

MISCELLANEA.

LINCOLNSHIRE SUPERSTITIONS.

I AM a Lincolnshire man by birth and spent all my early years in the Lincolnshire marshes, where underneath a thin veneer of Christianity there still exists a solid foundation of pure paganism. It is a most remarkable fact that in the very district which was once known as the "Land of Mary," say from 1200 to 1550, there is scarce a trace left of mediævalism, but any amount of Norse paganism.

We had a great deal of ague in the marshes in those days, and my dear mother dispensed much quinine amongst the poor. I often took it to their houses for her. Going one day with a second bottle to a certain old woman, whose grandson had a bad attack, I was met with the remark: "I knows a deal better cure than yon nasty bitter stuff. See here, lad!" And with that she took me into his room, and to the foot of the old four-poster on which he lay shivering and shaking. There in the centre of the footboard were nailed three horseshoes with a hammer fixed cross-wise upon them. Taking down the hammer she smartly tapped each shoe, saying words to this effect as she did so:

"Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Nail the devil to this post.
With this mell I thrice do knock,
One for God,
And one for Wod,
And one for Lok."

'There, lad!' she said, "yon's a sure charm that will hold the old one as fast as t' church tower when next he comes to shake 'un."

When I returned home and repeated this to my mother, she at once pointed out the extraordinary mingling of Christianity and paganism—God, Woden, and Lokki.

You ask me do I know of any other like Norse or other heathen

superstitions? Plenty of them. Here is an instance that happened to come under my notice within the last ten years:

We had had some trouble with the boys of the little town of which I was the rector, in Lincolnshire, about stone-throwing in the churchyard.

One day my churchwardens called my attention to a newly-made grave on which lay a mug and jug, evidently quite freshly broken, and said: "The boys have been at it again, and what's more, have stolen the flowers that widow D. had put upon her husband's grave."

I saw at once that no stone had caused the fractures. So, putting off my officials with some excuse, I went to see the widow, and said to her: "Well, Mrs D., how came you to forget to give your old man his mug and his jug?"

"Ah, sir!" she replied, "I knew you would understand all about it. I was that moidered with crying that I clean forgot to put 'em in t' coffin. I puts the groat in his mouth to pay his footing, but blame me if I doesn't leave out t' owd mug and jug. So I goes and does t' next best. I deads 'em both over his grave, and says I to mysen: 'My old man, he set a vast of store, he did, by yon mug and jug, and when their ghoastes gets over on yon side h'll holler out: "Yon's mine, hand 'em over to me," and I'd like to see them as would stop him a having of them an' all.'"

I have not time to write more to-day; but if you care for some curious superstitions about the elder tree, I can send you some that are worth preserving. All these ideas are rapidly dying out. But what is taking their place? I fear blank materialism to a great extent, and I am not sure that the change is for the better. Being a native, I had better opportunities than most clergy of learning these things. The people knew I was one of themselves, and they would talk openly before and to me, where to a man from another county they would either keep silence or, if pressed, feign utter ignorance.

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