

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1899.

NEGRO SUPERSTITIONS.

EVIL SPIRITS, CHARMS, DREAMS BIRDS OF ILL OMEN.

The Rabbit's Foot, a White Man's Charm—Cross Eyes Rather in Favor—Meaning of Dreams—Birds That are Feared, Bated or Destroyed—Satan's Winged Friends.

The superstitions of the negroes of the north Louisiana and Arkansas bottoms are divisible into four classes: superstitions about human beings, who possess supernatural powers, superstitions about evil spirits, superstitions about dreams and superstitions about birds. Of superstitions about human beings the most notable is the belief in the voodoo, which is a charm cast upon a person or animal, and the voodoo doctor, who is the person able to cast the charm. Some voodoo charms are cast by incantations, some by the evil eye, some by merely wishing harm to the object intended to be injured. It is noteworthy that no voodoo, or voodoo doctor, is credited with power to do good. The working of the charm is always inimical. The voodoo man can do harm to an enemy, but no benefit to his employer save such indirect benefit as may accrue from the enemy's hurt. In all the wide range of negro superstition there is nothing which will be productive of beneficial results, save only a few love charms and dreams which tell the dreamer how he may find money. Otherwise it is gloomy and brutal. The favorite voodoo charm, which is sold by aged witches at prices ranging from 50 cents to \$5 according to the wealth of the purchaser, is composed of a red flannel bag, some two inches long and an inch wide, which is sewed tightly all around after having been filled with fish bones, scrapings from the nails of a dead person, a dead baby's hair and one or two valuable dried herbs. This is worn around the neck by a string and is supposed to confer upon the wearer power to harm some one with a thought as well as protection from spirits. Contrary to accepted belief, the Louisiana negro has no faith in the efficacy of a rabbit's foot, nor, so far as is ascertainable, has any other Southern negro. That is peculiarly a white man's superstition. All the use a negro has for a rabbit is to catch it, in a graveyard or out of it, and eat it fried in flour batter with hot corn pone on the side.

Many evil spirits come to trouble the darky. Borne on the winds of the night, they are seen flickering in the black shadows of the trees in the moonlight, they turn up leering, mocking, drowned faces from the eddies and whirls of the great rivers they abide about lonely plantation cemeteries and lurk in the depths of woods so massive and thick that among them is twilight all of the day. The negro is an imaginative creature. In slave times the only leisure which he had for visiting came after sunset. He made long, secret journeys from plantation to plantation, with his heart in his mouth from dread of spooks and the patrol, and it is easy to see whence most of his fancies are derived. It is not easy, however, to trace the universal belief that a bite from a 'blue gum nigger' is death. Occasionally an African of pure blood has gums of a pale bluish cast. As, like other negroes, he is grinning almost constantly, his gums are liberally displayed and they are not pretty. Possibly a long time ago a blue-gummed negro bit somebody in a fight and his opponent died. Anyhow, belief in the fatality of the blue-gummed bite extends from the coast of Texas to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and there is little likelihood that it will ever die out. Indeed, one of these rare negroes is uncanny enough in appearance to jangle a Caucasian's nerves out of tune. The black man has had a hard time of it in Africa for some thousands of years and not any to easy a time since coming to this country. Handicapped by lack of education and possessing an unsurpassed capacity to 'see things' it is not to be wondered at that his superstitions are many and that nearly all of them have a gloomy cast. One of the few exceptions to this general rule is to be found in the affection, almost reverence, with which a strabismic person is regarded. The negro does not share the white prejudices against cross-eyes. He believes that a man or woman so afflicted is apt to be a special favorite of the dark powers, to be protected against many ills notable against snake-bite, and even to have in some cases the power of infecting others with good luck. A negro girl whose eyes look in opposite directions has no trouble in getting married, whether

she be of good figure and otherwise pleasing features or not. If any of her children also has crossed eyes she becomes celebrated and is looked upon as 'sho' nuff cur-jer.'

Dream superstitions of the black races do not differ materially from those of the whites. Indeed, many are derived from the whites. Also all Southerners no matter what their social standing or education may be, are strongly superstitious. In no other part in the world will one see so many men and women refusing to walk under ladders, and careful to touch each chair that is passed in going from a room, and anxious to see the new moon over the left shoulder, and fearful about the direction in which the salt is spit and so forth. Each of these beliefs, or dreams, they transferred to their slaves, and in addition the negro has devised several of his own to which he clings with unshakable tenacity. To dream of a bowl of clabber with a fly in its centre means that before the year is out he is going to be badly cut with some sharp instrument. To dream of a mud turtle in clear water means that some of the plantation stock, his own or his employer's, will perish in the swamp bog. To dream that the fiddler is turning means that there will be a death in the family. To dream of a marriage also means death as does a dream of death itself, or a dream of a heavy fall, or a dream of dancing long. The field hand takes a lead-colored view of the things he thinks of in his sleep. If he dreams of a rat gnawing his clothes, however, it is an indication that he is going to find a pot of gold, and many a negro having so dreamed, has watched the point of his plow with great care all of the season in expectation of seeing the pot turned up.

The African superstitions of birds are innumerable. Pretty nearly every feathered thing with which he is acquainted has some sort of occult significance. Some of these beliefs he has received from the whites, but most of them have been evolved from the inner consciousness of his ancestors, and they display for the most part the characteristic negro riot of imagination. The jaybird is regarded with comically grave disgust. It is the counsellor, guide and friend of 'O' Marse Sst'n' himself. The amount of confidence established years ago between the devil and the jaybird is to the African mind enormous. Plantation uncles and aunts believe that whenever Beelzebub can spare the time from trying operations he visits the earth, and he and the jaybird hold a conference of the powers, devising ways and means wherein and whereby to enslave the weak and feeble minded. Before this combination the voodoo charm sinks into insignificance in its ability to work evil. There is no defence against it save 'rassin' in prayer. This is highly esteemed, as the more sidious the 'rassin', the less work will be done in the field the next day. The jaybird is safe from negro attack, made safe through the negro's fear. A more impudent and noisy thief than this bird does not exist, but it may be guilty of any impertinence or scoundrelism about African premises and not a stone will be heaved at it. The immeasurable assurance of the bird, the manner in which it will pitter within a yard of the housewife's hand, its apparent utter fearlessness of the negro human, and the horribly harsh and argering cry with which it greets any attempt at resistance or signals a more than usually successful raid have had much to do with investing it with diabolical attributes. It is a very beautiful bird, but its beauty is only feather deep. The negro of the field and quarters looks upon it with picnic horror, and always hums some sort of hymn when it is around. On one Friday in every seventh month the jaybird visits hell, carrying in his beak seven grains of sand, and these seven grains dropped into flame make it seven times hotter. As this has been going on since Adam's unwarranted luncheon the hotness of the bird negro's future is long past computation.

There is common to all Southern boys and creeps a small blue heron, known as the shy poke. It is ungainly, timid and harmless. It has an infrequent cry that has something of the resonance of the bittern, though on a much weaker scale. This bird, which inhabits the depths of swamps and flies above morasses, the negroes have invested also with familiarity with the Evil One. To some of them it is known as the Devil's Doctor, and it is supposed to have a satanic knowledge of the virtues of herbs. It never eats herbs, living entirely upon minnows and small frogs yet it is supposed to take them when sick, and its gizzard and liver when dried and powdered are taken as specifics for many complaints. Shy-poke feathers are common ornaments in negro cabins, being held to bring good luck, and if the housewife can get a duster made of its wings she is happy.

The various forms of crow peculiar to the South are birds of ill omen. This includes all of the family of ravens and blackbirds, except the scarlet elbowed black bird which comes in the winter time and is good to eat. Possibly its brilliant red adornment save it from the condemnation. The purple grackle, which is a frequenter of barnyards and fond of the company of cows and horses, is looked upon with special aversion and a negro will waste an hour, which should be devoted to work, endeavoring to force one of these birds to leave the premises and stay away. Magpies, stallions and black martins are all objects of aversion. It would seem that the negro hatred of them is due primarily to their funereal color. The darky loves bright things and he is apt to

regard as evil anything which partakes of the traditional hue of the devil. An exception must be made of the magpie, which is disliked and believed to be an ill-luck bird as much because it is an irreformable thief as because of its irky cloak. All of this crowd of fliers partake of the nature of the Evil One and are classed as among his subjects. On the contrary, redbirds, cardinals, blue birds, tanagers, many of the green vireos and even the awkward pink flamingo are viewed with pleasure and their presence is welcomed about a cabin clearing.

The negro is musical in kind of music and is a great hand for domestic pets of all kinds, particularly feathered kinds. No matter how poor a family may be, it is certain to have chickens and ducks about. This is a racial propensity, and the marshes along the Orinoco river in eastern South America are now populous with wild Muscovy ducks, descendants of tame fowls brought over in the holds of slave ships along with their unhappy owners two hundred years ago. Yet one may traverse any of the Southern States from end to end and he will never see a caged mocking bird in a negro cabin. This is not because the African does not enjoy the bird's marvellous voice and repertory. He does, and will quit work at any time, if there is no one watching, to listen to the singing. But the negroes do not cage the mocker and keep it in their homes because they credit it with having supernatural wisdom. It is their belief that the little bundle of gray has an extensive vocabulary of its own, which is true enough, that it understands the speech of humanity, that it never forgets anything and that at the first opportunity it retails family secrets for the benefit of any of its kindred which may be in trees within sound of its voice. These in turn fly away to retail the news all over the country. In some mysterious way, which the darky does not attempt to explain, the information gets to the white folks. Petty thefts of such things as chickens, watermelons, garden vegetables and so forth are very common among the Southern blacks. In many cases they are forced into the trifling dishonesty by lack of an adequate food supply. One of them who kept a mocking bird would be regarded as doomed. He would as well go to the nearest country store and proclaim his guilt. Despite this distrust or dread of the mocker, negroes never slay it when it is in freedom, but their kindness to it is due to a desire to curry favor with it and not to appreciation of its beauty of body and voice. In fact the negro, who fond of its singing, looks upon it as an efficacious bearer of evil tidings and a common name for it is 'tattle tube' or 'middle hubd.' This belief is analagous to the white expression, 'A little bird told me,' often given in response to questions.

The cuckoo dweller on the plantations are down on the cuckoo. The women are especially inimical to it because they think its presence produces barrenness. They do not know it as the cuckoo, but call it the rain crow. Both men and women will break up a cuckoo nest wherever they find it. A negro woman who hates another negro woman will use up some time and patience endeavoring to mix a hard boiled cuckoo egg with her enemy's food. If she cannot do that, she will endeavor to sit some of the powdered egg shell on her hair. Many bitter feuds have been caused by this. A childless negro woman is a rarity, the race being especially fecund, but now and then one is found and she will always declare that some unknown rival or foe-woman has dosed her with 'rain crow sags.' The superstition may have its base in the cuckoo's refusal to build a nest of its own, and its success in disposing of other birds of the home they have constructed. The cuckoo will also devour, or destroy in wantonness, all eggs it may find in a captured nest, and if its incursion be made a little late in the season it is apt to produce barrenness in that particular bird family.

Negroes in southwestern Arkansas will not keep pigeons for fear of bad luck to the house, but this superstition does not appear to have extended across the Louisiana line. Few negroes in any section keep pigeons, but mainly because they are too lazy to build coops, not from fear of the evil omen. It is difficult to understand the universal darky dislike and fear of the wild goose, nor is any sensible explanation of it been offered. It exists, however, in many parts of the South. The owl is a bad luck to the thousands of Africans, but their detestation of it does not extend to its meat. They will eat it if they can get it, and if the geese are flying the negro able to procure ammunition will put in lots of time trying to kill them. The body, however, is plucked, baked and devoured as soon as it reaches the cabin. It is not kept hanging in order to become tender, for fear of the voodoo. The feathers are burned, though the superstition costs many a good black-house dame a pang, there being no better fan, or small broom, or duster than the wild goose's wing. Perhaps the common aversion to the bird in a state of life may be traced to its hooting during the night passages. Falling irregularly through the dark from the immeasurable ebon vault of heaven, the sound is eerie enough, particularly towards the little hours of the morning, when the precatory Sambo is looting a hasty way homeward with an uneasy conscience. The wild geese honks are said to be the basis for the Yorkshire legend of the Gabriel hounds, the ghostly pack which sweeps through the air in full cry, bringing death to the inmates of the house over which it passes, and a Southern darky has more imagination than an Englishman nineteen times out of twenty.

THE MINES MAY FAIL.

DIAMONDS ARE NOW GOING UP IN PRICE.

The Output of the African Mines Curtailed by Cecil Rhodes's Precautionary Order—Possibility of the Discovery in This Country of Diamond Fields.

The price of diamonds is going up and this is why: One day, about ten years ago, Barney Barnato proposed to Cecil Rhodes that they put all the diamonds at Kimberley in a pile.

'Good enough,' said the continent grabber. 'Pour them in. I'd like to see how they look.'

Barnato placed a large bucket on one of the sorting tables in the main office and into that dumped all the rough diamonds that had been mined during the year 1889. They filled it to the brim.

'Now,' he said, 'I'll buy that bucket of diamonds from you, Rhodes, just as they are, unsorted.'

The two agreed upon a price and then there was laid the foundation of the famous diamond syndicate which is now attracting the attention of the gem-wearing public; for when Barnato packed up the stones and sent them to London and Amsterdam it required the experts there three months to accomplish the sorting, and in that period diamonds became so scarce on the market that they began to bring fancy prices. Mr. Rhodes, who can awaken to such an opportunity without being roughly jolted, saw it was a good thing, and since then his syndicate has been buying up the Kimberley diamond crop in advance and doing out the stones as it sees fit.

The product is now arranged for until June, 1900, and if the demand continues to increase no one can say what diamonds will be worth a year from now. The De Beers Consolidated Mines Company has the world at its mercy. Not enough diamonds are produced in Brazil, Australia and other scattered localities to supply the demand of the city of Philadelphia alone. The jewelers in Maiden Lane say that the market value of stones is already 40 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. Every few weeks the syndicate makes a 10 per cent. advance and the buyers must pay or leave their contracts unfulfilled, which is a costly proceeding.

Meanwhile the De Beers Consolidated is going right along paying 40 per cent. dividends. There were nearly eight millions of dollars to divide among the stockholders in the De Beers Consolidated for the year 1898, and these fortunate persons will be enriched in a still greater portion when the accounts of 1899 are cast.

Contrary to the general impression, the man whom the directors of this company hold responsible for its prosperity is not Cecil R. Rhodes. He is not even an Englishman, but a thoroughly whole-souled American, who has displayed such wonderful managerial talent that the stockholders look to him, as it were, for their yearly dividends.

Gardner F. Williams, though comparatively unknown in this country, is one of the few prominent characters in South Africa, for he is head and front of the diamond industry and has metamorphosed the town of Kimberley from a straggling settlement into a model city. He is so greatly valued by the De Beers Company that no one ever questions his actions. He has often requested them to accept his resignation, but on each occasion the directors increase his salary as an inducement for him to remain. As for Mr. Rhodes, he seldom comes to Kimberley these days and makes whatever suggestions he has by letter. His last instructions were to decrease the output for the next twelve months, which will accordingly be done.

Mr. Williams is about 50 years old, of imposing figure and kindly face. He is American consular agent at Kimberley. His ambition is to establish a city where each man will own his own home and make money enough to live in comfort. To this end he has begun a model village on the outskirts of Kimberley which is called Kenilworth. Here there are beautiful cottages with the best sanitary arrangements, £2 10s. a month and purchase on installments. There are special buildings for bachelors and an excellent club house. The village is threaded by wide drive-ways flanked with eucalyptus, oak, cyprus and pine trees.

Making a model town, however, has been only a small part of this enterprising American's services to the De Beers Com-

pany. Every day he goes over the three mines now being operated, namely the Kimberley, the De Beers and the Premier. The Bullfontein and Datoispan though controlled by the company are not worked. He visits the convict station, the various departments of each mine, practically handles every diamond shipped from the country, and in general takes care of his 'family', which consists of 11,000 native Africans and 2,000 white miners.

The De Beers mine has now been carried down and beyond 1,400 feet and the Kimberley to 1,900 feet. The Premier is less rich than the two, but has a larger area and is very easily worked, so that a much lower cost of production compensates for a smaller yield. The amount of blue ground reported as in sight of the three mines is enough to keep them busy at Kimberley for five years, but Mr. Rhodes is cautious and advocates a constant diminution in the yearly output for fear that this vein of blue ground may suddenly become exhausted and humanity deprived of its supply of diamonds.

He has also instructed Mr. Williams to tighten the watch against diamond thieving, for when the employers learn that the stores have increased in value nearly one-half there is sure to be an outbreak in that direction, which the illicit diamond buyers will take advantage of. Formerly the 'boys,' as the Matabeles who work in the mines are called, did a thriving business by swallowing the diamonds, but Williams has put a stop to that by penning up these 11,000 natives in one great enclosure called the compound, and it is safe to say that no such habitation like this is to be found on the face of the earth. It is built in the form of a square and includes about five acres. Along each side of the square are built one story corrugated iron buildings divided into rooms holding twenty natives each. A high iron fence is erected around the compound, ten feet from the building, and guards armed with Martini rifles patrol thereabout.

Even with this arrangement, however, it was found that many diamonds were being filched, and it transpired that the boys stole them in the mines, concealed them until they got in the compound and then hid them over the fence to a confederate on the street. Williams thereupon had the entire compound roofed with fine wire netting, and this terminated the thefts of that sort.

There is very little opportunity these days for a native to dispose of a gem. He is never permitted to leave his compound, and when the end of his service is approaching he is kept for two weeks in a special compartment absolutely naked with fifty or sixty others. If the bry has concealed in his anatomy somewhere a precious stone it is bound to make its appearance in that time. A surgeon goes over each boy every two days and if he looks sick puts him through a sort of third degree that generally elicits a diamond or two. The company recovers about £400,000 worth of diamonds in a year from the native employees in this way.

Mineralogists are wondering if America may not do much toward breaking the combination's power by supplying new diamond fields. The newspapers for five or six years have occasionally printed the announcement that a fine diamond had been found near Milwaukee, in Wisconsin. These stories have been regarded by the public as of no particular importance, but not so by the mineralogists. From all over the world experts have come to study that field. The way in which the stones have turned up has been mysterious.

Diamonds are the result of certain definite geological processes. They are the product of enormous heat and stupendous pressure both brought to bear upon carbon at the same time and crystallizing it. The geological formations in which this curious process has gone on are known as chimneys. They are really comparatively small vents, through which enormous quantities of matter have been expelled quickly by means of some volcanic convulsion within the earth. Nature, in pushing a great quantity of practically molten matter containing carbon through a hole too small for it, brought about those two necessary conditions for the production of diamonds—heat and pressure.

But geologists, when they went to localities where diamonds had been found in Wisconsin, were puzzled by the fact that no formation of the chimney kind existed anywhere about. It was finally decided that the stones must have been brought from a great distance by a glacier, which dropped them when it melted. One of the great jewelry firms in New York sent its expert to Wisconsin to study the course of this glacier, hoping to find chimneys at the point where it started. This expert did trace the glacier and there found a chimney. There was only one, and it had been worked out. Facts indicated that this was done by a German mineralogist who was known to have been in that locality some years before. He had quietly worked out the chimney, taken what stones he found, and finding no other diamond-bearing spots had gone back to Germany, saying nothing to any one of his discovery.