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The Healing Art in the North of Scotland in the Olden Time

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Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 3 (1874), pp. 266-272

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2841317>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 12:39

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The Author read the following paper :

*On a PATOO-PATOO from NEW ZEALAND.* By SIR G. DUNCAN GIBB, Bart., M.D., LL.D.

[ABSTRACT].

THIS was a note upon a fine and perfect specimen of Patoo-patoo which had been found by the late Captain Lowe in one of the group of the Society Islands. There was little doubt, however, that the weapon had been formerly taken to that island from New Zealand. The author described the chief use made of it by the natives of New Zealand, which in the opinion of Captain Lowe was that of slaying old and infirm persons by a single blow on the top of the head, from behind, causing in every instance immediate death.

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The Director read the following papers :

*The HEALING ART in the NORTH of SCOTLAND in the OLDEN TIME.* By the Rev. WALTER GREGOR, M.A.

THE contents of the following paper were collected in Banffshire. The same customs and beliefs were found in Aberdeenshire and in other parts of the north. In a few years they will be all gone.

I have made no attempt to support them by book authority or to trace their origin, or to compare them with those of other parts of the country, or of other nations, or to trace their origin, or to draw conclusions from them. I do not consider myself capable of giving the philosophy of them, or of drawing anthropological conclusions from them, even though I had the time to do so and the opportunity to consult authorities, neither of which is at my command. I have contented myself to gather material for those who are fitted for the difficult work of comparing and classifying the customs and beliefs of the different nations and tribes of the human race, and if this paper should contribute in any degree to illustrate the geographical range of human beliefs and human customs my labour is not lost.

CAUSES OF DISEASE.

The belief in *casting ill* on one was prevalent. This power of *casting ill* was not in the possession of all ; yet few districts of the country were without one or more who were dreaded as possessing it. To such no one would have been foolhardy enough to have denied a request, however much it would have cost to grant it.

There were two modes of working ill on a person. In the one mode a small figure in human shape was made of wax and placed near the fire in such a position as to melt very slowly. As the figure melted the person represented by it wasted away by lingering disease. In the other the figure was made of clay, stuck full of pins and placed on the hearth among the hot ashes. As the figure dried up and crumbled into powder slow disease burned away the life of the hapless victim.

II. *The ill Ee*.—The power of the *evil eye* was possessed by some. It was commonly supposed to belong to certain families, and was handed down from one generation to another. It was called into use at the will of the possessors, and was exercised against those who had incurred their displeasure, or on behalf of those who wished to be avenged on an enemy and paid for its use.

III. *Prayers*.—There was a class of people whose curses, or, as they were called, *prayers*, were much dreaded. To incur their displeasure was to call down their *prayers*, and these prayers were speedily followed by bodily disease or accident, or by disaster to property, or by the miscarrying of some undertaking—by misfortune of some kind or other. The remark was quite common: “So-and-so got his leg broken aifter So-and-so curst ‘im.” “So-and-so never hid a weels day aifter he fell oot we So-and-so.” “Ill healths never been oot o’ So-and-so’s hoose sin he keest oot wee So-and-so.” “The beggar-wife’s mailison hiz lichtit on So-and-so’s hoose for pittin’ hir in ‘ir bairn oot in a nicht o’ blin’ drift.”

IV. *Forespeaking*.—Praise beyond measure—praise accompanied with a sort of amazement or envy—was followed by disease or accident.

V. *Hidden grave*.—Passing over a *hidden grave* produced a rash.

VI. Sudden startling news, or a sudden fright, was supposed to dislodge the heart. Slow disease followed.

#### CURES.

*The ill ee*.—Go to a ford where the dead and the living cross, draw water from it, pour it into a *cog* with three *girds* over a *crost shilling*, and then sprinkle the water over the patient in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

*Forespeaking*.—Pour water over a *crost shilling*, take three draughts of it, bury the remainder, and carefully preserve the shilling.

*Casting the heart*.—The patient was seated. A sieve for sifting meal was put on the head, and in it were laid, in the form of a cross, a comb and a pair of scissors, and over them a *three-*

*girdit-cog* with the girds of wood. Into this cog water was poured. Melted lead was slowly dropped from a height into the water. Search was then made among the pieces of lead for one resembling as nearly as possible a heart. If a piece of such a shape was found, it was carefully sewed into a piece of cloth and given to the sufferer, who had to carry it constantly. If a piece of the form of a heart was not found, the lead was again melted and dropped into the water, and this process was repeated till the piece of the desired heart-shape was got.

The other mode was somewhat more elaborate. The operator, who was generally an old woman renowned for her skill, set the sieve on the patient's head, and on the sieve she placed the *three-girdit-cog*, no other dish being of virtue. The comb was placed on the bottom of the cog, and the water was poured through one of the loops of the scissors into the cog. Lead was melted and dropped through the same loop. After the heart-shaped piece was found, the patient took three draughts of the water, and washed the face and hands with the remainder, which was then thrown over a place where the dead and the living cross, that is, over the public road. The patient might either bury the piece of lead on the boundary between two lairds' lands or keep it most scrupulously under lock and key. During the process the operator repeated the words: "Gehn ony thing be oot o'ts place, may the Almichty in 's mercies bring 't back."

*Sleepy Fever.*—There was a disease that bore the name of the "sleepy fivers." The patient was affected with a strong tendency to sleep, and, though not confined to bed, had no inclination to engage in anything. Hence, it was said of anyone lazy at work, that he had the *sleepy fivers*. Its detection and cure were as follows:—

The patient's left stocking was taken and laid flat. A worsted thread was taken and placed along both sides of it over the toe. The stocking was then carefully rolled up from the toe to the top, so that the two ends of the thread were left hanging loose on different sides of it. This stocking was put three times round each member of the body contrary to the course of the sun, beginning with the head. The left of two members was taken first. When the stocking was passed round an affected member the thread changed its position from outside to inside; but when the member was not affected, it kept its position. The process was gone through three times and in perfect silence. The thread was afterwards burned.

Another mode was as follows:—

The person who was *to look for the fever* went to a ford or bridge over which "the dead and the living cross," "atween the sin an' the sky," commonly in the gloamin, and took up three

stones. These stones were to represent the head, the heart, and the body, and were so named. They were placed overnight among the burning ashes on the hearth, and in the morning they were dropped one by one into water. The stone which it was fancied gave forth the loudest sound on touching the water indicated the part of the body in which the disease lay. The process was repeated for three nights in succession. The discovery of the disease was also its cure.

A cure for any disease was the following :—Two live pigeons were taken, ripped up, and tied to the soles of the patient's feet, sometimes wrapped in cloths to prevent the bed from being soiled. At times they were left uncovered fluttering on the patient's feet. A near relative in the early morning, or "atween the sin and the sky," removed the pigeons and carried them to a place over which the dead and the living did not cross, that is, to the top of a precipice, and left them. Some who have gone through this rite are still alive.

*Epilepsy.*—There were various cures for this malady.

The first time one was seized with it, let all the clothes be stripped off and burned on the spot where the patient fell.

Let the sufferer procure a shirt in which one died, put it on and wear it without being first washed.

Let blood from the left arm on the first attack.

For a doctor to draw blood from the arm of one on the first attack as his first patient brought about a cure.

If a person who saw the disease for the first time drew blood from the sufferer's little finger the malady was cured.

Another series of cures was effected by the sacrifice of a cock of a black colour. There were various modes of sacrifice.

One was to bury the bird alive on the spot on which the victim first fell, and before a second fit came on.

Another was to bury the bird below the patient's bed.

A third and more complicated cure was the following :—

The parings of the nails both of the fingers and toes, the cuttings of the hair, and ashes from the four corners of the hearth were put three times round the *crook*. A cock was buried alive along with these on the spot where the victim was first seized with the disease.

*Rickets.*—This disease was cured by *layan*. There were two modes of operating on the child, the one being more elaborate than the other. In the more simple of the two modes, one blacksmith was the actor, and in the more complicated mode the services of three of the same name were required.

In the more simple mode the child was taken to a smithy, when a tub was filled with water. The blacksmith, after having brought the water in the tub to as high a temperature as was

comfortable for a bath by plunging pieces of red-hot iron into it, received the child from the mother or nurse, and bathed it in the water. He also gave the child a little of the water to drink.

The more elaborate process was in this manner:—

The child was taken before sunrise to a smithy in which three blacksmiths of the same name wrought. One of them bathed it in the water-trough of the smithy. After its bath, it was laid upon an anvil, and all the tools were taken and one by one passed over it, and the use of each asked of it. It was bathed a second time, and then handed back to the mother or nurse. If a fee was exacted, the virtue of the lay was lost. The three blacksmiths must all take part in the work.

*Hooping-cough*.—Boil sheep's *pushlocks*, that is, the excrements of sheep, in water, and give the decoction to drink. The same decoction was used as a cure for jaundice.

Another cure was roasted mice.

Eat the food with a *quick-horn* spoon, that is, with a spoon made from a horn taken from a living animal.

A draught of water from the hollow of a detached boulder effected a cure.

Take the patient to the house of a married woman whose maiden name was the same as her husband's, and let her give the patient something to eat, and a cure will speedily follow. If the patient be taken to and from home through a wood, so much the better.

Let the sufferer be removed to another laird's property.

Let the first man seen riding on a white horse be asked what is the cure. Whatever he says, is the cure.

Let the patient be passed three times below the belly of a piebald horse.

The milk of an ass was an effectual remedy.

To ride on an ass put the disease to flight.

A more elaborate ceremony for the cure of the disease by means of the ass was as follows:—The patient was held below the animal's head, so as to inhale its breath. When this inhalation of breath had been carried on for a considerable time, the patient was passed three times under the belly and over the back of the brute. If it was possible to take the one labouring under the disease through a wood in going to the ass and in returning, so much more effectual was the cure.

Plait a straw rope—a *raip*—the contrary way, and tie the ends of it. Put the patient through the loop so formed in company with a cat. The cat carried off the disease, and died in a short time.

*Ringworm*.—The common cure for this disease was rubbing with silver. The modes of rubbing were various.

Put a new shilling three times round the *crook*, spit a *fastin spittle* on it, and with it rub the diseased part. Some, in addition, dropped the shilling through the patient's shirt before rubbing with it.

Another mode was first to measure the diseased part and then rub it with a shilling.

Another cure was by rubbing the spot with a silver watch.

A seventh son, without a daughter, if worms were put into his hand before baptism, had the power of healing the disease simply by rubbing the affected part with his hand. The common belief about such a son was that he was a doctor by nature.

*Warts*.—Go to a point where four roads meet, lift a stone, rub the warts with dust from below the stone repeating the words :

“ A'm ane, the warts twa,  
The first ane 'it comes by  
Tacks the warts awa,”

and the warts vanish in a short time.

Wrap up in a parcel as many grains of barley as there are warts, and lay it on the public road. Whoever finds and opens it, inherits the warts.

Rub the warts with a piece of raw meat, bury it, and as it decays the warts disappear.

Wash the warts with water that has collected in the hollow parts of a *layer-stone*.

Let the warts be rubbed on a man that is the father of an adulterous child. The rubbing must take place without the man's knowledge.

*Eye-disease*.—Catch a live frog, and lick the frog's eyes with the tongue. The person who does so has only to lick with the tongue any diseased eye, and a cure is effected.

*Swelling or festering in the breasts of a woman giving suck*.—Catch a live mole, and rub it slowly and gently between the hands till it dies. A few strokes of the hands that have done this deed over the breasts of the sufferer ensure a speedy cure. Killing the mole at once between the hands leaves no virtue in them.

*Lumbago, Rheumatism, and Sprains*.—Those who were born with their feet first possessed great power to heal all kinds of sprains, lumbago, and rheumatism either by rubbing the affected part or by trampling on it. The greater virtue lay in the feet. Those who came into the world in this fashion often exercised their power to their own profit.

*Toothache*.—Go to the churchyard when a grave is being dug, take a skull in whose jaws there are teeth, and with the teeth pull a tooth from it. A cure is the result.

Go between the sun and the sky to a ford, a place where the



dead and the living cross, lift a stone from it with the teeth, and the toothache vanishes.

*Hydrophobia.*—If a dog bit anyone, it was put to death, whether mad or not, as it was believed that if, at any future time, the animal became rabid, the one that had been bitten was seized with hydrophobia. If a dog was mad and bit anyone, it was put to death, the heart was extracted, hung over the fire, dried, ground to powder, and administered in a draught.

Another cure was to rip up the dog, extract the liver, fry it, and give it to the patient to eat.

*On a HYPOGEUM at VALAQUIE, ISLAND of UIST.* By ALEXANDER A. CARMICHAEL. [With Plates 17, 18, and 19].

THIS underground structure was accidentally discovered ten years ago. A lad was ploughing in a sandy field, when one of the plough horses broke through a hole in the ground from which he struggled. The lad got help and enlarged the hole through which the horse's leg had thus penetrated, and found that it entered the roof of a building at a distance of three feet from the surface. This hole remained open, and it was possible to see through it the roof and part of the walls of a house nearly full of sand.

Beyond this, however, nothing was done till last year, to ascertain the nature of the structure. Meanwhile the broken end of the roof was wholly destroyed, and the slabs forming it carried away by persons in the neighbourhood, and converted into lintels for their dwellings.

In April of last year (1871) I had the place cleared out. This occupied two men three days. Not much foreign matter was found among the drift-sand, of which the house was nearly full, till the floor of native sand was reached at ten feet from the ground surface. There, however, was found a large quantity of bones, teeth, and shells, chiefly the skulls and other bones of the deer, ox, swine, and sheep, and the shells of the limpet, mussel, cockle, and winkle, and a few broken scallop-shells.\*

The flat side of this shell is frequently found among the bones in cists in these islands. Invariably there is a small square hole through each side of it. In Barra it is called "diùcadan," and in Uist "liùcadaan."

\* Probably the concave scallop-shell was used as a drinking cup by the inmates of the dwelling, after they had extracted the original contents. In old Gaelic poetry the "shell" is often mentioned as a drinking cup, and the modern phrase—"Cuir an t-slige chreachain mu'n cuairt"—"Send round the