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Term Report on Folklore

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Independent
at

PROFESSOR SHOEMAKER
TERM REPORT

FOLKLORE -12

By

DARRELL M. NIXDORF

Jests

These jests were collected from Henry Goldbach, a long time resident of Lancaster county. Henry is in his late seventys and is now employed as a gravedigger for the Saint Anthony's Church. Henry has travelled all over the United States and undoubtedly has a worlds supply of folklore, but unfortunately he is becoming senial and is not always collected in his thoughts. I talked with Henry for over two hours but all he would tell me were funny stories or jests and a short history of his life. Through our conversation he told me had heard many stories about Mike Fink and Davy Crockett but that he couldn't remember any of them. Henry incidently worked up and down the Mississippi on a flat boat while being employed with the Standard Oil Company. I want to express my gratitude to Mary Kauffman of Lancaster for referring me to this "old gentleman". Mary remembers going to the cemetery when she was a little girl and being amused by Henry's many funny stories and tales.

Henry asked me how many legs there were on a horse and I naturally replied that there were four. However, Henry informed me that I was wrong; there are eighteen legs on a horse and the

answer is as follows: the fore legs which make four, the two in the rear which make six, two on each side which make ten, one on each corner which make fourteen, and two in front and two behind which make eighteen.

Henry asked me when six and five made twelve and I replied that I didn't know. Henry told me that he has six brothers and five sisters and himself makes twelve children.

Henry told me that since I was a college student I should know my grammar and wanted to test me on it. I agreed and he asked me which is correct: seven and five or eleven or seven and five is eleven. I guess I was too sharp for Henry because I told him that neither is correct; seven and five make twelve. Henry told me that he has been catching people on that one for as far back as he can remember.

Henry told me that one time a little boy came to him and asked if he could give him some problem that he could stump his father on. Henry gave him this one. If you have a grave thirty-six inches wide and six feet long - six feet deep how much dirt is there? The father replied that he would have to have a paper and pencil to get the answer. The little boy told his daddy

there wasn't any dirt; it was a grave and there wasn't anything in it.

Henry told me the story about the preacher walking along a country road on his way to York. He stopped and asked a farmer which way he should go to get to York. The farmer told him to go up the road and he would come to Reifensnyder's barn, then Reifensnyder's chicken house, then Reifensnyder's house, then Reifensnyder's outhouse, after that he would come to a fork in the road - if he took the fork to the right he would come to York. The preacher asked the farmer if he knew who he was and the farmer replied no but that didn't matter, if he didn't follow those directions he wouldn't get to York.

Henry told me a story about an old negro he knew in Alabama. The negro (Jake) had lost his hound dog and couldn't find it anywhere. Jake said to Henry, "Bass that old hound dog been missen for days now and I aint found him nowhere." "Bass he says I been hearin that old hound dog whinin for days but I can't find him nowhere, Bass I is scared." Henry told Jake to go over to the old tree in the yard and look in the hole on the ground. Jake bent down and there was

his hound-dog inside with four little puppies. Jake sure was surprised and happy.

Henry told me he has been telling these jokes for years and he still gets enjoyment out of telling them.

Local Folk-Beliefs

Henry Fenstermacher is an old man close to seventy-six and has lived around Lancaster County all his life. Henry was born in Strasburg and began teaching school when he was sixteen, he taught school all over Pa. and for a long time in Lancaster County. Henry quit teaching school when he was forty-five and went to work for the Railroad Postal System from which he retired at sixty-five. He now lives in a boarding house on the Lincoln highway East. Henry liked to talk about superstitions and he knew many of them and I will list them as he told them to me.

"To win every game of cards that you play, tie the heart of a bat with a red string to your right arm and you will win every game of cards you play."

"To prevent hawks from catching chickens, heat the poker in the fire until it is red hot; then take it out and make a young lady whisper to it the name of her lover. The hawks will leave."

"To put your left foot on the ground first when getting out of bed in the morning will surely bring bad luck."

"Avoid meeting a tailor; to encounter one is an omen of ill."

"If a cat runs across your path, start over again, or bad luck will follow."

"To turn back after having started on an errand or trip will bring bad luck."

"If you kill a snake, particularly a blacksnake, and hang it on a fence or on the limb of a tree, rain will come."

"A snake never dies till sundown."

"Carry a buckeye in your pocket and you will never have rheumatism."

"Thunder on April Fool's day brings good luck."

"Eggs laid on Good Friday or on Sunday keep longer than any other; but butter made on Friday is never very palatable."

"Should a bee, or any of its species, buzz about your room, you may expect pleasant visitors."

"When a wild bird flies into the house its visit is intended as a warning of approaching evil."

"When dogs howl at night a relative or neighbor is about to die."

"Never sweep a house after removing from it. This will cause sorrow to both yourself and the new occupant."

"A cat sleeping near the mouth of a sleeping baby steals the breath of the latter and will cause its early death."

"If the moon shines upon a sleeping person mental aberration will ensue."

"If you cut your finger nails on Sunday, bad luck will come, cut them on Saturday you will see your sweetheart on Sunday, cut them on Monday, and you will have good luck."

"Should you dream of a death, you will hear of a wedding; should you dream of a wedding, you will hear of a death."

"When a cat runs wildly about the house rain is at hand."

"The crowing of a rooster near the door is a sign that you are going to receive visitors."

"The counting of chickens or lambs in the spring will cause ill luck."

"When a wren whistles around the house rain is sure to come."

"Always bury or burn a tooth which has been extracted. If a dog should get hold of the tooth a dog's tooth will grow in its place."

"If a child cries on its birthday it ceases growing for a year."

Henry Fenstermacher told me that witches and witchcraft were not uncommon in Lancaster county. He told me about one of these so called "witches" that he remembers hearing about in his childhood and seemed to know her history quite well. "Mammy" Henderson as she was called died in 1876. She was accused of putting spells on people and was blamed for all sorts of diabolical things. She was thought to be insane and was tried before the Court but she was acquitted of being a lunatic. Her home was located near Walnut and Malberry street and there never was a single pane a glass in the house because the people were always stoning her house and breaking them out. After her death they found barrels of stones in the house that she had collected and saved. Many of her relatives were also made to suffer because they knew "Mammy". Henry told me that she was warm in her friendship but bitter towards those who had wronged her. Though eccentric, she was homeless, and apparently a much-abused woman.

"Mammy" Henderson never harmed a creature but she was persecuted because many thought that she was a witch. It was reported that she nursed many a person in this city who had been afflicted with smallpox. She appears to have been not half as bad as she was painted.

Negro Folk-Tales

I became acquainted with this colored woman while doing a term paper on the Negro Church of Lancaster. She requested that I should not mention her name and since she was grateful enough to give me a few folk-tales I will be grateful enough not to mention her name. For clarification I will call her "Bessie". Bessie is close to seventy-five years old and came to Lancaster about ten years ago - just before the War. Previous to that she had lived on a plantation and then had lived in her own little shack as a member of a sharecropper family. Many of Bessie's tales had an Uncle Remus background and she mentioned that the Uncle Remus tales were told quite frequently.

Bessie told me a very interesting story about the moon. She called to my attention how the moon appears to have a very dirty face and told me that she has told this tale

to children many times. It seems that every time the moon want to change to a different quarter it drops down behind a big log to change so nobody will see it. Well one night just as the moon had dropped down behind the log to change to a new quarter a man come along with a bag of charcoal over his shoulder; he went behind the log at the wrong time - just as the moon was changing. Well, both the man and the moon were scared to death. The man dropped his bag of charcoal and ran for home as fast as he could. The moon started to run also but in the confusion it tripped over the bag of charcoal and went rolling thru it; consequently the moon got all dirty and to this day the moon still has a dirty face.

One time the fox and the rabbit went out hunting; after a while they became hungry so they decided to cook some of their catch but they didn't have any fire so the fox went off to the big hole in the edge of the woods where the sun always came up, he was going to get some fire from the sun. Well, he sat down beside the hole and waited and waited for the sun to come up. Finally he laid down beside the hole and fell asleep. In the meantime the rabbit had gone home with the

food. While the fox was sleeping the sun came up. Now the fox had been sleeping with his feet over the hole and when the sun came up his legs were scorched and that is why the fox has black legs to this day.

This story is about the old nigger fool and his luck. This old nigger man had a big corncrib full of corn but every night a little bit of the corn was missing. He decided he was going to set out there all night and find out where it was going.

Well along about midnight he hears scratchin in his corn crib and he sees a whole band of squirrels carrying his corn out of the crib, so he follows them. Well these squirrels carry the corn down to the river and each one jumps on a piece of bark and paddles over to the shore with a piece of corn with them. Well the old nigger decides to go over there and see if he can find out where they are hiding it. The next day he takes his shot gun and goes across the river. Well he jumps a rabbit and he takes a shot at it, just as he did the rabbit ran into a nest of partridges and he killed the rabbit and eleven partridges. Well just as he shot, an old turkey gobbler flew up into a poplar tree and he banged away at it also and it fell dead but remained lodged in the poplar tree.

One of the partridges was injured and ran into the bushes; the old nigger followed the injured partridge and found it ran into a nest of turkey eggs so he now had one rabbit, eleven partridges, a hatfull of turkey eggs, and one turkey up in a tree. He climbed up the tree and found the turkey stuck in a hole; when he pulled it out there was all of his corn. When he started to chop down the tree he found it was loaded with honey so he picked up his game and started home to get his wagon to collect the honey and his corn. Well sir, he jumped another rabbit, but he didnt have anymore shells so he threw his gun at the rabbit; when he reached down to pick up his gun the ground began to give way and he fell into a big hole and right at the bottom was a keg of maney. He took his maney home and came back with his wagon and drained five barrels of honey out of that tree. Then he chopped it down and found more corn than he ever had in his crib. - those squirrels had been stealin someone else's corn. Well sir, just because those squirrel were carrying off that lucky ole niggers corn he now had one rabbit, one turkey, a hatfull of turkey eggs, eleven partridges, five barrels of honey, more corn than he had last, and a whole barrel of maney.

Chinese Folk-Tales

I would like to include in this report some Chinese folk-tales that I heard while I was in China. As you know, the Chinese place great emphasis upon story-telling and it has been a part of the family institution for hundreds of years. I'm sorry to say that these three stories are the only ones that I can recall. A young Chinese girl, with whom I was well acquainted, told me these stories. They come from around North China, mainly from the Peiping area. I thought I would include these stories because I have been telling them for years myself and they are well known by my own family.

The first one deals with a serpent-like creature called a "wamba". The Chinese whenever they want to call a person the worst thing they can do so by calling the person a "wamba". It seems a large turtle came out of the sea but couldn't find one of its own kind with which to mate, however, a large snake came along and the two had intercourse. The outcome of the match were creatures half turtle and half snake that were called "wambas". Since the snake and the turtle are regarded as evil creatures the "wamba" is a double whammy and a person is regarded

very low if someone refers to him as a "wamba". It is interesting to note that there is a large statue of the "wamba" in front of the Emperor's Palace within the Forbidden City.

The story is told of the young Chinese scholar who was very fond of women and was always flirting with them. One day he approached a carriage in which a beautiful young fairy princess was traveling. However, the young scholar could not keep his eyes away from the young princess and she became annoyed; she picked up a handful of dirt and threw it into his eyes. The young scholar terrified ran home, where in a few days, he became blind. He turned to religion and for a year devoted himself to religion. Then one day he heard a voice within his left eye saying, "It's pitch black here, enough to kill one!", the right eye replied: "Let's take a stroll to cheer ourselves up." The young scholar felt an itching in his nose and his two pupils ran down his inner nose and out into the garden. Presently they returned, but this continued for days until the young scholar heard a voice within his left eye say: "This round-about way is too bothersome; come over and help me break a hole thru this wall and we will be able to see without going outside." The young scholar felt a terrible pain within

his eye but in a few seconds he was able to see again. Upon close examination he found his left eye now had two pupils and he was able to see as well as before. The young scholar became known as the student with the talking eye-pupils.

Once there was a countryman selling pears in the market. They were very sweet and fragrant, but the price was high. A Taoist priest in a ragged hood and coarse robe stood before the cart and begged for one. The countryman shouted at him to be off, and as he did not go, the countryman grew angry and cursed and swore at him. The priest said: "On your cart are several hundred pears and I, an old priest, beg only for one, which would not be a great loss to you: why then become angry?" The crowd standing around urged the countryman to get rid of a bad pear and let him go, but the countryman refused. A shopkeeper in the market place, finding the commotion intolerable, brought out some coins, bought a pear, and handed it to the priest. The priest bowed his thanks and said to the crowd: "We priests who have given up our names do not understand stinginess. Now I have very fine pears, so let me offer some to you all." One of the crowd asked: "Since you have pears of your own, why not eat those?" And the

priest replied: "Because I first need one of these cores to grow them from." Saying which, he held the pear in both hands and finished it in big bites. Then he took the core and hurried it in the earth. Next he asked the market people for hot water and someone brought him a pail of hot water. The priest took the water and poured it on the spot where he had hurried the core and behold a sprout shot up, which became a pear tree full of pears; the priest picked the pears gave them to the crowd then chopped down the tree, + threw it over his shoulder and walked off.

Now, from the beginning, while the priest was performing the trick, the countryman had stood among the crowd, his eyes staring - his business completely forgotten. When the priest had gone, he turned around and looked at his cart: all the pears were gone! Now he knew that what the priest had been giving away were his own pears. Looking more closely at his cart, he also found that one of the handles was missing, having been newly broken off. Infuriated, he chased the priest, and just as he turned around a corner of the wall he found the chopped-off handle, which had been thrown away, and he realized that this was the pear tree that the priest had chopped down. The priest was nowhere to be seen. And the whole market place had a good laugh.