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Superstitions and Beliefs from Central Georgia

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SUPERSTITIONS AND BELIEFS FROM CENTRAL
GEORGIA.

SPIRITS AND WITCHES.

1. Children born with a caul see spirits.
2. Negroes say that all animals can see spirits at night.
3. Negroes contend that hogs can see the wind ; some maintain that all animals can do so.
4. If one is riding at night and feels a warm current of air on his face, negroes say that a spirit is passing by.
5. If you are walking or riding along, and see a mist rising from the ground, it is a sign of the presence of spirits.
6. Dogs frequently "run" spirits at night, but spirits will whip a dog, unless the dog has dewclaws. When the dog sees a spirit, he will come back whining and get behind you. The dog does not wish to fight a spirit if he can help it. I have hunted coons and opossums at night with negroes, and, when the dogs kept running and did not see anything, the negroes "quit" and went home, saying the dogs were running spirits.
7. The left hind-foot of a graveyard rabbit is a talisman against spirits, also productive of good luck generally. I asked a negro if spirits ever bothered him. He replied, "No, sir ; I totes the left hind-foot of a graveyard rabbit."
8. Negroes deem an *ignis fatuus*, or "Jack o' the Lantern," a spirit doomed to wander in swamps, seeking something it will never find.
9. To pass a haunted place, turn your pockets inside out ; the haunt will not trouble you.
10. Some negroes wear the coat turned inside out, to keep off evil spirits, or to keep witches from riding them.
11. To prevent a witch from riding a person, put a case-knife, pair of scissors, or some mustard-seed under the bed or pillow.

12. If a horse's mane is tangled in the morning, it is a sign that a witch has been riding him ; the little knots seen in the mane are "witches' stirrups."

13. To prevent a witch from riding horses, nail a horseshoe over the door of the stable.

14. Horseshoes, when nailed on doors or posts for good luck, are placed with the round part uppermost. No witch or evil spirit can enter when they are so nailed.

CROSS-MARKS.

15. When a negro is going from you, and you call him, making it necessary for him to retrace his steps, he will make a cross-mark X in the path and spit on it for good luck.

16. If you meet a stranger in the road, you must turn round, make a cross-mark, and slightly change your direction, for good luck.

17. When a rabbit runs across the road in front of you, it is a bad sign ; cross yourself, or make a X in the road and spit in it, and walk backward over the place where the rabbit crossed. If a rabbit runs across the road behind you, it is a good sign ; you have passed the trouble.

18. If any one wishes to trouble another, he makes a X mark on the path usually travelled by his enemy ; the only way to break the spell is to walk round it the first time, afterwards you can walk over.

19. To stop paths across a field, make cross-marks in it. Negroes may step around the X marks, but they won't step over them.

20. If the right shoestring becomes accidentally untied, it is a sign that a woman is talking good about you ; if the left shoestring, that a woman is talking evil. To prevent the evil, make a cross-mark, put your foot on the mark, and retie the string.

21. Negroes keep other negroes from getting over a rail fence by sprinkling powder or graveyard dirt on the rail.

LUCK.

22. Negroes will not carry a hoe or axe through a house, or put one on the shoulder ; to do so is very bad luck.

23. To step over a broom going forwards is bad luck ; you must step over it backwards.

24. It is bad luck to sweep the dirt out of a house at night ; sweep it up into a corner and sweep out in the daytime. If obliged to sweep it out at night, take a coal of fire and throw it first in front of you.

25. One negro will not step over another while lying down. If he does, he must step over again backwards.

26. Never let the moon shine on fresh meat ; it brings bad luck.

27. To pin bad luck, drive a rusty nail in the front doorstep.

28. If a negro sees a pin, and picks it up with the point to him, it is blunt luck ; he will walk about in order to take it point toward him, and then it is sharp luck.

29. If a negro moves into another house, even if the house has been swept and scoured, he will scour and sweep it again for fear of "cunjer."

30. If a looking-glass falls from a wall and breaks, it is a sign of death ; if any one lets it fall from his hands, of seven years of bad luck.

31. Never lend salt or red pepper ; if you lend it, it will give bad luck.

SIGNS.

32. For a cook to drop a dishrag is a sign that some one will come hungry.

33. When you drop your knife and it sticks up, it is a sign of good luck.

34. To see a measuring-worm crawling on any one is a sign that the person will have a new suit of clothes.

35. If a butterfly lights on you, it is a sign that you will die soon.

36. To see a butterfly, catch it and bite off the head, you will have a new dress the color of the butterfly.

37. In sitting in front of the fire, if the fire pops on you, you are sure to get new clothes.

38. If the fire pops with a blowing noise, it is a sign that there is going to be a fuss in the family.

39. To sit by a fire and have a "chunk" roll out is a sign of company.

40. It is bad luck for a stick of wood to roll out of the fire on the floor.

41. A rooster crowing before a door is a sign of a visitor.

42. To hear a rooster crow when he first goes to roost is a sign of hasty news.

43. When a hen crows, some evil will befall the family to which the hen belongs.

44. A dog's howling is a sign of the house catching fire.

45. For a dog to go hunting at night in winter is a sign of snow.

46. To see the new moon through the trees is a sign of bad luck.

47. Wear a string round the neck with a piece of money on it for good luck.

WEATHER.

48. When a peacock screams, it is a sign of rain.

49. When a hog squeals, it is a sign of cold weather.

50. When a whip-poor-will cries, it is a sign of warm, clear weather. There is no more frost.

51. When a yellow-hammer sings, it is a sign of warm weather.

52. The cooing of a turtle-dove is a sign of warm, clear weather.

53. When woodpeckers come in the spring, it is a sign of warm weather. Woodpeckers come south by night, and go north by day.

54. When birds come in numbers around the house, it is a sign of freezing weather.

55. When an alligator bellows, it is a sign of rain within twenty-four hours.

56. A rainbow is a sign of no more rain on that day.

57. When a storm is coming, buzzards fly high to get above it.

58. To hear fire make a noise like a woman walking in snow is a sign of snow.

SEASONS.

59. All things that grow out of the ground, such as peas, corn, and the like, must be planted in the increase of the moon, from new to full ; all things that mature in the ground, like potatoes, must be planted in the decrease or waste of the moon, from full to new.

60. Plant watermelons when the Zodiac points to the heart, as the best of the melon is the heart.

61. To castrate animals, the sign of the Zodiac must be in the knee or feet.

62. If you kill a hog in the waste of the moon and cook the meat, it will go away in grease. If in the make of the moon, it will swell up when you boil it.

63. Negroes never begin any work for themselves on Friday that cannot be finished the same day.

64. It is bad luck to lose Monday by not working ; the loss will bring bad luck all the week.

65. Never start work on Friday you can't finish on that day.

66. To have good luck all the year, eat a piece of boiled meat on the first day of January.

MEMBERS OF THE BODY.

67. When the left ear burns, it is a sign that some one is talking about you ; when the right ear burns, that he is talking evil. You must pull the ear and say :—

“Bad betiger, good betiger ;
Hope the Devil may ride yer.”

“Betiger” is a corruption of “Betide you.” If good is said of you, the burning or itching will continue ; if bad, it will stop.

68. If the lower part of your ear burns, some one is talking about you.

69. When your left nostril itches, it is a sign that some man whom you have never seen is coming to your house. When your right nostril itches, some woman whom you have never seen is coming.

70. When your nose itches while coming to your own house, you will see a stranger.

71. When your eye quivers, it is a sign you are going to cry about something.

72. When your left eye jumps, it is a sign that you are going to see some trouble.

73. If the palm of your hand itches, don't tell any one about it, but put your hand under your arm and you will have some money.

74. If the right palm itches, you are going to get some money. If the left palm itches, it is a sign that you are going to shake hands with a stranger.

75. To cut your hair, and throw the hair where birds can get it and build nests with it, you will have headaches.

POPULAR MEDICINE.

76. To wear one earring on the ear next a weak eye will give good eyesight.

77. An iron ring about the wrist will give strength.

78. A leather string tied about the wrist cures rheumatism.

79. A flannel rag round the wrist will cure pain in the arm.

80. To cure “biles,” walk along and pick up the first little white flint rock you see, as it is found sticking in the ground. Rub the

boil with the flint, then stick the flint in the ground again, in the same position as you found it. Turn around and leave it, walking backward for a few steps.

81. To cure chills and fever: After you have had three or four chills, take a piece of cotton string, tie as many knots in the string as you have had chills, go into the woods and tie the string around a persimmon bush, then turn around and walk away, not looking backward.

82. To wash your face in water in which eggs have been boiled will bring warts.

83. To take off a wart, take a grain of corn, eat out the heart or white kernel, strike or cut the wart till it bleeds, then take a drop of the blood, put it in the corn where the heart was taken out, and throw the grain to a chicken. The wart will go away.

84. To strengthen your wind in running, eat half-done corn-bread.

85. Negroes believe that if one borrows a hat from a diseased person, and the wearer sweats round the forehead where the hat rests, he will take the disease.

86. Don't step over a child; it will stop the child from growing. Stepping over a grown person is a sign of death.

87. If you cut a mole on your body till it bleeds, it will turn into a cancer and kill you.

88. To eat a peach, apple, or plum that a bird has pecked is said to be poisonous.

89. To scratch the flesh with the finger-nails till it bleeds is said to be poisonous.

90. The bite of a "blue-gummed negro" is said to be poisonous.

91. If a pregnant woman raises her hands high above her head, as for instance to carry a water-bucket on the head, it will cause the navel-string of the child to tie about the neck and choke it to death. The child will be born dead. All children so born are supposed to have met their death in this way.

92. Don't drink water out of a bucket carried on a child's head ; to do so will stop it from growing.

CATS AND MICE.

93. It is very bad luck to kill a cat.

94. If a strange cat comes to the house, it is a sign of good luck.

95. To "move a cat," that is, to take a cat away with you, is bad luck. Negroes never move a cat.

96. A cat will suck a child's breath, and one must not be allowed to sleep in the same room with children.

97. It is bad luck to have a cat sleep in bed with you. A negro told me that one night a cat almost drew all his breath away.

98. A black cat without a single white hair on it is said to be a witch. No negro will keep a pure black cat in his house.

99. If you rub the hair of a black cat in the night, you will see the fire it has brought from hell.

100. Never give a black cat away, but lend it.

101. If you kill a mouse, the others will gnaw your clothes ; if you shoot one with a gun, their friends will overrun the house and drive you from it. Mice are cats' food.

102. If a mouse eats a hole in a garment, and you darn it, you will have seven years bad luck ; to avoid this, you must make a square patch.

SNAKES.

103. It is good luck to kill the first snake seen in the spring.

104. If you find a snake in the yard about the house, kill him and then burn him. No mouse will come about the house.

105. Negroes believe that a black snake sucks cows.

106. Negroes will not kill a king-snake, as he is the enemy of rattlesnakes and other poisonous snakes.

107. If a snake bites a man, he goes and eats some snake-weed ; as the blood of a man is poisonous to a snake, he will die if he cannot get the weed.

108. When a king-snake fights a rattlesnake and gets bitten, the king-snake goes into the woods and gets a snake-root leaf as antidote.

109. A "coach-whip" will run you down and whip you to death.

BIRDS.

110. When a screech-owl "hollers" about a sick-room, the sick person will in all probability die.

111. To stop a screech-owl from "hollerin'," turn your left hand pants pocket inside out, or take off the left shoe and turn the sole up, or throw "a chunk of fire" out of the window.

112. If a screech-owl flies into a room, it is a sign of sickness or death, or of some evil. If any one kills the owl, some member of the family will be killed or hurt.

113. It is bad luck to kill a buzzard, a mockingbird, a bluebird, a bee-martin, or a thrush ; the last two oppose and keep off hawks.

114. If a buzzard flies over your house, you are going to get a letter or hear good news.

115. Jaybirds go to hell on Friday, carrying a small stick as fuel for the Devil.

116. To keep hawks from catching chickens, put a white flint rock in the fire.

117. To break up a killdee's nest is a sign that you will break a limb.

MISCELLANEOUS.

118. In spring, cow-lice turn to gnats ; hog-lice turn to fleas.

119. A toadstool is called the Devil's snuff-box, and the Devil's imps come at midnight to get the snuff. In the morning you can tell when the imps have been for the snuff, as you will find the toadstool broken off and scattered about. The snuff is used as one of the ingredients of a "cunjer-bag."

120. If a terrapin bites you, it will never let go till it thunders.

121. A pregnant woman cannot assist in killing hogs, or in handling fresh meat. The meat will spoil.

122. If you want a hen to hatch all pullets, put the eggs under her out of the bonnet of a young girl.

123. To make a girl love you, take a piece of candy or anything she is likely to eat, and put it under either armpit, so that it will get your scent.

124. To milk a cow on the ground, she will go dry unless you throw some of the milk on her back.

125. To make a cow take a strange calf, rub the nose of the cow and the body of the calf with tea made of walnut leaves, so that the scent will be the same with both.

126. To make a stray dog follow and stay with you, put a piece of bacon in the shoe of the left foot, wear it till you see the dog and throw it to him; if he eats it, he will follow you and stay with you. If he don't, get some hair off the dog's left ear and put it in the left pocket, or rub his left hind-foot with a piece of corn-bread.

127. To keep a strange dog with you, cut some hair off the end of his tail and bury under your doorstep.

128. If you wish a strange cat to stay with you, grease it with any kind of grease, stick the cat to the chimney back, and throw it under your bed.

129. If you want a cat to stay with you and not return to the former owner, grease the four feet of the cat in the house before taking it away.

130. Never throw keys; always hand them or lay them down, and let those who want them pick them up.

131. Negroes will not throw a knife or a key to one another, for they will certainly lose them if thrown.

132. In handing a knife to another, let the blade be shut up, and let it be handed back shut up.

133. If the blade of a knife is soft, put the blade into a piece of hot corn-bread, and put bread and knife into water.

134. To find water before seeking a spot to dig a well, negroes take a switch of willow or peach, hold it in both hands near the middle, and walk over the ground where the well is desired ; when they come to the spot where is the water, the switch twists and turns in the hands, sometimes rubbing off the bark, the ends turning down to the ground.

135. To get fleas out of a house, take a pine pole and skin it. The fleas in hopping about will hop on the pole and stick to the resin that issues. Sheep about a yard will also carry them off.

136. When the dogwood-tree blossoms, fish begin to bite. (Negroes always fish with a big cork, and put the lead close to the hook in order to keep terrapins from cutting the line.)

137. When fishing, spit on your bait for luck.

138. If any one steps across the pole of another while fishing, the person whose pole has been so treated will catch no fish unless the pole is again stepped over backwards.

139. You can't swear and catch fish.

Roland Steiner.

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