



A Dictionary of Superstitions (Oxford Quick Reference)

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Is it good or bad luck to mention a pig to a fisherman? What does it portend when you break a double-yolked egg? Or when you witness a headless shadow? How many frogs do you need to cure whooping cough? And what's all this about black cats?

Ranging from the familiar to the bizarre, and including everything from spells and omens to rituals and taboos, this delightfully informative dictionary covers a wide array of popular superstitions, touching on virtually every aspect of human culture. They embrace family life and the lore of farmers, sailors, miners, and actors; offer advice on the signs to observe when contemplating a journey or a marriage; reveal the significance of animals, plants, stones, colors, food and drink, the elements, and heavenly bodies; outline the precautions to be taken after a death in the house or during a thunderstorm; and disclose the motives behind seasonal customs at New Year, in May, at Halloween, and Christmas. Each entry is arranged alphabetically according to its central idea or object, and illustrated with a selection of chronologically ordered quotations that indicate the history and development of each belief. And a thematic index helps the reader discover surprisingly coherent patterns in these mysterious and often misunderstood methods of comprehending the world and overcoming its perils, and shows the strong underlying connections with witchcraft and pagan religions.

Superstitions have never before been treated in such depth or on such a scale. An entertaining volume for anyone curious about the beliefs of the past, *A Dictionary of Superstitions* also makes a valuable contribution to the study of folklore, providing the first systematic account of beliefs that form an integral part of our social life.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This one-volume reference work on superstitions does not compare favorably with such works as Edwin & Mona A. Radford's *Encyclopedia of Superstitions* (Greenwood, 1969, reprint). Its two major flaws are a failure to spell out clearly at the beginning of each entry exactly what superstition is being covered and a tendency to plunge immediately into ancient examples of folk wisdom or incidents on the subject. This is not so much a dictionary as a trove of historical examples of superstitious behavior. As such, it has a very limited appeal to advanced scholars and limited appeal to libraries. It could, however, serve as a back-up for those who want further information not found in works like that of the Radfords.

- *Gordon Stein, Univ. of Rhode Island Lib., Kingston*

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Review

'Review from previous edition a browser's delight'

Sunday Times

'wholly admirable, highly readable ... a memorable piece of work'

Literary Review

'for thos who presumed they had little but magpies and spilt milk to worry about, it offers a whole new insight into the potential terrors of everyday life'

Books

'Touch wood, cross-fingers, this book will be a success ... it certainly deserves to be'

Scotsman

About the Author

Iona Opie is noted for her pioneering work on children's folklore and games. **Moira Tatem** is a former school teacher and an expert on superstitions.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Martin Adams:

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Jennifer Mendoza:

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