have already done so; but as there is no body of the profession in Ireland whose interests at the present time need such safeguarding, it is essential that they should all be members of an Association which, from its numbers and great influence, will be able to exercise an immense power on their behalf. Anyone who reads the Irish daily papers must have noticed the constant tendency by Boards of Guardians to grind down the payment of their medical officers in every possible way. Indeed, matters have come to such a pass that in April of this year the Irish Medical Association sent a circular to the hospitals, medical schools, and professors, in which the disadvantages of the Irish Poor-Law Medical Service are clearly stated, and young practitioners are entreated to abstain from offering themselves as candidates for posts insufficiently remunerated. That the Poor-law doctor of Ireland is about the worst paid and the most thoroughly "sweated" public servant in existence is apparent from some recent statistics, which show (I quote from the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of September 22nd, 1900) that for medical attendance his remuneration is something under 6d. per head of his dispensary patients, and apparently anyone can get a ticket obtaining his professional services. Indeed, were it not for the control of the Local Government Board Poor-law medical appointments would be untenable at present in Ireland. Is it not true that many dispensary doctors, after a prolonged and expensive education, may work all their days, when located in districts where there is little private practice, paid little better often than a skilled mechanic, and when death comes at last they are fortunate if they have the satisfaction of knowing that their widows and children are not saddled with the debt necessarily incurred in their support and education?

I have no sympathy with those doctors who, owing to their own prosperity, overlook or do not admit the difficulties with which many have to contend, and therefore decry professional organisation. Successful consultants and men in well-paid practices may not feel the necessity for organisation; but do such questions as hospital abuse, club practice, medical defence, medical sickness and assurance societies, and Irish Poor-law medical mismanagement, not demand that we should be united and organised? It was said by the immortal Bacon, in the preface to *Maxims of the Law*: "I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from the which, as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto." It is surely the bounden duty of every one of us to try to live up to such an ideal, and to do his best to elevate that profession, to remove the grievances that press hard on any members of it, and above all things to bring contentment and happiness to all those who practise it.

It may be thought I have dwelt too much on the dark or disappointing side of our work, but I have done so simply in the hope that by union and combination such unpleasant features may be removed. No profession demands such constant and exacting attention on the part of its members as the one to which we belong. If we engage in any social pleasures, if we undertake any extra-professional duties, or if we plan a holiday we must always be prepared to submit without a grumble to their constant interruption; and yet, with all its drawbacks, who that is really interested in it would change it for any other? "Medicine," my old and revered teacher, Sir Andrew Clark has said, "is a most relentless mistress, but if we who are her devotees are faithful, she is always true." No profession is, after all, more unselfish or more useful than ours. We are entrusted by our patients in absolute confidence with every detail in reference to themselves and their families, as without such knowledge our advice would often be of no avail, knowing, as they do, that with us sealed lips are the time-honoured tradition of our profession. Of no body of men can it be said to a greater extent that they are both the friends and advisers of their patients.

While our work is to prolong life and to relieve suffering, our profession affords us constant opportunities of observing what is the most interesting of all studies—human nature; and the saying is a true one that the clergy see human nature at its best, the lawyers at its worst, but it is presented to us just as it is, without any attempt at deceit or pretence.

Whatever may have been the scientific advances in the

century now almost over, and no matter what fresh discoveries await us in the future—

Our ancient lesson will be ever new;
That priceless lesson will be ever true;
Time did not teach it, time will change it not.
This, this shall last though all our lore's forgot.
To give what none can measure, none can weigh,
Simply to go where duty points the way;
To face unquestioning the fever's breath,
The hundred shadows of the vale of death;
To bear Christ's message through the battle's rage,
The yellow plague, the leper's island cage,
And with our noblest "well to understand
The poor man's call as only God's command."
Ay, under every century's changing sky
Shall the Greek Master's triple signal fly—
Faith, honour, duty—duty calmly done,
That shouts no self-praise o'er a victory won;
One bugle note our only battle call,
One single watchword, Duty! that is all.

AN ADDRESS

ON

THE VULGAR ERRORS AND SUPERSTITIONS OF WEST SOMERSET IN THEIR RELATION TO MEDICINE.

*Delivered before the West Somerset Branch of the British
Medical Association.*

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President of the Branch.

THE life of a general practitioner holding 90,000 acres under the Poor Law, riding to see patients in twenty-one parishes, is not conducive to the treating of scientific subjects. I fear my subject may be considered trivial and yet it is full of interest to us all. Superstition is widespread among us, and is by no means confined to the lower classes of society. That there is a power of "working evil" has been believed in all times and in all countries; the origin of the belief has been lost in the obscurity of prehistoric ages. The belief in the evil eye was sanctioned by the Fathers of the Church and by mediæval physicians. Can you wonder that it exists to-day among us? Most of the vulgar errors are errors following the dictum of some supposed authority, local or not, just as our own profession has oftentimes blindly followed its leaders. The superstitions, although in a sense errors, rest on a much more solid basis than the dicta of men. I shall not endeavour to separate errors from superstitions. Sir Thomas Browne, writing in the sixteenth century, sets forth numerous reasons for the belief in superstition and error:

1. The common infirmity of human nature.
2. The erroneous disposition of the people.
3. False deduction.
4. Credulity and supinity.
5. Obstinate adherence unto antiquity.
6. Adherence unto authority.

He recites a long list of promoters of popular errors from Satan downwards, but his reasons by no means account for all the errors and superstitions of Somerset; they do account for many. I shall treat only of those errors and superstitions which have come under my notice.

I am sure these beliefs have a great bearing on our practice. Speaking from the experience of a life lived among the people I know they have to be taken into account in our diagnosis and prognosis. The modern scientific pharisee is sceptical, and yet there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy. The herbalist and white witch live to-day among us, to say nothing of the "doctor" the seventh son. These three carry on their practice oftentimes along side of ours without our knowledge, be it said, not infrequently to-day, to the exclusion of our efforts.

Conception taking place on a Friday is said to be unlucky. If a woman linger long in labour the child will be lazy. A pepper pot is held to the nose to facilitate labour. Burnt rag is invariably used to wrap the umbilical cord in; I know no reason for this. The placenta is burnt, as also the separated cord. The burning of the placenta seems universal. I shall try and show that there are deeper reasons for this than mere sanitation. If the placenta crackles in burning, as the number of crackles so will there be children born. If the umbilical cord be not burnt the child will be troubled with nocturnal enuresis.

The cure for congenital hernia is particularly interesting. The child so suffering is passed naked through a cleft maiden ash on a Sunday morning at sunrise, in a direction from west to east towards the rising sun. As the cleft in the ash unites so does the hernia get cured. The ash has always been held to be a sacred tree, the Tree of Life of our early progenitors. The sun typifies the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness. The direction, east to west, is a good example of orientation. The whole process typifies a new birth to complete that which was imperfect. There are various formalities to be gone through, for which I refer anyone interested to a paper by one of our late members, Doctor Mead, in vol. xxxviii of the *Transactions of the Somersetshire Society*.

Whooping-cough is cured by laying the child on the ground of a sheepfold.

Epilepsy is cured by procuring silver coins from friends—a coin for a year. The coins are worn as a necklace or bracelet. So are fits cured.

There are many ways of curing warts:

1. Steal a piece of meat and bury it; as the meat decays, so does the wart.

2. The sufferer places as many stones in a bag as there are warts, the bag is then thrown away, the finder contracts the warts; to find a wart bag is no uncommon thing.

3. By rubbing with bean-pods orcelandine, accompanied with prayer. My own were so treated.

A seventh son, especially if he be the seventh son of a seventh son, is much sought after, and is familiarly known as "The doctor." His cures of King's Evil are almost miraculous, his patients are attended to on a Sunday morning; both operator and patient should have fasted from the previous night. The cure is by touch and prayer. I knew a man well who declared to me that when growing up he seldom tasted food on a Sunday, his parents keeping a watch over him and deriving a rich harvest from his efforts.

Thorns are removed and inflammation subdued by prayer. I know a man who does a large practice in such cures; his patients often feel my lancet. The same man cures hemorrhage by repeating the following:

Christ was born in Bethlehem,
Baptised in Jordan,
The waters wild and rude,
The child mild and good,
Put its foot into the flood,
Bid it stand and turn.

A verse from Ezekiel is also effective:

And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, live.

The treatment by prayer is far less objectionable than by the application of cobweb or tobacco; cobweb is likely to be septic. The following prayer is efficacious for burns:

Three angels came from north, east, west,
One brought fire, one ice,
The third the Holy Ghost,
So out fire in frost.
Gloria Patri.

Goitre is cured by the touch of a corpse.

The treatment of sciatica or "bone shave" is radical. The sufferer lies by the side of a running stream, while someone chants the following verse:

Bone shave right,
Bone shave strite,
As the water runs by the stave,
So follow bone shave.

So the affliction is removed and carried away to the sea. John Roden lost his life in this way many years since.

It is scarcely a superstition, it is certainly an error to attempt to cure an irreducible hernia by a descent downstairs head first. I knew an old man who was persuaded to try and who came near to losing his life in the attempt.

It must be an error that a man can conceive or that a woman have a litter at a birth, yet recently I was asked to sign the following certificate:

This is to certify that John Cockran was confined in bed on February 28th.

I referred to the Rector of the parish.

I was called up recently by a farm boy who brought me a message that "I was to come at once; missus was having children, she had had one when he came away."

The belief in the Evil Eye, vulgarly "over-looking" or "whist" is widespread and deep-rooted, and well it may be since it is older than history; no class in society is free from it, no nation but accepts it. The magpie brings bad luck; the

ticking of the death watch is unlucky; the howling of a dog presages death. The savage sacrifices to propitiate an angry deity of whom he knows nothing. We fly to the white witch to remove the spell. There is a fast diminishing number of these white, wit, or wise gentlemen. The law is justly dealing out justice to them; they are frauds as great as the "witch finder" of the last century. Epilepsy, phthisis, and a whole host of ailments are attributed to the evil eye. "Her's a whist poor thing; her have a been over-looked," is a common expression, and off goes the patient and the friends to the "white witch" to find out who has worked the spell.

The power of the Evil Eye was believed in by the Egyptians. The Greeks appropriated it, the Romans followed suit. Amulets or charms against this power were as common among the Egyptians as among the Neapolitans to-day.

The ill-effects of the Evil Eye is produced in three principal ways:

1. By directly looking on the person or object to be influenced.
2. By touch.
3. Through the property of the person ill-wished.

What is the Evil Eye? Is there such a force? If such a power exists, I suggest that it is allied to hypnotism or to animal magnetism. Strip hypnotism from the charlatanism which surrounds it and yet there remains something which is not explained. Of the three ways of working evil that which is accomplished through the property of the person ill-wished is the most curious; it is for this reason I have no doubt that nothing is ever found in a vacated gipsy encampment, that the umbilical cord and placenta are burnt, and that many of our patients carry away their teeth from our surgeries. What class of beings possess the power of the Evil Eye?

1. Those maliciously disposed—the witches of our forefathers.
2. A class of beings who, against their will, work evil on their friends and enemies—a class we may term Jonahs.
3. People with a squint—vulgarly a north eye: "Always spit when you meet a man with a north eye."

It is curious that there are so few charms against fascination to be found among us. Egypt, Athens, and Rome abounded in such trinkets, so does Italy to-day. We read that Rachel stole charms from Laban, which Laban evidently valued, from the trouble he took to recover them.

The Jewish phylacteries were charms. All charms which did not consist of Scriptural texts were of two kinds: (1) Bright-looking ornaments to catch the Evil Eye, symbolical of some god or goddess, whose aid was thereby invoked; (2) they were of such a nature as to show contempt for the fascinator. This is in the main still so. The Thirteen Club shows its contempt by its name. We lift our hat in mock derision to a magpie. For the same purpose obscene charms were worn. The amulets of West Somerset are few:

1. The horse shoe.
2. The heart of some animal stuck with pins.
3. Some of the ornaments on the cart horses.
4. The gargoyles on our churches.

The horseshoe as a charm is interesting; originally horseshoes were crescent-shaped. The crescent is symbolical of Diana, whose attributes were "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness."

I suggest that the horseshoe was first used to show contempt for Diana and her attributes. Iron has a strong power over the Evil Eye, so that the horseshoe is the type of a double charm, and therefore more powerful.

I have come across a heart stuck all over with pins in a chimney corner, "to keep away they there witches." The heart no doubt was originally used to work harm to some person whom it was desired to injure; it had lost its original meaning and came to be used as an amulet.

I believe some of the ornaments used by carters on their horses' heads had a belief in fascination as their earlier meaning. The hideous gargoyles on our churches were no doubt placed against the Evil Eye; this as well as the fact that church bells had for their origin the scaring away of witches, seems to show how the earlier Christians adopted and utilised Pagan practices. A belief in pixies is common; these little gentlemen have all sorts of pranks foisted on them: they ride our horses all night; they lure the man late home from market to take the wrong road on the moor, and compel him to dance all night with them in their fairy rings, to the sore distress of his affectionate wife wearily waiting at home.