

MEDICAL DELUSIONS

MANY STILL LINGER FROM THE DARK AGES OF CREDULITY.

Superstitions Regarding Remedies For Disease on the Lower East Side In New York—Prescriptions of the Old Time Apothecaries.

An east sider in lower New York suffering from acute rheumatism was taken to the Postgraduate Medical School and Hospital wearing a pair of eels, long defunct and dried, by way of garters. He showed much distress when they were removed by the nurse, being firmly convinced they would cure his rheumatism in time.

The laugh of science to the contrary notwithstanding, medical delusions in surprising number still survive from the ages of faith. Any physician who practices among the poor and ignorant can testify to this, and it is in particular the staff and students of an institution like the Postgraduate Medical School and Hospital, which receives its patients largely from the lower east side, a quarter teeming with variety, who are made to appreciate most fully the extent of superstition regarding remedies for disease.

Italian immigrants are peculiarly interesting in this respect. They frequently attribute stomach trouble to cat's hairs supposed to have been swallowed and persist in eating eggshells to cure it. They also eat snails as a remedy for consumption, though here they are supported by a highly respectable authority—that of "The Accomplished Physician," published in 1656, which declares that snail water, "owing to the cool, clammy and glutinous substance of the snail," is particularly grateful to the consumptive. These Italians use castor oil whenever their feelings become at all excited, either by joy or sorrow, burn rolls of waxed paper in their ears to cure the earache and willingly go through the even more heroic treatment of lighting fires on their bare stomachs when they have dyspepsia.

The trouble with these people is merely that they have not advanced with the times, but are still holding beliefs which are held by the most intelligent and best educated men of a few centuries ago. An apothecary's shop in Queen Elizabeth's time was stocked with things that strike moderns as singular enough, considered as medicine. These were crabs' claws, foxes' lungs, stags' hearts, boars' tusks, sea horses' teeth, elks' hoofs, precious stones in powder, flying fish, tortoiseshell, alligators, dried toads, worms, scorpions and even human mummies. These latter were quite popular as a remedy for epilepsy, vertigo and palsy, besides being supposed to heal wounds and mortifications. Mummy cost 5s. 4d. a pound, or \$1.25 in our money, and was a recognized staple of commerce, but, being so expensive, an artificial substitute was invented which is described by Crollius in his "Royal Chemist" as calling for "the carcass of a young man, some say red headed, not dying of disease, but killed." It is probable that this ghastly recipe was responsible for many of the mysterious disappearances common in those thrilling days. Human skulls sold for as much as 11 shillings apiece and were given in the form of a powder, mixed with a little oil.

The most highly esteemed prescriptions of the old time apothecary were those which cost the most and which must needs, therefore, include powdered precious stones. "Gascon's powder" was one of the most costly of these medicaments, being prescribed by the great physicians for their more important patients. It cost 40 shillings (\$8.00) an ounce and was made in equal parts of crabs' eyes, pearls, white amber, oriental bezoar and the black tips of crabs' claws.

Precious stones, too, were thought to have much efficacy when worn as amulets. The ruby protected its wearer from plague and pestilence, the amethyst kept a man steady and sober, bloodstones stopped bleeding, the onyx prevented epilepsy, the topaz cured inflammation, the opal strengthened weak eyes, and the emerald prevented foolishness and aided the memory. Concerning the emerald an old writer writes: "It takes away vain and foolish fears, as of devils and hobgoblins, folly and anger, and causeth good conditions; if it do so worn about one, reason will tell him that being beaten into powder and taken inwardly it will do much more."

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FAUBLE'S

The Capture of a Live Okapi.

Great interest has been aroused in English scientific circles by the recent communication from Capt. Boyd Alexander and G. B. Gosling, who are making a tour of exploration through the Congo, that the party has secured a specimen of the okapi. The animal was secured in the district of Angu on the River Wells by the captain's Portuguese collector. The latter made several attempts to obtain the animal by means of the rifle, but it was too wary and nimble. At last the Portuguese resorted to the native trapping methods, by digging a pit in which a specimen ultimately fell. Capt. G. B. Gosling has also gathered some definite data concerning the somewhat speculative nature and habits of the okapi. He states that it is generally found singly and sometimes in pairs, but according to the Mombasti hunters, groups of three have been seen on rare occasions. He also remarks that the okapi frequents haunts where there is a small stream of water surrounded with muddy and swampy ground. In such regions there thrives a certain plant with a very large leaf, growing on a single stalk, and which invariably attains a height of some ten feet. This leaf constitutes the favorite food of the creature, and Capt. Gosling ventures to suggest that the animal is only to be found in those districts where this plant exists. The creature feeds and prowls around through the swamps during the night, since it is never observed in the daytime. It has, however, been seen feeding by the natives up to as late as 8 o'clock in the morning, but very rarely. During the day the animal lurks in the fastnesses and conclusion of the forest, venturing abroad in search of food at dusk. Capt. Gosling on three occasions observed the animal busily feeding, and was able to approach quite close to it without frightening it away, so that he was able to follow its movements and habits among the swamps with perfect ease. Capt. Gosling is the first white man to see the okapi alive and it is anticipated as the result of his close observations, that he will be able to contribute extensively to our meager knowledge of the animal. On these occasions at first it could hardly be discerned, so carefully was it concealed in the swamp vegetation. The animal is possessed of remarkably acute hearing, and on this account the Mombasti natives class it among the bush-buck, the local name of which is "bungana." Owing to the extreme wariness, even the natives, who are born hunters, very rarely succeed in running it to earth. The most successful methods of securing it being by means of the pit trapping. The dead specimen that has been procured will probably be forwarded to one of the English museums, since it is stated to be in excellent condition.—Scientific American.

Worse Than Childlessness.

There are parts of the world where girl babies are drowned like superfluous kittens, and others in which it is not uncommon for the daughters in the large families of the poor to be sold by their parents into lives of prostitution. On the other hand, the pages of history are filled with examples of the devoted lives of childless men and women who have worked unselfishly for the good of their kind. Bachelors and virgins have been the saints of the world, and the children are the philanthropists, the founders of colleges, hospitals, art collections and libraries, the philosophers, the great writers, leaders and thinkers of the race. Plato, Joan of Arc, Savonarola, George Washington, David Hume, Locke, Spinoza, Thomas Carlyle, Florence Nightingale, Ruskin and Herbert Spencer are only a few of the great names in this class. An interesting volume could be written on the indebtedness of the world to childless men and women. The pattern of civic virtue with twelve unkept children and a jaded, careworn wife has been held up for our admiration long enough. Without degrading matrimony we may now speak a good word for the respectable celibate.

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Table with columns: READ DOWN, Stations, READ UP. Rows include Bellefonte, Hecla Park, Dun Kles, Saydertown, Lantana, Clontonside, Rider's Sidling, Mackeyville, Cedar Springs, MILL HALL.

(N. Y. Central & Hudson River R. R.)

Table with columns: No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4. Rows include Jersey Shore, Wm's Fort, PHILA., NEW YORK, NEW YORK.

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