

COX — FAITH HEALING IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES



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# Faith-Healing

in the

## Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.

By

Charles F. Cox.



438

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READ BEFORE  
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BY  
CHARLES F. COX



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# FAITH-HEALING

IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES.

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*Read before the American Folk-lore Society, November 29, 1890.*

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THERE is no absolutely new form that superstition can assume. It long ago passed its highest point of evolution, so that species of this genus do not now originate. Such varieties as occasionally seem to arise anew and flourish for a while are merely reappearances of the ancient stock, greatly weakened in character, and with a decidedly reversionary tendency. For, happily, over-credulous supernaturalism is in the condition of those organisms described by Darwin, which have become out of adjustment to their environment and are, therefore, inevitably yielding place to fitter forms, and slowly but surely approaching extinction. They renew the struggle for existence from season to season, but with less and less vigor, and less and less success, until, by the inexorable law of natural selection, might at last becomes right.

This is true, also, of all phases of occultism, which is being gradually superseded by rationalism—if I may be allowed to use a much-abused word in its proper sense. Reason

refuses to take cognizance of results attributed to inscrutable causes, and insists upon testing all phenomena by known laws. Not that all the laws of nature have been formulated, but that enough are determined to deprive mystery of its awfulness, and to give man courage and confidence in approaching that which he does not understand. A thorough and well-grounded faith in the uniformity of nature is the antidote to those epidemic delusions which have periodically swept over the world, carrying off their myriad victims like pestilential diseases. It is not because the sum of our knowledge is greater, but because our confidence in the results of inductive logic is stronger, that we are not driven hither and thither by the force of morbid imagination, as were the poor Convulsionnaires and Flagellants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the wretched Witch-maniacs of the sixteenth and seventeenth.

The law of evolution does not demand the entire elimination of primitive forms, but by its operation they cease to be the types of prevailing organization, and, in successive epochs, are relegated to more and more subordinate places. The course of development is like a progression in musical harmony. As we raise the key some of the lowest notes of the chord drop out and some notes are added at the highest point, but the modulation is mostly a change of relative position and value of tones which have remained in the chord all the time. So, as the general scale of human intelligence moves upward, some of the traits characteristic of the earliest and lowest of mankind disappear entirely, and some new faculties are acquired by the expanding minds of the very highest; but the principal change which occurs is a readjustment of relations, resulting in an average betterment.

There are to-day perhaps a few lofty intellects which are wholly emancipated from the bondage of superstition. At the other end of the scale, however, is a vast number of men removed but one degree of cousinship from their quadrumanous relatives — cowed and crushed beneath the fear of that which they imagine “stands over” them, but which they cannot see, nor feel, nor comprehend, but only endeavor to placate and



appease. In between there exists every grade of mental obliquity or perversion, from that of the man who objects to beginning a journey on Friday, or the maiden who will not be married in May, down to that of the confiding worshiper of doubtful relics, or the self-seeking pilgrim to "Our Lady of Lourdes."

The number of those who dislike to see the moon over the left shoulder, or to pick up a pin with the point in the wrong direction, or to spill salt, or to raise an umbrella within doors, or to sit in a company of thirteen at table, is probably larger than most of us suppose. But the survival of these attenuated forms of superstition, together with the fancy amongst intelligent people for four-leafed clovers, for cast-off horseshoes, and for rabbits' feet, and the like, does not necessarily indicate any abiding faith in demons and charms and spells, but may be only a sort of poetical reflection, a traditional reminiscence of sentiments that once were deep-seated and serious in the minds of earlier and more impressive generations.

Still, the inherited experience has a ~~strong~~<sup>firm</sup> enough hold upon the average man to make him liable to occasional outbreaks of the original proclivity. This tendency often becomes strongly marked in a single person, who will infect a large number with whom he comes into contact, and we may then have, for a time, the appearance of an epidemic delusion, like the delusions of primitive times. Such in the main has been the recent craze for mind-cures, faith-cures, and "Christian science." It would be very easy to demonstrate that these are merely revivals, in slightly modified forms, of notions which have periodically taken possession of feeble minds since almost the beginning of history. What I propose to show in this paper, however, is, that similar manias were prevalent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more particularly in England.

This state of things was due, I think, more to Paracelsus than to any other one person, for the mystical element which he introduced into the practice of medicine continued to dominate the profession for nearly two hundred years. But he, himself, was a product of the supernaturalism of the times,

and in his character epitomized the spirit of the age. It was a period in which astrology and alchemy were enjoying a lively revival; when the ignorant, but honest, believer in planetary influences and metallic transmutations could hardly be distinguished from the sordid trafficker in unlawful secrets, either social or political, which were often concealed under the garb of a pretended science, or conveyed from person to person in the language of a pseudo-philosophy. Men claiming intellectual authority over their fellow-men were seeking not to instruct and to elevate, but to mystify and to overawe. It was a time, too, when even religion spoke in unknown tongues, and when incoherency of utterance stood for inspiration and prophecy. A mongrel jargon of science, theology, and philosophy had taken the place of the homely vernacular, or the lucid Latin, and the professions of the clergy, the doctor, the scientist, and the magician had become hopelessly mixed. Hence the Church was encouraging the pursuit of demons and witches with exorcisms, burnings, and drownings; the legal authorities were searching out right and wrong by ordeals, tortures, and appeals to chance and fate, and the physicians were going about curing diseases by amulets, touchings, incantations, and prayers. There was but little medicine in Paracelsus's wallet, but much magic in his sword-hilt, and great piety in his discourse.

Like some of his modern imitators, he justified his methods by ascribing magical powers to Christ and the apostles, as exemplified in their healing the sick by the laying-on of hands, and by appealing to Christ's promise that his true followers would do even greater things of this kind than he did. He declared that while a dead saint had no power to heal, a live saint might work recovery from sickness by means of a divine influence working through him. For this purpose, faith, he said, had more potency than merely physical remedies. In fact, through faith, he held that one might accomplish what he pleased, even overcoming nature, since faith is a spiritual force and superior to nature. He also advanced the doctrine preached in these later times, that the possessor of these supernatural curative powers is specially ordained of

God, and acquires his gift through personal holiness rather than by special learning. According to Hartmann,<sup>1</sup> Paracelsus taught that "imagination is the cause of many diseases; faith is the cure for all. If we cannot cure a disease by faith, it is because our faith is too weak; but our faith is weak on account of our want of knowledge; if we were conscious of the power of God in ourselves, we could never fail. The power of amulets does not rest so much in the material of which they are made as in the faith with which they are worn; the curative power of medicines often consists, not so much in the spirit that is hidden in them, as in the spirit in which they are taken. Faith will make them efficacious; doubt will destroy their virtues."

Unlike modern faith-healers, Paracelsus did not wholly abandon the use of material remedies. On the contrary, he is generally regarded as the originator of the whole system of chemical medicine, and we have abundant evidence that he paid much attention to botanical drugs. But, as we have already seen, he regarded both vegetable and mineral preparations largely as means for the awakening and directing of the curative power of faith. For the same purpose he employed amulets, talismans, and magical ointments, and in the preparation of all these he gave careful heed to the superstitious requirements of alchemy and astrology.

In this connection he bestowed his approval upon the curious doctrine of signatures, which was afterward so elaborately set forth as regards plants by Giambattista della Porta.<sup>2</sup> This theory had two applications: first, to the ascertainment, by some appearance in the thing to be employed as a remedy, of its fitness for application to the particular part to be healed; and, second, to the selection of a plant or other object into which the disease could be transplanted, because of some similarity believed to exist be-

<sup>1</sup> "The Life of Phiippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus, and the Substance of his Teachings, &c." By Franz Hartmann, M. D. London, 1887.

See, also, "Paracelsi Opera Omnia." Geneva, 1658.

<sup>2</sup> "Phytognomonica," 4to, Naples, 1588; 8vo, Francofurt, 1591.

tween it and the affected organ, through which both would have an affinity for the particular disease. This affinity was supposed to be signified by the physical characteristics of herbs, roots, etc., so that the red juice of *Sanguinaria*, the liver-like leaf of *Hepatica*, and the eye-like inflorescence of certain of the *Compositæ*, indicated the appropriateness of these plants respectively in affections of the circulatory, the digestive, and the optical organs.<sup>1</sup>

The power by which ailments might be removed from the human body and conveyed into a plant or an animal, or other fit receptacle, was conceived to be a sort of magnetism; and an intermediate object was generally used in the process of transplantation, and was called a magnet. Thus, in a case of toothache the gums were to be rubbed with the root of *Senecio vulgaris* until they bled, and then the root was to be reburied in the earth, whereupon the cause of the pain would be carried away with the blood and retained at a distance by the attraction of the plant. Or, for the same malady, the tooth might be picked with a splinter of blackthorn or willow, after which the toothpick was to be grafted into the original tree, whither the toothache would be securely banished.<sup>2</sup> These cures were spoken of as accomplished sympathetically; that is, through a magnetical sympathy existing between the inanimate object to which or by which the disease was conveyed and the animate one from which it was taken.

A certain degree of *rapport* was usually insisted upon as necessary between the patient and the practitioner also, and hence the literature of this subject came to abound with never-ending discussions, physical and metaphysical, respecting the operation and effects of sympathy and antipathy.

Paracelsus has the credit of having invented a most extraordinary method of applying the principle of magnetical healing, which attracted attention and retained its adherents for more

<sup>1</sup> See "Occult Physick; or, the three principles in nature antagonized, of the magical and physical vertues of Beasts, Trees and Herbs, of Medicines for all Diseases, &c.," by W. W., 1660.

<sup>2</sup> See "Hermanni Grube, Med. & Phil. D. De Transplantatione Morborum." Hamburg, 1674. And also Bartholinus, "De Transplantatione Morborum," Hafniæ, 1673.

than a hundred and fifty years, and which gave rise to what we cannot but regard as a school of practice, in which Van Helmont, in Brussels, and Robert Fludd,<sup>1</sup> in London, became the leaders fifty years after the death of Paracelsus in 1541. The remarkable invention to which I refer was that of the so-called sympathetical ointment, of which Paracelsus himself says: "Sympathy, or Compassion, hath a very great power to operate in humane things: As if you take Moss, that groweth upon a Scull, or Bone of a dead body that hath lain in the Air, to wit:

Take of that Moss.....	ii.
Of Man's Grease.....	ii.
Of Mummy and Man's Blood, each.....	ss.
Of Linseed Oyl.....	ii.
Oyl of Roses and Bole-Armoniack, each.....	i.

Let them be all beat together in a Morter so long, until they come to a most pure and subtil Oyntment; then keep it in a Box. And when any wound happens, dip a stick of wood in the blood, that it may be bloody; which being dryed, thrust it quite into the aforesaid Oyntment and leave it therein; afterwards binde up the wound with a new Linen Rowler, . . . and it shall be healed, be it never so great, without any Plaster, or Pain. After this manner, you may Cure any one that is wounded, though he be ten miles distant from you, if you have but his blood. It helpeth also other griefs, as the pain in the Teeth and other hurts, if you have a stick wet in the Blood, and thrust into the Oyntment and there left. Also, if a Horses foot be pricked with a nail by a Farrier or Smith, touch a stick with the blood, and thrust it into the Box of Oyntment, and leave it there, it will Cure him. These are the wonderful Gifts of God, given for the use and health of man." In another place he says: "There may also an Oyntment be made, wherewith if the Weapons be annointed (wherewith a wound is inflicted) the said wounds shall be cured without pain. This is made as the other, except only  $\frac{3}{4}$  i. of Honey, and 3 i. of Ox-fat is to be added to this. But because the

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Fludd's "Anatomie nis III., Partis III., Liber Secundus, Amphitheatrum," Sectionis I., Portio- Capita VIII., IX. et X. Francofurt, 1623.

Weapons cannot always be had, the Wood aforesaid is better."<sup>1</sup> But the magnetical method was not confined to the treatment of wounds. Paracelsus gives us a formula for "A Sympathetical Oyntment against the Gout," and his works contain numerous prescriptions for the preparation of charms for the removal of particular diseases.

The introduction of magical ointments gave rise to spirited discussions as to whether they operated beyond the presence of the patient and without his cognizance, and whether they acted by natural or by supernatural influence. On the first of these points we have seen that Paracelsus affirmed that what is nowadays called "absent treatment" was entirely practicable, and that the salves worked as well for beasts as for human subjects. Van Helmont afterward testified on this point: "I have seen also that Vulnerary Oyntment to cure not only Men, but also Horses, between whom and us certainly there is not so great affinity (unless we are Asses) that therefore the Sympathetical Unguent should deserve to be called common to us and Horses."<sup>2</sup>

One of the latest writers on the subject<sup>3</sup> describes the operation thus: "A magnetick virtue is propagated from the weapon anointed to the wound, by reason of the cognation and continuation of Nature, which a successive impulsion follows through the middle of the air, impregnated by the universal and primary spirit of the world, with a magnetick vigour and power."

This explanation is, for lucidity of style and brilliancy of conception, quite worthy to stand by the side of some of the

<sup>1</sup> "Paracelsus of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature. Of the Spirits of the Planets. Of Occult Philosophy. The Magical, Sympathetical, and Antipathetical Cure of Wounds and Diseases," &c. Englished by R. Turner. London, 1656.

<sup>2</sup> "On the Magnetick or Attractive Curing of Wounds," in Van Helmont's Works, made English by John Chandler. London, 1664.

See also "A Ternary of Paradoxes,

Translated by Walter Charleton, Doctor in Physick and Physician to the late King." London, 1650.

And "Oriatrike, or Physic Refined, being a new Rise and Progress of Phylosophy and Medicine, for the Destruction of Diseases and the Prolongation of Life." London, 1662.

<sup>3</sup> "The Art of Curing Sympathetically or Magnetically," by H. M. Herwig, M. D. 1699.

lucubrations of the faith-healers of the nineteenth century. But, fearing that his theory may not be wholly conclusive, our author goes on to say that, "However it is done, it is infallibly true that, by the permission of God, men are cured after this manner, . . . and that Wounds are healed, although at some miles distance.<sup>1</sup> To what purpose then is it to shut our eyes against the light manifest of experience, although we cannot trace out the true and adequate causes how these things come to pass. . . . Galen says that good hope and confidence are beyond Physick, for he cures most whom most repose trust in."

This too, you see, is quite in the line of recent argument by advocates of Christian Science; and the doctor's zeal, like theirs, grows by what it feeds upon, and so he goes on to say: "God would have Physick accompanied with Piety, and expects himself to be acknowledged and worshipped in the use of it. Nevertheless, many things lye hid in the bosom of Nature, not to be apprehended by humane sence, which although by reason of our ignorance they seem superstitious and irrational (because their causes are unknown to us) yet are very far from being guilty of that crime." For some reason or another, however, this ingenious writer was not content to leave the matter here, but must add a train of reasoning in the line of modern theories of suggestion, expectancy, or mental bias, by saying: "I think that a perswasian in itself, either by Faith or Credibility [credulity?] cannot effect anything, but it causes a sudden motion of the Spirits and Minds, in very soft and tender Natures, by which the blood is carried about by a various Flux, and at once removes the morbifick causes from the parts aggrieved, by which means the distemper ceases. Here is no superstition, unless superstitious persons create it by attributing the effect to other causes."

On this question of the naturalness or superstitiousness of the method, Van Helmont entered into a heated controversy

<sup>1</sup> See "Medicina Diastatica, or Sympatheticall Mumie; teaching the Magneticall cure of Diseases at distance, illustrated from the Works of Dr. Theo. Paracelsus, by Andrea Tentzelius, translated out of the Latine by Ferdinando Parkhurst, Gent. London, 1653."

with the elder Professor Rudolph Goelenius, of Marburg,<sup>1</sup> who, it seems, "endeavours to shew, That the curing of Wounds by the Sympathetical and Armary or Weapon Unguent, invented by Paracelsus, is merely natural." From this it might be inferred that Van Helmont took up the contention that the cure was simply supernatural; but such does not appear to have been the case. In fact, he seems to have devoted himself to drawing a fine distinction between sympathetical and magnetical action, attributing the healing to the latter, and thus repelling the charge of Goelenius that the Paracelsian method depended upon magical and superstitious practices. "Dost thou," he says, "perhaps maintain it to be diabolical because it cannot be understood by thee, that a natural Reason thereof doth subsist? I will not believe that thou couldst utter so idle a Sentence, from thine own Infirmity, of its Virtue: For thou knowest that the weaknesse of Understanding is our Vice, not that of things. Make hast, therefore; From whence knowest thou, that God hath not directed such a magnetical Virtue unto the use or benefit of the Wounded."

This was the line of argument pursued by all the Paracelsian school; sympathetical healing, even in those days, seemed incapable of a rational explanation, and was relegated to the realm of the miraculous. As the philosophy of hypnotism had not then made its appearance, and the theory of mental "expectancy" had not begun to germinate, the assailants and the defenders of the new practice, apparently agreeing that cures were actually effected, referred for the cause, on the one hand to the direct interposition of the beneficent Creator, working through chosen human agents of personal purity and exalted goodness, and on the other hand to the uncanny influence of the chief of demons operating through men whose souls he had bought with this sort of magical endowment.

<sup>1</sup> See other disputations on the same topic in "Theatrum Sympatheticum," a collection of twenty-five tracts by nius, Van Helmont, Fludd, Becker, Borell, Kircher, Sennertus, Fracastorius, and others. Nuremberg, 1662.



It was on this issue that Robert Fludd entered into his bitter contention with the Rev. Mr. Foster, who had taken it upon himself to show that "the wonderfull manner of healing by the weapon-salve, is diabolicall, or effected onely by the invention and power of the Devill."

Against the charge that the cure of wounds by the weapon-salve is "witchcraft and unlawfull to be used," Fludd maintains: "Theologically, the Cure of the Weapon-Salve to be good and lawfull, and proveth it by the authority of holy Writ to be the Gift of God and not of the Devill"; and, theophilosophically, he shows "how it is grafted or planted by God in the Treasury of Nature."<sup>1</sup>

We need not be surprised to hear that quarrels arose about the purity of doctrine held by the different branches of the Paracelsian school, and that one charged another with having corrupted the master's teaching and with transmitting a spurious practice. Thus Van Helmont declared that "Goclenius, that he might satisfie his own Genius, hath altered the Description [prescription ?] of Paracelsus, affirming that the Usnea or Moss is to be chosen only from the Skuls of hanged Persons; of which his own and false Invention, he enquiring the cause, blusheth not to dream that in Strangling the vital Spirits entered into the Skul, and there remain so long, as until that six years from that time being accomplished, the Moss shall under the open Air grow up thereon. Paracelsus hath taught the express contrary, and by practical Experiences it is confirmed, that the Moss of the Skuls of those that have been slain or broken on a Wheel is no less commendable, than that of those who were strangled with an Halter."<sup>2</sup>

Fludd, with his taste for mystical anatomy and physiology, attached little importance to the usnea or moss, but placed great stress on blood as an ingredient of the healing ointment, and explained its efficacy in the following ingenious manner: "We see that this Oyntment is compounded of things passing well agreeing unto man's nature; and consequently that it

<sup>1</sup> "Doctor Fludds Answer unto M. Foster, or The Squesing of Parson Fosters Sponge, ordained by him for the wiping away of the Weapon-Salve." 1631.

<sup>2</sup> Van Helmont's Works, Chandler's translation. 1664.

hath a great respect to his health and preservation, for as much as unto the composition thereof, wee have in the chief place or ranke Blood, in which the power of life is placed. Here, I say, is the essence of man's Bones growing out of them, in forme of Mosse, termed *Usnea*; here is his Flesh in the Mummy, which is compounded of Flesh and Balsame; here is the Fat of Man's Body, which concurrerth with the rest unto the perfection of this Oyntment. And with all these (as is said) the Blood is mingled, which was the beginning and food of them all, for as much as in it is the spirit of life, and with it the bright soule doth abide, and operateth after a hidden manner. So that the whole perfection of Man's Body doth seeme to concurre unto the confection of this precious oyntment. And this is the reason, why there is so great a respect and consent betweene this Oyntment and the Blood of the wounded person."<sup>1</sup>

This sympathetical, or, as he otherwise calls it, "balsamicke" nature of blood, he explains, "is nought else, but a volatill and essential salt, that is full of vegetating and multiplying vertue, which it receiveth from above as a precious soule to vivifie and animate it, the which vertue is that *Calidum innatum*, or *Natural heate*, by whose vertue every creature doth exist, and the volatile vehicle in which it is carried, is that *Humidum Radicale*, or *Radicall Moisture*, or *Humidity*, by which, and in which, the foresaid vertue doth immediately move, and act unto life, vegetation, and multiplication."<sup>2</sup>

As an illustration of the *modus operandi* of this wonderful "balsamicke nature" in the "Weapon Oyntment," I quote the following narrative from Fludd, merely remarking that a volume of such stories could easily be collected from the

<sup>1</sup> For other extraordinary explanations of the process, see "Medicina Magica tamen Physica: Magical but Natural Physick; or a Methodical Tractate of Diastatical Physick." By Samuel Boulton. London, 1656.

The following work is almost an exact duplicate of the foregoing: "Medi-

cina Magnetica; or The Rare and Wonderful Art of Curing by Sympathy &c. By C. de Iryngio [C. Irvine], Chirurgo-Medicine in the Army." Edinburgh, 1656.

<sup>2</sup> "Doctor Fludds Answer unto M. Foster."

treatises on this subject. The narration is given on the authority of Sir Nicholas Gilbourne, who was brother-in-law to Fludd, and is to the effect that, at Chatham, in Kent, "the servant of one Poppee, a ship-wright, was cut with his axe into the instep, so deep as it could passe, and not cut it off; upon the hurt (which was in the afternoone), hee was brought unto me; but I refused to meddle with it. . . . The next morning early I did dresse the axe, and after dressing it I did send to know how the fellow did. Answer was made that hee had beene in great paine all the night; but now lately was at ease. The next morning, comming into my study, I strucke my Rapier down upon the Axe, the hilt whereof strucke the oyntment off from the axe, which when I found, I sent to understand how hee did? and had answer, that he had beene exceeding well that night; but this morning he was in great paine, and so continued: I therefore anointed the axe againe, and then sent againe unto him, and heard that hee was then at great ease: and within seaven dayes was perfectly well."

Fludd's reference to an "essential salt" in which the "balsamicke nature" of blood resided, and which was the bond of sympathy between the wounded person and the healing ointment, marks a transition in the philosophy of this subject which finally resulted in the substitution of a simple, dry, inorganic powder in the place of the complex unguent of animal substances. Thus came about the celebrated "Powder of Sympathy," concerning which Sir Kenelm Digby delivered his "Discourse in a Solemn Assembly at Montpellier," in 1657.<sup>1</sup> He had been one of the first council of the Royal Society, was prominent in its management, was a friend of Des Cartes and other eminent men of learning, and was high in political favor and influence. His advocacy of sympathetical healing, therefore, carried great weight and attracted unusual attention. Sir Walter Scott refers to him as an authority for the lines in the

<sup>1</sup> See his work "Of Bodies and of Discourses, Of the Powder of Sympathy and Of the Vegetation of Plants." London, 1669.

"Lay of the Last Minstrel," in which it is said of Ladye Margaret:

"But she has ta'en the broken lance,  
And washed it from the clotted gore,  
And salved the splinter o'er and o'er,"<sup>1</sup>

and quotes at length Digby's account of the case of Mr. James Howel,<sup>2</sup> which is to the following effect:

"Coming by chance as two of his best friends were fighting in Duel," he "did his endeavour to part them," but "one of them, roughly drawing the blade of his sword, cut to the very bone the nervs and muscles of Mr. Howel's hand," and otherwise wounded him badly. "They bound up his hand with one of his garters, to close the veins which were cut and bled abundantly." The surgeon attending the wounded man was a neighbor to Sir Kenelm, and had heard that he had "extraordinary remedies upon such occasions." Having some fear that the sore might "grow to a Gangrene, and so the hand must be cut off," the surgeon invited Sir Kenelm to visit his patient and to "view his wounds." He found the man in nearly insupportable pain "in regard of the extream inflammation." "I told him," he says, "that I would willingly serve

<sup>1</sup> "Lay of the Last Minstrel," Canto Third, Stanza 23, is as follows:

"She drew the splinter from the wound,  
And with a charm she stanch'd the blood;  
She bade the gash be cleansed and bound:  
No longer by his couch she stood;  
But she has ta'en the broken lance,  
And washed it from the clotted gore,  
And salved the splinter o'er and o'er.  
William of Deloraine, in trance,  
When'er she turned it round and round,  
Twisted as if she gall'd his wound."

See also Scott's "Earl Richard,"—note to the lines

"The maiden touch'd the clay-could corpse,  
A drop it never bled."

In this note reference is made to the cure of wounds effected by applying salves and powders, not to the wound itself, but to the sword or dagger by which it had been inflicted; "a course of treatment which, wonderful as it may at first seem, was certainly frequently attended with signal success."

See also Dryden's "Tempest," Act V., Sc. I.

<sup>2</sup> Author of the "Familiar Letters" and of "Dodona's Grove."

him; but if, haply, he knew the manner how I would cure him, without touching or seeing him, it may be he would not expose himself to my manner of curing, because he would think it, peradventure, either ineffectual or superstitious." To this Mr. Howel replied: "Let the miracle be done, though Mahomet do it." Having aroused his faith to this satisfactory pitch, Sir Kenelm says: "I asked him then, for anything that had the blood upon it, so he presently sent for his Garter wherewith his hand was first bound; and as I called for a Bason of water as if I would wash my hands, I took a handful of Powder of Vitriol which I had in my study and presently dissolv'd it. As soon as the bloody garter was brought me I put it in the Bason, observing the while what Mr. Howel did, who stood talking with a Gentleman in a corner of my Chamber, not regarding at all what I was doing. But he started suddenly, as if he had found some strange alteration in himself. I ask'd him what he ail'd? I know not what ails me, said he, but I find that I feel no more pain: me thinks a pleasing kind of freshness, as it were a wet cold napkin spread itself over my hand; which hath taken away the inflammation that tormented me before. I reply'd, since then you feel already so good an effect of my medicament, I advise you to cast away all your plaisters, only keep the wound clean and in a moderate temper twixt heat and cold. After dinner I took the garter out of the water, and put it to dry before a great fire. It was scarce dry but Mr. Howel's servant came running to tell me that his master felt as much burning as ever he had done, if not more; for the heat was such as if his hand were betwixt coals of fire. I answer'd that although that had happened at present, yet he should find ease in a short time; for I knew the reason of this new accident, and I would provide accordingly, so that his master should be free from that inflammation, it may be, before he could possibly return unto him; but, in case he found no ease, I wished him to come presently back again; if not, he might forbear coming. Away he went; and at the instant I put again the Garter into the water, thereupon he found his Master without any pain at all. To be brief, there was no sense of pain afterward; but within

five or six days the wounds were cicatriced and entirely healed.”<sup>1</sup>

I am sure I need not call your attention to the practical confession, in the foregoing narrative, of the employment of mental suggestion in its most effective form; and of course I have no occasion to remark upon the unimportance of the powder used in the experiment as related, notwithstanding the fact that Digby himself regarded it as an essential element, and devoted many closely printed pages to an exposition of the virtues of vitriol and to an elaboration of a theory of its operation. Although other and more complex powders had been employed in the process of sympathetical curing, Sir Kenelm declares that he had seen “as great and admirable effects of simple Vitriol of eighteen pence the pound, as of that Powder which is us’d to be prepared now at a greater price.” The secret of the sympathetic powder he claimed to have obtained from “a Religious Carmelite that came from the Indies and Persia to Florence,” who had refused to disclose it to the Duke of Tuscany, but who made it known to Digby in return for “an important courtesie.” “And the same year,” says he, “he return’d to Persia, that now there is no other knows this secret in Europe but myself.” Nevertheless, he goes on to explain that he had given some of the powder to King James II., “instructing him in all the circumstances,” and afterward the King’s first physician, Dr. Mayerne, obtained the secret and carried it to France and communicated it to the Duke of Mayerne, from whom it passed to his surgeon, who sold it “to divers persons of Quality,” through which “the thing being fall’n thus into many hands, remain’d not long in termes of a Secret, but by degrees came to be so divulged that now there is scarce any Country Barber but knows it.”<sup>2</sup>

The avidity with which the sympathetic powder was sought after by all classes of people was merely one of the signs of the times. Every sort of mysterious curing was in vogue, and it is a wonder that the regular practice of medicine was not completely supplanted and exterminated. With the faith-

<sup>1</sup> Digby, “Of The Powder of Sympathy.”

<sup>2</sup> See “La Poudre de Sympathie Justifiée.” By L’Abbé Baudelot. Paris, 1658.

healers all pretense of physical agency was dropped, and even the simple solution of vitriol gave way to the laying-on of hands and stroking.<sup>1</sup> Thus there arose a whole tribe of Ophiogenes who, like their prototypes of ancient times, went about extracting the virus and easing the pains of every sort of infection and corruption by the mysterious virtue residing in the tips of their fingers. It is said of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, that he was able to cure certain diseases by the application of the big toe of his right foot. After the same manner the sovereigns of England and France<sup>2</sup> had for centuries been accustomed occasionally to apply a supposed remedial influence, through the touch of the royal hand.<sup>3</sup> But now the mania for supernaturalism, which had become rampant during the time of the Commonwealth, upon the restoration of the Stuarts laid its irresistible grasp upon the king himself, and forced him into an extensive and elaborate conduct of the business usually given over to the professional physicians. An imposing function was carried out at stated intervals, at which crowds of eager invalids, whose expectations of relief had been raised to a feverish point by previous examinations and registrations, were admitted to the presence of his Majesty and the chief officers of state, and, after taking part in a solemn religious service especially appointed for such occasions, and conducted by the court chaplains, were severally presented to the king by his attending surgeons, and, kneeling, received not only his healing touch upon the affected part, but also golden amulets<sup>4</sup> strung upon silk ribbons which were hung about the recipients' necks. In

<sup>1</sup> See "Wonders no Miracles; or Mr. Valentine Greatrakes Gift of Healing examined, Upon occasion of a sad effect of his Stroaking, March 7, 1665."

Also, "A Brief Account of Mr. Valentine Greatrakes and Divers of the Strange Cures by him lately performed, written by Himself." 1666.

And "The Miraculous Conformist: or An account of several Marvillous Cures performed by the stroaking of the Hands of Mr. Valentine Greatarick.

By Henry Stuble, Physician." Oxford, 1666.

<sup>2</sup> See Andreas Laurentius, "De Mirabili Strumas sanandi vi Solis Gallix Regibus Christianissimis divinitus concessa." Paris, 1609.

<sup>3</sup> See Shakespeare's "Macbeth," Act IV., Scene 3.

<sup>4</sup> For pictures of these amulets, see Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, "On Superstitions connected with the History and Practice of Medicine and Surgery." London, 1844.

this way Charles II., during twenty-two years of his reign, from May, 1660, to May, 1682, bestowed his beneficent influence upon 92,107 of his unfortunate subjects.

Dr. John Browne, "One of His Majestic's Chirurgeons in Ordinary," who took part in these imposing ceremonies, has left an intensely interesting account of the whole matter,<sup>1</sup> in which he declares: "I do humbly presume to assert that more Souls have been Healed by His Majesties Sacred Hand in one Year, than have ever been cured by all the Physicians and Chirurgions of his three Kingdoms ever since his happy Restoration."<sup>2</sup> But these cures were not exclusively of what is known as the "King's Evil." Many described as blind are reported to have been restored to sight, and some who came lame were immediately able to walk out of the king's presence. Of course Doctor Browne insists that the working of these "miracles" was not only proof of the king's divine right, but also evidence of his being "a Holy and good Man."<sup>3</sup> While he urges that "there is and must be God Almighty's hand going along with it," he quaintly but candidly admits, as to the beneficiaries, the fact of "their Faith being as a great Ingredient to this Composition." He says that some were cured the first time, but others required a second touch; some had strong faith only to be touched at particular times—as on Good Friday; some attached superstitious importance to the gold, and some who did not, and who therefore sold it, had their disease seize them afresh. On the whole, he concludes that the healing power

<sup>1</sup> "Adenochoiradelogia: or An Anatomick-Chirurgical Treatise of Glandules & Strumaes, or Kings-Evil-Swellings, Together with the Royal Gift of Healing, or Cure thereof by Contact or Imposition of Hands, performed for above 640 years by our Kings of England," &c. London, 1684.

<sup>2</sup> See Badger's "Cases of Cures of the King's Evil, perfected by the Royal Touch." London, 1748.

Also, "A Free and Impartial Enquiry into the Antiquity and Efficacy of Touching for the Cure of the King's Evil." By William Beckett. 1772.

<sup>3</sup> See "Explicatio totius Questionis de mirabilium sanitatum gratia . . . cui Reges Angliæ, rite inaugurati, divinitus medicati sunt." By Rev. Dr. William Tooker, Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth. London, 1597.

Also, "A Right Frutefull and approved Treatise, for the Artificiall Cure of that Malady called in Latin, Struma, and in English, the Evill, cured by Kinges and Queenes of England." By William Clowes, Surgeon to Queen Elizabeth. London, 1602.



is "not a gift of Nature, but of Grace, neither does it live in Man but in his Maker; not in human confidence, as [to] these Charms and Characters, but in the power of Faith derivative from the Almighty."

For myself, I believe that cures have been, and are now-days, effected by the methods employed by the different species of faith-healers. But I explain such cases upon the principles which have been comprehensively and convincingly expounded by Dr. William B. Carpenter,<sup>1</sup> with, perhaps, a reference also to the still later theories respecting that wonderful phenomenon known as hypnotism. I admit, however, that it is the old story of escaping one mystery by taking refuge in another. Still, I am not sure that even this is not a strictly scientific process, for Science, as I understand it, does not pretend to abolish mysteries, but only to furnish ground for a belief in an unbroken sequence of natural causes, finally ascertainable everywhere except as a first cause. Superstition, which is the opposite of Science, is that state of ignorance which argues at once from its own lack of knowledge to the non-existence of a knowable cause. The scientific spirit is that habit of self-restraint which accepts the uniformity of nature as the fulcrum upon which to move its own knowledge to a higher position. Superstition is self-important, and expects nature to change to its requirements. Science is humble and self-abasing, always striving to adjust itself to invariable law. Superstition fixed man and his little world at the center of the universe, but Science disclosed the true path of progress when it demonstrated that everything human and mundane is eternally moving onward through infinite regions of new truth and new experience, inseparably bound, however, to a never-failing source of light and life. Thus it is that the dark days of centuries past can never return, and that Science has gained a supremacy which can never be lost.

<sup>1</sup> See his "Mental Physiology." Also, his "Mesmerism, Spiritualism, &c."









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