

"You are right," she said; "what I am going to ask you, need offend no one, only—begging your pardon—some people are touchy, and others are not. The fact is, I want a little help in the tuition of my children; they are growing so big," with a sigh, "and are getting beyond me. Are you inclined to come up to Cappers of a day, between hours, and teach them history, geography, that detestable writing, and arithmetic?"

I was standing by her side, looking down on her white handsome face, on the lines drawn on her forehead and round her mouth, and a great pity rose in my heart for her, although she was not a person who specially attracted me. She was growing prematurely old, and why? But she was looking at me eagerly for an answer, and I had to give one.

"And music?" I queried with a smile, for I had foreseen and rehearsed this conversation in my own mind many times since I had sung to Sir John, and it almost seemed as though the force of my own will had brought it to pass. How her face lighted up!

"Would you, indeed, teach music?" she asked. "If so, you will add ten years to my life, which, by the way, is a very doubtful kindness."

"Yes, I can undertake the music, certainly," I answered. "But perhaps," colouring in my usual stupid way, "you would rather hear me play first?"

"No, indeed. Did I not hear you play the organ on Sunday? Besides, I know nothing of music really. I take it for granted that you understand the piano."

"It is very kind of you to say so, for of course the organ is no criterion of the piano. But I think I can confidently undertake to teach it, for I have been very well taught myself."

"Oh! I am perfectly satisfied on that point. Now, will you please name your own terms and hours? If the former are too high, and I cannot afford them, I must go without you, that is all," but she looked at me eagerly, for all her nonchalant manner.

I made a rapid calculation (for that, too, I had re-

hearsed) and then I named a sum, as low as I dared without offending her. Her face fell.

"That is so very moderate," she answered, "that I fear you only mean to give me one hour before lunch, which you will of course take with us?"

"If I may, I should prefer having my dinner at home," I answered, "returning three times a week at four-thirty, and staying there as long as you like."

She stared at me in amazement. "You don't really mean that?" she asked.

"Yes, I really do."

"Would you stay until seven, or is it asking too much?"

"No, I will willingly stay until seven; I am so fond of children and teaching."

Her face became radiant. "You do not know what a relief this is to me," she said; "I am so tied with Sir John that I have no time to educate the children, and they are growing so wild. When will you begin?"

"To-morrow if you like."

"That is indeed good of you! Will it be a long or a short day?"

"A long one. I have the organ and choir this evening."

"Then that is settled," she said with a sigh of contentment, and rising from her chair. "Now I must really go home to Sir John; you do not know how grateful I am to you. Good-bye till to-morrow," and smiling her nicest smile, Lady Challoner passed out of the room, and calling her little flock around her, was soon slowly breasting the hill to Cappers.

I turned from the window, and sat down in the chair she had just vacated. What I had wished and planned had come to pass. No fear of not being tired when I went to bed now. Should I be able to do it all, and do it thoroughly, I wondered. I thought so. In former days, in the name of pleasure, I had gone through greater exertions than I was undertaking now for duty. And was it not worth any amount of fatigue to be able to conjure up that glad smile on Lady Challoner's face? Ay, indeed.

END OF CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

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## SUPERSTITIONS REGARDING CHILDREN.

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**O**NE Sunday afternoon a few weeks ago the writer and a friend were coming home from a short walk, in the course of which they had perambulated sundry old-world thoroughfares, formerly of fashionable resort, but which are now relegated to the poorer classes and to those who pursue philanthropic labours for their improvement and elevation. We had passed through these, and were walking up a quieter street, when we saw coming quickly towards us two women, one of whom carried a "long baby," a *very* long one. There was scarcely time to notice the spotless whiteness of the baby's robes, and its veil, and the bunch

of snowdrops pinned on somewhere, when one of the women produced a small parcel, and, pressing it into my friend's hand, gave vent to an excited oration, the only intelligible words in which were "Baby's christening-cakes—please accept—old Scotch custom." Before she had time to recover from her astonishment, they were out of sight, and we were greeted by a roar of laughter from loiterers on the neighbouring doorsteps. The parcel, which was neatly done up in white paper, contained a scone, two square inches of plum cake, and a piece of cheese. The sight of these did not add to my friend's comfort, and her one thought now was how to dispose of the "cakes," for carry them home she would not; and although it seemed certain that

some accession of good luck was connected with their acceptance, we did not think it a necessary part of the programme for the recipient to eat them. The children we saw all looked so respectable that we were afraid of insulting them by offering them the obnoxious packet, and it was not until we had gone some distance that we found some little ragged hatless specimens of humanity, to whom the contents were only too great a treat.

What the meaning of the above episode was, and we were sure it had a meaning, remained a mystery for some time. At length, after some research, we have found an explanation of it, and the following is a brief account of this and other superstitions respecting children. The subject is an exceedingly interesting one, and deserves considerably fuller treatment than comes within the scope of the present paper.

It is said to be lucky for a mother or nurse, on taking a child to church to be christened, to give bread and cheese to the first person she meets, to insure prosperity in the after-career of the infant. The "first-foot," on receiving the bread and cheese, is expected to turn and walk a short distance with the child to show his good-will. Sleeping on the "children's cheese" is supposed to have much the same virtue for predicting future events as sleeping on bride's cake has.

In the East, children, even those of wealthy parents, are often kept untidy and dirty, in order to avoid attracting the attention of the dreaded Evil Eye, which, it is feared, may do them some harm; whereas, if they are dirty and untidy, it may overlook them, or turn from them in disgust. It may not be known to all that in this country a similar result is attained by simply holding the child by the dress with its head downwards for a few seconds every morning! The spell of the Evil Eye may also be removed by the mother borrowing a sixpence from a neighbour, putting it in a basin of water, and then washing the child with the water so charmed.

Some very curious superstitions with regard to the ailments of children are believed in implicitly in some parts of the country. In the Isle of Man it is thought that they may be preserved from disease by placing them in the hopper of a water flour-mill while the wheel makes three revolutions; and in order to prove efficacious, this ceremony must be gone through at a time when the ministers of the district are preaching in their pulpits; consequently Sunday is the day most frequently chosen to do it on. Mrs. Ewing mentions this superstition in her charming tale "Jan of the Windmill." Little Miss Amabel Adeline Ammaby had whooping-cough, and after every heard-of cure had been tried, "even to a frog put into the dear child's mouth, and drawed back by its legs, that's supposed to be a certain cure, but only frightened it into a fit I thought it never would have come out of" (p. 35), her credulous nurse brought her to the windmill in the temporary absence of Lady Louisa Ammaby,

the child's mother; "for they do say where I come from, that if a miller that's the son of a miller holds a child that's got the whooping-cough in the hopper of a mill whilst the mill's going, it cures them, however bad they be" (p. 35). The miller did it with much fear and trembling, and the result was that "the baby got well. Whether the mill-charm worked the cure, or whether the fine fresh breezes of that healthy district made a change for the better in the child's state, could not be proved" (p. 37).

In Eastern lands sick children are cured by weighing them at the tomb of a saint, the corresponding weight, consisting of money, to be given to the Church.

Probably many people know the lines—

"Monday's bairn is fair o' face,  
Tuesday's bairn is fu' o' grace;  
Wednesday's bairn is fu' o' woe,  
Thursday's bairn has far to go;  
Friday's bairn is lovin' and givin',  
Saturday's bairn works hard for its livin';  
But the bairn that is born on the Sabbath Day  
Is happy and lucky, and wise and gay."

Sleep and dreams have many curious interpretations. Amongst the ancients, sleep was depicted as a female figure with black unfolded wings, having in her left hand a white child, and in her right hand a black child, the image of death. If a poor person dreams of children, he is likely to become rich; while to dream of gooseberries betokens that the dreamer will be the parent of many children. When a child smiles in its sleep, it is said to see angels.

Sailors, who are among the most superstitious of mortals, are of opinion that to have women or children on board a ship will insure luck.

Fairies are supposed to have something to do with the welfare of children. Unless the mother is careful to nail a horse-shoe over the door, or to put a piece of rowan-tree in the cradle, they may remove the child from its cradle, substituting another one for it. In some cases, when procurable, a dose of medicine from a witch, administered to the changeling, will send it back to fairyland or to some equally unknown place to which it belongs.

Speaking of witches—a witch in Perthshire used to cure children by means of sundry invaluable decoctions, one of which, an infallible remedy, was a cake made of meal obtained from nine different women.

Many superstitions, having been handed down from father to son, are of such great antiquity that their origin cannot be discovered. Often they have acted as strong fetters, preventing the free action of men's wills. It is obvious that, although in many cases bereft of their original meaning, remnants of them still remain even in the present more enlightened age, with its progress of science, civilisation, and above all Christianity, which in reality is the only true antidote that will do away with these beliefs of the darker ages.

E. G. M.