

# 18 Superstitions

I CANNOT REMEMBER when I first began to reject superstitions.

My mother came from a very superstitious family. I remember how one day I put up an umbrella in the house and said I was sure it was not unlucky, as she had taught us to believe. My mother's reaction was swift. Slapping me across the face, she replied, "Well, it is unlucky to you." To me, that showed her anger, not bad luck.

Some British people still believe lots of superstitions, such as number 13, crossed knives on the dinner table, opening an umbrella in the house, putting shoes on the table, breaking a mirror, and so on, all being considered unlucky.

On New Year's Day, according to superstition, a family had to have a lucky "first foot", that is, the first person to enter the house after midnight at New Year. He must be a tall, dark-haired man, and he must bring into the house a parcel containing the ordinary things a family needs, such as coal, matches, other household things, and especially a bible.

On one particular night, as my mother had no "first foot" arranged, she made a parcel containing the "lucky" items. She took us children outside and asked a neighbour with the right physical qualifications to enter the door with the parcel. I was quite excited, and as soon as the door was unlocked, I rushed in

first, becoming, unintentionally, our first foot! I was short, fair-haired, and a girl! I was exactly the opposite of a "first foot". Can you imagine my mother's anger?

Punishment for "causing bad luck" made me examine the reasons why people believe superstitions. One superstition warned us that it is unlucky to walk under a ladder. I figured out that walking under a ladder would indeed be unlucky if there was a worker on the ladder with a tin of paint that might splash on to the people below. That was probably where the superstition originated.

I also decided that putting up an umbrella in the house maybe originated from the fact that people living in decrepit houses might have to use umbrellas to keep out the rain. Bad luck is surely due to family poverty, not due to putting up an umbrella.

The "unlucky" number 13 evolved from the story of Jesus at the last supper where there were thirteen persons. One of them (Jesus) was put to death and another (Judas) committed suicide.

In the next article, I would like to tell you how superstitions are sometimes used by criminals.