

CK. Corner

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1931)**

Heft 531

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

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CK. CORNER.

As it is near Christmas, I am going to tell you about some Legends, and I am writing this corner more especially for the younger readers of the S.O., though I do not mean to say that it may not prove of interest to others. Once more Sir James Barrie's fairy story Peter Pan is being played, and I want those of you who go to it, when they see Peter Pan upset at the loss of his shadow not to think of this as a mere phantasy on the part of the Author but as a modern rendering of an old, old belief which is very wide spread and of which the origin is lost. I am therefore going to tell you about some of these Legends so that you may realize that underlying many of the details which appear ridiculous to us, there is often a substratum of fact which shows that even the most fantastic stories are based on some idea which may have originated in long forgotten days and that after all there is not such a gulf between the ideas of the two ages as would appear at first sight to exist.

Thus, the shadow is a very important thing and the belief that it retains the soul or vital force is very wide spread. In numerous African tribes it is thought that harm can be done to a man by stabbing his shadow and it is considered unlucky to even stand on a man's shadow. In India in certain castes should a man be preparing food and the shadow of a European or an undesirable fall upon it, he will immediately throw away the food as it has been rendered unclean. In China, at a funeral when the lid is about to be placed on a coffin, the bystanders retire a few steps, for it is believed that a person's health would be endangered by allowing his shadow to be enclosed in a coffin. And when the coffin is about to be lowered into the grave most of the spectators recoil to a short distance lest their shadows should fall into the grave and harm should thus be done to their persons.

These Legends are therefore the origin of that well-known greeting "may your shadow never grow less" and in one of the stories of the South Pacific, we are told of a mighty warrior whose strength waxed and waned with the length of his shadow. In the morning, when his shadow fell longest, his strength was greatest but as the shadow shortened towards noon his strength ebbed with it but returned as the shadow stretched out in the afternoon. A certain hero discovered the secret of this warrior's strength and slew him at noon. Elsewhere it is believed that by doing damage to the shadow, harm can be done to its owner and in Bulgaria it was the custom to measure the shadow of a man with a piece of string, the string then being placed in a box and buried, preferably beneath the foundation stone of a new building. It was thought that the victim would die within forty days and that his spirit would be attached to the string and remain in the box.

You will now see how important a shadow may be and why Peter Pan was so upset at his loss.

From shadow to reflection is but a small step and so we have the reason why it is considered unlucky to break a mirror.

In other parts of the world the vital force is considered to reside in the lower jaw and in Uganda when the King died his lower jaw was buried in a temple and was carefully guarded because the ghost of the King was supposed to attach itself to the jaw bone. It was also believed that his strength remained attached to it and could be transmitted so that in other tribes it was customary to bury the lower jaw in secret because they feared that if anyone could get possession of it he would gain strength and the heir would lose strength.

Indeed, the belief is widespread that strength may go from one body to another and this is the reason for human sacrifices in many parts of the world because it was thought that by them the King might be invigorated. And if you go to the British Museum, in a case containing objects from the Ivory coast of Africa you will see a war horn with a human lower jaw attached to it. May we not have here the explanation of this horn; for would it not be employed to excite the warriors to battle and to invoke strength and force.

And did not Samson perform deeds of valour armed only with the jaw bone of an animal.

Now Legend holds a very important place in the history of Medicine and even to-day may not be ignored as any one can see by reading those advertisements which extol the virtues of numerous wonderful and mysterious remedies and thus healing springs in ancient days were considered to be sacred to Hercules for they were said to have been first produced for the refreshment of the hero after his labours. On the strength of this connection with medicinal springs he posed as a patron of the healing art. In heaven if we can trust Lucian, he even refused to give place to Aesculapius himself, and the difference between the two led to an unseemly brawl. "Do you mean to say," demanded the irate Hercules of his father Zeus, "that this apothecary is to sit down to table before me?" To this the aforesaid apothecary replied with much acrimony, recalling several

painful episodes in the private life of the burly hero when on earth. Finally, the dispute was settled by the father of the Gods, who decided in favour of Aesculapius on the ground that he died before Hercules and was therefore entitled to rank as senior God.

Another matter of great importance is the influence of the moon. Everyone knows that it is very bad to allow the moon to shine upon a person's face when asleep, and it would appear that great attention should be paid to the waxing and the waning of this luminary. For instance if it is desired to have a vigorous growth of hair, care should be taken to have the hair cut when the moon is waxing. I will not guarantee the efficacy of this procedure but at any rate it is simple and less expensive than most of the much vaunted lotions which are advertised for this purpose.

Again, if you wish to cure warts, you should treat them when the moon is on the decrease. And a German cure for toothache or earache is to look towards the waning moon and say "as the moon decreases, so may my pains decrease also."

In many parts of the world attention is paid to the moon when sowing or planting. Thus the Highlanders of Scotland used to expect better crops of grain by sowing their seed during the moon's increase. Elsewhere, plants which bear fruit above ground are sown when the moon is waxing, but plants which are cultivated for the sake of their roots such as potatoes and turnips, are sown when the moon is waning. The reason for this distinction seems to be a vague idea that as the waxing moon is coming up and the waning moon going down, accordingly the fruits which grow upwards should be sown in the former period, and fruits which grow downwards in the latter.

Of course, during the lapse of time legends have become distorted and very often explanations are given which have nothing to do with the original idea. Let me give one example of this change. I have said that human sacrifices were made in order to transfer strength and power to a King. They were also made in connection with the foundation of a building so as to ensure stability to the edifice or to ward off evil influences. It was thought that the more important the victim was the more powerful he would become as guardian of the building but as time went on and man became more civilized substitutes were employed and the use of actual victims was replaced by effigies in the form of coins of seals bearing the effigy of the King and we have here perhaps the origin of the custom which exists even to-day of placing coins beneath a foundation stone rather than the usual explanation of depositing coins with the date of the foundation thereon for the benefit of prosperity.

There are many quaint Legends in different parts of the world. Thus when you are loading a gun to go out shooting, you should always put the bullet in your mouth before you insert it into the gun; for by so doing you practically eat the game that is to be hit by the bullet and it therefore cannot possibly miss the mark. And there are many beliefs regarding methods for curing wounds. Thus, if a person cuts himself with a knife he will be well advised to take care to keep the blade bright and so to prevent the wound from festering, and in Suffolk, should a horse wound itself by treading on a nail it was customary to preserve the nail, clean it and grease it every day to prevent the wound from becoming poisoned. Elsewhere if you cut yourself with a knife you ought to smear the knife with fat and put it away in a dry place. As the knife dries, the wound heals.

Should you desire to do anyone harm you should collect the parings of nails, hair, eyebrows of your intended victim and make them up into his likeness with wax from a deserted bees comb. Scorch the figure slowly by holding it over a lamp for seven nights, and say:—

On second thoughts I do not think I will tell you what you should say lest you should attempt the spell and if it succeeded I might get into trouble with the Editor and I have had quite enough trouble in days past. So as it is Christmas time I will conclude with a few remarks about Mistletoe.

Amongst Swiss peasants special virtue was ascribed to mistletoe which grows on an oak. It may not be cut in the usual way; it must be caught as it falls to the ground; and it was esteemed a panacea for all diseases at least of children. It was used as a remedy in many diseases such as epilepsy and an oil made from it known as the oil as St. John was supposed to heal all wounds made with cutting instruments. However, after having been held in high repute, the opinion of the medical profession as to the curative virtues of mistletoe has undergone a radical change. Whereas the Druids thought that it cured everything, modern doctors appear to think that it cures nothing although in the last few years it has once more been used, and forms the principle drug in some preparations now on the market. Mistletoe is said to be able to extinguish fire, and Swedish peasants hang up bunches in

their rooms as a protection against harm in general and fire in particular. Perhaps the most precious of all its virtues, is that it affords efficient protection against witchcraft.

There are many other legends of which I should like to tell you, but as I do not wish to disturb your slumbers, I think I had better bring this corner to an end and wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, in the hope that the coming year will be more peaceful and less nerve racking than the one which is now fast drawing to a close.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.



ALBERT CH. NUSSBAUMER

MANAGER SWISS BANK CORPORATION.

M. A. Ch. Nussbaumer has been appointed Manager of the London office of the Swiss Bank Corporation in succession to M. M. Golay, who has been appointed General Manager at the Head Office in Basle.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

STUDENTS CHRISTMAS DINNER AND BALL.

The Students of the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society Ltd., celebrated their Christmas Dinner and Ball at the Imperial Hotel, Russell Square, W.C.1 on Friday December 18th.

The Dinner was preceded by a Reception held by M. C. Stähelin, Chairman of the Education Committee.

Rara Avis! The Dinner started punctually at 7.30, and many of the Societies in the Colony should try to copy this recommendable innovation, as lately delays from half an hour to an hour have been quite a usual occurrence.

M. A. C. Stähelin was in the Chair; the Legation was represented by Dr. Rüfenacht, 1st Secretary of Legation. Amongst the other guests were Mr. G. E. DeBrunner, ex President of the S.M.S. and a Trustee of the Society, Dr. Kessler, Correspondent of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," Dr. Egli, correspondent of the "Bund," Mr. Stauffer, ex President of the S.M.S., representing the "Swiss Observer," members of the Education Committee and the Teaching staff of the College. The gathering numbered about 220 people.

During the Dinner the customary loyal toast to H. M. the King was proposed by the Chairman. The toast to "La Patrie" was proposed by M. Paschoud, President of the London section of the S.M.S. and was responded to with enthusiasm.

Youth predominated; it was indeed a unique gathering which on seldom encounters in the colony and the happy laughter and chattering of the company created an atmosphere of mirth and merriment, which was a welcome antidote in these days, when worries are not an unknown factor. It was therefore only right and proper that the first speech should be given by one of the disciples of youth. Miss Dora Fritz, a student of the College, proposed the Toast to the S.M.S. in saying:

This is the first speech which I have made in English and I know you will excuse me if I prove unworthy of what I regard as a great honour in being asked to propose the toast of the S.M.S. If, however, I succeed only in voicing with sincerity the debt of gratitude which every student here owes to the London Section of the S.M.S. and in particular its Education Committee, including Mr. Levy and the other tutors, I shall be satisfied.

It is with great pleasure that we welcome in our midst to-night Mr. Rüfenacht, First Secretary of the Swiss Legation in London, Mr. Paschoud, President of the S.M.S., London, and Mr. Stähelin, Chairman of the Education Committee.

We students, at Swiss House recognise that we are favoured among our generation in enjoying, as we do, the privilege of spending a period of training in the greatest city in the world. We have been given an opportunity of getting to know the English people with whom our country has always enjoyed such a lasting bond of friendship, a friendship which grows stronger as years go by.