**Superstitions**

The Middle Ages was a time of great ignorance and superstition. Many of our fairy tales or our old wives tales come from the time when people actually believed in supernatural beings. Superstition is the belief or notion that is not based on reason or knowledge. Depending on how you look at it superstition can be interpreted in many different ways. In the Middle Ages, it was custom to pass down superstitions from generation to generation. The superstition could be to protect people from danger, or to keep evil spirits away. Some superstitions were just stories that were made up as a scary story to tell and others were just plain superstition.

Some of the superstitions of the Middle Ages helped to protect people from danger. An example of this is, breaking a mirror. As we all know, breaking a mirror is said to bring us seven years of bad luck, but what is behind this myth? Before there were mirrors people would look into reflective surfaces such as water to try and see their futures. If you broke mirror, then it was said that you would break your future. IF you want to reverse this bad luck, you must quickly pick up all the pieces and bury them. Another example is walking under ladders. This has been said to be bad luck for a very long time, but it is originally from the Middle Ages. In that time a leaning ladder resembled gallows, so by walking under it you guaranteed your death by hanging. You can reverse this bad luck by walking backwards back the way you came in while making a wish.

Another type of superstition is superstitions that keep evil spirits away. One of the superstitions that does just that is saying, “God Bless you” when someone sneezes. During the Middle Ages the people thought that when you sneezed your soul was temporarily vulnerable to Satan. It also was believed that the soul left the body when one sneezed. At one point in time it was considered impolite to with hold a blessing. Some believed that sneezing was a sign from God foretelling of good or evil fortune. Sneezing on certain days is said to bring good or bad luck. There is a rhyme to go along with this saying *Monday for danger, Tuesday kiss a stranger, Wednesday for a letter, Thursday for something better, Friday for sorrow, Saturday see your lover tomorrow.* Another superstition that fits this topic is the ringing of church bells. During the Middle Ages, it was believed that the sound of church bells ringing drove away demons. They were said to have hated bell music because it was made by holy things. When disease was thought to be the work of demons, they would ring the bell many times when there was an epidemic.

Superstitions could also be made up stories our equivalent to fairy tales. Examples of these superstitions would be Robin Hood and Bloody Mary. Robin Hood was a bandit who stole from the rich and gave what he stole to the poor. The common folk especially liked this story because it showed Robin standing up for them to the people in charge. Bloody Mary is a scary story that is still commonly told around campfires at night. But where did this story come from and who is bloody Mary? Bloody Mary was said to be a woman who died a horrific death or someone of royalty who was beheaded. To see her people will usually go into a dark room with a mirror and chant her name three or more times. You then supposedly see her face and she either tries to scratch your face off, kill you, or she does nothing.

Some superstitions in the Middle Ages were just superstitious and somewhat funny. One superstition is that if you have a vein across the bridge of your nose then you will die by drowning. Another superstition is that the number thirteen is very unlucky. It is especially unlucky if it falls on a Friday. It is generally bad luck for 13 people to be sitting at the same table. The first one to get up from the table is supposedly going to be the first to die. Salt is also considered an ill omen if spilled. Top reverse this luck the salt should not be cleaned up, and some should be thrown over the right shoulder three times.

It seems that the Middle Ages was a very superstitious time, whether it was to protect from danger or spirits, or if it was scary or funny. Even though it was thought to have been a time of ignorance, I can’t help but wonder what life would be like today if we didn’t know to say “Bless you” when someone sneezed or the story of Bloody Mary. We should embrace these superstitions as the culture of the Middle Ages and not as their ignorance. If we just open our eyes and look beyond the superstitions, we can see that they are indeed still helping us today.