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“SAILORS ARE SUPERSTITIOUS”

— Discourse before —

The Liverpool Nautical Research Society

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"SAILORS ARE SUPERSTITIOUS"

THIS title for to-day's talk is not intentionally provocative and should there be anyone in the audience who questions the good taste of a mere landlubber in drawing attention to the ancient traditions, beliefs and peculiarities of seamen, let it be admitted that in some degree everyone is superstitious.

Which of us has not said "Touch wood," and promptly proceeded to do so, when making some bold statement as to his good fortune, or to his avoidance of ill-luck?

If there be one here who has not given a coin in exchange for the gift of a knife or other steel instrument, will he please stand up? Of course, we always accompany the handing over of the coin with a superior smile at the utter nonsense of it all, but for all that it smacks of the dear old lady, who at any rate was honest, and who, when reprimanded by her vicar for bowing whenever the name of the devil was mentioned in church, simply said:—"Well, courtesy costs nothing, and *you never can tell.*"

REASON FALLS SHORT

It may be interesting at this point to explain that the word superstition comes from the Latin "super" = above; "stare" to stand.

Those who escaped in the old hand-to-hand battles were called Superstites—that is, they were "standing above the slain." It is, therefore, a very appropriate word for those primitive beliefs that still stand in the great battle that is being waged by reason.

Charles Darwin, an advocate for reason, used to tell a story against himself. He was arguing with a friend on the question of reason versus instinct and maintained that reason should always control instinct.

Unfortunately for the great Charles, they were in the London Zoological Gardens at the time, and Darwin went to the Serpent House and pressed his face against the glass partition that shuts off the poisonous snakes.

One of these objected to the apparent intrusion and struck sharply with outstretched tongue at Darwin's cheek. In spite of himself the great scientist jerked his head back out of a danger that he knew did not exist, just as you and I laughingly walk around ladders rather than pass beneath them.

Superstition is defined as: "Credulity regarding the supernatural, the occult, or the mysterious; ignorant or unreasoning dread of the unknown; a belief in omens, charms, &c."

Some superstitions are common to landmen and sailors, and these mainly spring from very ancient myths, but those in which we will interest ourselves are peculiar to the

seaman. They fall into several classes:

(1) Lucky and unlucky numbers, days, incidents, and persons.

(2) Belief in the influence of certain forces of nature.

(3) Manifestations of the occult.

(4) Customs and practices which originated in mythology.

To deal with luck first. The word itself derives from an old Anglo-Saxon verb "to catch," and is analogous to the German word *glück*, indicating "a good catch."

It would appear that the seaman has been concerned with avoiding ill-luck rather than with promoting the good variety.

For protection from malignant influences or accidents he carried certain articles—or wore charms. A very popular one was a child's caul, very much esteemed as a protection from drowning.

A few years ago it was common to see advertisements of cauls in the "Articles for Sale" columns of even such papers as "The Times," and prices ranged from £10 to £30.

It would be difficult to trace the origin of this belief, but I suggest that this caul—the covering of the child's head at birth—was regarded as a gift of protection from the spirit world which would protect its wearer from the evil power associated with the sea.

SEA MOTHER MYTH

It must be remembered that in many mythologies physical life was recognised as originating in the sea—the Sea Mother myth.

Even physical love and passion are associated, and are seen in the myths of Venus or Aphrodite—the goddesses who arose from the foam.

In many languages a name, some variant of *mare* or *mer*, was given to the Sea Mother. *Mer* is, of course, the actual word for sea in the French language, and in English we have Mary, Martha, Miriam, &c. In fact, even to-day, when we are troubled with a specially horrible dream we are, according to the Norse myth, visited by the spirit of this terrifying mother, which appropriately we call a *nightmare*.

Then there were certain numbers, or sequences of numbers which were considered as significant. A full lecture might be given on this subject of numbers alone, but I may only make brief reference to it now. The ancients regarded numbers as something much more important than merely arithmetic; numbers had sex—even numbers, feminine; odd numbers, masculine; and aggregations represented aspects of Ultimate Truth.

For instance, number one, male—and, as there is no number before it, one was the number of God—Source—Life—and the Sun. His symbol, was number one also, and God was a Father.

Number two, even, feminine—the

moon for symbol—associated with human love, because two was two ones "united"; in fact they became one.

Three—male again—was the product of the male and female, so new life was always associated with number three, and all the ancient trinities—Isis, Osiris and Horus, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, have this significance.

There were other triads—the Three Graces, the Three Fates, the Three Furies, also the Three Wishes of our fairy tales, even the exploded theory that a drowning person sinks three times.

Anything feminine was regarded as unlucky by the ancients, and in this matter of number it is interesting to note that even to-day all naval warship salutes are given in odd numbers.

The exception in this matter of odds and evens was 13. There are several explanations of this. Very early counting was based on the fingers of the hand.

In Roman numerals you will observe they show I., II., III., IIII. as up-pointing fingers; five was indicated by closing the fingers and holding up the hand with thumb at an angle making V. or 5; in fact, two V.'s are set point to point, making X. = 10.

THE UNKNOWN

The ancients made a marvellous stride when they invented words for something beyond the product of two fives—11 and 12—but beyond this they would not go. There were, of course, 12 houses in the Zodiac, and anything beyond 12 was "the unknown" — "the to-be-feared," therefore unlucky. You will note that we restrict our multiplication tables to our "twelve times."

There are other important numbers, notably 7 and 40, but I must not dally.

The Scandinavian myth regarding 13 is interesting. There were 12 Æsir or demi-gods, and the legend has it that Loki came among them, making the 13th. This Loki was what we would colloquially call "a nasty bit of work"—he promoted all the misfortunes that befell men.

Very much later in the Christian tradition, Loki was replaced by Judas, regarded as making the thirteenth at the Paschal meal. This was rather unreasonable, as the party of that same number had many previous sessions together.

It is noteworthy that the poet Hesiod, 1,000 B.C., in his poem, "Works and Days," declares that the thirteenth is an unlucky day for sowing, but is favourable for planting.

Particular dates regarded as unlucky were the first Monday in April, assumed to be the birthday of Cain, and the day on which he murdered his brother Abel; the second Monday in August, said to be the anniversary of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and December 31, the day on which

Judas hanged himself. Fishermen were warned that if they ventured out on that day they would not catch any fish, but instead would find a corpse and shroud. Of days, Friday was the unlucky one.

It was customary to dedicate days of the week and the months of the year to real or mythical beings—Sunday to the sun, Monday to the moon, and so on. Friday was dedicated to Frigga or Freyr, the wife of Woden, for whom Wednesday is named.

FRIDAY

Frigga personified femininity, and apparently, in every primitive race and age, anything feminine was not only unlucky—it was something to be feared. All the savages' taboos have this peculiarity, and some have not quite outgrown this fear and mistrust of woman—this survival of the savage in man.

On Friday then, woman's day, no new enterprise would be launched or voyage begun.

There is an amazing story—which I have not confirmed from official records—that the British Admiralty, desirous of putting an end to this superstition, caused the keel of a ship to be laid on a Friday, launched her on a Friday, gave the command to a man named Friday, and, although it was a well appointed vessel when it left port, neither ship nor crew was ever heard of.

The Americans, on the other hand, remember that it was on Friday, August 3, 1492, that Columbus set sail from Port of Palos, Spain; on Friday, October 12, land was sighted. On Friday, November 10, 1620, the Mayflower reached the harbour of Provincetown; on Friday, December 20, 1620, the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock; finally, on Friday, February 22, 1732, George Washington was born, and if any of you suggest that this disposes of the alleged ill-luck of Friday I would reply that the Nazis and the Japanese will not agree with you.

We may note that the Romans marked their unlucky days on their calendars (there were 54 such in the year) with charcoal, and we refer to our good days as our "red letter days."

RIGHT AND LEFT

Not only number and days had sex, but we find that as there are two sexes the two sides right and left similarly had sex. Right, masculine; left, feminine.

Nothing on the left side was lucky to the ancient mariners. In Spain it was considered unlucky to step on board left foot first or to step back to shore in that careless fashion.

It is significant that in the earliest craft, before the invention of the rudder, the steering was performed by means of a large sweep run out aft just to the right of the sternpost.

The steersman stood on a raised platform or board, and I submit

that this was not only for convenience in conning the ship but it was symbolical also. Height was good, depth was bad.

The familiar passage in the Psalms, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help," has this significance, and this starboard of the ancient was the starboard—the right side—of the ship, masculine, and you will note that the opposite side was first called lower-board, then larboard—now port, but to this day the place, or side of authority, is the starboard. Moreover, starboard is green—the safe colour, and the port, feminine, is the danger colour, red, and so one could go on. Poor woman!

The elevated part, the poop or quarterdeck, was regarded as sacred; it was recognised that intelligence ultimately steered and controlled the ship, and God was intelligence, and to this day, although the steering and control has passed to the bridge, usually well forward of amidships, everyone on approaching the quarterdeck of any of H.M. ships must salute.

You will note, too, that obeisance is paid to the sun by hoisting the ensign as it rises, everyone on board being required to face towards the quarterdeck.

OBJECTS AND SYMBOLS

The motion of the sun is the correct direction to be followed for everything on board, and woe betide anyone who attempted to coil a rope in the opposite direction—or, as we might say, anti-clockwise.

In my native East Anglia, in olden days, a fisherman would not go afloat in a boat that had been launched with its bow turned against the sun. The daily issue of rum on board H.M. ships is made at eight bells, high noon—the sun god in his zenith, and after the messes have drawn their quotas, some residue—no matter how small the quantity—must be poured down the scuppers—the old libation to the gods.

The impressive ceremony at the launching of a new vessel illustrates how the traditions of our forefathers are observed by us—very little affected by the passing of time and the advancement of civilisation.

Students of ancient religions and cults know that abstract ideas were represented by specific material objects and symbols, e.g., blood symbolising life; wine, inspiration; oil, gladness and appointment; ashes, grief and contrition; salt, substance, and so on.

When the ancients had built a craft—when it was assumed to be an entity—the lifeblood of the sun, wine was poured over its bow or head, the seat of intelligence; a name was bestowed on it, an invocation was breathed, and a blessing, after which it was launched down the slipway over the bodies of sacrificial victims, so that literally bathed in blood it entered the sea—the fearsome element.

You will note also how parts of the human body have their counterparts in the ship—the head; the waist; the eyes; even the yard arms—in fact the Chinese and Japanese still paint eyes on each side of the stem to enable the craft to see, and avoid any unpleasant spirits of the deep.

To-day we have dispensed with blood, but it is customary to appoint a lady to name the ship, to break wine over its bow and to commit it to the deep with a prayer and blessing.

As the sun was the god of spirit, the moon was the influence on the sea, the material life. The ancients obviously had observed the connection between the phases of the moon and the tides of the ocean. The Norse myth had it that the moon had two children, Juki and Bill. These drew the water up and down. Juki, the boy, was the flood; Bill, the girl, was the ebb.

Incidentally, flood tide was regarded as good and ebb tide as evil.

We perpetuate the Norseman's myth in our nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill and tell how, after Jack has broken his crown or reached high water—down the hill comes Jill—the ebb—tumbling after.

UNWELCOME SIGNS

We will now consider other unwelcome or unlucky signs and maybe trace their origin and significance.

Here I would say that none is qualified to criticise the ancients' lore and legends who has not acquainted himself with the peculiar method they had of expressing their mental conceptions.

It may safely be said that they used allegory and symbolism to convey ideas for which concrete terms could not conveniently be found.

Even the Biblical stories of the Old Testament become perfectly intelligible and scientifically correct when one turns "things into thoughts, and the objects of sense into the ideas of mind," to quote Mary Baker Eddy.

The next example will show my meaning. To lose a bucket overboard was considered to be very unlucky, and one who has lost his life has, in Jack's language, "kicked the bucket."

Let us apply the method I have mentioned. Our word kick derives from the Egyptian word khekh, the meaning of which was "to recoil or to send back." The ancients described life as contained in a vessel—symbol of the human body—and a bucket, pitcher, or other receptacle represented the body.

Consider the otherwise enigmatic description of advancing decline, death, and resurrection of the spirit in Ecclesiastes, chapter 12. "When the keepers of the house shall tremble"—the hands here symbolise the keepers of the house, they tremble in old age—"and the strong men shall bow themselves"

— the knees here are the strong men which bow—"and the grinders cease because they be few"—here the teeth are the grinders which become few with advancing years—"and those that look out of the windows be darkened"—the eyes certainly become dim, or darkened—and the pitcher be broken at the fountain (here is the illustration of life spilling from the body, the pitcher or bucket) for "then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Could any more graphic description be given to-day? So to "kick the bucket" was "the recoil or return of the spirit to the Creator when the receptacle was broken."

The ocean tides also were considered to have some effect and correspondence with physical life. Literature provides many examples of this theory.

You will remember that Dickens in "David Copperfield" makes Peggotty, the old East Anglian fisherman, say at the passing of Barkis: "People can't die along the coast except when the tide's pretty nigh out. They can't be born unless it's pretty nigh in—not properly born till flood."

Similarly, Shakespeare in Henry V, act 2, scene 3, makes Falstaff die "even just between 12 and 1—even at the turning of the tide."

In Scotland, the influence of the tide has given rise to many theories, or superstitions, if you will.

INTERESTING SURVIVAL

Here again the flood was deemed to be health-giving to animals as well as to man. Lugworm, not used as bait immediately, which were required to be kept alive, had to be preserved in water drawn from the sea on the flood tide.

A fairly general superstition among fishermen was that it was unlucky to meet a woman on the way to one's boat, especially so if she spoke. This appears to be associated with the influence of Frigga.

On this subject it is interesting to find that in very early days it was believed that if you beat your wife you would be lucky in your fishing. I don't think women thought so much of this superstition.

One interesting survival is the term "strapping," which used to indicate one properly brought up by beating with a strap, and we often refer to well-formed and proper young girls as "strapping."

Almost equally unpopular were a cross-eyed person, a parson, a lawyer and a black cat.

Most superstitions were held in common, but this of the black cat had two schools of thought; with some the black cat was the emblem of good luck, and that seems to be the more common belief to-day. Originally the cat was held to be the

invariable familiar of witches, and black has always been unlucky—it was associated with death.

One wonders if the truth of the matter was that poor souls who had the doubtful blessing of psychic faculties in those days were shunned by their own kind and consequently had to turn to animals for love and companionship.

It is interesting to find that the great Blackstone, on whose teachings English law is based, declared his belief in the possession by certain people of occult powers. To-day, of course, more prosaically we would say they were clairvoyant, or clairaudient, as in the case of Joan of Arc—the possession of that faculty brought her to the stake—and in this day of scientific inquiry she has won canonisation for the same qualities which in an earlier day brought agonising death.

The cross-eyed person was out of favour because the eye was the most feared member of the body. In many lands women protected their newborn children from sight of any stranger lest the Evil Eye saw the child, and from the earliest recorded times the cross was the symbol of death.

PROTECTIVE POWER

The parson—well, his normal dress of black may have had something to do with it, but possibly the legend of Jonah—an evangelist whose presence in the ship bound from Joppa to Tarshish caused a great storm which was only allayed when the sailors threw the parson overboard—had a share in bringing parsons into disfavour.

The lawyer—Jack describes one such as a "landshark," and our mariner hates sharks.

However, it was early found that the best method of catching and of holding many fish was to grasp the tail, and that may be why many sailors swear by the protective power of a shark's tail.

I was recently assured by a respected friend, a retired master mariner, of Liverpool, that his immunity from destruction during a bad enemy attack on his vessel at Tobruk was due to his talisman, the shark's tail, securely nailed to a part of the superstructure.

Moreover, the same captain remembered that on the only occasion he had some black kittens—inadvertently poisoned on board as they were passing through the Red Sea—Jerry got him with a torpedo—as he himself had gloomily foretold would happen when he heard of the death of the black kittens.

Certain words also are held to be unlucky, notably pig, minister, and salmon. Some superstitions appear to be more prevalent in particular parts of the world, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Northumbria, the Orkneys, and Shetlands having many not generally held.

Objection to the utterance of the word pig is most strongly held in Holy Island, Northumberland, and on Tyneside generally.

It is probable that animals were associated with certain qualities and characteristics, e.g., lion with courage, serpent with cunning, dove with peace, cat with mysticism, pig with uncleanness, and so on.

I am tempted to narrate a humorous story related to the dislike of the Geordie for hearing the word "pig."

Some years ago when I was serving on the Tyne, a colleague who had to board a new arrival from foreign, thought he would tease the captain, a Tynesider.

After he had asked the customary "health" questions, my colleague solemnly went on "and have you any live animals on board, captain—any dogs, cats or pigs?"

At the sound of the hated word the Old Man jumped up with an oath—and grasped the metal fluepipe leading from the slow combustion stove.

I should say that touching cold iron was the antidote to the evil influence of the sound of the word pig.

Unfortunately, as usual in these vessels, the little saloon fire was fierce—the vent pipe nearly red-hot—and the poor skipper no sooner touched it than he hopped round the saloon, nursing his burnt hand—cursing his luck.

MAGICAL POWERS

My humorous, if somewhat unfeeling colleague, calmly went on, "dear me, captain, up to now you've only thought that the word pig was unlucky. Now of course, you know it is!"

The beneficent influence of iron and steel has a long tradition. The horseshoe has been universally regarded as the emblem of protection. It originated as the feminine symbol in Phallic worship, in fact, it is found as the Yoni in all Hindu temples.

The Romans were accustomed to drive nails into their cottage walls as a protection against plague. By some, it is said that the nailing up of a horseshoe commemorated the Feast of the Passover, of the Jews. Blood sprinkled upon the doorposts, and lintel at the time of the feast formed the chief points of an arch-shaped talisman.

A variant is the magical powers held to be possessed by the blacksmith. In Russia, notably, a blacksmith was a magician and oaths were taken over his anvil as we take them over a Bible. The special power and authority of the blacksmith are shown in our old custom at the Gretna Green weddings.

Before passing on it might be mentioned that the two prongs of the horseshoe were represented by the pointing of the first and fourth fingers with the intervening ones closed towards anybody believed to have the evil eye.

Next comes the objection to the killing of certain birds, notably the

seagull, the albatross, and the stormy petrel—Mother Carey's chickens.

These last were held to be animated by the spirits of seamen who had been drowned. Coleridge, in his poem, "The Ancient Mariner," tells of the calamity which befel the ship when the old salt shot the albatross with a crossbow.

A variant of the Mother Carey's chicken theory on human reincarnation is held in the Customs Service. It is held that seagulls are reincarnated Customs Rummage Preventive Officers—note the ring and curl of his uniformed rank.

Some years ago when running down the Tyne one day in a Customs launch with a rummage crew of three, and a probationer with us for training, I observed a beautiful specimen of this gull standing on a buoy in the stream—which we would have to pass closely. I told the youngster of the legend—he was duly impressed and amazed.

As we drew close to the buoy I gave the signal to the three members of the crew and they who were well acquainted with the legend, fell into the spirit of the occasion—and at the appropriate moment we sprang to attention and solemnly saluted the gull, our probationer hesitatingly following suit.

SNEEZING

The old bird, quite unafraid, with equal solemnity opened wide his wings—slowly refolded them, gave a most impressive bow, and let out a deep "caw." How we suppressed our mirth I don't know, but that youngster is now, 14 years later, doubtless handing on the legend to a newer generation.

Another strong superstition is connected with sneezing; if vented to the right—good luck, if to the left, ill-luck.

You will note how the association of good with the right side and bad with the left is maintained. The Greeks, Romans and Egyptians regarded the sneeze as a kind of divinity which foretold good or evil.

For instance, in the *Odyssey* of Homer, 1,000 B.C., we read that Princess Penelope, unhappy at the importunities of her suitors, prayed that her husband, Ulysses, be returned to her.

As she ended the prayer, her son Telemachus sneezed, whereupon Penelope felt vastly relieved, accepting it as an omen that her prayer would be answered. Romans believed the sneeze expelled evil spirits—and those present would say "good luck to you."

There is an old legend that before the time of Jacob, men sneezed once only and expired. But the Patriarch interceded on behalf of man and obtained a relaxation of the law on condition that a prayer or benediction follow every sneeze—thus to-day

in many parts of these islands, it is customary for those present to say to the sneezer "God bless you."

Next comes the ill-luck of whistling, except during a storm. An old volume of "The Gentleman's Magazine" for January, 1763, vol. 33, page 14, has an article by one Dr. Pegge (under the signature of T. Row) in which is written:—

"Our sailors, I am told, to this very day—I mean the vulgar sort of them—have a strange opinion of the devil's power and agency in stirring up winds, and that is the reason they so seldom whistle on shipboard, esteeming that to be a mocking and consequently an enraging of the devil, and it appears now that even Zoroaster himself imagined there was an evil spirit called Vato that could excite violent storms of wind."

The ill-luck attending "raising the wind" is told in many legends of many races.

In the *Odyssey*, for instance, where Eolus is said to have imprisoned the winds in a leather bottle which he handed to Ulysses, one of the sailors opened the bottle from curiosity and paid for it with his life.

It is my view that wind, and the whistling, and hissing noises associated with it, conveyed the idea of evil—passion, turbulence—to the ancients; in fact, was associated with mortal existence or time. *Tempus*, the root of time, is also the root for tempest.

APPARITIONS

There is a German work, "Testament of Solomon," by F. F. Fleck, which tells of the legendary power of Solomon over the wind.

It concludes in this way: "King Solomon asked the spirit who had come up from the depth of the Red Sea to tell him who he was and what was his business, and the spirit replied: 'I, O King Solomon, am called *Abezithibod* and I once sat in the first heaven, being the descendant of an archangel. Fierce and winged I was, but I plotted against every spirit in heaven.'

"It was I who hardened the heart of Pharaoh, when Moses appeared before him and also in the time of the exodus of the children of Israel it was I who excited the heart of Pharaoh and caused him and all the Egyptians to pursue the children of Israel through the waves of the Red Sea."

Associated with evil is fear—and the slang expression "getting the wind up" is our way of describing being overcome with fear—a striking adaptation of the ancient superstition.

The final class, legends of apparitions and queer appearances appear in the lore of every known literature, and, what is most remarkable, there is similarity in the accounts. We are all familiar with the passages in Psalm 107, verses 23 and 24: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in

great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep."

Many are dismissed as sailors' yarns, but with others there is a weight of evidence by persons whose testimony, if given on any commonplace matters, would be accepted without question.

Why one should dismiss the evidence of these people because it relates to matters outside the experience of the landsman, I do not know.

There are stories of phantom ships such as the French *Concordia* and the *La Belle Rosalie*, but the best-known is, of course, The Flying Dutchman, or *Voltigeur*.

The full story is told in J. E. Lockhart's "Mysteries of the Sea," but Dr. Angelo S. Rappoport in his work cites two amazing instances relating to this Wanderer of the Sea. He refers the reader to W. Basset's "Wanderships," page 57.

Here we have the testimony of English and American sailors whose logs as recently as 1835 and 1881 contain references to this apparition.

In one case in particular the second officer declared he saw the Dutchman. The captain sent for his nightglass and observed, "Very strange, but there is a ship bearing down on us with all sail set, while we dare scarcely show a pocket handkerchief to this breeze.

ALL AGLOW

"In a few minutes the stranger was visible to all on deck, her rig plainly discernible and people on her poop. She seemed to near us with the rapidity of lightning, and apparently wished to pass under our quarter for the purpose of speaking.

"The captain, a resolute mariner, said it was quite incomprehensible and sent for the trumpet to hail an answer when, in an instant, and while we were all on the *qui vive*, the stranger totally disappeared and was seen no more."—See English log entry by R. M. Martin, 1835.

Another entry was made in 1881 in the *Bacchante*. It runs as follows:—"At four a.m. The Flying Dutchman crossed our bows. A strange red light, as of a phantom ship all aglow, in the midst of which light the masts, spars and sails of a brig two hundred yards distant stood out in strong relief as she came up.

"The lookout man on the fore-castle reported her as close on the port bow, where also the officer of the watch from the bridge clearly saw her, as did also the quarter-deck midshipman, who was sent forward at once to the fore-castle, but on arriving there no vestige nor any sign whatever of any material ship was to be seen either near or right away to the horizon.

"Thirteen persons altogether saw her, but whether it was van Diemen or The Flying Dutchman or who, she must remain unknown. The *Tourmaline* and *Cleopatra*, who

were sailing on our starboard bow, flashed to ask whether we had seen the strange red light."

Sir Walter Scott tells a queer story of a Liverpool lad who became a mate on a slave vessel. Bill Jones, an old sailor, to whom the captain had taken a violent dislike, was one of the crew.

In a fit of temper one day the master abused Jones when the sailor was aloft on one of the yards, and Jones, giving an impertinent and saucy reply, which the master regarded as amounting to mutiny, was shot by a blunderbuss loaded with slugs.

Bill was carried down, mortally wounded, and, fixing his eyes on the captain, he said: "Sir, you have done for me, but I will never leave you."

The captain, by way of reply, swore at him for a fat lubber. He threatened to have him thrown into the slave kettle, where they made food for the negroes.

Bill Jones died, and he was actually thrown into the slave kettle. Strangely enough, the crew swore that Bill repeatedly appeared on the yards with them. However, the master scorned the yarns. He later invited the mate to his cabin to have a glass of grog. He was very grave and anxious, and then said: "Jack, I need not tell you what sort of hands we have got on board with us. He told me that he would never leave me—and he has kept his word. You only see him now and again, but he is always with me, always at my side, and never out of sight. I am determined to hear it no longer."

SALT

When the mate was called away he heard a splash—the captain had jumped overboard, and when about to sink he made a last exertion, sprang half out of the water and exclaimed, "Bill is with me now." and sank, to be seen no more.

I mentioned earlier that salt symbolised substance, and so many superstitions are connected with salt that I should refer to some of them.

Because of the saltiness of seawater many legends told of the dispensation of God in putting substance or salt into the water as a punishment. The Moslems have one such legend; and the Jews had the story of Lot's wife being punished by being turned into a pillar of salt.

Material substance, salt, was the opposite of spiritual reality, which was of God. You all know the custom of throwing salt over the left shoulder if one accidentally spills a quantity.

You will notice it has to be over the left shoulder where the evil spirits are. Apropos, one may mention that in Burma the natives at certain festivals throw food over the left shoulder in order to propitiate the Evil One.

The subject of superstitions is vast and it has only been possible to refer to a few of the best known, and those which in some modified form are perpetuated by us in our present-

day conventions and ceremonial.

I was recently struck by a statement made by W. J. Fielding: "The caveman within us declares that man is still chained to the caveman within him—still chained to primitive levels. Beginning with the age of one year, the mind of the civilised child is a crude but unmistakable outline of the prehistoric evolution of the race.

"We know, of course, that the young child is a savage. He has all the emotional reactions peculiar to the savage. He likes to tie tins to the tail of a cat, to tear the legs from a frog, and the wings from a fly; to paint his face and to pretend that he is a strong and fearsome Indian, and even as an infant he likes to wield a stick, banging away in the manner of his club-using ancestor. Consider the rattle! Is it not necessary to the child's emotional instincts?"

Dr. James Harvey Robinson in his work "Mind and the Making" says "There are four historical layers underlying the brain of civilised man. They are the animal mind, the child mind, the savage mind, and the traditional civilised mind.

ULTIMATE WISDOM

"In an instant a man can become an animal, a child a savage. Sometimes the child mind is always predominate, and we have an imbecile. Sometimes the savage mind is always predominate, and we have a criminal. But, on the whole, it is the traditional civilised mind that predominates, a mind rich in a heritage of age-old tradition, a mind that still accepts without reasons, that still is tradition-bound and custom-bound."

In conclusion I would say that the sailor, whose calling brings him into close touch with the elements and forces of nature, compared with which the strength and importance of mortal man seem puny, has developed an attitude of mind which in the deepest sense is religious, even if certain manifestations of this attitude be regarded as merely superstitious.

Those of you who listened to the postscript to the Home Service news on Sunday, March 5 last, and heard the simple and eloquent confession of faith by a gunner of the Merchant Navy must have recognised the fact that in the true sense Jack's attitude is one of reverence and humility coupled with a childlike faith in the ultimate goodness of the Creator.

Those of us whose ways in life are more sheltered; or as Jack would say, "serve on a stonewall brig that ships no water," should not be condescending to these simple and great-hearted men. Faith and childlikeness -- as distinct from childishness -- are the ultimate wisdom, and one may quote the Founder of Christianity in reference to children -- and, I submit, also to the childlike mind, -- "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."