placed the door key between the leaves of the Bible, leaving the ring of the key outside, and tied your garter round the covers. Then two persons held up the Bible by placing the first finger on the ring of the key, one of them saying the following verses from the Song of Solomon:—"His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, . . . that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." Then you said slowly the letters of the alphabet, beginning at A, and, when you got to the initial of your future husband, the key slowly turned round.

Another way girls have of telling their fortunes, which is common to the whole county and is still practised, is by taking a seed-stalk of grass, called a 'bennet,' and saying the following, as they touch a seed, beginning at the bottom of the stalk and finishing at the



top,—“Whom shall I marry?” They then take a seed between the thumb and finger and say,—“A rich man,—a poor man,—a beggar man,—a farmer,—a thief”; “How shall I go to church? coach,—carriage,—wheelbarrow,—chaise.” “What shall I wear? silk,—satin,—cotton,—rags.” The sentence or word that finishes with the top seed determines the fortune.

I used to hear a great many curious old rhymes. I especially remember one which was intended to make your flesh creep. It was told in the twilight of a winter evening, and had to be said very slowly and solemnly, with the voice rising and falling dramatically, and with a strong emphasis on the words in *italics*:—

“*There* was a Lady all *skin* and *bone*  
 Such a *Lady* ne’er was *known*.  
*She* went into a church to *pray*,  
*As I have heard many people say*.  
*When* she got to the church *stile*,  
*She* waited *there* a little *while*.  
*And when* she got to the church *door*  
*She* waited *there* a little *more*,  
*And then she entered in*.  
*She* looked up, and *she* looked down,  
*And saw* a dead man lying *on the ground*,  
*And from his nose, and mouth, and chin,*  
*The worms* crawled *out*, and the *worms* crawled *in*,  
*And she* said to the parson,—“*Must I* be so?”  
*And the parson* said,—“*You must* be so.”  
*And she* said, OH DEAR, OH DEAR, O!”

The exclamations of the lady in the last line were said in a loud startling voice, and the reciter would put her hand suddenly on the listener’s, and make her start.

Another quaint old rhyme was the following:—

“A man, a man of double deed,  
 He sowed his garden full of seed;  
 When the seed began to grow,  
 ’Twas like a garden full of snow;  
 When the snow began to fall,  
 ’Twas like a bird upon the wall;  
 When the bird began to fly,  
 ’Twas like an eagle in the sky;  
 When the sky began to roar,  
 ’Twas like a lion at your door;

When the door began to crack,  
 'Twas like a stick about your back ;  
 When your back began to smart,  
 'Twas like a penknife in your heart :  
 When your heart began to bleed,  
 'Twas time for you to die indeed."

I remember my grandfather singing the following old song, when he was over seventy. It was the only song he ever did sing, and I believe he had sung it ever since he was a young man :—

" When Adam was first created,  
 And lord of the universe crowned,  
 His happiness was not completed,  
 Till for him a helpmate was found :  
 She was not taken out of his head, sir,  
 To rule and triumph over man ;  
 And she was not taken out of his feet, sir,  
 By man to be trampled upon :  
 But she was taken out of his side, sir,  
 His partner and equal to be,  
 And him she was bound to obey, sir,  
 For man was the top of the tree."

Those were not the days of suffragettes, and we used to listen meekly while he sang the last two lines with great gusto !

The two following old songs were frequently sung by the men at harvest homes :—

1. " I love a shilling, a jolly, jolly shilling,  
 I love a shilling, as I love my life ;  
 A penny I will spend, and a penny I will lend,  
 And tenpence carry home to my wife."

The next verse begins " I love a tenpence," and ends " And eightpence carry home to my wife " ; and so on, until the last verse, which ends " And nothing carry home to my wife."

2. " Oliver Cromwell lies dead in his grave,  
 'Um, ah, dead in his grave ;  
 There grows a green apple-tree over his head,  
 'Um, ah, over his head ;  
 The bridle and saddle are laid on the shelf,  
 'Um, ah, laid on the shelf ;  
 If you want any more you may sing it yourself,  
 'Um, ah, sing it yourself."

If a lady were asked to sing a song, and she was not anxious to do so, she would decline by singing the following verse :—

“You have asked me to sing, and I’m sure I’m quite sorry,  
I cannot oblige the good company here,  
If I were to begin you would see in a hurry,  
The guests would depart and the coast would be clear.”

: (*Then with its proper tune :*)

A shepherd was watching his flock by a fountain—  
(Oh that is too high for a voice with a tone)  
But by your permission I’ll try at another.

(*Then with its proper tune :*)

A North-country lass up to London did pass—<sup>3</sup>  
And that is so slow I will never get done,  
So I hope you’ll excuse me, for I’m sure I can’t sing.”

It used to be the custom for the hostess, in pouring out tea, to say to each guest,—“Is your tea agreeable?,” to which the answer was, usually,—“Quite, thank you.” If you wished for another cup of tea, you placed the teaspoon on the right side of the tea cup, but, if you did not want any more, on the left side; and in cutting bread and butter, it was considered polite to ask,—“Which do you prefer, upper-side or lower-side?”—meaning the top or bottom of a loaf.

The belief in witches was very strong in those times. I remember an old woman called “Shaking Charlotte,” who was afflicted with palsy, and we were always told she was a witch, and the children used to run away when they saw her coming, but I never heard that she did any harm. If you could scratch the supposed witch with a pin and fetch blood, she was unable to harm you. An old lady once told me that, many years before, she was in a low, depressed state of mind, and her brother came to see her. He said solemnly,—“Jane, you’re bewitched. I’ll tell you what I will do. I will put a cross over your door, and then no unholy thing can enter in.” He then placed two straws in the shape of a cross over the doorway. She did recover, but whether in consequence of the cross or not, she couldn’t say.

My mother used to speak of a boy who was supposed to have been bewitched. She told me his name, but I have forgotten it.

<sup>3</sup> This is not the original line.

It was said that he would run straight up the walls of houses, and over the roofs, like a cat.

There were many stories of the Devil, (familiarily spoken of as 'Old Nick,' or 'Old Scrat'), appearing to people. A man was going from Northleigh to Barnard Gate, and the Devil came to him in the shape of a fiery serpent, and surrounded him so that he could not pass for some time. When at length he was able to escape, he went back to Northleigh and brought several friends to the place where the serpent had been, but it had disappeared.

A friend of mine told an old labourer at Holton that he did not believe in a personal devil, and the old man said,—“Not believe in the Devil? Why, I've sin' 'im!” And he considered there was no more to be said.

If for any reason you should wish to call up the Devil, you must say the Lord's Prayer backwards. If a girl looks a long time in the looking-glass admiring herself, the Devil will come behind her and look over her shoulder. Any particularly profane or wicked person was said to have sold his soul to the devil.

Of course there were many tales of ghosts, and of spirits 'walking.' There was said to be a ghost that “walked” in a lonely road near Northleigh, which carried its head under its arm; another was said to open the gates for people going across the fields from Church Handborough to Eynsham. I was always told that, if you should see a spirit, you should say to it solemnly,—“Spirit, what troublest thou?”, and follow wherever it led you.

There was a pond on the Witney Road not far from Handborough, in which we were told, when children, that the spirit of a woman had been laid. She was called “Old Mother Culpepper,” and there is a tablet to her memory in Handborough church. The ceremony of 'laying the spirit' was performed by twelve clergymen, and the spirit was enjoined not to return until the pond ran dry; we were told that, if ever this particular pond should run dry, the spirit would “come again.” There was a spirit “laid” in a barrel of beer at Stanton Harcourt, and the barrel had always to be kept full to prevent the spirit from returning.

I have many times heard the lads “give the rough music” to a neighbour who was suspected of certain offences, such as beating his wife, or being too familiar with his neighbour's wife. They

came round early in the evening and begged old tin trays or tea-kettles, and then assembled before the offender's house, and made a deafening noise. If there was a back way to the house, the man would escape and hide himself till the performance was over; but, if he could not get away, his position was most miserable, for they would keep on beating their instruments with astonishing perseverance, until they were tired out, and had to go home to bed.

It was the regular custom on the evening of the 5th of November, which was called "Bonfire Night," for the boys to go round the village to collect faggots for a bonfire, chiefly from the farmers. They would come to the door, and sing,—

"Let gunpowder plot  
Never be forgot.  
A stick and a stake,  
For King George's sake.  
A faggot, a faggot, a faggot,  
If you don't give me one, I'll take two,  
The better for me and the worse for you.  
Hammer and block, beetle and wedges.  
If you won't give me a faggot, I'll cut down your old hedges."

The farmer would promptly fetch a faggot from his 'woodpile,' as he knew that, at the least hesitation on his part, the lads would help themselves to two. The boys still go round the villages, but now they ask for pence instead of firewood.

On Shrove Tuesday, or 'Pancake' Day, the children used to sing at each door,—

"Pit a pat, the pan's hot,  
And I be come a srover;  
Eat a bit, and bite a bit,  
And then 'tis all over,"

and ask for pence.

When the harvesting was finished, the labourers rode home on the last load of corn, shouting as they went along,—

"Hip, hip, hip, harvest home,  
A good plum-pudding and a bacon bone,  
And that's a very good harvest home."

The harvest-home dinner, (always called "the harvest-home"), usually consisted of large joints, plum-puddings, and tins of

potatoes, all baked in the brick-oven, and an unlimited supply of beer. When dinner was over, the company all stood up, and sang the following song,—

" Here's a health unto our master,  
     The founder of the feast.  
 I pray to God with all my heart  
     His soul in heaven may rest ;  
 And that ev'rythink may prosper, 5  
     Whatever he takes in hand ;  
 For we are all his servants,  
     And all at his command.  
     Then drink, boys, drink,  
     And see that you do not spill ; 10  
     For if you do, you shall drink two,  
     For 'tis our master's will.  
  
 Here's a health unto our misteris,  
     The best in one and twenty.  
 Heigho ! is it so, is it so, is it so ! 15  
     Fill him up a little fuller,  
 For methinks he seems but empty,  
 And down let him go, let him go.  
     And if he drinks too deep  
     He can go to bed and sleep, 20  
 And drive away dull sorrow, care, and woe."

At line 10 one or two would purposely spill a little, and have to drink another glass, and at line 16 all the glasses would be filled up. The "harvest home" has been discontinued for the last forty or fifty years.

Of course we had the mummers at Christmas. Some little time before, they would come and ask for newspapers or coloured paper, with which to deck themselves out, and when we saw them perform, it was a great part of the fun to guess who they were, for they were literally covered from head to foot with narrow strips of paper. I had forgotten part of the words said by them, so I obtained this from a native of to-day. It is much altered from what I remember, and several lines are omitted. It is still acted in the different villages.

The mummers would come to the back-door, and say,—“Please to let the mummers act,” and, upon our complying, they all walked into the room, and the first performer, who carried a

stick, walked stolidly round in a circle, and said in a monotonous tone,—

“ A room, a room, brave gallants all.  
Please give me room to rhyme,  
I am come this merry Christmas time,  
To show you activity, activity,  
Such as has never been seen before.  
Come in, the French officer.”

*French officer* :—“ I am the French officer, officer I,  
Many long fields I have battled to try,  
So guard thy head and mind thy blows, head, face also.  
So a battle, a battle, betwixt thee and I,  
To see which shall be on the ground dead first. Shall I ?”

(*They then fight, and the first speaker is wounded.*)

“ Come in, Doctor Airo.”

“ See, sir, here comes the noble Doctor Airo ; he don’t go  
travelling about like other quack doctors do ; he has got a sign to  
cure, not to kill.”

*Doctor* :—“ I’ve got a little box of pills to cure  
The hock, the pock, the palsy, and the gout,  
Pains within, and pains without.  
I can cure this man if he ain’t quite dead.  
So, noble fellow, raise up thy head,  
And fight again once more.  
Come in, Jack Finny.”

*Jack Finny* :—“ Jack Finny’s not my name,  
But Mister Finny is my name.  
Don’t you know I’m a man of very great fame ?  
Last year when I came here,  
You never asked me to taste your beer,  
Now I have come with my bladder and broom,  
To sweep the cobwebs from your room.”

Jack Finny was dressed as a clown, and carried a bladder attached to a long piece of string, with which he used to strike the heads of the other performers, for the amusement of the audience.

On the 29th of May everyone was supposed to wear a piece of oak, called “shick-shack,” and anyone not wearing it was liable to be stung with stinging-nettles. The old saying was,—“Twenty-ninth of May, shick-shack day.” In the afternoon in Oxford the shick-shack was discarded, and monkey-powder or leaves of the ash was put in its place, and in the evening both emblems had to

disappear, or the wearers were beaten with stinging-nettles. An oak tree was often called a shick-shack tree.

On April 1st there was the usual custom of making everyone an April Fool. If anyone was made an April Fool after noon, they would say to him,—

“April Fool is gone and past,  
And you're the biggest fool at last.  
When April Fool comes again,  
You'll be the biggest fool then.”

I was visiting some friends at Blackthorn near Bicester, when quite a little girl, and was awakened quite early one morning by a loud clanging noise. I was told they were “ringing the bees.” This was done by beating a fire-shovel with a door key, and was intended to induce the queen bee to settle. It was said that, if the bees were not “rung,” the owner could not claim them if they settled on another person's premises. Bees were seldom kept in the villages around Handborough.

Signs or tokens of death were firmly believed in, and there were many of them, such as a ‘death tick,’—a ticking noise in the wall, the hooting of an owl, the howling of a dog, a blowfly buzzing about the house, the chirruping of a cricket, and a “winding-sheet” or “shroud” in the candle (the guttering usually caused by a hair). Of three or four magpies seen together it was said,—

“One's a wedding,  
Two's mirth,  
Three's a berrin' (burying),  
Four's death.”

It was a general belief that a person could not die if there were pigeon's feathers in the pillow on which he was lying. I have often known a friend or nurse of a person ‘dying hard’ gently remove the pillow from under his head, saying,—“There may be some pigeon's feathers in it.” A person taken to see a dead body should always touch it, or it was thought he would dream of it. A cure for goitre, or ‘full neck,’ was to draw the hand of a corpse across it. There was a saying

“Happy is the corpse that the rain rains on,  
And happy is the bride that the sun shines on.”

There was another curious custom which deserves mention.



When I was quite a little girl I remember several times seeing the funeral of a baby. Four young women dressed in white carried the coffin on a white cloth held by the four corners. They wore large white bonnets tied under the chin in the fashion of those days, and, if they had no white bonnets, they covered those they had with a piece of white muslin. They walked from Long Handborough to Church Handborough, a distance of about a mile, and I never saw any mourners following. This custom was discontinued before I grew up.

There was a tradition that a ship could not sail if a murderer was on board. I remember part of an old song about a man named William who had murdered his sweetheart and her baby. The captain of the ship summoned all the men before him, and told them that there was a murderer on board.

““For the ship is in mourning and will not sail on.”  
 Then up came one,—“I’m sure it’s not me.”  
 And up came another, and the same he did say,  
 Then up came young William to curse and to swear,  
 “I’m sure it’s not me, sir, I vow and declare.”  
 As he was a-turning away for to go,  
 The ghost of his dear Mary came up from below.  
 She stript and she tore him, she tore him in three,  
 All for murdering her sweet baby and she.”

There were several “cures” and superstitions which were firmly believed in. A cure for cramp in the night was to place a bowl of water under the bed. An old labourer at Holton told me he used to suffer dreadfully from cramp, but was cured in this way. He said,—“Nobody need ever have cramp.” If anyone had warts certain persons in the place could charm them away, and many people assured me that theirs had disappeared after being ‘charmed.’ Another way, but a cruel one, was to take a snail, rub it over the warts, stick it on a thorn, and, as the snail died, the warts disappeared. There was an old superstition that, at twelve o’clock at night on Christmas Eve, all the cattle in the fields fell upon their knees, and another that it was a sin to kill a martin, swallow, robin, or wren, for

“Martins and swallows are God A’mighty’s scholars,  
 And robins and wrens are God A’mighty’s cocks and hens.”

At Bloxham it was ‘friends’ instead of ‘cocks and hens.’

The dark marks across the shoulders of a donkey, some used to say, were originally caused by Christ making a cross on the ass on which he sat; and others, that they were made by the legs of Christ as he rode into Jerusalem.

The old saying

“A whistling woman and a crowing hen  
Are neither good for God nor men”

was carried out in rather a heartless fashion by the farmer's wife, by chopping off the hen's head on the chopping-block. I have known this done many a time. It was considered unlucky to have a crowing hen, but this drastic proceeding was not so much to avert the ill-luck as to protest against the hen's usurping the privileges of the cock.

If your cheeks burned it was thought to be a sign that someone was talking about you, and, in case they should be backbiting you, you should say,—

“Right cheek, left cheek, why do you burn?  
Cursed be she that doth me any harm.  
If it be a maid, let her be slayed,  
And if it be a widow, long let her mourn;  
But if it be my own true love, burn, cheek, burn.”

If your nose itched it was a sign that you would be kissed, cursed, or vexed, run against a gatepost, or shake hands with a fool.

A small white spot on the finger-nail meant that a gift was coming to you,—

“A gift on the finger is sure to linger,  
A gift on the thumb is sure to come.”

The seventh son of a seventh son would have a remarkable career.

It was lucky to fall upstairs, or for a black cat to come into the house. It was unlucky to spill salt at table,—(but the ill-luck could be averted by throwing a pinch of salt over the left shoulder),—to meet on the stairs, to be married in May, to have an engagement ring with an opal in it,—(an opal signified widowhood and tears),—for a bride to wear any black article of clothing on her wedding-day, and to *meet* a funeral,—(you should always turn the same way until it was past). If you broke a looking-glass,

you would have no luck for seven years. If you laughed before breakfast, you would cry before night. If you shuddered suddenly, it was a sign that someone was walking over your grave. To mend your clothes on your back, meant that you would have lies told about you. A hot coal flying from the fire in your direction, was a sign that you had an enemy. A tea-stalk, (called a stranger), floating in your tea was a sign that a stranger was coming; and to stir up the tea-leaves in the tea-pot was to stir up strife. A spark in the candle meant that you would shortly receive a letter. To sneeze signified "once a wish, twice a kiss, three times a disappointment."

Dreams also had their significance. If you dreamt of clear water, it was a good sign, but, if of muddy water, a bad sign.

"If you dream of a weddin' you'll hear of a berrin.

Dream of the dead, you'll hear of the living.

Friday dreamt, and Saturday told,

Will be sure to come true, be it ever so old."

Although I have written in the past tense, because I have not been in the district for some years, I do not wish it to be supposed that these old customs and sayings are no longer in use. Of course some of them may now have become obsolete, but, as the habits of the people are still very much the same, it is likely that the old superstitions and omens will continue to be believed, and the old sayings to be spoken, for many years to come.

ANGELINA PARKER.

#### PIEDMONTESE PROVERBS IN DISPRAISE OF WOMAN.

ALONGSIDE the monkish literature which in mediæval times enlarged in dispraise of woman almost as a professional duty, there flourished a mass of popular ballad, jest, and proverb which more or less seriously adopted the same tone,<sup>1</sup> and this abuse of

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* the Scottish ballad of *The Dumb Wife of Aberdour*; J. Ritson, *Ancient Songs*, p. 134; etc.