

Weather and Folk Lore of Peterborough and District eBook

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Contents

Weather and Folk Lore of Peterborough and District eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	7
Page 3.....	9
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	25
Page 12.....	27
Page 13.....	29
Page 14.....	31
Page 15.....	33
Page 16.....	35
Page 17.....	37
Page 18.....	39
Page 19.....	41
Page 20.....	43
Page 21.....	45
Page 22.....	47

Page 23.....49

Page 24.....51

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
WEATHER AND FOLK LORE OF PETERBOROUGH AND DISTRICT.		1

Page 1

WEATHER AND FOLK LORE OF PETERBOROUGH AND DISTRICT.

(Second Series).

This is a continuation of a Paper on the "Survival of Old Customs" in Peterborough and the neighbourhood which was read at the Royal Archaeological Society's meeting in 1898, with an addition of a few more old customs, and more particulars of others, to which I have also added a collection of the quaint Weather and Folk Lore of this district. Being at a point where four counties are almost within a stone's throw, Peterborough possesses the traditions of the Counties of Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Lincoln, as well as Northampton. It is rather difficult to locate these sayings to one particular County, so I have taken those current within a radius of about fifteen miles.

Most of them have been repeated to me personally and only in a very few cases have I copied any which have been printed and then only to make the collection more complete.

The two Northamptonshire Poets, Dryden and John Clare, often notice the phases of the Weather, and John Clare, especially, describes the Rural Customs and weather Lore of this district with a true Poets feeling and amongst his M.S.S., now the property of the Peterborough Museum, are many unpublished poems and also his Diary which, at present, is unknown to the general public. John Clare was well styled the English Burns and his notes and Memoranda on the various local events are most valuable to those who take an interest in the sayings and doings of the early part of the 19th century.

Many charms are used at the present time and, altho' reticent, the villagers, (when you have gained their confidence), will tell you of their belief in the various whims and of the successful results of their practice.

In almost every proverb where Peterborough is mentioned it is associated with pride, and some people say that they are still applicable.

The first and second of the following rhymes date from before the Reformation:

Crowland as courteous, as courteous may be,
Thorney the bane of many a good tree,
Ramsey the rich and Peterborough the proud,
Sawtry, by the way, that poor Abbey,
Gave more alms than all they.

Ramsey the rich of gold and of fee,
Thorney the flower of the Fen Country,
Crowland so courteous of meat and of drink,
Peterborough the proud, as all men do think,
And Sawtry by the way, that poor Abbaye,
Gave more alms in one day, than all they.

Peterborough the proud of their ancient See,
Thorney the flower of many a fair tree,
Crowland the courteous of their meat and drink,
Spalding the gluttons as all men do think,
Sawtry by the way, that old Abbaye,
Gave more in one day than all they.

Peterborough poor and proud.

Another version gives Peterborough:

Famous for pride and Stamford for poor.

Page 2

The next two belong exclusively to Peterborough, and the first I have only just obtained from a lady who remembers the verses, as they were repeated early in the 19th Century:

When the Clock of the Abbey strikes three minutes fast,
There will be a gay wedding before the month's past;
When the Clock of the Abbey strikes three minutes slow,
The river's bright waters will soon overflow;
When the Church Clock and Abbey Clock strike both together,
There will soon be a death or a change of the weather.

The Abbey or Cathedral is dedicated to St. Peter, and the Parish Church to St. John. The Head Verger of the Cathedral until recently had charge of both clocks, and St. John's Clock was always kept slightly faster than the Cathedral Clock. Canon Jones, when Vicar of St. John's, one day met the late Verger, (Mr. H. Plowman, Senr.) and asked him why St John's Clock was always faster than the Cathedral Clock, and the Verger replied:—"Well Vicar, you know, the other disciple did outrun St. Peter on the way to the Tomb, so St. John has always kept in front ever since."

Sometimes the coincidences mentioned in the verses occur and maintain their reputation for veracity:

If in the Minster Close a Hare,
Should for herself have made a lair,
Be sure before the week is down,
A fire will rage within the town

It is very strange but these two events have sometimes happened.

One fire brings two more.

This too has often occurred and in April of this year (1911) three fires occurred in this district within a week.

These are all I can remember which refer to Peterborough.

Beginning with the County of Northampton we have:

Northamptonshire, more Spires, more Squires, more haughtiness, and less hospitality than any other County in England.

Northamptonshire for Spires and Squires.

Northamptonshire for Springs and Spinsters.

Thack and Dyke Northamptonshire like.

Marholm, a village near Peterborough.

“They held together like the men of Marholm when they lost their Common.”

This is used when people are divided one against another.

Caster where the woman is master.

“To lose a hog for a ha’porth of tar.” The hog referred to is a yearling sheep.

“To live by the penny.” Buying only when anything is absolutely required.

“As cross as two sticks.”

“As cross as old Wilks.” Who old Wilks was and why he was cross is lost in oblivion.

“As wise as Walton’s calf who ran nine miles to suck a bull.”

“Black as the pot.”

“Topsy turvey Moses Webster.” Used when things are in a disorderly state.

“Dance a jig, then come back and buy a pig.”

“Go to Farcet.” This is a village near Peterborough and the expression is used instead of advising people to go to Jericho or any other place.

Page 3

"As fat as moles."

"You've gotten hold of the wrong end of the stick," was a common expression when I was a school boy, when anyone was relating something which was incorrect.

Come day, Go day, God sends Sunday.
Sunday moon, flood before it is out.
Singing before breakfast on Monday, cry before the week is out.
As Friday so Sunday.
Friday is either the fairest or foulest day of the week.
Sun always shines on Saturday little or much.

Saturday new moon and Sunday full,
Never good and never wull.

January.

On corner walls,
A glittering row,
Hang pit irons less for use than show,
With horse-shoe brightened as a spell,
Witchcraft's evil powers to quell.

John Clare.

The first thing on New Year's morning, open your Bible and the first verse your finger or thumb touches that verse, will betoken what will occur during the year.

On New Year's morning if a sprig of green is placed in the Bible, the verse on which it lies fortells the events of the year.

It is lucky for a dark man to enter the house first on New Year's morning, and I know a man who used to see the Old Year out and the New Year in with a friend who always arranged for a very dark man to wait for him outside his own house until he returned. The man then entered the house first, and after a glass of something warm and good wishes, he left.

It is also a custom on New Year's Eve for some people to hide a sovereign or half-sovereign outside the house and when leaving the house on New Year's morning to pick up the piece of gold which is said to ensure their having gold in their pockets all that year.

Whatever is done on New Year's day, you will do throughout the year.

As the weather is the first twelve days of January so it will be for the twelve months. Each day's weather is taken for the corresponding month.

Plough Monday, First Monday after Epiphany. This custom has almost passed away. Only two lots of men were seen in Peterborough this year, the Stores no doubt not encouraging them as the tradesmen did in the old times. In Northampton, in 1910, I saw numerous groups of children with blackened faces and grotesque dresses going about the streets on this day as Plough witches.

When the day lengthens,
Then the cold strengthens,

On Old Christmas day (7th January new style) the day has lengthened a cock's skip.

January White.

If the grass grows in January it grows the worse for it all the year.

St. Paul's day, 25th January.

In some verses dedicated To all my worthy Masters and Mistresses, by *John Small*, Bell-man, Stamford, 1850, is the following:—

If Saint Paul's day be fair and clear,
It doth betide a happy year;
If blustering winds do blow aloft,
Then wars will trouble our realm full oft,
And if by chance to snow or rain,
Then will be dear all sorts of grain.

Page 4

February.

February fill dyke.

St. Valentine's day.

Children used to go round the villages and city on this day and sing:

Good Morrow, Valentine;
Please to give me a valentine;
I'll be yourn, if you'll be mine;
Good Morrow, Valentine.

Good Morrow, Valentine
First its yourn and then tis mine
So please give me a valentine.
Holly and ivy tickle my toe
Give me red apple and let me go.

Good Morrow, Valentine,
Parsley grows by savoury
Savoury grows by thyme
A new pair of gloves on Easter Day
Good Morrow, Valentine.

This was called going Valentining and some money or apples were given to the children.

In Peterborough and district sweet plum buns used to be made and were called Valentine Buns. They were given by Godparents to their Godchildren the Sunday before and the next Sunday after Valentine's Day.

March.

March, many weathers.

John Clare says:

March month of "many weathers" wildly comes,
In hail and snow and rain, and threatening hums and floods.

March wind.

A wet March makes a sad harvest.



A March without water dowers the hind's daughter.

If March comes in smiling and gay

Saddle your horses and go and buy hay.

March, Hic, Hac, Ham'
Comes in like a lion
And goes out like a lamb.

If March comes in stormy and black, she carries the winter away on her back.

Mothering Sunday.

This is Midlent Sunday when it was the regular custom, and even now very general, for the children, especially those in service, to visit their parents on that day.

Children away from home write to their parents on Mothering Sunday if unable to get home.

A special kind of cake was made for this day.

Palm Sunday.

It is known as Fig Sunday as figs are eaten and a fig pudding is a regular dish on this day. There used to be a great display of figs in the Grocers' windows the week preceding Palm Sunday, but there is not such a show now.

Good Friday.

On Good Friday, in 1904, I was reminded of an old custom by an old friend who was staying with me. When some hot cross buns were offered, he took one and told me to hold it with him and, whilst we were holding it together to repeat with him this couplet:—

Half for you half for me
Between us two good luck shall be.

When this was being said we broke the bun in two. This is said to cement friendship between the two who break the bun.

April.

St. Mark's Eve.

Take three tufts of grass plucked from a Churchyard, place them under your pillow and repeat aloud:—



Page 5

Let me know my fate, whether weal or woe
Whether my rank's to be high or low,
Whether to live single or be a bride,
And the destiny my star doth provide.

If this is done one dreams of the future.

When April blows his horn
'Tis good for hay and corn.

April showers make May flowers.

26th April was called Break Day. The Fen Commons were broke or opened by turning in stock.

May.

The May Day Garlands are of various forms. Those in Peterborough are formed of two hoops fastened together to form a globe and a stick or stave through the centre. The hoops are decorated with flowers and ribbons, and when the children possess one, the best doll is fixed on the stick inside the garland. Two girls carry the garland which is carefully covered with a white cloth. This is lifted at the houses and the wondrous garland is exposed whilst the children sing the following song, which is the favourite May Day song in the City. A friend has kindly given me the music and words which she wrote on the 1st May, 1904: from the children's performance:

[Illustration: Music]

I.

Good morrow, Lords and Ladies
It is the first of May,
We hope you'll view our garlands,
They are so bright and gay.

Chorus—To the green woods we will go,
To the green woods we will go,
To the green woods we will go,
To the green woods we will go.

II.

This bunch of May it looks so gay,
Before your door it stands;



It is but a sprout, but it's well spread out
By the work of our Lord's hands.

Chorus—To the green woods, *etc.*

III.

The Cuckoo sings in April,
The Cuckoo sings in May,
The Cuckoo sings in June;
In July she flies away.

Chorus—To the green woods, *etc.*

IV.

I'm very glad the Spring has come,
The sun shines out so bright;
The little birds upon the trees
Are singing for delight.

Chorus—To the green woods, *etc.*

V.

The roads are very dusty,
Our shoes are very thin;
We have a little money box
To put our money in.

Chorus—To the green woods, *etc.*

The Garlands are carried round on 1st May and on Old May Day.

The Huntingdonshire Garlands are usually of a pyramidal form of flowers and streamers, surmounted by a doll.

The frontispiece of May garland at Glatton is a copy of a water colour drawing by the Rev. E. Bradley (Cuthbert Bede) when living there in 1856.

In the earlier part of the last century it was the custom for a young man to get as large a branch as possible of May in flower on May 1st and fix it to his sweetheart's window. If the shutters were closed it was thrust through the diamond, oval, round, or heartshaped openings at the top of the shutters. The larger the branch and the more the blossoms the greater the compliment. If a quarrel had taken place, and peace not made, then the angry swain would fix a branch of blackthorn in the place which otherwise should have held the May blossom.



Page 6

In the country if the servant maids had not pleased the farm boys they used to get a branch of the crab apple and put it in the girl's window.

May day.

A branch of May I have brought you,
And at your door it stands;
Well set out, and well spread about
By the work of our Lord's hands.
Take a Bible in your hands,
And read a chapter through;
And when the day of Judgement comes,
God will remember you,
God bless ye all both great and small,
And I wish you a merry May.

Another variation is:—

Arise! Arise! ye dairy maids,
Shake off your drowsy dreams,
Step straightway to your dairies
And fetch us a bowl of cream,
If not a bowl of your sweet cream,
A pot of your brown beer;
And if we should tarry in this town,
We'll come again next year.

When Caster Common Lands were open to all and the gates taken off on May 13th, there was a struggle with the cottagers as to whose cow would get through the gateway first and the cow which secured the place of honour had a garland of flowers put round its horns when driven home at night, and the cow which was last to get on the Common returned with a "Dish Clout" tied to its tail.

Sunny May.

Cold May, good for corn and Hay.

Rain in May, makes plenty of Hay.

A May flood never did good.

The last two appear to be contradictory but the flood refers to the valley of the Nene and the lowlands which are apt to be flooded when the river overflows its banks. The mud and dirt consequently settle on the grass and make it unfit for hay, but the rainfall does good, causes the grass to grow and it is not injured by the silt.



Till May goes out, change not a clout.

29th May, Restoration Day, commonly called Oak Apple Day from an oak apple with oak leaves being generally worn on that day until noon. The leaves or apple at that time were put out of sight. Before noon everyone was challenged to “show your oak” and if none could be seen a blow or a pinch could be given, but after that hour the wearer of the oak could be struck. School boys used to fix leaves on the top of their boots, hidden by their trousers, and when challenged would lift their foot and kick the challenger, and so showing their oak and punishing the other boy.

When you hear the cuckoo for the first time you must run or you will be late for everything during the year.

Whit Sunday.

In South Northamptonshire it is said:—

“Whatsoever one did ask of God upon Whit Sunday Morning, at the instant when the sun arose and played, God would grant him.”

Turn your money in your pocket the first time you hear the cuckoo.

Count the number of times the cuckoo calls when you hear it for the first time and, as many times as it calls, so many years will it be before you are married.

Page 7

If a maid hears a cuckoo on the first of May, and takes off her left shoe, she will find inside a hair the colour of her future husband's hair. Girls used to get up early on May morning and go into the country and wait to hear the cuckoo.

An old adage is:—Don't change your clothes until the cuckoo picks up dirt.

June.

The oak's slow opening leaf, of deepening hue,
Bespeaks the power of Summer once again. *Clare.*

June roses.

The two June sayings are very optimistic:

A fine June, puts all things in tune.

A rainy June, sets all things in tune.

St. Peter's day, 29th June.

The gates of the Minster Precincts are still closed on this day to maintain the right of privacy.

The Proclamations of St. Peter's and Bridge Fair by the Town Crier, in the presence of the Mayor and Corporation, is still continued.

A copy of the proclamation was fortunately obtained for me before the old Beadle died. He had not a copy but used to repeat it from memory.

Sheep shearing. (June).

It was the custom, when the shearing was finished, for the Shepherds and Shearers to be entertained at supper by the Farmer. The Farmer's Daughter used to tie up posies of roses with ribbons and give a posy to each man, but the Head Shepherd always had the largest and best posy. It was considered by the girls to be great fun to put a quantity of pepper in the roses for the Head Shepherd, so that the poor Shepherd had severe fits of sneezing. Being expected, the joke never failed to cause a tremendous noise of sneezing, both natural and mock.

June was the month during which the feast was held and it was held as recently as 1856.

In some parts of Northamptonshire the last sheep to be sheared had a garland of roses placed round its neck.



MidsummerEve charms.

As the clock strikes Midnight take some hempseed and go into the garden and begin to throw the hempseed on the ground, repeating these words:—

Hempseed I sow,
Hempseed I hoe,
He that is my true love,
Come after me and mow.

After this, look over your left shoulder and you will see your future spouse.

In some places the sower goes round the house.

Another is to go into the garden backwards, in silence, and gather a rose and keep it in a clean sheet of paper without looking at it, until Christmas Day, when it will be as fresh as in June, and if it is worn on that day on the bosom he that is to be the husband will come and take it out.

Just before twelve o'clock at night take a clean chemise, wet it and turn it inside out and put over a chair before the fire, and when the clock strikes midnight your future spouse will come and turn the chemise. This must be done in perfect silence as a single word will break the spell.

Page 8

Dumb cake.

On Midsummer Eve three girls are required to make a dumb cake. Two must make it, two bake it, two break it, and the third put a piece under each of their pillows. Strict silence must be preserved. The following are the directions given how to proceed: The two must go to the larder and jointly get the various ingredients. First they get a bowl, each holding it and wash and dry it together. Then each gets a spoonful of flour, a spoonful of water and a little salt. When making the cake they must stand on something they have never stood on before. They must mix it together and roll it. Then they draw a line across the middle of the cake and each girl cuts her initials each on opposite sides of the line. Then both put it into the oven and bake it. The two take it out of the oven, and break it across the line and the two pieces are given to the third girl who places a piece under each pillow and they will dream of their future.

Not a word must be spoken and the two girls after giving the pieces to the third girl have to walk backwards to bed and get into bed backwards. One word or exclamation by either of the three girls will break the charm.

Should a gale arise and the wind appear to be rustling in the room, during the baking or latter part of the preparation, if they look over their left shoulder they will see their future husbands.

In some districts the pieces of cake are eaten in bed and not put under their pillows but nothing must be drank before breakfast next morning.

Another variation is that two only make the cake and go through the same form as the preceding, only they divide it themselves, then each eats her portion and goes to bed backwards as in the first case and nothing must be drank or a word spoken.

An uncooked dried salt fish eaten before going to bed in silence and walking backwards and getting into bed the same way, causes ones future husband to appear in a dream with a glass of water in his hand if a teetotaler, or a glass of beer if he is not one. Nothing must be drank before breakfast.

An old woman said she had tried it over 40 years ago and her husband brought her a glass of beer and he was not an abstainer but rather the reverse.

September.

Right glad to meet the evening's dewy veil
And see the light fade into glooms around. *Clare.*

The Harvest Home Suppers are now almost a thing of the past. I went to one about eight years ago and suppose it will be the last. It is held when the last load of corn is

taken home. This load used to be decorated with boughs and flowers and the youngest boy employed used to ride on it singing:—

Harvest Home! Harvest Home;
Two plum puddings are better than one,
We've plowed, we've sowed,
We've reaped, we've mowed,
We've got our harvest home.

They also used to shout Largess! Largess! but seldom got anything given them. It was merely an old custom.

Page 9

In the evening the supper was held, and after supper songs were sung. The oldest labourer used to propose the health of the Master and Mistress and all would sing:—

Harvest home.

Here's a health unto our Master, the giver of the feast,
Not only to our Master, but to our Mistress;
We wish all things may prosper whate'er he take in hand,
For we are all his servants, and all at his command.
Drink, boys drink, and see you do not spill,
For if you do you shall drink two, it is our Master's will.

I've been to France, I've been to Dover,
I've been to Harvest Home all the world over, over, and over,
Drink up your liquor and turn the bowl over.

Another:—

Here's health unto our Master the founder of the feast,
God bless his endeavours and give him increase,
And send him good crops that we may meet another year,
Here's our Master's good health boys come drink off your beer.

Some of the old songs used to be regularly sung. "The Poacher" was always a great favourite and the chorus, "For its my delight on a starry night" used to be given with great force and feeling. I wish I could remember the old songs which are now forgotten.

The day on which Harvest was finished, and the corn safely "Hovelled" used to be called "Wheat Hovel Day."

It was also the custom to decorate the last sheaf of corn with ribbons and flowers (It was only a small sheaf) and it was fastened to the wall inside the barn and left there until the next Harvest.

October.

Hail, falling leaves! that patter round,
Admonishers and friends.

Come pensive Autumn, with thy clouds and storms,
And falling leaves and pastimes lost to flowers. *Clare.*

Mops.

These were assemblies of people after Michaelmas in want of servants (male or female) who were not hired at the Statutes held before Michaelmas.

St. MARTIN'S day.

The 11th November is generally called Martlemas Day and old people still watch for the direction of the wind at noon on this day as they believe it will continue in that quarter for the next three months.

It is also a saying that if the ice will bear a duck before Martlemas it will not bear a goose all winter.

November.

When Winter comes in earnest to fulfil
His yearly task at bleak November's close.

Sybil of months, and worshipper of winds
I love thee, rude and boisterous as thou art. *Clare.*

St. CECILIA'S Day. Nov. 22.

The Lay Clerks of the Cathedral and friends used to be entertained by the Dean and Chapter at a dinner at which a boiled leg of mutton was the principal dish. After dinner songs and glees were sung.

Page 10

St. Catherine's day, Nov. 25Th.

The female children belonging to the Workhouse were dressed in white, trimmed with coloured ribbons, and went in a procession headed by the Workhouse Master and the tallest girl who wore a crown of gilt paper and carried a sceptre and distaff. They stopped at the houses of the principal inhabitants and sang this song. Money was given them and they had rump steak and onions for dinner, and a tea party, and games in the evening:

Here comes Queen Katrin as fine as any Queen,
With a coach and six horses a coming to be seen,
And a spinning we will go, will go, will go,

And a spinning we will go.

Some say she is alive, and some say she is dead,
And now she does appear with a crown upon her head,
And a spinning we will go, *etc.*

Old Madam Marshall she takes up her pen
And then she sits and calls for all her royal men.
And a spinning we will go, *etc.*

All that want employment though spinning is but small,
Come list and don't stand still, but go and work for all.
And a spinning we will go, *etc.*

If we set a spinning we will either work or play,
But if we set a spinning we can earn a crown a day.
And a spinning we will go, *etc.*

And if there be some young men, as I suppose there's some,
We'll hardly let them stand alone upon the cold, cold, stone.
And a spinning we will go.

Spinning was the employment for the females in the old Work house, and in the Dean and Chapter's accounts of payments there are entries of payments on St. Catherine's Day for wheels and reels for the children of the Workhouse.

December.

St. Andrew's day.

December 11th, commonly called "Tander," used to be kept by the Lace-makers as a feast day. St. Andrew was their Patron Saint. On that day men and women used to go

about dressed in each other's clothes, and calling at various houses and drinking hot elder wine. On this day the Morris Dancers or Mummers began their visits. There were from four to eight people who took part in the Mummary. The King, Beelzebub, Doctor, Doctor's man and Jack, the fool. Sometimes one took the part of the Doctor's horse and the Doctor made his entry riding on the horse, who was on his hands and knees but he generally had a small stool in his hands to make him a little higher, when moving about. This is described in Old Customs.

On St. Andrew's Day it was a custom called "Tander" at Easton on the Hill, about 12 miles from Peterborough, and other places, of the boys locking the village Schoolmaster out of School and demanding the rest of the day as a holiday, before the door was reopened. If the Schoolmaster could obtain an entrance to the School before giving his consent, the holiday was not given.

Page 11

St. THOMAS'S day, 21st December.

The practice of women going Gooding is fast passing away. Very few bands of women are seen now in the towns, but at Farcet last year (1910) the widows received about two shillings each for their share.

Christmas.

For a few weeks before Christmas Day the Waits and Singers still come round during the night time and on Boxing Days they call for their Christmas Boxes. The singers have now degenerated into two or three children who huddle together on the doorsteps of houses and sing through the keyhole and letter box as fast and as loud as they can utter the various hymns of which, "When shepherds watched their flocks by night." As soon as they receive a halfpenny away they trot to the next house to repeat the performance.

A Green Christmas makes a fat Churchyard.

If a Christmas Day on a Thursday be,
A windy winter we shall see.

If the sun shines on Christmas day for however short a time, the following year will be good for fruit.

Innocentsday, December 28th.

Called "Dyzemass Day," it is considered very unlucky to begin anything on this day and about sixty or seventy years ago many old people kept this day more sacred than an ordinary Sunday.

Country dances.

In the old County families the Christmas or New Year's dances in which tenants and servants all united together are still kept up in this district and anticipated and enjoyed as heartily as ever. The up-to-date dances are divided by the old Country dances which go with a vim and are enjoyed by all. In these dances the Master, Mistress, family and friends dance with the servants to the mutual good will and good feeling of all concerned. The dance is generally opened by a Country dance in which the Lady has the Butler for a partner and the Master the Housekeeper, and it is generally a handsacross and down the middle so that everyone meets during the dance. "The triumph" is a great favourite and opens with the lady being taken down the centre by the gentleman next to her partner who follows them to the bottom of the room and the two bring her back, each holding her by one hand and their other hands clasped and held over the lady's head with a very pretty effect.

“La Tempete” for noise and merriment takes a lot of beating and would suit the modern dancing as it partakes more of a romp than a dance.

The “Ribbon Dance” when each couple holds the end of a ribbon (red, white, or blue). This is very pretty when the ribbons are held up in the dance. There are many others which might be mentioned but space is limited. Sir Roger de Coverley always closed the ball.

Sedan chairs.

A Sedan Chair used to be seen in the streets of Peterborough until the early seventies. Certain old ladies would only go to Church or entertainments in it because it was taken into the entrance of the house or other place so that they could get in and out without being exposed to the weather. The harness worn by one of the men is seen in Peterborough Museum.

Page 12

In 1905; for the first time within the recollection of the inhabitants of Peterborough, St. John's Church Bells were not rung on Wyldbore's day as the bell tower was not considered safe. The sermon was preached as usual.

At the end of the sowing season a large "Siblet" or seed cake, was made for the farm labourers who ate it, and drank success to the sowing in home brewed ale or mead.

The Curfew Bell is still rung at the Minster from May 1st, to August 31st, at 8-50 p.m., and from September 1st, to April 30th, at 7-50 p.m. It has only been discontinued for a short time and this was during the Commonwealth, since it was first started.

Fit rings.

To cure fits:—If a female, she collects nine pieces of silver and nine three half-pennies from bachelors. The silver money is made into a ring, to be worn by the afflicted person and the half-pence is paid to the maker of the ring for his work. If a male, he collects from females.

I knew an old silversmith who was in great request to make these rings. He used to save broken silver spoons to make the rings but lately he found out he could buy the rings ready made so he did not trouble to make any afterwards.

Wedding rings.

It is unlucky for a bride to reverse her wedding ring on her wedding day.

If a bride can be persuaded to remove her ring and have some bride cake passed through the ring, and the cake, so passed, put under the pillow, the person will dream of her future spouse.

Games.

Earth air and water.

This was a favourite game at Christmas parties for forfeits. The players sit all round the room, a small ball or a handkerchief tied up is then thrown by the leader at one. After several feints so as to catch one not watching and throw the ball at that one and shouting Earth Air, or Water, and as soon as the word is said begins to count up to ten as fast as possible. The person hit by the ball has to name a bird, beast, or fish before ten has been counted or pays a forfeit. A name must not be mentioned which has been used by another person as that also entails a forfeit. It was not a game for a stammering person.

I love my love.



This is another forfeit game. All sit round the room and one begins I love my love with an A, because he is amiable, and everyone follows in their turn by repeating the form and qualification, beginning with the same letter as Active, Artful, &c. Anyone using the word which has been used pays a forfeit. Then it goes round with the letter B and so on through the alphabet.

The Quaker Wedding:—The leader goes round with his eyes looking on the ground and sings “Hast thou ever been to a Quaker’s Wedding.”?

Page 13

This is repeated until he or she stops before one of the party, who then answers—Nay, friend, nay. The leader then says, “Do as I do, Twiddle thy thumbs and follow me.” The selected one follows the leader singing the same words and both twiddling their thumbs. Then they are all got in line facing one way and kneel together as close as possible. When all are kneeling the leader gives a sly push to the one next to her and the whole row fall over amidst great laughter. I have played this game at Christmas time and it was sometimes fixed as a forfeit.

When playing a losing game at Cards, Dominoes, *etc.*, the chair in which the unlucky player is sitting should be turned (by the occupant) from right to left, to change the luck. It has been thought that this turning is a form of Sun Worship.

Crane.:—This game was generally played during the Harvest Home Feast. “A man holds in his hand a long stick, with another tied to the top of it, in the form of an L. reversed, which represents the long neck and beak of the crane. This with himself, is entirely covered with a large sheet. He mostly makes excellent sport as he puts the whole company to the rout, pecking at the young girl’s and old men’s heads, nor stands he upon the least ceremony in this character, but he takes the liberty to break the master’s pipe, and spill his beer, as freely as those of his men.” This mostly begins the night’s diversions, as the prologue to the rest, while the booted boys wind up the entertainment. *Clare*. Village Minstrel.

Handsell.

It is still a custom if a child has anything new to wear, to handsell it. That is to give a small coin to put in the pocket. The first money received on the day is called taking Handsell, and some spit on it and turn it to get good luck. When anything is used for the first time it is handselled.

Boot.

This was a kind of punishment for such boys as have carelessly neglected their duty in the harvest, or treated their labour with negligence instead of attention, as letting their cattle get pounded or overthrowing their loads, *etc.* A long form is placed in the kitchen upon which the boys who have worked well sit, as a terror and disgrace to the rest in a bent posture, with their hands laid on each others backs forming a hedge for the “boys,” as the truant boys are called to pass over; while a strong chap stands on each side with a boot-legging strongly strapping them as they scuffle over the bridge, which is done as fast as their ingenuity can carry them. *Clare*’s Village Minstrel.

Meeting eyebrows are lucky, and those having them are said to have great luck with stock.

Cutting nails.

Cut your nails on a Monday, cut for a gift.
Cut your nails on a Tuesday, cut them for thrift.
Cut your nails on a Wednesday, cut them for news.
Cut your nails on a Thursday, cut for a new pair of shoes.
Cut your nails on a Friday, cut them for sorrow,
Cut your nails on a Saturday, see your sweetheart to-morrow.
Cut them on Sunday, cut them for evil.
Cut them all the week round, and you'll go to the devil.

Page 14

Better that child had ne'er been born,
Who cuts its nails on a Sunday morn.

Of a Friday's pare,
No good will come near.

If you cut your nails on Monday morning before breakfast, and without thinking of a fox's tail, you will have a gift before the week is out. When told this, I asked, Why not a fox's brush? "Oh, no!" was the reply, "you may think of the brush but not the tail."

White specks on the nails are called gifts, and the rhyme says:—

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

In this district many mothers will not allow their babies' nails to be cut before they are a year old, but they bite the edges off. If the nails are cut the children grow up thieves.

A new born babe, before being taken out of the house, should be carried up some stairs, but if it is born in a room at the top of the house, the nurse lifts it up and gets on a chair, and puts the child on the top of something high, so that it may rise in the world.

If a pair of shoes are placed on the table a quarrel is sure to ensue.

This part of the county appears to possess more than the normal number of senses. I have often heard people speak of their seven senses. Only a short time ago a woman speaking of a neighbour who was a great sleeper, and also of her child, said they would sleep away their seven senses. And another woman who was startled said, "You're enough to frighten me out of my seven senses." I should like to know what the two extra senses are. Instinct may, perhaps, be one!

Marriage.

Three times a bridesmaid, will die an old maid.

Bride's dress.

Married in Grey, you will go far away.
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back.
Married in Brown, you will live out of town.
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead.
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl.
Married in Green, ashamed to be seen.
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow.

Married in Blue, he will always be true.
Married in Pink, your spirits will sink.

Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday the best day of all.
Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, Saturday no luck at all.

Marry on Sunday so that you cannot repent before the week is out.

Animals.

If a dog howls in front of a house it is a sign of a death very soon. If a woman in the house takes off her left shoe and turns it upside down and puts her foot on it the dog ceases howling. I know of one instance where a dog howled in front of a house, and the mistress seeing and hearing the dog took off her left shoe and put her foot on it. The dog was in the midst of a howl, and he finished it with a yell and turned away and ran from the house as fast as possible, but he returned very soon and howled again. It was very strange, but an invalid visitor was staying in the house, and he died exactly a week after the howling.

Page 15

To be followed by a strange dog is lucky.

If a cat licks her foot and passes it over her left ear it is a sign that a stranger will soon come.

When a cat lies with her tail turned to the fire it is a sign of hard weather.

If a cat licks her tail it betokens rain.

A strange black cat brings good luck into a house.

When a cat is taken to a new home its feet should be buttered, and it will stop.

If a cat has a cold and sneezes, all the people in the house will catch it.

When Noah's Ark is seen in the sky it is a sign of much rain.

It is described by Clare as "a long dark cloud stretching across the heavens, broad in the centre and tapering at each end, resembling the figure of the ark, and supposed to foretell great floods. But it depends on the direction of the ark. If it is from south to north it is a sign of good weather, but if from east to west bad weather."

Rain before seven, clear up before eleven.

Rain water collected as it falls on Holy Thursday is very good for diseases of the eye.

If it rains on St. Swithin's day it portends a good crop of apples.

Rain in the east, three days at least.

You should always wish when on strange ground.

If you shiver someone is walking over your grave. This means someone is talking of your death.

If you have a toothache you don't love true.

Wounds and corns aching are signs of rain or frost.

Left cheek burning someone is speaking well of you,
Right cheek burning someone is speaking ill of you.

But if you bite your finger when your cheek burns the person speaking ill of you will bite his or her tongue.



Right cheek, left friend,
Left cheek, right friend.

It is unlucky for a man to meet a cross-eyed woman, but the ill-luck is broken if he spits on the opposite side to that by which he passes her.

To lay an umbrella on a bed is to bring disappointment to the occupant.

If a shirt, or any other garment, is put on inside out, it must remain so all day and so avoid bad luck.

A Caul or Kell is the thin membrane which sometimes covers the face of an infant at its birth, and is supposed to betoken good fortune. Sometimes they are sold, and the general price used to be about three guineas. Seafaring men would buy them as preservatives from drowning, and also for good luck. In 1862 a poor woman wanted to sell one to my mother for my welfare, and all sorts of good luck and fortune were to belong to the possessor, but my mother would not speculate, so I lost the chance.

When pricked by a thorn, and to prevent the wound from festing, the following verse should be repeated:

Our Saviour was of a Virgin born,
His head was crowned with a crown of thorn,
It never cankered or festered at all,
And I hope in Christ Jesus this never shall.

Page 16

When a wise woman, or anyone, is called in to attend and charm anyone, the person to be operated upon must have an earnest belief that a cure will be effected, and the words "Please" and "Thank you" must not be used or the charm fails. In some cases the charmer blesses or hallows cords or leather thongs which the patient wore tied round the neck.

Whoopingcough.

On the 22nd January, 1908, two women were talking together in Long Causeway. One asked the other how her child was? (It was suffering from whooping cough). The mother replied, "No better. The other day Mrs. —— told me to steal a bit of raw meat from a butcher's and cut a hole in it, and put a lock of my hair in the hole and give it to a dog to eat. I did it, but it is no better." I had previously heard this, but with the difference that it should be a lock of the child's hair.

Washing.

They who wash on a Monday have all the week to dry,
They who wash on a Tuesday are not so much awry,
They who wash on a Wednesday not so much to blame,
They who wash on a Thursday wash for shame,
They who wash on a Friday wash in need,
But they who wash on Saturday are sluts indeed.

It is unlucky to wash on "Good Friday." The legend says:—"A woman who was washing when Our Lord was passing on his way to be crucified threw some dirty water over him."

Two persons washing together in the same basin or bowl, or drying themselves with the same towel, will very soon quarrel, but this may be prevented by each making the sign of a cross with their finger-tips on the surface of the water.

If, when washing, the soap slips from your hands and falls on the ground you will hear of a death before the week is out.

If a woman has a fine day for washing the first time after Michaelmas Day, she will have fine washing days all the year.

Sneezing.

Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger, sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger, sneeze on Wednesday get a letter, sneeze on Thursday, something better, sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow, Saturday, see your true love to-morrow.

To sneeze three times in succession, is a sign of a gift.

Peterborough Cathedral.

On July 26th, 1681, the Rev. John Wray, M.A., F.R.S., writes in his diary:—

“We (Mr. Wray and Mr. Willoughby) began our journey northwards from Cambridge, and that day, passing through Huntingdon and Stilton, we rode as far as Peterborough, 25 miles. There I first heard the Cathedral Service. The Choristers made us pay money for coming into the choir with our spurs on.”

Bells.

Helpston cracked pippins,
And Northborough cracked pans,
Glinton fine Organs,
And Peakirk tin pans.

The Churches of Tansor and Cotterstock are not very far from each other. Cotterstock has four bells, and Tansor only two. The villagers say that the Cotterstock bells ask:

Page 17

"Who rings the best? Who rings the best?"

and Tansor proudly and rapidly replies,

"We do, We do, We do, We do."

Tansor now possesses three bells, so their answer now is "We three do."

The Pancake bell is still rung regularly in Peterborough on Shrove Tuesday.

The Gleaning bell is rung in the district.

In some Parishes a bell was tolled during the time of a corpse being put in its shroud, and was called the "Winding Bell."

The Church Bells of Helpston, Northborough, Glinton, and Peakirk are described as:—

Personal.

A mole spot on the body, is considered lucky.

One with the mole on the neck, will gather money by the peck.

A mole on the left shoulder, betokens a drunken husband.

Right eye itching, sign of joy,
Left eye itching, sign of sorrow.

Right eye joy, left eye cry.

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

Nose itching, going to hear news.

Rub it on wood and it's sure to come good.

Palm of right hand itching, you will receive money.

Left palm itching, you will pay money away.

If your knee itches, you will kneel in a strange Church.

If your foot itches, you will walk on strange ground.

Folk Lore (3)



The moon, meek guardian of the night. *John Clare* (unpub.)

To see the new moon for the first time through glass is unlucky especially the first one in the year.

You should always turn the money in your pockets when you see the first new moon in the year, and if one of the other sex is near an interchange of kisses increases the good luck.

To see the new moon the first time over your right shoulder is lucky, but if over the left shoulder it is unlucky.

The first new moon in the year is stronger in its influence than the others.

If the new moon does not appear until the fourth day, it foretells a troubled time for the whole month.

When the moon appears on the fourth day very clear and sharp and rather on the slant, it promises mostly fair weather for the month.

An erect moon is said to threaten wind.

Near full moon a misty sunrise,
Bodes fair weather and cloudless skies.

When the clouds of the moon to the West fly away,
You may safely rely on a settled fair day.

When mountains and cliffs in the clouds appear,
Some sudden or violent showers are near.

Sun rising red and fiery foretells wind and rain. If cloudy and the clouds decrease it is a sign of fair weather.

If after rising the sun goes to bed again (that is going behind clouds) it is a sure sign of rain.

The evening red, the morning grey,
Are surely signs of a very fine day.



Page 18

Children are told they may go and play in the fields, or open, when the sun shines on both sides of the hedge.

A black cat following anyone into a home brings good luck.

Mice coming into a house indicate a death.

A mouse running over anyone is an infallible sign of death.

The squeaking of mice behind the bed of an invalid, or the appearance of a white mouse running across a room, are also signs of death.

Pigs should be killed when the moon is on the rise.

If killed when the moon is waning the fat of the pork will shrink.

It is unlucky to bring a squirrel into a house.

The first time you see any lambs turn your money.

If their heads are turned towards you it is lucky, but if their tails it is the reverse.

Moles work harder than general before rain.

A mole's foot carried in the pocket is a sure prevention against witches.

BIRDS.

Crows foretell rain when they caw and walk along on the banks of rivers and pools.

A crow alighting in front of anyone walking is unlucky.

Two crows bring good luck, and if they fly away over the person's head it is very great good luck.

Four crows foretell a death in the person's family.

I was recently told that two crows alighting on a house betokens a death, and a very peculiar instance was given. My informant told me that his coat of arms bears three Choughs and the night before his father died two crows sat on the window sill of his father's bedroom, and it was remarked that one of the three birds being absent foretold the death which occurred next day.

A bird flying into a house foretells a death.

A white pigeon is a bird of ill omen, and if after hovering about it alights on a house it is a token of the death of one of the inmates.

A hen crowing is a sign of death.

When swallows fly low it foretells rain.

The cuckoo comes in May. In June he changes his tune. In July he goes away. In August away he must, for a cuckoo in September nobody can remember.

It is said woodlarks are never found in Northamptonshire.

Larks rising very high and singing for a long time is a sign of fine weather.

Kites flying aloft betokens fine weather.

Peacock's feathers, even now, are considered to bring bad luck into a house.

When you see a heron flying the first time in the year put the tips of your right thumb and the finger nearest the thumb together and form a ring. Then wish and at the same time spit through the opening, and if the spittle does not touch the hand the wish comes to pass. This, I believe, is a strictly local custom, as there is a heronry in Milton Park, about three miles from Peterborough.

BEES.

On the death of their master or mistress one of the family or household must go to the hives and tap on them and say who is dead and who is to be their new master. If this is neglected the bees will pine away. Some sugared beer is given to the bees at these times.

Page 19

The various flights of bees are named as follows: A swarm. 2. A cast. 3. A colt or second cast, and should there be a fourth, which is very rare, it is called a spem—a swarm from a swarm is called a virgin swarm.

The different values of the swarms are described in this rhyme:

A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay;
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon;
A swarm of bees in July
Is not worth a fly.

Bees flying far from their hives and coming home late foretells fine weather.

Bees are more industrious just before rain, but do their best to reach their hives before the rain falls.

INSECTS.

Spiders were considered efficacious in cases of Ague. If put alive in a bag and tied round the neck or swallowed alive wrapped in paste.

If you wish to live and thrive
Let the spiders run alive.

Spider webs in the air or on the grass and nets foretells fair weather.

A spider on one's clothes means a new suit or dress.

Woodlice, of the kind which roll themselves up when touched, if swallowed in that state, were taken for the ague.

With regard to wearing out boots, there is a doggrel on this subject:—

Trip at the toe, live to know woe,
Trip at the ball, live to spend all,
Trip at the heel, live to do well.

One funeral brings two more.

A variation of this makes the “two more” dependent on a Sunday intervening between the death and burial of the body.

Another variation affirms that the first death must be that of a female.

When a grave opens for a “she,” it will open for three.

It is the custom, in some places, to place some salt, in a pewter plate, on the chest of a dead body; but especially when the death has been through dropsy. This was done only a short time since.

The roaring noise of a fire foretells a quarrel in the house.

A thin flake of smut on a bar of the grate betokens a visit from a stranger.

Cinders flying out of the fire, taking the form of a purse and giving a jingling noise when shaken, foretells the receiving of money. When they are in the shape of a coffin (and with no jingling) this betokens a death.

If anyone by stirring or otherwise makes a dull fire get bright, it is said to make his or her sweetheart smile.

To prevent cramp at night place your shoes by the bedside in the form of a T. One end pointed to, and the end of the other shoe pointed from the bed, is also considered a preventative.

Knives laid edge upwards on the table cut Angels’ feet.

Two knives, crossed on the table, foretells a quarrel within an hour.

To drop a knife mean a male visitor and, in the case of a fork, a female visitor.

Never give, or accept, a sharp edged or pointed present without giving a coin in exchange, or friendship will be broken.

Page 20

Knives crossed and laid on the floor is a strong protection against the power of witchcraft.

A very old woman told me she once tried the knives on one of her neighbours, as she suspected the woman of overlooking her; so she asked the woman to come and see her one day but before the woman came into the house she crossed two knives and put them on the floor in a dark corner. When the suspected person came in she wouldn't sit down and soon left, appearing to be very uncomfortable; so she was a "wrong un" but the old lady said she was all right after that, and had no more trouble.

Straws crossed and placed on a footpath, or on the road, prevents a witch from passing.

Many years since I remember hearing of this being done as a suspected woman was coming along, and it was said the woman got very angry and foamed at the mouth but she didn't pass the straws.

The following is in use at the present time:—

If a husband runs away from his wife she buys a pennyworth of Dragon's Blood, wraps it in paper, and places it under her pillow when she goes to bed, and it is sure to draw him back again.

A chemist in Peterborough had a letter a few years since, from a woman in the Fens, asking him to send her a "pennorth of Dragons Blood" for this very purpose; and the following shows that the custom is in use, even in the United States of America, at the present time according to the following extract from the "Daily Express" of 18th February, 1905:

Drank Dragon's Blood.

Buffalo Bill's wife gave him love Philtres.

"Express" Correspondent.

Cheyenne (Wyoming), Friday, February 17th., 1905.

It came out, during the hearing of Buffalo Bill's divorce case to-day, that he had been dosed with many love Philtres.

Mrs. Cody, his wife, was extremely jealous of him and imagining that his affection for her was gone, mixed gipsy love potions in his drinks. One of these, which was supposed to be particularly efficacious, was known as "Dragon's Blood."



Mrs. Parker, a witness, told the court that Mrs. Cody believed that every woman was infatuated with her husband, and confided to her the names of many prominent women who, she said, were in love with him.

The witness stated, in cross examination, that during these outbursts of jealousy Colonel Cody was beside himself with rage.

Dragon's Blood is not a fluid. It is a resin from certain kinds of palm.

At Oundle "There is a Well that is credibly reported to drum as a presage of very great alterations to publick affairs." M.S.S. dated 1703, of the Phillips Stourhead Collection, No. 22244.

I came across this Croyland rhyme some time since:—

In Holland fen, now mark the name,
Old Croyland stands, of mickle fame,
There is a wine of a certain class,
There is fodder like sword grass,
There's a bed as hard as stone,
Thence depart, with "get ye gone."

Page 21

If you can peel an apple with the paring in one piece take the peel by one end with the right hand and wave it three times over your head and throw it over your left shoulder, and it will fall in the form of the first letter of your sweetheart's christian or surname.

With the first cherry pie of the season, those who partake of it count the stones, to know their prospect of matrimony. The counting is done in this manner and, at the same time, repeating these words over and over again until all the stones on the plate have been counted:—

1st. stone "This year," 2nd stone "Next year," 3rd stone "Sometime," 4th. stone "Never," and on which word the last stone falls, that is the fate.

GENERAL.

"Grandfather" Clocks, and especially those which have been in a family for two or three generations, are regarded as capable of foretelling deaths in a family. If one falls down, stops without any apparent cause, or strikes several times more that it ought to do without stopping, then these events are certain signs of death.

A well known barrister told me he had bought an old Grandfather clock, and his man had entire charge of it. One morning the man found the clock had fallen down during the night and he was very much disturbed about it and said there would be a death soon, and within a week the man's father died.

In another case a man said he was cleaning a clock which his father had made, and the owner told him what a good clock it was, but, said she, "It was completely master of your father for a time. He came to clean it one day, and after a few weeks it stopped, and he went again and attended to it, but it was no use, so was given up as a bad job. The owner was certain a death would soon occur, and shortly after her husband's mother died. When she heard of the death she set the pendulum swinging, and it had never stopped since, except to be cleaned."

It is very seldom that other kinds of clocks are credited with these powers although at Werrington there was, in a cottage, a small wooden Dutch clock called in this neighbourhood a "Sheep's head" clock. It was hanging on the wall and had not been going for some years, the weights and pendulum had been lost and the lines were wrapped round the clock. One Sunday morning before the woman and her husband had risen from bed, but were both wide awake, they distinctly heard this clock strike "one" and by the next mail they received notice that their son, a soldier on Foreign service, had died that Sunday morning, and at one o'clock.

There are several things worn as charms and amulets, which are attributed with various powers, and one favourite is a "Lucky bone" which is worn for good luck. This bone is taken from a sheep's head, and is in the form of a T.

A stone with a hole through it, is worn and highly valued for its Good Luck.

The stones that have only one large hole, are hung on bed heads, and in stables.

Page 22

Horse shoes, when found, are very lucky and should be nailed over the threshold, or over the hearth. I have seen some at Cotterstock Hall, Alwalton Hall, and other houses, attached to the door. They are also nailed over stable doors. If there are any nails in the shoe, when found by a single person, then, as many nails as there are, so many years will it be before the marriage of that person.

Thorney men, seeing a small portion of a horse shoe lying in the road, pick it up and throw it over their shoulder, so that no ill-luck may befall them.

A knuckle bone or a cramp bone carried in the pocket prevents cramp.

A potato, chestnut or a nutmeg carried in the pocket prevents rheumatism.

A piece of wicken is worn as a cure for the ague.

A mole's foot or a load stone, in the pocket, is a protection against witches.

Although lamps and gas have generally supplanted candles, in the country where candles are still used, the spark on the wick is considered to denote the coming of a letter, and the melted tallow or composition forming a winding sheet denotes a death.

When a candle burns blue or dim, a spirit is said to be in the room.

It is very unlucky to return to the house for anything after leaving it, although the spell is broken if the person sits down before coming out of the house again.

Two people, meeting on a staircase, is a sign of an approaching wedding.

When walking together, two lovers must not pass on different sides of turnstiles, road posts, or lamp posts, or they will certainly quarrel.

It is bad luck, when two persons are walking together, to separate and one to turn back against a gate; but if one of them sits down for a time, whilst the other walks away, the bad luck is turned.

To spill salt is a sign of sorrow or anger; but if the spilt salt is gathered up in a spoon and thrown over the left shoulder the luck is turned.

An old shoe thrown after anyone starting on a new undertaking is considered to carry good luck; especially if it goes over the head and does not hit the person.

Flies are more troublesome before rain.

Gnats playing up and down in the open air near sunset is a sign of heat.



If in the shade, warm and mild showers, but if they join in stinging those who pass them
it presages cold weather and rain.

Children, even now, when they find a Ladybird or cow lady say:—

Click, Clock, Clay. What time o'day.
One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, Click, clock, clay.

Another custom is to get a ladybird and put it on the back of the hand and say:—

Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
Your horse is on foot, your children are gone;
All but one, and that's little John,
And he lies under the grindle stone.

If it does not fly away then it is thrown up into the air.

Page 23

In some places the insect is called cow lady, and then the rhyme begins cow lady, cow lady, etc.

PLANTS.

When the Dandelion clocks are blowing children carefully pluck them and with as perfect a head as possible hold it upright in front of them and say:—

Clicketty, Clock, what's o'clock?

and then try and blow as much off the head as possible, and as many times as it takes to blow the down off the heads such will be the time.

Children gather Timothy grass and beginning with the top seed say:—

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich man,
Poor man, Beggar man, Thief.

At each word the hand touches the next seed and on whichever name the last seed comes such will be the sweetheart. The words are repeated over and over again until all the seeds are counted.

FLOWERS AND SEEDS.

Clare mentions these signs in his Shepherds Calender

And scarlet-starry points of flowers,
Pimpernel, dreading nights and showers
Oft call'd "the Shepherd's weather-glass,"
That sleeps till suns have dried the grass,
Then wakes, and spreads its creeping bloom,
Till clouds with threatening shadows come,
Then close it shuts to sleep again;
Which weeders see and talk of rain,
And boys, that mark them shut so soon,
Call "John that goes to bed at noon."

Seeds should be sown and plants and roots planted when the moon is on the rise to ensure successful results.

If seeds are sown when the moon is on the wane there will be bad crops.

If a man or woman plants a sage tree and it thrives, the one who planted the tree will rule the house.

If a single man pulls up a sage tree at midnight on Christmas Eve a storm will arise and the man's future wife will appear.

It is unlucky to bring holly into the house before Christmas Eve.

All evergreens used for Christmas decoration should be burnt on Candlemas day and care must be taken to burn all the holly berries, otherwise a death in the family may be expected for each berry left in the house unburnt.

Mistletoe should hang in the house from one Christmas to another.

It is unlucky to bring the May flower or the Chestnut blossom into the house.

If flowers like the Dandelion or Pimpernel are closed or shut up it fortells rain and bad weather, but if quite open fine weather.

When the mulberry tree begins to shoot, the last frost has gone. In Hunts it is called the wise tree.

The shooting of the Ash and Oak in the Spring is carefully watched, and the first appearance of the new shoots accords with this rhyme:—

If the Ash before the Oak,
Then there'll be a regular soak;
But if the Oak before the Ash,
Then there'll only be a splash,

I have seen children eating apples and taking the pips one by one and repeating this doggreel:—

Page 24

Cobbley, Cobbley, fly away
Bring me an apple tomorrow day.

At the words “fly away” they used to throw the pip away, in the firm belief that they would have another apple the next day for every pip thrown; but only one pip from each apple could be used by each child.

KING’S CLIFFE.

On Palm Sunday the Church used to be decorated with palm branches in the seats and windows.

On Christmas Day the parishoners and clerk used to meet at the Church, at three o’clock in the morning and sing a Psalm and then proceed to the Cross, and to every gentleman’s house in the town for which they received a largesse during the holidays.

A winding bell used be tolled on a dead person being put into her shroud.

GODMANCHESTER.

If a man dies intestate and leaves a family the youngest son becomes the heir to the property.

HUNTINGDON.

Once a year, the Freeman of Huntingdon used to meet on the Market Hill, they then proceeded in procession dragging a horse’s skull with them and perambulated the bounds of the Freeman’s lands. At certain points there are boundry holes dug, these holes they re-dig and hold a boy (one of the Freeman’s sons) up by his heels with his head in the hole, and strike him (on the part prepared by nature for that purpose), with the spade. This is done at each hole. A different boy was whipped at every hole so that several could remember where the holes were dug, especially the hole at which each individual had suffered, and the memory of the hole was impressed on mind and body, and the position of the boundary marks were thus registered.

For many years the annual custom has been discontinued, and takes place at irregular intervals. It has only occurred once during this century.

The men of Godmanchester sometimes formed bands on the same day and when they met the men of Huntingdon a free fight and struggle took place between them to secure the horse’s skull.