

Notes and Queries

[As contributions to this section, the Editors welcome small items of traditional materials and inquiries designed to elicit information about such materials. Records of facts likely to be lost or overlooked and inquiries which our readers may be able to answer are appropriate items. Discussion should be brief.]

● *Frontier Birth Beliefs*—The folklore surrounding the birth of a child in the Mormon colonies of Southern Utah and Nevada had its roots in England or Germany or wherever the midwife or the mother's people came from. The midwife was not trained in any school; she was appointed by local Mormon leaders who outlined her duties and set her wages at three dollars for each delivery. She was to be present at the birth, of course, and was also to return each morning for ten days to care for mother and child. After the tenth day the mother was supposed to be able to take over the household again.

Upon arrival at the home, the midwife saw that all the children of the family were taken away to visit neighbors or relatives. They were not to be aware of the goings-on. The father, however, was expected to remain, ready to help if needed. Always there was a big fire in the stove with the tea-kettle on and a large saucepan full of boiling water. Squares of white cloth were placed in the oven on a heavy earthenware plate to be sterilized by light scorching. A heaping tablespoon of flour was browned in a skillet. A large raisin or two were set to soak in boiling hot water. The mother would usually have prepared the delivery bed by spreading an oilcloth over the straw-tick or mattress, on top of which old, disposable sheets were folded.

The delivery was not to be hurried even if labor lasted for days. The midwife encouraged and reassured the mother; if complications arose, the midwife called in the Elders and they prayed at the bedside for the muscles to relax. Occasionally the mother was given a "whiskey-sling."

If the new-born baby had a double crown, it meant he would travel or live on two continents or have double interests. If he was one of the few born with a caul or veil over his face, he would be endowed with special spiritual insights.

After she had oiled the new body, the midwife sprinkled parched flour over the navel, then opened a raisin that had been in a bowl

of hot water and carefully placed the inner, meaty side on top of the flour, binding it all together with a tight belly-band.

Among the set rules for the baby's care were the following:

1. Keep the new baby warm. He has come from a warm, dark place and must make his adjustments gradually. Do not expose him to any bright lights, especially direct sunlight in his face—it will injure his eyes.
2. Do not let the children, or adults either, for that matter, get close enough to breathe in his face. If they want to kiss him, let it be on the back of his neck or on his little hands or feet.
3. Talk to him, encourage him to look around and respond, but do not tickle him to make him laugh, or in any other way stimulate him to laughter. It will make him stutter.
4. Do not cut his fingernails with scissors. Bite them off with your teeth as they grow long. Cutting them will make him "sticky-fingered," so that he will pick up things that do not belong to him.
5. Do not let him look into a mirror before he is one year old. It will make his teething harder and will cause bad luck all around.
6. Do not cut his hair before he is a year old or you will delay his development. He will crawl earlier and walk earlier if you leave his hair alone. [The hair is very important for old as well as young, especially the care of the combings. If they are just wadded up and thrown down or swept into the yard with the trash, birds may find them and weave them into their nests. Then the person will suffer from headaches all the time the mother bird sits on her nest.]
7. Do not toss the baby about, throw him into the air, or hold him up-side-down by his feet. It will turn his liver over so that it cannot function.
8. Do not feed the mother rabbit while she is nursing a baby, or he will be prone to run away and perhaps later to leave home.

The rules for the mother are as important as those for the baby. She should keep the child beside her in the bed for the first few days. After that, she should keep him beside the bed in his basket where she can reach out and pat him if he is restless at night. He needs to be assured that she is near.

She should nurse the baby when he is hungry. He will take only a little at first and at close intervals, but as the milk increases and his

capacity increases, he can take more less often. She should always lie down to feed him so that both mother and child can be relaxed.

If the mother wants the baby to be free of colic, she is to avoid eating raw onions, cabbage, lettuce, and pears. Rinsing out diapers in cold water and hanging them on the line in cold weather will also give the baby colic, as will his mother's emotional upsets.

JUANITA BROOKS

Box 303, St. George, Utah

● *The "Lucky Impostor" in Ceylon*—The following widely known and interesting tale was given to me by Miss Seemanthani Madugalle, a student at the School of Agriculture for Girls, Kundasale, Ceylon, in 1952. It will be recognized as Aarne-Thompson type 1741; it comes nearest to 1741A in Stith Thompson and Warren E. Roberts, *Types of Indic Oral Tales* (FFC 180; Helsinki, 1960).

How the Gamarala Took Sil

The *gamamahage* of this story used to observe *sil* regularly.¹ The *gamarala* asked his wife how to observe *sil*. "That is very simple," said the *gamamahage*. "Repeat after the priest what he says."² Before dawn the following morning, the *gamarala* went to the temple with a *pingo* load of rice and curry for the priest's alms.³ He knocked on the closed door and the priest inquired from within, "Who are you (*kowda*)?" Remembering his wife's instructions, the *gamarala* repeated "*Kowda*?" The priest, surprised at this answer, cried "What do you want (*mokada*)?" The *gamarala* repeated this, too. The annoyed priest called out, "Catch him (*allapio*)!" And the *gamarala* repeated this. The priest went to wake his boy before he opened the door. The *gamarala* inferred from the long silence that the giving of *sil* was over, and returned home, leaving the load of rice near the door.

¹ A *gamamahage*, or *gamamayiya*, is the wife of a *gamarala*, an average Sinhalese villager who shows himself to be anything but wise. *Sil*, or *pansil*, "is said to be the subordinate code of moral law in Buddhism applicable to all men: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to drink intoxicating liquors. A person is said to take *pansil* when he promises in the temple before a priest to adhere to these five precepts" (J. H. Senaveratna, in *Dictionary of Proverbs of the Sinhalese* [Colombo, 1936], p. 116). "The average Buddhist takes as his Sabbath the four phases of the moon. . . . On these days he visits the temple with a tray of flowers, . . . he recites stanzas, . . . he often invites a monk to recite, in order that the formulary of the Five Precepts taken by every Buddhist may be repeated" (D. T. Devendra, in *Ceylon Today* 2 [1953]: 1).

² Devendra (p. 20) says that "it is incorrect to use the word 'priest' in connection with Buddhism. There is no ministration or intermediary attached to the Buddhist ecclesiastic duties. . . ."

³ The *pingo* is a shoulder yoke, a flattened stick about four feet long, carried on the shoulder, usually on one shoulder, with a burden attached to either end.

Every night when going to bed, the *gamarala* would call out, "*Kowda, mokada, allapio.*" Surprised, the *gamamahage* asked what he meant. "Well, that is what the priest taught me, and I am reciting it. Do you know more than the priest?" replied the *gamarala*. The wife thought it was useless to argue with him, and so the *gamarala* repeated these three words every night.

Some days later, certain thieves broke into a king's palace and stole many valuables. It so happened that they were dividing the spoils behind the *gamarala's* house. Hearing the noise and thinking to protect himself with his *sil*, the *gamarala* called out, "*Kowda.*" The thieves were alarmed and stopped their work. "*Mokada,*" cried the *gamarala*. On hearing this, the thieves left their spoils and bolted for their lives. The *gamarala* and his wife went out later and found the treasure, which they took into their house. It was great wealth, enough to last their lives.

A few days later, the *gamarala*, feeling that all this wealth was due to the priest giving him *sil*, said he would make an almsgiving of half this money to the priest. His wife could not dissuade him, and so she made plans, for she was a cunning woman. The *gamarala* had a fine breakfast prepared for the priest. In the early morning he went and invited the priest, telling him what had happened. "I have never seen you before," said the priest. "Then it must have been your teacher," said the *gamarala*, "but you are welcome, nevertheless."

When the *gamarala* came to his house with the priest, the *gamarala* whispered to his wife, "Has our neighbor brought the curd?" "No," replied the *gamamahage*. The *gamarala* asked her to entertain the priest, and he ran to the house next door. The priest asked the *gamamahage* what the *gamarala* had whispered. She replied, "I don't know, but he doesn't intend to feed you. He went next door to get a rice pounder.⁴ You had better get away." The *gamarala*, returning, found the priest gone. In answer to his questions, his wife told him that the priest had asked him to follow with a rice pounder. The *gamarala* grabbed a rice pounder from his own house, and ran after the priest, calling to the priest to wait. The priest, looking behind him, saw the *gamarala* pursuing him with a rice pounder; he ran to the temple, and closed the door when he got inside. The *gamarala* thought, "What a funny priest," but he gave up his plans for giving alms.

In another version of this story, from Mapalana Boys' Farm School near Kamburipitiya, in Southern Province, near Matara, Ceylon, the priest asks "Who are you?" and "Why did you come?" and then says, "This man is a rogue." The remainder of the story is the same, but the continuation, telling of the pursuit with the rice pounder, is not present.

Another version was given to me twice: once by a Kundasale stu-

⁴ The rice pounder is a long strong stick.

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