

'Special exhibition illustrating the folk-lore of London. Lent by Mr Edward Lovett, of Croydon.' Leaflet

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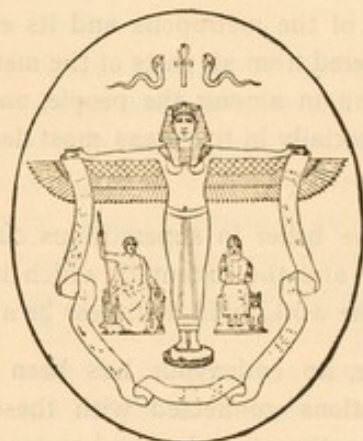
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THE WELLCOME HISTORICAL
MEDICAL MUSEUM.



SPECIAL EXHIBITION

ILLUSTRATING

THE FOLK-LORE OF LONDON,

CONSISTING OF MEDICAL CHARMS, AMULETS AND OTHER OBJECTS

USED TO AVERT DISEASE, TO WARD-OFF EVIL, AND TO

BRING GOOD FORTUNE.

Lent by Mr. Edward Lovett, of Croydon,

Member of the Council of the Folk-Lore Society.

October, 1916.

54a, WIGMORE STREET, LONDON, W.

THE FOLK-LORE OF LONDON.

THE Collection exhibited is the result of many years of patient labour by Mr. Edward Lovett who has long been an enthusiastic worker in the realm of Folk-Lore.

By the Folk-Lore of London is meant the customs, beliefs and superstitions of the "folk" of the metropolis and its environs. The objects shown have been gathered from all parts of the metropolis, north, south, east and west, by going in among the people, and gleaning these old-world superstitions, especially in the areas most densely populated in the north and east.

The survival of the belief in superstitious customs and in charms and amulets generally, and the extent to which it exists to-day in the greatest metropolis in the world, will doubtless be a surprise to many.

As far as possible, an endeavour has been made to confine the records and investigations connected with these objects to those of British origin, excluding the alien, but as London has been cosmopolitan for so long a time, it is obvious that such customs must show many traces of foreign influence. The British dwellers in the metropolis too have largely been nomadic, and its inhabitants are for the most part made up of those coming in from all parts of the United Kingdom, and this, combined with the foreign element, gives a mixed Folk-Lore such as is not to be found in any other capital.

People who believe in charms and amulets are generally reticent, as it is considered unlucky to discuss them, so it is with difficulty that accurate information can be obtained.

The collection may be roughly classified, as follows:

I.—Those objects carried with the purpose of averting or curing various diseases, including gout, rheumatism, cramp, diarrhoea, kidney troubles, bronchitis, sore-throat, tooth-ache, weak eyes, small-pox, also infantile dentition and nightmare. II.—Charms consisting of horns, tusks, teeth and claws, used formerly to avert the evil-eye, and now to bring "good luck." III.—Charms used to avert being struck by lightning, such as "thunderbolts," etc. IV.—Charms and mascots used by sailors. V.—Lucky shoes and their Folk-Lore. VI.—Charms, other than horns, etc., used to avert evil and bring "good luck."

The belief in luck, chance, or fortune, which still plays a prominent part in daily life, is one of great antiquity, and is the modern phase of what in very early times was known as demonism and witchcraft. Many of the charms used to bring "good luck" which are worn, or hung-up

in houses to-day, are of such antiquity that the original object of their use has been long forgotten. The witch-balls which are often found suspended in small sweet-stuff shops in south and south-west London "for luck," and to drive off evil spirits and witches, may be taken as an example. Their owners will rarely dispose of them, yet most of them are unaware of their meaning. The same custom has been found common both in France and Italy. The horns and tusks also belong to a similar class.

Besides the belief in actual objects, Mr. Lovett has gleaned many interesting items connected with medical Folk-Lore in London, and relates how he was recently asked by a woman who dealt in second-hand clothes if he would like to know of a good cure for whooping-cough. She told him that she had cured several cases by means of cutting off some hair from the back of a child's neck, who was suffering from the complaint, placing it between two pieces of bread and butter, and giving it to the first passing dog to eat. The disease would then pass from the child to the dog, and the former would be cured. It is curious to find this belief in the transference of disease, which is common to savage races in many parts of the world, still existing in London to-day.

Another superstitious practice was related to him by a herbalist in the East End. Two girls came to his shop and asked whether he could let them have a pennyworth of Tormentilla root. He gave it to them, but they would not tell him why they wanted it. After about a week they returned for some more. He would not let them have it till they had told him what they were going to do with it, and finally they confessed that the 'young man' of one of them had ceased to be a lover, and, acting on the advice of a "wise woman" they were going to burn the root on a Friday midnight, in order to make the lover so miserable that he would return to the love he had forsaken.

Charms performed with dragon's blood, a gum resin commonly used for staining, which are believed to influence the affections, are still practiced in the East End, according to Mr. Lovett, and great mystery is observed in the manner in which this modern love philtre is employed. The working of this charm is accompanied by the following incantation:

"'Tis not this blood I wish to burn,
But (William's) heart I wish to turn.
May he no joy, nor profit see,
Till he comes back again to me."

Thus in London, to-day, we find the perpetuation of the old beliefs in magic, that are probably the actual survivors of customs practiced by the inhabitants of these islands in a far remote age.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE COLLECTION.

Section I.—CURES FOR DISEASES, etc.

- Heart and Amber Amulets, carried to promote good health.
- Natural Flints in the form of a foot and leg, carried as a cure for gout.
- Pendant Charm, used as a cure for rheumatism.
- Bones (Astragalus, etc.), carried as a cure for rheumatism.
- Potato, carried as a cure for rheumatism.
- Small Bottles of Mercury, sold as a cure for rheumatism.
- Cat Skins, worn over the chest for rheumatism.
- Portion of an Old Belt of Acorns, worn as a cure for diarrhoea.
- Acorn Necklets, worn as a cure for diarrhoea.
- Coral Necklets, worn as a cure for sore-throat.
- Bead Necklets, worn as a cure for sore-throat.
- Necklace of Blue Beads, used for bronchitis.
- "Kidney Stone" (iron ore), used for rubbing the parts affected in kidney troubles.
- Fossil Coral, worn as a charm against small-pox.
- Rock Crystal, carried for weak eyes.
- Human Teeth in little bag, tied round the necks of infants to facilitate teething.
- Orris Root, for rubbing infants' gums when cutting teeth.
- "He-root and She-root" (orris root), used for rubbing infants' gums when cutting teeth.
- A Russian Cross Amulet, for protection from nightmare.
- Horse and Donkey Shoes, hung up to keep away nightmare.
- "Horse-shoe" (cork), charm against nightmare and cramp.
- Stones with natural holes, charm against nightmare.

Section II.—CHARMS CONSISTING OF HORNS, etc.

- Tusks, Teeth and Claws, worn as a protection against evil-eye or as lucky charms.
- Collection of Bifurcating Deer Horns, hung up as luck charms.

Section III.—LIGHTNING.

- "Thunderbolts," carried as a protection against lightning.
- Objects in the form of Acorns, used as charms against lightning.

Section IV.—SEAFARING.

- Sailors' Mascots, carried for a "lucky voyage."
- Child's Caul, carried as a charm against drowning.
- Rosary, carried as a charm against drowning.
- A Ship in a Bottle, formerly used as a votive offering.

Section V.—LUCKY SHOES AND THEIR FOLK-LORE.

- Shoes, and various other objects made in the form of shoes and other foot-gear, are said to bring happiness, prosperity, and good luck.

Section VI.—CHARMS GENERALLY FOR 'GOOD LUCK.'

- Cowrie Shells, placed in pairs to bring good luck.
- Witch Balls, hung up in shops for luck.
- Coral Charms, worn for good luck.
- Keys, hung up to keep out evil spirits.
- Hebrew Charms, worn as a protection against the evil-eye.
- Charms, carried against the evil-eye.
- Reliquaries, carried as a protection from evil.