

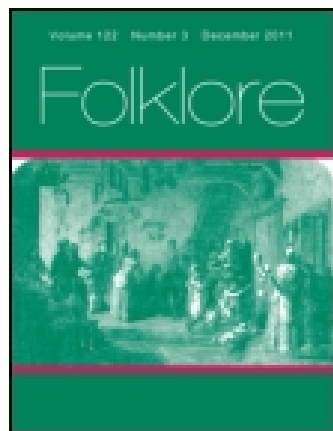
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Ontario Beliefs.

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ONTARIO BELIEFS.

THE following notes were derived from a retired farmer, a man of about 70, of a good United Empire Loyalist family, partly Scot, partly Northumbrian, with a strain of Dutch. Those marked (C) were furnished to him by his niece, and forwarded to me. All the ideas mentioned are, or were within my informant's lifetime, living beliefs in his part of the province, Napanee, Prince Edward Co., on the Bay of Quinté, and its neighbourhood. As his memory is unusually good, they may be taken as in substance correct. As to how far these notions form part of current belief to-day, I am not sure. Many people seem to have forgotten all about them; one old resident whom my correspondent approached for information declared that he had come "a generation too late." Yet other and much younger people, such as the contributor of the items marked (C), have a good store of traditions. On the whole, I am of the opinion that few of these ideas are now taken very seriously, except the weather-signs, perhaps. Where I know any particular belief to be a real and living one, I indicate the fact.

1. *Weather-signs.*

The usual rhyme about Candlemas Day is remembered. The local form of the belief, common in Canada, is as follows:—

On February 2 a hibernating bear comes out of his hole. If he sees his shadow, *i.e.* if the day is at all sunny, he goes back again for another six weeks, during which time winter lasts. He then comes out for good.

If Easter is early, spring will be early (C). The prevailing wind on Easter Sunday is the prevailing wind for the next forty days. Consequently, if it be in a cold quarter, the fruit crop will be good, as it will hinder the blossoms from forming prematurely.

The usual belief exists about rain on St. Swithin's Day.

The following signs, largely Indian in origin,—the local Indians are for the most part Mohawk,—indicate a hard winter:—

Dead leaves clinging to the trees instead of falling.

Muskrats building high and strong winter houses. Before a mild winter they build less elaborately; in the very mild winter of 1877-8 they made no houses at all.

Bees storing a great amount of bee-bread. (This cannot be Indian.)

Burrowing animals making deep burrows (C).

Squirrels laying in a large store of nuts (C).

Several layers of husk on the corn (C). ("Corn" in this country always means maize, never wheat.)

When the first snow falls, count the number of days to Christmas; this will indicate the total number of snow-storms for the winter.

Three white frosts in succession presage rain.

The last Friday and Saturday of each month foretell the weather of the next month; as they are warm or cold, rainy or fine, etc., so it will be. (I have met this belief elsewhere in Ontario.)

A clear sunset on Friday means a storm before Monday night. (Communicated by another old resident of Napanee.)

Friday is either the fairest or the foulest day of the week.

When the leaves on the trees turn wrong way up in a wind, it will rain (C). (This is also Yorkshire.)

If the Great Bear, generally called the Dipper, is visible, it will not rain; or, in general, if the stars are out (C).

2. *Moon beliefs.*

The moon controls the weather to some extent. According as it lies far north or south in the heavens, the weather will be warm or cold; if the crescent moon lies supine, there will be dry weather till the next phase; rain, if it stands upright.

A halo around the moon indicates a storm coming; the number of stars visible within the halo equals the number of days till the storm arrives.

If you wish your hair to grow quickly, cut it in the new moon; for slow growth, cut it in the wane.¹

Kill hogs in the new moon, for then their meat will not grow less in cooking.

To ensure a good crop of potatoes, plant them at full moon.

To see the new moon over the right shoulder betokens good luck, which may be conditional on hard work; over the left shoulder, bad luck but no hard work; straight ahead, very good luck.

Always wish on a new moon (C).

¹ Cf. vol. xxiii., p. 345.

3. *Stars.*

Always say "Money" when you see a falling star (C). (This is apparently a worn-down form of wish; see the next item.)

Wish on the first star you see of an evening (C).

4. *Days of the year.*

New Year's Day "First foot" must not be a red-headed man, and should be a dark-haired man. (C, who adds that many of the older people "make a point" of having the first foot dark-haired. The name "first foot," however, does not seem to be in use.)

If you would be lucky in the new year, clean the house on New Year's Eve, so as not to carry over any of the old year's dust (C).

Easter. Wear some new article of clothing, or you will have nothing new all year (C).

Christmas. Collect pieces of Christmas cake made by different friends. Every piece eaten during January will bring a month's happiness (C). [Cf. *N. and Q.*, 9th S., vol. xii. (1903), p. 505; 10th S., vol. i. (1904), p. 172.]

5. *Days of the week.*

Cut your nails on Sunday, and you kill God's grace for the week (C).²

Friday is an unlucky day to commence any piece of work; however, if a little is done on the Thursday, the ill-luck is avoided.

To be free from toothache, cut your nails on Friday.

6. *Birth, marriage, and death.*

Houses were formerly built with the different rooms of the same floor on different levels, connected by steps. The reason given to my informant by an old lady was that the dust would collect about the steps and not drift from room to room. Is it not rather to facilitate the carrying of a new-born child upwards?

"Rock the cradle empty, babies in plenty."

A child born with a caul will have the second sight if the caul be removed upwards, so as to open the eyes. If the caul be removed sideways, so that the eyes are not fully opened, the power

²Cf. Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities etc.*, vol. iii., p. 178; *County Folk-Lore*, vol. iv. (*Northumberland*), p. 58; *N. and Q.* 1st S., vol. ii. (1850), p. 511 (*Devonshire*), vol. iii. (1851), p. 55 (*Lancashire*), p. 462 (*Devonshire*), vol. vi. (1852), p. 432 (*Kent*).

will be imperfect, and his vision too dim to describe; if downwards, so as to keep the eyes closed, he will not have second sight at all.

To sit on the edge of a table indicates a desire to marry.

When a wish-bone or merry-thought,—the former is the common name in Canada,—had been broken in the usual way, the larger part used to be hung up over the front door of the house. The first young unmarried person passing under it in entering would marry within a year.

The same is presaged by the person being handed a cup of tea or other drink with two spoons in it.³

In shaking hands, if the hands are accidentally crossed, one of the persons so doing will marry within the same interval. (The symbolism is obvious; the position of the hands suggests that of the hands of bride and groom during the giving of the ring.)

In choosing the wedding-day, the usual rhyme, "Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth," etc., is quoted.

If an unmarried woman finds a horseshoe, which in general is lucky, the number of nails in it indicates the number of years to her marriage (C).

You will never be wealthy until you have worn out all the clothes in which you were married.

The future husband or wife may be seen as follows:—Walk upstairs backwards in the dark, holding a mirror and gazing fixedly at it. Repeat at each step,—“Come my future, come my love.” The image of the destined person will be dimly seen in the glass looking over the experimenter’s left shoulder.

A girl who “mocks across a chair,” (*i.e.* makes fun of or mimics anyone when there is a chair between them), will not be married that year (C).

If a wedding party on its way from the ceremony passes a funeral, one of the family of either bride or groom will die within a year.

In baking bread, if the top crust of the loaf cracks, a death will occur before the loaf is eaten. If a hole (supposed to represent a grave) is found in the centre of the loaf, a funeral will take place within the same time.

If a framed picture falls from the wall, someone will die in the house within a year (C).

³ Cf. vol. xx., p. 219 (*Oxfordshire*); vol. xxi., p. 226 (*Yorkshire*).

In sowing a field by hand, if you miss a cast, *i.e.* leave a bit of the ground you have covered with no grain cast on it, a member of the family on whose land you are sowing will die within the year.

If a hen crows, she must be killed at once, or one of the family will die. This seems to be taken quite seriously, and has resulted in the death of numerous hens.

If you sleep on your face, you will die by drowning.

A dog howling at night is a sign of death, near the place where he howls and in the direction in which he looks at the time. (Cf. Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, ch. x., which gives the same belief for the Mississippi valley, with the addition that the dog must be a stray.)

When a funeral procession has left the house, the corpse must not be carried past the house again, or another of the family will die. "Many in this locality . . . will travel miles around rather than pass the house with the corpse," adds my informant.

The usual belief is prevalent about thirteen at table. In general, "thirteen is an unlucky number for *anything*" (C).

"Telling the bees" in the case of a death has apparently been thought superstitious for the last half-century, but seems still to continue.

The following illustrates the power of a dying man's curse:— Before the repeal of the death-penalty for theft, a certain Judge D—— accused his servant, a man of about forty, of stealing his watch. The servant, who was innocent, was convicted on circumstantial evidence. Before being hanged he wished that none of the D—— family might live beyond forty, since one of them had unjustly caused his death at that age. The curse was fulfilled, for every member of that family has died somewhere in the fourth decade of his life.

"Green Christmas, fat graveyards."⁴

A red spot on a finger-nail denotes the death of a friend.

7. *Folk-medicine.*

To cure neuralgia, wear about the neck next the skin a necklace of nutmegs bored lengthwise and strung together, long enough to fall some six inches below the throat.

⁴ Cf. *County Folk-Lore*, vol. iv. (*Northumberland*), p. 179.

Swelling of the neck may be checked or prevented by a necklace of amber beads, which must be genuine and of fair size.

For toothache, use toothpicks made from splinters of a tree struck by lightning.⁵ (See also *Days of the Week*.)

An excellent cure for whooping-cough is bread made by a married woman who retains her maiden name,—e.g. a Brown who has married a Brown.

For warts, steal a piece of meat from a butcher's shop, rub it on the warts, and hide it. Or put it on a loaded cart, or in some other way insure it being carried some miles off. The warts will then disappear on the ninth day (C).

For a cold in the head, rub the nose and the brow between the eyes three times with saliva on retiring, taking care to rub downwards and to allow the application to dry in each time. In the morning there will be copious discharge at the nose and great relief.

Convulsions :—Take off the child's shirt and burn it. Be careful not to burn it too fast, or the child may die. This belief flourishes among the poorer classes.

Colic in horses. Put a pan of water on the fire ; by the time it has boiled dry the horse will have recovered.

8. *Witches and wizards.*

The latter were rarer than the former, but equally evil. Elf-locks in the mane of a horse were known as "witches' saddles," and regarded as proof that the beast had been ridden by them in the night. Nothing seems to have been done beyond the practical measures of combing out the mane and keeping the stable door locked.

A horse-shoe over the door would keep witches out of the house. If they got into the churn and prevented the butter from coming, a shoe recently worn by a stallion, heated red-hot and dropped in, would scald them out. If the witch who was doing any one an injury was known or suspected, she might be shot at with a silver bullet. This was quite infallible, as the witch would perhaps die, and certainly lose all power to harm the shooter ; but she might nullify the process if she or one of her family could at once buy or borrow something from him.

⁵ Cf. vol. xxiii., p. 193 (*Japan*).

9. *Harvest customs.*

Corn. This was, and sometimes still is, husked at a "husking bee," *i.e.* all the farmers of the district took it in turns to go to each other's houses and help in the husking. Food and drink were provided and a good deal of merry-making went on. Any one finding a red ear would be married within a twelvemonth.

Wheat etc. The last sheaf was called "the maiden" or "the Lord's sheaf." It was cut, bound up, and stood in a place where the rain would not beat it down. It was not lucky to garner it, and it was left for the poor. Often a whole corner of the last field was left standing for the poor to glean or for "the Lord's birds," a reminiscence of Matth. c. 10, v. 29. The charitable desire to leave enough for the poor to glean seems to have swallowed up all other practices connected with the last sheaf. These customs do not seem to have been general, but the habit of a few families originally from Vermont. Related to them is the custom reported by another old inhabitant of his grandfather, who left the United States shortly after the War of Independence. He would never allow a sheaf which had been dropped on the way from the field to be picked up, but gave no reason for letting it lie.

10. *Visitors.*

If you enter anyone else's house and leave by a door different from that by which you entered, you will bring them visitors.

To drop the dishcloth while washing up means that visitors are coming. The same is indicated by a tea-leaf floating in one's cup. If the leaf, when bitten, feels hard, the visitor will be a man; if soft, a woman. To ensure fulfilment of the omen, throw the leaf under the table, silently wishing that some particular person may come. (In this hospitable district there is no demand for means of averting such an omen.)

11. *Good and bad luck.*

It is unlucky :—

To cut across a corner. If you must do so, wish (C).

To break a mirror; this means seven years' ill luck.^o

^oCf. vol. xxiii., p. 347; *N. and Q.*, 1st S., vol. xii. (1885), p. 38 (*Cornwall*).

To spill salt. Matters are somewhat improved if you throw some of it over your left shoulder (C).⁷

To go under a ladder; also to hold an umbrella over one's head while in the house (C).⁸

To meet (not to overtake or be overtaken by) any person on the stairs (C).⁹

When having your fortune told by tea-leaves, to point at them with the finger; this nullifies the signs and brings on ill fortune. If you must point, use a spoon or the like.

To dress one foot entirely while the other is still bare (C).

If after starting from the house you go back for something forgotten, sit down and count seven before starting out again. Otherwise you will be unlucky (C).¹⁰

Sing before breakfast and you will be sorry before supper, ("will cry before dinner," C).

The following are lucky:—

To find a horse-shoe (C).

If a cat comes to one's house and stays. But, if the cat is black, it will bring bad luck (C).

To put on clothes accidentally wrong side out. If it is necessary to change them, wish. (C.—Wishing seems a powerful counter-agent to evil influences, *vid. supra*.)

To put the left boot on first. This brings good luck while those boots are worn.

A rabbit's foot should be carried for luck (C). (This is of course American, originally Southern, but rabbit-foot charms have of late years been popular in the Northern States as well.)¹¹

"See a pin and pick it up,

All that day you'll have good luck" (C).

After mentioning a piece of good fortune, touch wood, or you may lose it.

⁷ Cf. *N. and Q.*, 1st S., vol. iii., p. 387 (*Holland*); Brand, *op. cit.*, vol. iii., p. 161.

⁸ Cf. vol. xx., p. 345 (*Worcestershire*); vol. xxi., p. 89 (*Argyllshire*), pp. 225-6 (*Yorkshire*).

⁹ Cf. vol. xxi., p. 226 (*Yorkshire*).

¹⁰ Cf. vol. xx., p. 346 (*Worcestershire*).

¹¹ Cf. vol. xix., p. 296.

12. *Miscellaneous.*

Hair from the head should be burned, not thrown away. Otherwise the rest of the hair will come out (C).

If, when you rise from a chair or go up or down stairs, your joints crack, you have not yet seen your best days.

“Dream of fruit out of season,
You’ll be mad without a reason.”

(“Mad” generally means “angry,” not “insane,” in popular speech.)

“Wash and wipe together,
Live at peace forever.”¹²

If your nose itches, you will either kiss a fool or shake hands with a stranger.¹³

Froth in the tea or coffee cup is a sign of wealth, if it be collected in a spoon and drunk before it dissolves.

If a person has “crowns” in his hair, their number indicates the number of reigns in which he will live.

Rat-charmers used formerly to go from house to house. Their method was simply to walk up and down saying, “Rats, rats, rats, go away” three times. The vermin were then supposed to go within three days.

Lizards were formerly, I gather, thought poisonous, perhaps are still occasionally. My informant describes amusingly the wild panic of a tea-party which found one in their kettle.

To cut a baby’s nails will make it steal (C).¹⁴

When two people are walking together, if they meet a third and allow him to pass between them, they will quarrel. But this may be averted if one of the two says “Bread and butter” (C). (Apparently the estrangement may be avoided by the mention of two things constantly found together.)

On coming to the end of a sidewalk, make a wish afterwards, naming some poet (C). (Our country towns generally have extending from them into the open country a half-mile or so of paved or board walk. This is referred to here.)

If a spider crawls over a woman’s dress it signifies that she will soon have a new one (C).

H. J. ROSE.

¹² Contrast vol. xxiii., p. 347 : vol. xx., p. 346 (*Worcestershire*).

¹³ Cf. vol. xxiii., p. 462.

¹⁴ *County Folk-Lore*, vol. iv. (*Northumberland*), p. 58.