The medical background of Anglo-Saxon England : a study in history, psychology, and folklore / [Wilfrid Bonser].

Contributors

Bonser, Wilfrid, 1887-1972.

Publication/Creation

London : Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1963.

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THE MEDICAL BACKGROUND OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

THE MEDICAL BACKGROUND OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

A STUDY IN HISTORY
PSYCHOLOGY, AND FOLKLORE

BY

WILFRID BONSER

LONDON
THE WELLCOME HISTORICAL MEDICAL LIBRARY
1963

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AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD
BY VIVIAN RIDLER
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

To the honoured memory of

W. P. KER

R. W. CHAMBERS

J. H. G. GRATTAN

CHARLES SINGER

to whose inspiration
the following pages are due:
from their pupil

FOREWORD

THERE is one important branch of Anglo-Saxon culture on which there is no adequate monograph and that is its medicine. The only work of any size upon the subject is J. F. Payne's *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times* (1904), being the FitzPatrick Lectures which he gave sixty years ago. In 1920 appeared Dr. Charles Singer's paper on *Early English Magic and Medicine*, which I was privileged to hear when he read it before the British Academy. It is an important modern contribution to the subject but it is all too short. This present book is an attempt by one of Dr. Singer's pupils to deal with the subject at length and in all its phases.

Though individual aspects have been covered by various articles in periodicals, it is remarkable that, broadly speaking, the period has been omitted in the larger histories of medicine. It is ignored by Garrison in his *History of Medicine*: the amount of space devoted to it by Thorndike in his *History of Magic and Experimental Science* is one brief chapter. Even the Germans, usually so thorough, have practically ignored the Anglo-Saxon period.

Looking at the period from the general historical aspect, Sir Frank Stenton in his *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943) has not dealt with the medical background at all, though there is hardly a page on which he does not consider some problem of research. Dr. Hodgkin, on the other hand, in his *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1954) has in a few pages succinctly, but hardly sympathetically, given the gist of the matter.

I hope to show that the medical background will throw new light on the social and economic conditions of the people in Anglo-Saxon times. In some cases also it may suggest a new interpretation of some aspects of political history which have not hitherto been fully explained.

The book includes records of epidemics and accounts of cures by saints and leeches as far as these have been preserved in the chronicles and in other written sources of information. Hence we gain some idea of the general state of the health of the people during the period. An attempt is made to interpret the various Anglo-Saxon words which relate to disease, and to ascertain the

extent of the medical knowledge possessed by the Anglo-Saxons, their methods of diagnosis, which were most elementary, and their treatment of the sick. For their methods of cure they relied upon folk-medicine, written prescriptions, many of which had been translated into the vernacular from Latin, prayers, and magical or quasi-magical practices. A description of non-medical magical practices in pagan times has been added to show the atmosphere in which the Church had to work when it took over the task of caring for the sick.

This book, therefore, contains matter of interest to the physician, the historian, the philologist, the archaeologist, the folk-lorist, and the medievalist in general. It has been difficult to write an intensive study on a subject which involves so many varying technical details, although one of the chief interests has been the wide reading which it has entailed. As a University Librarian, I have had opportunities that are denied to many specialists, for I have come into contact professionally with the books on all the subjects involved, and as a member of a university community been able to discuss my problems with those who have special knowledge of its various aspects.

I wish to record my grateful acknowledgement for information and advice to many who have helped me with this work during the long period of its gestation, partly in London and partly in Birmingham.

During the earlier period, the late Dr. Charles Singer and Mrs. Singer placed their collection of treasures at my disposal with their usual generosity: and Dr. Margaret Murray and the late Professor J. H. C. Grattan and the late Professor S. J. Crawford were most helpful. During the later period Dr. J. F. D. Shrewsbury, Professor of Bacteriology, and the late Dr. G. A. Auden, Professor of Public Health, both in the University of Birmingham, gave me invaluable help, especially on the medical side; in fact the book would not have been completed if they had not worked through various medical details with me. And finally I owe a great debt to Sir William MacArthur, who has unstintingly allowed me to use his knowledge and experience in the chapters on epidemics and skin diseases.

This work was accepted for publication in 1949 and proofs were corrected in 1954. The long delay in publication has inevitably resulted in certain anomalies. I am indeed grateful to Dr. F. N. L.

Poynter, the present editor, for encouraging me, in 1961, to revise the proofs once more, and I have endeavoured to bring the work up to date by some corrections and additions and by including in the bibliography the more important books and articles published since this work first went to press. I am equally grateful to the Oxford University Press for its patience. There are, however, many things which could not be altered at this advanced stage; for example, the notes on the dating of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts which were kindly supplied to me by Mr. Neil Ker before the publication of his *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* in 1957. Fortunately, the progress of Anglo-Saxon studies is not as rapid as that of medicine, and no work published while this book has been in the press has called for any reconsideration or major changes in the text. As a comprehensive survey of medical thought and practice in the Anglo-Saxon period it will, I hope, be of service, not only to medical historians, but to those engaged in literary and historical studies of the time.

WILFRID BONSER

September 1963

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MS.	*Contents*	*Language*	*Date*
London: British Museum			
Harleian 55	ff. 1–3. Recipes for hemiplegia	A.S.	Early 11th c.
585	Lacnunga	A.S.	Late 10th or early 11th c.
1585	ff. 12*v*–13*r*. Prayer to the Earth	Latin	Late 11th or early 12th c.
2378	Recipe book (Henslow)	M.E.	14th c.
2965	Book of Nunnaminster	Latin	8th or 9th c.
3719	Diagram for blood-letting (Sudhoff, *Beiträge*, i, plate 54)	M.E.	14th c.
6258		A.S.	Early 12th c.
Cotton Tiberius A. III	f. 28*r*. Prognostics from dreams (Cockayne, iii, p. 200)	A.S.	Mid-11th c.
	ff. 32*v*–35*v*. Blood-letting (Cockayne, iii, pp. 184–96)	A.S.	
	ff. 40*v*–41*r*. Formation of foetus (Cockayne, iii, p. 146)	A.S.	
	ff. 42*v*–43*r*. Divination for sex (Cockayne, iii, p. 145)	A.S.	
	ff. 118*r*–163*v*. Rule of St. Benet (E.E.T.S.)	A.S. & Latin	
Cotton Caligula A. VII	ff. 171*r*–173*r*. Prayer for crops (Cockayne, i, pp. 398–404)	A.S.	Early 11th c.
A. XV (IV. b)	f. 41*r*. Charm for preservation	Latin	10th c.
	f. 126*v*. Blood-letting (Cockayne, iii, p. 152)	A.S.	
	f. 127*r*. Childbirth (Cockayne, iii, p. 154)	A.S.	

MS.	*Contents*	*Language*	*Date*
London: British Museum			
Cotton Otho B. XI	Herb remedies	A.S.	Early 11th c.
Cotton Vitellius C. III	A.S. Herbal, Sextus Placitus	A.S.	*c.* 1000
E. XVIII	f. 13*v*. Charm for bees (Cockayne, i, p. 395)	A.S.	Mid-11th c.
	f. 16*r*. Charm for barn (Cockayne, iii, p. 290)	A.S.	
	f. 16*r*. Charm for cattle (Cockayne, i, p. 388)	A.S.	
	f. 16*r*. Charm for sheep (Cockayne, i, p. 388)	A.S.	
Cotton Titus D. XXVI	f. 4. Charm for blood-letting	Latin	10th c.
	f. 16*v*. Charm against *Blégene* (Cockayne, i, p. 380)	A.S.	
D. XXVII (i)	ff. 2*r*–3*r*. For blood-letting	A.S.	10th c.
Royal 2 A. XX	f. 45*v*. Charm (elves)	Latin	8th c.
	f. 52*r*. Charm for blood-letting	Latin	12th c. (addition)
4 A. XIV	f. 106*v*. Charm for wens		12th c. (addition)
12 D. XVII	Leechbooks	A.S.	*c.* 950
Sloane 521	Charm for *worm* and *venum* (Henslow)	M.E.	14th c.
1580	ff. 44*v*–45*r*. Charm for toothache	Latin	13th c.
1784	ff. 2, 3. Carbuncle, jasper	Anglo-Norman	
2584	p. 174. Directions for gathering herbs (Henslow)	M.E.	14th c.
2839	ff. iv–3. Liber cauterium	Latin	11th c.
Additional 2584	f. 23*v*. Charm contra latrones	M.E.	
17063	Herbarium (pseudo-Apuleius)	Latin	*c.* 1460
21115	,, ,,	Latin	*c.* 1500
33996	f. 91*v*. Charm for tooth-ache	M.E.	15th c.
	f. 96*v*. Jordan-Segen	M.E.	15th c.
London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library			
WMS 46	Prescriptions for heart-ache, &c.	A.S.	*c.* 1025
Oxford: Bodleian Library			
Ashmole 328	Handboc of Byrhtforð	A.S.	1011
Hatton 76	ff. 68–130*v*. Herbarium (pseudo-Apuleius)	A.S.	Mid-11th c.
Junius 85	Two charms (Cockayne, i, pp. 392, 394)	A.S.	Mid-11th c.

MS.	*Contents*	*Language*	*Date*
Bodley 57 (2004)	f. 10. Cattle charm (lorichot)	Latin	*c.* 1300
130	Herbarium (pseudo-Apuleius)	Latin	1120
Auct. F. 36	ff. 1 and 2*v*. Two charms (*Herrigs Archiv*, lxxxiv, p. 323)	A.S. & Latin	11th c.
Oxford: St. John's College			
St. John's 17	f. 1*v*. Blood-letting charm	Latin	Early 12th c.
	f. 2*v*. Table of weights	Latin	
	f. 2*v*. Prognostications	Latin	
	f. 175*r*. Charm for nose-bleeding (Cockayne, i, p. 394)	A.S.	
Cambridge: Corpus Christi College			
C.C.C.C. 41	p. 202 (margin). Charm for bees (Cockayne, i, p. 384)	A.S.	11th c.
C.C.C.C. 190	Two penitentials	A.S. & Latin	11th c.
Durham Cathedral			
Hunter 100	ff. 82–84. Plant names	A.S. & Latin	Early 12th c. (1100–28?)
	ff. 85–101. Medical texts, principally from Isidore	Latin	
	f. 119. Illustrations of cautery	Latin	
	f. 121. Charm for stopping blood	Latin	

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GUIDE TO READERS

THE abbreviations used are, I think, self-evident: e.g. A.S. for Anglo-Saxon.

In the *Lacnunga*, references in arabic numerals refer to Cockayne's text: those in roman numerals refer to that of Grattan and Singer.

If words have been supplied in the middle of a quotation, these have been placed in square brackets [ ], but Anglo-Saxon equivalents have been placed in round brackets ( ).

I have adopted Sir Frank Stenton's spelling of Anglo-Saxon personal names, except in the case of St. Etheldrida—since Æthelthryth is better known under that name.

PART 1

General

CHAPTER I

Introduction

THE Anglo-Saxon period is a long one, stretching from the obscurity of the fifth century of our era to the Norman Conquest. Ethnologically it is important as being the period during which the various elements which were to form the English nation arrived in this island. To the culture and customs of the existing Celtic population were joined successively those of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, and of the Norsemen; during the eleventh century that of the Normans was rapidly infiltrating. The term 'Anglo-Saxon' is conveniently used to denote this period.

Conditions naturally varied considerably during these six hundred years. The amount of reliable material relating to medicine is lamentably small, and when it does occur, it is all too meagre in detail. But since the manuscripts containing the prescriptions which have come down to us date mostly from the tenth and eleventh centuries, the picture of Anglo-Saxon medical practice will be more accurate and complete for those than for the earlier centuries.

There is no evidence for the existence of a 'Harley Street' in Anglo-Saxon Winchester, though the names of several Anglo-Saxon leeches have survived. These were not knighted or ennobled by the kings of Wessex; but one 'royal physician' became the abbot of an Anglo-Saxon monastery.

No learned Anglo-Saxon treatises on medicine have survived, still less any series of 'recent advances' on special topics; but there are various notebooks in the vernacular which were used by the general practitioners of those days. These men did not specialize in diseases whose names ended in '-itis' or '-osis'; but they had to deal with heads that had been broken in battle, with various types of skin diseases, and with cases of vomiting and diarrhoea. They were entirely baffled by internal medicine and were quite unable to cope with epidemics. But there is evidence that they were practical men according to their lights, and that they had inherited some knowledge of medicine, both literary and empirical, from the past.

The Anglo-Saxon period was one of continual warfare. Warfare and the devastation it caused was followed by epidemics of famine and disease. Plagues such as those which descended upon England in 1664, and still more so the Black Death, were spectacular, and have therefore received considerable attention; but those which accompanied the Viking invasions have received far less attention than they deserve.

Endemic diseases, which have been mostly ignored through lack of information about them, had their effect upon the general health and on the social condition of the people. *Lencten-ádl* ('lent-disease'), which seems to have prevailed in this island each spring, may be given as an example.

When a large number of the population manifest some morbid condition, there is a natural tendency to regard this condition as due to infection and not to some general agency, such as a defective or imperfect diet. It will be shown that the conditions under which the people then lived were such that health in general must have been far from ideal, and that epidemics could find abundant material on which to thrive.

Medical knowledge, at least until the close of the period, was largely the property of ecclesiastics. This was natural, since the care of the sick was in their hands, and since such culture as there was hardly existed outside the fraternity of the Church. Although individual ecclesiastics treated their patients with loving care and solicitude, the attitude of the Church towards disease hindered rather than stimulated progress. There were two reasons for this. On the one hand the Church was determined not to lose its authority over the masses. Its attitude therefore inevitably gave rise to fear and superstition, and the result was a stifling of independent thought. On the other hand, its theories had no practical value for the patient's bodily welfare; disease in the eyes of the Church was but the visible evidence of a struggle between the forces of good and evil for the possession of his body, while the salvation of the soul through the sufferings endured by the body was of paramount importance.

A passage in the *Institutes of Polity* (fo. 18), which occurs in the tenth-century MS. Bodley Junius 121, shows well the attitude of the Church. It runs:

> And if it happen that misfortune befall the people, through an army or famine, through plague or mortality, through failure of crops or bad

weather (*þurh here oðþon hunger, þurh stric oððe steorfan; þurh unwæstm oððe unweder*), then let him earnestly consult how amends for this may be sought from Christ, with pure fasts, and with frequenting churches, and with humble prayers and with alms-givings.

It was inculcated by the Church that disease was a punishment incurred as the result of sin.[1] Since one of its functions was the forgiveness of sin after due repentance, it follows logically that it was for the Church also to remove and to cure the disease. A typical description of such an illness and cure occurs in the anonymous life of St. Cuthbert:

> There came some women bearing a certain youth who lay on a litter; they carried him to . . . the holy bishop . . . adjuring him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that he would bless him with holy relics and would utter a prayer for him to the Lord, beseeching God's pardon for the sins by which he was bound and on account of which he endured punishment. So the bishop . . . prayed . . . and blessing the boy, he drove away the disease and restored him to health.[2]

This is in conformity with the medieval idea of the universe being governed by general laws which had been laid down by the Almighty, but whose reversal could be obtained as the result of prayer. Such reversals were termed miracles.

In the time of Bede the monasteries were the largest communities in the land and the monks and nuns accomplished much to ameliorate the condition of the sick, at least for their own members and probably for lay folk also. But since the ecclesiastic was forbidden to shed blood, monasteries had to retain the services of a lay 'medicus' to perform such primitive surgery as was required. Such a medicus (*læce*) was Cynifred at Æthelthryth's (Etheldrida's) nunnery at Ely. Most of the 'medici' mentioned by Gregory of Tours also appear to have been laymen.

The existence of the professional leech, whether layman or ecclesiastic, is inferred in the laws of King Æthelberht of Kent as early as the beginning of the seventh century.

Details referring to the practice of medicine exist for the time of Bede and again for the reign of King Alfred onwards, but (apart from entries in Irish annals) there is a hiatus, during which there is no record, between these periods.

[1] A theory repudiated by Bishop Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society*.

[2] Anonymous life of St. Cuthbert, iv. 5, in B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 117–19.

The evidence for the later Anglo-Saxon period is much fuller. Vernacular texts such as the three *Leechbooks*[1] were written at Winchester shortly after Alfred's time. This indicates the acquisition by then of a certain amount of empirical knowledge. The names of three physicians have been preserved: Bald, the possessor of the first two *Leechbooks*, whose name occurs in the colophon of the second; Oxa, who prescribed a recipe for the disease called *peór-ádl* in chapter 47 of the first *Leechbook*; and Dun, who prescribed one for lung disease in chapter 65 of the second *Leechbook*.

The most famous physician of the eleventh century was Baldwin of Chartres, who became 'royal physician' to Edward the Confessor. He was sent by the king to cure Leofstan, abbot of Bury, who was suffering from paralysis.[2] He succeeded Leofstan as abbot, but returned to the service of medicine after the Conquest and became physician to William I. 'Because of his medical skill and attractive personality,' says MacKinney, 'to his last days his services were much in demand among the higher nobility and clergy.'[3]

Western medicine stagnated for more than five hundred years from later Imperial Roman times until it began to revive in the hands of the Arabs. The chief reason for this stagnation was the lack of that inquiring spirit to which one is accustomed today. Science and medicine rested upon authority, just as much as did theology itself. Most leeches were content to copy dead material without questioning this authority. 'It was the wondering and questioning of men like Alfred', says R. H. Hodgkin, 'which was in time to lead mankind through the accumulated rubbish of unscientific ages to knowledge.'[4]

The term 'Dark Ages' applies to medicine as much as to other aspects of human knowledge. Yet it must be remembered that 'dark' is a comparative term. One is apt to take for granted the amenities of twentieth-century civilization, and it is difficult to realize the limitations of mankind without them. Defective eyesight, for instance, is now adjusted by means of spectacles; in those days there were none. The man who has lost his teeth is now fitted with dentures, but in those days he remained toothless, probably to the detriment of his health in general owing to imperfect

[1] Text and translation in Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. ii.

[2] For details see p. 194.

[3] L. C. MacKinney, *Early Medieval Medicine*, Baltimore, 1937, p. 144.

[4] R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1939, vol. ii, p. 675.

mastication of his food. If a man loses a limb, he is now provided with a new one; in those days he probably went without, though we know from the occurrence of nicknames such as 'wooden-leg' that in the Scandinavia of that period artificial limbs could sometimes be supplied.

The outlook of man on natural science in classical times is depicted in Pliny's *Natural History*. This vast but uncritical encyclopaedia summed up the results of ancient knowledge. Its popularity was sustained throughout the Middle Ages, and it was continually copied and added to by monks and scribes. Pliny notes with delight all stories of the marvellous, however improbable they may be; and though he at least pretends not to give credence to them himself, it is obvious that his less cultured readers would regard them with still less discrimination. The student of medieval medicine must always bear in mind that Pliny's book was its background and that knowledge had not progressed, but had rather deteriorated, since his day.

Before the advent of modern science and the present outlook on natural phenomena, acquired by assessing and interpreting them rightly, man ascribed disease to the wrath of the Deity or to the malice of elves or of evil spirits, and not to the intricate physical causes now known. He therefore tried to avert and often to cure it by prayers or else by resort to magic.

It is impossible to present an accurate picture of medicine at that period without giving at the same time an account of the magical practices performed, and in which the participants believed. Only by so doing can one realize the atmosphere of ignorance and credulity then prevailing, and the reasons for the uncritical acceptance by the patient of the remedies prescribed. The word 'magic' in this connexion must be taken to include not only the ritual and charms of paganism, but also the supernatural power or 'virtue' employed by the Church for effecting cures.

Both the magic and the medicine of the Anglo-Saxons were largely derived from classical authors such as Pliny and from late-classical authors, such as Marcellus Empiricus, who derived from him. Speaking of magic, Pliny says:

> Of the fact that it first originated in medicine, no one entertains a doubt, or that under the plausible disguise of promoting health, it insinuated itself among mankind, as a higher and more holy branch of the medical art. Then, in the next place, to promises the most seductive and the most

flattering, it has added all the resources of religion, a subject upon which, at the present day, man is still entirely in the dark.[1]

The mysterious origin of some diseases, such as insanity, and of some natural processes, such as childbirth and its complications, led to the use of magic in dealing with them. But magic, as will be seen from the following pages, was associated with most branches of medicine, thereby ousting the healing art itself. The assessment of what was of value for healing purposes was therefore entirely different from what it had been in classical Greece and what it is today. Thus one must not necessarily look in a prescription for any physiological effect which the ingredients might have had on a patient. Storms gives a good example of a recipe 'against a swelling', which occurs in the *Lacnunga*, § 9 (XXIV). He comments that 'the three ingredients of which the paste' in this prescription 'consists show some thickening or swelling, and just as these swellings disappear by cutting them or pounding them, so the swelling of the patient will disappear'.[2] The choice of herbs or other ingredients often has some reason which is to us obscure, for the magical attributes of objects then used for effecting cures were those which had most value in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon. Another cause of his attitude to disease may have been that he regarded it as endowed, like himself, with will and personality: the obvious inference was that pressure could be brought to bear upon it.

One result of the combination of magic and medicine was an attempt by our ancestors to prognosticate. Prognostics of various kinds were made from the age of the moon, from observations of heavenly bodies such as comets, and from dreams. From these it was hoped to ascertain many hidden matters: whether a patient would recover, whether a woman would bear a male or a female child, or on which days blood-letting might be performed. Prognostications were also made for every conceivable kind of object, holy and unholy: for such things as indications of character, for propitious times for setting out on journeys, for catching thieves, for agriculture, for transacting business. This practice derives from Pliny and from later Latin sources, and was a result of man's curiosity and credulity, untempered by any rational scientific principles by which he might have regulated his thoughts.

[1] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXX. 1.

[2] G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, The Hague, 1948, p. 29.

Yet in spite of these intimate associations with magical practices, the prescriptions of the Anglo-Saxons exhibit an extensive acquaintance with medical lore. The long lists of the parts of the body in the *Lorica* of Gildas[1] seem to indicate at least a superficial knowledge of anatomy, and the number of herbs that occur in prescriptions and in glossaries is very great. But the inability to make any practical use of this knowledge is shown by the fact that not one drug in a hundred has the physiological action attributed to it. Ill effects must have often resulted from remedies thus ignorantly, but none the less explicitly, prescribed. One prescription ends with the words, 'With God's help no harm will come to him'.[2] This phrase might well have been added in most other cases. Perhaps in some a definite pharmacological value can be discerned. The numerous green herbs that were used may well have been beneficial by reason of their antiscorbutic properties; and since they were chiefly employed in the early spring, they may have aided in correcting that alteration of the blood from which our forefathers were liable to suffer after a winter's diet consisting largely of salt meat and dried peas. Perhaps a purgative action here and there may have been of value, or a styptic have been effective. But the overwhelming majority of substances used would have no beneficial effect save upon the mind of the sufferer.

The large number of drugs in each prescription is a feature of this material, and is in striking contrast to the practice of the Hippocratic authors. A considerable number of the drugs used in classical times remained in the pharmacopoeia of the Anglo-Saxons, but this was owing to the glamour of their origin, and not from any experience of their efficacy. It may well be that it was the names of some drugs, rather than the drugs themselves, that remained. An example is dittany, which is said to grow only in Crete. One curious recipe prescribes, as an antidote against the bite of a snake, the eating of the bark of a tree 'which comes out of paradise (*neorxna wang*)': the Anglo-Saxon writer naïvely remarks that this would be obtained with difficulty.[3] Singer regards many of the prescriptions as 'mere scribal exercises'. He thinks 'it should be an error to regard' them 'as indicating the actual lines of treatment. For practical reasons many of the recipes could not have been prepared'.[4]

[1] *Lacn.*, between 34 and 35 (LXVIII). [2] Ibid., 13 (XXXII).
[3] *Leechbook I*, xlv. 5.
[4] Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, Lond. 1952, p. 24.

Anglo-Saxon leechdoms are, however, but a link in the chain of copying: the same remedies occur again in Middle English, and on into the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The occurrence in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of glosses in later hands indicates that these manuscripts were still in use at least till the thirteenth century. Many of the ingredients are used to this day in folk-medicine. Betony, for instance, is prescribed in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* 'for the bite of a mad (*wéde*) hound',[1] and appears again in a fourteenth-century recipe book, 'For bytyng of a wodhound—lat hym drynke betayne'.[2] Our English peasantry still prescribe it.

One of the chief difficulties in Anglo-Saxon, as indeed in classical and all medieval medicine, is the complete lack of modern terminology and nomenclature. The nature of the complaint and the definition of the part affected are often vague in the extreme. For instance, the word *innoð* signifies merely the inside of the body. If a prescription says *wið innoðes sár* only, the lack of precision makes the prescription worthless. Sometimes, however, the sense will help. In some cases this word is used of the heart or the stomach; when spoken of in connexion with a woman, it usually signifies the womb. Again, one may translate *wið innoðes fæstnysse* as 'for constipation', or *wið tobrocenum innoðum* as 'for ruptured intestine'. The word *inneweard* is equally vague as a medical term; the curious combination *innoðes innewearde* is found and may safely be rendered as 'intestines'. The word *hrif* is also used vaguely of the interior of the body, and it may be translated 'belly' or 'womb' according to the sex of the subject. The *mid-hrif* (diaphragm) separates the heart from the stomach.

The word *ædre*, which denotes a channel in which liquids may flow, when used in medicine must be translated according to the sense: it may signify an artery or a vein when blood is mentioned, also a nerve, a sinew, or kidney.[3] *Þeóte* also is used for a channel: compounded with *líc* (body) it signifies a pore.

The word, *hreðer*, breast, appears to have been used metaphorically rather than anatomically.

If the Anglo-Saxon word is itself a translation from a Latin one, the Latin equivalent is often useful in establishing the meaning.

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, i. 25.

[2] MS. Harley 2378, fo. 268 (Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century*, London, 1899, p. 116).

[3] e.g. *A.S. Herbal*, lxxxvi. 3, 'for sore of the kidneys' (Cockayne, vol. i, p. 191).

Examples will constantly occur in the following pages. Thus three Latin equivalents are found for the word *weargbræde*, namely impetigo, ulcus, and carcinoma. In this connexion the collection of *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* originally published by Thomas Wright, but edited by R. P. Wülcker in 1884, is invaluable. The first twelve vocabularies are of the Anglo-Saxon period and were originally written between the eighth and eleventh centuries. They were intended to help the Anglo-Saxons to learn Latin. The eleventh vocabulary, which is printed from an eleventh-century manuscript in the Royal Library at Brussels, is especially interesting in this connexion, since it contains a long list of words relating to the human body.

Líc is a general word signifying the body, or, more often, a corpse.[1] The compound *lic-hama*, on the other hand, usually refers to the living rather than the dead body, and it is used of the corporeal part in contrast to the spiritual part of man.

The word *bán*, a bone, has derivatives *bán-cófa* (bone repository), *bán-sele* (bone hall), and *bán-hús* (bone house), all three signifying the body, and also *bán-loca*, that in which the bones are locked or enclosed, namely the skin.

Anglo-Saxon words which signify disease (*morbus*) in general are *ádl*, *cóðu*, *ece* (pain), and *wærc* (ache or pain). Compounds of these are used to localize the ache or pain. Such are *lungen-ádl*, disease of the lungs; *eár-cóðu*, disease of the ear; *cnéo-wærc*, knee pain. Sometimes these four words when compounded with parts of the body have been shown to bear a more specific meaning, either with certainty or conjecturally. Such are *fót-ádl*, a pain in the foot, gout; *lenden-ece*, an ache in the loin, ? lumbago (according to Cockayne), but *lenden-wærc* is translated by Bosworth–Toller as a disease of the kidneys (? nephritis); *þeóh-ece*, an ache in the thigh, ? sciatica; *sweor-cóðu*, a disease of the neck or throat, possibly to be equated with quinsy.

But *ádl*, *cóðu*, *ece*, and *wærc* can be compounded with other words than those signifying parts of the body, e.g. *ban-cóðu* signifies erysipelas (*bana*, a killer); *bræc-cóðu* signifies epilepsy, the breaking or falling disease (*brecan*, to break); *felle-wærc* or *fylle-wærc* also means epilepsy, the falling sickness; *fær-cóðu* signifies apoplexy (*fær*, sudden).

[1] It has survived in two derivatives relative to the *dead* body, namely, 'lich-gate' and 'lykewake'.

Other words signifying disease in general are *leger*, literally a lying, whence sickness and also death; and also *suht*[1] which occurs but once—in the Later Genesis—in Anglo-Saxon, though it is found many times in the *Heliand*. *Suht* is found compounded with *hrit* as a word for fever. *Un-trumness* signifies weakness or infirmity, being the negation of *trumness*, strength. *Sár*, besides signifying soreness of the skin, is also used for pain and suffering, both physical and mental. In Icelandic *sár* is the general term for a wound.

The word *bræc* signifies a breaking, whence flowing, catarrh; it is equated in the glossaries with *rheuma*. From it is derived *gebræceo*, a cough, and *hræc-gebræc*, a cold in the chest, hoarseness.

Læca is the Anglo-Saxon word for a physician. The medieval word *leche*[2] was first used as a descriptive term and later developed into a surname. *Læce-feoh* is a physician's fee; the occurrence of this word suggests the beginnings of the craft, if not yet the profession, of medicine. *Læce-hus* is a hospital. *Lǽcung*, healing, suffixed to *sealf*, a salve, signifies pharmacy. Cognate are *lácnian*, to heal, and *lácnung*, healing, a remedy or medicine.

The first *Leechbook* arranges its material according to the parts of the body affected, beginning with the head and its parts (eyes, ears, &c.) and working downwards.

As is shown from the descriptions of disease, especially in the *Leechbooks*, the Anglo-Saxons were very weak with regard to diagnosis. They had no specific knowledge of the interior organs of the body or of their diseases, and in consequence but seldom took matters in hand until, judging from the descriptions given of the symptoms, the patient was already dying and human aid was too late.

[1] Equivalent to *soght* in the Middle English *Cursor mundi* and other northern texts: there are cognate words in various Teutonic languages, e.g. German *Sucht*. See *O.E.D.* under 'sought' (= sickness, especially of sheep in later use).

[2] G. A. Auden, in a paper on the Barber Surgeons of York, speaks of a certain Christofer Leche (16th century) who was 'the forerunner of eleven members of seven successive generations of that name who became members of the Barber Surgeons' Company, the last being Joseph Leech, who received his freedom as Barber Chirurgion in 1721' (*Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1927–8, xxi (Sect. Hist. Med.), 70–75).

CHAPTER II

Documents

THE documents with which this book is concerned relate partly to history and partly to medicine. It is not necessary here to enumerate and discuss the manuscripts of such works as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, since this information can readily be found in the best edition of those works, but a brief account will be given of Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts.

(*a*) *The monastic chronicles and biographies as sources of medical history*

The events of importance in the history of Anglo-Saxon medicine must be sought for in the various chronicles which relate to the period. Those which are more or less contemporary, or at least based on contemporary writers—and they are few—are by far the most important. The rest, from that of William of Malmesbury, who belongs to the generation immediately after the Norman Conquest, are of minor importance in comparison. In many cases they are merely copied from the earlier chronicles. But 'what might nowadays be foolishly called plagiarism', to quote Eoin MacNeill, 'was in truth the most honest course—it saved the reader, contemporary or later, from imagining that there were or might be two authorities for a statement when in fact there was but one.'[1] In some cases, however, these later chronicles include local material which they derived from copies of the *Chronicle* which have perished, and they are therefore valuable as giving extra evidence.

Alfred tells us at the beginning of his version of the *Pastoral Care* that the 'churches throughout all England were filled with treasures and books', and how these were destroyed during the Viking incursions, and especially between the years 867 and 878, when 'everything was harried and burnt up'. It is obvious that our contemporary records for the Anglo-Saxon period would have been richer but for this destruction. It is probable, from the evidence of

[1] *Ériu*, 1913, vii. 37.

Alfred, that the decay of literacy during the period of the earlier incursions was such that no contemporary records would then have been written.

The two chief contemporary documents are the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Bede carries Anglo-Saxon annals down to the year 731. After this there is a hiatus of contemporary evidence for the next century and a half. The *Chronicle* then continues the narrative till the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

The *Chronicle*, as contemporary evidence, dates from the time of Alfred. The period preceding his reign was then recorded as tradition, but current events were chronicled from his reign. The *Chronicle* is usually but a bald narrative entered under each year. It expands, however, in three periods: namely, for the reigns of Alfred and Edward the Elder, for those of Æthelred the Unready and Edmund Ironside, and for those of Edward the Confessor and Harold. Occurrences of famines and pestilences are duly recorded throughout. Copies of the *Chronicle* were kept up simultaneously at different religious houses. It is therefore sometimes necessary to specify which manuscript contains the information quoted. A local outbreak of pestilence may have been recorded in only one copy, such as that kept at Canterbury, Peterborough, or Worcester.

Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* provides invaluable information for the early period. Histories of individual cures by saints or by means of their relics throw much light upon the 'general practice' of his day, which, as has already been mentioned, was then in the hands of the Church. The *Ecclesiastical History* was translated into the vernacular by King Alfred. Medical terms will be quoted from both Latin and Anglo-Saxon versions.

Bede's two shorter historical works, the *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* and the *Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne*, also provide useful examples of healing by saintly men. The preface to this last-mentioned work gives details of Bede's tests for accuracy until he was satisfied that his narrative portrayed the truth as far as it was to be ascertained. He says it was first submitted, for perusal and correction, to Herefrid, abbot of Lindisfarne; it was then read during two days by the elders and teachers of the congregation of Lindisfarne, and 'accurately weighed and examined in all its parts, [but] there was nothing at all found which required to be altered'.

Apart from this, Bede's work on the face of it bears the stamp of truth as far as it was known to him. If one compares his account of the miracles of healing performed by St. Cuthbert, for instance, with the accounts by later writers such as Simeon and Reginald of Durham, it is at once obvious that many of these miracles as related by Bede are less inconsistent with what could have been accomplished by a man of saintly character, working at the time of a period of religious enthusiasm, than are the crude and extravagant accounts of the two later writers. Besides, Simeon and Reginald impute to Cuthbert motives for his miracles, especially posthumous ones, which are as inconsistent with his saintly character as are the acts of petty spite imputed to Christ in the apocryphal gospels.

Reference will also be made to Bede's three 'scientific' treatises known since the introduction of printing as *De temporum ratione* (written in 725), *De temporibus*, and *De natura rerum* (both written about the year 703).[1] The question of the authorship of the smaller works that bear Bede's name is a very vexed one. Charles W. Jones, in the latest treatise on this subject, says:

> No writer has had more different works unknowingly attributed to him than Bede: yet most of the confusion . . . is the result of errors of renaissance printers instead of mediaeval scribes. Bede, by the nature of his writings, was bound to attract anonymous works to his name, but with the possible exception of the editor of the 1563 edition of his works [at Basle] we never meet conscious fraud. . . . Because his works were short, several were written in one codex, and extra leaves were filled with other short material. Eventually all the anonymous material in the volume might take the name of Bede.[2]

The work *De minutione sanguinis* has been ascribed to Bede, and was included by Giles in the collected edition of his works, but it is not claimed by Bede himself, in the list at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History*, as his own work. Plummer considers that it possibly may be by Bede, especially as the latter shows an acquaintance with the subject in Book V, chapter 3 of his *Ecclesiastical History*. For the sake of convenience it will be quoted here as Bede's work. Jones, however, is very sceptical concerning Plum-

[1] For Professor Whiting's discussion of the date of *De temporibus*, see *Bede, Twelfth-centenary Essays*, edited by A. Hamilton Thompson, Oxford, 1935, pp. 15–16.

[2] Charles W. Jones, *Bedae pseudepigraphia: Scientific Writings falsely attributed to Bede*, Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1939, pp. 1–2.

mer's opinion. 'Tenuous criteria, indeed!', he says, 'blood-letting in established times and seasons is standard medical practice from classical days to the Renaissance, especially in cloisters. But blood-letting according to Egyptian Days is definitely superstition uncharacteristic of Bede.'[1]

Three contemporary biographies throw light on short periods. The earliest of these is Eddius's *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, which tells of cures by that saint. The second is that of *St. Guthlac*, by Felix of Croyland. It was composed, according to T. D. Hardy,[2] at least before 757. Felix claims to have derived his information from competent witnesses who were acquainted with the saint. It is the only historical work which has survived from Mercia. The third is Asser's *Life of Alfred*, which covers the life of the king only down to the year 894. It records, however, several interesting medical facts concerning him. The authenticity of the *Life* as being by his friend and contemporary, the bishop of Sherborne, was disputed by Thomas Wright, especially the passage which relates to the king's health; but W. H. Stevenson in his definitive edition considered it to be the genuine work of Bishop Asser.[3] Little doubt now remains, however, after the destructive attack by J. W. Adamson, the latest critic, that it is a political forgery of the twelfth century.[4]

Ælfric wrote his *Lives of the Saints* about the year 997. Those lives which deal with the Anglo-Saxon saints are of interest in the present instance. The lives of St. Etheldrida and St. Oswald, however, add nothing to the more contemporaneous information given by Bede, but those of St. Swithun (xxi) and St. Edmund (xxxii) contain much that is useful.

Edward the Confessor is, perhaps, the most interesting of the Anglo-Saxon kings from the point of view of medicine. Not only are various miracles of healing attributed to him while alive, but, since his body is one of those which was uncorrupt, it became the agent for further miracles after his death. Contemporary evidence for the life and reign of the Confessor is provided by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Various *Lives* of the king exist, but only one of them has any claim to being contemporary. This is the *Vita*

[1] *Bedae pseudepigraphia*, p. 89.

[2] Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, vol. i, part 1, p. 407 (Rolls Series).

[3] See the edition of W. H. Stevenson, 1904, pp. xcvi–cx.

[4] Adamson, 'Who was "Asser"?' in his *The Illiterate Anglo-Saxon and other Essays*, Lond. 1946, pp. 21–37.

Æduuardi regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit. It is preserved in the British Museum MS. Harley 526, a manuscript of twenty leaves in a twelfth-century hand, printed by H. R. Luard in his collection of lives of the Confessor in the Rolls Series. It purports to have been written within a few years of Edward's death and is dedicated to his queen Eadgyth, from whom the author says he received much kindness. There has, however, been much controversy as to the date when it was actually written, and also as to its authorship. Marc Bloch, in his preface to the Life of the Confessor by Osbert de Clare, argues—chiefly on the ground that a work which details Edward's prophecies can hardly have been written before their fulfilment—that in reality it was not written until the beginning of the reign of Henry I.[1] The latest critic, R. W. Southern, argues (October 1943) from internal evidence that the *Vita* is probably an early work of Goscelin, and that it was written when it purports to have been.[2]

The *Vita* was the basis of all later lives of Edward. William of Malmesbury, writing more than half a century after the king's death, gives an account of his miraculous cures.

The *Life* by Osbert de Clare was written in 1138, during the reign of Stephen. It describes the exhumation of the king and the condition of his body. The translation of Edward's body in 1163 (after his canonization by Pope Alexander III in 1161) took place in the reign of Stephen's rival Henry II, and necessitated the writing of a new life. This was by Ælred of Rievaulx.

Ælred's *Life* formed the groundwork of a metrical life—*La Estoire de seinte Aedward le rei*—which was written in the middle of the thirteenth century. This last-mentioned life occupies the major part of Luard's volume.

The evidence for the cures attributed to Edward (apart from that in the *Vita Æduuardi*) is therefore too late to be of much value for

[1] It is natural that no life of the last king of the house of Egbert should have been written during the reigns of the first two Norman kings. Henry I, however, married an Anglo-Saxon princess in order to strengthen his position, and he appears to have tried still further to conciliate the Anglo-Saxon portion of his subjects by presenting Edward in a specially favourable light, and by stressing his saintliness—possibly at the expense of historical facts. The cult of Edward and of his great-niece, St. Margaret, who was the mother of the new queen, had its place in the propaganda—religious, dynastic, and political—of the later Norman and of the earlier Plantagenet period, and lives were written in consequence.

[2] R. W. Southern, 'The first Life of Edward the Confessor', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 1943, lviii. 385–400.

the satisfying of the sceptic of today, though it evidently satisfied Alexander, since in his bull of canonization he says that he had 'examined a book of miracles and testimonies from the archbishops, bishops, abbots and priors of England'.[1] It is unfortunate also for the present purpose that the intention of the chroniclers was to enhance Edward's reputation as a saint rather than as a healer of the sick.

All the later chroniclers copy from contemporary sources. The chief from which information is to be derived are the following:

1. *William of Malmesbury*. He exercises more of the critical spirit than most, but he is full of tales of the marvellous, especially when dealing with the years at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

2. *Florence of Worcester* wrote about the time of Henry I. His narrative from 1030 onwards appears to be derived from a copy of the *Chronicle* which has now been lost.

3. *Simeon of Durham* was precentor of Durham and nearly contemporary with Florence. The *History of the Kings* which bears his name is valuable in that it incorporates (and thus has preserved) two series of annals which contain some independent matter relating to Northumbria.

4. *Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon*, wrote about the middle of the twelfth century. His narrative is often the same, word for word, as that of Roger of Hoveden.

5. *Roger of Hoveden*, or Howden, who was a clerk to Henry II, was employed by the king in visiting monasteries on the death of an abbot or prior, for purposes of the revenue; this gave him access to monastic material.

6. *Geoffrey Gaimar* wrote about the middle of the twelfth century. He also gives fuller details in some cases than can be obtained from any existing copy of the *Chronicle*, and therefore, presumably, had access to a copy which has been lost.

7. The *Book of Hyde* is a chronicle of England from the Saxon settlement to the time of Cnut (455–1023) as well as a cartulary of the abbey of Hyde in Hampshire. It is a late source, since it was composed at Winchester some time after the year 1354. It contains some items of local interest—especially concerning St. Swithun, and also information with regard to King Alfred, whose body was translated to the abbey from Winchester—which are not found elsewhere.

[1] E. W. Kemp, 'Pope Alexander III and the canonization of saints', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 1945, 4s. xxvii, 17.

8. The *Flores historiarum*, which has gone under the name of 'Matthew of Westminster', is a chronicle of events from the Creation to 1327. Its popularity during the Middle Ages is shown from the number of manuscripts of it which have survived. Of these, two are originals from which the eighteen others have derived. The earliest is MS. Chetham 6712, written (until the year 1265) at St. Albans. The other was written at the priory of Merton early in the fourteenth century and is now at Eton College.

9. The so-called *History of Ingulf, abbot of Croyland*, is interesting as a source, but must be used with the greatest caution. Although Ingulf was abbot from 1075 to 1109, this work was probably written by a monk of Croyland in the fourteenth century in order to further the litigation in which the abbey was then involved. The many charters which it contains were forged for this end, and the dates given in it are often incorrect. It is useful as giving an intimate picture of monastic life during the Anglo-Saxon period; but it is to be hoped that some of the details of corruption (for example, in connexion with relics) which are recorded belong rather to the period of the writer than to that with which he deals. It gives local colour and may probably be relied on for information which it was not in the interests of the monastery to falsify.

10. The mid-twelfth-century history of the monastery of Peterborough, *Hugonis Candidi cœnobii Burgensis historia*, ends abruptly in 1155 on the election of William of Walterville as abbot. Its author was Hugh, sub-prior of Peterborough, who from the paleness of his countenance was originally surnamed Albus, and later Candidus. It gives many interesting details concerning the abbey's relics.

11. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. Nothing more need be said of this as a source than that it must be used as evidence with the greatest scepticism. It was written largely as political propaganda during the reign of Stephen (between 1136 and 1138), and its success as a popular rehash of early legend may be judged from the number of its manuscripts which exceeds even that of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The late R. W. Chambers, in order to demonstrate the amount of fiction it contains, was wont, characteristically, to quote the passage in Giraldus Cambrensis concerning a Welshman who was beset with evil spirits; he was relieved when the Gospel of St. John was placed on his bosom, but when Geoffrey's work was substituted for it, 'the spirits settled

not only upon his body, but upon the book in greater numbers and for a longer time than usual'.[1] Geoffrey's picturesque details will, however, be quoted from time to time.

12. Celtic annals, such as the *Annales Cambriae*, supposed to have been originally compiled in 954, the *Old-Irish Chronicle*, and other Irish sources such as the *Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters* supplement English sources of information with regard to the epidemics which visited the British Isles. The various versions of Irish annals have a relationship similar to that between the various manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. 'The mutual relationship of these chronicles', says O'Rahilly, 'deserves a closer study . . . but one may infer . . . that a copy of the Ulster Chronicle and its continuation reached Clonmacnois in the early years of the tenth century, and that a new recension of it, incorporating the local annals, was made at Clonmacnois at that time.' He assumes 'that those entries, relating to the period 431–740, which are common to the Annals of Ulster and to the Annals of Tigernach or Chronicon Scotorum go back to the eighth-century Ulster Chronicle'.[2]

Lives of Celtic Saints, such as that of St. Samson of Dol, provide many useful sidelights, especially with regard to healing by means of relics. But the paucity of contemporary evidence makes it essential that caution should be used here also. If a monastery required the life of its patron saint and no evidence for it was forthcoming, the result was the manufacture of such evidence, and the addition to it of stories of the marvellous to enhance the saint's reputation. There was also a tendency to mix the exploits of different saints who had the same name, or with similar names.

The falsification of evidence by the Church for political and financial ends has already been mentioned in connexion with Ingulf's *History of Croyland*: the faking of relics for healing and other purposes will be mentioned many times hereafter. Herder says: 'Once the evil principle had been adopted that in the interest of the Church faith might be broken, lies invented, and fiction resorted to, the historical faith was violated. The tongue, the pen, the memory, and the imagination of mankind lost all rule and compass, so that instead of quoting Greek and Punic faith we might, with

[1] R. W. Chambers, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and *The Brut* as sources of early British history', *History*, 1919, n.s. iii. 225, quoting Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, i. 5 (*Opera*, vi, Rolls Series, 1858).

[2] T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, 1946, p. 258.

more reason, speak of Christian credibility.'[1] It follows that the reliability of most monastic sources, after the time of Bede, must always be carefully considered.[2]

(*b*) *Other written sources of information*

Much relevant information may also be obtained from the Anglo-Saxon laws, both lay and ecclesiastical, and from the penitentials.

The laws are of interest especially in connexion with surgery. They specify the various penalties for broken limbs and other injuries, and also in some cases prescribe that a fee be paid to the physician who is attending the victim.

The three most important early penitentials are those of Theodore (688), of Bede (before 735), and of Egbert, the first archbishop of York, which dates from at least thirty years later. There has been a great deal of confusion with regard to penitential literature, which has now been clarified by a careful study of the manuscripts.

It is now generally agreed that the real Penitential of Theodore is that which occurs in a codex of the second half of the seventh century in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. C.C.C.C. 320.[3] This is printed by Haddon and Stubbs. Book I, section 15, 'de cultura idolorum', is especially of moment in the present instance.

Various closely related penitentials have been ascribed to Bede. That printed in 1871 by Haddon and Stubbs is from a Vienna manuscript (116). It contains sections on drunkenness and on impure food. In 1901 Dom Bruno Albers published another text bearing the name of Bede, which he had discovered in the library of the Barberini at Rome (MS. Vatican, Barb. Lat. xi, 477)[4]. The tenth section concerns auguries and divinations and does not occur in the text of Haddon and Stubbs.

The genuine Penitential of Egbert is to be found in the first book of MS. Bodl. 718, as well as in other manuscripts outside this country. This again has been printed by Haddon and Stubbs.

[1] Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, xvii. 1.

[2] For instance, the process of building up the 'life' of St. Edmund from the bald narrative of a few lines in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to the 'full-blown legend' as given by Capgrave is traced by Thomas Arnold on pp. xiv–xv of vol. i of his *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, 1890 (Rolls Series).

[3] James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, 1912, vol. ii, p. 132.

[4] Macneill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 1938, pp. 217–33.

The two penitentials in MS. 190 in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, published by Thorpe in 1840 for the Royal Commission, as were those of Theodore and Egbert, have now been discredited and shown to be a medley of penitential material, partly Anglo-Saxon, partly foreign, partly early, but containing much of a later date. This manuscript (C.C.C.C. 190) is of the eleventh century and was given, among others, to the Church of Exeter by Leofric, its first bishop, who died in 1072. The first penitential in it, that mistaken by Thorpe as the Penitential of Theodore, is rejected by Haddon and Stubbs, who say that it is a portion of a Frankish penitential of the 9th century, containing much that is Theodore's and much more that is of later date'.[1] I shall frequently quote from it, since it contains much material that is useful for the present purpose, and I shall cite it as 'the first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190'. 'The literary history of Egbert's Penitential', say Haddon and Stubbs, 'is not less complicated than that of Theodore's: a considerable number of works founded upon or incorporating his genuine penitential having been from time to time ascribed to him, besides others to which he has no sort of claim.' The material printed by Thorpe in 1840 as the Confessional and Penitential of Egbert has versions in both Latin and Anglo-Saxon. His 'Confessional' consists of extracts from Theodore and from the genuine Penitential of Egbert. The 'pseudo-penitential' consists of translations from the Penitential of Halitgar, who was bishop of Cambrai from 816 to 831 (books i–iii), and (book iv) of extracts from Cummean, from the Roman Penitential, and from Theodore. This manuscript is entered in the list of Leofric's gifts to Exeter Cathedral as *Scrift bóc on Englisc*. I shall cite this as 'the second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190'. It is clear that these two penitentials were known in England at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period, since, though partly of foreign origin, they have re-appeared in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the eleventh century.

These documents are interesting as showing the diffusion of such material over western Europe. They also demonstrate the development of penitential literature which was included in one manuscript after another from the monastic scriptoria. The pagan practices against which Theodore inveighed in 688 were those which were especially obnoxious to the spirit of Christianity on its

[1] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 1871, vol. iii, p. 175.

reintroduction under Augustine and his successors. The Penitential of Egbert, together with the acts of the Council of Clovesho of 747, represents the earliest Anglo-Saxon attempts to prevent the increase of abuses in the monasteries. The abuses against which the penitentials in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 inveighed were either such as still persisted from earlier days, or those which had crept in during the intervening centuries, and which reformers were endeavouring to eradicate at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period.

The section of the Anglo-Saxon Rule of St. Benedict which deals with the treatment of sick monks, and the rules laid down for the food and drink to be consumed in the monasteries are also pertinent. St. Benedict drew up his Rule for the government of his Order and as a standard for monastic life in general about the year A.D. 516. Wilfrid in his defence before King Aldfrith in 702 claimed that it was he who had introduced the Rule into this country. Benedict Biscop imposed it upon his two monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, and on his death-bed in 689 charged his monks to observe it. The Council of Clovesho in 747, in its effort to reform abuses which had crept into the Church, attempted to enforce the Rule. It is, however, possible that it did not become a force in English monasteries until the reign of Edgar the Peaceful. The leader of the monastic reform movement—in collaboration with the king and Dunstan—was Æthelwold, who became bishop of Winchester in 963. He introduced the Rule into the Old Minster there, and caused it to be strictly adhered to. Its introduction into other monasteries followed. As many of the monks were unable to read it in Latin, he rendered it into the vernacular at the special request of the king. It will be remembered that the second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, mentioned above, appeared in Latin and also in Anglo-Saxon, presumably for the same reason. Various prose paraphrases of the Rule in Anglo-Saxon have been edited by Schröer.[1] He thinks that Æthelwold composed his version in 961, while he was still abbot of Abingdon, but the two oldest manuscripts which survive (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 178 and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 197) both date from the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh. Another—inter-linear Anglo-Saxon and very bad Latin—version occurs in

[1] *Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benedictiner-Regel*, edited by A. Schröer (Grein, Bibliothek der ags. Prosa, vol. ii), 1885.

MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III (fos. 118*a*–163*b*) and has been printed by the Early English Text Society.[1]

(*c*) *Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts*

The bulk of the material for Anglo-Saxon recipes is contained in the following Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, most of which are in the British Museum.[2]

1. *MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III* (*c.* A.D. 1000). This beautiful manuscript is on vellum, illustrated in colours which are still bright and fresh in spite of the damage done in the Ashburnham fire nearly two hundred years ago. Its probable history has been traced by Cockayne.[3] It seems to have belonged to the library of Christ Church, Canterbury, and is probably the 'Herbarius anglice depictus' in the medieval Christ Church catalogue.[4] It passed from Canterbury through the hands of the Hollands into the library of Sir Robert Cotton, which is now in the British Museum. The contents of the manuscript are the Anglo-Saxon version of the *Herbarium* of Apuleius Platonicus, or pseudo-Apuleius, describing 132 plants, to which are added 33 more plants from Dioscorides: this is usually known as the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, and it is therefore so called in this work. Following this are the prescriptions of Sextus Placitus, again in Anglo-Saxon, which provide treatment by animal extracts. Various parts of various animals were employed: also their secretions and excretions.

2. *MS. Hatton 76, fos. 68–130v.* This Bodleian manuscript contains another Anglo-Saxon version of the *Herbarium* of pseudo-Apuleius. It is collated by Cockayne as MS. B. Spaces have been left for illustrations of a similar size to those in Cotton Vitellius C. III, but the drawings were, unfortunately, never added.[5]

3. *MS. Royal 12 D. XVII.* This contains the two *Leechbooks* of *Bald*, probably written at Winchester about the year 950.[6] A third *Leechbook*, in a similar hand, follows: it was possibly copied from

[1] *The Rule of S. Benet.* Latin and Anglo-Saxon interlinear version. Edited by H. Logeman (E.E.T.S., o.s. 90), 1888.

[2] Most of the information with regard to the dating and provenance of these manuscripts has been very kindly given to me by Mr. Neil Ker.

[3] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, pp. lxxviii–lxxix.

[4] M. R. James (ed.), *Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover*, 1903, no. 308.

[5] Mr. Ker says the volume was at Worcester in the thirteenth century, but the palaeographical evidence that it was written there is not conclusive.

[6] Mr. Ker dates and localizes these by comparing the script with that of the annals for 924–55 in the Parker Chronicle.

older sources and it contains also later additions. The first two are called 'of Bald', from the name of the Anglo-Saxon 'practitioner' who owned them. The colophon to the second book says that 'Bald hunc habet librum Cild quem conscribere iussit', adding a prayer that it may not be stolen. The first *Leechbook* deals largely with the outside of the body, beginning with the head and proceeding downwards as is usually the case with medieval medicine: the second deals with the inside. The third is a miscellaneous collection of prescriptions.

4. *MS. Harley 55, fos. 1–3.* This fragment contains recipes 'for the half-dead disease' (i.e. hemiplegia) and has been printed by Cockayne as chapter 59 of the second *Leechbook*, i.e. in the hiatus in MS. Royal 12. D. XVII (between *Leechbook* II. lvi and lxiv). The 'contents' of the second *Leechbook* clearly indicate that this is where this chapter belongs. The manuscript is in an early-eleventh-century hand, and was at Worcester in the thirteenth century.

5. *MS. Cotton Otho B. XI.* This manuscript was partly burnt in the Cottonian fire. It once contained some herb recipes, most of which fortunately are to be found in the *Leechbook*. The missing end of the manuscript (of the first half of the eleventh century), which was the part containing the recipes, now exists in transcript as B.M. Additional MS. 43703, fos. 261–4*v*.

6. *MS. Harley 585.* This contains the *Lacnunga*,[1] a medley of recipes. The *Lacnunga* is in many respects the most interesting of all the sources, especially as the pagan element is strongest here.

7. *MS. Harley 6258.* This contains περὶ διδάξεων,[2] which is mainly a translation of the works of certain Salernitan writers of the eleventh century. The date may be fixed as early twelfth century, since it was copied from late-eleventh-century manuscripts.

8. *MS. Hunter 100* in Durham Cathedral Library.[3] This manuscript, in Latin, dates from the first half of the twelfth century. It contains several folios of medical interest. On fos. 82–84 is a

[1] Retranslated by J. H. G. Grattan, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, 1952, (Grattan and Singer, pp. 96–265). This is the translation I have followed. Mr. Ker dates this manuscript as either late tenth or early eleventh century, except fos. 115–20, 170–93 which are later.

[2] Text restudied by Max Löweneck in *Erlanger Beiträge z. eng. Philologie*, 1896, xii.

[3] Described by R. A. B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts*, Durham, 1939, pp. 49–50 and plate XXXVII: and in detail in the notes (made by J. P. Gilson, Keeper of MSS., British Museum), now called MS. Hunter 100 a. The original order is fos. 85–101, 1–84, 102–21.

glossary of plant names in Latin and Anglo-Saxon[1]: fos. 85–101 (which formerly stood at the head of the volume) contain medical texts, principally taken from the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville: fos. 102–18 contain various recipes and charms: fos. 119–22 contain medical drawings.[2]

9. A manuscript fragment in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, found in an old binding. It contains five recipes (for wens, &c.) in different eleventh-century hands.[3]

10. *MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III* is a mid-eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript from Christ Church, Canterbury. Its miscellaneous contents have been described by Max Förster.[4] Of moment are a description of the growth of the human foetus (fos. 40*v*–41*r*.)[5] and sundry prognostications, medical and otherwise.

11. *MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII* dates also from the middle of the eleventh century. It was written at Winchester. It contains a psalter and various veterinary and agricultural charms.

Most of this material has been printed in Cockayne's *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England* (3 vols., Rolls Series, 1862–6).[6] In the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* and in *Sextus Placitus* it is arranged under the remedies which are to be applied to the diseases: in the *Leechbooks* and in the *Lacnunga* it is arranged under the diseases themselves to which the remedies are to be applied. The *Leechbooks*, *Lacnunga*, and *περὶ διδάξεων* each occur in a single manuscript only. The two former have also been printed in the sixth volume of Grein's Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa (1905). It has been necessary to revise Cockayne's translation throughout, and also to bring it up to date.

The *Lorica* of Lodgen or of Gildas[7] occurs in six different manuscripts dating from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, including MS. Harley 585 already mentioned, where it appears in the middle

[1] Printed (inaccurately) by Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 299.

[2] See p. 303.

[3] Formerly in the collection of Viscount Clifden. Published by A. Napier in *Herrigs Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 1890, lxxxiv, 325–6.

[4] M. Förster, 'Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Volkskunde, III.–4. Inhaltsangabe des volkskundlichen Sammel Kodex Tiberius A. III', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 1908, cxxi. 30.

[5] This manuscript was refoliated some years ago, and Cockayne's reference numbers (fos. 38*v*.–39*r*. in this case) are now incorrect. I therefore follow Förster, who gives the correct present foliation. Mr. Ker disagrees with Förster's supposition that the manuscript consists of ten originally separate parts. 'It is clearly all one', he tells me, 'and always has been.'

[6] See note on this in the Bibliography.

[7] See also p. 246.

of the *Lacnunga*. There are various Irish versions of it, and it is clearly of Irish origin.[1]

Various other documents have been printed elsewhere. The ninth-century *Book of Nunna-minster* from Winchester, now in the British Museum (MS. Harley 2965), contains a version of the *Lorica* of Gildas and several charms, for example, one against poison[2] and one assigning the various parts of the body to the care of Biblical personages,[3] both quoted later.

Isolated charms occur in a great many early medieval manuscripts, and many will be quoted in the following pages.

(*d*) *Archaeology*

Archaeology has also added considerably to our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon medicine. Useful information with regard to the physique and racial characteristics of our ancestors, especially during the earlier period, has been obtained from the exhumation of their bodies from the various Anglo-Saxon cemeteries scattered throughout England. Periapts which were worn to ward off disease have also been discovered in association with the bodies. On this question Morant says:

> But it is only for the first half of [the Anglo-Saxon] epoch—roughly until the [time of] Alfred—that we have any evidence relating to the physical type of the invaders. The characteristic Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in which . . . distinctive artifacts are found alongside the bodies all belong to the earlier period, and the majority are prior to the conversion of the inhabitants to Christianity at the beginning of the seventh century. Graveyards of the tenth and eleventh centuries have frequently been found, but they were of little interest to archaeologists as the practice of interring artifacts with the body had died out by that time and no skulls of the period appear to have been preserved. Records of the excavations of a large number of cemeteries which can be assigned to the earlier centuries are to be found in *Archaeologia* and in the *Proceedings* of various county archaeological societies, but unfortunately few of the skeletons are at present available for study, the usual practice having been to re-inter them. All the material is in a fragile and incomplete condition, the shallow inhumations, usually in wooden coffins or without coffins at all, being ill adapted to preserve the skeletons, and in that respect they are

[1] Singer, 'The Lorica of Gildas the Briton', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1918–19, xii (Sect. Hist. Med.), 124 (reprinted in *From Magic to Science*, 1928, p. 111).

[2] See p. 286.

[3] See p. 227.

contrasted with the prehistoric remains which were protected by stone cists and tumuli.[1]

The invading Anglo-Saxons and their Iron Age predecessors might be buried in the same cemetery, but it is often possible to distinguish between the two. The average height of the Anglo-Saxon skull and also the length of its base are greater than those of their predecessors, and there is no retreating forehead. The invaders—Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—seem to have belonged to the same homogeneous racial group. 'The distinct type of the Anglo-Saxon invaders persisted in a pure form for several centuries and appears to have been finally absorbed by the native population without appreciably modifying the latter.'[2]

Karl Pearson's mean figures for Anglo-Saxon stature in general are 170·9 cm. (*c.* 5 ft. 6½ in.) for males and 156·0 cm. (*c.* 5 ft. 0½ in.) for females.[3] These figures may be compared with those of modern English men and women which are given by Galton and Pearson as follows:

	Male	*Female*
Commonalty . . .	170·0 cm.	158·3 cm.
Middle classes . . .	172·7 cm.	159·75 cm.

The reports written by the excavators of the various cemeteries, and more especially those by the anatomists who examined the bodies, give, as is mentioned by Morant, much valuable information. This is illustrated by the following particulars and quotations. These examples have been selected from a very large number, in an attempt to give a composite picture of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors.

(i) *South-Eastern England* (*Kent, Surrey, and Sussex*)

1. A. J. E. Cave found the following dimensions of a cranium from Barham Down, Kent, which was found in 1944: 'Maximal cranial length 118 mm., maximal breadth 137 mm., cephalic index being 75·6.'[4]

[1] G. M. Morant, ' A first study of the craniology of England and Scotland from neolithic to early historic times, with special reference to the Anglo-Saxon skulls in London museums', *Biometrika*, 1926, xviii. 75.

[2] B. G. E. Hooke and Morant, 'The present state of our knowledge of British craniology in late prehistoric and historic times', *Biometrika*, 1926, xviii. 104.

[3] Given in *Archaeologia*, 1923, lxxiii. 109.

[4] Cave, 'Cranium from Barham Down, Kent', *Archaeol. Cantiana*, 1944, lvii. 71–72.

2. W. L. H. Duckworth wrote in 1906 of the skeletons found in the early Anglo-Saxon burial-ground at Mitcham, Surrey, that 'the remains belong to persons of tall stature and powerful physique, ranging in stature from 1,668 to 1,736 mm. [4 ft. 10½ in. to 6 ft.] for the males'. In another place he mentioned one—no. 15 in the third series—whose stature he estimated to have been 1,827 mm., 'by far the greatest'. The following cephalic indices are given: 77·5, 80, ?86, 72, ?76·9, 73·8, 78, ?86. He also noted that the left radius, in two cases, had been fractured and had been naturally repaired.[1]

3. A. F. Griffith and L. F. Salzmann described in 1914 the excavation of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Alfriston, Sussex. They gave an interesting pathological detail in connexion with the skeleton of a woman in grave 43: 'The left femur was anchylosed with the pelvis; the pelvis and femur are preserved in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Dr. Keith reports that this anchylosis was caused by tuberculous disease of the hip-joint in youth; the joint became flexed and fixed in a most inconvenient position.'[2]

(ii) *Wessex*

4. A. J. E. Cave, writing in 1935, gave the cephalic indices of two skulls from a pagan burial at Woodbridge, North Newnton, Wiltshire, as 72 or 73 and *c.* 77.[3]

5. J. B. Davis gave in 1860 the following details of crania found in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Long Wittenham, Berkshire:

No. 61 is the cranium of a man of advanced age, probably not less than 70 years. . . . The calvarium is well filled out, capacious, equable and of the platycephalic form; the forehead squarish, ample and upright, and the nasal bones appear to have proceeded from it at a small angle. The face is of good size, the horizontal arch of the jaws well rounded, and the chin upright and expressed. The whole features give the idea of an agreeable, if not handsome countenance. The skull appertains to what we regard as the *typical* series of Anglo-Saxon crania, and has probably belonged to a tall, well-proportioned man. . . . Of the three

[1] Duckworth, 'Notes on a collection of crania and bones from Mitcham', *Archaeologia*, 1906, lx. 60–68.

[2] Griffith and Salzmann, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Alfriston, Sussex', *Sussex Archaeol. Collections*, 1914, lvi. 39.

[3] Cave, 'Pagan Saxon burial at Woodbridge, North Newnton, Wilts.', *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, 1935, xlvii. 265–7.

other skulls, one, that of a man of about 60 years of age, presents the next common form of the Anglo-Saxon cranium—the ovoid—which has descended to the modern English race. The face is rather long, and the nose aquiline, which was not a common feature among the Anglo-Saxons.[1]

6. Sir Arthur Keith gave a very human account of the skeletons which he examined at the pagan Saxon cemetery at Broadchalke, eight miles west of Salisbury. He attempted to equate them with those of modern English men and women. He wrote:

The most complete representation of a skeleton is that from grave 2. The man found in this grave was about 40 years of age and 5 ft. and 5 in. in stature, not robust and strong, but the opposite. Many of his features are effeminate. It reproduces characters which one can identify amongst men living round us. His head is large; the volume of his brain I estimate at 1,600 cc., about 120 cc. above the modern average. The vault is remarkably high, rising 126 mm. above the ear passages: it is wide, 147 mm., the width being maintained as the sides of the skull rise towards the roof. It is of good length, 193 mm., the forehead and occiput both rising almost vertically towards the dome-shaped roof. Although the occiput rises nearly vertically, the skull is not brachycephalic; the width is 76·2% of the length. The shape, the dimensions, and their proportions are those so often found amongst Saxons. The forehead is of good width, 100 mm., the greatest frontal width 120 mm. . . . In this community we meet not a robust, strong-limbed warrior, but a big-brained man who may well have been statesman, philosopher, poet or clergyman. . . . In Saxon cemeteries, we always meet with some large-boned men of particularly robust build. In this case there was one man (No. 15) of this type; the oblique height of the thigh bone was 487 mm., indicating a stature of 6 ft. 9 ins. His tibia had a total length of 400 mm., both bones were robust, the degree of flattening in the upper part of the shaft of the femur being indicated by the figure 71·4, the side to side flattening of the tibia by 6·15. On the other hand some of the women were slenderly formed and of a small stature. The woman buried in grave 10 was ultra-feminine, her thigh bone being 410 mm. in height, indicating a stature of 5 foot. The lower end of the tibia from No. 15 showed a plainly marked squatting facet.[2]

In his report on a Saxon burial at Ebbesbourne Wake, also in Wiltshire, Keith again noted a 'well-marked squatting facet at the

[1] Davis, 'Notes on the Anglo-Saxon skulls from Long Wittenham', *Archaeologia*, 1860, xxxviii. 349.

[2] Keith, 'A pagan Saxon cemetery at Broadchalke—report on bones', *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, 1925, xliii. 97–100.

lower end of tibia'.[1] Henry Lambert in his report on a pagan Saxon burial at Banstead, Surrey, in 1926, remarked that the subject had a 'squatting' facet at his ankles, showing that he was not an habitual user of stools or chairs.[2] The same condition was observed by Brash in skeletons at Bidford. (See below.)

7. A more recently excavated Anglo-Saxon cemetery is that at Petersfinger, near Salisbury. The report on the skeletal remains found there is again by A. J. E. Cave. He says:

> The Petersfinger skeletons reveal great homogeneity of anthropological (racial) character. The skulls are typically long-headed, with prominent 'bossed' occiputs, and with prominent parietal eminences. The facial skeletons tend to be narrow and longish. . . . The males attain an average stature of about 5 foot eight inches, and the females a stature of some 5 foot four and a half inches. In all this these remains agree with Pagan Saxon material from other sites.[3]

8. N. Gray Hill gave several interesting details in his description of the cemetery on Stockbridge Down in Hampshire. He dated it to the late Anglo-Saxon period, since coins of Edward the Confessor were found tucked in the axilla of skeleton no. 19. He said that several thousand bones were examined, but few showed signs of bone disease. Of case no. 27 he wrote:

> 'There was evidence that acute periostitis of one fibula had occurred in this case, but recovery had been satisfactory.' He thought that 'case No. 36 must have had pseudo-coxalgia when a boy that doubtless left him with a limp to the day of his death', since 'the right femur had a short neck with very pronounced flattening at the head'. He said that 'Very little, if any, evidence of chronic rheumatism could be found in the joints of the limbs, but in some cases the bones of the vertebra showed changes indicating spondylitis.'[4]

(iii) *Mercia*

9. One of the most important Anglo-Saxon cemeteries yet discovered is that at Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. The excavations were conducted by Dr. John Humphreys, who was a dentist

[1] Keith, 'A pagan Saxon burial at Ebbesbourne Wake—report on the bones', ibid., lxiii, p. 101.

[2] Lambert, 'Find of skeletons at Banstead', *Surrey Archaeol. Collections*, 1926, xxxvii. 91.

[3] E. T. Leeds and H. de S. Shortt, *An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Petersfinger, near Salisbury, Wilts.*, Salisbury, 1953, p. 64.

[4] N. Gray Hill, 'Excavations on Stockbridge Down, 1935–36', *Papers and Proc. Hants. Arch. Soc.*, 1937, xiii. 247. Cf. *Brit. Num. Jnl.* 1957, xxviii. 253–7.

as well as an archaeologist. The examination of the bodies was carried out by Dr. J. C. Brash, who was then Professor of Anatomy in the University of Birmingham. This was the burial-place of a community, with a very considerable proportion of children. Brash stated that the cephalic index range was from 70 to 77·6, with an average of 73, and that the average stature was found to agree within a few millimetres with Pearson's general Anglo-Saxon estimate, which has already been given.

Writing of the pathological conditions which were found, Brash noted two items of special interest:

> Osteoarthritis is common, affecting the vertebral column with occasional fusion of adjacent vertebrae, most of the limb articulations, and, in one instance, the temperomandibular joint.
>
> There is a remarkable example of disuse atrophy of the right upper limb, the bones of the other side being available for comparison. This may have been due to some form of early injury, but in the opinion of those qualified to judge the appearances suggest infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis). When the proportion of children found is recollected, it is perhaps legitimate to speculate that this disease may have been epidemic.[1]

10. The cephalic indices 73·8 and 70 are noted for two crania found at Ellesborough, Buckinghamshire.[2]

(iv) *East Anglia*

11. Another important cemetery is that at Burwell, Cambridgeshire, excavated by T. C. Lethbridge in 1925–6. It contained pre-Roman and Roman as well as Anglo-Saxon remains. Duckworth divided the skulls into three groups. He said that the first two groups

> may be described as characterized by the 'globose' appearance of the brain-case. This, however, is of the dolicho-cephalic order though its narrowness is not pronounced. . . . The stature of these individuals is judged to have been of moderate degree, without examples of extremes in either direction. . . . It seems probable that the men with skulls described above as 'globose' will be found representative of the invaders traditionally termed 'Saxon'.[3]

[1] Brash, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire—notes on the cranial and other skeletal characters', *Archaeologia*, 1923, lxxiii. 106.

[2] Wm. Wright, 'Anglo-Saxon calvaria from Ellesborough', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 1909, ix. 429–30.

[3] Duckworth, 'Report on human bones from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Burwell excavated by Mr. Lethbridge in 1925–26', *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.*, 1927, xxviii. 124–5.

(v) *Northumbria*

12. W. C. Lukis has given particulars of Anglo-Saxon graves discovered on Howe Hill, near Carthorpe in the North Riding of Yorkshire. In describing the occupant of grave 2, who was probably an old woman, he says: 'The left leg was considerably shorter than the right, the consequence of an extensive disease of the hip joint of long standing'. Her skull measurements were $7\frac{1}{5}$ inches long by $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches broad. 'The right femur measured 16 inches, which would give a height of about 5 feet 4 inches.' 'The skull' in grave 4 'measured $7\frac{1}{8}$ inches by $5\frac{7}{10}$ inches. . . . Length of femur (19 inches) . . . indicated a man of large size, probably nearly six feet in height.'[1]

Some interesting comparative statistics of the bones of the South and West Saxons and the East Anglians have been collected by R. J. Horton-Smith in his article on 'The cranial characteristics of the South Saxons compared with the other races of south Britain'.[2] He considers that the dolichocephalic South Saxons were a purer type than the more brachicephalic West Saxons, who had penetrated farther from the coast and who had intermarried to a greater extent with the older inhabitants.

A description of the teeth found in these cemeteries has been included in the section on teeth (below, pp. 387–90).

A complete list of the reports on Anglo-Saxon crania, &c. (which have been published to the end of 1953), is given in my *Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Bibliography*, Oxford, 1957, entries 8745–8803.

[1] Lukis, 'On some Anglo-Saxon graves on Howe Hill, near Carthorpe, North Riding', *Yorks. Archaeol. Journ.*, 1870, i. 175–81.

[2] *Journ. Anthrop. Inst.*, 1896, xxvi. 82–102.

CHAPTER III

Aetiology of Disease and Sources of Anglo-Saxon Knowledge of Medicine[1]

THE sources whence the Anglo-Saxons derived their medical knowledge and their theories as to the causes of disease may be divided into (*a*) classical and post-classical, (*b*) the Church, (*c*) native Teutonic, (*d*) Oriental, (*e*) Celtic, and (*f*) possibly also Salernitan.

The quantitative importance of all other sources in comparison with the first two of these is but small.

(*a*) *Classical and post-classical*

The theories as to disease—causes, diagnosis, and cure—which prevailed during the Dark and Middle Ages were derived ultimately from the classics, but adulterated by late-Latin authors. That these theories were known to the Anglo-Saxons, at least at the close of the period, is shown by their appearance in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

The medical knowledge of Greece was disseminated thence to Rome and the Roman world. Many Greek medical texts were translated into Latin and thus became available to the leeches and medical writers of the West. Thus Bede was not unfamiliar with the works of Hippocrates; he quoted, for instance, from the *Aphorisms* at the end of his *Liber Retractationum* when discussing the nature of the 'fever and dysentery', from which the father of Publius, the chief man of Malta, was suffering (Acts xxviii. 8). But unfortunately that which was living in the medicine and biology of the Greeks, together with their experimental outlook, perished temporarily with their decline. Even with the Greeks, theory had often taken the place of direct observation. This was the case, for instance, with cerebral localizations. There was little dissection of the human body until modern times. Galen carried

[1] For the aetiology of plague see pp. 55–57.

out many of his dissections on animals, especially the Barbary ape, the pig, ox, and sheep.

With the coming of the Dark Ages, 'the tenor of medical life', to quote the words of Gregory Zilboorg,

> adjusted itself to the general cultural tenor of the times. The mainsprings of intellectual activity were no longer curiosity and research, but a certain elastic, logical ingenuity which proved by means of intellectual constructions that the past contained everything, and that the human mind could best be used to reaffirm the authority of the past rather than to reconsider it. This was the spirit which later came to be known as scholasticism.[1]

A number of epitomes of earlier and worthier works were made and are a feature of the declining years of the Roman Empire. They were intended to be used for easy reference and are known by such names as pseudo-Pliny and pseudo-Apuleius. Sterile formulae, which could be applied without any exercise of reasoning, alone survived for use during the Dark Ages. It is these, therefore, with very few exceptions, which appear in Anglo-Saxon medical practice.

Singer, speaking of this Dark Age medicine, says that

> its philosophical basis is the doctrine of the four elements and the four humours, a view which finds ample illustration in English manuscripts. In the belief of the men of the Dark Ages there was a close relation between the external and the internal world, the macrocosm and the microcosm, and so they discerned a parallel between the four ages of man and the four seasons, between the humours of the body and the solstices and equinoxes, between the four elements and the four cardinal points, and so on.[2]

Many diagrams survive to illustrate these relationships. Folio 16*v*. of MS. Hunter 100 in Durham Cathedral Library, for instance, contains an elaborate diagram of eight intersecting arcs within a circle, designed to show the correspondence of the elements, the seasons, the humours, and the four ages of man.

To amplify the above quotation, the Anglo-Saxons retained among their ideas of the constitution of the human body the Hippocratic doctrine of the four humours—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow (or red) bile (*cholera nigra* and *cholera rubra*). The predominance of any of these influenced a man's temperament:

[1] G. Zilboorg, *History of Medical Psychology*, New York, 1941, p. 115.

[2] C. Singer, 'Early English magic and medicine', *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1919–20, ix. 348.

that of the first-named inclined a man to be sanguine in his nature, that of the second to be phlegmatic, that of the third to be melancholic, and that of the fourth to be choleric.

Combined with the four humours, two and two in each case, were Aristotle's four fundamental qualities, the hot, the cold, the wet, and the dry. Physiology and even diet were considered to be governed by such formulae: thus digestion involved the combined operation of the hot and the wet.[1]

'The four humours', says a passage, in Latin, in MS. Hunter 100 at Durham (§ 30), 'are located or control in their own regions. Blood has control over the right side of the liver; but red bile also controls there. On the left side, that is in the spleen, black bile has control. Phlegm [controls] in the head and also in the bladder; blood also controls in the heart. Their peculiar virtues are as follows: blood is hot, moist and sweet; red bile is bitter, vigorous, burning-hot and dry; phlegm is cold, salt and wet; black bile is acid, cold and wet. All these are on the increase in their own seasons.' Particulars of these seasons, and of the pertinent hours of the day and night, follow. 'All these are absorbed (*habent respirationes*) through particular parts of the body: blood through the nostrils, red bile through the ears, black bile through the eyes, phlegm through bone.'[2]

The four seasons were equated with the four ages of man—childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. This combination is described in the *Handboc of Byrhtferth*, which survives in a manuscript dated 1011 in the Bodleian Library (MS. Ashmole 328).[3] Here spring, childhood, and its blood are wet and warm: summer, youth, and *cholera rubra* (*incoða*) are warm and dry: autumn and manhood are cold and dry—'in autumn occur *cholera nigra*, those are black humours, they are dry and cold': winter is cold and wet—'old man is cold and snivelling (*ceald & snoflig*). Phlegms, that is coughs and colds, are the diseases of the old and infirm.' This is accompanied by a diagram which is interesting as showing the ages which are meant by these four periods of life: thus childhood ranges from 1 to 14, youth up to 28, manhood up to 48, and old age up to 70 or 80.

[1] St. Hildegard, before speaking of the medicinal uses of the mandrake, says that it 'is hot and somewhat wet' (*Physica*, i. 56).

[2] Printed by R. Peiper in *Philologus*, 1874, xxxiii. 562–4.

[3] Charles and Dorothea Singer, *Ann. Med. Hist.*, 1921, iii. 136–49.

The Durham manuscript goes on to describe the practice of medicine as governed by the four humours. It was thought that these must be maintained in a state of equilibrium in order that a man might keep in a healthy condition. 'Whenever any one of these humours increases too much, then it causes lengthy sickness—that is, if the doctor is inexperienced or negligent, or if he does not understand the cause or [perceive] through which humour the sickness has originated. But if the doctor is discerning and is cognizant of the cause of the sickness, then he is able to be of use. If, however, he is negligent or has not understood, then he will prolong the period of the sickness until the season during which that humour prevails shall have passed, and until another of the humours has acquired control: then the influence of the humour through which the sickness was caused is removed.' In other words, the discerning doctor is able to diagnose at once what any sickness may be merely by ascertaining at what hour it began, since it must have been caused by an excess in his patient's system of the humour then dominant. He has but to counteract the excess of humour by applying the opposite as an antidote: 'If blood is the cause, then since blood is sweet, wet and hot, it is necessary that it be counterbalanced by the opposite, that is to say, cold, bitter and dry', and so on. 'Thus,' the passage happily concludes, 'the doctor becomes experienced, and the sick man is quickly restored to health.'

In Chaucer's day the 'doctour of phisyk' was accomplished when

> He knew the cause of everich maladye,
> Were it of hoot or cold, or moiste, or drye.[1]

In post-Anglo-Saxon times the various parts of the body were thought to be governed by the signs of the zodiac. But figures of the human body with the twelve signs attached are not found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, though they are common in those of the fourteenth century, when astrology had become closely associated with medicine.

There were two lines of development in the literature of prescriptions. One was scientific, originating in Galen and leading through Oribasius and Paulus of Aegina to Byzantine medicine and to Latin antidotaria. The other was empiric, and appears in vernacular texts such as the Anglo-Saxon *Leechbooks* and the *Lacnunga*.

[1] Chaucer, *Prologue*, ll. 419–20.

Collections of charms and medical lore were made under the Roman Empire from the time of Pliny to that of Cassiodorus, and were added to from various sources, including Roman spells. Each remedy degenerated or altered as time went on until it became barely recognizable. The influence of Pliny's *Natural History* (*c.* A.D. 77) on the medicine of the Dark and Middle Ages can hardly be over-estimated. Pliny gives a list of several hundred authorities at the end of each of his books; this shows the debt of the medieval and of the modern world to the ancient literature. Many important Greek writers would have been unknown but for the inclusion of parts of their work by Pliny.

The *De medicina* of pseudo-Pliny is a selection from Pliny's work, but arranged under the diseases to be cured instead of under the herbs themselves. The order—from the head downwards—set a precedent: it is that followed in the first *Leechbook*. 'The compiler's rearrangement', says Lynn Thorndike, 'is an essential one, if the medical recommendations of the *Natural History* were to be made available for ready reference.'[1]

Dioscorides, who flourished in the time of Nero, founded the science of botany as regards the Roman Empire. He composed a compendium of drugs which was originally written in Greek, but was translated into Latin in the sixth century. It appears, in part, translated into Anglo-Saxon, in companionship with pseudo-Apuleius in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*.

The immediate forerunners of Anglo-Saxon medicine are late-Latin writers such as pseudo-Apuleius, probably of the fourth century, and Sextus Placitus of the first half of the fifth century. These two exist in Anglo-Saxon translation. It is possible, of course, that translations of other medical works were also made, but if so they have been lost.

How popular these two authors were at that period is shown by the large number of manuscripts of their works which have survived. These have been described by Howald and Sigerist in the preface to their edition (1927).[2] This late-Latin collection of herbal and animal recipes usually includes two other small treatises and it is therefore made up of four works: (1) *Antonii Musae de herba*

[1] L. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. i, New York, 1923, p. 595.

[2] E. Howald and H. E. Sigerist (ed.), *Antonii Musae de herba vettonica, Pseudo-Apulei herbarius*, &c., Leipzig, 1927. (Corpus Medicorum Latinorum, 4.)

vettonica liber, which corresponds to the first section of the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* in MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III (describing the herb betony). Antonius Musa, to whom this small treatise is falsely ascribed, was physician to Augustus. (2) *Pseudo-Apuleii Herbarius*, which corresponds to the rest of the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* as far as herb no. 132 (the mandrake), but without the description of herbs 133 to 185 which the Anglo-Saxons have taken from Dioscorides. (3) *Anonymi de taxone liber*, which corresponds to the first section of the Anglo-Saxon work on animal recipes (describing the badger); and (4) *Sexti Placiti liber medicinae ex animalibus*, which corresponds to the Anglo-Saxon Sextus Placitus; but the Latin adds recipes from several more animals, and from various birds also, which do not appear in the Anglo-Saxon version at all.

Howald and Sigerist divide the Latin (and other) manuscripts of these four works, so far as they antedate the seventh century, into three classes. Those in classes β and γ have many interpolations but a common archetype: those in class α have but few interpolations and have been utilized by the editors to form a standard text. MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III belongs to class α: the editors also call attention to two other illustrated manuscripts of the fourteenth century which are very closely related to it, namely Addit. MSS. 17083 and 21115 in the British Museum. They consider that a sister manuscript, now lost, was that used by Ioannes Philippus de Lignamine for the earliest known printed edition.[1]

Sigerist says that 'five books combined represented the authoritative source of early mediaeval materia medica'.[2] These were the four works just mentioned, together with the *Liber Dioskoridis de herbis femininis*, a shortened and therefore more popular form of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, dealing with seventy-one herbs only.

Another author, contemporary with these, from whom Anglo-Saxon medicine was immediately derived, was Marcellus Empiricus of Bordeaux, who was not a physician but was *magister officiorum* under the emperor Theodosius I. His *De medicamentis* is chiefly noteworthy as marking the depth of futility to which 'medicine' descended. Neuburger calls it the 'most significant expression of the superstition of the age. . . . Herein can be seen how

[1] See also p. 312.

[2] H. E. Sigerist, 'Materia Medica in the Middle Ages', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1939, vii. 417–23.

ancient oriental, Graeco-Roman and western European elements unite into a whole of craziest superstition, and many sidelights are thrown upon the age and origin of some of our present-day popular medical customs.'[1] Though contemptible as medicine, it has, however, a value as illustrating the culture of the age—or rather the lack of it. Various examples of Marcellus' recipes, especially with regard to the transference of disease, are given by Thorndike.[2]

Alexander of Tralles lived about the middle of the sixth century. Various passages of the second *Leechbook* are taken from his *Therapeutica*.

And finally mention must be made of Isidore of Seville (died 636). Book IV of his *Etymologies*, which had a great influence on medieval thought, deals with medicine. His work is in dictionary form, but appearing under subjects. There are many extracts from it in the early-twelfth-century MS. Durham Hunter 100, and it is therefore not unlikely that the work was known also at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Isidore, speaking of the practice of medicine in general, says that 'there are three kinds of cures in all. The first is the dietetic: the second the pharmaceutical; the third the surgical. Diet is the observance of the law of life. Pharmacy is curing by medicine. Surgery is cutting with the knife; for with the knife is cut away that which does not feel the healing of medicines.'[3] This threefold division obtained in classical Greece,[4] and continued during the Middle Ages, including the Anglo-Saxon period. It is also found in the ancient East. Thus the *Vendîdâd* of the Zend Avesta differentiates three kinds of doctors: 'one who heals with the knife, one who heals with herbs, and one who heals with the Holy Word'[5] (i.e. the reciter of spells). The pagan wielder of spells became the exorcist of the Christian Church.

Isidore also echoes other theories just mentioned, as for instance: 'Every cure is wrought by contraries, as cold by warm and dry by moist, just as in man pride cannot be cured except by humility.'[6] And again: 'The body is made up of four elements.

[1] M. Neuburger, *History of Medicine*, trans. Playfair, vol. 1, London, 1910, p. 308.

[2] L. Thorndike, op. cit. i, pp. 586–93.

[3] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, lib. iv (*De medicina*), 9 (3).

[4] Cf. Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, iii. 52–54.

[5] *Vendîdâd* of the Zend Avesta: Fargard vii. 44 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. iv, p. 87).

[6] Isidore, op. cit. iv. 9 (5).

For earth is in the flesh; air in the breath; moisture in the blood; fire in the vital heat.'[1]

It will be shown in the course of this work how largely Anglo-Saxon medicine and its recipes are founded on ideas such as these.

Bede was well acquainted with the work of Isidore. His *De natura rerum* derives largely from Isidore's work of the same name: his chronological works also, says Plummer, are 'largely Isidore'. His pupil Cuthbert tells us that he was engaged on the last day of his life in translating St. John's Gospel and in making 'certain selections from the books of Bishop Isidore'.[2]

(*b*) *The Church*

The difference between classical medicine and Church medicine is well illustrated by the following quotation from a hymn in honour of St. Pantallon by Fulbert, who was bishop of Chartres from 1006 to 1028:

> We Christians know that there are two arts of medicine, the one concerning earthly things, the other concerning heavenly things; just as they differ in origin, so each has its own efficacy. Earthly leeches [of whom he considers that Hippocrates was the greatest] by long experience learn of the power of herbs and similar substances, which completely alter the condition of human bodies. . . . But when Christ, the author of heavenly medicine, appeared, he was able to cure diseased people by mere command, and to raise the dead from the sepulchre.[3]

The Church attempted to take over the role of Christ, and the saint or priest professed to be able to effect cures without resort to the art of the physician or surgeon. In other words, the Church relied on faith-healing, which has been described as 'that dangerous field, placed between theology and medicine, that no one has dared thoroughly to explore'.

Since the monasteries were custodians of that which has been preserved from the past, it follows that the Church possessed the book-knowledge of medicine that existed at the time. It was therefore natural that it had power and authority where the practice of medicine was concerned, even though the folk possessed the more

[1] Ibid. ii. 1 (16). Cf. Durham, MS. Hunter 100, fo. 90*v*.

[2] Cuthbert, *De obitu Baedae*. In Bede, *Opera Hist.*, ed. Plummer, vol. i, p. clxii.

[3] J. P. Migne, *Patrologia latina*, vol. cxli, 339; quoted by L. C. MacKinney, *Early Medieval Medicine*, Baltimore, 1937, p. 134.

practical knowledge of simples that had been handed down by word of mouth. The Church therefore gave such official sanction to medicine as there was, and thereby made it effective in the eyes of the patient and of the layman in general. Its prayers were requisitioned for the sick, its blessing was attached to prescriptions, its relics were used as the media for cures, wells were blessed by it before their water could be used for healing purposes.

'We may perchance wonder', remarks Cockayne, 'at the slavery in which people were held by the Church . . . at the saying of medicine masses, at the blessing the worts out of the field, at the placing them upon the altar; but . . . how audacious an infidel that man, in those ages, would have seemed, who had refused to pray in the received manner for the restoration of his health.'[1]

This is one aspect of the case, but, as will be shown later, the picture that Bede gives is that of the Church in Britain doing wonderful work for the care and cure of the sick, and using its stored knowledge to the best of its ability.

Histories of religious houses, such as that of Peterborough by Hugo Candidus, and the various lives of saints, provide much information with regard to cures and the methods employed. But the information was coloured and must be used with care and discernment.

Il est bien certain [says Fustel de Coulanges] que ces biographies n'étaient pas rédigées en vue de faire œuvre historique. Dire qu'elles l'étaient pour l'édification des fidèles n'est pas tout à fait exact. Elles l'étaient plutôt en vue de démontrer la sainteté du personnage et de faire ressortir sa valeur comme saint, dans l'intérêt de l'église ou du couvent qui le prenait pour patron. La biographie était comme la légende explicative des reliques que le couvent possédait et qui faisaient sa fortune.

The folk of the Middle Ages were hungry for tales of the marvellous, and the tendency was therefore to add corroborative detail so as to satisfy this demand. In such cases fiction must, if possible, be separated from fact and eliminated. 'To the mediaeval hagiographer,' says Baring-Gould, 'an incident in a saintly life was not worth recording unless it led up to a miraculous display of power.'

'Legends' of the saints (*legenda*, what is read) were composed for reading aloud for monastic instruction on the days dedicated to each saint. The present meaning of the word has been derived

[1] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. xxviii.

from the amount of unauthenticated tradition of this nature which came to be included in these martyrologies.

(*c*) *Native Teutonic*

This element is in many ways the most interesting, since it is the most truly Anglo-Saxon and original. 'Native Teutonic magic and medicine', says Singer, 'may be distinguished from imported elements of Classical, Ecclesiastical, or Salernitan origin by the presence of four characteristic elements: the doctrine of *specific venoms*, the doctrine of *the nines*, the doctrine of *the worm*,[1] as the cause of disease, and lastly the doctrine of the *elf-shot*.'[2] He quotes the *Lay of the Nine Healing Herbs* from the *Lacnunga* as showing how the first three of these occur therein together.[3] These verses tell how Wodan smote the serpent, and how the nine diseases arose from the nine fragments into which it was severed. The presence of Wodan at least indicates a non-classical origin for this lay. The doctrine of the elf-shot is one of the chief characteristics of Finnish medical magic, as will appear when it is dealt with later. The Anglo-Saxons attributed the sudden attack of disease to the arrows of elves: infection was considered to be caused by 'flying venom'.

In his article 'On some survivals of pagan belief in Anglo-Saxon England', F. P. Magoun, jr., calls attention to the West Germanic conception of *mana*, 'the possession of which assures success, good fortune, and the like to its possessor'. The Anglo-Saxon material is small in comparison with the Old Norse, but it may be traced in various Anglo-Saxon charms. He considers that the words *miht*, *mægen*, and *cræft* indicate aspects of *mana*. Various plants in the *Lay of the Nine Healing Herbs*, for instance, are endowed with this force, which is therefore of value for the repulsion and conquest of disease.[4]

(*d*) *Oriental*

Magical practices (medical and otherwise) appear to have originated in the East, especially in Persia,[5] Chaldea, and Assyria

[1] For worms, see pp. 277–81. In a fourteenth-century manuscript the following occurs: 'This charme brouth aungyl gabriel to sanctus William, for to charme cristen men fro *worm*, fro *venum*, etc.' (MS. Sloane 521: Henslow, p. 144).

[2] For elf-shot, see pp. 158–64. Singer, 'Early English magic and medicine', p. 353.

[3] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXIX).

[4] F. P. Magoun, 'On some survivals of pagan belief in Anglo-Saxon England', *Harvard Theol. Rev.*, 1947, xl. 85 ff.

[5] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxx. 2.

(according to Pliny the 'magi' were responsible for a large proportion), and to have come to Greece in the train of Alexander and his army. It is now known, from the researches of Campbell Thompson and other scholars, that the medicine and pharmacy of Babylonia attained to an extraordinarily high level. The doctrine of the humours is said to have originated there. It is possible that this and much of their practical knowledge of medicine also reached the Greeks through the same medium.

The great influx of Oriental knowledge which constitutes the beginning of the reawakening of the mind of the West took place just after the Anglo-Saxon period. A few direct contacts with the East at this time are, however, known. A Gaulish bishop named Arculfus visited the Holy Places, probably about the year 670. On his return he was forced to land on the west coast of this island owing to bad weather. Bede tells how he described his travels to Adamnan, who wrote them down and sent his book to King Alfred.[1]

Willibald, a native of Wessex, who became bishop of Eichstadt about the year 740, travelled extensively in Palestine as a young man, and an account of his experiences was written by a nun of Heidenheim.[2]

King Alfred made a vow that after the expulsion of the pagans from London he would send an embassy with rich gifts to the Christians in the Far East. He sent messengers annually with gifts to Rome, and on one occasion these messengers journeyed thence eastward in fulfilment of his vow. William of Malmesbury says that perfumes and precious stones were brought home as memorials of this wonderful journey, and that they were long preserved in the churches.[3] Jerusalem would almost certainly be visited on the return journey. Asser remarks, 'We have seen and read letters, accompanied with presents, which were sent to him [i.e. Alfred] by Abel, the Patriarch of Jerusalem.'[4] Now the 64th chapter of the second *Leechbook* ends with the sentence, 'All this dominus Helias, patriarch at Jerusalem, ordered to say to king Alfred.' Although the name of the patriarch is different,[5] this is probably

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 15. See also 'The travels of bishop Arculf in the Holy Land', in Thomas Wright's *Early Travels in Palestine*, 1848, pp. 1–12.

[2] T. Wright, op. cit., pp. 13–22.

[3] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 122.

[4] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch. 91, ll. 16–18. See also note on pp. 328–9 of W. H. Stevenson's edition of Asser, 1904.

[5] The form Abel is derived by Assemani (*Oriens Christianus*, vol. iii, p. viii) from a scribal error. It is a contraction from Ab[ba] El[ias]. (Elias III, 878–907.)

another record of the visit just mentioned. Chapter 64 is noteworthy in that it mentions ingredients which are especially connected with the East. One of these is petroleum (A.S. *petraoleum*), which is found in the region of the Dead Sea, and was therefore easily obtainable in Jerusalem, though unknown in western Europe. Bitumen as a product of the Dead Sea was known to the Romans,[1] but the word 'petroleum' does not occur, I believe, in Latin or Greek, nor yet again elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon. Balsam is also mentioned here, but the word does not again occur in English until about the year 1600.[2] Balsam appears in Pliny, but he states that it is 'a plant that has been bestowed by Nature only upon the land of Judaea'.[3] If therefore the patriarch accompanied these prescriptions by a gift of the ingredients for King Alfred's use, the gift was a unique one. *Tyriaca* (i.e. theriacum) also occurs in this chapter, but in no other passage in Anglo-Saxon literature to my knowledge. Although common in the medicine of the Middle Ages, this is, I believe, the first time that it is met with in western Europe.[4]

Other products of the Orient occur in Anglo-Saxon recipes, especially in the *Lacnunga*. This does not necessarily imply that such articles were imported to this island, since these recipes may have been copied from some southern antidotary.

The word *sideware* (i.e. zedoary) occurs as an ingredient in a prescription against enchantment in the eleventh section of the *Lacnunga* (XXIX). It is perhaps, according to Grattan and Singer, 'the earliest Arabic word traceable in A.S.'[5] Zedoary is an 'aromatic gingerlike substance made from the rootstock of East-Indian plants and used in medicine', whose name is derived from the Arabic *zedwár*. The Middle English form of the word, *cetewale*, occurs

[1] Tacitus, *Hist.* v. 7; also Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxviii. 23.

[2] *O.E.D.* Except in the following passage from the life of St. Willibald: 'Willibald had formerly, when at Jerusalem, bought balsam, and filled a gourd with it; and he took a gourd that was hollow, and had flax, and filled it with *petræ-oleum*, and poured some in the other gourd, and cut the small stalk, so that it fitted exactly and closed up the mouth of the gourd. So, when they came to Tyre, the citizens stopped them and examined their burdens to see if they had anything concealed . . . but they found nothing but Willibald's gourd, which they opened, and smelling the *petræ-oleum* in the stalk, they did not discover the balsam that was within.' (Wright, op. cit., p. 21.)

[3] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xii. 54. For oil of balsam, see also xxiii. 47.

[4] See also pp. 286–7.

[5] J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, p. 108, note 10.

twice in the *Canterbury Tales*, mentioned with other herbs.[1] Zedoarium is included in a ninth-century list of herbs and spices which the monks of Corbie (Cambrai) planned to buy for their monastery.[2]

Zedoary occurs again in the next section (xxx) of the *Lacnunga* in a prescription against wens. Here it is in the company of four other commodities from the East, namely pepper, galingale (*gallengar*), ginger (*gingifer*), and *rind* (?= *súderne rind*) which Cockayne translates 'cinnamon', and Grattan and Singer translate '[Southern] bark', and pyrethrum.

Another ingredient in the prescription in *Lacnunga* (xxix) is *disman*. This has been translated 'tansy' by Cockayne and also (with a query) by Bosworth–Toller. O. B. Schlutter, however, equates it with 'muscus' (musk, cf. M.H.G. *tiserne*)—another product of the East.[3]

Five drugs from the East occur at the end of 'Arestolabius' prescription' in the *Lacnunga*.[4]

(*e*) *Celtic, &c.*

There are many parallels between Anglo-Saxon and Celtic magic, but the evidence tends to show that the Celtic was not a source.[5] The possible Celtic origin of the *Lorica* has already been mentioned. Stray words, which are of neither Latin nor Teutonic origin, appear in prescriptions from time to time, usually as unintelligible to us in their present mutilated condition, despite modern research, as they were to the Anglo-Saxon who transcribed them.[6] Some may be Celtic,[7] some Hebrew (especially in the *Lorica*).

[1] *Miller's Tale*, l. 20, and *Sir Thopas*, l. 50. Skeat, in his glossary, says 'the name *setwall* was also given to valerian'.

[2] MacKinney, op. cit., p. 169, note 99.

[3] O. B. Schlutter, 'Anglo-Saxonica', *Anglia*, 1907, xxx. 123.

[4] *Lacn.*, iii (CLXXVIII).

[5] See my article, 'The dissimilarity of Ancient Irish magic from that of the Anglo-Saxons', *Folk-lore*, 1926, xxxvii. 271–88.

[6] Three charms containing Irish words are quoted and discussed at the end of my article in *Folk-lore* just mentioned. They occur in *Leechbook* I, ix, xlv. 5, and *Lacn.* 10 (xxvi). See also H. Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English charms', *Speculum*, 1945, xx. 172–82.

[7] F. Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon charms', *Journ. Amer. Folk-lore*, 1909, xxii. 105, rearranges such collections of words 'as more closely resembling the characteristics of the jingle charm'. It need hardly be pointed out that the majority of these are not 'jingle charms' at all, but mutilated survivals for the interpretation of which the existing order of the words is all-important.

(f) Salernitan

It is difficult to determine to what degree Salernitan teaching infiltrated into Anglo-Saxon England. Sir Norman Moore says 'we may conclude that the Schola Salernitana first became known in England in the middle of the reign of Henry III'.

On the other hand, Singer says that Salerno had long been a medical centre before the Normans reached Campania about 1070. 'Under Norman rule it developed a characteristic medical literature just in time to affect speakers of the Early English language.'[1]

Salernitan borrowings are said to appear in *περὶ διδάξεων*. The influence of Greece as well as of south Italy appears in this source.

[1] Singer in his introduction to the reprint of Cockayne's *Leechdoms*, 1961, p. xxxix.

PART 2

Historical

CHAPTER IV

Epidemics[1]

(*a*) *Introduction*

PESTILENCE is a factor in the history of civilization which cannot be overstressed. The epidemics which have swept over and depopulated Europe from time to time have had such far-reaching consequences as to paralyse the activities of whole generations. Until the advances of modern science succeeded in bringing them under some measure of control, they were of such frequent occurrence that only the most virulent and deadly have found their way into the pages of classical and medieval historians.

The most outstanding pestilences in ancient times were that of Athens, described by Thucydides, and that which began about the year A.D. 250, and which was described by Cyprian and Galen. During the Middle Ages the two most memorable were that in Justinian's time, which marks their inception, and the Black Death which marks their close. Both of these were examples of bubonic plague, and both were remarkable in their severity and far-reaching in their social and economic results.

There are many records in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in the Irish annals, and also in the pages of Bede, of pestilences which visited these islands during the period under consideration. The middle years of the sixth century and the latter half of the seventh were especially periods of pestilence. There are continuous records of outbreaks in Ireland from 759 to 785, and from the beginning of the incursions of the Norsemen both islands were continually subjected to invasion by those who brought disease and famine as well as other forms of destruction in their train. Shrewsbury thinks that the epidemics which occurred in the sixth and seventh centuries were spread not by trade but by Celtic missionaries, who

[1] This chapter is an expanded version, with many additions, of my essay which was awarded the Reginald Taylor Prize of the British Archaeological Association for 1944. The essay was printed in the *Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, 1944, 3s. ix. 48–66.

carried them from the Continent to Ireland, whence they spread by way of Wales to England.[1]

The prevalence of disease in Anglo-Saxon England—and also in Ireland at the same period—should always be borne in mind as an important factor in the background. It may account for much in the history of the period which has hitherto seemed inexplicable. For instance, the decadence of Northumbria after her glorious hegemony under Edwin, Oswald, Oswiu, and Ecgfrith, which followed the defeat of the last-named at Nectansmere in 685, may well be attributed to a large extent to the decimation of the population by the continued attacks of pestilence which occurred from about 664 till that date.[2] These continued attacks had such a demoralizing effect on the East Saxons, who also suffered severely, that they relapsed into paganism, and had to be reconverted by Jaruman. Shrewsbury suggests that pestilence 'robbed Ireland of its position as the repository of European culture and learning: partly by its slaughter of the monastic orders . . . and partly by inhibiting the immigration of scholars and students from the continent'.[3]

The occurrence of famine and pestilence, as narrated in the following pages, might be stressed as a cause of England's weakness in the time of Æthelred the Unready. They explain to some extent the ease of the Danish conquest. The incursions of the Norsemen had been repelled by Alfred and his successors, but the country succumbed to Swein and Cnut, owing in part to the weakness of Æthelred, but still more to the demoralized condition of the people after the successive attacks of famine, pestilence, and murrain which occurred in his reign. It is to be noted that no outbreak occurred in the reign of Cnut, when the devastation wrought by the Danes had at last ceased with the accession to the throne of their king.[4]

[1] J. F. D. Shrewsbury, 'The Yellow Plague', *Journ. Hist. Med. and Allied Sci.*, 1949, iv. 14.

[2] Bede says of Aldfrith, who succeeded Ecgfrith and reigned over Northumbria from 685 to 705, that 'he nobly retrieved the ruined state of the kingdom though within narrower bounds' (*Eccles. Hist.* iv. 26). It is perhaps curious that the political ascendancy of Northumbria should have ceased, but that art and literature should still have flourished. This is especially the case since, as will be shown, the monasteries suffered severely from the pestilence. Yet the reign of Aldfrith has been called 'the golden age of Northumbria'. To this period belong the writings of Bede and such works of art as the Lindisfarne Gospels.

[3] Op. cit., pp. 26–72.

[4] See the epitome of outbreaks of pestilence on p. 63; this particularizes, for this period, the king's reign, as well as the year in which the outbreak occurred.

The complete absence of hygiene in general and of sanitation in particular ensured the persistence of conditions in which pestilence could be engendered and could thrive. Ignorance of its causation and lack of prophylactics or control usually resulted in a pestilence raging unchecked until only the hardiest survived. The epidemic in Cyprian's time lasted for about sixteen years, that in Justinian's for about fifty (*c.* 531–*c.* 580). Fresh outbreaks of pestilence following the great pandemic of 664 are recorded every few years for about a quarter of a century. Hecker estimates that about twenty-five million people—over a quarter of the entire population—perished in Europe during the Black Death: no country escaped. In England its chief outbreak was in 1348, but fresh outbreaks occurred till nearly the end of the century.

The psychological effect of pestilence was most demoralizing. Thucydides, in speaking of the plague of Athens,[1] vigorously describes the attitude of helpless despair to which the people were reduced; this condition applies to all epidemics.

> No single remedy [he says] could be deemed a specific: for that which did good to one did harm to another. No constitution was of itself strong enough to resist or weak enough to escape the attacks; the disease carried off all alike and defied every mode of treatment. Most appalling was the despondency which seized upon anyone who felt himself sickening: for he instantly abandoned his mind to despair and, instead of holding out, absolutely threw away his chance of life. Appalling too was the rapidity with which men caught the infection, dying like sheep if they attended on one another: and this was the principal cause of mortality.

The religious attitude towards pestilence was also one calculated to inspire terror. It was usually regarded as a visitation—in consequence of popular wickedness—of divine vengeance, which could not be averted and from which it was impossible to escape. Consequently the monastic chroniclers deplore famine and pestilence as chastisements rather than as mere misfortunes. Malign influence descending from heaven is depicted in many of the mediaeval and Renaissance pictures of pestilence. Such pictures, too, portray the appalling conditions produced and the terror inspired in a far more graphic manner than do the most vivid accounts which have survived in writing. Still more graphic are the three wax models of the plague and its victims in the Bargello at Florence. They are by

[1] Thucydides, ii. 47–53.

Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, a 'ceroplastico' (1656–1701). The presence of a rat on one of the bodies is perhaps significant (see p. 82).

The plague of Justinian's time was heralded by many natural phenomena which made a great impression on the minds of the people, and were especially connected by them with the plague that followed. The Anglo-Saxon and Irish annals, before recording the pestilence itself, enumerate all the unusual phenomena, especially earthquakes and comets, which were regarded as manifestations of the retributive action of the offended Deity and tokens of impending punishment at his hands. The year 664 is the most notable example. There was an eclipse of the sun on 1 May. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say that 'the firmament seemed to burn the same summer with extream heat'. The great pandemic followed on 1 August. The comet of 676 (wrongly stated to have occurred in 678 by Bede) occurred in the year of the outbreak at Barking.

Byrhtferth's Manual (A.D. 1011) says 'there is a star called comet. When it appears, it betokens famine or pestilence or war or the destruction of the earth or fearful storms.'[1] This passage is directly derived from Isidore of Seville, writing in the first half of the seventh century, who says: 'Cometes stella est dicta eo quo comas luminis ex se fundat. Quod genus sideris quando apparuerit aut pestilentiam, aut famem, aut bella significat.'[2] In chapter xxxiv of his *De cursu stellarum* Gregory of Tours differentiates two types of comet which presage disaster: 'When it seems to have a flaming diadem, it portends the death of a king. When it has a long ray like a sword, glowing red, and spreads its hair abroad darkly, it announces ruin to the country.'[3] The comet that heralded the pestilence in Auvergne in 571 was of the latter variety. 'On the kalends of October', says Gregory, 'the sun appeared so darkened that not a quarter part kept its light, but it was murky and discoloured as sackcloth. Moreover, a star by some called comet, which had a projection like a sword, appeared over that region throughout a whole year, and the heavens seemed to burn. Many other portents were made manifest.'[4]

[1] *Byrhferth's Manual*, ed. S. J. Crawford, 1929, p. 132 (E.E.T.S., o.s., 177).

[2] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, iii. 71, 16.

[3] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. by O. M. Dalton, Oxford, 1927, vol. ii, note on p. 526.

[4] Ibid. iv. 24 (31).

This belief persisted until the eighteenth century. A note in the parish register of Hibaldstow in Lincolnshire concerning the cattle-plague of 1747–8 runs: 'Before this said distemper amongst the Horned Cattle . . . there appeared a comet or blazing star in shape like a rod & was seen every evening westwardly and in the morning eastwardly for a considerable space of time, when as the air was clear. This was written by me, Ed. Watson, Parish Clerk, with design that generations that come after know the wonderful works and power of Almighty God which he hath done in our time.'[1]

'Belief in the miraculous healing power of saints, relics, etc.,' says Neuburger, 'naturally increased immensely at the time of plagues, . . . since fear conjured up terrifying phantoms and unbalanced reasoned judgement. The more medical art proved itself actually powerless, the more was salvation looked for from supernatural aid.'[2]

It is not surprising to find, in the earlier years of the period, that those who had been but newly converted to Christianity considered the new religion to have failed them in this time of trial, and that they therefore lapsed again into paganism. The relapse of the East Saxons has already been mentioned. The same happened also in Northumbria. Bede relates how Cuthbert strove to cope with this situation when he was at Melrose in 664: 'He sought to convert the neighbouring people . . . for some at the time of the pestilence, forgetting the sacred mystery of the faith into which they had been initiated, took to the delusive cures of idolatry, as though by incantations or amulets [*per incantationes vel alligaturas*] or any other mysteries of devilish art they could ward off a blow sent by God the Creator.'[3]

The aetiology of pestilence was derived by the Anglo-Saxons from classical and post-classical sources. Two different theories emerge. One of these ideas as to the cause of pestilence is found in classical writers of the earliest times, and it can be traced as a Christian conception throughout the Middle Ages. This ascribed it to the arrows which were shot at its victims by the gods. Thus Homer in the first book of the *Iliad* says that the pestilence which fell upon the host of the Greeks encamped before Troy was caused by the arrows of Apollo: *δεινὴ δὲ κλαγγὴ γένετ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοῖο.*

[1] Quoted by P. B. G. Binnall, *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries*, 1932, xxii. 19.
[2] Neuburger, *History of Medicine*, Lond., vol. ii, 1925, p. 7.
[3] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 9.

Job also attributed his sufferings to the arrows of the Almighty. St. Sebastian is a 'medical saint', and his shrines were especially popular in times of pestilence. The connexion is that arrows were considered to be the instruments of the pestilence, and were also the instruments of this saint's martyrdom. Albrecht Dürer represented the plague as a rider on a white horse who with his bow sends plague arrows over the land.

This idea is also found in Anglo-Saxon England. The sudden onset of disease was ascribed to 'elfshot'. The elves shot their arrows at the animals as well as at human beings, and various recipes for the cure of the former are to be found in the *Leechbooks* and in the *Lacnunga*. Presumably therefore murrain may also have been thought of as caused by elfshot. The word *stice*, hitherto translated 'stitch', might equally well signify the puncture produced by the elf's arrow.[1]

The alternative theory of the aetiology of pestilence is also derived from classical and post-classical sources. Thus, for instance, Galen describes pestilence as 'a disease which attacks all, or the greater number, arising from corruption of the air with the result that great numbers perish'.[2] Similarly Isidore of Seville says that pestilence 'is produced from a corruption of the air, and it makes its way by penetrating into the inward parts'.[3] Bede takes his ideas, which he sets forth in his *De natura rerum*, from these. He speaks of pestilence as being 'produced from the air when it has become corrupted (in accordance with the deserts of men) either from excess of dryness or of heat, or from rain. Inhaled in the process of breathing, the air generates plague and death.'[4]

Thus Columba, sitting on a hill in Iona, 'sees in the north a . . . dense cloud rising up from the sea on a clear day: and [he] . . . says to one of his monks . . . 'This cloud will be very harmful to men and to cattle: . . . it will pour down in the evening a pestilential rain which will cause grievous and festering ulcers to be found on the bodies of men and on the teats of cattle; and by these the sick men and cattle will suffer from that poisonous infection even unto death.'[5]

This conception persisted until the beginning of the scientific

[1] Elfshot is described at length in Chapter IX of this book.
[2] Galen, *Definit. med.*, cliii (Kühn, vol. xix, p. 391).
[3] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, iv. 6 (17).
[4] Bede, *De natura rerum*, xxxvii (*De pestilentia*).
[5] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, ed. W. Reeves, 1874, ii. 4.

study of medicine. Marsilio Ficino, writing in 1481 of the causes of the Black Death, says that 'poisonous vapour forms itself in the air during the plague epidemics, more especially during the evil conjunctions of stars, particularly Mars and Saturn'.[1] Fracastoro thought the invasion of syphilis in 1495 was due to corruption of the atmosphere. Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621) says, while speaking of the nine kinds of bad spirits: 'The sixth are those aerial devils that corrupt the air and cause plagues, thunders, fires, etc., spoken of in the Apocalypse.'

In Anglo-Saxon days pestilence was possibly spread in times of peace by monks travelling from an infested to an uninfested monastery. In times of war the soldiers of either side probably infected the countryside, including its civil population, as the fighting spread across it. In those days there was no health organization to provide remedial measures. 'One reason for the neglect of preventive measures', says Prinzing, 'was the belief that these pestilences broke out spontaneously when large numbers were crowded together under miserable living conditions'—as was presumably the case in Anglo-Saxon towns and monasteries.

> The physicians [of olden time] in their efforts to explain the sudden appearances of these pestilences, arrived at the conclusion that they were autochthonic. But modern medical science, realising its limitations, contents itself with the hypothesis that the original cause of these diseases is not to be ascertained, but with the knowledge that the infective agents in the case of almost all of them have been discovered, and that an outbreak of any infectious disease in any specific locality signifies that the germ of that disease must in some way have been deposited there.[2]

The epidemics which occurred in Anglo-Saxon times may be divided into five periods. The first series of outbreaks occurred in the two middle quarters of the sixth century. They are chronicled in Celtic sources only, and appear to have devastated Wales and Ireland, but there is no record of their spread into England. The second series began in 664 and continued, with short intervals, in both Britain and in Ireland for about half a century. In the third period—the second half of the eighth century—the Irish annals chronicle a series of outbreaks in Ireland. The fourth series, again

[1] Quoted by C. E. A. Winslow, *The Conquest of Epidemic Disease*, Princeton, N.J., 1943, p. 108.

[2] F. Prinzing, *Epidemics resulting from Wars*, London, 1916, p. 328.

in both Britain and Ireland, covers the period of the Danish invasions, and may be directly ascribed to the devastation of the countryside caused by them. The fifth series occurred during the reign of Edward the Confessor and resulted from a series of hard winters. The last two were hunger pestilences.

Prinzing enumerates as 'war pestilences' typhus fever (formerly called contagious typhus, hunger typhus, and camp fever), bubonic plague and cholera, typhoid fever, dysentery, smallpox, and also, perhaps, scurvy.[1] As will be seen, the identity of the pestilences of Anglo-Saxon times is still a matter of dispute. 'If we start from the time when more or less accurate descriptions enable us to determine the nature of epidemics', says Prinzing, 'we find that plague and typhus fever were the two diseases which, until a few decades ago, most continuously attacked the soldiers. . . . For a long time nobody knew just how to combat these pestilences, and nowhere were national measures adopted aiming to prevent them from spreading.'[2] This explains the long duration of some of the outbreaks, which has already been mentioned.

Throughout her early history, from the days of King Conchobar and the epic *Táin bó Cúailnge*, or 'Cattle raid of Cooley', Ireland has continuously suffered from internecine war, the chief purpose of which was the raiding of cattle, the main source of wealth in the island. Loss of animal stock from this cause, or from epizootic disease resulting from continued bad weather, naturally produced frequent famines. Each famine was followed by an epidemic of fever. The prevalent Irish famine-fevers were typhus and relapsing fever. Both are conveyed by the common louse, and the louse is associated with dirt. Both were therefore often present together, and naturally no distinction in those days was made between them.[3] They may, however, be distinguished now if the accounts in the *Annals* mention certain characteristics, such as jaundice, as a complication. A usual symptom of relapsing fever (to quote a report relating to the Irish epidemic of a century ago) was 'a yellow tinge of the skin varying from straw-colour to very deep jaundice'. This is at least suggestive of the name 'yellow plague' given to the epidemic of the sixth century.

[1] Prinzing, *Epidemics*, p. 4. In 1916 alone, 11,000 men were invalided home from Mesopotamia as a result of scurvy.

[2] Ibid., p. 328.

[3] The name 'typhus' was introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century, and that of 'relapsing fever' about a hundred years later.

Smallpox, bubonic plague, and dysentery, all prevalent in the outbreaks about to be described, also appear in Prinzing's list. Dysentery is intensified by famine and is accompanied by bleeding if not checked. Hence the term *riuth fola*, 'the bloody flux', used in the outbreaks of 763, 772, 776, and 777.

Descriptions of contemporary outbreaks of pestilence in France are given by Gregory of Tours, and the dry bones of the Anglo-Saxon and Irish annals may often be clothed from Gregory's details.

(*b*) *Epitome of pestilences*

The following table—for reference—epitomizes the accounts of individual outbreaks about to be described and discussed in detail.

There are various Anglo-Saxon words signifying pestilence which occur in this table and in the notes which follow it. The usual one is *máncwealm*, which is cognate with *cwelan*, to die. *Orf-cwealm* signifies murrain, while *wól* signifies both pestilence and murrain. *Onflyge* is an infectious disease. The word *stric* may be equated with *plaga*, a stroke.

The significance of the various Irish terms will be discussed with the description of the diseases themselves.

1. SIXTH-CENTURY VISITATION: 'BLEFED' AND 'PESTIS FLAVA'

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*
c. 526	Outbreak in Ceredigion	*Life of St. Brioc*
534	A great mortality, i.e. the 'Buidhe Chonnaill'	*Annals of Boyle* (MS. Cotton Titus A. XXV)
537	'Mortalitas' in Britain and Ireland	*Annales Cambriae*
545	'Blefed'	*Annals of Ulster*,[1] *Chronicon Scotorum* (under 541), *Annals of the Four Masters* (under 543), *Annals of Tigernach*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 546)
547	'Mortalitas magna in qua pausat Mailcun rex Genedotae'	*Annales Cambriae*
549	'Magna mortalitas' in Ireland ('cron chonaill')	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of the Four Masters*

[1] 'From 431 to 1014, every year is duly numbered, yet it is a commonplace that this part [of the *Annals of Ulster*] is antedated by one year', says B. MacCarthy in the introduction to these *Annals* (vol. iv, p. xcvi). I have therefore added one year in the date column where a record is given from the *Annals of Ulster*, since this dating appears to be the most reliable wherever it can be checked by natural phenomena.

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*
550	'Boy Connell' begins in Ireland	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*
551	'Mortalitas magna', i.e. 'Crom Conaill'	*Annals of Tigernach, Chronicon Scotorum, Annals of Inisfallen* (under 541)
552	'Sawthrust' in Ireland	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*
554	'Samthrosc' (lepra)	*Annals of Ulster, Chronicon Scotorum* (under 554: *Samthrosc*), *Annals of Tigernach*
556	'Magna mortalitas'	*Annals of Ulster*
569	'Leaprosie and knobbes'	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*
576	'Scintilla leprae'	*Annals of Ulster*
577	'Bolgach' (smallpox)	*Annals of Inisfallen*
	2. SEVENTH-CENTURY VISITATION	
664	'Mortalitas', reached Ireland 1 Aug.	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of Tigernach, Annals of Clonmacnoise, Annals of the Four Masters, Chronicon Scotorum* (under 660)
664	'Máncwealm' in Britain	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, Nennius, Matthew Paris
665	'Mortalitas magna' (Irish)	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of the Four Masters* (*Buidhe Connail*), *Annals of Tigernach, Annals of Clonmacnoise, Chronicon Scotorum* (under 661: *Buidhe Connaill*)
665	'Mortalitas'	Matthew Paris
665	'Mortalitas magna. i. budi connill'	*Annals of Boyle* (MS. Cotton Titus A. XXV)
c. 667	'Mortalitas' in which four abbots of Bangor (Ireland) perished	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of the Four Masters, Annals of Tigernach, Chronicon Scotorum* (under 663)
668	'Magna mortalitas'	*Annals of Ulster*
670	A great famine ('Oscolt')	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of Tigernach*
672	Outbreak at Lichfield and death of St. Chad	Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 3
675	'Bolgagh' in Ireland	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*
676–84	Outbreak at Lindisfarne	Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, 8
676	Outbreak at Barking ('wool')	Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 7–9
680	'Lepra gravissima in Hibernia qua vocatur *bolgcach*'	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of Tigernach, Chronicon Scotorum* (under 676), *Annals of Inisfallen* (under 668)
681	Great mortality through the whole island of Britain	*Brut y Tywysogion*
681	Outbreak of famine at Selsey	Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 13–14

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*
683	'Initium mortalitatis puerorum in mense octimbris'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*, *Annals of Inisfallen*, *Chronicon Scotorum* (under 679), *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 678)
684	'Mortalitas paruulorum'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*, *Chronicon Scotorum* (under 680), *Annals of Inisfallen* (under 672)
683	Outbreak in Ireland	*Annales Cambriae*
684–6	Mortality of animals	*Annals of the Four Masters*
685	Mortality in Ireland	*Brut y Tywysogion*
685	Outbreak 'in Britain'	Florence of Worcester
686	Outbreak at Wearmouth and Jarrow	Bede, *Vita abbatum*, 10
686 and 688	Outbreak in Northumbria	Adamnan, ii. 46
699	'Bouina strages in Saxonia'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 694)
700	'Accensa est bouina mortalitas in Hibernia in cal. Februi. Fames et pestilentia tribus annis facta est, ut homo hominem comederet'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*, *Chronicon Scotorum* (under 696), *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 695)
701	'Bouina mortalitas'	*Annals of Ulster*
708	'Bouina strages iterum incendit'	*Annals of Ulster*
709	'Pestis quae dicitur *baccach* cum uentris profluuiis, in Hibernia'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Chronicon Scotorum* (under 705), *Annals of Inisfallen* (under 698)
714	Great drought	*Annals of Ulster*

3. Eighth-century Irish outbreaks

743	'Bolgach'	*Annals of Ulster*
c. 760	Famine, abundance of acorns	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*
764	Famine. The bloody flux ('Riuth fola') in all Ireland	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*
769	Famine and 'morbus leprae'	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 762)
773	'Fluxus sanguinis', famine	*Annals of Ulster*
774	'Fluxus sanguinis', famine	*Annals of Ulster*
777	'Riuth fola.' Many diseases besides: 'pene mortalitas'. Great mortality of cows	*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (under 770–2)
778	'Riuth fola.' Great mortality of cows	*Annals of Ulster*
779	Murrain. Pestilence from famine 'Bolggach' throughout Ireland	*Annals of Ulster*
783	'Scamach'	*Annals of Ulster*
786	'Pestis que dicitur *Scamach*'	*Annals of Ulster*

4. NINTH- TO ELEVENTH-CENTURY VISITATIONS: FAMINE PESTILENCES

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*	*Reign*
793	Famine ('hunger') in Northumbria	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MSS. D, E, and F	..
800	Murrain in various places	Roger of Hoveden	..
806	'Pestilentia magna in Hibernia'	*Annals of Ulster*	..
810	Murrain in Britain	*Annales Cambriae*	..
814	Heavy diseases in Ireland	*Annals of Ulster*	..
825	'Magna pestilentia in Hibernia: fames'	*Annals of Ulster*	..
831, 2 or 3	'Mortalitas' at Christchurch, Canterbury	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. F	..
868	Famine	Asser	Æthelred I
869	Famine, pestilence, and murrain	Asser	..
896	Bread famine in Ireland	*Annales Cambriae*	..
897	Pestilence and murrain ('ceápes cwild & monna')	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*	Alfred
907	'Annus mortalitatis'	*Annals of Ulster*	..
909	'Bouina mortalitas'	*Annals of Ulster*	..
917	'A great plague in Ireland this year'	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*	..
949	'Clamhtrusccadh & rith fola' among the Danes of Dublin	*Annals of the Four Masters*	..
951	Mortality of bees: a great leprosy ('clamtrusca') upon the foreigners of Ath-cliath & a bloody flux ('rith fola')	*Annals of Ulster*	..
954	Great cow mortality throughout Ireland	*Annals of Ulster*	..
962	'Máncwealm'	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. A	Edgar
963	Famine in Ireland	*Annals of the Four Masters*	..
965	Famine in Ireland	*Annals of Ulster*	..
976	Famine ('hungor') & murrain	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MSS. D and E	Edward the Martyr
c. 986	Murrain ('yrfcwealm') in England	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MSS. C, D, and E	Æthelred the Unready
986	Murrain of cows ('Maelgarbh') in Ireland	*Annals of the Four Masters*, *Annals of Tigernach*	..
986	'Great mortallity in St. Querans see of Clonvickenois'	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*	..
987	Pestilence and murrain 'in Saxonland, Britain and Ireland'	*Annals of Ulster*	..

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*	*Reign*
987	Pestilence ('scitta') and murrain	Simeon of Durham, Florence of Worcester, Roger of Hoveden, Matthew Paris	Æthelred the Unready
988	Great mortality through famine	*Brut y Tywysogion*	..
992	Mortality of men, cattle, and bees in Ireland	*Brut y Tywysogion*	..
993	A great famine in the territory of Maredudd	*Brut y Tywysogion*	..
1005	Famine ('hunger')	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*	..
1010	'Dolor viscerum' in Danish army in Kent	William of Malmesbury, Roger of Hoveden	..
1012	'Lumps and griping' ('cnuic' and 'treaghait)' [= dysentery] at Armagh	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of the Four Masters*	..

5. VISITATIONS DURING THE CONFESSOR'S REIGN (AND AFTER): FAMINE PESTILENCES

Date	*Pestilence*	*Source of information*
1041	Mortality of cattle	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. E
1044	Famine ('hunger')	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MSS. C, E, and F
1044	Unknown pestilence at St. Queran, Ireland	*Annals of Clonmacnoise*
1046	Severe winter, 'máncwealm' and 'orfcwealm'	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. C
1047	Severe winter, 'máncwealm' and mortality of cattle	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. C
1047	Famine in Ireland	*Annals of Ulster, Annals of the Four Masters*
1049	'Máncwealm' and 'orfcwealm' at Worcester, Derby, &c.	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. D
1054	Murrain ('orfcwealm')	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. E
1061	Pestilence in Leinster of smallpox and colic ('bolgach' and 'treghaid')	*Annals of Tigernach*
1063	'Colic and lumps' in Ireland, and great scarcity	*Annals of the Four Masters*
1086	Murrain	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. E
1087	Fever ('drif') and famine ('hungor')	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. E

(*c*) *Sixth-century visitation*

Bede mentions a 'great famine (*hungor*) at Constantinople' in 446, and that it was 'immediately succeeded by a pestilence'. He

adds that 'the famine spread also to Britain', but 'after this came a good year, and such abundant crops in Britain as no age can since record'. This abundance caused the people to lead a life of luxury and corruption. But 'during these things, there came suddenly a great and furious pestilence (*wól*) upon these men of perverted hearts, which speedily laid low and carried off such numbers of them that the living no longer sufficed to bury the dead'.[1] This immediately preceded the invitation from Vortigern to Hengist and Horsa.

A reference occurs in the life of St. Brioc to a pestilence which raged in his native land of Ceredigion (Cardiganshire and a portion of Pembrokeshire). Brioc was then in Brittany, but returned home to minister to his own countrymen in their affliction. Since the date of Brioc's death is given as 530, this local outbreak in Ceredigion must have occurred about 526.

The pestilence of Justinian's time, which broke out in 542, is the first authenticated visitation of bubonic plague in Europe. The *Flores historiarum* records that 'in the year of grace 540 there was a great mortality at Constantinople'. Its symptoms are fully and accurately described by Procopius, who was an eye-witness.[2] 'The Gaelic name for this pestilence', says Sir William MacArthur, 'is preserved in the chronicles as *blefed*, *belfeth*, and *belefeth*, and it would appear that the transcribers of the existing MSS. did not themselves understand the term. Perhaps for this reason the Four Masters omit it in favour of the general descriptive phrase, "an extraordinary universal plague throughout the world".'[3] Celtic records show that these islands were suffering at the same period from a series of outbreaks of pestilence, sometimes *blefed* and sometimes *pestis flava*. Some entries are brief and without details, others are fanciful and vividly descriptive. 'If', continues MacArthur, 'the Blefed advanced at the same speed as the Black Death (also bubonic plague) 800 years later, we should expect it to reach Ireland round about 544 or 545, the date given in the Annals of Ulster. We know from Gregory of Tours[4] that the groin pestilence was raging in diverse regions of France in 543, which is in keeping with the Irish date.'

The earliest Celtic record occurs in the *Annales Cambriae* under

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 13–14.

[2] Procopius, II. xxii.

[3] Sir W. P. MacArthur, 'The identification of some pestilences recorded in the Irish Annals', *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 172.

[4] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, op. cit. iv. 5.

the year 537. It reads: 'The battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell: and there was a plague (*mortalitas*) in Britain and Ireland.' This dating of the outbreak seems to be about seven or eight years too early, but much of the chronology of the earlier periods is somewhat problematical, especially with regard to Celtic annals. The *Annals of Ulster*, as mentioned above, place under the year 544 (i.e. 545) 'the first[1] mortality, which is called the *blefed*', adding 'and in it Mobi Clarainech died'.

The last chapter of the second book of Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba* is concerned with this outbreak, as well as with that of the following century. The point which Adamnan wishes to press home is that, in both instances, the areas of Scotland to which the pestilence did not penetrate were those in which the monasteries founded by St. Columba were situated, and that Providence spared them through his influence. William Reeves, in his edition of the *Life*, adds various relevant notes concerning the area in Ireland which was unaffected. He says that, according to the Irish memoirs, Columba left the monastic seminary of St. Finnian where he was trained and 'entered the monastery of Mobi Clarainech . . . near Dublin. . . . A violent distemper, however, which appeared in the neighbourhood about 544, broke up the community, and Columba returned to the north. On his way he crossed the Bior, now called the Moyola water, a small river which runs into Lough Neagh on the north-west, and in doing so, prayed, it is said, that this might be the northern limit to the spread of the disease'. In a further note Reeves adds: 'The Irish Life [of St. Columba] says, "Mobi told his pupils to leave the place in which they were, for that a strange distemper was about to come, namely, the Buidhe chonnaill".'[2]

In 547 the *Annales Cambriae* chronicle 'a great mortality, in which Mailcun, king of Guenedota, reposed'. The *Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters* record the deaths of various saints in the year 548 'of the mortality which was called the *cron-chonaill*'. The *Annals of Ulster* also record under 548 (i.e. 549) a 'great mortality' with a list of notable people who died, and again under 553 (i.e. 554) the occurrence of 'the disease (*pestis*) which is called

[1] The word 'prima', inserted here, indicates that this is a retrospective and not a contemporary record, or else that there were two almost simultaneous outbreaks (see later).

[2] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, op. cit., pp. xxxv, 226.

samthrosc'. This last word MacArthur equates with the word *clam-trusca*, used in the *Annals of Ulster* (*clamhtrusceadh* by the *Four Masters*) of a disease which attacked the Danes in Dublin in 951, and identifies them both as smallpox. The gloss 'lepra' in the *Annals of Ulster* he considers to be wrong, since 'leprosy is a chronic condition of slow development—the degree of infectivity is very low, and in no circumstances could the disease give rise to a "pestilence"'.[1]

The *Annals of Clonmacnoise*[2] chronicle that in the year 550 'the Great Pestilence called the Boy Connell began', and under 552: 'This year there grew a sickness called the sawthrust' (= *samthrosc* phonetically, the *m* being aspirated): this again, according to the foot-note, is described as 'some sort of cutaneous disease'. These two entries probably refer to the two outbreaks just quoted from the *Annals of Ulster*, though the dates again vary. But Irish copyists incorporated glosses into their texts, so that entries giving alternative dates for the same event often appear. Thus exact dating for the various outbreaks in the sixth and even in the seventh century is not to be counted upon.

Under the year 555 (i.e. 556) appears the entry in the *Annals of Ulster* of 'a great mortality in this year'. In a later gloss the following phrase is erroneously added: 'i.e. the *crón conaill*, i.e. the *buidhe-conaill*.' Under 569 the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say: 'Diseases of the Leaprosie did abound and knobbes this year.' An entry in the *Annals of Ulster* under 575 (i.e. 576) runs: 'Scintilla leprae, and an unheard of abundance of nuts.' This probably chronicles a less intense—or a localized—outbreak of *samthrosc*.

This is the last entry for this century, apart from one in the *Annals of Inisfallen* for 577 which runs: '*Bolgach for doenib*' (i.e. smallpox amongst the people). This entry is important as being the earliest known mention of smallpox under the name *bolgach*.

Three Celtic names for pestilence occur in the entries quoted above from the Irish and Welsh annals, namely, *blefed*, *cron chonnaill*, and *buidhe chonnaill*. The meaning of two of these terms was discussed as long ago as 1856 by Sir William Wilde in his official report on the Irish Census. Wilde wrote:

The term *Buidhe Chonnaill* has been . . . long misunderstood . . . it

[1] Sir W. P. MacArthur, op. cit., *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 183–4.

[2] Now lost, but surviving in a translation by C. MaGeoghan, 1627. Edited by D. Murphy, 1896.

is the stalk of corn, and more particularly the stubble, being cut; and the term may have been applied from the similitude of the colour of the skin to the yellow hue of recent stubble. *Crom Chonnaill* is a synonyme for the same disease in perhaps a more aggravated form, *crom* or *cron* being a dull-black to dark-grey colour, and *buidhe* a bright-yellow, as people still say in popular language, the yellow jaundice, *Galar Buidhe*, and the black jaundice, *Galar Dubh*. . . . *Buidhechair* was another term employed, expressive of a greenish-yellow colour, perhaps arising from another appearance, which icteric patients assumed. This word is not even yet altogether lost, but is still occasionally applied to jaundice.[1]

Wilde also translates the Welsh *vall velen* as 'the dark-coloured yellowness'.

Much attention has been paid recently to the identification of the three conditions by MacArthur and Shrewsbury independently. Shrewsbury identifies all three with smallpox.

At first sight [he says] the Irish names would appear to indicate that Ireland was afflicted by a succession of severe epidemics of different diseases, and it is probable that more than one disease was epidemic in that country between A.D. 534 and A.D. 679. The different terminology does not prove, however, that the *blefed*, the *samthrosc*, the *buidhe connaill*, the *buidhe-chair*, and the *bolgach*, were distinct diseases. When a transmissible disease is introduced to a virgin population, it erupts with a violence and a malignity that are extraordinary, and its clinical picture may be different from the one it exhibits after it has settled down as an endemic disease. . . . With each successive outbreak, however, an increasing tolerance develops between host and parasite. . . . In ancient times it is practically certain that, during this progress of adaptation, the different stages marked by successive outbreaks would be given different names. I submit, therefore, that the names recorded in the Irish Annals most probably depict the stages in the acclimatization of the same pestilence after its introduction to a virgin society.[2]

MacArthur, however, identifies *blefed* with bubonic plague, *pestis flava* with relapsing fever, and only *bolgach* and *samthrosc* with smallpox.

On the heels of the *Blefed* [he says] came another pestilence, the famous and mysterious Yellow Pestilence, called accordingly in Gaelic, the *buidhe chonaill*, and the *crón chonaill*, the latter possibly being the more literary form of the two. In Britain the equivalent names, *pestis*

[1] *Ireland, Census for the year 1851. Part 5. Tables of deaths*, vol. i, Dublin, 1856, p. 416.

[2] Shrewsbury, 'The Yellow Plague', *J. Hist. Med.*, 1949, iv. 25–26.

flava and *lues flava*, were used. It was called in Welsh *y fâd felen*, and *lallwelen*, which have the same meaning. It is possible that the Blefed and the Buidhe Chonaill overlapped to some extent; but the Irish annalists clearly differentiate the two by their distinctive names, and state further that the Blefed was the first Mortality, as if to demarcate it from the second which followed so closely. It seems to me that the redactors of the British chronicle, the Liber Landavensis, hypnotised by the picturesque name, Pestis Flava, confused the two pestilences, and ended by recording them as one.[1]

If MacArthur's three separate diagnoses are right, it follows that these three pestilences followed one another in quick succession and overlapped.[2]

MacArthur identifies *pestis flava* with relapsing fever.

> The unanimity [he says] both in Ireland and Britain in applying the descriptive epithet 'yellow' to this malady makes it certain that jaundice was an outstanding feature. . . . To arrive at an identification we must find some acute infectious malady which would give rise to a fatal epidemic, extensive enough to involve both Britain and Ireland, with jaundice as a characteristic and predominating sign. Within my knowledge, there is only one disease which could possibly fulfil all these requirements, that is relapsing fever. Relapsing fever is a spirochaetal infection in which the first bout of fever is followed by a series of relapses which occur at intervals of about seven days. It was one of the two famine fevers formerly common in Ireland, typhus being the other. Both are conveyed by lice, and famine provides these insects with conditions ideal for their multiplication and spread. . . . To me it seems beyond all reasonable doubt that the Yellow Pestilence—probably with some remnant of the foregoing plague—was severe relapsing fever in which the accompanying jaundice was common enough to dominate the general picture of the disease in the popular mind.[3]

I must refer the reader to MacArthur's article for his instances of

[1] MacArthur, op. cit., *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 173–4.

[2] Personal communication to me from Sir William MacArthur: 'This would be quite in order. In the Irish Famine of 1846–49, the following epidemics appeared in Co. Galway, for example, in the order given, then persisting and overlapping; (1) scurvy, (2) dysentery, (3) famine dropsy, (4) typhus, (5) relapsing fever, (6) Asiatic cholera (in 1849); with further localized outbreaks of infectious ophthalmia, and smallpox. As a result of the ophthalmia, the hospitals (and most of the peasantry did not go into hospital) reported 380 persons as totally blinded, and 972 as having lost one eye. (These figures do not refer to Galway only.)'

[3] MacArthur, 'Comments on Shrewsbury's "The Yellow Plague" ', *J. Hist. Med.*, 1950, v. 215.

modern examples to corroborate his thesis: relapsing fever is still known as yellow fever in Ireland, and Graves headed the chapter on it in his *Textbook of Medicine* (1848) 'Yellow fever of the British Islands'. Shrewsbury's article on 'The Yellow Plague'[1] was published simultaneously with that on the Irish pestilence by MacArthur. Shrewsbury disagrees with MacArthur's identification, of which he was aware from the paper of the latter published in 1944 (as an appendix to my article which was the first draft of the present chapter).[2] He says:

> There are serious objections to the acceptance of relapsing fever as the Yellow Plague. Relapsing fever is communicated to man in the British Isles solely through the agency of the louse, and it cannot spread from one person to another either by direct or indirect contact. The infection is not communicated by the bite of the louse. The causal agent, a spirochaete, multiplies only in the blood of the louse, and the louse must be so injured that some of its blood escapes before the spirochaete can enter the human body through the wounds in the skin made either by the bite of the louse or by the scratches of the host. . . . The mere presence of lice, however, does not engender relapsing fever; it is the spread of lice infected with the spirochaete that governs the spread of the disease. . . . There would appear to have been few opportunities for the spread of infected lice with the speed, or over the area commensurate with the speed and extent of spread of either the *Vad Velen* of Wales or the Yellow Plague of England.[3]

Shrewsbury argues in favour of the identification of *pestis flava* (as well as *bolgagh*) with smallpox as follows:

> It must have been a disease which showed . . . a complete independence of the conditions of race, climate and soil; a disease that was so highly infectious that the exposure must be but once and for a short time to transmit the infection. . . . There are only four diseases, to my knowledge, that fulfil these requirements, namely pneumonic plague, influenza, measles, and smallpox.

He eliminates the first three, and then produces his arguments in

[1] Shrewsbury, 'The Yellow Plague', ibid., 1949, iv. 30, 32, 34, 35.

[2] Bonser, *Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, 1944, 3s. ix. 48–66; appendix, 66–71.

[3] On the other hand, the official history of the great Irish Famine quotes from contemporary medical reports that relapsing fever was 'fast propagated by contagion', and ran through whole families in a few days.

favour of smallpox: for these again, I must refer the reader to Shrewsbury's article.

The following notes which relate to the outbreak of the sixth century in both Ireland and Wales may be of interest.

Tara, until that time, had been the residence of the High King of Ireland, but it was then abandoned because nearly all the inhabitants had died of the pestilence. It was consequently supposed to be peopled by ghosts and therefore regarded with dread. The desertion was later ascribed to the curse of a saint.

The attitude of some of the Irish monks towards the pestilence seems from the following account, if they are to be taken at face value, to have been at once heroic and theatrical. St. Finnian died of the *buidhe conaill* in 562. The *Book of Lismore* says that he 'died in Clonard on behalf of the people of the Gael, that they might not all perish of the Yellow Plague'.[1] An Irish tract called *Cáin Eimíne Báin* 'relates how Eimíne Bán and forty-nine of his monks vicariously sacrificed themselves by voluntary death in order to save Bran úa Faeláin, king of Leinster, and forty-nine Leinster chiefs from the pestilence which was then destroying Leinster'.[2]

Lloyd, in his history of Wales, says that in the year 550 'the Yellow Plague was roaming through the land in the guise of a loathly monster'.[3] From it Maelgwn Gwyneld took refuge in a church [that of Llanrhos]: but he 'beheld the yellow plague through the keyhole of the church door, and forthwith he died' [*c.* 547]. In the *Mabinogion* Taliesin prophesies: 'a most strange creature will come from the sea marsh of Rhianedd: his hair, his teeth and his eyes being as gold, and this will bring destruction on Maelgwn Gwynedd'.[4] The pestilence was regarded as a living thing which roamed the land in Ireland also: there it is said that at the

[1] Life of St. Finnian of Clonard. In *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. Whitley Stokes, 1890, p. 82 (translation, p. 229).

[2] C. Plummer, 'Cáin Eimíne Báin', *Ériu*, 1908, iv. 39. The tract is translated on pp. 41–46.

[3] J. E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, vol. i, Lond. 1912, p. 131 (quoting Iolo MS. 378). The passage concerning mugwort in *The Lay of the Nine Healing Herbs* in the *Lacnunga* (A 5 (LXXIX)) is strangely suggestive of this description of the pestilence. It runs:

> þeos mæȝ wiþ attre, heo mæȝ wiþ onflyȝe,
> heo mæȝ wiþ ða laþan þe ȝeond lond fer[a]þ.

[This is strong against venom, she is strong against the onflight, she is strong against those evil things that fare throughout the land.] See Grattan and Singer, pp. 152–3.

[4] *Mabinogion* (Everyman edition), p. 276.

prayer of St. MacCreiché in Kerry a fiery bolt from heaven fell upon it, and 'reduced it to dust and ashes in the presence of the people'.[1]

The life of St. Teilo in the *Liber Landavensis*[2] contains the fullest description of this outbreak of pestilence in Wales and its consequences. It runs as follows:

> St. Teilo received the pastoral care of the Church of Llandaff . . . in which however he could not long remain, on account of the pestilence which nearly destroyed the whole nation. It was called Pestis Flava, because it occasioned all persons who were seized by it, to be yellow and without blood, and it appeared to men as a column of watery cloud, having one end trailing along the ground, and the other above, proceeding in the air, and passing through the whole country like a shower going through the bottom of valleys. Whatever living creatures it touched with its pestiferous blast, either immediately died, or sickened for death. If anyone endeavoured to apply a remedy to the sick person, not only had the medicine no effect, but the dreadful disorder brought the physician, together with the sick person, to death. For it seized Maelgwn, king of Guenedoth, and destroyed his country; and so greatly did the aforesaid destruction rage throughout the nation, that it caused the country to be nearly deserted.

It raged 'not only against men, but also against beasts and reptiles'. Teilo left for Cornwall, and visiting Geraint *en route*, proceeded to Armorica, where he was received by S. Samson of Dol. 'In the meantime . . . it happened that Christ, through his mercy, ordered that the aforesaid pestilence, which was called the yellow, should depart and vanish from the whole island of Britain.'[3]

A Welsh triad says: 'the second pestilence was the Yellow plague of Rhôs, which was caused by the carcasses of the slain, and whoever went within reach of the effluvia fell dead immediately'.[4] As the air was 'corrupt', according to the theory then prevailing, any one breathing it was smitten with the 'corruption'.

Wirt Sikes, in his book on British goblins, speaks of the '*marw-*

[1] E. O'Curry, *Lectures on the MS. Materials of Ancient Irish History*, Dublin, 1861, p. 631.

[2] The *Liber Landavensis* or *Book of Llan Dâv* was drawn up in the middle of the twelfth century to establish certain rights of the see of Llandaff. It also includes lives of SS. Dubricius, Teilo, Oudoceus, and Samson.

[3] *Liber Landavensis*, 3. 1, ed. and trans. W. J. Rees, p. 343. (Welsh MSS. Society, 1840.)

[4] Ibid., p. 344 note.

coel, or yellow-spot before death' as a death omen.[1] He says he can find no details of this: the connexion with the pestilence under discussion, however, seems obvious.

Vast numbers are said to have died in Wales from this outbreak: those who could, including St. David, St. Teilo, and St. Padarn, escaped to Armorica and remained there during the years that the pestilence lasted. One gathers from the evidence in the *Liber Landavensis* that they found many of their churches desolate on their return to Gwent, and many monasteries in consequence of this were not reoccupied.

It is said that St. Gildas, then at Rhuis in Morbihan, composed his *Lorica* so that the yellow plague should not extend to Armorica. If so, 'the pestilence of this year', which is mentioned in the opening lines, refers to this outbreak.[2]

(*d*) *Seventh-century visitation*

The second epidemic which is recorded in English history began in 664, in the reign of Oswiu.[3] Outbreaks continued for a great many years. More reliable details are available of this than of any other pestilence of the Anglo-Saxon period. The entry for 664 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*[4] speaks of an eclipse of the sun on 3 May (really on 1 May) and continues: 'In the same year there was a great pestilence (*máncwealm*) in the island of Britain: and of that pestilence died bishop Tuda [of Lindisfarne] and was buried at Wagel [perhaps = Whalley]. . . . And the same year archbishop Deusdedit died.' Bede also mentions the eclipse and the pestilence (*pestilentiae lues*; A.S. version *wool & áðol*) which 'first depopulated the southern coasts of Britain, and afterwards extending into the province of the Northumbrians, ravaged the country far and wide, and destroyed a great multitude of men'.[5] He also says it did no less harm in Ireland, and, later, that the East Saxons turned to idolatry on account of it, and had to be shown the error of their ways.[6]

[1] Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins*, London, 1880, p. 216. [2] See p. 247.

[3] An outbreak of pestilence is mentioned in the (twelfth-century) *Vita Oswaldi*, but the source is a late one to have much value. The king's symptoms, which are given, are picturesque. Possibly this may be a reference to an earlier wave of this pestilence visiting Britain a quarter of a century before the main outbreak.

[4] MS. E (Laud). Other manuscripts merely mention the outbreak.

[5] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 27. [6] Ibid. iii. 30.

The number of notable people who died of the outbreak in this year seems to have impressed the historians of the time. Erconbert, king of Kent, died on 14 July, on the same day, according to Bede, as Archbishop Deusdedit. Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, died on 26 October at Lastingham, Bishop Damian at Rochester.[3] The death of Bishop Tuda has already been mentioned. According to Florence of Worcester, Ethelberga, abbess of Barking, also died then, on 11 October. This would place the outbreak in her monastery[4] in that year, and not twelve years later, as related by Bede.[5]

The epidemic appears to have increased in violence in its second year, for Matthew Paris (a late source, however) has this entry under the year 665: 'The pestilence prevailed in England to such an extent that men went in crowds to the cliffs of the sea and threw themselves headlong into it, preferring a swift death to perishing by lingering torment.'[6]

The pestilence visited Melrose when Cuthbert was there in 664. Its prior, Boisil, died of it. Cuthbert suffered from an attack but recovered. Bede says:

> The brethren of that monastery spent all night watching and praying for his life. . . . Next morning . . . rising up, he began to try to walk, leaning on his staff; and his strength increasing every day, he was restored to sound health; but though the tumour which appeared on his thigh ceased to swell, and gradually sinking beneath the surface of the body, settled in his bowels, he ceased not to feel some pain in the inward parts for almost the rest of his life.[7]

Cuthbert, going about among the people, exposed himself recklessly to the plague. Tydi, a priest of Melrose, says in the 'Anonymous Life' that

> our holy bishop, during the pestilence which depopulated many places, was preaching the word of God to the people who survived in a certain

[1] Ibid. iv. 1. See, however, the note on dates in Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1943, p. 129. Here he computes the date of Deusdedit's death to have been '28 October 663, which Bede would regard as falling within the Year of Grace 664'; R. H. Hodgkin remarks in connexion with the state of affairs in the English Church at this juncture that 'when Theodore . . . arrived in England in May 669, . . . for five years there had been no archbishop at Canterbury. . . . These five years had been years of plague; and bishops and clergy had been carried off by the disease. Theodore on his arrival found only three bishops in the land. These were Wini (of London), Wilfrid, and Chad.'

[2] Ibid. iii. 23. [3] Ibid. iv. 2. [4] Ibid. iv. 7–9. [5] See *infra*, p. 78.

[6] 'But', comments Shrewsbury, 'bubonic plague does not cause "lingering torment"; death comes within seven days as a rule, often in three or four.'

[7] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 8.

village called Medilwong, when he turned to me and said gently: 'Is there anyone in the village still suffering from that pestilence so that I may go forth and preach to him and bless him?' I pointed out to him a woman who was standing not far from us, weeping and wailing on account of her son who was lately dead, and holding another one in her arms, with his whole body swollen, half-dead and breathing his last. He straitway rose and approached her, and blessing the infant, kissed it.[1] [The child recovered.]

The reference to pestilence in Nennius, ch. 64, is probably to that of 664: 'during [Oswiu's] reign, there was a dreadful mortality among his subjects, when Catgualart [Cadwalader] was king among the Britons, succeeding his father, and he himself died among the rest.'[2] Geoffrey of Monmouth also gives a picturesque account of the pestilence: he says that the multitude of those who perished was so great that 'the living were not enough to bury the dead'.[3]

The pestilence was also raging in Ireland in 664 and 665, and again in 667 and 668. The Irish sources supply more information as to its nature than the English ones do—these are therefore most useful in the present case. The *Annals of Ulster* record under the date 663 (i.e. 664): 'Darkness on the Kalends of May, at the ninth hour; and in the same summer the sky seemed to be on fire.[4] A pestilence (*mortalitas*) reached Ireland on the Kalends of August . . . [since] the first mortality, 112 [years].'[5] These *Annals* continue, under 664 [i.e. 665], 'a great mortality . . . and bishops and abbots, and other persons innumerable died'. 'Mortalitas in Hibernia' was still continuing in 667 and 668. The great famine (*oscolt mor*) recorded under 669 [i.e. 670] may have been the result of the distress caused by the pestilence, aided by the great fall of snow which is also mentioned.

The passage relating to the year 664 in the *Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters* runs: 'A great mortality (*mortlath*) prevailed in Ireland this year which was called the *Buidhe Connail*, and the fol-

[1] 'Life of St. Cuthbert by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne', iv. 6. In B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 117–19.

[2] But, according to the oldest manuscript of the *Annales Cambriae*, he died of a pestilence in 682. Later manuscripts, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, make him fly to Armorica to avoid it. The passage is obscure: it cannot refer to the death of Oswiu himself, since this occurred in 671.

[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Hist. Regum Britanniae*, xii. 15.

[4] ? Aurora Borealis.

[5] *Annals of Ulster*, 663 (Rolls Series, vol. i, p. 119).

lowing number of saints of Ireland died of it.' Eight names follow. 'After Diarmaid and Blathmac, the two sons of Aed Slaine, had been eight years in the sovereignty of Ireland, they died of the same pestilence. . . . An eclipse of the sun on the third day of May.' O'Donovan, as editor, adds a note to say that *Buidhe Connail* has been explained as 'icteria vel aurigo, id est abundantia flavae bilis per corpora effusae, hominemque pallidum reddentis'. The identification of this outbreak is, however, discussed later.

Another Irish account of the pestilence is as follows:

> An assembly of the clergy and laity was summoned in 657 by Dermot and Blaithmac, kings of Ireland, to take counsel. It was decided that the amount of land held by any one person should be restricted; and further, the seniors directed that prayers should be offered for a pestilence 'to reduce the numbers of the lower class, that the rest might live in comfort'.

Another version expresses it that 'the nobles of Ireland's men fasted[1] along with the sons of Aed Slane [i.e. the two kings] . . . to get the population reduced'. St. Fechin of Fore, on being consulted, approved this extraordinary petition. He and both the kings, however, died of it, together with a multitude of clergy and nobles. But history does not relate that any of the 'lower class' died also.[2]

During this pestilence Colman O'Cluasaige, head professor of St. Finnbarr's School in Cork, took fifty of his pupils across from the mainland to an island 'for the learned say that pestilence does not make its way further than nine waves'.[3]

A miraculous cure of the *buidhe-conaill* occurs in the life of St. Mochua of Balla in the *Book of Lismore*.[4] 'It was one of Mochua's miracles, to wit, Sil Muiredaig was suffering from the Yellow Plague, and the clerics of the province of Connaught sought to banish it from them, and they succeeded not. So they came to the place where Mochua was dwelling, and he healed them and put

[1] Fasting was a usual Irish method of attempting to coerce kings and even the Deity. Thus 'the triple rampart of Tailtiu' is described in the *Metrical Dindsenchas* as 'the spot where the kings used to fast, with laymen, with clerics, with hundreds of headmen, that no disease might visit the land of Erin' (E. J. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas*, vol. iv, p. 157, Todd Lecture Series).

[2] Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. ii, pp. 12–13, 113–14. (Henry Bradshaw Soc., 14, 1898).

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. Whitley Stokes, 1890, ll. 4798 ff. (pp. 287, 361).

the colour which was on them upon his crozier.'[1] Whitley Stokes remarks that 'though transfers of disease to inanimate objects are frequent in folk-medicine, these objects are not usually sacred'.

The pestilence seems to have been widely spread over Europe. Adamnan, writing in about 691, speaks of

> the pestilence which twice in our time had ravaged the greater part of the world. For not to speak of the other wider districts of Europe (that is of Italy and the city of Rome itself, and . . . Gaul and Spain . . .) Ireland and Britain were twice entirely ravaged by dreadful pestilence, with the exception of two peoples: the people of the Picts and that of the Scots of Britain, between whom is the boundary of the mountains of the Ridge of Britain.[2]

Pestilence was still raging in Rome in 668. Wighard, archbishop elect of Canterbury, repaired thither in that year to receive his pallium from Pope Vitalian, but died of the pestilence together with most of his companions on his arrival.

Matthew Paris chronicles that a pestilence was raging at Rome and Pavia in 686. It only ceased at Rome, he says, when the relics of St. Sebastian, who has already been mentioned in connexion with pestilence, 'were translated out of the city and placed on an altar which had been set up for the purpose in the basilica of St. Peter ad Vincula'.[3] The fresco above the tomb of Antonio Pollaiuolo in this church tells the story of this famous pestilence; it depicts the two angels who passed from door to door and the translation of the saint's relics from the catacombs.[4]

There are various records of pestilence in England and Ireland in the years following 664. Outbreaks are recorded as occurring especially in monasteries. The grain (resulting from dues) stored there naturally attracted the rats which were the carriers of pestilence. Before the growth of the towns[5] the monasteries were

[1] James F. Kenney, in his *Sources for the Early History of Ireland*, vol. i, p. 461, note 281, says that the *Chronicum Scotorum* gives the date of St. Mochua's death as 690, with 637 or 638 as a possible alternative. He comments that 'this earlier date has generally been accepted by hagiologists'. But his association with the *buidhe-connaill*, which began in 663, makes the earlier date impossible. (637 is obviously too late to allow of the saint's connexion with the outbreak of 545–53.)

[2] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, op. cit. ii. 46.

[3] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. i, p. 308 (Rolls Series.)

[4] Reproduced in *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1913, vi (Sect. Hist. Med.), 41.

[5] The urban population in those days was probably less than one-tenth of the total population.

among the larger communities of the population, and it is therefore to be expected that the chroniclers, apart from their professional interest as monks, should note the spread of infection among them. In 666, according to the *Four Masters*, there was 'a great plague . . . of which died four abbots at [Bangor, in Ireland]'. St. Chad died of it at Lichfield on 2 March 672. Nearly all the monks of Lindisfarne perished during the years 676 to 684, when St. Cuthbert was there. Bede, in his life of the saint, makes Cuthbert tell of the visitation as follows:

> After they [i.e. the monks who had been keeping Christmas with him] left me to return in the morning to their monastery [i.e. Lindisfarne] they found that a certain one of their brethren had died of the pestilence, and the same disaster increased in violence every day . . . almost the whole year, so that nearly the whole of that noble community of spiritual fathers and brethren departed to the Lord.[1]

The anonymous *Historia abbatum* says that Cynefrid, the second abbot of Ingætlingum (Gilling in Yorkshire), died there of the pestilence and that some of the surviving monks migrated thence to Wilfrid's monastery at Ripon.[2]

Monks moving thus from one monastery to another helped to spread the infection. An outbreak occurred at the newly founded monastery at Lastingham; it is remarkable that the pestilence should have penetrated even to this secluded moorland retreat. Bishop Cedd, on a visit there at the time, fell a victim. About thirty men belonging to his own monastery—presumably Ythancæstir or Bradwell—' in the province of the East Saxons', on hearing of his death came to Lastingham 'being desirous either to live near the body of their father, or . . . to die there and be buried. Being lovingly received by their brethren . . . all of them died there by the aforesaid pestilence, except one little boy who was delivered from death by his father's prayers.'[3] It was after their influence had been withdrawn that the East Saxons relapsed into paganism in the following year.

One of the canons enacted by Theodore at the synod of Hertford in 672—eight years after the death of Cedd—prohibited monks from moving from one monastery to another after the Celtic

[1] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 27.
[2] Auct. anon., *Historia abbatum*, 3 (Plummer, Bede, *Opera hist.*, vol. i, p. 389).
[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 23.

fashion.[1] He may have had an ulterior motive; he wished to prevent the spread of the pestilence by this means.

Bede tells various stories in connexion with the outbreak at the monastery at Barking in 676, during which its abbess Æthelberga died.[2] The following passage shows the terror with which the pestilence was regarded:

> When the mortality which we have already so often mentioned, ravaging all around, had also seized on that part of this monastery where the men resided, and they were daily hurried away to meet their God, the careful mother of the society began often to inquire in the convent, of the sisters, where they would have their bodies buried, and where a grave-yard should be made when the same pestilence should fall upon that part of the monastery in which God's female servants were divided from the men, and they should be snatched away by the same destruction. . . . She and all of them received a most certain answer from heaven. For one night . . . on a sudden, a light from heaven, like a great sheet, came down upon them all, [and] . . . rising from that place, removed to the south side of the monastery . . . and having continued there for some time . . . withdrew again to heaven, leaving conviction in the minds of all, that the same light, which was to lead or to receive the souls of those servants of God into heaven, was intended to show the place in which their bodies were to rest, and await the day of the resurrection.

The symptoms of one patient, a nun named Tortgith, are given. She 'was so far spent with the distemper that her bones would scarcely hang together, and at last, when the time of her dissolution was at hand, she not only lost the use of her other limbs, but also of her tongue'.

St. Etheldreda died in 680,[3] her death being associated with a chronic swelling in her neck, which Bede says was a 'tumor sub maxilla'.[4] He adds that it was said that she prophesied both the pestilence of which she was to die and the number of the members of her monastery who would be killed by it; but the 'medicus', Cynifrid, who witnessed the illness and operated on her,[5] does not

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 5.

[2] Ibid. iv. 7–9, ? in 664, *v. ante*. Barking was a 'double monastery', i.e. for both sexes, and was, as seems to have been usually the case, ruled by a woman. See, in this connexion, G. F. Browne, *The Importance of Women in Anglo-Saxon Times*, Lond., 1919, p. 23, where he says, 'I have not found record of a double monastery ruled by a man'.

[3] *A.S. Chronicle* says 679, but see Plummer's note in Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 239.

[4] Ibid. iv. 19.

[5] See also pp. 98–99.

mention any other deaths at Ely, nor does the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Bede[1] describes an outbreak which attacked Sussex about the time of its conversion to Christianity in 681, and especially mentions its occurrence in the monastery of Selsey. No rain, he says, had fallen in Sussex for three years before the time that Wilfrid arrived there, 'whereupon a dreadful famine ensued, which cruelly destroyed the people. . . . But on the very day on which the nation received the baptism of faith, there fell a soft but plentiful rain'. Bede, who is obviously more interested in the spiritual message of his story than in the medical aspect, goes on to say how this pestilence was stopped owing to the supplication of St. Oswald. SS. Peter and Paul appeared to a boy who was sick of the pestilence in the monastery, and told him that he would be the last to die there of the disease, and that since on that day St. Oswald had been murdered, God was then answering his prayer that the rest of his countrymen might be saved.

The Welsh *Brut y Tywysogion* (Chronicle of the Princes) begins in the year 681, and opens with the passage which states that this was 'the year of Christ when the great mortality took place through the whole land of Britain'. It continues that in 685 and two years subsequently there was a mortality in Ireland.

The *Annales Cambriae* record a pestilence in Ireland in 683, and the *Annals of Inisfallen* record under 671 (i.e. 683) 'initium tertiae mortalitatis'. This is reminiscent of the epithets (*pestis secunda*, &c.) applied to the recrudescences of the Black Death.

The *Annals of Ulster* record under 682 (i.e. 683) and other Irish annals at varying but adjacent dates, 'initium mortalitatis puerorum in mense Octimbris'. MacArthur notes that the *pestis secunda* (1361) of the Black Death was also called *pestis puerorum* 'because of the disproportionate number of juveniles who fell victim'.[2] This he explains from the fact that, 'as a new generation grew up, the proportion of persons protected by having passed through a previous attack of plague was much greater among the adults than among the young, so that the latter would be likely to suffer more heavily when a recrudescence flared up'.

From 684, according to the *Four Masters*, there was 'a great mortality upon all animals in general, throughout the whole world,

[1] *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 13–14.

[2] MacArthur, op. cit., *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 180.

for the space of three years, so that there escaped not one out of the thousand of any kind of animals.[1] There was a great frost in this year so that the lakes and rivers of Ireland were frozen; and the sea between Ireland and Scotland was frozen, so that there was a communication between them on the ice.' Florence of Worcester notices this pestilence under the year 685; he says, 'Britain was swept by a pestilence which carried death into all quarters, and abbot Eosterwinni . . . falling a prey to it was taken to the Lord.'

Bede gives further details of this outbreak as far as it affected the monastery of Wearmouth in 686. Abbot Benedict, returning from his sixth visit to Rome, 'found sorrows awaiting him at home; namely that the venerable presbyter Eosterwinni, whom at his departure he had appointed abbot, and no small number of the brethren committed to his care, had died of the pestilence which was then everywhere raging'.[2] The pestilence also visited the sister monastery of Jarrow, where it was so severe that all who could preach or recite the antiphons died, except for the sub-abbot Ceolfrid and one small boy. It has been thought that the latter may have been Bede himself, who was then about twelve years old. Adamnan says a pestilence was raging in Northumbria when he visited his friend King Aldfrith in 686 and again in 688;[3] but, he says, 'the Lord mercifully saved me from danger on both occasions, though I was living and moving about in the very midst of the pestilence: so that not one of my own company died, nor was any one of them troubled by any disease'.

Bede also chronicles an outbreak in an Irish monastery, that 'which in the language of the Scots is called Rathmelsigi'.[4] This has been variously located in Connaught and in Louth: and has been identified by Creighton with Melfort in Meath.

One isolated outbreak in a monastery appears to have occurred in a later period. The *Canterbury Chronicle* says in a Latin insertion of doubtful authority that all the monks except five in the priory of Christ Church at Canterbury were carried off by a pestilence 'in the first year that Ceolnoth was archbishop', i.e. in 833.[5]

[1] With this may be compared the curious entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 671: 'In this year was the great destruction of birds'. Florence of Worcester more expressly says: 'there was a great pest among birds, which destroyed vast numbers.'

[2] Bede, *Vita abbatum*, ch. 10.

[3] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, op. cit. ii. 46.

[4] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 27.

[5] *A.S. Chronicle*, under year 995 in MS. F: B.M. Cotton, Domit. A. VIII (Rolls

It has already been suggested that the decimation of the manpower of Northumbria by the frequent recurrence of pestilence may have largely contributed to her collapse after the defeat of Nectansmere. The details just given show also how far it was responsible for the removal of her leading men, and also of the more cultured portion of the population, who were located in the monasteries.

The identification of the pandemic of 664 and of the recrudescences of pestilence of the following years is as much in dispute as is that of the sixth-century pestilence.

Shrewsbury asserts that this pestilence of 664, like its predecessor, was smallpox, the name *buidhe chonaill* being applied to both. MacArthur, on the other hand, considers that this, like the *blefed*, was bubonic plague. He says:

> The name Buidhe Chonaill has for centuries been given to the pestilence of 664 in Ireland, an unfortunate identification that has caused much confusion, and led to far-reaching and erroneous deductions. At one time I accepted this as a genuine and contemporaneous name, but . . . being myself familiar with plague, I could conceive of no possible reason for calling the disease 'yellow'. I became more doubtful of its authenticity on observing that, where it is included in the text of a chronicle, it is in a form suggestive of an interpolation. . . . In the MS of the *Annals of Ulster* preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, 'Buidhe Chonaill' has been written in above the line in a different hand and in different ink. I have examined the Bodleian MS of this chronicle, and 'Buidhe Chonaill' does not appear there. It is evident, therefore, that this name did not appear in the earlier MS from which these copies were derived: nor in the much earlier prototype called by O'Rahilly the 'Ulster Chronicle', which he calculates was compiled about 740, from still older records. I am convinced that the pestilence of 664 was bubonic plague, and that in Ireland it was never regarded as a revisitation of the Buidhe Chonaill until some transcriber, writing at a date later than the eleventh century, added the name as a retrospective gloss, in the mistaken assumption that the pestilence was of the same nature as the true Buidhe Chonaill recorded a century before.[1]

Shrewsbury argues that there was no outbreak of bubonic plague in these islands in the sixth or the seventh century, because it is conveyed to man by means of infected rat-fleas; and until the black rat became established in Britain as the natural reservoir of the plague bacillus, it is extremely doubtful that the bubonic plague

Series, vol. i, p. 246). But more probably in 831 or 832. See under Ceolnoth in *D.N.B.*

[1] MacArthur, op. cit., *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 176–7.

could have spread in this country. Zinsser says that there is no certain knowledge of rats in Europe, within historic times, until shortly after the Crusades.[1] In spite of this argument MacArthur is of opinion that the plagues of both the sixth and seventh centuries were bubonic. In a personal communication he summarizes his argument as follows: (1) The houses of our ancestors swarmed with fleas. 'There was therefore a heavy infestation of man, domestic animals and rats with the human flea, *Pulex irritans*, and a resulting interchange of hosts. This flea can transmit plague, and if less effective than some other species, its huge numbers would have compensated.' (2) Bede says that St. Cuthbert was suffering from the pestilence which was widely diffused over Britain, and that he had a tumour on his thigh. 'It was considered worthy of note that this tumour ceased to swell and gradually sank below the surface of the body—just as a plague bubo sinks when it resolves, instead of going on to the more common suppuration and discharge.' (3) Plague causes 'greater panic than any other epidemic disease (except cholera, which this was not) because of its sudden appearance, short course, and its very high mortality—all these features are recorded of the plague of 664'. (4) This pestilence, like plague, started in the summer (on 1 August, according to the *Annals of Ulster*). (5) There are no separate words for 'rat' and 'mouse' in the classics.

On this last point MacArthur has expressed his view (in print) as follows: 'In the Aryan languages, except for the Germanic group, the same word served for both "mouse" and "rat". As the latter word is found both in Old High and Old Low German, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Anglo-Saxon invaders brought it with them to Britain. A Low Latin hybrid *raturus* existed in Anglo-Saxon England, and appears in Ælfric's *Glossary*, perhaps a relic of the Roman occupation.'[2] The evidence seems to support MacArthur's view that *blefed* was plague, and that it was spread by rats which were present in these islands in the seventh century.

Apart from the main epidemic of the seventh century dealt with

[1] H. Zinsser, *Rats, lice and history*, Lond., 1935, p. 195. But Sir William MacArthur tells me that Koller states in *Das Rattenbuch* that skeletons of house rats have been found in excavations at Pompeii. He also tells me that two Roman votive offerings have been identified as rats.

[2] MacArthur, op. cit., *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 170.

so far, there appear to have been other diseases, at least in Ireland, occurring at the same period, as was the case with the sixth-century visitation. These are named *bolgagh* (or *bolgcach*) and *baccach*. There were also outbreaks of murrain.

Under the year 675 the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say: 'There Raigned a kind of great Leprosie in Ireland this yeare called the pox, in Irish *bolgagh*.' It appears to be agreed that this was smallpox,[1] which appears again as a concomitant now, as in the preceding epidemic.

The *Annals of Ulster* chronicle four outbreaks of murrain—in 698, 699, 700, and 707 (i.e. 699, 700, 701, and 708). The mortality accompanying that of 699 (i.e. 700) appears to have been especially severe, as the Annals add: 'Fames et pestilentia tribus annis facta est ut homo hominem comederet.' It is also chronicled in other Irish annals under slightly varying dates.

Under the year 708 (i.e. 709) the *Annals of Ulster* record: 'Pestis quae dicitur *baccach*, cum uentris profluuiis, in Hibernia.' MacArthur discusses the possible identification of *baccach*, which he translates as 'lameness' in the sense of 'weakness or disablement of any limb, upper as well as lower'. He says 'the problem is to name an epidemic disease which might have given rise to numerous cases of paralysis or weakness of limbs. . . . I venture to suggest that the *baccach* of 708 may have been poliomyelitis, popularly called "infantile paralysis", although it is far from being restricted to children. . . . The initial phase of the infection would have passed the understanding of any monk of old, but no one could have failed to observe the trail of cripples it left behind.'[2]

Abbot Ethelbert Horne, in his description of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Camerton in Somerset, notes that some sixteen skeletons (including the four shown on his plate 7) were not 'laid out' in any way before burial. He queries if these were victims of the pestilence, especially as the cemetery was in use at the time of this seventh-century outbreak. In grave 108 'the body was put in face downwards. Grave 59 was only 11 in. under the present surface, and no real grave had been dug, but the body had been simply covered with the top soil. It also gave the appearance of having been fully dressed when buried, it certainly was not laid out in any way.'[3]

[1] A prayer against variola appears at the end of the *Lacnunga* (CXC: fo. 191*b*).

[2] MacArthur, op. cit., pp. 185–6.

[3] E. Horne, 'Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Camerton, Somerset, pt. 2', *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. Soc.*, 1933, lxxix. 42 and pl. 7.

(*e*) *Eighth-century Irish outbreaks*

Judging from the fact that Anglo-Saxon records are silent on the subject, Britain would appear to have been immune from pestilence during the eighth century, but the Irish annals mention several outbreaks in Ireland during the latter half. These seem to have differed from the main epidemics which occurred there, as well as in England, in the two preceding centuries, most of which were a concomitant of famine. In this respect they are more akin to those of the succeeding periods. But considering the incessant internecine warfare, with its consequent ravaging of territory and plundering of cattle, which fill the pages of the Irish annals throughout this early period, it would be surprising if there were not an equally recurring record of famine, of murrain, and of pestilence.

Under 759 (i.e. 760) the *Annals of Ulster* chronicle a 'famine, with an abundance of acorns'. But the entry for this year in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* is worthy of being recorded in detail—in the picturesque diction and spelling of Ma Geoghan of 1627:

> There was a Great famine throughout all the kingdome, in the beginning of his [Nealle Frassagh's] raigne. In soe much that the K. himself had very little to live upon, & being then accompanied with seven godly Bishops, fell upon their knees, where the king very pitifully before them all besought God of his Infinite Grace & Mercy . . . to send him & them some Releefe for maintenance of his service, which request was noe sooner made than a Great shower of Silver fell from heaven, whereat the K. greatly Rejoyced, and yett (said he) This is not the thing that can Deliver us from this famine & eminent Danger, with which he fell to his Prayers againe; then a second shower of heavenly honey fell, & then the K. said with Great thanksgiving as before, wth that y^{e} third shower fell of pure wheat, which covered all the fields over that like was never seen before, soe that there was such plenty & aboundance of wheat, that it was thought y^{t} was able to maintaine manye kingdomes. Then the K. & the seven Bushopes gave great thanks to the Lord.

The same annals say that in 761 (in 767, i.e. 768, according to the *Annals of Ulster*) 'Duffeinreaght, K. of Connaught, Died of a sanguine flux'; and in 762 that 'There Raigned famine & many Diseases in this kingdome, untill they were suckoured by the prayers of K. Neale & his Bushopes as before'.

For the year 763 (i.e. 764), the *Annals of Ulster* record: 'Great snow for nearly three months. . . . The great scarcity and famine'—

probably in consequence—and 'Great drought beyond measure'. This is followed by 'The bloody flux (*riuth fola*) in all Ireland'. Hennessy's note adds: 'This seems to be the first mention of the prevalence of the bloody flux, or true dysentery, in Ireland.'

In 768 (i.e. 769) the same *Annals* record: 'An earthquake, and a famine; and a leprous disease attacked many. Abundance of acorns.' (This is presumably the same famine as that recorded in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* under 762.) In 772 (i.e. 773) they record that Moenach, abbot of Slane, died of the bloody flux (*a fluxu sanguinis*), also 'an unusual drought and heat of the sun, so that almost all food failed'. The 'bloody flux' continued next year, and again in 776 (i.e. 777)—'many diseases besides; pene mortalitas. The great mortality of cows'. The corresponding entry in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* is apparently that for 770: it runs: 'There raigned many diseases in Irelande this yeare. A great Morren of Cowes came over the whole kingdom, called the Moylegarow.' This and great scarcity of food continued for two years. The *Annals of Ulster* also record that in 778 (i.e. 779) the 'bouum mortalitas' had not ceased, and that there was also a mortality of men from want. They also chronicle an outbreak of *bolggach* (smallpox) throughout all Ireland.

In 782 and again in 785 (*Annals of Ulster*: i.e. 783 and 786) there occurred a pestilence called *scamach*. Sir William MacArthur tells me that this word means lung disease, and that it is also used for pleuro-pneumonia of cattle, though 'the *pestilence* that is called *scamach*' always refers to man. He is undecided whether to equate it with 'very severe influenza (the pain, cough, panting and blood-stained expectoration could not have been overlooked), like that of 1918'. 'I cannot', he says, 'think of any other human lung disease which could qualify as a "pestilence" in Ireland. Pneumonic plague was never epidemic in these islands. The main stream of the disease was always bubonic.'

(*f*) *Ninth- to eleventh-century visitations* (*period of the Danish invasions*)

The majority of the epidemics of Anglo-Saxon times subsequent to those already mentioned appear to have been the result of famine. The prevalence of famine in this island is shown by the medieval proverb: 'Tres plagae tribus regionibus appropriari solent, Anglorum fames, Gallorum ignis, Normannorum lepra.'

It is significant that the Anglo-Saxon word for 'to die' is *steorfan*, whence is derived the modern word 'starve'.

In Anglo-Saxon times the condition of the countryside was very different from that of today. The forests were many and uncleared, the fens were not reclaimed, the roads were few—mainly ridgeways along the downs and those Roman roads which were still usable;[1] in consequence there were no facilities for communications as there now are, and each district was more or less dependent on its own resources. It was often difficult to supply even the necessaries of life from elsewhere: hence the need for each community to be self-supporting. Today a famine of crops following a drought may send up the price of bread: in those days 'a bad season brought scarcity and murrain, and two bad seasons in succession brought famine and pestilence' (Creighton). In China, even at the present time, the failure of the harvest may result in thousands of deaths. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, especially during the period of the Danish invasions, is one long record of famine, usually followed by a murrain among cattle and a serious mortality among human beings. The terror inspired by the invaders must have been enhanced by the demoralization caused by the general diminution of vital resistance. In times of distress such as this the populace was always afflicted by a mixture of diarrhoea, dysentery, and scurvy. Owing to ignorance of causation, these have been grouped together by the chroniclers as if they were a single type of disease.

Another point which should be borne in mind in connexion with pestilence is the dirtiness of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Hirsch remarks:

> Almost all the authorities on epidemics of plague in Europe during past centuries point to the accumulation of filth in the houses and in the streets, to the defective disposal of faecal matters and other animal excreta, to overcrowding and insufficient ventilation of dwellings, and the like, as a real means of fostering the pestilence.[2]

Since Hirsch wrote these words the aetiology of plague has been elucidated and shown to depend upon the transmission of *Pasteurella pestis*, but the defective hygiene to which he refers must have

[1] 'Late in the eleventh century, there emerges the tradition of four great roads, Watling Street, Ermine Street, the Foss Way and the Icknield Way, on each of which travellers enjoyed the King's special peace.' F. M. Stenton, 'Medieval roads', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 1936, vii. 3.

[2] A. Hirsch, *Handbook of Geographical and Historical Pathology* (trans. Creighton), vol. i, Lond. 1883, p. 522.

aided the spread of many epidemic diseases then unidentified. With our newly acquired knowledge of the aetiology and methods of transmission of communicable disease, we can recognize in this lack of personal hygiene and general state of squalor the most potent causes of the bodily ills from which the population suffered.

Although famines are not mentioned in the earlier period, it does not necessarily follow that they did not occur. Infanticide was not accounted a crime in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period, since it was considered better in times of stress that a child should die as soon as born, rather than that it should linger for a few days and then die of starvation. As times became more settled, the practice became a crime.[1]

One instance of famine which occurred in the last-mentioned period must be noted. Bede says that Cædwalla, the king of the West Saxons who preceded Ine, abdicated and went on a pilgrimage to Rome for the good of his soul.[2] But Matthew Paris gives the real reason in a marginal gloss to the entry for the year 688; he says that 'it was on account of a widespread famine in England that he fled from the country. Never had one of such magnitude been since the beginning of the world.'[3]

The earliest instance of famine in England (apart from that just mentioned) is given in the Peterborough manuscript of the *Chronicle* under the year 793, and this was presaged, as usual, by signs of divine wrath. In this year 'dire forewarnings came over the land of the Northumbrians. . . . These were excessive whirlwinds and lightnings, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine soon followed these tokens.' The tokens were also thought, no doubt, to have foretold the ravaging of Lindisfarne by the Danes in the same year.

Roger of Hoveden says that 'an extensive murrain prevailed among the cattle in various places' during the year 800. Presumably this record was derived from some local copy of the *Chronicle* which has not survived, since it is not corroborated by contemporary evidence now existing.

The *Brut y Tywysogion* notes that '810 was the year of Christ when the moon was turned black on Christmas day; . . . there was a mortality among the cattle of the island of Britain'.

[1] See, for example, Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xiv. 25 and 26 (688).
[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 7.
[3] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 1872, vol. i, p. 309 (R.S.).

The *Annals of Ulster* chronicle in 824 (i.e. 825) 'magna pestilentia in Hibernia insola senioribus et pueris et infirmis; magna fames et defectio panis'.

Asser records 'a severe famine' in the year 868, in the reign of Alfred's brother Æthelred, and says that in the following year 'a great famine arose, causing a mortality among mankind and pestilence among cattle'. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* again fails to record this outbreak.

A deficiency of bread in Ireland in the year 896 is chronicled by the *Annales Cambriae*. The following abstruse sentence then occurs: 'Worms like moles, with two teeth, fell from the air: they ate up everything and were expelled by fasting and prayer.'

In 897 the *Chronicle* speaks of 'a mortality of cattle and men' (*ceápes cwild & monna*), and says that 'many of the king's [i.e. Alfred's] most excellent thanes that were in the land died'. This pestilence caused more misery during this and the two preceding years than even the Danish army did.

The last two paragraphs chronicle the outbreaks during the Danish incursions of the reigns of Æthelred and Alfred. The 'Great Army' of the Danes was in England from 865 to 870, ravaging the countryside. Famine, pestilence, and murrain occur at the end of this period—in the years 868 and 869. The Norsemen returned to this country after their incursion into France owing to the famine which was caused by the devastation they wrought there. The 897 mortality came just after the conclusion of Alfred's last war. One of the difficulties encountered by the English kings was the impossibility of keeping a national levy in the field for more than brief periods at a time.[1] Possibly this saved them from a pestilence which might be the natural concomitant of prolonged campaigning.

Against the year 962, in the reign of Edgar the Peaceful, the Parker manuscript of the *Chronicle* says: 'Within the year there was a great mortality, and the great fire[2] was in London, and Paul's monastery was burnt'—a remarkable parallel to similar events in Charles II's reign. This outbreak appears to have caused such an amount of distress that special legislation was called for. The opening paragraph of the series of Edgar's laws which have been preserved in the Corpus MS. 265 runs as follows:

[1] R. H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 1939, vol. ii, p. 549.

[2] Translating *mán-bryne* as 'fire' (in which men lose their lives). Thorpe (Rolls Series, p. 92) translates 'and the great fever was in London'.

Here is manifested in this writing how Edgar the king was deliberating what might be of assistance (*bót*) in the sudden pestilence (*fær-cwealm*) which much afflicted and decreased his people, widely throughout his dominions.—That then is first, that it seemed to him and his witan that a misfortune of such kind had been merited by sins, and by contempt of God's commandments, and most of all by the diminution of the tax (*neád-gafol*) that Christian men ought to render to God in their tithe (*teóðing-sceatt*) . . .[1]

The *Four Masters* record 'an intolerable famine in Ireland' in the year 963, 'so that the father used to sell the son and daughter for food'.

The *Chronicle*, speaking of 975, the year in which Edgar died and was succeeded by Edward the Martyr, says that 'in the autumn the star cometa appeared, and in the following year came a very great famine'. Five of the later chroniclers—Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester, Huntingdon, Simeon of Durham, and the *Flores Historiarum*—all mention this outbreak: a comet is seen, and this is followed by a scarcity of corn, by famine, and by murrain among cattle.

The unhappy reign of Æthelred the Unready began in 979 and ended in 1016. It was especially a time of famine and pestilence.

With regard to the year 986, the *Chronicle* (MSS. C, D, and E) says: 'In this year first came the great murrain (*yrfcwealm*) among the cattle into England.' Presumably this exceeded in its destructiveness that of ten years earlier, which the *Chronicle* omitted to mention. This outbreak extended into Ireland also, for the *Four Masters* record for this year 'the commencement of the great murrain of cows, i.e. the strange Maelgarbh, which now never came before'. The *Annals of Ulster* record under this year (but really 987) 'a sudden great mortality which caused the slaughter of people and cattle in Saxon land and Britain and Ireland'. The *Four Masters* also chronicle a 'praeternatural sickness', brought on by demons in the east of Ireland, 'which caused mortality of men plainly before men's eyes'. This was preceded by a 'great and unusual wind, which prostrated many buildings and houses'. This is not the only pestilence which, according to Irish annals, was caused by demons. The *Annals of Tigernach* record under the year 1084, for instance, one which killed off a quarter of the men of Ireland: 'demons came out of the northern isles of the world, to

[1] MS. C.C.C.C. 265, p. 217 (*c.* 1040): Liebermann, pp. 206–7.

wit, three battalions, and in each battalion were [3030] . . . And wherever their heat or fury reaches, there their venom was taken. For there was a sword of fire out of the gullet of each of them, and every one of them was as high as the clouds of heaven. So that is the cause of the pestilence.'[1]

For the next year (987) Simeon of Durham has an entry which gives slightly more detail than usual: 'In this year, two pestilences unknown in past ages to the English nation, namely a fever in men and a malady in cattle, called in their tongue "scitta",[2] or a looseness of the bowels (*fluxus intraneorum*), prevailed very greatly over all England.'[3] This is chronicled also by Florence of Worcester, who calls it the 'skit', and by Roger of Hoveden, who calls it 'scitha, consuming the inner parts of the body'. Matthew Paris chronicles 'febres hominum et mortalitas animalium'.

The Welsh *Brut y Tywysogion* says that in 998 'a great mortality [*uarwolyaeth*, modern Welsh *marwolaeth*] took place among the men through famine'; the same happened in 993 'in the territory of Maredudd'.

Under the year 992 the *Annals of Ulster* chronicle a 'great mortality among men and upon cattle and bees throughout all Ireland this year.'

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that in 1005 there 'was the great famine throughout England, such that no man before ever remembered one so destructive', but there is no mention of a pestilence following it.

In 1010 (or perhaps 1011) occurred the only recorded instance of camp-sickness during the pre-Conquest period. The Danish army which was invading Kent was stricken with a pestilence, which the chroniclers interpreted as divine vengeance for the murder of Archbishop Ælfheah. 'Interea tabes letifera grassata in Danos', says William of Malmesbury, 'catervatim hostes Elfegi fundebat, adeo ut celeritas mortis praevenerit sensum doloris.' Simeon of Durham says that two thousand perished 'per diros internorum cruciatus'. These descriptions suggest one of the enteric infections or bacillary dysentery, because both enteric fever

[1] *Annals of Tigernach*, translated by Whitley Stokes in *Revue Celtique*, 1896, xvii. 416.

[2] Cf. *skytte* in *Promptorium Parvulorum*: and Icelandic *skita*, diarrhoea. *Skit* still persists as a provincialism in the Fens with the meaning 'a disorder in young cattle. Diarrhoea' (*Fenland Notes & Queries*, 1897, iii. 347).

[3] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Kings of England*, under 987.

and dysentery have been peculiarly associated with armies from the earliest times.[1] William of Malmesbury says of this epidemic, which he terms 'tabes' (literally 'a wasting away'), that it occasioned so swift a death that it anticipated any perception of pain. He adds that since the bodies of those who had died were not buried, the air became infested, and a plague was thus brought upon those who had remained well.[2]

In 1011 to 1012 Ireland was visited according to the *Four Masters* by 'a great malady, namely lumps and griping, at Ard-macha, from All-hallows'-tide till May, so that a great number of seniors and students died', including a bishop and a lector.[3] The *Annals of Ulster* record a 'plague of colic' (*teidm tregait*). In 1015 the *Chronicon Scotorum* records 'a disease of the legs [*Cos ghalar*, 'probably scurvy' according to Sir William Wilde] throughout the Danes, and a plague of rats or mice [*luch*] among the Danes and Leinstermen.' The term *luch*, again according to Sir William Wilde, was 'applied indiscriminately to rats and mice', which were probably introduced in Scandinavian vessels.[4]

The cessation of the Danish inroads and of their devastation of the countryside, coupled with the beneficent rule of Cnut, brought some measure of prosperity to England, and it is not surprising therefore that no further outbreak of pestilence is recorded during his reign. An exactly parallel case occurred in the twelfth century. The countryside had been harried by the barons during Stephen's reign until, in the words of the *Chronicle*, 'there never was more misery . . . the earth bore no corn and . . . the land was all ruined'. But six years of ordered government under Henry II did much to restore prosperity to the wasted land, as is shown by the figures for a new Danegeld given in the Pipe Roll of 1162.

(*g*) *Visitations during the reign of Edward the Confessor*

The famines and pestilences which occur now until the end of the Anglo-Saxon period are attributable to a prevalence of severe weather. In fact, the opening years of the Confessor's reign might

[1] Shrewsbury: personal communication.

[2] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, p. 171 (Rolls Series).

[3] *Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters*, vol. i, p. 765. Also *Annals of Ulster*, *sub anno* 1011 (i.e. 1012).

[4] Sir W. Wilde, in *Ireland, Census for the year 1851, Pt. 5. Tables of deaths*, vol. i, 1856, p. 65.

well be called the 'hungry forties' of the eleventh century, owing to the number of famines which occurred from this cause.

Some importance must be attached to the particular copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which mentions a famine. If it is mentioned by several copies, the distress was in all probability widely spread; but if it is mentioned in only one copy, it is possible that the famine was limited to the area around the monastery in which that copy was written.

The next record of mortality—after a respite of some thirty years—is for the year 1041, that in which, according to the Laud (Peterborough) manuscript of the *Chronicle*, Harthacnut died and Edward the Confessor became king. 'And all that year', says this manuscript, 'it was very sad in many and various things, both in tempests and in earth-fruits. And so much cattle perished in this year as no man before remembered, both through various diseases and through bad weather.'

Again, in 1044 the *Chronicle* (MSS. C, E, and F) says that 'there was a very great famine all over England, and corn so dear as no man before remembered, so that the sester [? our bushel] of wheat went to sixty pence, and even further'.

The spell of misfortune continued, for two years later (1046) the *Abingdon Chronicle* (MS. C) records, at least as regards Mercia, that 'after Candlemas [2 Feb.] came the severe winter, with frost and snow, and with all kinds of bad weather, so that there was no man alive who could remember so severe a winter as that was, both through mortality of men and murrain of cattle; both birds and fishes perished through the great cold and hunger'. The next winter also was a hard one, 'and there was all over England a very great mortality in the same year'. Ireland suffered as well as England, for the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* record under the year 1044 a pestilence which was inflicted on a predatory clan. 'For which outrages', runs the entry, 'committed upon the clergie of St. Queran, God horribly plagued them, with a strange unknowen disease, that they died soe fast of that infection, that theire townes, howses and Derie places [i.e. winterages for cattle] were altogether wast without men or cattle.'[1] The *Four Masters* record under the year 1047 that 'a great famine came upon the Ulidians, so that they left their territory and proceeded into Leinster. It was on account of the

[1] *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. D. Murphy, Dublin, 1896, p. 177 (Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland).

violation of a covenant this famine came on. . . . Great snow in this year . . . from the festival of Mary [8 Dec.] to the festival of Patrick, so that it caused the destruction of cattle and of wild animals, and the birds of the air, and the animals of the sea in general.'

On the first day of May 1049, says the Worcester copy of the *Chronicle* (MS. D), there was 'an earthquake in many places, at Worcester, at Wick, and at Derby, and elsewhere; and there was also a great mortality among men, and a murrain among cattle; and the wildfire[1] also did much evil in Derbyshire and elsewhere'.

Of the year 1054 the Peterborough copy of the *Chronicle* (MS. E) says: 'And in this year was so great a murrain among the cattle, as no men remembered for many winters before.'

The *Annals of Tigernach* record under 1061 'a great pestilence (*teidm mor*) in Leinster, to wit, small pox and colic (*bolgach* and *treghaid*) so that there was a great destruction of people throughout Leinster'.

Ireland again suffered from pestilence and famine in 1063, for the *Four Masters* record that 'the colic and lumps (*treagait & cruice*) prevailed in Leinster, and also spread throughout Ireland. Great scarcity of provisions for cattle in this year, and scarcity of corn and obsonia.'

There is but one more record of a pestilence in the *Chronicle* for this century, and that is for the year 1087. It is beyond our period but interesting. It occurs in the Peterborough manuscript, which is the only one continuing till this time. The year (1086), we are told, had been 'a very heavy, and toilsome and sorrowful year in England, through murrain of cattle; and corn and fruits were at a stand, and so great unpropitiousness in weather, as no one can easily think: so great was the thunder and lightning that it killed many men; and ever it grew worse with men more and more. May God Almighty better it, when it shall be His will.' But the spell of misfortune continued, for the *Chronicle* says of 1087 that it was 'a very heavy and pestilential year in this land. Such a malady came on men that almost every other man was in the worst evil, that is with fever [*drif*], and that so strongly that many died of the evil. Afterwards there came, through the great tempests which came as we have before told, a very great famine over all England, so that many hundred men perished by death through

[1] Roger of Hoveden says 'ignis aereus, vulgo dictus sylvaticus', and dates 1 May 1048 (Rolls Series, vol. i, p. 94). 'Wildfire' is anthrax in sheep.

that famine. Alas, how miserable and how rueful a time was then! when the wretched men lay driven almost to death, and afterwards came the sharp famine and quite destroyed them. Who cannot feel pity for such a time?'

It is a depressing note on which our record ends, but this is partly due also to the oppression of the people by King William and his followers and to their harrying of the countryside. In addition the winters were looked forward to with dread, for woe betide the folk and their cattle if the winters were hard.

CHAPTER V

Hospitals

THE word *læce-hús*, for hospital, occurs once in Anglo-Saxon, where it is used as a translation of the Latin *stabulum*, the place whither the Good Samaritan conducted his patient.

There were very few hospitals in England before the Norman Conquest, though several were founded shortly after. Some 750 hospitals existed later during the medieval period.

The earliest mention of a hospital in this country is by Bede. He is speaking of the death of Cædmon, which seems to have taken place in the year 680. 'In his neighbourhood was the house to which those that were sick and like shortly to die were carried. He desired the person that attended him, in the evening, . . . to make ready a place there for him to take his rest.'[1] Bede also speaks of a man named Bethwegen as 'having on a certain day washed the mantles or garments which he used in the hospital'.[2] This hospital was presumably attached to the monastery at Lindisfarne. Though the Latin word here used is *hospitale*, the Anglo-Saxon version says *cumena-búr*, which may merely mean 'guest-house'. This clearly shows that the hospital was originally a place for providing hospitality (*hospitium*) for strangers, including pilgrims, but it was especially intended for the old and infirm.

The earliest house of this kind of which there are authentic records is that of St. Peter at York. This was founded, according to generally accepted tradition, through the munificence of King Athelstan about the year 937. The original building was presumably of wood, and the ground given for it by the king was the site of the present Theatre Royal. It was refounded after the Conquest and became St. Leonard's Hospital, but it was still essentially an almshouse. The original endowment was one thrave of corn (i.e. twenty sheaves) from every carucate of land in the bishopric of York.[3]

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 24. [2] Ibid. iv. 31 (A.D. 698).

[3] See *Handbook to York, prepared for the 75th Meeting of the British Association*, ed. G. A. Auden, 1906, pp. 140–1, 180–4.

Another 'hospital', probably for wayfarers rather than for the sick, is said to date from the time of Athelstan. This was at Flixton in Holderness; it was founded by a knight named Acehorne, and dedicated to the Virgin and St. Andrew.

Two more hospitals are known to date from Saxon times, and both were in Worcester. One was said to have been founded by St. Oswald, bishop of Worcester, who died in 992. The other was founded just after the Conquest by Wulfstan, the last Anglo-Saxon bishop, and continued to bear his name. Its chapel was dedicated to St. Godwald, who may have been an Anglo-Saxon bishop, but of whom nothing is known. After the canonization of Wulfstan in 1203, many miracles were performed at his shrine, and the hospital prospered in consequence.

Leland says that two other hospitals, that of St. Giles at Beverley and that of St. Nicholas at Pontefract, were of pre-Conquest date, and mentions an almshouse dedicated to St. Chad at Shrewsbury, but there appears to be no contemporary evidence for these.[1]

There is nothing to indicate that the hospitals just mentioned (with the exception of that at Lindisfarne) were connected with monastic establishments. But each monastery in the medieval period had an infirmary attached to it for its sick and infirm brethren.[2] Presumably this was the case in Anglo-Saxon times. Bede speaks of various sick inmates, and it is obvious that they would be segregated from the others for quiet and for treatment. The treatment in the infirmary was supervised by a *medicus*, but a layman such as Cynifrid, who will be mentioned in the next chapter, was called in when an operation was to be performed, since ecclesiastics were forbidden to shed blood. 'In monastic literature', says Riesman, 'one often meets the terms *medicus* and *infirmarius*. The distinction between the two is difficult to fathom at this date, but Wickersheimer is presumably right in thinking that the *medicus* was the head of the infirmary, and that he was assisted by a number of auxiliaries designated *infirmarii*.'[3]

The official who presided over the administration of the in-

[1] For leper hospitals founded in England just after the Norman Conquest, see p. 374.

[2] Much information concerning the monastic infirmary and its position in the building is given by D. H. S. Cranach in his *Home of the Monk*, Cambridge, 1926, ch. vi.

[3] D. Riesman, *The Story of Medicine in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1935, p. 20.

firmary was the cellarer (A.S. *hordere*). He was also responsible for the goods, granaries, cellars, and kitchens of the monastery.

As has been mentioned earlier,[1] the Rule of St. Benedict was translated into Anglo-Saxon in the reign of Edgar the Peaceful for the benefit of the monks who could not read the original Latin. Section 36 concerns the sick brethren of the monastery. It runs:

> For them let a separate cell (*cyte*) be set apart with an attendant who is God-fearing, diligent and painstaking. Let baths be granted to the sick as often as it shall be expedient, but to those in health, and especially to the young, they shall be seldom permitted. Flesh-food may be allowed to the sick, and to those of very weak health for the recovery of their strength. As soon, however, as they shall mend they must all in the accustomed manner abstain from flesh-food. Let the abbot take special care that the sick be not neglected by the cellarer, or the attendants . . .

Special consideration was also to be shown to the old monks and children:

> Let their feebleness (*wácmódness*) be taken into account, and let the full rigour of the Rule as regards food be in nowise maintained in their regard. There is to be a kind consideration for them, and permission is to be given them to anticipate the regular hours.

The practical wisdom of St. Benedict was of more use to the infirm than the attempts of monkish superstition to cure the sick. In the words of MacKinney: 'He who seeks to know early medieval medicine will find its true expression, not so much in the shadow of a saint's shrine as in the monastic infirmary.'[2]

In 725 Ine, king of Wessex, founded the Borgo Saxonum in Rome as a *hospitium* for the Anglo-Saxon pilgrims, including, it is said, Offa, Cnut, and Macbeth. It has now developed into the chief hospital in the city, the Archiospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia: but the medical aspect was not stressed at its foundation.

[1] See p. 23.

[2] L. C. MacKinney, *Early Medieval Medicine*, Baltimore, 1937, p. 151.

CHAPTER VI

Surgery

MEDICINE and surgery are, perhaps, the only aspects of civilization to which war makes an active and useful contribution—a fact which has especially been brought home to us during the two great wars of this century. The constant state of strife which existed in Anglo-Saxon times, and especially during the Viking age, necessitated at least a knowledge of first aid and of nursing in order to rehabilitate the wounded.

Anglo-Saxon surgery has been dealt with at some length by J. F. Payne in his second FitzPatrick lecture.[1] He remarks that there are but few references to surgery in the *Leechbooks*, but that this is not surprising, since surgery was a handicraft, practical skill in which might 'be handed on from one generation to another by apprenticeship and tradition without any aid from books'.

Various instructions, however, have survived, together with accounts of a few operations. The term *læc-seax*, a surgeon's knife, occurs in Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*.[2] Words for a lancet are *ædre-seax* (literally a vein-knife), *blód-seax*, and *snid-ísen*. Blood-letting, cupping, and cauterization will be dealt with later under 'Remedies'.[3]

Bede speaks of an operation upon St. Etheldrida three days before her death. He says that the physician (*læce*) Cynifrid was

> wont to relate that in her last sickness she had a very great swelling under her jaw. 'And I was ordered', said he, 'to lay open that swelling, to let out the noxious matter in it, which I did, and she seemed to be somewhat more easy for two days, so that many thought she might recover from her distemper; but the third day the former pains returning, she was soon snatched out of the world.

Some years after, the body of the saint was exhumed, and Cynifrid was again present. He says:

> 'They called me in, opening the door of the pavilion, where I found the body of the holy virgin taken out of the grave and laid on a bed, as

[1] J. F. Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, Oxford, 1904, pp. 83–94.

[2] *Pastoral Care*, xxvi. 3 (Sweet, 187. 9).

[3] See pp. 294–9, 303.

if it had been asleep; then taking off the veil from the face, they also showed the incision which I had made healed up; so that, to my great astonishment, instead of the open gaping wound with which she had been buried, there then appeared only an extraordinarily slender scar.'[1]

From this passage it would appear that Cynifrid was not a cleric himself, since he says 'they called me in'; and also that he was merely the instrument employed, since he 'was ordered to lay open that swelling'. Sir Norman Moore remarks as follows on this narrative:

Had we been present we should probably have thought that the incision had thoroughly drained the abscess and that the edges of the wound had fallen together. What was the nature of the swelling? A remark which immediately follows Cynifrid's description shows that the swelling was not an incident of an acute disease but had existed for some time in the saint's neck. 'She was much delighted with this kind of illness and used to say "I know truly that I ought to bear the weight of disease in my neck on which I mind me that in my girlhood I used to carry the useless burden of necklaces, and I believe that therefore Providence wills that I should suffer pain in my neck that thus I may be cleared from the accusation of vanity when now for gold and pearls the redness and heat of a swelling stand out in my neck!" ' These are the words and meditations of a patient who has long had a suppurating swelling in the neck and such a swelling is rarely other than tuberculous. The words 'ac solita dicere' exclude the sudden onset and rapid course of an attack of bubonic plague.[2]

Bede also relates an accident that occurred to Herebald, a servant of St. John of Beverley, when out riding. In his fall his thumb was broken and his skull cracked (literally: 'the joining [*geðeódnes* ? sutures] of the head was broken'). He was carried home by his companions, 'but lay speechless all the night, vomiting blood, because something within him (*innoðes*) was dislocated (*tólócene*) by the fall.' The bishop spent the night with him and then 'called in the doctor (*læce*), and ordered him to set (*gesette*) the opened sutures from the wound in the head and to bind them up'. He was so much better the next day that he mounted on horseback and travelled on with the bishop.[3] This seems to be a true account, since the vomiting would be caused by the blood swallowed after

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 19.

[2] Sir N. Moore, *The Physician in English History*, Cambridge, 1913, pp. 1–2. (See also the present work, p. 78.)

[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 6.

his injury—or, more likely, perhaps, he bled into his nasal cavity from his fractured skull, and the blood escaped by mouth.

In 1025 Jarl Eirik, a Norwegian chieftain, died from haemorrhage following an operation on the uvula, performed in England at the court of Cnut.[1] This operation, which was known to the Romans,[2] was resorted to when the uvula, during an attack of angina, became so elongated that it came in contact with the tongue.

The Anglo-Saxons could do little else than administer first aid in the case of fractures, as is illustrated in the following. Eddius Stephanus, in his life of Bishop Wilfrid, tells how a young man named Bothelm, during the building of Hexham Priory, 'slipped from a pinnacle of enormous height, fell to the ground and was dashed upon a stone pavement. His arms and legs were broken, all his limbs were out of joint and he lay breathing his last; the masons, thinking he was dead, quickly carried him outside.' The bishop 'prayed and gave his blessing, and the boy recovered the breath of life. The physicians bound the broken limbs with bandages (*alligantes medici panibus ossa confracta*) and he grew better gradually from day to day.'[3]

A good idea of the first aid that could be rendered during a battle at this period can be gained from the description of the battle of Stiklestad (29 July 1030) in *St. Olaf's Saga* (chapter 247). A woman was in attendance in an outhouse behind the battlefield, engaged in binding up wounds and cleansing them with warm water. For the extraction of arrows from wounds she used a pair of tongs (*spennitong*). If she could not find where the arrow was, 'she stirred together leeks and other herbs in a stone pot and boiled them and gave the wounded men of it to eat, for if the wound had gone deep it would smell of leek'.

Various stories in the sagas give some idea of the state of surgery in Scandinavia at this period. Considering the state of perpetual strife which prevailed there, as well as in a lesser degree in this country, some knowledge of wound treatment was inevitable. Perhaps therefore one may profitably digress to give some details. It seems to have been the practice for the victors to search the battle-

[1] *Flateyjarbók*, i. 561; *Fornm. Sögur*, xi. 200.

[2] Celsus, vii. 12: Martial, *Epigr.* x. 56.

[3] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 23. *Sár-cláð* and *wætla* are A.S. terms for a bandage.

field for their wounded. Thus after the battle of Stiklestad, mentioned above, Kalf Arnison 'sought for his brothers who had fallen there. . . . Their wounds were searched, but they had no hurt that seemed dangerous'. Other 'wounded men were carried to the farms, so that every house was full of them, and tents were erected over some'.[1] Harold Hardrada escaped from this battle, though sorely wounded, to the hut of a free householder who dwelt in a wood, 'and there he was leeched until he was whole'.[2]

After his victory over the Wends at Lyrshaw-heath (Hlýrskógsheiðr) in north Schleswig, King Magnus the Good looked to his wounded. 'But leeches were not so many in the host as were needed then. Then the king went to such men as seemed good to him, and felt their hands; and when he had taken and stroked the hollow of their hands, then named he twelve men who seemed the softest handed, and told them to bind up the wounds of men, and yet none of them had bound a wound before, but all these became the greatest of leeches.' Two Icelanders are named from among these, 'from whom many leeches were descended'.[3]

The number of men with such epithets as 'wooden-leg' indicates a certain skill in amputation and the substitution of wooden limbs. We have, however, no details as to how this was done. Such are Thorir Arnason who lost his leg in battle in 981 and was known as Viðleggr,[4] and Önund Ufeigsson, whose leg was cut off below the knee at the sea-fight at Hafunsfiord and who was afterwards called Trêfôtr.[5] The *Eyrbyggjasaga* tells how Thorleif Kimbi lost his leg in battle 'and after this went about most often with a wooden leg'.[6]

The two following stories come from the 45th chapter of the *Eyrbyggjasaga*, and also illustrate the rough and ready surgery of the period. The chief actor in both is Snorre Goðe Thórgrímsson or Snorre the Priest. The first story is of an incident at the meal on the evening following the sea-fight at Swordfirth:

> Snorre Goðe saw that his namesake [Snorre Thórbrannsson, who had been in the fight] did not get on with his cheese, and asked him why he ate so slowly. . . . Then he felt his throat and found an arrow stuck across the throat in the root of the tongue. Then Snorre Goðe took the tweezers and pulled out the arrowhead, and after that he ate his food.

[1] *St. Olaf's Saga*, ch. 243.
[2] *Saga of Harold Hardrada*, ch. 1.
[3] *Saga of Magnus*, ch. 29.
[4] *Eyrbyggjasaga*, ch. 18.
[5] *Grettissaga*, ch. 2.
[6] *Eyrbyggjasaga*, ch. 45 (end).

The second story tells how Thorodd Thórbrannsson was brought home after the fight and was also healed by Snorre Goðe. He 'had so great a wound in the back of his neck that he might not hold his head straight'.

The saga continues:

> Snorre Goðe healed all the sons of Thórbrand. But when Thorodd's neck began to heal, the head stood somewhat bent forward on the shoulders. Then Thorodd said that Snorre wanted to heal him into a blemished man. Snorre Goðe said he thought that the head would lift when the sinews were knit. But Thorodd would be content with nothing but having the wound opened and the head set straighter. But that time it went as Snorre guessed; when the sinews knit the head lifted a little, but he could not do much bowing after that.

There are several instructions relating to surgery in chapter 35 of the first *Leechbook*.

> If the blackened body be so mortified that there be no feeling in it, then you must cut off (*a-sníðan*) all the dead and unfeeling [part] as far as the live body, so that there be none of the dead remaining, which before felt neither iron nor fire [i.e. the cautery]. After that you shall heal the wounds, as you would the part which yet may have some feeling.

The subsequent treatment is to vary according to whether the body be that of a man, woman, or child, daily workman or man who is idle, accustomed to suffering or otherwise, for 'white bodies are more tender than the black or the red'. Consideration has therefore to be given in cutting off a limb, since

> some feel the leechdoms later, some earlier. If you must cut off an unhealthy limb from a healthy body, then cut it [not?] on the limit of the healthy body, but cut much more on the healthy and quick body, thus you will cure it well and sooner. When you set fire on a man [i.e. cauterize him], then take leaves of tender leek (*porr*) and grated salt, overlay the places: thus shall the heat of the fire be the more readily drawn away.[1]

The foregoing passage gives a good description of gangrene, with remarkably sound observations about amputating through healthy tissue well beyond the limit of the gangrene.

After an operation the wound was to be sewn up. 'For hare lip (*hær-sceard*)... cut with a knife, sew fast with silk, then smear with the salve without and within before the silk rots. If there be con-

[1] *Leechbook I*, xxxv.

traction [where the stiches are] smooth out with the hand: smear again soon.'[1] 'If a man's bowels prolapse . . . put the bowels back into the man, sew up with silk.'[2] Two similar cases of primitive abdominal surgery occur in the sagas. In that of Hromund Greipsson, this hero has been badly wounded in the belly, which has been ripped open in a duel. 'Then Hromund took his belt-knife and thrust it into his belly where there was a gaping wound, and forced back the paunch fat which was hanging out. At the same time he stitched up the edges of his belly with a cord (*rifjar med bandi*), bound his clothes firmly over it, and so continued fighting valiantly.' After the battle was over, Hromund 'went back to his tent and got some rest. Now the king's sisters were sent for. Svanhvit [one of them] examined Hromund's wound, and stitched (*saumar*) his stomach together and tried to bring him round. She got him taken to a man called Hagal to be cured. This man's wife was very skilful, and they made him welcome and nursed him back to health.'[3] This saga was not composed until at least the thirteenth century and the incidents occurred some centuries earlier. The story, though probably founded on facts, has lost nothing in the telling.

The second case occurs in the saga of King Hrolf Gautreksson. Thorir Jarnskiöld was also wounded in the belly and was healed by the king. 'The king saw that all his belly was slashed so that the tissues (*lifhinna*) scarcely held together. . . . Then he tended the wound, and after that he took a needle with silk thread and sewed it up; then he covered it over with that ointment (*smyrsl*) which he thought most effective, and bound him up.'[4]

The second *Leechbook* prescribes for 'sensitive hardness of the liver'. The treatment is comparatively simple if the discharge can be voided in the urine, aided by administering diuretics; but if the swelling and accumulation of matter are excessive, then a lancet (*snid-ísen*) is to be used. The wound is to be bound up with a linen cloth and syringed through (*geond-spætan*) every day with a tube (*pipe*).[5] Payne notes that he can find no recipe in classical authors;

[1] Ibid. xiii.

[2] *Leechbook III*, lxxiii.

[3] *Hrómundar saga Greipssonar*, vii–viii. In V. Ásmundarson, *Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda*, 1886, ii. 333. Translation by N. Kershaw in her *Stories and Ballads of the Far Past*, translated from the Norse, Cambridge, 1921, pp. 73–74.

[4] *Hrolfs saga Gautrekssonar*, xx. In V. Ásmundarson, *Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda*, 1889, iii. 102–3.

[5] *Leechbook III*, xxii.

that given here may have been copied from one now lost, or may possibly be derived from contemporary experience.

The recipes for broken limbs sometimes prescribe plasters and salves, but the surgeon is not called in. If, for instance, the shins (*sceanca*) be broken, the first *Leechbook* advises application of pounded 'bone-wort' mixed with white of egg as a salve, and to overlay with elm-rind together with a splint (*spelc*):[1] these are to be renewed until the limb is healed. Smart comments: 'This portrays the employment of demulcent cataplasms, of albumen (for collodion) to close a wound of the integuments, fortified with a backing of the soft inner bark of the elm (for lint), the use of splints; and it counsels the assiduous use of the means until the fracture has united.'[2]

If the brain protrudes from the head, the wound is to be filled with yolk of egg and honey and then syringed, according to a prescription in the first *Leechbook*.[3]

In Chapter xxxviii of the first *Leechbook* there is a large collection of 'Salves and drinks and cleansings for wounds of every sort, whether internal or external'. For cleansing, clean honey is recommended, to be warmed at the fire and put into a clean vessel; salt is to be added and the mixture stirred till it has the thickness of pottage, and the wound is to be smeared with this when it becomes foul.[4] And again, 'for an inward wound, a salve, wine, oil, comfrey, honey' are prescribed. The first two of these ingredients are mentioned in *Piers Plowman* as being used by the Good Samaritan: 'with wyn and with oyle his woundes he wasshed.'[5]

Sigerist says that 'wound-drinks, which later played so great a role, were then in the background'.[6] Before the advent of modern antiseptic methods, wound-drinks were found from practical experience to be useful for preventing sepsis. Recipes for wound-drinks (*dolhdrenc*) are found in the first *Leechbook*.[7]

Karl Sudhoff, speaking of the illustrations in medieval manuscripts which relate to surgery, says that in the earlier period—

[1] *Leechbook I*, xxv. 2. Cf. 'spelk', a splint (Yorkshire and Scotland).

[2] W. R. E. Smart, 'Notes towards the history of the medical staff of the English army prior to the accession of the Tudors', *Brit. Med. Journ.*, 1873, i. 112.

[3] *Leechbook I*, i. 15. See p. 381.

[4] Ibid. xxxviii. 3.

[5] *Piers Plowman*, B Text, xvii, l. 69; cf. Luke x. 34.

[6] H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur*, Leipzig, 1923, p. 180.

[7] *Leechbook I*, xxxviii. 10–11.

which includes the Anglo-Saxon—these are merely copied from those of classical times; and that it is not until the thirteenth century that in Italy and still more in France this tradition is abandoned and original observation begins to be shown. He considers that these later illustrations are more artistic, but that the earlier ones are, to him, the more interesting historically, since they show their connexion with Greece, Alexandria, and Rome.[1]

Some information with regard to surgery can be gleaned from the Anglo-Saxon laws. They deal, however, mostly with the penalties to be inflicted for wounding and loss of limbs rather than with the medical aspect, though occasionally the calling in of a physician and the payment of his fee are mentioned.

It was realized that a compound fracture was a much more serious matter than a simple fracture. The Laws of King Alfred (70) say: 'If a man break another man's ribs within the whole skin, let X shillings be paid as *bót*: if the skin be broken and bone be taken out, let XV shillings be paid as *bót*.'

In the laws of King Æthelberht of Kent (A.D. 606) occurs the passage:

> '61. *Gif hrif wund weorðeð. XII scill. gebéte.*
> *Gif he þurh-þirel weorðeð. XX scill. gebéte.*
> 62. *Gif man gegémed weorðeð. XXX scill. gebéte.*'

Thorpe appends a footnote to *gegémed*: 'I have been unable to discover anything which will illustrate the term. . . . Though *gegémed* means "to take care of", I know of no instance where it is used in the sense of healing.'

The medical connexion is, however, to be found in at least two places.

Firstly, the passage under the word 'cura' in the tenth-century glossary in the British Museum MS. Harley 3376 runs: 'cura . . . studium, uel medicina curatio, uel *lácnung*, uel *gýmen*, uel *hogu*'.[2] Again, the word *gegýmed* occurs in Chapter 65 of the third *Leechbook*. This passage runs: '*Gif man sie gegýmed & þú hine gelácnian scyle* . . .', with a prescription to be acted upon if there is a likelihood of the patient's recovery.[3] Cockayne here translates *gegýmed* as

[1] K. Sudhoff, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Chirurgie im Mittelalter*, Leipzig, 1914–18, vol. ii, pp. xii–xiii.

[2] T. Wright and R. P. Wülcker, *Anglo-Saxon and Old-English Vocabularies*, vol. i, p. 216.

[3] For fuller text, see p. 288.

'overlooked', i.e. by a witch or spirit with evil intent. Two better translations have, however, been suggested. The first is, 'If a man be under observation [as a patient] and you are about to treat him . . .'. The second is that of O. B. Schlutter,[1] who thinks that *gegýmed* refers to a bodily wound rather than to a magical disease.

Since all the prescriptions in this section of the third *Leechbook* are for elf-disease, lunacy, and other disorders of a quasi-magical nature, Cockayne preserved the continuity by translating *gegýmed* 'overlooked'. Schlutter, however, formed his opinion from the nature of the prescription that follows. This runs: 'Comfort the *wound* with red spikenard (*spíca*) or with fresh butter: when it is clean and a good red, treat it with the same ointment, and let it not unite until it be clean: let it unite afterwards.' He connects *gýman* with *gymmian* (cf. *jugulare*) 'to cut the throat',[2] and queries a connexion also with *góman* (*fauces*).

If the former amended translation of *gegýmed* be adopted also for Æthelberht's law, this would be interpreted: 'If the man's belly be wounded, the compensation is fixed at 12 shillings: if the damage done is so great that it is pierced through, It is to be 20 shillings: but if the wound is such that a leech has to be called in and he has to keep him under observation, then the compensation is to be 30 shillings.' This seems to agree with Liebermann's rather ambiguous translation of Chapter 62: 'If anyone [compelled by the wound] is cured medicinally, let the evil-doer pay compensation of thirty shillings.'[3] The thirty shillings might possibly be regarded as a kind of insurance in case of further complications.

The late Professor J. E. G. de Montmorency, on the other hand, was of the opinion that Chapter 62 has no more connexion with Chapter 61 than with the other cases mentioned in this section of Æthelberht's laws, but should be taken generally. He called my attention to another passage in Thorpe's volume.[4] In Chapter 10 of the so-called laws of William the Conqueror, which in many places are restatements of older laws and customs, the following

[1] O. B. Schlutter, 'Anglo-Saxonica', *Anglia*, 1907, xxx (n.F. xviii), 132–3.

[2] 'Die angelsächsischen Glossen in dem Brüsseler Codex von Aldhelms Schrift De Virginitate', published by K. Bouterwek in *Zeitschr. f. deut. Alterthum*, 1853, ix. 495: 'iugulaturas, *to gymienne.* occisuros perfossuras; unter der Zeile: *to gymmienne.*'

[3] F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Halle a. S., vol. i, 1903, p. 6.

[4] Personal communication.

occurs: 'Si hom fait plaie [a] auter e il deive faire les amendes, primereinement lui rende sien leche[feo]. E li plaez jurra sur seinz que pur meins nel pot feire ne pur haur si cher nel fist.' That is to say, if a man wounds another and has to pay compensation, he shall first pay him the cost of his leech, as much as is required for the curing of the wound—the compensation is no longer arbitrarily fixed at thirty shillings. Also the wounded man shall swear on the relics that he could not have been cured for less, and that he has not, out of hatred, increased the amount due.

Schlutter's rendering would also fit in case of the Æthelberht's law. It would then enact that if a man's belly be wounded, the compensation should be 12 shillings: if the wound pierced through the man, it should be 20 shillings: but if his throat had been cut, it should then be 30 shillings. The last-mentioned injury was presumably considered the most dangerous and disfiguring.

The penitentials as well as the secular laws deal with wounding and impose penalties. That ascribed to Bede says that 'he who by a wound in a quarrel renders a man weak or maimed shall pay for the physician and a fine for the scar (*macule precium*), and make compensation for his work while he is recovering, and do penance for half a year. If he has not the means, he shall make good these things in an entire year'—of penance, presumably, though this does not seem fair either to the man who has been wounded or to the physician whom he has employed. But the penitential is concerned with the delinquent and the good of his soul rather than with the matter of compensation.[1]

The expenses of the leech are also mentioned in the second penitential in Corpus Christi (Camb.) MS. 190 (ch. 22) which enacted, in the eleventh century, as follows: 'Quicunque homo alium in genitalibus debilem fecerit, vel ei vulnus in faciem inflixerit, emendet ei vulnus, et opus ejus operetur, donec vulnus sanetur: et mercedem medico solvat, et II vel III legitima jejunia jejunet . . .'

By the laws of Ine of Wessex (A.D. 688) it was enacted that 'if a commoner has been often accused of theft and is at last proved guilty . . . his hand or foot shall be struck off'. Horne, in his report in 1933 on the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Camerton, Somerset, says that 'Grave 83 contained an adult male under middle age, whose right foot had been taken off at the ankle, the end of the tibia being

[1] Bede, *Penitential*, ii. 8 (McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 225).

completely healed and rounded, so that the foot must have been lost some years before death'. He adds: 'Is it not possible that the loss above mentioned came about in this manner, for the amputation looked as if it had been a very clean one?'[1]

[1] E. Horne, 'Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Camerton, Somerset, pt. 2', *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. Soc.*, 1933, lxxix. 41.

CHAPTER VII

Medical Histories of Distinguished Persons

More Anglo-Saxon kings were slain in battle than died in their beds. The particulars we have of the health of Alfred are more detailed than in the case of any other king, but this may be due to the fact that he became a popular hero concerning whom chroniclers collected, or fabricated, all the information they could. Sometimes information is forthcoming as to the disease from which a saint suffered owing to the fact that after his death his relics were supposed to cure that disease—as, for instance, was the case with Abbot Mellitus and the gout.

The following particulars of symptoms are given so as to illustrate the kind of material which the monastic chronicler or hagiographer set down for the edification of his reader. In most cases the writer lived several centuries after the patient, and has done his full share of embroidering, with the result that these stories have hardly any historical value.

Details of the health of King Alfred are given in his life by Asser. These are noted for what they are worth—which, it is to be confessed, is but little if the life was written in the twelfth century (as appears to have been the case according to Adamson's latest work on this much disputed subject).[1] Although the account is confused, it is obvious that the king was constantly in pain, and the amount and quality of his output, both physical and mental, is the more astonishing. Asser's account reads as follows:

After his nuptials had been celebrated and after continued feasting both by day and night, he was suddenly seized before all the people with a severe disease unknown to all physicians. . . . It continued incessantly . . . from his twentieth to his fortieth year, and even longer still. Many thought it arose *favore et fascinatione circumstantis populi*; others suggested the envy of the devil. . . . Some thought it an unusual kind of fever, while others thought it to be ficus,[2] which prevailed from

[1] Adamson, *The Illiterate Anglo-Saxon*, Cambridge, 1946.

[2] Probably piles: if so the king's mode of life in camp and especially among the marshes of the Parret must have aggravated the disease incessantly.

his infancy. On a certain occasion . . . he went to Cornwall for the purpose of hunting and had turned aside to pray at a certain church[1] in which St. Guerrier sleeps, [and where now St. Neot rests].[2] He prayed that his present malady might be changed for some lesser infirmity which should not appear outwardly in the body lest it should render him useless and despised. . . . At the end of his prayer, he continued his journey, and not long afterwards he found his complaint . . . completely healed. . . . After a short interval he suffered by God's pleasure from the ficus under which he laboured long and painfully for many years. Indeed his life was despaired of until he was entirely relieved of it by his prayers, but, alas, after its removal, another, more harassing, seized him at his nuptials, as we have said, and tormented him incessantly day and night. . . . But if ever that malady was assuaged for a single day or night, yet the nervous dread . . . never left him, and rendered him in his own opinion almost useless in both divine and human duties.[3]

According to the fourteenth-century *Book of Hyde*, an attempt was made to cure the ficus by his father King Æthelwulf, who sent him 'to be cured by St. Modwenna, at that time journeying in Ireland'. This incident, not mentioned by Asser, is distinctly spurious; it is found in various lives of St. Modwenna from the eleventh-century MS. Cotton Cleopatra A. II onwards, and presumably was copied thence into the *Book of Hyde*. John of Wallingford, who was *infirmarius* of St. Alban's in 1252, says in his *Chronicle* that as a young man Alfred 'gave up both soul and body to voluptuous indulgence', so that at the age of 51 'he paid the debt due to a nature corrupted by Adam, and died in peace'. This slur on the king's character is not mentioned by Asser, and it is probably a post-Conquest libel.

Wallingford says of Alfred's grandson, King Eadred, that 'the chief thing that hastened his death was the decay of his teeth. For he could not masticate solid food, and the liquid food which was frequently prepared for him did not contain sufficient nourishment to support life. In addition to this, he was afflicted with a continual languor, and that common enemy of the old, a frequent cough.'[4] This may refer to an anaemia, caused or aggravated by dental sepsis and pyorrhoea.

[1] St. Neots, near Liskeard.

[2] The phrase in square brackets is evidence that the Life is not contemporary.

[3] Asser, *Life of Alfred*, ch. 74.

[4] *Chronica Joannis Wallingford*, in T. Gale, *Historiae Britannicae, Saxonicae, Anglo-Danicae, scriptores XV*, vol. i, 1691, p. 542. J. Stevenson, *Church Historians of England*, vol. ii, part 2, p. 549.

William of Malmesbury says that this king devoted his life to God and St. Dunstan, by whose admonition he endured with patience his frequent bodily pains.'[1]

Apparently nothing is known of the health of the subsequent kings of the period, with the exception of Edward the Confessor,[2] and possibly of Harold II.

Was Edward an albino? William of Malmesbury says of him that 'his beard and hair were milk-white: his countenance florid: fair throughout his whole person'.[3] The *Vita Æduuardi regis* describes him as having 'hair and beard of an unusual milky whiteness, his face full and the skin ruddy, his hands lean and snow-white with long and transparent fingers, the rest of his body vigorous in every way, and of royal bearing'.[4] Karl Pearson, discussing this problem, says that 'the fundamental and most striking features of an albino are: (1) a very white skin . . . ; (2) white hair from birth; (3) red pupils . . .; (4) marked photophobia, nystagmus, or oscillation of the eyes, and unusually extreme myopia'. He remarks that the argument for (1) in connexion with Edward rests on Malmesbury's *toto corpore lactens*, and that there is no evidence for (2), since the 'writer of the *Vita* almost certainly saw Edward towards the end of his life, probably when he was over sixty years old, and the flowing white hair and beard may well have been "senile majesty" '. He thinks that (3) would have been noted if they had existed; and with regard to (4), if the words *humilitatis incedens visibus*, which occur in the *Vita*, 'can be interpreted to signify photophobia, then almost every mediaeval saint was an albino'.[5]

An unexpected reference, and of unknown value, is made to this king in the Welsh *Physicians of Myddvai*. The recipe in question runs:

Take apples, and bake or boil them, mix them with kine's or goats' milk, and let it be your only food or drink for a month or nine weeks, according to the strength of the disease. This food is exceedingly good for lung pock, or for blood pock, and it will also neutralise the poison

[1] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 146.

[2] For the description of the body of the Confessor at its exhumation, see p. 197.

[3] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 220.

[4] *Vita Æduuardi regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit*, ll. 248–51. H. R. Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, Rolls Series, p. 396.

[5] K. Pearson, 'A myth about Edward the Confessor', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 1910, xxv. 517–20.

of scrofula. It was by means of this treatment that Hywel Feddyg, of Llangynwyd, cured Edward the Confessor when there was not a physician in Christendom who could promise him an hour of life in consequence of the violence of the lung disease.[1]

The anonymous *Vita Haroldi*, written some 150 years after the battle of Hastings, gives various spurious details with reference to Harold. It says that some women found that life still lingered in the king's body after he was shot, that he was secretly removed to Winchester, 'where he was attended for two years and finally cured by the surgical skill of a Saracenic woman'. This story also says that 'when the king of Norway invaded York, and Harold went against him, he was attacked by a disease in his legs, and that he was cured by Elsinus, abbot of Ramsay, through the mediation of the spirit of Edward the Confessor'.[2] Presumably this last-mentioned 'disease in the legs' is the same as the gout which is mentioned by the *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* as attacking Harold before the battle of Stamford Bridge.[3]

Eddius, in his life of Wilfrid, mentions a seizure which came upon Eorminburh, the second queen of King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, in 680. The king and queen came during a progress to the nunnery of Coldingham in Berwickshire.

> At this place the queen became possessed with a devil that same night and like Pilate's wife was so plagued and scourged that she scarcely expected to live till day. On the next day, as soon as dawn appeared, the discreet abbess came to the queen and saw that her limbs were all contracted and tightly bound together (*veniens ad reginam contractis membris simul in unum stricte alligatam*) and that she was manifestly dying.[4]

She was, however, healed, we are told, as soon as Wilfrid was released from prison, where he had been consigned owing to the queen's enmity.

Information is available with regard to the following Anglo-Saxon saints and ecclesiastics:

Abbot Mellitus and St. Cuthbert both suffered from gout: details are given in the section dealing with gout.[5] Cuthbert must

[1] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, ch. 756.

[2] T. B. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, Lond. 1862, vol. i, pt. 2, p. 670 (Rolls Series).

[3] *La estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, ll. 4163–66. Quoted on p. 406.

[4] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 39.

[5] See p. 405.

have been a man of great bodily strength and endowed with great physical endurance. This is shown by his fastings and by his immersions in the sea. It probably also enabled him to survive the pestilence which was raging at Melrose when he was there in 664, and of which he was a temporary victim. 'His bodily strength', says Hodgkin, 'enabled him, in making his cell, to lift rocks on to his wall which would have needed four men of ordinary strength—deeds not unworthy of a Beowulf.'[1]

Benedict Biscop was helpless during the last three years of his life at his abbey of Wearmouth, owing to paralysis of his lower limbs. Sigfrid, who was abbot there at the time, suffered from an incurable disease of the lungs. Details of Benedict's illness and also that of Leofstan, abbot of Bury, are given in the section dealing with paralysis.[2]

Bede gives particulars of the last illness and death of the Abbess Hilda of Whitby. 'Falling into a fever, she fell into a violent heat, and was afflicted with the same for six years continually. . . . In the seventh year of her sickness, the distemper turning inwards, she approached her last day.'[3]

Various details with regard to the operation performed upon St. Etheldrida are given by Bede,[4] and have been dealt with in the section on surgery.[5]

[1] R. H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 1939, vol. i, p. 340.
[2] See p. 415.
[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 23.
[4] Ibid. iv. 19.
[5] See pp. 98–99.

PART 3

The Pagan Background

CHAPTER VIII

Survivals of Paganism

(*a*) *Introduction*

THE mentality of the people in Anglo-Saxon times will be better understood if an account is given of their pagan magical practices when these are indirectly, as well as when they are directly, connected with medicine and cures.

It will be seen that the nature of the 'magic' employed before and after the conversion to Christianity is to all intents and purposes one and the same. Diseases attributed to 'devils' by the Church were still attributed to elves by the common folk. When the Church became responsible for the care of the sick, pagan prescriptions had to be christianized so as to become operative against the pagan deities and spirits of evil which were thought to have caused the disease.

To reconstruct the religious history of the Anglo-Saxons before the advent of Christianity is a very difficult task. Though many of the links in the chain are missing, there is little doubt that there has been a continuous though unrecorded sequence of magical practices from the earliest Indo-European stratum, through the Germanic, to modern times.

Written records are of three kinds: first the charms themselves, which are the *liturgy* of magic; second, descriptions of the ceremonies connected with them, which constitute the *ritual*; and third, descriptions of events recorded by Bede and other chroniclers.

The earliest writer to describe the German tribes is Tacitus, in the second century after Christ. Before the next account of them was written there had occurred the final dispersion of the Teutonic peoples, and their settlement in the various countries now inhabited by them was almost complete. Christianity spread slowly among them. The Anglo-Saxons were converted—outwardly at least—as early as the sixth century, and the whole work, from the landing of Augustine to Wilfrid's mission to Sussex, was completed in three-quarters of a century. They then took a large part in the conversion of their continental kinsmen by sending missionaries

among them. The Scandinavians did not accept Christianity until the tenth or eleventh century. Records show that heathen ceremonies were still practised on the Continent—and especially in Scandinavia—at a time when England was outwardly Christian, and it is these records which are important in showing what probably took place in England also before the conversion.

As the Finns turned to Christianity even later than the Scandinavians, it is possible, and profitable, to compare their magical practices with those of their Germanic neighbours.

Information with regard to the Teutons on the Continent is to be found in the German and Frankish Capitularies, the writings of Jornandes, of Adam of Bremen, and of Paulus Diaconus, the history of Saxo Grammaticus, and above all, in the *Edda*, the *Sagas*, and *Heimskringla*.

The chief Anglo-Saxon sources of information are Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the *Homilies* of Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham, the *Lives of Saints*, and the various Laws and Penitentials. Later chronicles, such as that of William of Malmesbury, are full of useful stories. In his *Leechdoms* Cockayne published the text and translation of the charms. Most of the evidence for pagan practices which has survived comes from Christian sources and is therefore prejudiced. The laws made against paganism, the penances enjoined for those who relapsed, and the invective levelled against it by Christian ecclesiastics do not place it in the best light. 'Devil' must often be interpreted to mean 'pagan deity' rather than 'spirit of evil', and the practices connected with the pagan worship must not necessarily be condemned because they were obnoxious to those who were endeavouring to supplant them. The repeated injunctions against paganism found in both civil and ecclesiastical laws show that for a long time Christianity was but a thin veneer, and that the old religion was still a vital force. These injunctions are as brief and uninformative as the headings in the Saxon *Indiculus Superstitionum et paganiarum*;[1] but occasionally the details can be filled in by a comparison with records in the works just mentioned.

The difference between the condemned pagan practice and the new Christian one is often very fine. The same result could be obtained from either practice: the difference consisted in the name of the deity invoked. Thus, for instance, Ælfric writes: 'We should not set our hope in medicinal herbs, but in the Almighty Creator

[1] Codex Palatinus 577 (9th century).

who has given that virtue to those herbs. No one shall enchant a herb with magic, but with God's word shall bless it, and so eat it.'[1] In another place Ælfric, after speaking against the sick man who seeks his health 'at unallowed practices or at accursed enchantments or at any witchcraft', recommends him to 'seek his health at holy relics'.[2]

Again, in the story given by Bede[3] and also by Ælfric,[4] a Mercian king's thane named Imma was taken prisoner by the Northumbrians after the battle on the Trent in 679. The chains by which he was bound continually burst asunder, and in consequence he was brought before the Northumbrian ealdorman 'The ealdorman then asked the captive whether through witchcraft or through runes he brake his bonds': or, in the original of Bede, 'an forte literas solutorias, de qualibus fabulae ferunt, apud se haberet, propter quas ligari non posset'. Imma, who was a Christian, explained that this was not the reason, but that his brother Tunna, who was an abbot, believing him dead from wounds sustained in the battle, was having masses said for his soul, 'the celebration whereof occasioned that none could bind him without his being immediately loosed again'. The pagan Teuton hoped, when he recited the first Merseburger charm, to obtain that release from fetters here effected by the singing of masses.[5]

The Christian priest himself believed in and feared the power of pagan magic; to him the heathen gods were devils. Similarly the Anglo-Saxons, before their conversion, feared the power of Christian 'magic'. King Æthelberht of Kent preferred to receive Augustine and his companions in the open air—'he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, lest, according to an ancient superstition, if they practised any magical arts, they might impose upon him, and so get the better of him'.[6]

Ælfric gives many stories of contests in magic between saints and

[1] Ælfric, *Homilies*, ed. Thorpe, vol. i, p. 477.
[2] Ibid., p. 475.
[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 22.
[4] Ælfric, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 357–9.
[5] If any prisoner in chains prayed to St. Leonard, godson of Clovis, his chains immediately fell from him. See William of Malmesbury, who relates (Bohn's Library, p. 415 and note) how Bohemund gave the silver chains with which he had been bound as a votive offering to St. Leonard at Antioch. Since maniacs were kept in chains in the Middle Ages, St. Leonard was regarded as their patron saint as well as that of prisoners. They too gave their chains to him as votive offerings after they had been cured.
[6] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, i. 25.

pagan magicians; e.g. between SS. Peter and Paul on the one hand and Simon the magician on the other;[1] between St. James and the sorcerer (*dryý*) Hermogenes;[2] between SS. Matthew, Simon and Jude on the one hand, and on the other the two Ethiopian wizards, Zaroes and Arphaxat.[3] In Celtic romance the fairy palace of Gwynn ap Nudd vanished when sprinkled with holy water.

In the contest between the devil and the Paternoster, in *Salomon and Saturn*, these two take thirty different shapes.[4] This is comparable to the metamorphoses of Gwion Bach and Caridwen in the myth of Taliesin,[5] and of Lemminkainen and the Host of Paiëvola in the Finnish *Kalevala*.[6]

The Church's method of converting a pagan charm into a Christian remedy was by adding a few words of Church Latin, or by substituting the name of Christ or of a saint for that of a heathen deity—accompanied by the ever efficacious addition of the sign of the cross. A German example of a heathen charm being deliberately changed into a Christian prayer occurs in a ninth-century manuscript from Breslau. The original charm addressed to Herba Cucumeris is crossed out and the same hand has added: 'quod hic sequitur non valet, sed pro hoc dicatur pater noster et credo.'[7]

The charms exhibit all stages between the pagan and Christian; there is no difference in spirit between the two. The same is shown in Finnish charms; the names of Christ and the Virgin were to the Finns but new names with which to conjure, the result being a mixture of paganism and Christianity in the same spell. Similarly, in the medieval mystery plays, the addition of a few Biblical characters was often the sole difference from the pagan folk-game.

In Scandinavia and in Germany a mass of similar material has survived, but even here there are only two purely pagan charms, the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*. This continental material often shows the origin of the Anglo-Saxon spells used in Britain. More or less complete genealogies of charms, such as those employed for

[1] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, pp. 377–81; also *Blickling Homilies* (E.E.T.S., o.s. 73), 1880, pp. 173–5.

[2] Ælfric, vol. ii, pp. 413–19.

[3] Ibid., pp. 481–99.

[4] *Salomon and Saturn*, ed. J. M. Kemble (Ælfric Society), pp. 144–6.

[5] *Mabinogion* (Everyman edition), p. 264.

[6] *Kalevala*, rune 27.

[7] Breslau University Library, III. F. 19. Quoted by J. Klapper, 'Das Gebet im Zauberglauben des Mittelalters', *Mitteil. d. schlesischen Gesellsch. f. Volksk.*, 1907, xviii. 5–41 [p. 19].

stopping blood, to cure sprains, or against worms, can be traced.[1] These derive chiefly from late Latin sources, though some are Indo-European. Since Latin rather than the vernacular was the language of the Church, the Latin charms occur more and more frequently as the influence of the Church grew.

The common folk did not easily lose their faith in the power of charms or in that of their old deities, whether for good or for evil. The fireside spirit continued to be a comfort for those in trouble, and it was some time before the comforting message of Christianity became known. Similarly, when the purer spirit of the Reformation came to England, the peasant at first found it austere and unkindly. John Buchan, in his *Blanket of the Dark*, puts this feeling into the mouth of one of his peasant characters: 'There are preachers [who] will allow a poor man none of the kindly little saints to guide his steps when God and His Mother have bigger jobs on hand.'

In Russia the Bolsheviks decreed that there should be no outward religion, and the result was that many still worshipped in their old way in secret. Forty years ago writers were saying that in many a peasant home a portrait of Lenin—as representing the new order—was placed at one end of the room, but an eikon still hung on the opposite wall. So, when Christianity was made the State religion in the various kingdoms of the Heptarchy, paganism died hard among our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. The king and his nobles might be converted, but the common folk did not immediately follow suit. A wise pope like Gregory the Great might realize this possibility of difficulties and make allowances, but more bigoted—or more ardent—proselytizers were less tolerant.

It was, in general, the deliberate practice of the Church to effect conversion with the least possible disturbance to the convert. Thus Gregory himself says in his epistle (written in 601) to Abbot Mellitus:

> 'Tell [Augustine] what I have determined upon after mature deliberation on the affairs of the English: namely that the temples . . . ought not to be destroyed, but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be . . . sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected and relics placed.' Thus 'the nation . . . may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. . . . For there is no doubt that it is impossible to efface everything at once.'[2]

[1] See pp. 242–6.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 30. Cf. also the words of Gregory in his replies to

Gregory in his wisdom made his main assault on the belief, and left the custom and ceremony to be undermined by slow siege.

It depended on individual missionaries [say Ploss and Bartels], which Christian figure they set up as 'object of worship' in a Teutonic place of worship. . . . Thus arose names still half Teutonic which were quite unknown to the Church. . . . Originally, Holden and Perchten are only troops of demons; by personification there arose their woman leader, Holda or Perchta, who may have enjoyed greater reverence (or, better perhaps, fear) than Freia, and who possibly had much less religious significance.[1]

King Æthelberht had a heathen temple outside the walls of Canterbury, the conversion of which into the church of St. Pancras shows how Gregory's method was put into actual practice in England. Bede chronicles the conversion of the Pantheon at Rome by Boniface, the fourth Pope in succession to Gregory, 'to the end that, the devils being excluded, the blessed company of saints might have therein a perpetual memorial'.[2] Axel Olrik says that 'many of the churches in Scandinavia were erected on pagan sacrificial sites. The grove or the spring was often preserved into a later age, and the peasant continued to cast his mite into the spring as his forefathers had done before him.'[3] Conversion may have been facilitated by the fact that the heathen temples, in Scandinavia at any rate, were similar in plan to the Christian churches; that described in the *Eyrbyggja Saga* was a rectangular structure and ran east and west with apsidal end.[4] Since the permission given by Æthelberht of Kent to Augustine was 'to build *or repair* churches in all places',[5] it seems possible that some of the Christian churches of Roman times were still left, though in a ruinous condition.

Augustine's queries (ibid., i. 27): 'Holy Church chastises some things through zeal, and tolerates some through meekness, and connives at some things through discretion, that so she may often, by this forbearance and connivance, suppress the evil which she disapproves.' The same policy had been advocated by St. Augustine of Hippo nearly two centuries earlier. He says: 'To continue the good uses practised by idolators, to preserve objects and buildings used by them, is not to borrow from them, but, on the contrary, to take again what did not belong to them and give it to the true God, consecrating it directly in his cult and indirectly in honour of the saints, but always to his greatest glory.' (*Epist. class.*, 47. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xxxiii, col. 185.)

[1] Ploss and Bartels, *Woman*, ed. E. J. Dingwall, 1935, vol. iii, p. 297.

[2] Bede, op. cit. ii. 4.

[3] Axel Olrik, *Viking Civilization*, 1930, p. 146.

[4] *Eyrbyggja Saga*, ch. 4.

[5] Bede, op. cit. i. 26.

A. Hadrian Allcroft[1] has discussed at length the possible nature of the Anglo-Saxon pagan places of worship, and especially that at Godmundingham near Market Weighton, which was Northumbria's sacred place in the time of Edwin. If the words *fana* and *heargas* denote buildings, the latter probably were of wood, but they may have signified merely precincts, a sacred enclosure, or even, perhaps, a grove. The word *hearh* may be translated either temple or idol. The subsequent building of Christian churches in stone followed the Mediterranean and Gallo-Roman practice.

Gregory realized that the pagan religious festivals, being a large part of the social life of the people, would be difficult to eradicate, and that therefore 'some solemnity must be exchanged for them'. To this end the common folk were to 'build themselves huts of the boughs of trees about those churches which had been turned to that use from temples, and celebrate the solemnity with religious fasting, and no more offer beasts to the Devil'. The times of the pagan ceremonies and those of the Church festivals were made to coincide: the heathen feast at the winter solstice became identified with Christmas, that at the summer solstice with the festival of St. John the Baptist, and so on.

The results of Gregory's method were, however, in some cases hardly satisfactory. For instance, Rædwald, king of East Anglia, had been converted to Christianity, but relapsed owing to the influence of his heathen wife. The result was that 'in the same temple (*fanum*) he had an altar (*altare*) to sacrifice to Christ, and another small one (*arula*) to offer victims to devils'.[2] (The A.S. version has *wígbed* for both altars.)

There is a story in the *Landnámabók* of a certain Helgi: 'He was very mixed in his belief, he believed on Christ, but made vows to Thor for seafaring and doughty deeds.'[3] He at least showed discrimination. It was the custom for those Norsemen who came much into contact with Christians to receive the *prima signatio*, or mark of the cross—a kind of preliminary baptism to enable them to hold free intercourse with both Christian and pagan and to believe in anything that pleased them.[4] This was the case with Egil Skallagrimsson when he took service with King Athelstan; in consequence

[1] A. H. Allcroft, 'The circle and the cross, chap. 21—Saxon paganism', *Archaeological Journ.*, 1929, vol. lxxxi (for 1924), pp. 162 ff.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 15.

[3] *Landnámabók*, iii. 12. (*Íslendinga Sögur*, i. 206: ed. of 1843.)

[4] W. A. Craigie, *Scandinavian Folk-lore*, 1896, p. 445.

he was buried at the edge of the churchyard, where consecrated and unconsecrated ground met.[1] Pirates, when captured by Christians, were often offered the alternatives of death or baptism. It is related that one, when confronted with this proposition, replied 'that he had no objection: he had been baptized nineteen times before, and supposed that the twentieth would not hurt him'.

The coincidence of dates of the Christian and pagan festivals so as to preserve continuity also seems to have led to relapses in some cases, since the Canons of King Edgar enjoined 'that on feast days heathen songs and devil's games be abstained from'.[2]

The compromises of the Church with paganism were not confined to the folk, but extended to the clergy themselves. Theodore says[3] that if a priest had drunk too much 'for joy of Christmas or Easter or any of the feasts of the Saints, especially if he had not taken more than was decreed by his superior', he was to be excused penance.

The outward conversion to Christianity was an easier matter in England than on the Continent, perhaps because Anglo-Saxon paganism had been transplanted from its old associations and its original home. Charlemagne was confronted with the problem of eradicating an ancient religion where it had flourished from time immemorial. His destruction of the national shrine of the Irminsul appears to have no parallel in Britain. Bede expressly says that the temple and altars at Godmundingham, the nearest equivalent, which were destroyed by Coifi, the high priest of Deira, had been consecrated by Coifi himself.[4] The absence of heathen place-names in Northumbria seems to indicate that paganism was less strongly rooted there than in the south and south-east parts of the island.

Christianity had penetrated among the Teutons for some time before the official conversion took place. Some late Scandinavian myths therefore, such as that of Baldur, exhibit subtle Christian influence.

The passage in the *Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden* in the *Lacnunga*—

[1] *Egils Saga*, ch. 50, 91.
[2] Canons of Edgar, 18.
[3] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. i. 4.
[4] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 13.

These herbs did the wise Lord create,
Holy in the heavens when he hung—[1]

might refer either to Odin or to Christ.

As usual in cases of wholesale conversion, the power of the greater gods was more easily destroyed than that of the lesser. Indeed, it had already been broken in England by the time that the documentary evidence begins. The reign of spirits, apart from their adaptation to the new creed, was undisturbed, and they still had their old places in fireside tradition and fireside cult. The same conditions prevailed in Scandinavia, where Dr. Hilda Ellis says that 'popular beliefs about spirits controlling the fertility of the soil and the health of human beings proved harder to eradicate than all the mythological concepts of the heathen gods'.[2]

The cult of the local saint seems to have been substituted for that of the pagan god with a local shrine. That of St. Cuthbert at Durham is an instance of this. There were feasts here in his honour in March and again in September in medieval times. Such dual seasonal rites seem to indicate the absorption of a pagan local cult with complementary spring and autumn ritual.

It is natural that a site which had been held sacred for generations should continue so despite the outward changes of religion. It was also necessary that there should be on the site some object for worship or connected with healing: this might be a well, a hill figure, or in later times a relic. Such a site was Cerne Abbas in Dorset, which gives a good illustration of this cultural development. 'The well on the east,' says Sir Flinders Petrie, 'is obviously the early centre of attraction: it is said that it was visited by Augustine, and that it cured many diseases. It was one of the sacred springs round which primitive religion centred.'[3] The figure of the 'Cerne giant' on the hill above the village remains cut in the chalk to this day. It has been identified with the pagan god Helith[4] who, from the nature of the figure, was obviously a fertility deity. Augustine visited Cerne in his peregrination of southern England

[1] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXX). The same infiltration of Christian influence is shown in Finnish myths, e.g. in the 50th rune of the *Kalevala*.

[2] H. R. Ellis [now Davidson], *The Road to Hel*, Cambridge, 1943, p. 119.

[3] Flinders Petrie, *Hill Figures of England*, 1926, p. 10 (Royal Anthropological Institute). The well, according to William of Malmesbury, sprang from the ground at the word of Augustine so that he might baptize his converts.

[4] 'In quo pago olim colebatur deus Helith' (Walter of Coventry, *Memoriale*, under A.D. 1045. Rolls Series, vol. i, p. 60).

after his conversion of Kent, since he realized the strength of the pagan cult there. By his preaching there he 'increased the number thus snatched from the devil for Christianity', says William of Malmesbury.[1] 'Sed loco illo virtus hesit', he continues; this seems to show that Augustine, again carrying out the instructions of Pope Gregory, decided that this holy ground should remain holy ground. The Benedictine abbey of Cerne, though acknowledging Augustine as its spiritual founder, received its foundation charter from Ailmer, earl or duke of Cornwall, in 987, in the reign of King Edgar. Cerne then received its third cultural object, for Ailmer and Dunstan then transferred to the church the relics of Edwold, the local hermit who was reputed to be the brother of Edmund of East Anglia. He had established his hermitage at Augustine's Well.

Sir Frank Stenton has done much to ascertain by a study of Anglo-Saxon place-names at what periods sites were connected with heathen worship, and in what districts the connexion was concentrated. He says:

> The identification of these sites is a work of much more than antiquarian interest, for it makes possible a new estimate of the strength of the popular resistance to Augustine and his colleagues of the first Roman mission. . . . They were labouring in a country where the sanctuaries of a living heathenism were so numerous that after thirteen hundred years, something of its general character can be recovered from the surviving names of these holy sites.[2]

Some places contain names of deities and indicate centres of worship, others contain Anglo-Saxon words which denote temples, altars, or sacred precincts. At the time of his writing (1940) between fifty and sixty such sites could be identified by means of local names. By plotting these names he establishes 'the strength of popular heathenism in the central midlands, the original Wessex and the smaller kingdom of the south-east'. There is no evidence for the existence of sanctuaries in forest country such as Arden or the Weald, but most sites 'were either on cultivated ground or on conspicuous features of the countryside'. The word *hearh*, for instance, seems to indicate a hill-sanctuary: Harrow and com-

[1] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum anglorum*, ii. 84, Rolls Series, p. 184. See also Stuart Piggott, 'The name of the giant of Cerne', in *Antiquity*, 1932, vi. 214–16.

[2] F. M. Stenton, 'The historical bearing of place-name studies: Anglo-Saxon heathenism', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 1941, 4s. xxiii. 1–24.

pounds of it are examples. Stenton calls attention to Harrow in Middlesex which he elsewhere calls 'the most impressive site of heathen Germanic worship in the whole of England.' Its original name was *Gumeninga hearh*: this 'must have meant the sanctuary of an otherwise unrecorded tribe called the *Gumeningas*'. *Weoh*, a sacred precinct, is another most interesting word: it often occurs in place-names, as for example in Weedon in Northamptonshire, and in Weoley in Birmingham.

Henry E. Bannard notes that 'the *weohs* are often found on low ground, but it seems improbable that a difference in situation was the only difference between them' and the *heargs*. There must have been also 'some difference of function or of status'. He also gives details of names derived from *lundr*, a sacred grove. These occur mostly in Northumbria and the north midlands.[1]

According to the Christian authors, the common folk were more impressed by spectacular miracles performed by men like Bishop Germanus in the name of Christ[2] than they were by the rites of Odin and Thor to which they had long been accustomed.

Mention of the higher gods is hardly ever found in Anglo-Saxon charms. Signs of the worship of the Æsir survive in the names of the days of the week (Wednesday, Thursday, Friday), and in place-names. The names of Thor and Woden constantly occur in the latter.[3] That of Thor, says Stenton, is 'curiously limited in distribution'. It seems to be confined to the south-eastern quarter of England: 'in Anglian territory, the traces of his worship are few'. The place-names connected with Woden are found in the same area, but extend also into Mercia. There are indications of two large sanctuaries: one is in Wiltshire, extending from *Wodnes denu*, a valley between Overton and Marlborough, to *Wodnes beorg*, a tumulus four miles away above the vale of Pewsey. The other is in Staffordshire on rising ground above the headwaters of the Tame and is indicated by the names Wednesbury and Wednesfield. 'It is evident', Stenton says, 'that there must have been a strong basis of popular feeling beneath the aristocratic convention which regarded Woden as the ancestor of most English kings.' The name of Tirs occurs also in place-names (e.g. Tysoe in Warwickshire) and indicates centres of his worship.

[1] Henry E. Bannard, 'Some English sites of ancient heathen worship', *Hibbert Journ.*, 1945, xliv. 76–79.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 17–18.

[3] F. M. Stenton, op. cit., pp. 17–21.

We have the testimony of Wulfstan, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, that Woden and Thor were the most popular of the heathen gods in England,[1] as they were also on the Continent from the time of Tacitus to the final conversion to Christianity. The Renunciation used under Boniface by the Saxons and Thuringians ran: 'I forsake all devil's work and words, and Thuner and Woden and Saxnot and all the monsters who are their companions.' In Anglo-Saxon charms the name of Woden occurs only once to my knowledge: possibly in other cases it has been cut out by Church influence. Woden was the god of magic and spells in Scandinavia, and his spirit is behind the Anglo-Saxon charms, even though his name no longer occurs.

Perhaps the various prohibitions concerning the horse which were issued in 787 were the result of this animal being sacred to Woden. The eating of horseflesh was then forbidden: also 'the evil custom of cutting off their heads, slitting their noses, tying their ears together and docking their tails'— these being *reliquiae paganorum rituum*.[2]

Consequently the laws against paganism forbid, not the worship of Woden and Thor, so much as the performance of *wiccecræft*, *fyrht*, and other practices for which it was difficult to find a Latin equivalent.[3] But it was known at once what was referred to. We know of the existence of many magical practices from an enumeration in the laws and in the writings of ecclesiastics, whose primary object it was to eradicate them. Thus Eddius tells how Wilfrid, on his return from Gaul after his consecration, was driven on the coast of the still heathen Sussex. 'Stans quoque princeps sacerdotum idolatriae . . . in tumulo excelso, . . . maledicere populum Dei et suis magicis artibus manus eorum alligare nitebatur.'[4] But of the nature of the *magicae artes* nothing is said.

Theodore's Penitential, especially in the section *De cultura idolorum*,[5] gives a longer list than some other sources.

The magical practices specially attacked may be divided into the following categories: (1) idolatry and worship of 'demons' in general; (2) the cult of the dead; (3) the worship of nature (trees, wells, stones, fire, &c.); (4) pagan calendar customs and festivals;

[1] Wulfstan, 197, 19.
[2] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, pp. 458–9.
[3] e.g. Secular Laws of Cnut, ch. 5.
[4] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 13.
[5] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xv.

(5) witchcraft and sorcery; (6) augury and divination; and (7) astrology. I will endeavour to give some examples of these.

(*b*) *Idolatry*

Idolatry, or reversion to paganism, was one of the three capital sins of the first stage of the Church. The earliest instance of the prohibition of idolatry by law seems to be in the laws of King Wihtred of Kent, which date from the last years of the seventh century: 'If a husband, without his wife's knowledge, make an offering to devils, let him be liable in all his substance and his *heals-fang*. If both make offering to devils, let them be liable in their *heals-fang*, and all their substance. If a *theów* make an offering to devils, let him make a *bót* of vi shillings or his hide.'[1] The severity of the penalty indicates the seriousness with which the offence was regarded. The sentence in the laws of Alfred, nearly two centuries later, is still more severe: 'Let him who sacrifices to gods, save to God alone, perish by death.'[2] It is of King Alfred that William of Malmesbury narrates 'that he ordered golden armlets to be suspended on the public high roads, *ubi semitae in quadrivium finduntur*; these derided the greed of passers-by, since there were none who would carry them off': not, it is to be feared, because of this law of the good king but from fear of the dread powers which abode at the cross-roads.[3] A passage in the *Flores Historiarum* connects the crossroads with paganism as late as 1054. It tells how Godwin was convicted of perjury by Edward the Confessor by his choking with a crumb. The king then says, 'Take this dog and traitor and bury him at the crossway (*in quadrivio*), for he is unworthy of Christian burial.'[4]

The secular laws of Cnut 'earnestly forbid every heathenism: heathenism is, that men worship idols, that is that they worship heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water-wells or stones, or forest trees of any kind; or love witchcraft, or promote *morth-wéorc* in any wise; or by *blót*, or by *fyrht*, or perform anything pertaining to such illusions (*gedwimera*)'.[5]

The penitentials naturally have much to say against heathenism.

[1] Laws of King Wihtred, 12–13. [2] Laws of King Alfred, 32.

[3] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 122. (Rolls Series, vol. i, p. 130.)

[4] *Flores historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. i, p. 573 (Rolls Series).

[5] Laws of King Cnut (secular), 5.

Both Theodore and Egbert say that the man who sacrifices to demons in little things shall do penance for one year, but if in big things, for ten years.[1] If he shall eat or drink in the vicinity of a heathen shrine (according to the first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190[2]) or if he shall partake of food which has been used in a heathen sacrifice (in the more precise words of the second penitential in the same manuscript[3]) he shall likewise do penance.

The usual word for demon is *daemon* in Latin, and *déofol* or *féond* in Anglo-Saxon. Other words, however, are found. Such is *scucca*,[4] which P. G. Thomas identifies with a Norfolk demon in the shape of a black dog named Shuck, the Yarmouth variety of which is called Scarfe.[5] *Scucca*, as part of a place-name, occurs in various localities.[6]

Fifel is another word for a monster: cf. *fífelcynn* in *Beowulf*.[7] In the *Menologium poeticum* occurs the line, 'the spectre (*thyrs*) shall dwell in the fen'.[8] Grendel is also called a *thyrs*; the sea-monster Ikuturso in the 42nd rune of the *Kalevala* is a similar being. *Thyrs* occurs twice in medieval field-names in Nottinghamshire.[9] Bruce Dickins, in his article on 'Yorkshire hobs', gives much valuable information on *thyrs* and its compounds. 'There is a good deal of evidence', he says, 'for the belief in *Hobthrus*, malevolent or beneficent, from the place-names and folk-lore of the Northern and North Midland counties': this he sets out in detail topographically.[10] The form *orc-thyrs* is also found, the prefix showing the connexion with the infernal regions (*orcus*). The word *orcen* also signifies a sea-monster (possibly cognate with the Icelandic *orkn*, a kind of seal).[11]

Eótens and elves and *orcneas* are mentioned together in *Beowulf*.[12] 'The Eótenas (Jotnar)', says Thorpe, after speaking of the Jutes

[1] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xv (1).
[2] First penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, xxvii. 1–2.
[3] Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 (Confessional), 32.
[4] *Blickling Homilies*, 1897. Cf. also *Beowulf*, line 939, *scuccum and scinum*.
[5] P. G. Thomas, 'Further notes on Beowulf', *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 1927, xxii, 71. See also Dutt, *Highways and Byways in East Anglia*, p. 216.
[6] Listed by F. M. Stenton in his 'Historical bearing of place-name studies', op. cit., p. 5.
[7] *Beowulf*, line 104. See also F. A. Wood, 'Etymological notes, 3', *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 1907, xxii. 235.
[8] *Menologium*, line 545.
[9] See Stenton, op. cit., p. 5.
[10] B. Dickins, 'Yorkshire hobs', *Trans. Yorks. Dialect Soc.*, 1942, vii. 9–23.
[11] See Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. ii, pp. 520–1.
[12] *Beowulf*, line 112.

(Jötar), 'were apparently a still earlier (Finnish) race, out of whom the Gothic (Teutonic) conquerors made their trolls and giants. Both *Jôti* (plural *Jôtar*) and *iötunn* (plural *iötnar*) are rendered in Anglo-Saxon by *eóten* (plural *eótenas*).'[1] The word *jötnar*, according to Miss Phillpotts, 'usually denotes daemonic beings, but it seems that it may originally have applied to the early non-Aryan inhabitants of Scandinavia whom the Teutonic settlers drove gradually northwards'.[2] Grimm derives *eóten* from Gothic *itan*, to eat, and *thyrs* from Gothic *paúrsus*, dry: these two words would thus signify creatures with an inordinate desire for eating and drinking.[3]

'It may reasonably be conjectured', says Bruce Dickins, 'that the belief in monsters of superhuman strength, who lived in remote holes and caves, often entered below water, was brought to this country by the Angles and Scandinavians. Here these monsters were sometimes localised in burial mounds, mostly of the pre-English period.'[4]

In Scandinavia, the trolls and dwarfs of legend, possessing as they do so much that is normally human, represent therefore, according to some writers, the Finns who remained in the country, especially in the recesses of the mountains, after the Teutonic conquest. They, like the Finns, are represented as possessed of great magical powers. It is known that the North Germans went to the Finns on important occasions to learn spells from them. Therefore Christian laws forbid belief in, and application to, them (*trúa á Finna, fara til Finna, gera finnfarar*).[5] In a similar way the little people of Irish legend may represent the remains of a conquered race which still lurked in remote places. In wild country such as the mountains of Scandinavia, the forests of Finland, or the bogs of Ireland, illusions are likely to occur, and the size of the human figure may be lessened or magnified with the prevalence of mist. Such stories are less frequently recorded in England; this is possibly due to the fact that our landscape and climate are less romantic and lack the air of mystery that one associates with legends of the supernatural. One passage in the life of St. Guthlac, who dwelt in the Lincolnshire fens, is, however, most suggestive:

It happened in the days of Cenred, King of the Mercians, that the

[1] Thorpe, *Beowulf* (glossary), p. 320.
[2] *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. ii, p. 481.
[3] Grimm, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 520–2.
[4] Dickins, op. cit., p. 22.
[5] Mogk, art. 'Zauberei', § 10, in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

British nation, the enemy of the Anglo-Saxon race, with many battles and various contests annoyed the Anglo-Saxons. It happened one night, when it was the time of cock-crowing, and the blessed man Guthlac fell to his morning prayers, that he was suddenly entranced in light slumber. Then Guthlac woke from his sleep, and went immediately out, and looked and hearkened; there he heard a great host of the accursed spirits speaking in British; and he knew and understood their words, because he had once been in exile among them.[1]

It is obvious that the 'accursed spirits' were British and actual flesh and blood, despite the following statement that 'they departed like smoke from his presence' as soon as he had sung the first verse of the psalm 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered' against them.

The attitude of the Teutonic peoples towards 'devils' and such-like beings and their power for evil is illustrated by Anglo-Saxon stories of saints and by folk-tales. These show the clash of the two religions and the invariable victory of Christianity.

Thus Ælfric tells how Cuthbert, wishing to lead the life of an anchorite, went to Farne. 'That island is all beaten by the salt ocean, . . . and all within, before that time, was very full of swart ghosts, so that men could not cultivate the soil for the threats of the swart devils; but they at last all fled and entirely vacated the island to the noble champion.'[2]

Bede tells us that Cedd, having been given land by King Æthelwald of Deira at Lastingham on which to build his monastery, 'desiring first to cleanse the place *a pristina flagitiorum sorde* by prayer and fasting, . . . requested the king that he would give him leave to reside there all the approaching time of Lent to pray'.[3] This was obviously to exorcize the evil spirits which he considered must infest the wild moorland country.

St. Botulph, who died about the year 700, also had trouble with devils. Æthelmund, king of the Southern Angles, gave him permission to found a monastery. Botulph 'chose a spot at Ikanhoe, a desert place invested by demons; on his approach the devils raised a fetid vapour, and then with loud wailings quitted the place'.[4]

[1] Anglo-Saxon version of the *Life of St. Guthlac*, ch. 6.

[2] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. ii, p. 143. Cf. also Simeon of Durham, *History of the Church of Durham*, ch. 7 (end), and Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 29.

[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 23.

[4] Folcard, *Vita S. Botulphi* (quoted by T. D. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, vol. i, pt. i, p. 374).

A similar story is told by W. P. Ker of the thirteenth-century Icelandic bishop Gudmund Arason:

> Among the miracles of Gudmund, in the earliest life of him, it is noted how he had great power against trolls. . . . He was once, it is said, going over the steep little holm of Drangey, blessing it and casting out the trolls, when, after they had done their worst, there came a petition from them in reasonable terms. In his purification of the island, which was carried out very thoroughly, he was let down by a rope over the cliffs to bless them. At one place a shaggy grey arm in a red sleeve came out of the rock with a knife, and cut two strands of his rope: the third strand was hallowed and would not give, and the bishop hung there. Then a voice from the rock said: 'Do no more hallowing, Bishop; the Bad Folk must live somewhere.' The bishop had himself hauled up, and left that corner as a reservation for trolls, so it is said.[1]

Dr. Hilda Ellis gives other instances: one from the *Flateyjarbók* speaks 'of the spirits fleeing before the approach of Christianity, when Þorhallr, a man of second sight, sees many hills opening and every living creature getting his baggage ready, both great and small, and making it a day for moving.'[2]

The north was regarded as the abode of the heathen gods, and therefore in Christian times was looked upon as unlucky and a place of devils. The pagan used to worship turning towards the north, while the Christian turns towards the east. The north side of the churchyard was not used for burials till the south (and sunny) side was full—unless it was used for suicides or murderers. In the words of A. E. Housman:

> To south the headstones cluster,
> And sunny mounds lie thick:
> The dead are more in muster
> At Hughley than the quick.
> North, for the soon told number,
> Chill graves the sexton delves,
> And steeple-shadowed slumber
> The slayers of themselves.

The north door, to be found in most Anglo-Saxon and Early Norman churches, is said to be the one by which the child was brought into the church for baptism, signifying the change from

[1] W. P. Ker: Address to the Viking Club, 1907. *Collected Essays*, vol. ii, p. 172.

[2] H. R. Ellis, op. cit., pp. 116–17 (quoting *Flateyjarbók: Olafs Saga Tryggvasonar*, 1. 335, pp. 421 f.).

pagan to Christian influence about to be effected. It is also said that the Holy Spirit coming in at the south door at the time of a christening drives the devil out at the 'demon's door' opposite: the font is often situated between the two.

In the north clerestory windows at Fairford are represented the various (pagan) persecutors of the faith, each with a devil shown against a fiery backgound: in the south clerestory windows are saints.

In the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon, excavated by Dr. John Humphreys in 1921, it was found that the majority of the heathen burials were with the feet to the north. Those investigated in 1923 had the feet towards the east, and therefore belonged to Christian times: these produced no such objects for the use of the dead as the pagan graves yielded.[1]

(*c*) *Cult of the dead*

One would judge from a passage in William of Malmesbury that the Anglo-Saxons believed that a dead man could 'walk' owing to the devil reanimating the corpse. After saying how it was believed that the spirit of King Alfred—after his burial in Winchester Cathedral—resumed its body and wandered nightly through the building, he continues: 'These and similar superstitions, such as that the dead body of a wicked man runs about after death by the agency of the devil, the English believe with almost inbred credulity, borrowing them from the heathens.'[2]

'Whoever burns grain', says Archbishop Theodore, 'where a dead man lies, for the protection of the survivors and the house, shall do penance for five years.'[3] This points to a cult of the dead, since the corn was burnt for the benefit of the dead man, who would for this reason look with favour on the survivors. Presumably some similar practice was alluded to in the Canons of Edgar in this passage: 'and we enjoin that a priest allow no tampering (*unnit*) with the corpse, but with fear of God, bury it wisely.'[4] The Canons of Edgar also forbid swearing and bewitching by means of the dead:[5] *líc-wígelung* is evidently the same as necromancy.

[1] *Archaeologia*, 1923, lxxiii. 89–116; 1925, lxxiv. 271–88.

[2] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 124 (Rolls Series). See also *Book of Hyde*, ch. 13.

[3] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xv (3).

[4] Canons of Edgar, 65.

[5] Ibid., 16.

The Canons of Ælfric enjoin, 'When ye are invited [to a funeral], then forbid ye the heathen songs of the laymen, and their loud cachinnations, nor eat ye, nor drink where the corpse lieth therein, lest ye be imitators of the heathenism which they there commit.'[1]

There is some evidence of the worship of the dead by the Teutons on the Continent. The oldest testimony of sorcery among the Germanic peoples is found in Jornandes, where the Gothic *haljarunae* signify women conjurors of the dead.[2] The Old Norse *val-galdr* was a charm to conjure the dead from sleep, and was employed, for instance, by Woden to awaken the *völva*, and also, in the story told by Saxo Grammaticus, by Hadding and the giantess Hardgrep on the corpse lying in the house where they spent the night. This gives more detail of the practice itself: 'Here, desiring to pry into the purposes of heaven by the help of a magical espial, she [Hardgrep] graved on wood some very dreadful spells, and caused Hadding to put them under the dead man's tongue; thus forcing him to utter, with a voice so given, a strain terrible to hear.'[3] In Grógaldr, the young Svipdag learns from his deceased mother the magic songs that are to shield him from all manner of danger.[4] The eighth she sings is 'that a *dead Christian woman* may have less power to bring you misfortune'.

The passage in the *Hávamál*, 'If I see a halter-corpse swinging high on the tree, I can so grave and paint in signs, that the man shall come down and talk with me', seems also to indicate the use of *val-galdr*.[5] The ceremony called *sitja úti* was also used to learn the future from the dead.[6]

The first two headings in the *Indiculus Superstitionum* refer to the dead: '1. De sacrilegio ad sepulchra mortuorum' and '2. De sacrilegio super defunctos, id est *dadsisas*'. These last were songs sung for the dead at night. Mogk says they were either to ward off the soul, or were invocations through which oracular utterances concerning the future were obtained from the dead. The Old German word, now obsolete, was *sisu* or *sise-sang*, which is glossed 'funebria carmina'. The Low German form of the word is

[1] Canons of Ælfric, 35.

[2] Heusler, *Altgermanische Dichtung* — 8. *Zauberdichtung*, p. 55.

[3] Saxo Grammaticus, i. 22. (Elton and Powell, p. 27.)

[4] *Grógaldr*, 6–14. See Clarke, *The Hávamál, with selections from other poems of the Edda*, pp. 101–3.

[5] *Hávamál*, 20. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i, p. 27.

[6] See *Heimskringla*, vol. iv, pp. 494–5 (Saga Library).

ses-spila: the old Saxon *sisas*. The Latin equivalent is *nenia*. Horace speaks of *Marsa nenia*, which may refer to this, but he gives no details.[1] Schütte says the Old High German *siswa* signifies 'exorcising of corpses', and adds that 'it was the exorcising of dead bodies which brought about the unpopularity of sorcery: Harald Fairhair had his own son Ragnvald Rettilbeini and eighty wizards burned, and won universal approval for the deed'.[2]

The Capitulary of Carloman, A.D. 742, forbids among other pagan practices 'sacrificia mortuorum'.[3]

(*d*) *Worship of Nature*

Storms has endeavoured to show the survival of sun-worship in various charms, and particularly in that for improvement of crops, cited below on page 433: 'Eastwards I stand, for favours I pray . . . Earth I pray and sky.' He also cites the laws of Cnut (ch. 5) which state that it was special heathenism 'to worship the sun and the moon'.[4]

The worship of nature lies behind a great many charms, even those which are apparently Christian. The primary source of nature is Earth, the Great Mother. Anglo-Saxon invocations to her have been preserved: the setting of one of these[5] is the most important evidence that has survived to show what ancient Teutonic agricultural ceremonies—such as blessing the fields to make them fruitful—were like.[6] Tacitus says that our forefathers considered the woods to be especially the homes of their gods. By 'woods' he meant the wild country in which were the trees, streams, springs, rocks, and stones most adapted for nature-spirits to abide in. The *Urwald* remained the seat of nature worship in Germany, as it did in this island, until the coming of Christianity.

'The Germanic races, which founded their States on the ruins of the Roman Empire', says Burckhardt, 'were thoroughly and specially fitted to understand the spirit of natural scenery; and though Christianity compelled them for a while to see in the springs

[1] Horace, *Epodon*, 17, 29.

[2] G. Schütte, *Our Forefathers, the Gothonic Nations*, trans. Young, vol. i, p. 238.

[3] *Karlomanni principis capitularia*, 5 (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, legum tomus I, folio ed., 1835, p. 17).

[4] G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 1948, pp. 6–10.

[5] Printed in Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, pp. 398–405.

[6] See *infra*, Chapter XXIX.

and mountains, in the lakes and woods, which they had till then revered, the working of evil demons, yet this transitional conception was soon outgrown.'[1]

'No one', says the first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, 'shall go to trees, or wells, or stones, or enclosures (*cancellos*), or anywhere else except to God's church, and there make vows or release himself from them.'[2]

The following passage occurs in the Law of the Northumbrian Priests, which dates from about the time of the Norman Conquest: 'If there be a *frith-geard* on anyone's land about a stone or a tree or a well, or any folly of such kind, let him who hath it pay *lahslit*', &c.[3] And yet again in the Canons enacted under King Edgar: 'And we enjoin that every priest zealously promote Christianity and totally extinguish every heathenism; and forbid well-worshipping and necromancies, and divinations (*hwata*) and *galdra*, . . . and with *frith-splottum*, and with elders and also with various other trees, and with stones.'[4] The *frith-geard* and *frith-splot* were apparently the equivalent of the *cancellus* mentioned above. They were plots of land enclosing the object of worship, and therefore afforded sanctuary (*frith*).

But the Anglo-Saxon Church, which thus vigorously suppressed the heathen *frith-splot*, felt the necessity of a Christian substitute for it, and therefore instituted its equivalent. The most complete example was at Beverley, where the *pax ecclesiae sancti Johannis* afforded the same protection as the heathen *frith-splot*. The Anglo-Saxon frith-stool, which now stands on the south of the high altar of the minster and behind the mouth of the holy well, afforded the most inviolable sanctuary (*frith*).

The second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 forbids not only vows at trees and wells, but also eating and drinking in such places, even if no offering be brought.[5]

A sermon of St. Eligius, bishop of Noyon, of about the year 640, adds a few more details as to these rites: 'Let no Christian', he says, 'place lights at the temples, or the stones, or at fountains, or at trees, or *ad cellos*, or at places where three ways meet. . . . Let no

[1] Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Phaidon Press), 1944, p. 178.
[2] MS. C.C.C.C. 190, First penitential, xxvii. 18.
[3] Law of the Northumbrian Priests, 54.
[4] Canons of Edgar, 16.
[5] 'Penitential of Egbert', ii. 22 (MS. C.C.C.C. 190).

one presume to make lustrations, or to enchant herbs, or to make flocks pass through a hollow tree or an aperture in the earth; for by doing so he seems to consecrate them to the devil.'[1]

Ælfric says: 'It is not allowed to any Christian man to fetch his health from any stone, nor from any tree, unless it be the holy sign of the rood.'[2]

(*i*) *Trees.* The elder tree is singled out by Edgar, in the passage quoted above, as having been especially venerated. Thorpe[3] quotes the following German prayer, which was repeated kneeling when this tree was lopped: 'Frau Ellhorn, give me some of thy wood, when I will give thee also some of mine, when it grows in the forest.' In Hildesheim, an elder wand was used by the grave-digger for measuring the corpse. Stenton calls attention to 'an ash-tree "which the ignorant call holy" [which] is mentioned among the boundaries of Taunton in a charter dated 854'.[4]

The earliest mention of the cult of trees and groves is by Tacitus.[5] The *Vita Bonifacii* gives an account of a sacred oak at Geismar in Hesse, of whose wood an 'oratorium' was constructed and dedicated to St. Peter (*c.* A.D. 725–31).[6] The sacred grove at Uppsala is described by Adam of Bremen.[7]

'Vota ad arbores' were especially forbidden at the Council of Paderborn in 785.[8] Other continental councils and laws also forbid this practice.[9]

In the eighth century also the Saxon *Indiculus Superstitionum* has a section 'De sacris silvarum quae nimidas vocant'.[10]

(ii) *Wells.* Wells which were considered in heathen times to possess magical healing properties naturally continued to possess them after the arrival of Christianity, but the Church often would not allow them to be used for the performance of cures until they had been blessed by the bishop and placed under the auspices of some saint. The twenty-sixth canon of Anselm (1102) says: 'Let

[1] Quoted in S. R. Maitland, *Dark Ages*, 1841, pp. 151–2.

[2] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 475.

[3] Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (Glossary under *Ellen*).

[4] F. M. Stenton, 'The historical bearing of place-name studies: Anglo-Saxon heathenism', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 1941, 4s. xxiii. 4 (quoting Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 476).

[5] Tacitus, *Germania*, 9.

[6] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. i, p. 72.

[7] Adam of Bremen, 27.

[8] Schmidt, *Gesetze der Angel-sachsen*, 2nd ed., p. 272.

[9] See Grimm, op. cit., vol. i, pp. 72 et seq.

[10] *Indiculus Superstitionum*, 6.

no one attribute reverence or sanctity to a fountain, without the bishop's authority.' Many wells still bear the names of Anglo-Saxon saints, either to commemorate some historical event connected with the well or its immediate vicinity, or owing to the association with a saint who lived near the well and used it for baptismal purposes. Examples of the first sort are the wells dedicated to St. Kenelm at Winchcombe and on the Clent Hills in Worcestershire,[1] and St. Edward's well at Corfe Castle.[2] An example of the second is St. Chad's well at Lichfield, which is still decorated with flowers on Ascension Day.[3] Wells with a pagan dedication are Woden's well at Wanswill, Gloucestershire, and Thor's well at Burnsall, Yorkshire.

The eleventh heading of the *Indiculus Superstitionum* is 'De fontibus sacrificiorum'.

Well-worship continued through medieval times. In the thirteenth century, for instance, Bishop Canteloup of Worcester had to forbid 'the superstitious worship of wells and meetings of folk at Cerney *et apud fontem Rollae, juxta Gloverniam*, and in other places of a like nature'.[4] Yet wells and springs, functioning under the auspices of the Church, were frequented for curing purposes throughout the Middle Ages, and bishops frequently granted indulgences to those who visited them.

(iii) *Stones*. The practice of passing children through holed stones will be mentioned later when the subject of the transference of disease to inanimate objects is discussed.[5] The seventh heading of the *Indiculus Superstitionum* is 'De hiis [sacris] quae faciunt super petras'.

(iv) *Fire*. Fire was regarded as warding off devils, and also as an agent of purification. It is especially mentioned in the laws of Cnut[6] as an object of pagan worship. The custom of kindling the needfire through which cattle were driven at Midsummer was assimilated with the Christian lighting of fires on St. John's Eve.[7] The Capitulary of Carloman, Mayor of the Palace of Austrasia (A.D. 742), mentions among the various pagan practices which each bishop is

[1] *Early South English Legendary* (E.E.T.S., o.s., 87), No. 49—St. Kenelm.
[2] Ibid., No. 17, ll. 121–2.
[3] Many other wells in various parts of the country are dedicated to St. Chad, who seems to have been specially connected with water and springs.
[4] Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, London, 1737, vol. i, p. 669.
[5] p. 240. [6] Secular Laws of Cnut, 5.
[7] See Mogk, article 'Feuerkult', in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, vol. ii, sect. 5.

required to put down, 'illos sacrilegos ignes quos Nedfratres (Niedfyr, Nodfyr)[1] vocant',[2] and the fifteenth heading of the *Indiculus Superstitionum* is 'De igne fricato de ligno, id est nodfyr'.

(*e*) *Pagan calendar customs and festivals*

There are indications that festivals were held in pagan Anglo-Saxon England which resembled (though probably on a smaller scale) those continental festivals of which records still survive. The Church, wherever possible, made a point of assimilating these pagan events with Christian festivals occurring at approximately the same time of year.

Though the year, as regards the plant world, naturally begins in early spring, yet the pagan year as regards festivals begins with the coming of winter. The *Ynglinga Saga* mentions three annual festivals: at the beginning and middle of winter, and in the summer.[3]

The *Calendarium poeticum*[4] calls October *Winterfylleð* and November *Blótmónað*: 'This month is called Novembris in Latin and in our language *Blótmónað*, because our forefathers when they were heathen, always sacrificed in this month, that is they took and devoted to their idols the cattle which they wished to offer.' Presumably they sacrificed those flocks which were superfluous before the winter came. Bede defines *Blótmónað* as 'mensis immolationum, quia in eo pecora quae occisura erant, Diis suis voverant.'[5] In Danish, November was called *Slagtemaaned*, while in Old Swedish October was called the *Blotmånad* or *Slagtmånad*.[6] The name must therefore have originally been in use both in Northern and Western Germanic.

The Tamfana festival, mentioned by Tacitus, was celebrated at the beginning of winter.

Widukind, abbot of Corvey (*c.* 980), speaking of a great victory over the Thuringians in the sixth century, says that for three days they held a feast of victory. Possibly, however, this was not an isolated festival, for he continues: 'Now all this happened, as runs

[1] Derived, according to Müllenhoff, from *nôt*, necessity; but according to Grimm from *hniudan*, *hniotan*, to rub. This latter is obviously right, from the explanation in the *Indiculus*.

[2] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, p. 385.

[3] *Ynglinga Saga*, 8.

[4] Printed in G. Hickes, *Thesaurus*, vol. i, Oxford, 1705, pp. 203–21.

[5] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15 (end).

[6] K. Weinhold, *Die deutschen Monatnamen*, Halle, 1869, pp. 33, 54.

the tradition of our forefathers, on the first of October, and these heathen festivals have been changed by the consecration of pious men, into fasting and prayers and offerings for all departed Christian souls.'

December appears in the *Calendarium* as *Iúle*; Bede gives the name *Giúli* to both December and January. The great Scandinavian festival was that of Yule, and with it Thor was especially connected; it was probably at a comparatively late period (about the ninth century) that it was merged in Christmas. It seems likely that the great nine-yearly festival at Uppsala was held about Christmas time. Bede says of Christmas Eve, 'ipsam noctem nunc nobis sacrosanctam, tunc gentili vocabulo *Modranicht*, id est, matrum noctem appellabant; ob causam ut suspicamur ceremoniarum, quas in ea pervigiles agebant'.[1]

Heathen rites at the New Year were especially forbidden. The first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 gives details of these: 'If any one on the Kalends of January walks as a stag or as a little old woman (*in cervulo aut vetula vadit*), that is to say, if they change themselves into the likeness of wild animals, or clothe themselves in the skins of cattle and wear the heads of beasts, those who in fact transform themselves in such wise into kinds of wild animals, shall do penance for three years: for this is devilish.'[2] And yet again this penitential says: 'Qui observat . . . feriam, honore Jovis [= Thor?] vel kalendas Januarii more paganorum honorat . . . poeniteat.'[3] St. Eligius says, 'Let none on the Calends of January join in the wicked and ridiculous things, the dressing like old women or like stags (*vetulas aut cervolos*), or the fooleries, nor make feasts lasting all night, nor keep up the custom of gifts and intemperate drinking.' A variant of *vetulas* is *vitulas* (calves), but the wearing of female clothing by men seems to have been a feature of this festival.[4] The Council of Auxerre in 378 decreed 'non licet Kalendis Januarii vetula[s?] aut cervolo[s?] facere'.

Dietmar of Merseburg in his description of the festival at Hlethra in Seeland says: 'post novem annos *mense Januario* . . . omnes convenerunt.'[5] In the Highlands of Scotland a 'band of young people

[1] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15.

[2] MS. C.C.C.C. 190, First penitential, xxvii. 19.

[3] Ibid. xxvii. 24. It is said that this practice originated in the Compitalia, founded by Tarquinius Priscus in honour of the Lares compitales, and celebrated on the Kalends of January.

[4] See Maitland, *Dark Ages*, p. 151.

[5] Dietmar, 1, 9.

visit the neighbouring houses on New Year's night "*Oidhche Challainn*—calends of January," and midst the noise of beating sticks on dry sheepskins, demand in rude rhyme for food and drink. If the entertainment is refused, they go round the house widdershins.'[1]

February in the *Calendarium* and in Bede is called *Sol-mónað*. Bede explains that this signifies 'the month of cakes (*mensis placentarum*), which in it they offered to the gods'.[2] Bosworth–Toller say, 'the first part of the compound is of doubtful meaning . . . there is no word *sol* = placenta, unless it be found in the gloss *panibus sol*, [in the] Épinal Glossary, ed. Sweet, p. 21a, 11'.[3] The third heading in the *Indiculus Superstitionum* is 'De spurcalibus in Februario': possibly the name *Sporkelmonat*, which is given to February today in some parts of Germany, is derived from the festival here alluded to. Saupe discusses at length the meaning of the word *spurcalibus*. He thinks it has no connexion with *sporkel*, the Low Rhenish name for February, nor with the Roman *spurcalia*, but considers it to be cognate with spark. Following Pfannenschmidt, he equates these rites with those held in February to commemorate the death of winter and the coming of spring which were celebrated by means of fires, since fire expelled the demon of winter. As this third heading of the *Indiculus* follows the two which concern the pagan cult of the dead, he connects this one also with the souls of the dead, who reappeared out of the ground at the return of spring together with the spirit of vegetation.[4] The Roman Lupercalia took place on 15 February—the most important date in the Roman month. The essence of the festival seems to have been purification, the name given to the day being *dies februatus* or Purified Day, whence the month itself acquired its name of February. Of the Lupercalia Bede says:

> But the Christian religion has happily changed this custom of purification, when in the same month of February, on the day of St. Mary, the whole populace with the priests and ministers proceed through the churches with hymns . . . and through the crowded places of the city . . . not in a five-yearly purification of the earthly empire, but in perpetual memorial of the heavenly kingdom.[5]

[1] A. Macbain, 'Highland Superstition', *Trans. Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 1888, vol. xiv, p. 233.

[2] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15.

[3] See also Kluge's note in *Englische Studien*, 1885, viii. 479.

[4] H. A. Saupe, *Der Indiculus Superstitionum*, pp. 8–9.

[5] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 12.

March and April are named *Rhedmónaðˇ* and *Eósturmónaðˇ* according to Bede, after the two pagan goddesses Rheda (or *Hrede*) and *Eóstre*[1] to whom sacrifices were then made. Grimm says:

> The great Christian festival, which usually falls in April or the end of March, bears in the oldest of O.H.G. remains the name Ôstarâ; it is mostly found in the plural, because two days were kept at Easter. This Ôstarâ, like the Anglo-Saxon Eástre, must in the heathen religion have denoted a higher being whose worship was so firmly rooted that the Christian teachers tolerated the name, and applied it to one of their own grandest anniversaries.[2]

The *Calendarium* says that we cannot compute Easter and Ascension Day, 'but the old in years shall *on circule cræfte* [the zodiac] find out the holy days'.[3] Ælfric says:

> The eighteenth day of the month which we call March . . . was the first day of the world. . . . Now, the Hebrews begin their year on the day when all the seasons were appointed, that is on the fourth day of the world's creation; and the doctor Bede reckons . . . that that day is the twenty-first of March, the day which we celebrate in honour of the holy man Benedict, for his great excellencies. Aye, the earth also makes known by her plants which then return to life, that the time at which they were created is the most correct beginning of the year. Now foolish men practise manifold divinations on this day, with great error, after the heathen custom . . . as if they could prolong their life or their health.[4]

Speaking of 21 March, the *Calendarium* says, 'But after four nights [from the time] that earls celebrate the Equinox, the Father sent his Archangel [to announce to Mary].'[5]

May, says Bede, was called *Thrimilchi*, 'because in it the cattle were milked three times a day. For such once was the fertility of Britain, or of Germany from which the nation of the English came into Britain.'[6]

June and July are both named *Lida* by Bede: the name seems therefore to be connected with the season summer, rather than with particular months. He adds: 'When Embolismus, that is a year of thirteen lunar months, occurs, they assign the extra month

[1] 'Eástre, the goddess of the rising sun, whose festivities were in April [i.e. at the vernal equinox]. Hence used by Teutonic Christians for the rising of the sun of righteousness, the feast of the Resurrection' (Bosworth–Toller).

[2] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. i, p. 290.

[3] *Calendarium*, ll. 130–1.

[4] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 101.

[5] *Calendarium*, ll. 96 ff.

[6] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15.

to summer, so that then three months are called by the name Lida, and on account of it that year is surnamed *Thrilidi*.'[1]

'Let no one,' says St. Eligius, 'on the festival of St. John, . . . join in *solstitia*, or dances, or leaping, or *caraulas*.'[2]

Dancing seems to have formed a large part of the ritual of the heathen festivals, and it would appear that the Church took this over into the corresponding Christian festivals. Nuns are spoken of as dancing in a church in the eighth and ninth centuries, and there are repeated rebukes from the clergy. 'The word *lāc*', says Gummere, 'means in Anglo-Saxon both a religious ceremony and a game or play, a dance or "leaping"; the second syllable of "wedlock" is the same word, and points to a religious ceremony.'[3]

There are various injunctions in the Anglo-Saxon laws and penitentials against dancing and similar performances: 'Jocationes et saltationes,' says the first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, 'vel lusa diabolica', neither in the church itself, nor in the houses, nor in the piazza (*in plateis*), nor in any other place are allowed, 'because this has remained from the practice of the pagans.'[4]

The Canons of Edgar enact 'that on feast-days, heathen songs (*hæðenra leóða*) and devil's games (*deófles gamena*) be abstained from.'[5]

In 1287 a synod at Exeter rules 'ne quisquam luctus, choreas vel alios ludos inhonestos in coemeteriis exercere praesumat, praecipue in vigiliis et festis sanctorum'.

The late S. J. Crawford called my attention to the story in Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* (A.D. 1303) of the *Coueyne* of maidens who danced in the churchyard at Colbek (= Cölbigk, in Anhalt)

> Hyt was vpp-on a crystemesse ny3t
> Þat twelue folys a karolle dy3t;

and of their punishment. The refrain they sang was

> Equitabat Beuo per siluam frondosam,
> Ducebat secum Merswyndam formosam,
> Quid stamus, cur non imus?[6]

[1] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15.
[2] S. R. Maitland, *Dark Ages*, p. 151.
[3] Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, p. 452. Cf. also Lake (sb.[2]) in *O.E.D.*
[4] MS. C.C.C.C. 190, First penitential, xxvii. 9.
[5] Canons of Edgar, 18.
[6] Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ll. 9015 ff. (E.E.T.S., Original Series, 119, 123, ed. Furnivall.) See also notes by Kenneth Sisam in his *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921).

This legend is obviously a variant of that told in William of Malmesbury's Chronicle by one Ethelbert 'a sinner', who danced on Christmas Eve, 1012, with eighteen companions (fifteen men and three women) in the churchyard of St. Magnus the Martyr of a certain town in Saxony. The dancing and singing of profane songs disturbed the mass, and the performers were therefore cursed by the priest and had to continue for a year. The phrase 'we neither wore our clothes or shoes' seems to indicate a fertility dance, and 'First we sank into the ground up to our knees, next up to our thighs' is reminiscent of the 'Quid stamus, cur non imus?' of the Colbek episode.

The story is given also in the *Flores Historiarum* with some variations. Here the town is named Colewi3: Ethelbert is not mentioned. The son of the priest attempts to rescue his sister, who is one of the dancers, but without success, for he tore her arm from her body. 'Howbeit not a drop of blood followed, and she remained a whole year dancing with the rest.'[1]

In 1282 the priest of Inverkeithing was brought before the bishop for leading a fertility dance at Easter round the phallic figure of a god,[2] and as late as 1590 Barbara Napier was accused of dancing 'endlang the Kirk-yaird' on All Hallows' Eve, at North Berwick.[3]

August was called *Weód-mónaþ*, because the weeds abound in that month; and finally September was called *hálig-mónaþ* (= *mensis sacrorum*, Bede). The *Calendarium* says it was so called because Christianity was first preached in England in that month, and adds, some lines later: 'we celebrate . . . the feast of the archangel Michael in harvest . . . five nights after that the day of equinox is made known to people, to earls.'[4]

(*f*) *Witchcraft and sorcery*

Sorcery and witchcraft are included by Ælfric among the fourteen deadly sins which 'will not be purged in the penal fire', but are reserved for punishment in the eternal fire.[5]

[1] *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. A. Luard, vol. i, pp. 531–2 (Rolls Series).
[2] *Chronicle of Lanercost*, trans. Sir Herbert Maxwell, Glasgow, 1913, p. 29.
[3] R. Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol. i, pt. 2, p. 245. (Cited by M. A. Murray, *Witchcraft in Western Europe*, Oxford, 1921, pp. 54–55, 110.)
[4] *Calendarium*, ll. 342–8.
[5] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. ii, p. 593.

There are a large number of words, often with differing shades of meaning, which denote magical practices under this heading.

It is interesting to note that Anglo-Saxon *galdor* (incantation) and the word 'charm' derive respectively from words meaning 'to sing'. This suggests that a form of singing, or rhythmic recitation, was the original method of uttering incantations.

The Old Norse form was *galdr*: its compound *val-galdr*, the charm employed for conjuring the dead, has already been mentioned. The Old High German was *galdar* and *bigalan*, to charm with spells: Schroeder says that *galdar* was the word for the charm itself, but a charm with a narrative introduction was called *spell*: the *spell* was spoken, the *galdar* sung.[1]

Finnish magic was also performed by means of song. Vainamoinen is a singer, and when he performs incantations, he sings them. The contest in magical powers between Vainamoinen and Youkahainen proceeds by means of singing.[2] Vainamoinen thus sings his adversary into the marsh up to his chin. To release him, he seats himself on the 'stone of song', and sings the charm backwards for three hours, and so breaks the spell. There are numerous other examples both in the *Kalevala* and in the Magic Songs.

The *ljoð-smíð* of the *Ynglinga Saga*, who are the immediate followers of Odin and his chosen comrades, resemble the Finnish *runoias*. The saga says of Odin, 'All this art [*skald-craft*] taught he by runes and songs called wizard songs, wherefore are the As-folk called smiths of wizardry.'[3]

The English (and German) word *spell* has also a long history. *Spilla* is the word used in the Gothic translation of the Bible for 'old wives' fables':[4] in Old High German it was originally the equivalent of *sermo* and of *parabola*, and later that of *fabula*. In Anglo-Saxon also, spell has the sense of story; it has acquired its magical significance in later times.[5]

Another method of reciting charms was by whispering or murmuring. This was derived from the Romans, for Ovid says: 'Ter novies carmen magico demurmurat ore.'[6] The instructions to a

[1] E. Schroeder, 'Über das Spell', *Zeitschr. f. deutsch. Altertum*, 1893, xxxvii. 241–68.

[2] *Kalevala*, rune 3.

[3] *Ynglinga Saga*, 7.

[4] 1 Timothy iv. 7.

[5] The earliest quotation given in the *O.E.D.* is Elizabethan.

[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xiv. 58.

sorcerer in an Old High German charm is *Tu rûne imo in daz ora.* Hence, the Anglo-Saxon words *leód-rúne, hel-rúne,*[1] for a witch. The Old High German *helliruna* signifies necromancy. *Rún-stæf* is a magical letter: such were written on swords for magical purposes, or worn as periapts, as in the story of Imma. This thane is asked whether he knew *alýsendlícan rúne* (i.e. *literas solutorias*) in the version of Bede: in the version of Ælfric he is asked whether he broke his bonds through *drýcræft* or through *rúnstafas.*

Another Anglo-Saxon word for sorcerer is *wicca*: for sorceress *wicce.* The word *wælcyrge* (Icelandic *valkyrja*) is also used for sorceress, especially in the laws.

The word *scín*, an extraordinary or deceptive appearance (possibly connected with *scín*, brightness), has given the word *scín-cræft* for magic, the art by which such appearances are produced, and so *scíncraftiga* and *scínere*, a sorcerer. Akin to this in meaning are *gedwol-cræft,*[2] deception, and *ge-dwomer*, necromancy. *Gedwimor*[3] is a phantom or delusion.

The word *malscrung* signified fascination, the condition produced when a person is under the influence of a charm (Latin, *fascinatio*). A charm in the third *Leechbook* for using the stones which are found in the maw of young swallows is, *inter alia*, for bewitching (*malscra*), and for incantation (*gealdor*) by evil crafts.[4]

The word *hægtesse*, a witch, is cognate with the German *hexe* and the English *hag.*

The words *drý*, a sorcerer, and its derivative, *drýcræft*, are said to show Celtic influence and to be derived from the Irish *drui.* The fact that there are no cognate words in other Teutonic languages supports the probability of its being a Celtic loanword.[5]

The word *lybb* means both a drug and a poison. It often implies the use of witchcraft, especially in its compounds. Thus, *lybbestre* (cf. O.H.G. *luppari*) signifies a witch, *lyb-læca*, a sorcerer, and *lyb-cræft*, skill in the use of *lybb*, i.e. magic.[6]

[1] *Hel-rúna*, a sorcerer, is found once. (*Beowulf*, l. 163.) For the Gothic form, *haljarunae*=women conjurors of the dead, see page 135.

[2] Cf. *Blickling Homilies*, p. 63, l. 14.

[3] Cf. Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 86, l. 18.

[4] *Leechbook III*, 1. The verb *to masker* (= to bewilder, confuse), now obsolete except in dialect, is the same word as *malscrian.* See *O.E.D.*

[5] See my article, 'The dissimilarity of ancient Irish magic from that of the Anglo-Saxons', in *Folk-lore*, 1926, xxxvii. 285–6.

[6] Cf. *Blickling Homilies*, p. 229, l. 12.

Lybesn is a charm or amulet: it is equated in Wright's Vocabularies with *obligamentum*. *Unlybba* is either poison or sorcery,[1] whence *unlybwyrhta* is one who prepares poisons for purposes of witchcraft: Wulfstan groups together *wyccan* and *wælcyrian* and *unlybwyrhtan*,[2] and in another place couples them with *drýmen* and *wigleras* as companions for Antichrist.[3] *Wyrt-gælstre* is a woman who uses herbs for charms.

Schütte says that sorceresses on the Continent 'are always called by professional names, never by personal ones: Veleda, Albruna, Ganna, Waluburg. The name *veleda* is borrowed from Celtic; Old Irish *fili*, gen. *filed*, from the root *vel* "to see". *Ganna* is probably connected with Old Norse, *gandr*, "Stick, wizard's wand." . . . *Waluburg* is probably connected with Gothic *walus*, "stick".'[4] The *gann* was the magic dart used by the Finnish sorcerer. I suggest that this word is also connected with *Ganna*. In either case it is the instrument used by the sorcerer for magical purposes. A derivation from the Old Norse *gandr* is *gand-riða*, a rider on a witch's wand; which is reminiscent of the broomstick of later times.

The power of witches and sorcerers, and the consequent danger, are demonstrated in the Anglo-Saxon laws and penitentials.

1. *General laws*

The laws of King Alfred say: 'The women who are wont to receive enchanters (*gealdor-cræftigan*) and workers of phantasms (*scín-læcan*), and witches (*wiccan*), suffer thou not to live.'[5]

The laws of Edward and Guthrum enact: 'If witches or diviners (*wígleras*) or poisoners (*morð-wyrhtan*) . . . be found anywhere within the land, let them be driven from the country and the people cleansed.'[6]

King Athelstan ordains, '*be þæm wicce-cræftum & liblacum & be morð-dædum*, if any one should be thereby killed, and he could not deny it, that he be liable in his life. But if he will deny it, and at the threefold ordeal shall be guilty, that he be 120 days in prison . . . and that he evermore desist from the like.'[7]

[1] Cf. 'Confessional of Ecgbert', 29 (MS. C.C.C.C. 190).
[2] Wulfstan, *Homilies*, 298, 19. [3] Ibid. 194, 18.
[4] G. Schütte, *Our Forefathers, the Gothonic Nations*, trans. Young, vol. i, p. 237.
[5] Laws of Alfred, 30.
[6] Laws of Edward and Guthrum, 11.
[7] Laws of Athelstan, 6.

The laws of Edmund, Æthelred, and Cnut contain similar passages.[1]

Similar enactments appear in continental laws. One of the earliest Icelandic Church ordinances says, 'If any one engages in witchcraft or charm-magic, he shall lose his freedom.'[2] A Norwegian law runs: 'Every woman who uses charm remedies, and declares that she can help people, if convicted thereof, shall pay three shillings.'[3]

2. *Particular laws*

The following passages deal with particular acts of witchcraft:

(i) *Love potions.* 'If any one perform witchcraft (*veneficiis utatur*) on any one on account of [i.e. to win] love, and give him anything in his food or in his drink, or perform incantations of any kind, so that their love thereby may be increased . . . he shall fast.'[4]

(ii) *Stacung.* King Edgar enacts: '*Gif hwá drífe stacan on man*, he shall do penance for three years'—or seven if the man dies of it.[5] This alludes to the practice of thrusting a pin (*staca*) into the image of a person, whom it was intended to injure. There is an actual record of this about the year 950. 'A widow and her son drove an iron pin into Alsie, Wulfstan's father. . . . They removed the *morþ* [= the image of the victim which she was using] from her inner chamber. Then they took the woman and drowned her at London Bridge.' Presumably the son escaped.[6]

This practice is mentioned under the name *invultuacio* in the laws of Henry I.[7] Its perpetrators were called *vulti-voli*, whom John of Salisbury describes as 'those who press out in some soft material, such as wax or mud, effigies of those men whose dispositions (*affectus*) they wish to change'.[8]

(iii) *Enchanting by runes.* The word *rún* was used both in Anglo-Saxon and in Norse in two senses, either as a letter of the old

[1] Laws of Edmund, 6; of Æthelred, vi. 7; of Cnut (secular), 4.
[2] P. Herman, *Nordische Mythologie*, 1903, p. 566. [3] Ibid., p. 567.
[4] Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, iv. 18. Cf. also Canons of Edgar (*modus imponendi poenitentiam*), 39. Cf. also Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, xvii (*De auguriis*), ll. 157–8 (E.E.T.S., vol. i, p. 375).
[5] Canons of Edgar (*modus imponendi poenitentiam*), 38. Cf. also Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, iv. 17.
[6] Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum aevi Saxonici*, 1865, p. 230.
[7] Laws of King Henry I, 71. 1.
[8] John of Salisbury, *De nugis curialium*, i. 12.

alphabet, or as something secret. The two meanings are not always clearly distinguished.[1]

The invention of runes is ascribed to Odin.[2] The Eddic poems tell of the origin of runes:

> They were engraven on the shield that stands before the shining God . . . on the midwife's palm, on the healing footprint, on men's amber and gold, on talismans, on wine and wort. . . . All that were engraven were scraped off, and mixed with holy mead, and sent away on every side. The Anses have some, the Elves have some, some the wise Wanes have: mortal men have some . . . profit by them if thou canst.[3]

The Anglo-Saxons engraved charms and washed them into drink.[4]

The writing of runes was regarded as a deed which might have important consequences. Thus Egil says: 'No man ought to cut runes unless he knows quite clearly how to interpret them. . . . I saw ten runes written on a piece of whale-bone which brought long-enduring misery to a maiden.'[5]

The witch whom the Saga makes responsible for the death of Grettir 'carved runes on the root [of a tree she found on the sea shore] and reddened them with her blood and said spells over them. She went widdershins round the tree, and said over it mighty words.' Then she sent it across the sea to Drangey to bring disaster to Grettir.[6]

The belief that magic power existed in runic letters, and that it was made active by writing them against the person to be injured, continued down to Christian times.

(iv) *Weather.* The Penitential of Bede says that 'those who conjure up storms (*emissores tempestatum*) shall do penance for seven years'.[7] Egbert in his Penitential also imposes seven years.[8] Finnish wizards were specially accredited with the power of raising storms. In the Saga of King Olaf the Holy, for instance, it is said that 'the Finns made in the night wild weather and storm at sea with their sorcery'.[9]

[1] The Gaelic word *run* has also the meaning of secret. See also D. E. M. Clarke, *The Hávamál*, p. 37.

[2] *Ynglinga Saga*, 7.

[3] Spell song, lines 10–34. (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i, pp. 29–30.)

[4] *Leechbook I*, lxii. 3; also *Lacn.* 11 (xxix).

[5] *Egilssaga*, 72.

[6] *Grettissaga*, 81.

[7] Bede, *Penitential*, vi. 14.

[8] Egbert, *Penitential*, iv. 14.

[9] *Heimskringla*, vol. ii, p. 10. (Saga Library.)

3. *Individual witches*

This section on witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon times would not be complete without the story of the witch of Berkeley. This is told by William of Malmesbury under the year 1065, and therefore just comes into our period.

There lived at Berkeley a woman addicted to witchcraft. After expatiating on her evil life, the chronicler tells how she perceived that her doom was at hand. She took to her bed, and when she discovered that her disorder was rapidly approaching her vitals, she summoned her two children, who, strange to say, were a monk and a nun. To these she made confession, and told them that she depended on them to defend her against the evil spirits who were her foes. She continued:

> I entreat you to endeavour to alleviate my sufferings, and although you cannot revoke the sentence passed upon my soul, yet you may perhaps rescue my body by these means: sew up my corpse in the skin of a stag:[1] lay it on its back in a stone coffin: fasten down the lid with lead and iron: on this lay a stone, bound round with three iron chains of enormous weight: let there be psalms sung for fifty nights, and masses said for an equal number of days. . . . If I lie thus secure for three nights, on the fourth day, bury me, your mother, in the ground.

She died and they did their best to carry out her injunctions. On the first two nights, while the choir of priests was singing psalms around the body, the devils burst open the door of the church although it was fastened with an immense bolt. They then broke the two outer chains round the coffin, but could not break the middle one, which was stronger. On the third night, about cock-crow, the very foundations of the monastery seemed to be shaken by the clamour of the approaching enemy. A gigantic devil, who was of more terrible appearance than the rest, broke the doors of the church to shivers. The priests were paralysed with fear, and their hair stood on end. The devil advanced haughtily to the coffin, and calling on the woman by name, commanded her to rise. She replied that she could not on account of the chains.

'You shall be loosed', he said, and immediately broke the chain, which had withstood the other devils, as though it had been made of flax. He then broke the lid of the coffin with his foot and, taking the woman by the hand, dragged her out of the church. At the

[1] See my article, 'Animal-skins in magic and medicine', *Folklore*, 1962, lxxiii, pp. 128–9.

door stood a black horse, with iron hooks projecting all over his back. The wretched woman was placed thereon, and together with the whole party of devils, immediately vanished. Her piteous cries for assistance, however, were heard for the distance of nearly four miles.

(*g*) *Augury and divination*

Divination and prognostics were important matters to the Anglo-Saxons as they had been to the Romans.[1] Cockayne in the third volume of his *Leechdoms* prints much on this subject.

Augury and divination were practised among the Teutons in various ways. One method was by lot. Tacitus says of the Germans of the first century of our era: 'Augury and divination by lot no people practise more diligently. The use of the lots is simple. They cut off the twig of a fruit-bearing tree, and cut it into little wands. These they thereupon distinguish by certain marks, and catch them at random and fortuitously upon a white garment.'[2] He also says that they divined by the whinnying of horses. The use of augury and divination survived in Germany: it is recorded there again in the eighth century, for the thirteenth and fourteenth headings of the *Indiculus* deal with it (*De divinis et sortilegis*). It also remained among the Anglo-Saxons. Augury and divination were always vigorously suppressed by the laws and condemned in the penitentials; but this was not the case with the lot, except in connexion with heathen practices.

In the laws of Edward and Guthrum, and later in those of Æthelred and of Cnut,[3] diviners (*wígleras*) are mentioned in the company of witches and others as people to be driven from the country. The laws of Henry I deal with the man who 'vel veneno, vel sortilegio, seu maleficio aliquo faciat homicidium'.[4] The Council of Clovesho in 747 forbids 'paganas observationes, id est, divinos, sortilegos, auguria, auspicia, fylacteria, incantationes', &c.[5]

Theodore says: 'He who celebrates auguries, omens from birds (*auspicia*) or dreams, or any divinations according to the custom of the heathen . . . if they belong to the clergy they shall be cast out; but if they are secular persons they shall do penance for

[1] See Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, *passim*.
[2] Tacitus, *Germania*, 10.
[3] Laws of Edward and Guthrum, 11; of Æthelred, vi. 7; of Cnut (secular), 5.
[4] Laws of Henry I, 71, 1.
[5] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, p. 364.

five years.'[1] The penitential of Bede also imposes penance for five years.[2] Ælfric speaks of auguries 'from birds, or from sneezings, from horses, or from dogs'.[3]

Since the primary meaning of the word *tán* (lot) is a twig, it is evident that the Old German method survived, at least as far as the instrument was concerned. In the *Andreas* of Cynewulf, when the folk cast lots to find which of them is to be eaten, *tán* is the word used.[4] The use of twigs for purposes of the lot also survived in Iceland till the eleventh century, for Ari, writing of the temple in his native town, says that a table stood in the midst of the floor and that 'on the table there was wont also to stand the bowl of sortilege, and therein the twigs of sortilege'.[5]

The English word 'lot' comes from the Anglo-Saxon *hlot*, whence *hlyta*, a diviner by means of casting lots. The compound *tán-hlyta* (= *sortilegus*) is also found. Other words for diviner are *wíglere*, whence *steor-wíglung*, divination by stars, or astrology: *hwata*,[6] whence *fugel-hwata*, a diviner by means of birds, the equivalent of the late Latin *caragius*: and *hælsere*, from *hælsian*, to foretell.

A method of divining especially obnoxious to both Church and State was *fyrht*.[7] It is forbidden in the Law of the Northumbrian Priests to 'practise any heathenship, either by sacrifice or by *fyrht*'.[8] The secular laws of Cnut operate against those who deal 'aut in sorte, aut in *fyrhte*, vel in similibus fantasiis'.[9] The exact Latin equivalent was hard to find, but the men who practised it were aware of what was forbidden. Light is shed on this practice from both Scandinavia and Scotland. Meissner thinks it is the same as the Norse *frétt*,[10] while Henderson observes that 'this species of divination which we owe to the Norse is by no means extinct in the Hebrides'.[11] Carmichael says that it was performed

[1] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xv. 4.

[2] Bede, *Penitential*, vi. 13. Cf. also Penitential of Ecgbert, viii.

[3] Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, xvii (*De auguriis*, ll. 89–90). (E.E.T.S., o.s., 82, vol. i, p. 371.)

[4] *Andreas*, l. 1099.

[5] *Eyrbyggia Saga*, ch. 4 (quoting Ari's lost *Islendinga-bók*). (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i, p. 403.)

[6] The Canons of Edgar (16) enjoin that every priest forbid auguries and incantations (*hwata* and *galdra*).

[7] For more modern use, see *O.E.D.* under 'freit' (='Anything to which superstition attaches').

[8] Law of the Northumbrian Priests, 48.

[9] Secular Laws of Cnut, 5.

[10] R. Meissner, '*Ganga til fréttar*', *Zeitschr. d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, 1917, xxvii. 4.

[11] Henderson, *The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland*, Glasgow, 1910, p. 73.

to ascertain the position and condition of the absent and the lost, and was applied to man and beast. The augury was made on the first Monday of the quarter, and immediately before sunrise. The augurer, fasting and with bare feet, bare head and closed eyes, went to the doorstep and placed a hand in each jamb. Mentally beseeching the God of the unseen to show him his quest, and to grant him his augury, the augurer opened his eyes and looked steadfastly straight in front of him. From the nature and position of the objects within his sight, he drew his conclusions.[1]

It was in Scandinavia that divination to learn the future reached its highest forms, the chief rite being *seiðr*.[2] In *seiðr*, a *spákona* (prophetess) makes a magical circle, and summons spirits by a magic song. This song is the most important part of the rite, for it forces the spirits to impart to her the knowledge she seeks. Various examples are given by Meissner.

The fullest description of a witch, that of the spae-wife Thorbjörg, and her method of divination, found in the sagas, is in *Eiriks Saga*.[3] She performed in order to find out when a famine which was raging in Greenland would cease. The food provided for her was 'porridge with kid's milk, but for meat to her were prepared the hearts of every kind of animal that could be got there. She had a brass spoon and an ivory-handled knife, with two rings of brass upon it, and the point of it was broken.' Next morning a song was sung by another woman, while Thorbjörg sat on the spell-seat. The song caused the presence of many spirits, whence Thorbjörg knew that the famine would soon cease.[4]

Famine and fertility were naturally subjects of so great importance that such inquiries were especially made regarding them. Dr. Hilda Ellis remarks in this connexion:

> In any society where agriculture mattered intensely because a year of bad crops meant suffering and famine, as in Scandinavia, it is obvious that a knowledge of the coming seasons was one of the aspects of the glimpse into the future which could be of the greatest value. The chief question put to the *völva* in *Þorfinns Saga Karlsefnis* (iv) is whether the bad harvests and the plague from which the community was then

[1] A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, Edinburgh, 1928, vol. ii, p. 158.

[2] For Odin and *seiðr*, see *Ynglinga Saga*, 7. Apparently there was a kind of *seiðr* connected with the cult of Frey, for Snorri says (ch. 4) that Freya was the first to teach it to the Æsir, 'according to the wont of the Vanir'. See also E. Mogk, article 'Zauber', in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, §§ 14–15.

[3] *Eiriks Saga*, ch. 3.

[4] W. A. Craigie, *Scandinavian Folk-lore*, pp. 337–40.

suffering would come to an end. . . . The living *völva* might foretell the course of the plague [as was the case with Thorbjörg mentioned above] but in herself had no powers to make it cease.[1]

In the *Vatnsdæla Saga* also there is the description of a feast, with magical rites, to inquire into the future. This story shows the belief in the power of prophecy and the impossibility of fighting against it. It runs as follows: Ingemund, the son of Thorstan of Reamsdale in the north of Norway, aided King Harold Shock-head to win the battle of Hafrs-frith. As a reward, the king gave him a small image or teraph in the form of 'a Frey stamped out of silver'. Ingeald, Ingemund's foster-father, then made him a great feast, and to it 'there was come a witch—a Finnish woman'. She 'was set on a lofty seat and arrayed in the finest way. Men went up to her to inquire of her, each from his place in turn, to ask after their fates.' Ingemund said he did not want to know the future, but the witch insisted on telling him that he would go to Iceland. 'It shall come about as I say, and this shall be a sign thereof, that the teraph which King Harold gave thee at Hafrs-frith is vanished away out of thy purse and is now come to the very holt where thou shalt settle there.' The teraph had vanished, but Ingemund struggled hard against the fate prophesied for him. Then 'he sent after Finns, and there came three from the north'. He said he would reward them if they would 'do his errand to Iceland, to seek after his teraph, and tell him about the lie of the land'. They told him to shut them up together in a house and no man must name their names.

And when three nights were gone, Ingemund came to them. They rose up then and drew a deep breath and said: 'It was a hard piece of work for thy messengers . . . it was a hard job for us to seek the teraph, and great is the power of the Finnwoman's prophetic words.' They had however found it, but 'whenever we sought after it it ever ran away, and over it lay always a kind of cover so that we could not get near it, and thou must go thyself'. Then he said that he would do so, declaring that it was no good trying to stand out against prophecy.[2]

King Edwin of Northumbria is stated in the *Flores Historiarum* to have possessed an 'astrologus' named Pellitus. This man is said to have been very useful to the king in his campaign against

[1] Ellis, op. cit., p. 167.

[2] *Vatnsdæla Saga*, 10–12. (Vigfusson and Powell, *Origines Islandicae*, vol. ii, pp. 289–91.)

Cadwallon. The latter was unable to effect a landing, since the astrologer informed his master of everything that was happening: Cadwallon, however, sent his nephew in disguise to York, where he killed the magician.[1]

(*h*) *Astrology*

In astrology any undertaking which is influenced for good by any planet must be commenced in the hour in which that planet is dominant. As Jupiter is the most propitious planet for the letting of blood or for taking medicine, all prescriptions for these should bear the sign of this planet.

Astrology in Anglo-Saxon times was in a very elementary state. The ban of the Church had destroyed the old judicial system, and only remnants of the study were left until the recovery in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the Arabian revival. Thus astrological references are rare in Anglo-Saxon material. The evil repute in which it was held is shown by the following words of Ælfric:

> We are also to know that there were some heretics who said that every man is born according to the position of the stars, and that by their course his destiny befalls him, and advanced in support of their error, that a new star sprang up when the Lord was corporally born, and said that that star was his destiny. Let this error depart from believing hearts. . . . Man is not created for the stars, but the stars are created as a light by night for men.[2]

The occurrence of comets is carefully noted in the various chronicles. Gaimar mentions divinations in connexion with that of 1066: 'Many people looked at it, in many places there were divinations; everyone gave his prophecy.'[3] It has already been noted that comets heralded the occurrence of pestilence.

Astrology is also forbidden in the Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190: 'Non est permissum vana auguria (*hwatunga*) facere, uti gentiles faciunt, (id est, quod credant in solem et lunam, et in cursum stellarum; et auguria temporum exquirant, ad negotia sua incipienda).'[4]

[1] *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. i, p. 306 (Rolls Series).

[2] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 111.

[3] Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engles*, ed. Hardy and Martin, ll. 5145–55 (Rolls Series).

[4] Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, ii. 23.

Ælfric also forbids this: 'No Christian man shall practise anything in the way of divination (*wiglian*) by the moon.'[1]

The magical figure called the Circle of Petosiris, found in various Anglo-Saxon and English manuscripts from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, was derived from Greek astrology, or at least from Pythagoreanism. Celtic influence is seen in the treatment of the earlier examples, Byzantine in the later. The circle is also called the 'sphera Apulei Platonici de vita et morte'. The instructions for use showed how to estimate the numerical value of the name of the sick man, and, calculating by means of the moon's age on the day when the sickness began, to prognosticate if he would recover or die.[2] Parallels are to be found in modern Greek folk-medicine.

The Circle of St. Columcille, a variant of the circle of Apuleius, occurs in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the eleventh century.[3] The stone on which it was to be inscribed was to be used for charming bees, but the days of the moon appear inside the circle as in that of Petosiris.[4]

[1] Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, viii (De saltu lunae), 7 (ed. H. Henel, E.E.T.S., o.s., 213, 1942). Also in Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 266, where it is headed 'Starcraft from Beda'; but see Henel's note, p. xlii.

[2] See, for example, MS. Cotton Tiberius C. VI (II), fo. 6*b* beginning 'Collige per numeros quicquid cupis esse probandum'.

[3] B. M., Cotton Vitellius, E. XVIII, fo. 13*b*. Figured in Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. 395.

[4] The legend of the origin of this magical figure was given by Singer in his British Academy lecture on 'Early English Magic and Medicine'. Various prognostics from the moon's age are given in Cockayne, vol. iii, pp. 152 ff. Singer figures an example of the Circle of Petosiris (Pythagoras) with a Greek script which is found in St. John's Coll., Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 8*a*, was written at Ramsey *c.* 1100. He also gives a figure of the Circle of St. Columcille from the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, fo. 13*b* (Singer, *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1919–20, ix. 363). See also Singer in Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, 1952, pp. 48, 66, for other reproductions of these figures.

CHAPTER IX

Elves, Elf-shot, and Nightmare[1]

In Anglo-Saxon times diseases were erroneously attributed to many causes which were usually of a supernatural nature. The object was malevolence, with or without provocation. The evil was most usually attributed to the elves (who attacked with their arrows) or to 'flying venom'; these may be taken as the equivalents of sudden illness and of infection respectively. A spirit might also act at the suggestion and through the instrumentality of a human enemy: this last comes under the head of sorcery or witchcraft.

These beliefs were widely spread throughout northern Europe. The Æsir themselves, at any rate after the coming of Christianity, were accredited with such malevolence. The passage in the *Lacnunga*

> Were it Æsir shot, or Elves' shot
> Or Hag's shot, now will I help thee.[2]

shows the descending stages of powers—the Æsir, the smaller but still supernatural elves, and the human witch or hag. The Irish *Lorica* of St. Patrick (?fifth or sixth century A.D.) offers protection 'against incantations of false prophets . . . and against spells of women, and smiths, and druids', thus sub-classifying the human element.

'Anglo-Saxon, and even Middle-English, literature', says Singer, 'is replete with the notion of disease caused by the arrows of mischievous supernatural beings.' This is called elf-shot, and, according to the same writer,[3] is a characteristic of native Teutonic —whether Anglo-Saxon or continental—as opposed to imported magic. It is, however, equally characteristic of Finnish magic.

The compound word 'elf-shot' appears to signify an elf's arrow, but, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'shot',

[1] The substance of this chapter was read before the Oxford Meeting of the British Association, 11 August 1926, and published in *Folk-lore*, 1926, xxxvii. 350–63, under the title 'Magical practices against elves'.

[2] *Lacn.* 76 (CXXXV).

[3] See p. 43.

besides having its usual significance in connexion with shooting, has the meaning 'a sudden sharp pain',[1] and also, as a rare meaning, 'a sudden attack of illness or disease' which occurs in dialect.

Dalyell in his *Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (pp. 22–23) quotes the following 'charm for curing cattle'. In a footnote he equates the suffix '-schot' with 'distemper':

> I charge thee for arrowschot,
> For doorschot, for wombschot,
> For eyeschot, for tungschote,
> For leverschote, for lungschote,
> For hertschote,—all the maist:
> In the name of the Father, the Sone, and Haly Gaist.
> To wend out of flesch and bane,
> In to sek [sek or sok = earth] and stane;
> In the name of the Father, the Sone, and Haly Gaist. Amen.

This occurs in the record of a Scottish witchcraft trial, that of Bartie Paterson, 18 December 1607. Though 'arrowschot', the first disease to be mentioned, may be the same as elf-shot, the other aspects of *-schot* seem more likely to be variations in Scottish dialect of the 'sudden attacks of illness or disease' mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Anglo-Saxon elves are represented as small folk dwelling everywhere, but especially in waste places, where they loved to shoot at the passer-by. The sex of *ælf* seems to be nowhere decisively fixed. It is usually male; the feminine form *ælfen* occurs, however, but only as a suffix, as in *dunælfen*, *wuduælfen*, &c. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the word 'elf' is used of both sexes.[2]

The Middle-English word *elfe* is equated in the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, written in 1440, with the Latin *lamia*, which seems to denote a sort of female centaur.[3]

The Finnish elves (*Maahiset*) dwell under trees, thresholds, and hearthstones. They are ill-natured, and inflict on mankind ulcers, tetter, ringworm, and other cutaneous diseases. They also especially punish 'those who enter new houses without making obeisance to the four corners'. The 'origin' of elf-shot occurs in the *Loitsu-runoja*, the magic songs of the Finns: 'I'll get to know thine origin. . . . Elf-shots have been shot from the regions of divining

[1] Cf. modern German *Hexenschuß* = acute lumbago.
[2] *O.E.D.*
[3] *Promptorium Parvulorum*, Camden Society, 1865, vol. xxv, p. 138.

men, . . . from the trampled fields of sorcerers, . . . from the witchery of long-haired hags, from the distant limits of the north, from the wide country of the Lapp.'[1]

Apparently the elves were especially addicted to shooting their arrows at the domestic animals. There are various charms for horses that have been elf-shot. The term must be taken as having been meant in its literal sense by the Anglo-Saxons. In the *Lacnunga* the following charm occurs: 'If a horse or other beast be shot [*gescoten*]: Take dock seed and Scottish wax. Let a mass-priest sing twelve masses over them, and put holy water on them. And put it then on the horse or whatever beast it be.'[2] The same charm occurs again in the first *Leechbook*, the only difference being that this latter says *ófscoten* instead of *gescoten*.[3] The resinous covering would be a benefit to the wounded animal.

Finally, a curious charm occurs in the second *Leechbook*:

> If a horse be elf-shot [*ófscoten*], then take the knife of which the haft is horn of a fallow ox, and on which are three brass nails, then write upon the horse's forehead Christ's mark and on each of the limbs which thou mayst feel at: then take the left ear, prick a hole in it in silence; this thou shalt do, then take a staff, strike the horse on the back, then will it be whole. And write upon the horn of the knife these words: 'Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum.' Be the elf what it may, this has power against him as a remedy.[4]

Grimm says that he who looks through the hole made in a beast's skin by the elf-arrow can see things otherwise hidden.[5]

The word *stice* has been translated 'stitch' when used for a disease which was caused by the shots of elves or of witches. Since, however, *stice* also means a puncture, I suggest that it signifies the hole made in the victim by the elf-shot. The second *Leechbook* gives two recipes, one *wiþ instice* and the other *wiþ stice butan innoðe sie*: possibly in the former case the elf-shot has penetrated the skin, while in the second it has failed to do so.[6] 'The white stone', says the second *Leechbook* in another passage, 'is powerful against *stice*, and against flying venom, and against all unknown maladies (*bróc*)'[7]—unknown, because caused by supernatural agencies or by

[1] *Loitsu-runoja*, § 5*a* (Abercromby, *Pre- and Proto-historic Finns*, 1898, vol. ii).
[2] *Lacn.* 60 (CXVIII).
[3] *Leechbook I*, lxxxviii. 2.
[4] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 1. Striking the horse was to drive the devil out of him.
[5] J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. ii, p. 461.
[6] *Leechbook II*, liv.
[7] Ibid. lxiv.

witchcraft. The most realistic verses in the *Lacnunga* describing the onset of witches and their discharge of 'little spears' are a charm against *fær-stice*[1] (sudden puncture):

Loud were they, yea loud, when they rode over the hill;
Fierce were they, when they rode over the land. . . .
Sat a smith, a knife he sledged,
Small the iron, woeful the wound.
Out little spear, if herein it be;
Six smiths sat; battle-spears they wrought. . . .
If thou wert shot in skin, or shot in flesh,
Or shot in blood, or shot in bone,
Or shot in limb, may thy life ne'er be shattered.
Were it Æsir shot, or Elves' shot,
Or Hag's shot, now will I help thee.[2]

The Lapp sorcerer had recourse to arrows and darts called *gann*, with which to inflict injuries. The following Finnish charm 'to still violence' is also pertinent:

With what shall I the elfshots squeeze . . . with what extract the sorcerer's bolts . . .? Only yesterday I was in company with smiths, . . . I got made for me little tongs . . . with which I'll lift the sorcerer's bolts. . . . More dreadful are a dead man's hands . . . with them shall I the elfshots squeeze, tightly compress the fairy darts.[3]

The Neolithic arrow-heads, sometimes picked up on the Downs, are often locally known as elf-arrows or elf-bolts. They are still used as periapts. There are also elf-shot traditions in Scotland and Ireland. Edward Lhwyd, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, writing in 1699, speaks of the use of 'shower stones and elf arrows' as amulets in Scotland. The shower stones, he says, were 'in great Esteem for curing of Cattle; and some on May Day put them into a Tub of Water, and besprinkle all their Cattle with that Water, to prevent being Elf-struck'.[4]

[1] Storms (charm 2) translates *færstice* as rheumatism. 'In Germany', he says, 'the word *Geschosz* is used for a headache, a toothache, for general rheumatic affections and gout. From the wording of the charm (ll. 20–22) ['If thou wert shot in skin,' &c.] we can infer that rheumatic pains affecting various parts of the body are meant.'

[2] *Lacn.* 76 (CXXXV).

[3] *Loitsu-runoja*, § 15b.

[4] 'Extracts of several Letters from Mr. Edward Lhwyd . . . containing Observations . . . made in his Travels thro' Wales and Scotland', *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc.*, 1713, xxviii. 98–99.

Keightley says that in Scotland,

> Lowland fairies . . . carry . . . bows made of the ribs of a man buried where three lairds' lands meet; their arrows are made of bog-reed, tipped with white flints, and dipped in the dew of hemlock. . . . With their arrows they shoot the cattle of those who offend them; the wound is imperceptible to common eyes, but there are gifted personages who can discern and cure it.[1]

In Ireland, according to Mooney, 'the prehistoric arrow-head or *saige-ad* occasionally found in the country, is a fairy dart which has been shot at some man or animal, and thus lost. The fortunate finder can counteract the designs of the fairies.' Here, as in Scotland, they are used as a protection against those who originally used them, for 'when an illness is supposed to be due to the influence of the fairies, the *saige-ad* is put into a tumbler and covered with water, which the patient then drinks, and, if the fairies are responsible for his sickness, he at once recovers. The *saige-ad* is preserved in some iron receptacle to prevent the fairies stealing it.'[2]

Wood-Martin speaks of a cow-doctor who 'invariably found that the animal was either "elf-shot" or "dinted," or it might be suffering from both troubles'.[3] 'Elf-shot' was when the arrow had actually pierced the hide, 'dinted' was when there was only an indentation, which, however, could be felt. This doctor had himself a collection of arrow-heads. He would order gruel to be prepared and into it he would put some of his arrow-heads, together with a piece of silver and some soot. 'When all had been boiled well together, and was ready for use, he would take a mouthful and blow it into the animal's ears, another mouthful and blow it over her back, and then he would give the remainder to the cow to drink, and would go away, assuring the owner that she would soon be better.'

The mischief from elves takes various forms in Anglo-Saxon leechdoms. Sometimes the charm is merely (1) 'against an elf'[4] (A.S. *ælf*: cf. M.H.G. *alf*—alp, nightmare). Sometimes it is against the (2) 'elfkind'[5] (A.S. *ælfcynn*), sometimes against (3) 'elf-disease'[6] (A.S. *ælfádl*), sometimes (4) the 'water elf-disease'[7] (A.S. *wæter*

[1] T. Keightley, *Fairy Mythology*, Bohn's Library, 1878, pp. 351–2.

[2] J. Mooney, 'Medical mythology of Ireland', *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.*, 1887, xxiv. 143.

[3] W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, 1902, vol. i, pp. 41–42.

[4] e.g. *Leechbook II*, lxv. 5.

[5] e.g. *Leechbook III*, lx.

[6] e.g. ibid. lxii.

[7] e.g. ibid. lxiii.

ælfádle, though what this was is unknown;[1] *wæter-ádl* is presumably dropsy): sometimes against (5) the 'influence of elves' (A.S. *ælfsiden*, also nightmare: Latin, *impetus castalidum*, *diaboli incubus*). In the charm, 'This is the holy drink against elfin enchantment and for all temptations of the Fiend',[2] the heathen and the Christian causes are classed together and therefore curable by the same charm. The word occurs again in the first *Leechbook*: 'Against every evil witch (A.S. *leódrúne*) and against the influence of elves', a written charm in Greek letters providing the remedy.[3]

The form (6) *ælfsogoþa* is also found ('*sogotha*' is hiccough, or perhaps heartburn). This disease was supposed to be from elfin 'possession', as is seen from the (Latin) charm used to expel it, which runs as follows: 'Almighty God . . . expel from thy servant N, through the laying on of this writing, all attack of the castalides, from his head, from his hair [and from all parts of his body].'[4] The 'castalides' are the Muses, a name derived from the fountain Castalia under Parnassus which was haunted by them, but here equated with *dúnælfen*.[5]

'Elf-cake', according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is an enlargement of the spleen, so called because it was attributed to the agency of the elves.

The term *ilfig* signifies 'mad, frantic', and presumably a man in this condition was therefore considered to be affected by elves.

Ælfthone[6] was so called since it was employed as a remedy for elf-disease (*ælfádl*). The lower part (*niopowearde*) of it, with other herbs, must be first laid under the altar and have nine masses sung over it: then three fragments of it must be given to the patient to eat, and finally it must be laid on hot embers which are placed near him to make him sweat.[7]

[1] Storms translates 'chickenpox'. For his arguments, see his *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 160–1. Grattan and Singer suggest that a 'water-elf has presumably attacked one waterlogged with dropsy, and the element earth will soak up the water and bury the elf'. The charm runs: 'May earth bear on thee with all her might and main.' See Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, 1952, p. 60.

[2] *Lacn.* 11 (XXIX) and *Leechbook III*, xli.

[3] *Leechbook I*, lxiv (wrongly translated by Cockayne, 'against every evil rune lay, and one full of elvish tricks').

[4] *Leechbook III*, lxii.

[5] Bosworth–Toller. See also Wright's *A.S. Vocabularies*, 60, 19.

[6] For an interesting account of how this plant came to be erroneously identified by Cockayne with 'enchanter's nightshade', see Grattan and Singer, pp. 85–86.

[7] *Leechbook III*, lxii.

Elf-dock (or elf-wort) has been identified with elecampane (*helenium*).[1]

Elf-grass is 'a kind of grass yerbwives find, and give to cattle they conceive injured by elves'.[2]

When Christianity came,[3] the elves of heathendom were equated with demons, and therefore diseases caused by them were thought to be the same as demoniacal possession (*deófolseócnes*). Mugwort, mandrake, and periwinkle 'put to flight devil sickness'. Similarly, *sideware*[4] (zedoary), being an unusual substance, is an ingredient in the 'holy drink' against elfin enchantment just mentioned.[5] The charms were, therefore, modified to suit, and it became necessary 'against elf-disease' to dip the herbs in hallowed water, to lay them under the altar, sing psalms and masses over them, and perform other Christian ritual—often in addition to the old heathen rites—before the drink or salve might be safely administered or the demon exorcized.[6]

Kuhn[7] draws parallels between the Germanic elves who fascinate the wanderer at night and the Vedic Apsaras and Gandharvas who fascinate and cause diseases to men and women respectively. Both were thought to enter into the human body and to be driven away by the recitation of a charm[8] and the smelling of a herb called *arâtahî* (? hartshorn). Various herbs, such as St. John's wort and valerian, were also thought to drive away elves.

The elves were regarded as the source of apparitions, especially at night, and therefore of nightmare.[9] Thus, one finds charms against 'the elf-kind and goblins that go by night (*niht-gengan*)', the remedy being the performance of various ceremonies over a collection of herbs which are finally thrown into running water.[10]

[1] But see Grattan and Singer, pp. 90–91.

[2] Quoted in J. Britten and R. Holland, *Dictionary of English Plant-names*, p. 533, with the remark, 'We do not know what is meant.'

[3] Cf. for association of the two, the lines: 'Adiuro te Satanae diabulus aelfae.' MS. Royal 2 A. xx, fo. 45*v*. (8th century).

[4] See pp. 45–46.

[5] *Lacn.* 11 (XXIX).

[6] See *Leechbook III*, lxii, for a good example.

[7] A. Kuhn, *Indische und germanische Segensprüche*, pp. 118 ff.

[8] e.g. *Atharvaveda*, iv. 37.

[9] 'The word "Alp",' says Chantepie de la Saussaye (*Religion of the Teutons*, p. 318), 'restricted at a later time to the meaning of "incubus", "nightmare", does not occur in German literature before the thirteenth century.' In England, however, the connexion of elves with nightmare is much earlier.

[10] *Leechbook III*, lxi.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* finds in betony a shield from 'frightful goblins that go by night and terrible sights and dreams'.[1] Similarly, a Welsh charm runs: 'to prevent dreaming, take the leaves of betony, and hang about your neck, or else drink the juice on going to bed.'[2] Vervain is supposed to have a similar effect.[3] The first *Leechbook* gives the following, betony again being part of the remedy: 'If a mare ride a man, take lupins and garlic and betony, and incense, bind them on a fawn's skin, let the man have the worts on him.'[4] Some plants presumably were thought to cause dreams, as well as being used as a remedy against them. It was said, for instance, of leeks in old Welsh medicine that 'they produce terrible and fearful dreams'.[5]

There are various animal charms for apparitions (*scínlác*) in Sextus Placitus, including the following: 'Let those who suffer apparitions eat lion-flesh; they will not after that suffer any apparition.'[6] Presumably the characteristics of the lion would be transferred to the patient, who would then be fearful no longer.

There appear to be no mineral remedies for apparitions in Anglo-Saxon times. In Anglo-Norman times, however, the jasper was carried as an amulet for this purpose. 'Fantosma toilt a tute gent; si se volt porter en argent.'[7] So also was the diamond: 'Sompnia et visiones et fantasmata non eum terrebunt' who bears it, if he has led a pure life, 'nec quicquam ei nocebit'.[8] According to Benoni, the onyx was said to cause nightmare for this reason: 'in the onyx is a demon, imprisoned in the stone, who wakes only at midnight, causing terror and disturbance to sleepers who wear it.'

But the best charm for nightmare[9] is in the *Lacnunga*. One must take seven little wafers, and write on each wafer the name of one

[1] *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, i. 1. See also *Leechbook II*, lxv. 5, and *Leechbook III*, liv.

[2] *Physicians of Myddvai*, Pt. II, § 399.

[3] Ibid., § 220.

[4] *Leechbook I*, lxiv.

[5] *Meddygon Myddveu*, Pt. I, § 135.

[6] Sextus Placitus, *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, x. 1. Cf. also ibid. v. 12, ix. 1.

[7] Marbode's *Lapidary* (first French version), iv. ll. 161–2 (Studer and Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, Paris, 1924, p. 34).

[8] Alphabetical Lapidary, Arundel MS. 342, fo. 71 (Romania, 1909, xxxviii, 539).

[9] A.S. *dweorh*: literally, therefore, 'for a dwarf'. Cockayne miscopied as *weorh* and translated 'for a warty eruption'.

of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. The description of a nightmare, in the incantation which follows, is most vivid:

Here came stalking in a creature all swathed.
He had his bridle in his hand; said that thou wert his steed;
Laid his bonds on thy neck; they began to move from the land.
As soon as they came off the land, then began their limbs to cool.
Then came stalking in the sister Ear,[1]
She made then an end, and oaths she swore
That never this one the sick should harm
Nor him who might obtain this charm,
Or understood this charm to sing.
Amen, fiat.[2]

This is to be sung first into the left ear of the sufferer, then into his right, then over his head, and finally hung round his neck by one who is a maiden—thus for three days.

That nightmare was regarded as no slight matter is shown by the story in the *Heimskringla* of the Swedish King Vanland's death from nightmare produced by magical means.[3]

This belief in nightmare goes back to classical times, for Pliny says that magicians assure us 'that persons who are apt to be troubled by the gods of the night and by Fauni will experience relief by rubbing themselves morning and evening with the tongue, eyes, gall, and intestines of a dragon, boiled in oil and cooled in the open air at night'.[4]

A cure for nightmare may be found as late as Gerard's time. He says of the peony: 'The blacke graines [i.e. seeds] to the number of fifteene taken in wine or mead is a speciall remedy for those that are troubled in the night with the disease called . . . night Mare . . . and they are also good against melancholicke dreams.'[5]

[1] Reading '[*eá*]*res sweoster*'. That is Eástre, goddess of Dawn and naturally the disperser of the terrors of the night.

[2] *Lacn.* 56 (XCIII), *The Lay of the Night Goblin*, trans. Grattan and Singer. Both this charm and that quoted on p. 161 present many textual difficulties. They are discussed by A. R. Skemp in his article on 'The Old English Charms' in *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 1911, vi. 289–301, and by J. H. G. Grattan in his 'Three Anglo-Saxon Charms from the *Lacnunga*', ibid., 1927, xxii. 1–6. They have also been recently discussed by Storms in *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 168–73. Karl Jost, in his review of Storms's book (*English Studies*, 1950, xxxi. 102), says: '"Then his (the patient's) limbs began to cool" makes for better sense. . . . It is of no account what happens to the disease-spirit and the spider after they had taken their departure; what matters is that the patient should cool.' The 'spider' here mentioned belongs to another interpretation: not Grattan's which I follow.

[3] *Ynglinga Saga*, 16.

[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 24.

[5] Gerard, *Herball*, 1636, p. 984 (Peionie).

As a remedy against seeing visions, the St. John's wort (called Columba's herb) was carried as an amulet in the western islands of Scotland, and was sewed in the neck of one's coat.[1]

In Scandinavian belief, if the mare, who resembles a beautiful maiden, puts her fingers into the mouth of the sleeper to count his teeth, and if time is given her to do this, he at once gives up the ghost. A method for preventing her entrance into the bed is to place one's shoes at bed-time so that the heels are turned to the bed and the points out to the room. The visitor will rattle the shoes during the night but can come no farther.[2]

Sextus Placitus has a remedy consisting, as is usually the case, of unpleasant ingredients, 'to do away a dwarf'. It is to be administered 'ere the hour of the hour of the dwarf's arrival, whether by day or by night it be; his access is terribly strong, and after that it diminishes and departs away'.[3]

A charm against a dwarf (here spelt *dworh*) occurs in MS. Bodley Auct. F. 3. 6, fo. 1. It consists of a series of Latin words to be written on three wafers.[4]

'At times he writhes, as if against a dwarf'[5] is a description of one of the symptoms of asthma, and illustrates the close association in the Anglo-Saxon mind of dwarf and nightmare.

[1] Mackenzie, 'Glimpses of St. Columba in Highland folk-lore', *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Oct. 1895.

[2] Craigie, *Scandinavian Folk-lore*, pp. 271–2.

[3] Sextus Placitus, *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, ix. 17.

[4] Napier, 'Altenglische Miscellen', I. a, in *Archiv f. d. Studium d. neueren Sprachen*, 1890, lxxxiv, 323.

[5] *Περὶ διδάξεων*, 51.

PART 4

The Church as Physician

CHAPTER X

Healing by Holy Men in Person

In the Anglo-Saxon period, as indeed throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, the Church included among its functions the care of the sick. It provided *hospitium* for the infirm and ailing, and its members were especially in bounden duty to perform works of mercy.

St. Benedict made the care of the sick the peculiar care of his followers—'Infirmorum cura ante omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut re vera Christo, ita eis serviatur'—and entrusted it principally to the hands of the 'Cellerarius'. . . . Cassiodorus, however, went much further, recommending the study of medicine to the monks and giving them detailed advice as to the writers of antiquity who should be utilised as a foundation for their principles.[1]

But the chief function of the Church was rather with the soul than with the body. It taught that the body was temporal but the soul eternal: the former must therefore be humiliated in order to save the latter. Its attitude towards medicine was governed by this point of view. St. Ambrose and the early Fathers preached the sinfulness of resorting to medicine as a cure for bodily ills, and advocated instead trust in the intercession of saints. It was, in fact, a test of faith that a man should choose the aid of the Church rather than resort to medicine.

Even Cassiodorus says, when addressing his monks, 'Learn to know the properties of herbs and the blending of drugs, but set all your hopes upon the Lord, who preserves life without end.'[2]

Acting on such authority, it was natural that the enmity of the Church to medicine should have increased as time went on. A synod at Ratisbon in 877 forbade the study of medicine by ecclesiastics (*leges et physicam non studeant sacerdotes*). These injunctions were repeated at the Council of Rheims in 1131 and at the Lateran Council of 1139.[3] As a result medicine passed more and more into the hands of laymen.

[1] M. Neuburger, *History of Medicine*, 1925, vol. ii, pp. 7–8.
[2] Ibid., p. 8.
[3] Gurlt, however, makes the statement that medicine was taught occasionally

Bede's story of the illness of St. Etheldrida illustrates the separation of the Church from the practice of surgery. He states that the *medicus* Cynifrid was called in by the ecclesiastics, and performed the operation on the saint which the ecclesiastics could not undertake. He therefore must have been a layman.[1]

The cure of one disease, however, was a special function of the Church. There were seven orders of priests, to one of which, exorcists, was assigned the duty of expelling 'devils' from those possessed by them.[2] The method of exorcism seems to have consisted of a series of prayers prescribed for this purpose.[3] 'Every day', says Egbert, 'the exorcists are to lay their hands on those possessed.'[4] The phrase *ab infestatione Demonum libera nos, domine* remained in a Scottish litany as late as the sixteenth century.[5]

It was also a function of the priest to say masses for the sick man and to anoint him with oil so that he might be cured. 'Unguo te N. oleo sancto,' says the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, one of the few pre-Conquest English service books which has survived,'. . . ut non lateat in te spiritus immundus, neque in membris, neque in medullis, neque in nulla compagine membrorum, sed in te habitet virtus Christi . . . quatenus per huius operationem mysterii et per hanc sacrati olei unctionem atque nostram deprecationem virtute sanctae trinitatis medicatus sive sanatus pristinam et melioratam recipere merearis sanitatem.'[6]

Yet, in spite of this antagonism to medicine, the healing of the sick throughout the Middle Ages was in the hands of the Church. It follows that non-medical means were those which the Church employed.

As disease was regarded as a supernatural visitation, supernatural means were naturally used to avert and cure it. It was a function of the saint, following in the footsteps of Christ Himself, to cure the sick. The pages of Bede and others show that the Anglo-Saxon saints nobly did their share in this work. The most successful cures

in abbey schools in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But he gives no reference for this (E. Gurlt, *Geschichte der Chirurgie*, Berlin, 1898, vol. ii, p. 143).

[1] See pp. 98–99.

[2] For cases of *deófol-seócnes* and its cure, see Ch. XVI.

[3] Canons of Ælfric, 13; Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 11.

[4] *Excerptiones Egberti . . . e dictis . . . sanctorum*, 84. 'Canon Cartag[inensis].'

[5] *Breviarium Aberdonense*, vol. ii, fo. lxix. (Quoted by J. G. Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, 1835, p. 601.)

[6] *Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. H. A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. xi, 1896, p. 292.

were probably those of functional disorders, and were accomplished by means of faith and suggestion. A blessing at the hands of a living saint, such as St. Cuthbert, St. Guthlac, or St. John of Beverley, might well be sufficient to effect such a cure; or it might be done by a priest of less pronounced personality and reputation through the instrumentality of relics and rites. Each cure would naturally be in the nature of a miracle, and as such it directed the attention both of the patient and of the onlookers to the spiritual side.

In those days the cure was the cause of rejoicing to the monks concerned as it resulted in greater prestige for their monastery and for the relics under their care. In modern times the successful treatment and cure of a patient is the cause of satisfaction to the physician and to the hospital to which he is attached, since it constitutes an advance in medical science. Such was—and is—the professional point of view.

From the stories of cures which follow it will be seen that the actual evidential value of the 'cures' effected in Anglo-Saxon times is very difficult to assess, especially since the record was prejudiced and was usually written many years after the cure took place. The force of sympathy, strong in the healer as well as in the patient, played an important part. It may be that men like Cuthbert, after a life of extreme asceticism and contemplation, possessed sympathetic powers amounting to a kind of hypnotic influence which perhaps effected what would have been considered in his day to be miracles of healing. Some cases of functional diseases would undoubtedly benefit then as now from such methods of suggestion, but it is impossible to accept the medieval accounts of organic diseases being permanently cured in this way.

The earliest miracles of healing which are recorded by Bede as having been performed in England are those of St. Germanus, bishop of Auxerre:

> A certain . . . tribune [says Bede] presented his blind daughter, ten years of age, for the priests to cure. . . . Germanus . . . invoked the Trinity, and taking into his hands a casket with relics of saints, which hung about his neck, applied it to the girl's eyes, which were immediately delivered from darkness.[1]

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 18.

A second cure was that of the son of a chief named Elafius:

> The nerves being withered, his leg was so contracted that the limb was useless, and he could not walk. . . . Germanus, causing the youth to sit down, gently passed his healing hand over the leg which was contracted; the limb recovered its strength and soundness by the power of his touch, the withered nerves were restored, and the youth was, in the presence of all the people, delivered whole to his father.[1]

It is also related that Germanus 'took up a parcel of dust from the place where St. Alban's blood had been shed to carry away with him'.[2] Bede does not state the reason for this action, but the use to which the dust was to be put will be apparent from the stories of later cures.[3]

Various cures wrought by Cuthbert are detailed by Bede in his life of that saint. Some were at the hands of the saint in person, others, like that given at the end of this chapter, were performed in his absence by means of some article with which he had had personal contact. A certain nun who had fled with the rest of her community before the invading Picts 'was oppressed with a grievous sickness, and for a whole year had suffered from intolerable pains in the head and her whole side, so that her case was considered desperate by the physicians'. Cuthbert 'anointed her with consecrated oil. And immediately, from that hour, she began to revive, and in a few days was restored to perfect health'.[4]

On another occasion, when Cuthbert was preaching to a large crowd of his people.in a mountainous district, a young man 'wasted with a long and grievous illness', the nature of which is unfortunately not specified, was carried before the saint in a litter, 'that he might receive his blessing'. Cuthbert 'ordered all to withdraw to a distance. And having recourse to his wonted weapons of prayer, he gave him his blessing, and forthwith expelled the malady —which the anxious skill of the physicians with their compounded drugs could not accomplish. And rising up the same hour, and being refreshed with food, the youth gave thanks to God, and returned to the women who had carried him thither.'[5]

The last cure effected by St. Cuthbert before his death was that of the aged monk Uualhstod, who had been weakened by diarrhoea

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 21.
[2] Ibid. i. 18. See also Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ii. 5.
[3] See pp. 184, 187.
[4] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, xxx. 50.
[5] Ibid., xxxii. 52.

(*uentris fluxu languentem*). This monk alone accompanied the dying saint into his cell to minister to him. He says, 'From the time that I went in thither and touched the bishop to lead him to the oratory, I forthwith felt that I was freed from all the trouble of my long infirmity.'[1]

Bede gives various stories of cures by St. John of Beverley. The power of mind over body is well shown in the case of the nun Coenberg at Wetadun (Watton, Yorkshire). This girl had been bled in the arm, 'and while under treatment [*in studio*: the Anglo-Saxon version translates "during the bloodletting"] was seized with a sudden violent pain', and the arm in consequence had become so swollen that she could not bend her elbow. The abbess entreated Bishop John to give the patient his blessing, which he did. The effect was as was hoped. 'As soon as the bishop had said the prayer', said the girl afterwards, 'given me his blessing and gone out, I immediately began to mend: and though I have not yet recovered my former strength, yet all the pain is quite gone from my arm, where it was most intense, and from all my body, as if the bishop had carried it away with him; though the swelling of the arm still seems to remain.'[2] Probably extravasation of blood into the tissues following unskilful phlebotomy would account for the condition described. Bertram Colegrave points out that this story has 'preserved most of the [concomitant] details of the miracle of the healing of Jairus's daughter though the main thread is different'.[3] The medical details quoted above, are, of course, different from those in St. Luke's narrative.

Another cure by St. John of Beverley is that of a case of aphasia by means of mechanical exercises. 'The bishop . . . caused the poor man to come in to him, and ordered him to put his tongue out of his mouth and show it him; then laying hold of his chin, he made the sign of the cross on his tongue, directing him to draw it back into his mouth and to speak. 'Pronounce some word', said he, 'say *gae*' [yes]. . . . He immediately said what was ordered.' The bishop then made him say all the letters of the alphabet, followed by syllables, words, and finally sentences, continuing the exercises all that day and the next night.[4]

[1] Ibid., xxxviii. 64.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 3. See also p. 297.

[3] B. Colgrave, 'Bede's miracle stories', in *Bede, his Life, Times and Writings*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson, *Twelfth Centenary Volume*, Oxford, 1935, p. 208.

[4] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 2.

Edward the Confessor was accredited with the power of healing. The *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*[1] gives details of the curing of various blind men and of a young woman who was suffering from scrofula. The patients are warned in their sleep that they should appeal to the king. It is noticeable that in no case does the king himself take the initiative. Miraculous cures by this king are also narrated by William of Malmesbury and others.[2]

The following story told by Bede shows how a functional disorder could be cured by the faith of the patient herself, employing as instrument the 'virtue' derived from a living, though absent, saint. It relates to the abbess Ælfleda of Whitby:

> When physicians were unable to provide any remedy, divine grace, suddenly acting inwardly, saved her, and drew her back little by little from death, although she was yet far from being entirely cured. For although the internal pain left her, and the vigour of her limbs returned, yet she had no power whatever either to walk or to stand, so that she could not raise herself upright, nor move except on all fours. [One day her thoughts turned to her friend St. Cuthbert,] and she said, 'I would that I had something belonging to my dear Cuthbert, for I know of a surety, and I trust in the Lord, that I soon should be healed.' . . . Not long after there arrived one who brought with him a linen girdle, which Cuthbert had sent to her. . . . She girt it around her, and next morning she was able to stand erect, and on the third day she was restored to perfect health.[3]

This story of the use of an article which had had contact with a living saint was probably derived directly from the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where it is said that cloths which had been in contact with St. Paul's skin were brought to the sick of Ephesus to cure them.[4]

An analysis of the methods of healing employed by these holy men shows a technique similar to that found in the Gospel narratives and shared by the multitude of cures which occur in every volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*. Bertram Colgrave, in his essay on Bede's miracle stories in the twelfth centenary memorial volume, points out that 'these scriptural miracles found in the legends

[1] In Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (Rolls Series).

[2] See pp. 271–4 and p. 386.

[3] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. xxiii. 38.

[4] ὥστε καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας ἀποφέρεσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ χρωτὸς αὐτοῦ σουδάρια ἢ σιμικίνθια. (Acts xix. 12.)

naturally became standardized and usually preserved certain features of the biblical miracles on which they were based'. He gives various instances from Bede. The instruments employed are holy water, consecrated oil or bread, or a saint's girdle as detailed in the story quoted above. Evil spirits are cast out as they are in the New Testament.

CHAPTER XI

Healing by Means of Relics[1]

(*a*) *Introduction*

ÆLFRIC, after inveighing against the sick man who 'seeks his health at unhallowed practices, or at accursed enchantments or at any witchcraft', recommends him to 'seek his health at holy relics'.[2] These were the instruments employed by the Church for curing purposes, and their efficacy, therefore, depended on the unshaken faith in them by the patient who 'sought his health' by this means.

The chief justification for the collecting and consecration of relics was the good that could be done to the sick thereby. The objects for which pilgrimages were made during the Middle Ages, and the facilities afforded for them (especially in later times), are discussed by George Sarton in his monumental work on the history of science. He states that the objects of the pilgrims were 'to obtain indulgences . . . or to atone for sins or crimes', and later 'to gratify their own adventurous spirit . . . or to escape . . . from any kind of relationship which had become irksome'.[3] But he omits to mention the primary object for which pilgrimages were first undertaken, namely the cure of disease by means of relics preserved in the shrines visited and for the conservation of which the shrines were originally erected.

In early Christian times the bodies of saints and martyrs were regarded with reverence, but there is no trace of any cult. Their preservation in shrines for purposes of veneration or of healing seems to have originated in the fourth century, and, thanks to encouragement from men like SS. Ambrose and Augustine of Hippo, their cult increased with rapidity once it had taken root. The sale of relics was found to be profitable, and frauds were already being practised by the beginning of the fifth century.

[1] This section incorporates my article, 'The Magic of St. Oswald', published in *Antiquity*, 1935, ix. 418–23.

[2] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 475.

[3] G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Baltimore, 1931, vol. ii, p. 34.

Canon 15 of the Council of Carthage (A.D. 401) 'orders the bishops to examine carefully all supposed shrines and to destroy them where there is no evidence of connexion with a true martyr. No person is to be venerated as a martyr except upon a reasonable basis of historical evidence.'[1]

From the time of the Council of Mainz (813) which forbade the translation of bodies of saints without the permission of the bishop and synod and 'for some centuries afterwards', according to E. W. Kemp, 'translation was the principal outward sign of recognition of a saint'.

One is amazed at the dishonesty of the early medieval Church and at the extreme credulity of its dupes when one contemplates the exhibition of such spurious relics as part of Our Lord's manger, shown at Wimborne, the Virgin's wedding-ring, shown in the duomo at Perugia,[2] hairs from the beard of Noah shown at Corbie, and drops of the Virgin's milk shown both at Walsingham and at Corbie. The spiritual value of an article is to be gauged by the use to which it is put, the value of an action by the motive which inspires it.

One is, perhaps, the more shocked that such frauds should have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity. But examples of fraud and credulity will be found among the Greeks and Romans. They occur, for instance, in the pages of Pausanias, who wrote in the days of Marcus Aurelius, and in the pages of Pliny. Pausanias, to give but one example, says in describing the sanctuary of Hilaira and Phoebe at Sparta that 'an egg is here hung by ribbons from the roof: they say it is the famous egg which Leda is reported to have given birth to and from which issued Castor and Pollux.'[3] Pliny tells us that Marcus Scaurus, when aedile, 'exhibited at Rome the bones of the monster to which Andromeda was said to have been exposed, and which he had brought from Joppa'.[4] In confirmation of this, we are told in another passage in the *Natural History* that in front of Joppa there lies 'a rock upon which they point out the vestiges of the chains by which Andromeda was bound'.[5]

[1] J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Lat.*, vol. lxxxiv, col. 212. Quotation from E. W. Kemp, 'Pope Alexander III and the canonization of saints', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 1945, 4 s. xxvii. 13.

[2] In the Capello del Santo Agnello. It is formed of a sort of agate which is said to change its colour according to the character of the spectator.

[3] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, III. xvi. 1.

[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* ix. 4.

[5] Ibid. v. 14.

Many will concede that a relic, such as the Holy Blood at Bruges, which has been kissed with awe and reverence by countless generations of the devout, may thereby have acquired an aura of sanctity. Similarly the Palace Chapel of Bucoleon at Constantinople must be considered as holy ground from its having been used as the storehouse of the major relics of Christendom, such as the Crown of Thorns, the wood of the Cross, the Holy Blood, the Holy Lance, the Seamless Coat, and others of a similar nature. Grant Allen, speaking of Venice, says that 'bodies of saints were the chief articles of import during the middle ages'.[1] Indeed, her treasures rivalled those of Constantinople. Apart from the body of her patron saint, Mark, she possessed those of St. Lucy, St. Roch, St. Isidore, St. Theodore, and St. Nicolas (less authenticated than that at Bari), also a fragment of the True Cross, the head of St. John the Baptist (presumably a copy additional to that at Edessa mentioned in the next paragraph) and relics of St. James and St. George. But those in high places in the Church who originally created these more than spurious holy things must bear the stigma of unexcusable fraud, and in many cases of unexcusable greed.

A similar procedure in the early Church is well illustrated by the following passage from the *Flores Historiarum*:

> In the year of grace 458, two eastern monks having gone up to Jerusalem to worship, John the Baptist revealed to them the place of his head, near the house where Herod formerly lived. It was straightway brought to Edessa, a city of Phoenicia, and was there buried with due honour.

It is obvious that the church at Edessa was poor and wished to augment its income. It therefore sent out the two monks with instructions to manufacture some relic of major importance and bring it home with a suitable story. Attempts were made by reformers in the Church to put a stop to such frauds and also to test spurious relics, some of which were even submitted to the ordeal by fire—a custom unfortunately conducive to further fraud by skilful cheats. A story in the letters of Gregory the Great records that Augustine of Canterbury wrote to that Pope from France inquiring about a body of St. Sixtus which was suspect and asking for genuine relics of this martyr. These were sent by Gregory with the following instructions: 'The relics which you have asked for are to be buried by themselves, that the place in which the aforesaid body

[1] *Grant Allen's Historical Guides: Venice*, 1898, p. 192.

lies may be altogether closed up, and the people not suffered to desert the certain and worship the uncertain.'[1]

Since the second Council of Nicaea, held in 787, had decreed that no church should be consecrated without relics, it naturally followed that spurious or faked relics were used when the genuine article was not forthcoming. Perhaps the papal assertion that relics possess the power of self-reproduction may have helped to alleviate this condition of things.

But the purpose of the present work is to record and discuss the use—and abuse—of relics in Anglo-Saxon England, and two pictures may be drawn by way of contrast of the use of relics by the Church, one at the time of Bede, and the other at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period. In the first picture it will be seen that the moral standard is nobly upheld; in the second that the chief object of the Church seems to be financial gain from the money paid in offerings by those who had benefited, the original purpose being subordinated to this end. The following pages bear out this statement, firstly, by illustrations from Bede of the way in which cures were effected in his time; secondly, by giving details of how the major relics (i.e. the bodies of the saints) were preserved; and thirdly, by showing the abuse of such hallowed relics in later times.

Stories of cures by means of relics such as those of SS. Oswald and Cuthbert indicate the technique by means of which the relics were used for healing purposes. Later this technique was manipulated so as to enrich each monastery. The relics were still used for healing, but it is difficult to say whether a genuine desire to cure the sick prevailed over the temptation to exploit credulity and to fill their coffers. As the corruption in the monasteries increased, the latter object did prevail over the former. The signs of decadence were already far advanced in England even before the close of the Anglo-Saxon period.

The relics which were so carefully cherished were sometimes the bodies of native saints preserved entire. A great deal of information is available as to the preservation of these bodies which did not decay, and their shrines naturally attracted great crowds of sick who hoped to be restored to health through their instrumentality. If a cure was not effected at one shrine, a patient might be carried to others in turn. William of Malmesbury tells of

[1] Pope Gregory I, *Epistolae*, xii. 31.

a blind man who visited eighty-seven shrines while seeking a remedy.[1] Each monastic chronicler was naturally jealous of the reputation of the relics at his own monastery, and therefore uncritical of the medical aspect.

Though countless relics were deliberately and shamelessly manufactured for the benefit of needy monasteries, there is no reason to suspect that the various Anglo-Saxon relics which were preserved in the earlier period were other than genuine. The purity of the early Church in England was too great, and the sincerity of the higher clergy, as shown in the accounts of Bede and others, is too obvious, to permit of any other conclusion. The Anglo-Saxon saints were men and women of great sanctity in the eyes of their contemporaries, who therefore conserved the relics of these saints as the greatest treasures they possessed.[2] They also believed sincerely in these early days in the efficacy of the relics for healing purposes. Being the most accredited physicians of their time, they nobly did their duty in effecting 'faith-cures' by these means whenever possible.

(*b*) *Cures and their technique in the time of Bede*

King Oswald of Northumbria was the first English martyr—St. Alban being the first British one. Perhaps more miraculous cures are associated with him than with any other Anglo-Saxon saint,[3] and they well illustrate the various uses to which relics were put.

Cures were attributed to the cross which Oswald set up on the Heaven-field before his victory there over the heathen Cadwallon. Bede says that 'in that place of prayer very many miraculous cures are known to have been performed as a token and memorial of the king's faith; for even to this day [i.e. a century later] many are wont to cut off small chips from the wood of the holy cross, which being

[1] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 224. See p. 273.

[2] These feelings of veneration still obtained in the days of the Italian Renaissance. J. A. Symonds says that in the 'passion for reliques two different sentiments seem to have been combined—the merely superstitious belief in the efficacy of charms, which caused the Venetians to guard the body of S. Mark so jealously . . . and that nobler respect for the persons of the mighty dead which induced Sigismondo Malatesta to transport the body of Gemistus Pletho to Rimini, and which rendered the supposed coffin of Aristotle at Palermo an object of admiration to Mussulman and Christian alike' (*Renaissance in Italy*, vol. i, 1897, p. 361).

[3] Details given by Bede in his *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 1–13.

put into water, men or cattle drinking thereof, or sprinkled with that water, are immediately restored to health'.[1] Particulars of one more miracle through this medium are given. A monk of Hexham named Bothelm, who was still alive when Bede was writing, fell one night on the ice and broke his arm. A fellow monk was visiting Oswald's cross soon after, and brought him some of the old moss which grew on the surface of the wood. This the sick man put into his bosom, and awaking in the middle of the night, 'he found his arm and hand as sound as if he had never felt any such pain'.[2]

King Oswald fell in battle at Maserfield in 642, fighting against the heathen Penda of Mercia. 'Wherefore many took up the very dust of the place where his body fell,' says Bede, 'and putting it into water, did much good with it to their friends who were sick. This custom came so much into use that, the earth being carried away by degrees, there remained a hole as deep as the height of a man.'[3] It is not said if the earth at the bottom of the hole was less efficacious for healing than that at the top: the faith was evidently strong enough to surmount such a possible deficiency.[4]

Some half a century later Oswald's niece, Osthrida, queen of the Mercians, 'found and translated' his bones to her monastery of Beardeneu (Bardney) in Lindsey. The monks would not at first give admittance to the relics, as being those of a foreigner who had subjected them to his rule and was therefore distasteful to them. The bones lay in a wagon outside the gates all night; but 'a pillar of light[5] reaching from the wagon up to heaven, was seen by almost

[1] Ibid. iii. 2. A similar story is told by Bede (ibid. iii. 17) in connexion with Aidan. He died leaning against the post used to strengthen the wall of a church. Later the church was burned by Penda, but the post 'could not be consumed by the fire which consumed all about it'. The church was 'rebuilt in the same place, and that very post was set up on the outside, as it had been before, to strengthen the wall. . . . And it is manifest that since then many have been healed in that same place, as also that chips being cut off from that post, and put into water, have healed many from their distempers'.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 2.

[3] Ibid. iii. 9.

[4] Similarly with the earth where Aldhelm died. With this may also be compared the following passage from Bede's description of the church on the Mount of Olives: 'in the midst of it are to be seen the last prints of Our Lord's feet . . . and though the earth is daily carried away by believers, yet it still remains as before and retains the same impression of the feet' (Bede, *De locis sanctis libellus*, cap. vi).

[5] This is the usual method of revelation of relics and holy things. See, for instance, the story in chapter 251 of *St. Olaf's Saga* of the 'clear light burning at night over the spot on the battlefield [of Stiklestad in 1030] where King Olaf's body lay'. Sometimes, as in the case of St. Oswald, the light seems to have

all the inhabitants of the province of Lindsey'. The monks then received the bones, and having washed them, placed them in a shrine. The virtue in them at once became apparent. The monks 'poured out the water in which they had washed the bones in a corner of the sacred place. From that time the very earth which received that holy water had the virtue of expelling devils from the bodies of persons possessed.'

Bede gives details of two cures at Bardney.[1] The first is that of a man 'who was on a sudden seized by the Devil, and began to gnash his teeth and foam at the mouth'. None could restrain him, nor were 'the prayers that were prescribed against that disease'—i.e. the usual form of exorcism used by the Church—of avail, but as soon as a casket containing the above-mentioned earth was brought into the room, the patient fetched a deep sigh and said that all the evil spirits that vexed him had departed, and were no more to be seen. He was given a little of the earth to keep, presumably in case of a recurrence. The other cure was that of a little boy at the monastery who was troubled with prolonged malaria (*in longre lencten-ádle*).[2] One of the monks instructed him, '"Go into the church, and get close to S. Oswald's tomb; stay there quietly and do not leave it until the time that your fit (*ádl*) is to go off; then I will go in and fetch you away." The boy did as he was directed, and went to sit by the saint's body. And that day the illness (*untrymnis*) did not visit him; but kept away as if afraid, nor on the next, nor on the third day, nor ever after durst attack him.' This personification of disease was, and still is, very general.

After his death Oswald was dismembered by Penda, and it is interesting to follow his various members in their travels. Penda caused the head and arms and hands to be set upon stakes, but Oswiu took them down next year. He buried the head at Lindisfarne, and the arms and hands at Bamborough (where they were wrapped in a pall and enclosed in a costly shrine).[3] In 875 the monks

emanated from the relics themselves: sometimes it descends upon them, for example, in the case of the relics of St. Petroc when they had been stolen—'that same night there shone a light from heaven upon the ark in which those relics were enclosed' (*Antiquity*, 1939, xiii. 405). Is there any connexion with the *málm-logi* or *vafr-logi*, the flame which in Norse belief hovers over buried treasure?

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 11, 12.

[2] See p. 404.

[3] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Kings of England*, under date 774, and again in his *History of the Church of Durham*, ch. 2.

of Lindisfarne fled before an incursion of the Danes, and carried the head, together with the body of Cuthbert, with them. It accompanied them in their wanderings from place to place until it finally rested at Durham. It was found in Cuthbert's tomb when this was opened in 1104, and the frontal bone of the king was again found and replaced when the coffin was examined in March 1899.[1]

But the majority of the miracles were connected with the right arm and hand. Aidan had once sat next to the king when he was distributing food to the poor, and, struck with his piety, had 'laid hold of his right hand and said, "May this hand never perish". Which fell out according to his prayer', continues Bede, 'for his arm and hand, being cut off from his body when he was slain in battle, remained entire and uncorrupted to this day, and are kept in a silver case, as revered relics, in S. Peter's church in the royal city' (Bamborough). They were stolen from Bamborough by a monk of Peterborough named Vynegot in the time of Abbot Elsin (died 1055), who was a most diligent collector of relics. Peterborough's 'most precious relic', says Hugo Candidus, the abbey's sub-prior and chronicler who wrote in Henry II's reign and died about 1155, 'is the right arm and hand of S. Oswald, remaining whole in flesh and skin after the blessing of S. Aydan, the bishop: this we have seen with our own eyes and have kissed and handled and washed when it was shown to Alexander, bishop of Lincoln [and others] . . . 487 years after the martyr was killed. . . . They also possess one of his ribs and some of the ground on which he was killed.'[2]

When Peterborough was burned by the Danes and Hereward the Wake in 1070, Prior Athelwold saved the arm and hand by secreting them in the straw of his bed.[3] The monastery was again burned down in 1116, and the new church was not opened for worship until 1140. At the opening ceremony the bishop of Lincoln and the abbots of Ramsey and Thorney were present.

The arm of S. Oswald was on show [says Hugo], but first [it] was shown to Abbot Martin who desired to see it either out of curiosity, or because he doubted if it were whole. . . . They opened the case and

[1] See J. C. Wall, *Shrines of British Saints*, Antiquary's Books, 1905, pp. 206–7. The statue of Cuthbert in Henry VII's chapel at Westminster represents him as carrying the crowned head of Oswald in his left hand.

[2] *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough*, ed. W. T. Mellows, Lond. 1949, p. 52.

[3] Ibid., p. 81.

brought it out whole and with it blessed the entire congregation, and washed it in great fear as they had done before in the time of Abbot Matthias. Many of the monks who were sick men when they entered the church were [completely] cured. And the third time that it was shown was to King Stephen when he came thither and offered to it his ring. . . . Through the merits of S. Oswald, and through the water in which the arm is washed, many sick persons are healed and are liberated from demons, and *paralytici* and *frigoritici* are cured. [Two examples of such cures follow.] The water was carried through many districts and drunk and many were cured *according to the faith of each one*. It was taken to London, and we know that innumerable persons were cured there, wherefore his altar in the crypt of S. Paul's was held in great veneration.[1]

The left arm seems to have been preserved at Gloucester. Like other relics, however, King Oswald's arms showed a tendency to multiply, for another copy of the left arm appears to have existed at Durham, and an arm (which not specified) is mentioned in an inventory of 1245 of St. Paul's Cathedral, London.[2]

The body of the king was probably buried first on the field of battle where he fell,[3] but was taken thence to the abbey of Bardney in Lindsey, as already mentioned. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that his bones were removed thence by Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, to a monastery built in his honour at Gloucester. This was owing to a war between Edward the Elder and the Danes in Northumbria.

Many of Oswald's relics were also transferred to the Continent.[4]

[1] *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, pp. 106–8.

[2] 'Brachium Sancti Oswaldi coopertum foliis argentiis, praeter manum' (W. Sparrow Simpson, 'Two inventories of the cathedral church of St. Paul, London', *Archaeologia*, 1887, l. 470). The twelfth-century life of St. Teilo (MS. Cott. Vesp. A. XIV) says that on this saint's death in 560, 'three parties claimed his remains, but on examination finding three bodies exactly alike, each took one away' (T. B. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, I. i, p. 131 (Rolls Series)).

[3] This has usually been taken to be at Oswestry, owing to a passage in the twelfth-century life of St. Oswald which is too late a source to be of much value. But Alfred Hunt argues that the site of Maserfield was at Epworth in the Isle of Axholme. It would have been easy, he suggests, for Oswiu to recover the body by a raid from his own kingdom of Deira on the opposite side of the Humber. (The expression 'found and translated' by his niece, used by Bede (*Eccles. Hist.* iii. 11), however, seems to contradict the suggestion of such a raid.) But Bardney is also in the same vicinity, and the number of churches (enumerated by Hunt) in this area which were dedicated to St. Oswald also connects him especially with it. See A. Hunt, 'Maserfield, 642', *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries*, 1924, xviii. 78–88.

[4] Plummer gives a long list of churches dedicated to St. Oswald both in this country and on the Continent, and also of those churches, both here and abroad,

The church of Zug, for instance, received some on its dedication to him in 1478; the cathedral of Hildesheim still possesses in its treasury a thirteenth-century casket which is said to contain a head of Oswald, the crown of which is of eleventh-century workmanship. Bede speaks of his renown spreading to Germany and Ireland, and gives details of a cure in the latter country. A 'certain scholar of the Scottish race' being about to die—presumably through fear that he should be carried away to hell for his sins—asked Acca if he had in his custody any relics of Oswald, since he thought it was possible that through them his life might be prolonged. Acca replied, 'I have some of the stake on which his head was set up by the pagans, and, if you believe with a sincere heart, then the Divine Goodness may, through the merit of so great a man, both grant you a longer term of life here and render you worthy of admittance into eternal life.' When the patient had assured him of his faith therein, Acca blessed some water, put into it a chip of the stake, and gave to the sick man to drink. Needless to say he recovered and, changing his mode of life, lived for a long time after.[1]

It is interesting to note, from the stories in connexion with these relics, the means employed for extracting 'virtue' from them, so that it might be applied for healing purposes.

The four sources of virtue in connexion with Oswald were (*a*) the cross which the king set up, (*b*) the stake on which his head was impaled, (*c*) the ground on which he fell, and (*d*) the various parts of his body. The chips of the cross and of the stake were immersed in the water which the patient drank, and the water in which the uncorrupted arm had been washed was also given by the Peterborough monks to the sick to drink. But the mere presence of the earth or dust appears to have been sufficient to give the necessary faith to the sufferer. The dust and water cures seem to have been combined with regard to the bones, for apparently after the water in which these were washed had been poured on the ground, this earth when dried to dust was considered to retain the healing properties derived from the water. This may have been used as a plaster, and possibly its mere presence again sufficed.

Judging from that used in connexion with the relics of St. Petroc when in Brittany, it would seem that the most convenient

in which his relics were reputed to be found (*Baedae opera historica*, ed. Plummer, vol. ii, pp. 157–60).

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 13.

and therefore probably most usual procedure was to keep a stock of 'water sanctified by contact', that is, presumably, water in which the bones had been washed, and to give it to the patients to drink.[1]

The 259th chapter of *St. Olaf's Saga* tells how 'in the sandhill where King Olaf's body had lain on the ground, a beautiful spring of water came up, and many human ailments and infirmities were cured by its waters'. A perennial supply such as this would have proved invaluable.

Many other relics, beside those of St. Oswald, were treasured for healing purposes. Perhaps the most famous was the body of St. Cuthbert, which, as will be recounted later, remained uncorrupted at least until the dissolution of the monasteries, after which time the healing of the sick passed from the Church into other hands. In 875, when the attack by the Danes under Halfdene was imminent, the monks abandoned Lindisfarne and carried the precious body with them. The same shrine also contained the head of St. Oswald and some of the bones of St. Aidan. Its wanderings via Crec (Craik), Chester-le-Street, and Ripon to Durham are too well known to be narrated here.

Cures were performed at each successive resting-place of the saint's body. Bede records cures at Lindisfarne in 698, for example, for the palsy, and for a swelling on the eye which was healed by the application of some of St. Cuthbert's hair. 'The very garments', says Bede, 'which had been on St. Cuthbert's body, either whilst living or after he was dead, were not exempt from the virtue of performing cures.'[2]

Reginald of Durham says that Bede himself was cured, by the relics of St. Cuthbert, of the impediment in his speech from which he suffered when he was young.[3]

Among the various miracles detailed by Bede in his prose life of St. Cuthbert the three following present interesting features. 'A certain boy in the neighbourhood of Lindisfarne was vexed by a most cruel spirit, so that . . . he howled and strove to destroy everything within his reach, and even to bite his own limbs.' Exorcism had failed. Then one of the priests 'went to the place where he knew that the water had been poured, wherewith [St.

[1] G. H. Doble, 'The relics of St. Petroc', *Antiquity*, 1939, xiii. 407.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 31, and his *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 43.

[3] *Reginaldi monachi Dunelmensis libellus de admirandis beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society, vol. i, 1835, § 76.

Cuthbert's] dead body had been washed, and taking thence a small portion of the mould, he put it into water, and carrying this to the patient, poured it into his gaping mouth. . . . As soon as the water touched him, he shut his mouth, closed his eyes . . . and his whole body sank into repose.'[1]

Another young man, who was suffering from 'that disease which the Greeks call paralysis', and was unable to move any part of his body except his mouth, was cured by having the shoes which had been on St. Cuthbert's feet in the tomb[2] put on his feet, 'for the malady had first attacked him in the feet'. The patient immediately fell into a placid sleep, and as the night advanced, 'he began to move his feet alternately. . . . And as the virtue of healing that was bestowed through the relics of the holy man advanced, the soundness he had prayed for continued to pass from the soles of his feet through the rest of the limbs.'[3]

Bede's third story shows how the spiritual exaltation derived by a saintly-minded man from communion with the spirit of Cuthbert —made manifest in the incorruption of the latter's body—was such that he was able to regain his health. A priest (*clericus*) of St. Willibrord—the first bishop of the Frisians[4]—while staying there as a guest, fell into a severe infirmity. After a long illness he was taken into the church leaning on a staff. He prayed for recovery at Cuthbert's tomb and 'felt that he had received throughout his body such a great power from the saint's incorrupt body that he rose from his prayer without exertion and returned to the guest-house without the aid of his attendant or of his staff. A few days later he proceeded on his journey *roborata ad integrum virtute*.'[5]

Simeon of Durham tells of a cure effected after the body had reached Durham; how a crippled woman dragged herself to where the body had rested and was cured on the spot.[6]

Similar stories are related of other saints. St. Chad died at Lichfield in 672 and was buried in St. Mary's church there, but the body was translated to that of St. Peter when it was built.

[1] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 41.

[2] Plummer says that the *calceamenta* in which St. Cuthbert was buried 'though a Christian significance is given them "in obviam Christi", are probably derived from the "hellshoon" with which it was the custom in heathen times to bind the feet of a corpse, so that it might walk to Valhalla' (Plummer's ed. of Bede's *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. ii, pp. 270–1).

[3] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 45.

[4] Willibrord, a Northumbrian, was archbishop of Utrecht from 696 to 739.

[5] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 44.

[6] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Church of Durham*, iii. 3.

In both places [says Bede], as a testimony of his virtue, frequent miraculous cures are wont to be wrought. And of late, a certain distracted person, who had been wandering about everywhere, arrived there in the evening, unknown or unregarded by the keepers of the place, and having rested there all the night, went out in his perfect senses the next morning, to the surprise and delight of all. . . . The place of the sepulchre is a wooden monument, made like a little house, covered, having a hole in the wall, through which those that go thither for devotion usually put in their hand and take out some of the dust, which they put into water and give to sick cattle or men to drink, upon which they are presently eased of their infirmity, and restored to health.[1]

The *Flores Historiarum*, after telling of the translation of the relics of St. Alban by Offa in 794 to the church thence named St. Albans, say that 'miracles continue to be wrought at that spot; for, in the sight of numbers of witnesses, the deaf there recover their hearing, the lame walk, the blind see, and all who in faith invoke the aid of the blessed martyr, obtain of God the wished-for blessing, whether of mind or of body'.[2] Presumably St. Albans played the part in those days which is now played by Lourdes.

A passage in the 66th chapter of the *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, by Eddius Stephanus, suggests that similar cures were performed at Ripon. He says that 'they put up a tent outside the monastery, bathed the holy body and emptied the bath on to the ground in the same place. The people who inhabited the monastery afterwards built a wooden cross on the spot, and the Lord used to perform many marvels there.'

Ælfric gives many details of cures at the shrine of St. Swithun at Winchester. 'Within ten days two hundred men were healed, and so many within twelve months that no man could count them. The burial-ground lay filled with crippled folk, so that people could hardly get into the minster; and they were all so miraculously healed within a few days, that one could not find there five unsound men out of that great crowd.'[3] He speaks of the votive offerings in the church: 'the old church was hung all round with crutches (*mid criccum*), and with the stools of cripples who had

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 3.

[2] This church superseded that mentioned by Bede (*Eccles. Hist.* i. 7) as being erected there after the death of the saint. It had become a resort of pilgrims even in his day.

[3] Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Skeat, vol. i, p. 451, § xxi, ll. 149–55.

been healed there from one end to the other on either wall, and not even so could they put half of them up'.[1]

(c) *The preservation of the bodies of Anglo-Saxon saints*

The most notable of the relics of Anglo-Saxon times were the bodies of the holy men and women who lived during the period.

English monastic annals, from the Anglo-Saxon period until the suppression of the monasteries, contain innumerable stories of the cures of the sick which were performed at the shrines of saints such as Cuthbert, Edmund of East Anglia, John of Beverley, and others of less fame. I shall endeavour in this section to show in what way these cures were rendered possible by the preservation of the bodies at the outset, and also by the continuous conservation of them.

William of Malmesbury enumerates five Anglo-Saxon saints whose bodies did not decay after death, 'who with skin and flesh unwasted, and their joints flexible, appear to have a certain vital warmth about them, and to be merely sleeping'. These are: St. Etheldrida, St. Wihtburh, King Edmund of East Anglia, St. Ælfheah or Alphege of Canterbury, and St. Cuthbert.

The cause of this miraculous condition was naturally set down by the Church to the sanctity of the individuals, 'typifying the state of final incorruption'.[2] In the case of male as well as of female saints it was ascribed to virginity. 'The body man can bury', says the *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*,

> But his virtue cannot be concealed,
> The body of him who was a virgin
> When dead cannot be corrupted;
> The sick man finds health,
> The sinner there holiness,
> Which is a proof of his sanctity.[3]

(It may be remarked, in passing, that if Edward the Confessor had been able to sacrifice his repute as a 'virgin' and had had a son, his people might have been saved from the evils attendant upon

[1] Ibid., ll. 431–4.

[2] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum*, ii, § 207 (Rolls Series, vol. i, p. 260). The glorification of these Anglo-Saxon saints by Malmesbury may have been part of the political propaganda of the time of Henry I, already mentioned.

[3] Op. cit., ll. 3980–6. H. R. Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (Rolls Series, 1858, p. 137).

a disputed succession, and the whole course of English history might have been different.)

Possibly, however, the phenomenon of incorruption may be explained by the mode of disposing of the bodies in these cases. Bede says on this subject: 'Myrrh and aloe express continence of the flesh, since the nature of these spices is that the bodies of the dead which are anointed with them decay least. Wherefore corruption of the body shows the rottenness of luxury, even as its preservation shows the virtue of continence and chastity.'[1] John of Wallingford says that the body of Edward the Martyr, which also was uncorrupted, was wrapped in lead and for a long time hidden in the river Stour.[2] This example may provide the key to the mystery, for if all these precious bodies were placed in wooden or airtight caskets, they would thus have become mummified and therefore uncorrupt: but for the medieval pilgrim it was to believe and not to reason why.

The following evidence concerning the bodies of the five saints mentioned above is forthcoming from the chroniclers:

Bede says that St. Etheldrida (or Æthelthryth) of Ely, who was a daughter of Anna, king of the East Angles, was exhumed sixteen years after her death in 674, in order that her body might be translated into the church (at Ely). 'When her grave was opened, the body was found as free from corruption as if she had died and been buried on that very day.' The physician Cynifrid, who was present at her death and also at her exhumation, describes the condition of the body.[3] 'Besides, all the linen clothes in which the body had been buried appeared entire and as fresh as if they had been that very day wrapped about her chaste limbs.'[4] These clothes were accredited with healing virtue: in the hymn in honour of the saint which was composed by Bede occur these lines:

> Hydros et ater abit sacrae pro vestis honore
> Morbi diffugiunt, hydros et ater abit.[5]

[1] Bede, *Cantica Canticorum*, iv. 14.

[2] John of Wallingford is the sole authority for this. Possibly the burial beneath the river was to prevent the spirit returning to plague the living, e.g. his murderer. Geoffrey of Monmouth records the burial of King Lear under the Soar at Leicester for the same reason.

[3] This has already been quoted: see pp. 198–9.

[4] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 19. Also mentioned by Eddius, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 19.

[5] Ibid. iv. 20.

Bede says that St. Etheldrida was originally buried 'as she had ordered . . . in a wooden coffin (*ligneo in locello*)': sixteen years later she was reinterred in a stone one. Her niece and successor Sexberga 'ordered some of the brothers to provide stone to make a coffin', but as no stone was available in the fen country around Ely, they had to search farther afield. They eventually found a coffin (presumably a Roman one) at Grantchester. When it was brought to Ely it was found to 'fit the virgin's body as if it had been purposely made for her'.

St. Wihtburh, who died in 743, was also a daughter of King Anna, and a nun at Ely. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says of her under the date 797: 'In this year the body of Wihtburh was found at Dereham all whole and uncorrupted, five and fifty years after she had departed this life.' The author of *Miracula Sanctae Wihtburgae, Virginis* says he had seen persons who were present at the translation of her body 350 years after her death, i.e. in 1106, when it was still found to be entire.[1]

The story of King Edmund of East Anglia is told by Ælfric, writing a little over a century after the saint's martyrdom at the hands of the Danes on 20 November 870. Then the country-folk, he says, 'laid the head by the holy body and buried him as they best might.' But 'when the harrying had ceased, . . . they came together and built a church [at Bury, in 903] worthily to the saint, because miracles were frequently done at his burial place.[2] . . . Then there was a great wonder, that he was all as whole as if he were alive, with clean body, and his neck was healed which before was cut through, and there was as it were a silken thread about his neck, all red. . . . And so he lieth uncorrupt until this present day' [997]. The story continues: 'A certain widow who was called Oswyn . . . would every year cut the hair of the saint, and cut his nails, . . . and keep them in a shrine as relics on the altar. . . . And Bishop Theodred[3] exceedingly [enriched the church] with gifts in gold and silver, in the saint's honour.'[4] Wallingford, in his chronicle,

[1] MS. Cotton Caligula A. VIII, § 98 (14th century).

[2] The first miracle was at the end of Alfred's reign, when a blind man recovered his sight.

[3] Bishop of London from 926 to 953.

[4] Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, xxxii, ll. 164–97 (Early Eng. Text Soc., O.S. 114, vol. ii, pp. 326–8). The story is also given by William of Malmesbury (*De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 213) and in the *Flores Historiarum* under A.D. 870 (Rolls Series, vol. i, pp. 441–2).

further says that Bishop Theodred opened the shrine of King Edmund, and 'found the head and body united and entire. He also clothed the saint with new garments and ornaments and *re-embalmed him with fresh spices.*'[1]

The miracle of the reunion of the head to the trunk is reaffirmed in the following thirteenth-century story. In the days of Abbot Leofstan the saint appeared and complained that his shrine was neglected. A three days' fast was held and an inspection of the coffin followed. The abbot was curious to know if the head was firmly joined to the body. He therefore caused one of the monks, named Thurstan, to hold the body by the feet, while he himself grasped the head with both hands. A tug-of-war ensued, and the abbot dragged both the body and the monk towards him.[2] Leofstan was soon seized with contrition for his impiety, and was struck with paralysis; he became blind and dumb and his hands were distorted and palsied. He sent to Edward the Confessor for a physician, and the king sent him Baldwin, a monk of St. Denis, who became the next abbot of Bury. Leofstan recovered his sight and speech, but could not recover the use of his hands which had been engaged in his impious deed.[3]

The *Flores Historiarum* say of St. Alphege, who was martyred by the Danes on Palm Sunday 1012, that 'after the lapse of ten years, the said body, free from every stain of corruption, was raised and borne to Canterbury to a more becoming resting-place, where, unto the present time [i.e. thirteenth century], the blood continues fresh and the body untainted'.[4]

St. Cuthbert died in 687, and the body was exhumed on the eleventh anniversary of his burial. Bede relates how 'they found his whole body as entire as when he was living, and more like one in a sound sleep (for the joints of the limbs were flexible) than one who was dead.'[5] The second exhumation was about the year 934, when the body was at Chester-le-Street. Simeon of Durham,

[1] Wallingford, *Chronica*, in T. Gale, *Historiae Britannicae*, vol. i, 1661, p. 534. But Wallingford, in adding this new detail, may merely be quoting the current practice with the bodies of saints at the time when he wrote.

[2] On p. 134 I quote the Canons of Edgar (65) as enjoining 'that a priest allow no tampering (*unnit*) with a corpse, but with fear of God, bury it wisely'. But there are countless examples of *unnit* with the bodies of the saints.

[3] Abbot Samson, *Opus de miraculis S. Ædmundi*, I. viii (T. Arnold, *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, 1890, vol. i, p. 134, Rolls Series).

[4] *Flores Historiarum*, under A.D. 1011: vol. i, p. 531. (Rolls Series.)

[5] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 42.

writing on the translation of the relics in 1104, 417 years after St. Cuthbert's death, testifies that the body was still uncorrupted, and says that he himself had handled it. The body was examined for the fourth time in 1537 or 1538 at the dissolution of the greater monasteries, and, on the contemporary evidence of Harpsfield, found to be still uncorrupt. It then lay in its broken coffin, and it is possible that corruption took place as a result of this exposure to the air. In order to save it from Thomas Cromwell, it was then buried by the prior and monks of Durham in the cathedral—probably in 1542. The almost complete skeleton of the saint was found and replaced at the opening of his tomb in March 1899. 'There can be no doubt on scientific grounds', says Henry Gee, 'that the body of the saint, emaciated by fastings and rigour, had dried up, but had never perished.'[1]

But besides the five saints mentioned by William of Malmesbury as being uncorrupted after death, there are many others of whom records remain.

Mention has already been made of the uncorrupted right arm and hand of St. Oswald, and the testimony of Bede[2] and of Hugo Candidus has been given.[3] Simeon of Durham also, writing early in the twelfth century, says that Swartebrand, a fellow monk of Durham but lately dead, had frequently testified as an eyewitness to the hand and arm remaining uncorrupt.[4]

St. Æthelberga, a daughter of Anna, king of the East Angles, and a sister of SS. Etheldrida and Wihtburh, was abbess of the monastery of Brie. Seven years after her death Bede says that the monks translated her body: 'on opening her tomb, they found the body as free from decay as it had been from the corruption of carnal concupiscence, and having washed it again and put on other clothes, they removed it to the church of St. Stephen'.[5]

A similar story is told by Bede of St. Fursey. His body was taken up after twenty-seven years from the porch of the church in Péronne in which it had been buried, so that it might be reinterred near the altar.

[1] *Victoria County History, Durham*, vol. ii, p. 11. For modern accounts see J. C. Wall, *Shrines of British Saints*, Antiquary's Books, pp. 176–207, and C. F. Battiscombe, 'The relics of St. Cuthbert', *Trans. Architect. and Archaeol. Soc. Durham and Northumberland*, 1937, viii. 43–79.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 6.

[3] See p. 185.

[4] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Church of Durham*, ch. ii (end).

[5] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 8.

It was found as entire as if he had just then died. And again, four years after, a more decent chapel being built for the same body to the eastward of the altar, it was still found free from corruption and translated thither with due honour; where it is well known that its merits, through the divine operation, have been declared by many miracles.[1]

St. Werburga, virgin and abbess, who died in 720, was a daughter of Wulfhere, king of Mercia, and became a nun under her great-aunt St. Etheldrida. Her body was buried at the monastery of Heanbyri (Hanbury in Staffordshire) and it was found to be without corruption nine years after her death, when it was conveyed to Chester during the confusion caused by the Danish incursions.[2]

Æthelberht, king of the East Angles, was a contemporary of Offa, who caused him to be beheaded in 794. His martyred body was later discovered through the agency of a heavenly light, and taken to Hereford where it became the centre of a cult. His head, says 'Richard of Cirencester', 'solidum ac cerebro incorrupto plenum', is conserved to the present day in the church of St. Peter at Westminster.[3]

St. Eadberga was a daughter of Edward the Elder. William of Malmesbury says her body was uncorrupted as 'the attendants of her churches at Winchester and Pershore relate to such as are unacquainted' with this.[4]

King Edgar the Peaceful died in 975 and was buried at Glastonbury. William of Malmesbury says that the tomb was opened by Abbot Ailward in 1052. The body was found to be uncorrupted, and was—strange to say—then cut in order to get it into its new coffin. Blood flowed from it in torrents. The remains were placed in a shrine on an altar, and a man, lunatic and blind, was there cured.[5] If the various scandalous stories about Edgar are true, it can hardly be said that the incorruption of the body in this case was due to the 'virtue of continence and chastity' on the part of the king, whatever may have been his merits as a ruler. The story has a pagan-vampire savour about it.

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* 19.

[2] Goscelin, *Vita S. Werburgae, virginis* (MS. Cotton Caligula, A. VIII, § 82: 12th century). See also Florence of Worcester under year 675.

[3] 'Richard of Cirencester', *Speculum historiale de gestis regum Angliae*, ch. 64 (Rolls Series, vol. i, 1863, p. 294).

[4] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 217.

[5] Ibid. ii. 160.

Edward the Martyr was murdered at Corfe in 978. Simeon of Durham relates that in the following year: 'Elfa, duke of the Mercians, with a multitude of people came to Wareham and ordered the blessed body of the king . . . to be raised from the tomb: which when exposed was found to be free from all decay and corruption. Being washed and enveloped in new vestments, it was brought to Shaftesbury and honourably entombed.'[1] William of Malmesbury says that cures were effected at his tomb: the lame walked and the dumb spoke. A well sprang up at Wareham where the body was found: 'þare Mani Miracle hath i-beo: ase þe contreie dethþ telle.'[2]

In the thirty-seventh year after his death the body of Edward the Confessor was exhumed by Gilbert, surnamed Crispin, and by Gundulf, bishop of Rochester. A description of the body is given by Osbert de Clare, writing in 1138,[3] and also by Ailred of Rievaulx. When they lifted the lid of the sarcophagus, a fragrant odour filled the church. 'They found the whole body to be firm and fresh', says Ailred. 'They extended his arms, flexed his fingers, examined his joints and found all to be sound, all pliable, and most strong with the old vigour. Finally they investigated the soundness of his flesh, likewise its colour, which was purer than glass and whiter than snow, thus revealing the glory of his future resurrection.' The bishop of Rochester also drew forth the snow-white beard from under the face-cloth.[4]

The esteem in which these incorrupted saints were held is shown by the number of churches (before 1700) dedicated to them. There are, for instance, 72 dedications to St. Cuthbert, 67 to St. Oswald, and 61 to St. Edmund.

A curious parallel may be given from ancient Ireland. King Slanoll[5] died at Tara in the year 3959 (counted since the beginning of the world), 'and it is not known what disease carried him off: he was found dead, but his colour did not change. He was afterwards buried, and after his body had been forty years in the grave, it was taken up by his son [Oilioll macSlanuill]; and the body

[1] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Kings of England*, under A.D. 979.
[2] *Early S. English Legendary*, 17, l. 122 (E.E.T.S., o.s. 87, p. 50).
[3] Osbert de Clare, *Vita beati Eadwardi regis Anglorum*, xxx, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xli, 1923.
[4] Ailred (abbot of Rievaulx), *Vita S. Edwardi regis et confessoris*, in Migne, *Patrologia Lat.*, vol. cxcv, col. 782.
[5] *Slan*, health; *oll*, great.

had remained without rotting or decomposing during this period. This thing was a great wonder and surprise to the men of Ireland.'[1]

In the Eastern Church the incorruption of the body was one of the important points in the evidence submitted with regard to candidates for canonization.[2] The bodies of Boris and Glyeb, the earliest Russian saints, who died in 1015, were both uncorrupt.

It has just been shown how a healing technique was developed for the use of relics, and it is only natural that a technique should also have been evolved for the preservation of the relics themselves.

Though officially a miraculous explanation of incorruption was given, it seems probable from a study of the foregoing notes that artificial means were taken for the preservation of these precious bodies, or at least in order that corruption might be retarded.

The bodies concerned were of either royal or ecclesiastical personages. In the former case money and the means for the preservation of the bodies would easily be obtained; in the latter it was in the interest of the miracle-workers that they *should* be forthcoming. In either case, the care of the bodies passed into the hands of the clerics, who could and did make use of them for healing purposes.

It has been mentioned in connexion with the body of King Edmund that it was 're-embalmed with fresh spices'. Those of St. Æthelburga and of King Edward the Martyr were washed when they were exhumed and translated. I suggest that the bodies were washed in wine; they may have been actually steeped in strong wine as a preservative. In several cases it is recorded that the bodies were put into new clothes, and possibly these were saturated with spirit. The 'fragrant odour' which 'filled the church' when the body of Edward the Confessor was exhumed also points to the means which had been employed for embalming it. Similarly the eleventh-century *Vita St. Neoti* says that at the time of the burial of the saint in 877, 'an odoriferous smell pervades the church and numbers of sick persons are cured'. The body was translated seven years later and the same smell was perceived.[3] William of

[1] *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. John O'Donovan, vol. i, 1856, p. 55. The *Annals of Clonmachnoise* say 5 years, and add: 'during whose reign the kingdom was free from all manners of sickness'.

[2] W. H. Hutton, article on 'Canonization' in Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. iii, p. 211.

[3] T. D. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, I. ii, p. 545 (Rolls Series).

Malmesbury says that when the body of St. Milburga, which had been lost, was accidentally discovered in a vault at Wenlock, 'a balsamic odour pervaded the whole church'.[1] This seems to indicate that it was the genuine body of the saint, since means had been employed to preserve it.

From the evidence of a few recorded examples it is reasonable to assume that some of the bodies of Anglo-Saxon and of at least two post-Conquest saints were preserved in oil. Jerome Porter notes that in 1312 'a wonderful oyle issued miraculously from the sepulchre of St. John of Beverley by the space of a whole day, which was very medicinal and sovereign against manie diseases'.[2] He also says that 'from the relics of St. Wallburga of Eichstadt issued a sacred oil which by the Grace of God and the intercession of St. Wallburga gave sight to the blind'.[3] The latter saint, who died in 774, was the daughter of a West Saxon thane and the sister of St. Willibald: she is represented in art with a flask of oil. Her relics were translated to Eichstadt in 870, and a considerable part still remains there.

The two post-Conquest saints in question are St. Hugh of Lincoln and St. William of York. Giraldus Cambrensis says that when Bishop Oliver Sutton of Lincoln was holding the severed head of St. Hugh in his hands prior to the saint's translation, 'ex ejus maxilla non parum olei distillavit'.[4] The tomb of St. William, after his translation at Whitsuntide in 1308, is said to have 'sweated forth a glorious oil' which healed the sick.[5]

Since in each case there appears to have been a larger amount of oil than could have been generated by the body, I suggest that the oil was here the preservative that had been employed.

The most famous continental example of a comparable nature is the body of St. Andrew. It is said that oily matter exuded from it at Patras where he was martyred. This appeared again in the fourteenth century after it was acquired by the cathedral of Amalfi. 'This substance', says Bompus, 'under the name of Manna of St. Andrew became, like that of St. Nicholas at Bari—Manna di San Nicolà—a source of great profit, and long enjoyed a reputation

[1] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 216.
[2] J. Porter, *The Flowers of the Lives of the . . . Saints*, 1632, p. 419.
[3] Ibid., p. 185.
[4] Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, vii. 222 (Rolls Series).
[5] E. Venables, 'The shrine and head of St. Hugh of Lincoln', *Archaeol. Journ.* 1893, vol. 50, p. 47.

in all the south of Europe for its miraculous powers in the cure of disease.'[1]

The fact that the clothing in which the bodies were wrapped did not decay any more than did the bodies themselves also seems to indicate that some preservative was used. 'Tam corpus quam lintheamina integra sunt reperta', to quote Matthew Paris, writing of St. Cuthbert. The *Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert* says that after his death 'he was robed in his priestly garments, wearing his shoes in readiness to meet Christ, and provided with a waxen shroud (*in sindone cerata curatus*)'.[2] Details have already been given of this saint's body at its various exhumations, but information is also available with regard to his clothing on each occasion. This information is given in the long and most useful article published by C. F. Battiscombe in 1937 on the relics of St. Cuthbert, and from it the following relevant details are noted.[3]

Bede in his *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert* tells us that, before his burial in 687, the saint's body was wrapped in a winding-sheet given him by the Abbess Verca of Tynemouth. The *Anonymous Life* says also that it was then robed in mass vestments. In 698 the monks of Lindisfarne exhumed the saint. Bede says that they removed 'part of the clothes which were about the holy body' and that they 'wound the body in a new garment before placing it in the coffin which they had provided'. Simeon of Durham tells us that on the next exhumation (about 934) King Athelstan presented the shrine, which was then at Chester-le-Street, with a stole,[4] a maniple, a girdle, and two golden bracelets.[5] This provided a third opportunity for attending to the body and its clothing.

Reginald of Durham furnishes particulars of the fourth exhumation, which was carried out on the occasion of the translation of the relics in 1104. He says that the three outer garments were removed, and that 'others most costly and elegant' were substituted for them. Another—anonymous—account of the translation adds that 'all the swathements retained their original freshness without any stain of corruption', a statement which provides yet another

[1] T. F. Bompus, *The Cathedrals and Churches of Rome and Southern Italy*, London, n.d., p. 262.

[2] *Anon. Life of St. Cuthbert*, iv. 13.

[3] C. F. Battiscombe, 'The relics of St. Cuthbert', *Trans. Architect. and Archaeol. Soc. Durham and Northumberland*, 1937, viii, 43–79.

[4] R. A. Smith, 'St. Cuthbert's stole', *Brit. Mus. Quart.*, 1937, xi. 4–5.

[5] Simeon of Durham, *Opera omnia*, vol. i, p. 211 (Rolls Series).

indication of the use of preservatives. Richard of Segbrook, the shrine-keeper in Edward III's reign, gives a list of the relics which were in his charge in 1373, and also mentions the 'cloth dipped in wax which had enveloped the body of St. Cuthbert in his grave'.

Battiscombe ends by describing the means taken in recent years to preserve these vestments. In 1935 they were scientifically treated in the British Museum, the task of remounting being undertaken by Mrs. Guy Antrobus, Mrs. H. J. Plenderleith, and Dr. Margaret Murray.

It is possible also that the nature of the ground in which the bodies had been buried tended to preserve them in some cases. Payne, after quoting Bede's description of the body of St. Etheldreda, says:

> The appearances thus described would be caused by the formation of adipocere, which is often found when a body is buried or preserved in a cold and damp situation; and thus the abbess's body, enclosed in a wooden coffin buried under the damp marshy soil of the undrained Isle of Ely, would be in conditions very favourable for this change. If it be asked why the same change was not observed in the bodies of the humble nuns as in that of the saintly abbess, the answer is obvious, that the bodies of the nuns were not exhumed. When the fatty tissues are completely transformed into adipocere, no further decomposition takes place for an indefinite period.[1]

Chapter 258 of *St. Olaf's Saga* in the *Heimskringla* tells of the exhumation of the king's body on 3 August 1031, a year and five days after his death at the battle of Stiklestad. After chronicling that 'his appearance was in no respect altered', that 'his cheeks were as red as if he had but just fallen asleep', and that, as in the case of King Edmund, 'his hair and nails had grown as much as if he had lived on the earth all the time that had passed since his fall', the saga quotes one of the bystanders as saying that 'people buried in sand rot very slowly, and it would not have been so if he had been buried in earth'. His son, King Magnus, himself clipped the saint's hair and cut his nails every twelve months, keeping the key of the shrine in his own possession. This shows that an opportunity was given each year for renewing the means of preserving the body.[2]

The practice of cutting the hair and nails of a dead saint by privileged persons is recorded yet again in the case of St. Cuthbert.

[1] J. F. Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 1904, p. 24 (footnote).

[2] *Saga of Harold Hardrada*, 25.

Reginald of Durham in his *Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus* tells us that Elfred Weston, 'as often as it pleased him, might freely and with impunity open the coffin of the saint, might wrap him in such robes as he thought fit . . . and that it was his custom to cut the overgrowing hair of his venerable head, to adjust it by dividing it and smoothing it with an ivory comb, and to cut the nails of his fingers'.[1] An ivory comb was among the relics enumerated as found in the coffin.[2] What Benjamin Thorpe rightly terms a 'strange narrative' by a monk of Winchester named Eadwine, who calls himself 'child-master in the New Monastery' there, occurs in a Winchester manuscript. He says 'the holy Cuthbert manifestly appeared to me', and, in spite of the refusal of leave by his abbot, 'I went thither north, and bishop Ægelwine received me with worship: and God and the saint granted me that I washed him with my hands, and combed his hair with a comb, and sheared his hair with shears, and clothed him all with new clothing and took from him his old clothes: some I left there and some I have here.'[3] This 'miracle' with regard to hair and nails was not confined to England. Burckhardt, citing Michele Savonarola, mentions 'how the hair and nails on the corpse of a holy nun in Santa Chiara [at Padua] kept on continually growing'.[4]

One would expect to find the Anglo-Saxon custom, and method, of preserving the bodies of the dead to have been derived by them from the Roman practice, which had in turn been derived from the Hellenistic East and from Egypt. But the evidence for embalming under the Empire is strangely meagre. Mau cites but two instances from Latin writers, one from Tacitus and the other from Statius.[5] Tacitus says of Nero's wife Poppaea, who was put to death by him in A.D. 65, that 'her body was not consumed by fire according to Roman usage, but after the custom of foreign [i.e. Hellenistic] princes was filled with fragrant spices and

[1] Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ch. xxvi (Surtees Society, vol. i, 1835).

[2] St. Edmund's comb was once preserved as a relic in the chapel of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Oxford, and was used for curing those who suffered from continual headaches.

[3] Addressed by Eadwine to Ælfsie, bishop of Winchester (1015–32). MS. Winton, fo. 114 *v*, in B. Thorpe, *Diplomatarium anglicum aevi Saxonici*, 1865, p. 322.

[4] J. Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Phaidon Press, 1944, p. 298.

[5] Mau, in Pauly–Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, v, 1905, col. 2114.

embalmed'.[1] Statius says of Priscilla, the wife of Abascantus, a Secretary of State under Domitian (81–96) whose tomb was at the city end of the Appian Way: 'Here thy peerless consort—for he could not bear the smoke of burning and the clamour of the byre—laid thee, delicately arrayed in Sidonian purple, blissfully to rest. Length of years will have no power to harm thee . . . such a wealth of perfume does the venerable marble breathe.'[2] From the wording of Tacitus it is obvious that the practice of embalming was of a later date than the time of Nero. Mau remarks that it was revived with the reappearance of the sarcophagus. He mentions the finding of a perfectly preserved body in a sarcophagus on the Appian Way in 1485; trustworthy contemporary details of its condition are not available, but it is said to have been covered with a 'crust'.[3] Evidence as to the methods of embalming employed by the Romans seems to have been destroyed, and all the tombs on the Appian Way, which might have preserved such evidence, have been despoiled of their contents by thieves.

(*d*) *The use* (*and misuse*) *of relics during the later Anglo-Saxon period*

It is obvious that the faith, or credulity, of the ordinary patient was such that, once the healing reputation of a relic had been established, its possessors by their ingenuity were able to 'work the oracle' in various ways. When, instead of doing good merely for the glory of their religion, the element of greed entered in, and when payment was demanded in return for the cure, the spirit of the early Anglo-Saxon Church entirely disappeared. The atmosphere of deceit already prevailing on the Continent entered in when the religious life in this country began to decay.

Zimmer, in a vigorous defence of the early Celtic Church, says that the cult of relics did not enter into its life until it had become associated with Rome. He instances that 'in St. Columba's Life, written by Adamnan before he joined the Roman party in 688, nothing is said of relics, of the cult of relics, or of miracles effected by relics'. Roman influence began in southern Ireland after the return in 633 of the embassy sent to Rome by the Irish Church. Zimmer quotes the words of Cummean as a result of the visit: 'And we have proofs of the virtue of God being in the relics

[1] Tacitus, *Annals*, xvi. 6. [2] Statius, *Silvae*, v. 1, ll. 222–31.

[3] Burckhardt (op. cit., p. 112) suggests that this may, however, refer to a 'coloured mask of wax or some other material' which covered the face.

of the holy martyrs, and in the writings which they have brought hither. With our own eyes we have seen a totally blind girl open her eyes before these relics, and we have seen a lame man (*paralyticum*) walk, and many evil spirits cast out.' Zimmer comments: 'Everything in this passage, down to the very terms used (*reliquiae*) is Roman, not Irish.'[1] It has already been shown how the relics of St. Oswald were used by the Christian Church in Northumbria after it had come into contact with Roman influence, even before its official conversion to Roman usage in 664.

Pope Gregory, supporting Augustine in his undertaking, sent him relics as well as books and vestments and other things which would be of use to him.

The man who first was active in bringing foreign relics to England was Benedict Biscop, abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow and a minister of King Oswiu. On his fourth journey to Rome, Bede says 'he introduced a great number of the relics of Christ's apostles and martyrs, such as would bring grace to many churches of the English'.[2] Wilfrid also brought back relics (among other things) on his various visits to Rome. In 680, before leaving Rome, he 'obtained from chosen men a great many holy relics, for the edification of the churches of Britain, writing down what each of the relics was and to which saint it belonged'.[3] Similarly, prior to his departure from Rome in 704, he 'visited with his friends the shrines of the saints, and according to his habit, collected from elect men holy relics authenticated by the names of the saints, buying also vestments of purple and silver to ornament the churches'.[4]

The Leofric Missal, which was used at Exeter during that bishop's episcopate (1050–72), contains a long list of the relics possessed by the monastery; most of them were given to it by Athelstan at its foundation by him in 932. 'They were collected', says F. E. Warren, the editor of the Leofric Missal, 'on the Continent for Athelstan by messengers sent abroad for that purpose. The list is an appalling one, both in its character and dimensions, and yet we are told that it forms only a third part of the relics possessed by that king.'[5]

[1] H. Zimmer, *The Celtic Church in Britain and Ireland*, 1902, p. 123. In Old Irish the word *relic* means cemetery and that for relics is *martre*. Modern Irish *reileag* still signifies a churchyard. (H. Zimmer, op. cit., pp. 119–20.)

[2] Bede, *Vita abbatum*, 6.

[3] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 33. [4] Ibid., ch. 55.

[5] *Leofric Missal*, ed. F. E. Warren, Oxford, 1883, pp. lxi–lxii and 3–5.

But the major English relics of the Anglo-Saxon period, and possibly also of the later Middle Ages, were those of native saints such as those mentioned in the last two sections. So great was the sanctity of these men and women, and so great in consequence was their reputation, that many of their relics, such as those of St. Oswald already mentioned, were exported to the Continent to help the work of English missionaries there.

Religion in the later Middle Ages in this country had a much greater appeal to the senses than the established religion has today. Many of the churches did not show merely the natural colour of the stone of which they were built, but were gaily painted in the brightest colours. 'In the south-east', to quote the words of H. C. Darby, 'the Benedictines and Cluniacs built their monasteries characterised by gorgeous decoration.' The rich vestments of the Catholic Church, and the magnificent shrines, adorned with the gold and jewels which were offered to them by kings and less illustrious pilgrims, all combined to intoxicate the worshipper. It is therefore no matter of surprise that miraculous cures throve in such an atmosphere. This state of affairs was in its infancy during the Anglo-Saxon period, but the seeds for it were then being sown and each cure effected at a shrine was acclaimed as a matter of moment for its reputation.

The following story from the *Book of Hyde* shows the atmosphere at the close of the tenth century. It concerns the miraculous cures which were being performed at the shrine of St. Swithun at Winchester. Bishop Æthelwold (died 984) had ordered that whenever

> any sick person should be sensible of a desired cure of a bodily disorder, wrought by the power of the Lord and the merits of the holy bishop, all the brethren of that place should straightway lay aside whatever necessary occupations they happened to be engaged in, and go to the church, and give due praise to God. Now it happened that some persons enticed by the deceit of the devil, were greatly annoyed at being frequently roused from their nightly rest, sometimes thrice, sometimes four times, in one night; and they wickedly persuaded the rest to decline obedience to the order of their bishop.

After about fifteen days of this, St. Swithun appeared in a dream to a certain venerable matron one night, being 'clothed in a white garment, and in a robe that reached to his feet, bearing a crown of gold upon his head, richly adorned with precious stones, and ornamented with Indian pearls, and shod with beautiful sandals'. He

informed her of the negligence of the monks, and threatened that if things did not mend, the miraculous cures would forthwith cease. The saint then 'removing thence his angelic face, ascended in dazzling light to heaven'. The matron awoke, and having arisen 'with a speed that exceeded her strength', she at once informed the bishop. He threatened the recalcitrant monks with a seven days' penance, 'neither eating nor drinking anything except bread and water'. After that no further instance of disobedience to his injunctions occurred.[1]

It has been shown that many relics were translated after their first burial. This was sometimes done, as in the case of St. Cuthbert, in order to preserve them from the ravages of the Norsemen. It was also done to facilitate their being accessible for miracles and cures. In some cases the body was moved to a different spot. Cedd's body, for instance, was first buried in the churchyard at Lastingham, and afterwards was removed to a tomb on the right of the high altar of the stone church which replaced the original wooden building. In other cases, for example that of St. Hugh at Lincoln, the original small chapel in which the saint had been buried became in time so thronged by the numbers of the sick seeking a cure that it could no longer receive them. The chapel

[1] *The Book of Hyde*, ed. by E. Edwards, ch. 12 (Rolls Series). This story is derived from Ælfric (*Lives of the Saints*, xxi, St. Swithun). He, in turn, took his material from a monk of Winchester named Lantfred who wrote in 981. I have quoted, however, from the much later *Book of Hyde* (still a Winchester source) since it gives many picturesque, though inconsequential, details omitted from the earlier narratives. A comparison of the three earlier accounts, i.e. those in (*a*) Lantfred's *Translatio et miracula S. Swithyni* (Bibl. cod. lat. 5362), (*b*) his work of the same name from MS. U. 107 in the Municipal Library at Rouen, and (*c*) Ælfric, 'will disclose the rapid changes in the accounts of St. Swithin, which were made in the three decades following the translation of his relics'. The quotation is from an article by G. H. Gerould on Ælfric's legend of St. Swithun in *Anglia*, xxxii, p. 340. The account in the *Book of Hyde* elaborates still further.

St. Swithun died in 862, and the translation of his relics took place in 971. Lantfred speaks of the miracles which happened during the ten years following the translation, and he therefore wrote in 981. Ælfric describes the translation of the relics and was at the time, in the opinion of J. S. Westlake, probably a postulant at Winchester. He was obviously well acquainted with the Winchester practices, since he remarks (ll. 262–4), concerning the seven days' penance which was threatened by the bishop, 'henceforth they ever observed this custom, as we ourselves have very often seen, and have not seldom sung this hymn [the Te Deum, as instructed by Æthelwold] with them'. Ælfric probably wrote his *Lives of the Saints* about 997. The *Book of Hyde* dates from the middle of the fourteenth century.

might then be enlarged, rather than the body translated to another part of the church.[1] Crossley points out that these translations often entailed major changes in the evolution and development of churches. The transfer of relics from the crypt to 'a place of honour behind the high altar, raised on bases of stone or marble where all could view the costly gifts of gold and jewels which adorned the shrines', involved a considerable enlargement of the eastern limit of the building.[2]

If a saint were unwilling that his body, or any part of it, should be moved from one place to another, he often made his wish known. For instance, the body of St. Cuthbert could not be removed from Wurdelau, thereby indicating that the adjacent cathedral of Durham was to be built as his permanent resting-place. On the other hand, there are stories, presumably originating in a desire for increase of revenue by the monastery concerned, of various saints appearing in dreams and giving instructions that their bodies should be moved to other, and usually more honourable, places. In the year 970, for example, 110 years after his first burial, the remains of St. Swithun were translated from the cemetery into the church—that of SS. Peter and Paul at Winchester—by St. Æthelwold the bishop, 'who had been warned by heaven to do so'.[3]

The discovery of relics by miraculous means is recorded most frequently at the time when the various monasteries which had been burned by the Norsemen were being rebuilt, and consequently required re-endowment.

The greed of Durham, already so opulent, in removing relics from their original homes and collecting them under her own roof, seems to have been insatiable. Elfred Weston, alias Alured Larwa, son of Weston, traversed the whole of Northumbria with the express purpose of collecting relics for his church. It was he who, having rifled the ruins of Jarrow for the purpose,[4] brought the bones of Bede to Durham in 1022.[5]

[1] Venables, op. cit., pp. 39–40. Later St. Hugh's body was translated to a shrine behind the high altar, but the head remained in the original chapel. By this means pilgrims could frequent two shrines at the same time.

[2] F. H. Crossley, *English Church Design, 1040–1540 A.D.*, 1945, p. 90.

[3] *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. i, p. 511 (Rolls Series).

[4] To quote Sir Charles Peers, 'he dug up and placed in shrines the bones of the anchorites Balther and Bilfrid, of Acca and Alchmund, bishops of Hexham, of King Oswiu, and of the abbesses Æbba and Ethelgitha. Parts of all these he brought to Durham and put them with St. Cuthbert's body. From Melrose he

Notes 4 & 5 continued overleaf.

There is a story, told by Simeon of Durham, that St. Alchmund, bishop of Hexham, appeared to a certain devout man of that place, telling him to ask Alured to remove his remains to a more honourable position within the priory. Alured arrived, and after six hours of digging discovered the remains of the saint. Thinking he was entitled after his labour to some reward, he attempted to carry off a piece of a finger with him to Durham. The bearers tried for a whole day to carry the relics from the former grave into the church but were unable to move them. Alchmund then appeared a second time in a dream and showed his hand with part of the finger missing. Restitution was made, and the translation of the relics was then completed without difficulty.[1]

But the saddest story relating to the collection of relics for the benefit of an English monastery is that told by Hugo Candidus, sub-prior of Peterborough, concerning Ælsinus, or Elsin, who was abbot of that monastery for the fifty years from 1005 to 1055. The unchristian methods employed by the abbot for extorting relics show how far the morality of the Church had sunk since the days of the saintly Bede. Hugo says that Ælsinus

> enriched the church especially with the relics of saints. . . . He was in Normandy for three years with Queen Ymma, . . . and it happened that while he was there a severe famine cruelly vexed the whole province . . . so that many left their fatherland. Whence it happened that abbots and monks sold what they had of most value so that they might avoid so great a peril. Ælsinus, being on the spot, bought many things, and he was able to have everything almost for nothing. When he came to the monastery of St. Florentinus de Bona Valle, he found everything in confusion, and that the famine was troubling them greatly. They had nothing more that they could sell except St. Florentinus himself, their patron and protector. Him they sold to him with his whole shrine (*feretrum*), excepting only his head so that it might be the protector of their monastery for all time. Wherefore the monks of St. Florentinus lament through the ages for this change.[2]

brought the bones of St. Boisil and set them in a shrine near St. Cuthbert's, and going to Jarrow he . . . eventually contrived to abstract the bones [of Bede], and bring them secretly to Durham, putting them into St. Cuthbert's coffin.' *Bede, Twelfth Centenary Essays*, pp. 105–6.

[5] For the collecting by Alured, see J. Raine, *The priory of Hexham*, vol. i, 1864, pp. liii–liv (Surtees Soc. vol. xliv).

[1] Simeon of Durham, *History of the Kings of England*, under A.D. 781. He calls Alured 'Elfred, son of Westueor, priest of the Church of Durham'.

[2] *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough*, ed. W. T. Mellows, Lond. 1949, pp. 48–49.

Hugo gives much information, as already mentioned, concerning the right arm of St. Oswald, which he considers the most precious of the relics of Peterborough. One can but regret the spurious company in which it was then found. The list of Peterborough's relics, which is given by Hugo, includes such things as 'two small pieces of the five loaves which the Lord gave to the five thousand' and Aaron's rod.

Thomas Wright, speaking of relics, says that 'it is a very suspicious circumstance that in general they gave no miraculous evidence of their existence, except while they were in the hands of those who were making a profit of them'.[1] He also calls attention to the fact that at the Reformation no miracle was wrought for the protection of any relic.

Thus far had corruption in connexion with relics advanced at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period. It increased from that time and contributed, as is well known, to the separation from Rome of the Church in England some four and a half centuries later.

The knowledge that the body of St. Cuthbert did not perish at the Reformation and that it was not subjected to insult at the hands of Thomas Cromwell is, however, a source of joy to the student of the Anglo-Saxon period. To him the cathedral of Durham is indeed holy ground, for it still contains all that was mortal not only of Cuthbert but also of Bede.

One gathers that the Normans were at first uninterested in Anglo-Saxon relics, and that later they were suspicious of them. But upon the revival of interest in Anglo-Saxon matters at the beginning of the reign of Henry I, the Normans seem to have perceived that Anglo-Saxon relics might be used to advantage. They wished, however, first to test their genuineness: hence sundry exhumations such as that of Edward the Confessor, whose body, as was mentioned above,[2] was inspected by Gundulf, bishop of Rochester, and by Abbot Crispin.

Another ecclesiastic who came to be consulted as an expert at distinguishing true relics from false was Ralph d'Escures (a hamlet near Séez), who was abbot of Saint Martin de Séez in Normandy. Ordericus Vitalis tells us that Ralph was present at the translation

[1] T. Wright, *Essays on Archaeological Subjects*, 1861, vol. i, p. 259 (ch. xi, 'On saints' lives and miracles').

[2] See p. 197.

of the relics of St. Nicholas and other saints to Noron in 1092;[1] these relics became in great demand for curing fevers and other maladies. He left his abbey to escape the tyranny of Robert de Bellême, and fled to England, where he was kindly received by Henry I, by Anselm, who was an old friend, and by Gundulf, bishop of Rochester. Ralph, on his arrival, made a circuit of the English abbeys.[2]

When the body of St. Cuthbert was removed to its new shrine in the newly completed cathedral of Durham on 4 September 1104, Ralph, in company with Alexander of Scotland, who afterwards became king as Alexander I, inspected the body before the ceremony. This was on account of doubts concerning it which had been expressed by certain abbots.[3] Ordericus Vitalis says that the vestments on the body were changed on this occasion.[4]

On the death of Gundulf, Ralph succeeded him as bishop of Rochester in August 1108. When Anselm died in 1109, 'Ralph was present', says Malmesbury, 'and he particularly asked [a monk named] Baldwin if he had some drops of balsam with which to anoint at least the head so that it might escape corruption.'[5] One sees here again the carrying out of the process of preservation. By a miracle the amount of balsam increased so as to be sufficient to anoint the whole body.

Ralph was enthroned as archbishop in succession to Anselm on 17 May 1114.[6]

[1] Ordericus Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, Bk. VII, ch. xiii.

[2] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, i. 68 (Rolls Series, 1870, p. 127).

[3] Simeon of Durham, *De miraculis et translationibus* (Rolls Series, vol. i, pp. 258–9).

[4] Ordericus Vitalis, op. cit., Bk. V, ch. ix. 22.

[5] William of Malmesbury, op. cit. i. 66 (Rolls Series, p. 123).

[6] I owe the above account of Ralph to the research of the late Professor R. L. G. Ritchie.

PART 5

Magic as an Adjunct to Medicine

CHAPTER XII

Things Possessing Magical Properties which aid Cures

'THE aim of positive magic', says Sir James Fraser, 'is to produce a desired effect: the aim of negative magic or taboo is to avoid an undesired one.'

The 'things possessing magical properties' dealt with in this chapter were all calculated to forward the objects of positive magic so as to cure disease. They are the agents employed, or their accessories.

(*a*) *Numbers*

Odd numbers were usually more magical than even. *Numero deus impare gaudet*, says Virgil:[1] whence Servius concludes that 'odd numbers are observed for the purpose of healing, for it is the gods above who delight in odd numbers, and the gods below in even ones'. Considering the influence that Virgil had on the medieval mind, this is a matter of some moment. But, in Palestine today, 'Every odd number, and especially the number eleven, is unlucky'.[2]

By far the commonest numbers used in prescriptions by the Anglo-Saxons were three and nine, the latter intensifying the former. The *Lacnunga*, having prescribed certain herbs as a remedy against pock and scab in sheep, says, 'Put a dose into the mouth with a spoon, always three a day; nine times if there be great need.'[3] Three occurs in almost every charm, and it is therefore superfluous to quote examples. In Christian times it is especially connected with the Trinity. If borrowed, the number three may have come from Rome, for many examples again could be given. Thus Ovid says, 'Terque senem flamma, ter aqua, ter sulfure lustrat.'[4] Here the number three occurs three times, as is often the case in Anglo-Saxon charms.

The number nine is more potent. To cure haemorrhoids the directions in the *Lacnunga* are: 'Take myrrh the plant and cut off

[1] Virgil, *Ecl.* viii. 75.
[2] J. E. Hanauer, *Folk-lore of the Holy Land*, 1907, p. 310.
[3] *Lacn.* 81 (CXLIV).
[4] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vii. 261.

nine [slices like] pennies . . . and swallow them at even, and again a second nine in the morn. And so do for nine days and nine nights unless cure come to thee sooner.'[1] The *Lacnunga* names nine specially magical herbs to be used against nine venoms and against nine blisters.[2]

Three and nine figure much in Finnish magic, and nine was also especially magical in ancient Ireland.[3] Three is an especial feature in Welsh folk-lore; nine, less frequently.[4] One may compare also the charm in *King Lear*:

> Swithold footed thrice the old;
> He met the night-mare and her nine-fold,[5]

which is a corruption of 'Saint Withhold footed thrice the wold: he met the night-mare and her nine foals'.

In Anglo-Saxon there are also, occasionally, instances of twenty-seven being used; for bite (*slite*) of snake, *ellen-wyrt* (*ebulum*) is to be held in the hand, and the charm beginning 'Omnes malas bestias canto' is to be said thrice nine times.[6] Again, twenty-seven peppercorns are prescribed for a good drink against 'stitch in the side' (*síd-ece*).[7]

The other two uneven numbers employed in Anglo-Saxon are five[8] (and its multiples) and seven, though these are not so common as three and nine.

The number five is found especially in connexion with bloodletting. A manuscript at St. John's College, Oxford, dated *c.* 1110–12 says, 'Especially beware of the 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, and 30th days of the month. On these days, quinones as doctors call them, no blood should be let.'[9] In another prescription, which occurs in the third *Leechbook*, exactly the opposite proceeding is advocated, since for the palsy a man is to be 'bled every month when the moon is 5 and 15 and 20 nights old'.[10]

[1] *Lacn.* 6 (XIX).

[2] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXIX–LXXXI). More correctly, against six blisters followed by three more venoms, which come from the east, north, and west: that from the south has been omitted as it would have made a tenth. For quotation of this charm see p. 334.

[3] For examples, see P. W. Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, 1913, vol. i, pp. 307–9.

[4] Cf. esp. *Mabinogion*, passim.

[5] Shakespeare, *King Lear*, III. iv. 114–15 (Variorum edition).

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, xciii. 2.

[7] *Lacn.* 65 (CXXIII).

[8] Five is the sacred number in Chinese medicine.

[9] St. John's Coll., Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 1*v.*; cf. also *Leechbook I*, lxxii (quoted on pp. 296–7.

[10] *Leechbook III*, xlvii.

Apart from blood-letting, five is rare: but for a sore on the back of the neck, according to *περὶ διδάξεων*, special poultices are to be applied fifteen times.[1]

Seven also occurs, but only occasionally, in Anglo-Saxon recipes. Masses may be sung seven times,[2] or seven wafers may be used. In the case of the wafers, in a charm against nightmare already quoted, seven is essential because the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus are to be written on them.[3]

The seventh son always has special powers. In the Highlands of Scotland the king and the seventh son can cure scrofula by their touch.[4] A Welsh charm for warts runs: 'Wash the warts with the water from a font in which the seventh son of the same man and wife is baptized.'[5]

Seven may owe its importance to the seven days of the week, and thus to the quarters of the moon. In medieval medicine the days of crisis in an illness are the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th from its beginning.[6] Higher multiples of seven are not of importance, for after the 28th day the disease becomes chronic; it then ceases to be governed by the positions of the moon, and is henceforth regulated by the sun.[7]

Eleven and thirteen and their multiples apparently had no special magical significance for the Anglo-Saxons.

One curious example of odd numbers occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* 'for the fever which cometh on a man on the fourth day. The juice of field-larkspur is to be pounded with pepper and mixed, and of the peppercorns let there be an odd number (*ofertæl*), that is on the first day, one and thirty; and on the second day, seventeen; and on the third day, thirteen'.[8] It may be noted that all these numbers are indivisible.

[1] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 42.

[2] *Leechbook I*, lxiii.

[3] *Lacn.* 56 (XCIII). See also pp. 165–6.

[4] A. Macbain, 'Highland superstition', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, 1892, xiv. 258.

[5] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, § 813.

[6] See also Maçoudi ['Alī Ibn Husain, *al-Mas'udi*], *Les Prairies d'or*, éd. C. B. de Meynard et P. de Courteille, Paris, vol. iii, 1864, ch. lxi, pp. 438–9, where he is dealing with the Arabs.

[7] C. A. Mercier, *Astrology in Medicine*, 1914, pp. 64–65. Seven is the most common number in Assyrian charms, as might be expected from the importance of the moon in the Assyrian religion. See R. C. Thompson, 'Assyrian medical texts', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1923–4, xvii (Sect. Hist. Med.), 1–34 (*passim*).

[8] *A.S. Herbal*, clx.

Of even numbers there is but little to be said. Four occurs most often in connexion with the four evangelists, the four elements, and the four humours. It has magical significance in connexion with quartan fever, even as three has with tertian fever. Four is also associated with the four cardinal points of the compass,[1] which constantly occur in Anglo-Saxon charms. These, says Singer, are Indo-Germanic, and are not borrowed from the Classics. This was because they were especially connected with the winds, and the Mediterranean peoples were accustomed to the 'periodic recurrence of winds from definite directions', and therefore did not connect them with the four cardinal points.[2] 'The twelve signs of the zodiac were known from of old to influence the parts of man's body, and the twelve signs arranged themselves obviously into four groups in relation to the four points of the compass.'[3] In a recipe in the first *Leechbook* twelve masses are to be said over herbs 'in honour of the twelve apostles'.[4]

(*b*) *Colour*[5]

Colour is a most important factor in folk-medicine, and it is not wanting in that of the Anglo-Saxons. Sometimes (i) it is important that a thing should be all of one colour, and sometimes (ii) it must be of a specific colour.

(i) *One colour*. Three examples of this occur in Anglo-Saxon recipes:

1. 'And thus shall the butter be made for the holy salve: let the butter be churned from a cow all of one colour, so that she be all red or all white and without markings.'[6]
2. For 'flying venom . . . on a Friday churn butter which has been milked from a cow [lit. 'neat'] or hind all of one colour'.[7]
3. 'The woman who cannot bring her child to full time: Let her take in her hand milk of a cow of one colour, and then sip it up with her mouth, and then go to running water and

[1] E.g. *Lacn.* 74 (CXXXIII).

[2] Singer, 'Early English Magic and Medicine', *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1919–20, ix, 356.

[3] Singer, 'A review of the medical literature of the Dark Ages', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1916–17, x (Sect. Hist. Med.), p. 123.

[4] *Leechbook I*, lxiii.

[5] For this section, see my paper, expanded with comparisons, in *Man*, 1925, xxv. 194–8, 'The significance of colour in ancient and mediaeval magic, with some modern comparisons'.

[6] *Lacn.* 29 (LXIII).

[7] *Leechbook I*, xlv. 5.

spew therein the milk [etc.]'[1] Possibly the cow was to be all one colour so as to provide against birth-marks on the unborn child.

The angel who cured St. Cuthbert of the gout prescribed as an ingredient of his poultice 'þe milk of one kou: þat is of o colour.'[2]

The 'milk of a one-coloured cow' also occurs in Welsh medicine as a remedy 'for an abscess on the breast'.[3]

'Bres, son of Elathan', runs a passage in the *Rennes Dindsenchas*, '. . . demanded from every roof-tree in Ireland a hundred men's drink of a hornless dun-cow, or, of the milk of a cow of some other single colour.'[4] Many other Irish references for this could be given. The produce of an unspotted (immaculate) animal was naturally more connected with both purity and perfection than that of a spotted one. The Apis bull had to be without spots.

(ii) *Specific colours.* One great difficulty in dealing with the specific colours of olden times is that it is uncertain what exactly was meant by the words used. Though the Greeks appreciated difference of colour, they had a very small colour-vocabulary. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, had words for most of the colours. Nine of these occur together in the charm of the 'Nine magical Herbs' in the *Lacnunga*:

Now these nine herbs avail Against nine spirits of evil,
Against nine venoms And against nine onfliers,
Against the red [1, *réadan*] venom, Against the foul venom,
Against the white [2, *hwítan*] venom, Against the purple [3, *hæ-wenan*] venom,
Against the yellow [4, *ȝeolwan*] venom, Against the green [5, *ȝrénan*] venom,
Against the livid [6, *wonnan*] venom, Against the blue [7, *wédenan*] venom,
Against the brown [8, *brúnan*] venom, Against the crimson [9, *basewan*] venom.[5]

[1] *Lacn.* 104 (CLXXI).
[2] *Early South-English Legendary*: Cuthbert, l. 51. (E.E.T.S., O.S. 87, p. 360.)
[3] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, 673.
[4] Whitley Stokes, *Rennes Dindsenchas*, no. 46 (*Revue celtique*, 1894, XV. 439).
[5] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXX). The fact that these lines are verse was for the first time recognized by J. H. G. Grattan.

In lines 4 and 6 I have accepted Grattan's readings *hæwenan*, purple or flax-blue, and *wedenan*, woad-blue. For the former, cf. *linhæwenne* in *Lacn.* 3 (XII), 'Wring through a flax-blue cloth into the eye'. [*Continued on p. 218.*

Three other instances of *hæwan* occur in the leechdoms:

1. 'For contraction of the pupil (*æ-smæl*), and for all pain of the eyes; chew wolfscomb, then wring the juice through a purple (*hæwenne*) woollen cloth upon the eyes, [etc.]'[1]
2. 'For paralysis (*lyft-ádl*): . . . take coriander, dry it, work it to dust, mingle the dust with the milk of a woman who has brought forth a male, wring through a purple (*hæwenne*) cloth, and smear the sound cheek therewith [etc.]'.[2]
3. As a plant name, *hæwen hydele* occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*.[3]

There is also another example of *basu*, a more reddish purple than *hæwan*. 'Leechdoms for *peór-disease*, ashrind, aspenrind [and five others], empurple (*besoreáda*) all the rinds on the outside and pound them thoroughly', and drink in ale.[4]

Individual colours were associated for magical purposes with those things which obviousness suggested. Thus red was associated with blood, yellow with the liver, white with anaemia, and so on.

An interesting use of woad is found in the early-thirteenth-century poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* (ll. 77–78):

'Þin eȝene boþ colblake 7 brode
Riȝt swo ho weren ipeint mid wode.'

The data for the use of woad as a source of blue dye in Anglo-Saxon times are confusing. The usual word for woad is *wád*, but woad is also given by Bosworth–Toller as a second meaning for the word *wurma* (a purple dye, or the shellfish from which it was obtained). *Wæden* (or *wéden*) is translated by Bosworth–Toller (Supplement) as blue, purple; but *wád*, from which it is derived, is equated in the vocabularies four times with *sandix*, which signifies vermilion, and only once with *fucus*, which signifies red, purple.

Bosworth–Toller (p. 1148) note that 'the growth of woad seems marked by the occurrence of the word in such forms as *wád-beorh*, *wád-denu*, *wád-lond* in charters'.

The occurrence of two words seems strongly in favour of its use as a dye, but there is no real evidence of its cultivation to any extent in this country before the fifteenth century. 'Woad', according to Biffen (*Journ. Roy. Agricult. Soc.*, 1917, lxxviii. 84 ff.), 'is a biennial plant, and the cultivation of a crop which, when seed was required, occupied the land for two seasons could hardly have been carried on on a large scale in the days of open fields.' In another passage he calls attention to the 'difficulty that this colour can only be extracted from woad after a long and intricate series of processes which seem too complicated for a primitive people ever to have discovered'. See also H. O. Clark, 'Preparation of woad in England', *Trans. Newcomen Soc.*, 1935–6, xvi. 69.

[1] *Leechbook III*, 46.

[2] *Leechbook III*, 47.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, xxx. 1.

[4] *Leechbook I*, xlvii. 1. Cockayne derives *besoreádan*, to empurple, from *baso*, purple, and *read*, red.

Plants with red blossoms, berries, or roots were used for cases of haemorrhage. There is one example of this—in Sextus Placitus—which does not quite conform to type.[1] Here the fruit of the morbeam, or mulberry, is to be taken (with the thumb and ring finger of the left hand) *before* it has become red (*réadige*) and wound up in a scarlet (*weolc*) red web of fine material (*godweb*): it must not touch either earth or water. This passage occurs in the Anglo-Saxon version, but not in the original Latin. This connexion persisted until modern times, for the *unripe* fruit of the mulberry is prescribed by Colbourne in his *Dispensatory* (1753) for spitting of blood.[2] As the idea appears to be to stop red (i.e. blood) from flowing, so something which might have become red is used before it turns red; and it is also prevented from becoming red.

The use of a red (*réad*) fillet for tying herbs round the head in cases of headache[3] is less obvious, but is probably explainable in that red is the colour for expelling demons. It is also prescribed that, in the case of a lunatic, clove-wort should be tied round his neck with a red (*réad*) thread: if done in April or early October, when the moon is on the wane, 'soon will he be healed'.[4]

The best-known case of the sympathetic use of red in the Middle Ages is that of the son of Edward II treated by John of Gaddesden for smallpox. 'I caused everything around the bed to be red in colour', he says, 'and a perfect cure resulted, nor were there any traces of pocks as sequelae.'[5] John was, however, unaware of the scientific explanation when his treatment of his royal patient turned out a success, although he knew from experience of its utility. It is interesting to compare his practice with the modern Finsen red-light treatment.

Yellow flowers were given for jaundice and diseases of the liver: yellow-wort (*Chlora perfoliata*) is an example from the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*.[6]

In Swedish belief, the jaundice was brought by the yellow-hammer, and a cure was effected by eating roasted yellow-hammer.[7]

[1] Sextus Placitus, op. cit., i. 5.

[2] Colbourne, *Plaine English Dispensatory*, 1753, p. 70.

[3] *Leechbook III*, 1.

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, x. 2.

[5] John of Gaddesden, *Rosa Anglica*, 1502, fo. 41*b*, col. 1: 'Feci omnia circa lectum esse rubea, et est bona cura, et curavi eum in sequenti sine vestigiis variolarum.'

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, xxxv. 1.

[7] A. Kuhn, *Indische und germanische Segensprüche*, p. 73. Other examples are also given.

This belief in the cure of jaundice by yellow things dates back to Vedic times. In the *Atharvaveda* is a charm which ends with the words: 'into the parrots, into the thrush, do we put thy jaundice, and furthermore into the yellow wagtail do we put thy jaundice.'[1]

The idea also occurs in Pliny: 'a bird is called icterus from its colour. If anyone sees it, the disease is thought to be cured, and the bird to die.'[2]

A striking instance of the connexion of individual colours with particular diseases in southern Greece today is given by Sir Rennel Rodd:

> St. John was a physician, and especially skilled in the cure of fevers. . . . When he was aware that his death was approaching, he set up a column, and bound to its foundations all manner of diseases with silken threads of various colours: fevers with a yellow thread, measles with a red one, and other diseases with other colours . . . and said, 'When I die, let whosoever is sick come and tie to this column a silken thread with three knots of the colour that his sickness takes, and say "Dear St. John, I bind my sickness to the column, and do by thy favour loose it from me," and then he will be healed.'[3]

In colour symbolism, red signifies the male principle, while green signifies the female, the *human* mother, and fertility. That this obtained in Anglo-Saxon times is shown in the charm: 'If one is to have mugwort for a remedy, then let one take the red for the cure of a male and the green for the cure of a female.'[4] Blue also represents the female principle, but its significance is more spiritual than that of green.[5] It is, however, sometimes thought to show sex in plants. Thus the ordinary red pimpernel was considered to be male, but the blue variety (*caerulea*) is known, according to Lyte (1578), as the 'female pimpernel'.[6]

There is one curious Anglo-Saxon use of the parti-coloured which may also be mentioned. In dreams, 'to have a parti-coloured (*bléo-fáh*) overcoat betokens an unpleasant message'.[7]

[1] *Atharvaveda*, i. 22.

[2] Pliny, *Hist Nat.* xxx. 28.

[3] Sir Rennel Rodd, *The Customs and Lore of Modern Greece*, London, 1892, p. 167.

[4] *Lacn.* III (CLXXVIII, at the end).

[5] For example, the Virgin Mary is usually represented as dressed in blue.

[6] Britten and Holland, *A Dictionary of English Plant Names*, pp. 178, 321.

[7] MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III, fo. 28 *r*. (Förster, xxxiii, in Herrigs *Archiv*, cxxv, p. 50; formerly fo. 26 *r* in Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 200, ll. 6–7.)

(*c*) *Magic of the body*

The personal factor is very strong in magic, whether the thing used is blood or spittle, or merely a footprint or an article of clothing. The important point is that it must be individual, as representing the actual man or woman of which it is a part or to whom alone it belongs. It may be used to aid the person concerned, as in prescriptions, or to his detriment, as in witchcraft.

This belief has persisted until modern times, for even in early editions of the *London Pharmacopoeia* the following occur as remedies: blood, fat, bile, viscera, bones, bone-marrow, claws, teeth, hair, human perspiration, and saliva of a fasting man. As recently as 1925 a doctor in a welfare centre in the north of London interviewed a mother who had been intending to cure her child of a naevus by means of fasting spittle, and treated another patient who said that he cured his corns with fasting spittle, but always left one untreated, because it told him the state of the weather.[1]

(*a*) *Blood.* In a recipe in the first *Leechbook* for the affection of the skin called *blǽco*, one is directed to 'scarify the neck after sunset. Pour in silence the blood into running water, thereafter spit three times, and then say "Have thou this evil and depart with it."'[2] Both the blood and the spittle represent the diseased part of the man himself: after his symbolic cleansing the *blǽco* should be cured.

The colour red, which often represents blood, and the days on which a man should not be bled, are dealt with elsewhere.[3]

In the *Penitential* of Theodore (late seventh century) a woman is forbidden to taste her husband's blood as a remedy.[4]

(*b*) *Spittle.* A charm in the *Lacnunga* known as the 'worm charm'[5] may be sung against a penetrating worm: 'Sing it frequently into the wounds and smear with thy spittle.'[6] Similarly, 'as a holy salve', various herbs and butter must be prepared, the 'worm charm' and other charms must be sung: the recipe then says 'put thy spittle on the plants and blow on them . . . and afterwards let a mass-priest hallow them'.[7] Blowing shows the efficacy of breath also as something personal. 'For joint pain, sing nine times this incantation thereon, and thy spittle spit on the joint: ". . . Malignus

[1] Verbal communication.
[2] *Leechbook I*, xxxii. 2.
[3] See p. 219 and pp. 294–9.
[4] *Penitential* of Theodore, I. xiv. 16 (Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, p. 188).
[5] See p. 281.
[6] *Lacn.* 10 (XXVII).
[7] *Lacn.* 29 (LXIII).

obligavit, angelus curavit, dominus salvabit.'' It will soon be well with him.'[1]

It is narrated in St. John's Gospel that, to cure the man who was born blind, Christ 'spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay'.[2]

(*c*) *Hair.* Hair is sometimes used as a charm, though not necessarily hair belonging to the patient. One recipe is to prepare pottage for a patient: 'Let it cool, take three little bits of hare's wool, wind them on the outside round the pottage that he may swallow them.'[3] Another occurs in Sextus Placitus, where a woman is required to comb her hair under the mulberry-tree, and hang the combings on a twig of the tree. The hair is to be preserved and carried as a charm.[4]

A Welsh example says: 'For worms in children. Take the child's hair, cut it as small as you can, and mix as much as will stand on a golden crown with pulp of a roasted apple, or with honey, and this will cure the worms.'[5]

(*d*) *Sweat.* The cure of the Abbess Ælfleda of Whitby through the instrumentality of a *zona linea* (presumably a loin-cloth) worn by St. Cuthbert, was obviously considered to have been effected by means of the sweat from St. Cuthbert's body which endowed it with the requisite 'virtue'.[6]

After the death of St. Wilfrid, the water in which his garment had been washed was instrumental in effecting the cure of a nun with a withered arm and hand. 'For I believe', said she, 'with unwavering faith that this crooked hand of mine and this arm that has long been withered can be healed, if God so wills it, in this water, through the mingling therewith of the holy sweat.'[7]

(*d*) *Unusual things*

Unusual objects were often thought to be endowed with magical powers and properties and were therefore especially efficacious for healing purposes.

[1] *Leechbook III*, xxiv. 1.
[2] John ix. 6.
[3] *Leechbook III*, lxv (end).
[4] *Sextus Placitus*, op. cit. i. 6, 7, 8.
[5] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, 26.
[6] See also p. 176.
[7] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 66. Or, in the words of Eadmer: 'unde interulam ejus sanctissimi corporis sudore saepe madentem cuidam religiosae abbatissae deferendam minister accepit; quam mulier quaedam paralysi dissoluta, ut tangere mereretur, obnixe rogavit . . .' (*Vita Wilfridi*, ch. 54. *In* J. Raine, *The Historians of the Church of York*, i, p. 222 (Rolls Series)).

This is frequently the case with plants. It was doubtless the unusual and striking root of the mandrake which gave rise to the magical ideas associated with it.[1] The same was the case with dracontea (A.S. *dracentse*), of which the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says, 'the netherward root is like a dragon's head'.[2] The illustration of this latter herb in the manuscript (Cotton Vitellius C. III) unfortunately has a large red-bordered hole in it—presumably where the head of the dragon used to be.

Of sea-holly, 'it is said that its root is compared to the head of the . . . Gorgon, and the root-suckers have, as is also said, both eyes and nose and colour of serpents'.[3] The illustration given for shepherd's purse (§ 150) in MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III does not seem to apply, and might well belong to sea-holly. The root is shown as a grotesque face, surrounded by small dull red lines with black and white markings, which may be meant for serpents.

Any unusual growth in an individual plant also gave it magical properties: such, for instance, was a 'bramble of which both ends are in the earth'.[4]

Still more efficacious would be a marvellous occurrence like the following: 'If thou find a fish within another fish, take and roast it thoroughly, and break it up into a drink, and give it to the sick man to drink in such a manner that he knoweth it not.'[5]

Under the category of the unusual come also the magic of the left hand and of the ring finger.

Since the right hand is the one usually employed in the ordinary work of daily life, it followed that anything done with the left hand only would acquire some special significance. Therefore in magical prescriptions the left hand is often used. 'Against dysentery', says the second *Leechbook*, 'a bramble of which both ends are in the earth: take the newer root, cut off nine shavings into the left hand, and sing three times Miserere mei, deus, and nine times Paternoster.'[6] Sextus Placitus prescribes: 'For flux of blood . . . come to the tree which is called mulberry, and from it take a berry with thy left hand, with two fingers, that is with the thumb and the ring finger.'[7] Pliny says that samolus, parthenium, pseudo-anchusa, and vervain were to be gathered with the left hand.[8]

[1] See p. 329.
[2] *A.S. Herbal* xv. 1.
[3] Ibid. clxxxii. 1.
[4] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 1.
[5] *Leechbook I*, xxxvii.
[6] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 1.
[7] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. i. 5.
[8] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxiv. 63; xxi. 104; xxii. 24; xxv. 59.

The left hand is that of theft in the Classics. As the gathering of a plant was regarded as a theft from the earth, its association with the left hand becomes apparent.

Lucan tells us, that before the battle of Pharsalia, the witch Erichtho performed magical rites and 'with the left hand, from the dying stripling, cuts off the hair'.[1]

The third finger is the one especially connected with magical practices. Prescribed things are often to be taken up with the thumb and third finger (following Alexander of Tralles and Marcellus Empiricus), this being the most awkward and most unusual mode of procedure. 'Dans toutes les recettes', says Delatte, 'l'intention domine de se servir des doigts qui sont les moins "profanés" par les usages de la vie quotidienne.'[2]

This finger is also called the medicinal or leech finger. The leech finger occurs in an Anglo-Saxon charm in an eleventh-century Bodleian manuscript: 'For a strange swelling, sing upon thy *læce-finger* a paternoster, and draw a line about the sore and say "Fuge, diabolus, Christus te sequitur".'[3] Although Cockayne translates 'little finger', he is obviously wrong, from the following quotation from a fifteenth-century (Northern) manuscript:

> Ilke a fyngir has a name, als men thaire fyngers calle,
> The lest fyngir[4] hat lityl man, for hit is lest of alle:
> The next fyngir hat leche man, for qwen a leche dos o3t
> With that fyngir he tastes all thyng, howe that hit is wro3t.[5]

The above-quoted recipe 'for flux of blood', where a mulberry is to be picked with the thumb and ring finger (*mid hring fingre*) of the left hand, is applicable again here.[6]

The word *widsínes* (Scotch *widdersinnes*, 'widdershins') occurs in Anglo-Saxon with the meaning 'contrary to nature', but it does not seem to be specially connected with magic and ill luck as it is with the Celts.

(*e*) *The use of holy things and ceremonies as adjuncts to medicine*

The sign of the cross was always considered efficacious for warding off evil. Examples abound in Anglo-Saxon recipes, and only a

[1] Lucan, *Pharsalia*, vi. 563.
[2] A. Delatte, *Herbarius*, Liège, 1938, p. 144.
[3] MS. Bibl. Bodl. Junius 85, quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 394.
[4] In Anglo-Saxon called *eáre-finger*.
[5] Quoted in Bosworth–Toller, p. 607, s.v. *læce-finger*.
[6] Sextus Placitus, i. 5.

few striking ones need be selected for quotation. 'Petroleum . . . is good for anyone if his speech fails: then let him take it, and make Christ's sign under his tongue and swallow a little of it.'[1] Another example is that for lung trouble in cattle: 'Make five Christ-crosses of hassock grass; set on four sides of the cattle and one in the midst.'[2] Or again: 'Against elf-disease, take [four worts] and lichen from the hallowed sign of Christ.'[3] When in one of Ælfric's sermons St. John is challenged by the chief idolator to drink poison, he drinks 'having armed his mouth and all his body with the sign of the rood'.[4]

In the following recipe from the first *Leechbook* another feature of interest is added: 'A drink for fiend-sick men, to be drunk out of a church bell: [ten herbs and] church lichen, lichen of Christ's mark, obtain the drink from clear ale, sing seven masses over the worts [etc.].'[5] The bell was thought to be efficacious in scaring away fiends when rung for service, and was therefore prescribed as a cup, especially for this complaint. Presumably the same reason explains 'For þe flyx. Take the rust of þe belle-claper and temper it with water and drynke it'.[6]

Things that had been hallowed were thought to be especially powerful for keeping away ill, wherefore holy water, holy salt,[7] oil of unction, and such-like ingredients are found in prescriptions: to make doubly sure, the concoction was often stood under the altar to be hallowed. An example occurs in a mid-eleventh-century manuscript, written at Winchester: 'Take from the hallowed bread, which is hallowed upon Lammas day, four pieces, and crumble them on the four corners of the barn.'[8] Drinking hallowed words was commonly enjoined: 'A man shall write upon the housel dish, and wash it off into the drink with holy water, and sing over it, "In principio erat verbum [etc.]".'[9]

[1] *Leechbook II*, lxiv.

[2] *Lacn.* 79 (CXLII), quoted more fully on pp. 423–4.

[3] *Leechbook III*, lxii. Comparable is Pliny's use of a 'plant growing on the head of a statue' (*Hist. Nat.* xxiv. 106). This latter also comes under the category of 'unusual things'.

[4] Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. i, p. 72.

[5] *Leechbook I*, lxiii.

[6] MS. Harley 2378, p. 267 (Henslow, p. 116).

[7] For holiness of salt (pagan and Christian) from the time of Tacitus onwards, see Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. iii, pp. 1046–9.

[8] Fragment from Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, fo. 16*r*. (quoted by Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 290).

[9] *Leechbook I*, lxii. 3. See also *Lacn.* 11 (XXIX), and cf. Ne-nefer-ka-Ptah's action in Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, p. 107. He copied the

Probably the most magical of all ingredients of prescriptions was holy water: it occurs a countless number of times. Hodgkin suggests that the fee paid to the prototype of the parish priest for supplying it for this purpose was a part of his meagre income.[1]

Magical power was thought to be given to a plant if 'produced in holy places', as in the case of dracontea.[2]

Names of the Deity and of saints, especially the four evangelists, were considered potent against evil. Another name which often occurs in charms is that of Veronica (usually under the form of Berenice), particularly for haemorrhage, since Veronica is traditionally the name of the woman with the issue of blood. To the uninitiated it often did not matter if the name employed was a holy one or not, provided it was an unknown one. Names of foreign gods, kings, or legendary persons are sometimes found in recipes.[3]

The names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus occur in several charms.[4] They are generally used in connexion with sleep—or nightmare; but in some cases they are to be employed against fever. The following is from the *Lacnunga*: 'For nightmare, one shall take seven little wafers as used in the Mass, and write these names, [one] on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martinianus, Dionysius, Constantinus, Serafion.'[5]

There is a parallel Welsh charm 'to produce sleep': 'Take a goat's horn, and carve the names of the seven sleepers thereon, making a knife-haft of it. The writing should begin at the blade. . . . When the names are inscribed, lay the knife under the sick man's head unknown to him and he will sleep.'[6]

The seven names, again to be written on wafers, appear in a charm against fever (*gedrif*) in a manuscript (4°. 5) in Worcester Cathedral Library. It is in a hand of the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century: the instructions are in Anglo-Saxon, the words of the charm in Latin. The connexion with sleep appears in the phrase after the seven names: it runs 'ita sicut

magical book of Thoth on a piece of new papyrus, washed it off in beer which he drank, and therefore knew all the spells contained in the original book. (Late Ptolemaic.)

[1] R. H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 2nd ed. 1939, vol. ii, p. 426.

[2] *A.S. Herbal*, xv. 1.

[3] E.g. *Lacn.* 94 (CLXI) and *Leechbook I*, lxv.

[4] See also my article, 'The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and later recipes', *Folk-lore*, 1945, lvi. 254–6.

[5] *Lacn.* 56 (XCIII). The incantation which follows is given in full on p. 166.

[6] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, 807.

requieuit dominus super illos, sic requiescat super istum famulum dei N. coniure uos, frigora et febres [etc.].'[1]

The following eighth-century charm from the *Book of Nunnaminster* has a collection of mixed Old and New Testament names to protect the various parts of the body: '✠ Caput Christi, oculos Gesaeie [Isaiah], frons nasuum Noe, labia lingua Salomonis, collum Timothei, mens Beniamin, pectus Pauli, iunctus Iohannis, fides Abrahae, sanctus sanctus sanctus usque ad finem.'[2]

The second section of the *Lorica of Gildas*[3] also contains a list, but a much more detailed one, of the various parts of the body, and a prayer that each may be protected 'that the foul demons may not . . . hurl, as is their wont, their darts'. Christ is besought to be 'a most secure lorica to me as to my members and to my inner parts'.

The leechdoms abound with ceremonies to be performed over the sick person or animal. Usually they are a mixture of heathen charms and Christian ritual. 'For *lond-ádl*[4] boil wormwood . . . in oleum [infirmorum],[5] till a third part of the oil is boiled away, and smear all the body at the fire with it, and a mass priest shall perform the leechdom if a man hath means to get one.'[6]

If the priest were not present, the holy water and utensils employed must have been in each case obtained with his aid. He was, judging by the last quotation, paid for his service, if the patient were rich enough.

[1] A. S. Napier, 'Altenglische Miscellen, II', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 1890, lxxxiv. 324.

[2] MS. Harley 2965, fo. 40 *v*.

[3] *Lacn.* LXVIII, between 34 and 35.

[4] Cockayne, in his glossary, says nostalgia; Bosworth, comparing *lond-iuil* in *Promptorium Parvulorum*, suggests epilepsy.

[5] Cockayne says 'The letters have been paled away purposely'.

[6] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 5.

CHAPTER XIII

Taboos

'TABOO', says Frazer, 'is a negative application of practical magic. It says, "Do not do this, lest so-and-so should happen."'[1]

Those who impose taboos are actuated by fear of the unknown. The continued observance of them, without any deviation from the stereotyped formula, shows fear that the required result might not be obtained unless the taboos were strictly observed.

Some taboos imposed in Anglo-Saxon times were beneficial: personal purity, for instance, especially in connexion with health and medicine. Some were practical, as in the case of the observance of silence, which was conducive to concentration on the matter in hand. But many were useless and puerile, and tended to become more so as circumstances altered, since they themselves were unalterable.

Taboos were sometimes positive, to increase the efficacy of the treatment or medicine; sometimes they were negative, to avoid misfortune and ill luck.

(*a*) *Personal purity* belongs to the 'positive' category. Examples abound in the recipes. 'When thou shalt pluck [periwinkle] thou shalt be clean of every uncleanness.'[2] For many observances it is prescribed that a virgin shall be employed. For instance, it is said of an incantation against nightmare, 'then let a virgin approach and hang it on his neck'.[3] This taboo was derived from classical times.

(*b*) *Looking behind.*[4] There are many instances of this taboo in Anglo-Saxon recipes. 'The woman who cannot bring her child to full time' is required to perform various rites with running water; but 'when she goeth to the brook, then let her not look round, nor again when she goeth thence'.[5]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes for the man who is fastidious

[1] Frazer, *Golden Bough, Magic Art*, vol. i, p. 112.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxix; cf. also ibid. cxxxii. 1 and clxxvi.
[3] *Lacn.* 56 (XCIII), quoted on p. 166.
[4] This taboo is directly derived from Pliny and Marcellus Empiricus.
[5] *Lacn.* 104 (CLXXI), quoted in full on p. 267.

in eating: 'Lead him out of the house in the early part of the night, and perfume him with the wort which is called aristolochia, and when he goes out let him not look behind him.'[1]

The method of gathering sea-holly and the taboo are reminiscent of the legend of Perseus:

> Of this wort it is said that its root is made like unto the head of the monster which men name the Gorgon, and the shoots have, as is also said, both eyes and nose and colour of serpents. . . . And when thou shalt take up this wort with its roots . . . carve it off with a crooked and very hard iron: and he who will carve it, then let him be turned from it, for it is not permitted that any man may see the root unharmed.[2]

(*c*) *Use of iron.*[3] In some cases iron is to be employed, usually with certain conditions imposed owing to possible danger, while in others it must on no account be used.

Iron is to be used for gathering mandrake. The plant is to be encircled with iron, but under the following conditions: 'So shalt thou delve about it as thou touch it not with the iron, but that thou shalt earnestly with an ivory staff delve the earth.'[4] Of sea-holly, the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says, 'Carve it off then with a crooked and very hard iron.'[5]

Betony,[6] waybread,[7] and burdock[8] are to be gathered *without* the use of iron.

(*d*) *Silence.* Silence was imposed to ensure concentration on the part of the person practising the rite. The recipe for gathering helenium will serve as an example of this. Having left the knife sticking in the plant, you are required the next day to go first 'to church and cross thyself, and commend thyself to God; then go in silence, and though anything soever of an awful sort or [any] man approach thee, say not thou to him any word ere thou come to the wort which on the evening before thou markedst'.[9]

There are many similar examples.

(*e*) *Fasting.* Fasting is often prescribed, and this may usually have been the equivalent of saying that the medicine is to be

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, viii. 2. For Singer's interpretation of this passage, see his introduction to the reprint of the *Leechdoms* (1961), pp. xxvii–xxviii.
[2] Ibid. clxxxii. 1–2.
[3] For iron, apart from taboos, see under Metals (p. 345).
[4] *A. S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1.
[5] Ibid. clxxxii. 2.
[6] Ibid. i. 1.
[7] *Leechbook III*, 1.
[8] *Lacn.* 44 (LXXVIII).
[9] *Leechbook III*, 62, quoted at length on p. 323.

taken before food. The following, however, is worth notice in this connexion:

> The man who suffers from neck-tumour: Let him take neck-wort and [ten other herbs named in the text] and make them with Welsh ale into a drink. And then, on the eve of the first day of summer [literally, on the night when summer comes to the farm in the morning], the man who intends to drink that drink *must wake all night*. And at first cock-crow let him take a drink once, at first dawn a second drink, at sunrise a third drink. And let him rest thereafter.[1]

The taboos which are especially connected with the gathering of herbs will be dealt with later.[2]

[1] *Lacn.* 4 (XIV).

[2] See pp. 321–4.

CHAPTER XIV

Protective Measures

(*a*) *Protective actions and agents*

To carry something which might provide protection was considered an effective way of warding off sickness.

'An interminable catalogue might be prepared', says Dalyell, speaking presumably of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but with words equally applicable to the Anglo-Saxon period, '. . . of amulets deemed a safeguard from convulsions of the elements, . . . from the accidents of life, from evil machinations, or to promote health, wealth, and prosperity.'[1]

The amulet differed from the fetish in that it was always carried on the person; it differed from the idol in that it was personal, or belonged to the family only. Amulet and idol might, however, have the same form. Hallfred, in the *Hallfreðar Saga*, is reproached for carrying an ivory image (*hlutr*) of Thor in his pocket.[2] A charm on which Frey was stamped in silver is mentioned in the *Vatnsdæla Saga*. Figures of saints are to this day suspended round the neck. Miss Phillpotts says that 'a name compounded with that of a god was esteemed a safeguard to its bearer',[3] whence the large number of Scandinavian proper names compounded with Thor.

Ligatura and *philacterium* signify amulet, and those who carried them were called *obligatores*. The laws and penitentials constantly prohibit the use of both.[4] The First penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 says, 'si quis ligaturas fecerit, quod detestabile est, iii annos poeniteat';[5] and in another passage, 'non licet clericos vel laicos . . . facere philacteria'.[6] Similarly, the eighth-century Saxon *Indiculus Superstitionum* has a heading, 'de phylacteriis et ligaturis'.[7] They are likewise forbidden by the Salic law and the laws of the Visigoths.[8]

[1] J. G. Dalyell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1835, p. 138.
[2] *Hallfreðar Saga*, Islensk Fornrit, 1939, vol. viii, p. 162.
[3] *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. ii, p. 481.
[4] See e.g. Egbert, *Penitential*, viii. 4.
[5] MS. C.C.C.C. 190, First penitential, xxvii. 22.
[6] Ibid. xxvii. 8; cf. also 24.
[7] *Indiculus Superstitionum*, 10.
[8] Quoted by Thorpe in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, glossary, s.v.

The latter (ch. vi. 2. 4) especially connect them with medicine: 'ut clerici vel laici phylacteria, vel falsas scriptiones aut ligaturas, quae imprudentes pro febribus aut aliis pestibus adjuvare putant, nullo modo ab illis vel a quoquam christiano fiant.'

That the Church found it difficult to suppress the wearing of amulets is not to be wondered at, since its own bishops practised similar superstitions. Bede speaks of St. Germanus as having a casket full of relics hung round his neck,[1] despite the words of Alcuin, 'melius est in corde sanctorum imitari exempla, quam in sacculis portare ossa'.[2] Eddius, speaking of the illness of Oswiu's queen in 681, says that Æbbe, abbess of Coldingham, told Oswiu to 'send back' to Wilfrid 'by a faithful messenger those holy relics of which he had been robbed, which the queen took from his neck and carried about from town to town like the ark of God to her own destruction'.[3] The pseudo-Ingulf in his history of Croyland says that Abbot Turketul carried about him the thumb of the blessed apostle Bartholomew, and crossed himself with it in all perils, and storm and lightning.[4] Ordericus Vitalis, speaking of the battle of Hastings, says that 'Duke William, having intelligence of Harold's approach . . . reverently suspended from his neck the holy relics on which Harold had sworn'.[5] Perhaps William thought that his personal safety might be the better secured if he placed himself under the protection of those saints whose enmity had already been provoked by Harold when in Normandy.

Often the protecting agent was hung round the neck, as a periapt: sometimes it was sufficient to carry the object anywhere on the person. The agent was sometimes a plant or part of a plant, less often an animal or part of an animal, or again a mineral substance. Sometimes it was a charm in writing. This last was a labour-saving device, and enabled the wearer to evade the trouble of continually repeating.

The following may serve as examples of articles to be hung round the neck:

(i) *Animal.* 'For swollen eyes, take a live crab, put his eyes out,

ligaturae. For various German and Latin examples of *ligaturae*, see Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. iii, pp. 1173–5.

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 18.

[2] *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, ed. Jaffé and Wattenbech, p. 719.

[3] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 39.

[4] Ingulf, *Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, trans. H. T. Riley, 1854, p. 104.

[5] Ordericus Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, iii. 14.

and put him back in the water alive, and put the eyes upon the neck of the man who has need: he will soon be well.'[1]

(ii) *Vegetable.* 'For a lunatic, take [clovewort] and wreathe it with a red thread about a man's neck.'[2] 'For sore eyes . . . take knotgrass, and hang it about the man's neck: it will profit well.'[3]

This practice of hanging the protective amulet round the neck is widespread. Many examples occur in the late classical authors. Cockayne quotes instances from Marcellus Empiricus.[4]

In the following cases the protective agents are carried, but it is not specified that they be hung round the neck. Often they are to be worn near, or applied to, the part affected:

(i) *Animal.* 'For stomach ache, take heels of a hare, bear them on thy garment'[5] (the Latin original gives *ventrem*). 'For pain and pricking sensation in the eyes, break to pieces a hound's head; if the right eye ache, take the right eye; if the left eye ache, take the left eye, and bind it on externally.'[6] Sometimes it is prescribed that the amulet shall be bound up in a fawn's skin (*næsc*) and so carried about on the person.[7]

(ii) *Vegetable.* 'For lunacy, if a man lays this wort peony over a lunatic, as he lies, soon he rises cured; and if he has [this wort] with him, the disease never again approaches him.'[8] This provides for cure first and also for prevention of future recurrence. Garrison mentions among amulets in the folk-medicine exhibit in the National Museum at Washington 'a peony root to be carried in the pocket against insanity'.[9]

The practice of tying on (*alligare, adalligare*) herbs was derived from the Romans, and examples occur in Pliny.[10]

(iii) *Beads, etc.* Archaeology has added to our knowledge of periapts. Baldwin Brown[11] gives instances of many articles which have been found in Anglo-Saxon graves, some with holes in them for suspension.

Cypraea shells are examples of such objects. One found at Cambridge was 3 inches long, and was suspended from a string of

[1] *Leechbook III*, 2. [2] *A.S. Herbal*, x. 2. [3] Ibid. xix. 5.
[4] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. xxix. [5] Sextus Placitus, iv. 17.
[6] Ibid. xiii. 10. [7] E.g. *Leechbook I*, xxxix. 3 (end), lxiv (end).
[8] *A.S. Herbal*, lxvi. 2.
[9] Garrison, *History of Medicine*, 3rd ed. 1924, p. 40.
[10] E.g. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xv. 40; xxv. 30. Cf. Smith, *Dict. Greek and Rom. Antiq.*, vol. i, s.v. Amuletum.
[11] Baldwin Brown, *Arts in Early England*, 1915, vol. iv, pp. 449 ff.

coloured beads.[1] The Red Sea cowrie has been found in women's graves on Kingston Down, Sibertswold Down, and near Wingham, in Kent.[2] A cowrie was also found in excavations at Alfriston, Sussex, as was an eagle's talon. Teeth of a beaver and of a horse (with holes for suspension) which were found in a grave near Stamford, Lincs., are mentioned by Akerman.[3]

Beads were worn by both sexes and seem to have been regarded as protective agents against danger in general and against witchcraft in particular.

Amber was held to possess medicinal and magical properties. 'We find', says Thomas Wright, 'continual instances of interments in which the deceased had merely one bead of amber attached to the neck, and sometimes it appears to have been simply placed in the grave by the side of his head. The lumps of amber were usually made into beads by drilling a hole through them without attempting to shape them into regular form.'[4]

At Broadstairs were found in an Anglo-Saxon grave seventy-five amber beads of various shapes and sizes, including one long cylindrical one, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter and an inch long, that suggests use as an amulet.[5] In another Anglo-Saxon grave at Chessell Down, on the left side of a female skeleton were five lumps of amber that were once fastened to a ring which remained near them, and which once suspended them from a girdle.[6]

Six amber beads were found on the left breast of a female body in grave 113, and twelve in grave 78, in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Abingdon.[7]

A number of amber beads are recorded as having been found round the neck of a body in a Saxon grave near Mildenhall. They are presumably of the yellow North Sea or Baltic variety, but changed to a rusty red colour owing to exposure to the action of organic acids from the body of the wearer.[8]

Amber occurs in at least eight graves in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Alfriston;[9] in various graves at Soham, Cambridgeshire,

[1] Baldwin Brown, op. cit., p. 450 and pl. 107. [2] See p. 266.

[3] Akerman, *Pagan Saxondom*, pp. 26–27 and plate xii.

[4] T. Wright, *The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon*, 4th ed. 1885, p. 489.

[5] Baldwin Brown, op. cit., p. 438. [6] Ibid., p. 406.

[7] E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon, Berks.*, Oxford, 1936, p. 33.

[8] T. M'Kenny Hughes, 'Amber', *Archaeol. Journ.* 1901, lxviii. 46.

[9] A. F. Griffith and L. F. Salzmann, *Sussex Archaeol. Coll.*, 1914–15, lvi. 16–53; lvi. 197–208.

both as beads and lumps;[1] and at the sixth-century cemetery at Guildown, Guildford (12 beads).[2] Describing grave 71—a woman's —at Long Wittenham, Berkshire, J. B. Davis notes 'the right arm extended by the side; between it and the body 280 amber beads of various sizes'.[3]

Amber was found in various graves in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon. In one grave Humphreys reports 'a necklace formed of twenty-two amber beads roughly and irregularly shaped', and in another 'a string of twenty-two perforated pieces of amber.'[4] From these examples it would appear that the amber was worn for magical purposes rather than for its beauty.

The mention of amber as an amulet occurs in a passage in a penitential ascribed to Bede:

> Do not employ adroit jugglers [reading *caragios curiosos*] and chanting diviners when the moon is eclipsed, since by sacrilegious custom they trust they can protect themselves by their outcries and magical arts, even by the attaching of diabolical amulets, whether of grass or of amber, to their people or to themselves.[5]

Wood-Martin says that

> an amber bead, with an ogham inscription ['A Taladh mna'—? at a woman's delivery] was for many years in the possession of a family named O'Connor in the county Clare. It was used as an amulet for the cure of sore eyes, and was also believed to insure safety to pregnant women. . . . The Finns and Lapps believe, like the Irish peasantry, that amber cures rheumatism, neuralgia, and other ailments.[6]

(iv) *Written charms as amulets.* Examples of prayers and other writings carried to ward off evils are of peculiar interest as exhibiting more definitely the mentality of those who employed them. A man is to write a charm in silence for *lencten ádl* and then 'silently put these words on the left breast', but the charm must not be worn indoors.[7] 'For loose bowels: This epistle did the angel bring to Rome, when they were grievously afflicted with

[1] T. C. Lethbridge, *Proc. Cambs. Antiq. Soc.*, 1933, xxxiii. 152–63.
[2] A. W. G. Lowther, *Surrey Archaeol. Coll.*, 1931, xxxix. 13.
[3] J. Thurnam and J. B. Davis, *Archaeologia*, 1860, xxxviii, 343.
[4] J. Humphreys, *Trans. Birmingham Archaeol. Soc.*, 1923, xlix. 24.
[5] Penitential ascribed by Albers to Bede, x. 3 and 4 (J. T. McNeill and N. M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 1938, p. 229).
[6] W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, London, 1902, vol i, p. 185.
[7] *Leechbook I*, lxv. 1.

loose bowels. Write [various words, mostly unintelligible] on a vellum sheet as long as may surround the head, and hang it on the neck of whatsoever man needeth it. He will soon be better.'[1]

In some cases, despite the obvious inconvenience, the writing was to be worn beneath the foot. The Anglo-Saxon instructions for use given after a mid-eleventh-century Latin charm for childbirth are, 'Write this on virgin wax, . . . and bind it under her right foot.'[2]

In one case, prescribed in the *Lacnunga*, the writing was not to be worn, but written on the actual arms of the patient as a protection against the nightmare.[3] In others the writing was to be on the forehead.[4]

A tenth-century prayer for preservation against enemies and cold ends with the words 'in dextero brahio scribe uerba hec ✠ anola ✠ sinola ✠ agila'.[5]

The story of the captive king's-thane Imma[6] contains an instance of the supposed powers of the written charm. The ealdorman who examined him when his chains continually broke asked him 'an forte *literas solutorias*, de qualibus fabulae ferunt, apud se habere, propter quas ligari non posset?' The Anglo-Saxon version of Bede renders, *hwæðer he . . . þa stafas mid him awritene hæfde*, while Ælfric says, *hwæðer ðurh drýcræft oððe ðurh rúnstafum.* This indicates charms written down and worn as amulets.

During the Middle Ages it is said that an oath had to be taken by every knight before engaging in wager of battle, that he did not bear about him any charm, and that he was not protected by magic or enchantment. That this practice dates back to classical times is shown by a story told by Suidas: 'When a Milesian was wrestling with an Ephesian, they say that the Milesian was not able to wrestle because his adversary had bound "Ephesian letters" to the ankle of his foot. These, however, were discovered, and taken off, and then they say the Ephesian was thrown three times.'[7]

Closely connected is the custom of carrying a charm when on

[1] *Lacn.* 102 (CLXVIII).

[2] MS. Bibl. Bodl. Junius 85 (Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. 392).

[3] *Lacn.* 51 (LXXXVII).

[4] e.g. St. John's College, Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 175*a*. Charm to stop nose-bleeding.

[5] MS. Cotton Caligula A. XV (iv. b), fo. 41*a*.

[6] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 22; Ælfric, *Homilies*, vol. ii, pp. 357–9. See p. 119 of this book.

[7] Suidas, under *Εφέσια γράμματα.*

a journey, to prevent fatigue and avert danger. Mugwort is the special safeguard. 'For much travelling over land,' says the first *Leechbook*, 'lest he tire, let him take mugwort in his hand, or put it into his shoe, lest he should weary, and when he will pluck it, before the upgoing of the sun, let him say first these words, "Tellam [i.e. tollam] te, artemesia, ne lassus sum in uia".'[1] This belief survived into the Middle Ages, for the following is found in a fourteenth-century manuscript: 'For a man that sal begyn to travayle: take mugworte, and cary hit with the, and thu sal noght fele na werynesse.'[2] Gerard quotes Pliny for the belief that 'the traveller or wayfaring man that hath the herb tied about him feeleth no wearisomenesse at all, and he that hath it about him can be hurt by no poysonsome medicines, nor by any wilde beast, neither yet by the Sun itselfe'.[3]

(*b*) *Cures by means of transference*

The transference of disease or other evil from the patient to some object or place by a symbolic action is often prescribed in Anglo-Saxon recipes. Sometimes the scapegoat is (i) a creature of a lower order, such as a frog or a beetle. Sometimes (ii) the evil is consigned to some element which has special cleansing power, such as running water or fire. Sometimes (iii) the evil is thrown away over a symbolic boundary such as a roadway, so that it may not return.[4] To make the charm stronger, the object is thrown over the shoulder without looking round.[5]

The earth is the great healer, and transference was often made to this safest of all receptacles.

(i) *Transference to a lower animal.* For belly-ache, says the third *Leechbook*, 'when thou seest a dung beetle in the earth throwing up [mould], grasp him with thy two hands along with his casting, wave him vigorously with thy hands, and say thrice "Remedium facio ad uentris dolorem": then throw the beetle away over thy back. Take care thou look not after it.'[6] The man who seized the

[1] *Leechbook I*, lxxxvi.

[2] Quoted in Wright and Halliwell, *Reliquiae antiquae*, 1841, vol. i, p. 53.

[3] Gerard, *Herball*, 1636, p. 1104.

[4] For confining infection *within* a symbolic boundary so as to destroy it, see p. 427, footnote 4.

[5] See pp. 238–9.

[6] *Leechbook III*, 18. For remedies from the 'earth-beetle' and the earth thrown up by it, see Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 12.

beetle will have acquired the power to stop belly-ache in others for the next twelve months by the grasp of his hands. Marcellus Empiricus says: 'You will stop toothache, when, standing with your shoes on, under an open sky upon the living earth, you seize the head of a frog and open his mouth and spit into it, and ask him to take away the toothache with him, and then let him go alive.'[1]

(ii) *Transference to one of the elements.* There are many examples in Anglo-Saxon recipes of the use of running water. That it was 'running' was a guarantee of purity, and it also suggested that the evil would be borne away with the stream. In ancient Ireland it was required by law that any house in which sick persons were treated should have a stream of water running across it through the middle of the floor.[2]

Running water possessed magic power for the healing of sickness in pagan times, and there is no need to derive its power from Christian baptism, though doubtless the clergy were not slow in annexing the heathen belief so as to strengthen the appeal made by the Christian ritual.

Similarly, anything buried under running water was thought to be safe against an unwelcome return. Geoffrey of Monmouth states that 'Cordelia buried her father in a certain underground chamber, which she had bidden be made under the river Soar at Leicester.'[3]

'For swellings (*onfealle*)', says the first *Leechbook*, 'take firstly a hazel or elder stick, write thy name thereon. Cut three scores on the place, fill the name with the blood, throw it over thy shoulder or between thy thighs into running water and stand over the man. Strike the scores, doing all in silence.'[4] This contains many points of interest. First, the use of hazel, a specially magical tree. Second, the writing of the name and filling the writing with the blood of the sufferer made the matter a personal one for him. Third, the throwing over the shoulder symbolized the transference of evil from him. Fourth, the running water was the recipient that it might carry off the evil. Fifth, the silence imposed during the action ensured concentration on the matter in hand.

A similar charm, again in the first *Leechbook*, prescribes for *blǽco*[5]

[1] Marcellus Empiricus, xii. 24. See also Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 20, for transference of griping and intestinal pains to ducks and puppies.

[2] Brehon laws, Senchus Mor (*Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. i, p. 131, Rolls Series).

[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth, ii. 14.

[4] *Leechbook I*, xxxix. 3.

[5] See p. 376.

the pounding together of four herbs, and then says: 'Add thereto a spoonful of old soap . . . and at night lather on. Scarify the neck after sunset. Pour in silence the blood into running water, thereafter spit three times, and say: "Have thou this evil, and depart with it." Go again on a clean way to the house, and go either way in silence.'[1]

The following is a mixture of herb magic and ecclesiastical magic: 'Work thus a salve against the elf kind. . . . take [fourteen herbs], put them into a vat, set them under the altar, sing 9 masses over them, boil them in butter and sheep's grease, add much sanctified salt, strain through a cloth, throw the worts into running water.'[2] Presumably the salve (which passed through the cloth) was so hallowed by Holy Church that it was effective against the elf kind, but the herbs themselves, to which the trouble had been transferred, were thrown into the running water.

If the patient could be placed in the stream, the ill could be washed away even more effectively. 'For eruptions in horse and man: Sing this thrice nine times, evening and morning, above a man's head, and in a horse's left ear, in running water, and turn his head against a stream.'[3] Here follows the charm, partly in Latin and partly in meaningless words.

In Christian times running water was thought to be an antidote to pagan magic. Thus St. Hildegard (twelfth century) says of the mandrake: 'When it is dug out of the earth, at once let it be put into running water (in fontem, id est *queckbornen*) for a day and a night, and thus all ill and evil humour which is in it is expelled, that is *uszgebiszen*, so that it is thus no longer of value for magical purposes. But when it is uprooted from the ground, if then it is laid down with the earth adhering to it which has not been removed in the *queckborn*, as has been mentioned, then it is an evil agent for much hurtful magic.'[4]

This kind of charm was known to the Romans, for Virgil says:

> Fer cineres, Amarylli, foras, rivoque fluenti
> Transque caput jace, nec respexeris.[5]

Chrysostom says that running water was drawn at midnight at the Epiphany festival and was kept for thaumaturgic purposes. It was considered to be still fresh after having been kept for a year.[6]

[1] *Leechbook I*, xxxii. 2. [2] *Leechbook III*, lxi. [3] *Lacn.* 109 (CLXXVI).
[4] St. Hildegard, *Physica*, i. 56, in Migne, *Patrologia Lat.*, vol. cxcvii, col. 1151.
[5] Virgil, *Ecl.* viii, ll. 101–2.
[6] Chrysostom, *Opera*, Paris, 1818, vol. ii, p. 369.

Things which had holes in them were considered to be notably efficacious as agents to rid sufferers, especially children, of disease. Thus, if a stone had a hole in it large enough for the child to be passed through, the child would be healed and the disease would remain with the stone. If scrofulous children were passed naked thrice through the Mên-an-tol, the holed stone on the hills above St. Just in Cornwall, and then drawn on the grass three times against the sun, it was thought that the children would be cured.[1] Similarly, crawling through a hole in the ground or in a tree, or through a split sapling, was thought to cure disease, which was transferred to the earth or tree.

The Anglo-Saxon laws attempted to put a stop to such practices.

The First penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 enjoins that 'if anyone passes his child for the sake of its health through a hole in the earth, and then fills the hole behind him with thorns, he shall do penance for forty days on bread and water'.[2] The Second penitential in the same manuscript says that the woman must do penance 'who would cure her infant by any sorcery, or draw it through the earth at the cross-roads: for such is great paganism'.[3] And, again, the Canons of King Edgar enjoin that every priest shall put a stop to 'tree-worshippings and stone-worshippings and that devil's craft whereby children are drawn through the earth'.[4]

The same practice is mentioned in the decrees of Burchard of Worms: 'Women . . . who have crying infants make a hole through the earth, and pass the infant through it: thus, they say, the child's crying ceases.'[5]

(iii) *Transference over a boundary*. The following is an example of symbolic transference of evil from the patient over a boundary. 'If a hunting spider (*hunta*) bite a man . . . strike three scarifications near, in a direction from the bite: let the blood run into a green hazel spoon. Then throw it away over the road: then no harm will come of it. . . . Again, strike 5 scarifications, one on the bite, and four round about it, throw [the blood] with a spoon silently over a cart track.'[6]

In the following, from the *Lacnunga*, the destination whither the

[1] R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, 3rd ed., 1881, p. 176.

[2] First penitential, xxvii. 16.

[3] Second penitential, iv. 20. See also Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, xvii (*De auguriis*), ll. 148–50 (E.E.T.S., o.s., 76, vol. i, p. 375).

[4] Canons of Edgar, 16.

[5] Burchard of Worms, *Decrees*, 199.

[6] *Leechbook I*, lxviii.

evil is to be transferred is not specified. 'For flying venom: Smite four slashes with an oaken brand towards the four quarters; make the brand bloody; hurl away. Sing this over it thrice.'[1] Here follows a Latin ecclesiastical charm.

The transference of disease is a common modern folk practice.[2]

Occasionally disease or evil is to be sold. This is the most certain way of ensuring that the evil has been transferred. An example occurs in the *Lacnunga*. 'The woman who cannot nourish (*afedan*)[3] her child: Let her herself take a piece of her own child's grave, then wrap it up in black wool and sell it to traders, and then say:

I sell it; buy ye it,
This black wool, and seeds of this sorrow.[4]

The practice at St. Tegla's well, between Ruthin and Wrexham, similarly indicates the buying of a cure. In this case it is of epilepsy, which is called in Welsh 'clwyf y Tegla' (Tegla's disease). 'The patient repairs to the well after sunset, and washes himself in it, then, having made an offering by throwing into the water fourpence, he walks round it three times, and thrice recites the Lord's Prayer.' The disease, after further payment, is transferred to a cock or hen, according to the sex of the patient.[5]

(*c*) *The use of narrative charms and formulae*

A charm, when used in medicine, was regarded as a passwood to health. The earliest form of the charm was probably a simple command; later an epic introduction was added, such as is seen in the Merseburg charms. It was thought that the telling of a story of what had once happened in the case of gods might induce the same event to happen again for the benefit of mankind. The supernatural occurrence was thus intended to form a precedent. Later still stories dealing with the feats of Teutonic deities gave place to New Testament incidents (especially those relating to Christ) or narratives (either true or invented for the occasion) concerning apostles and saints.

Good alliterative charms occur early; prose and gibberish are later varieties. Often a narrative introduction in prose precedes the actual charm, which is in verse.[6] In such cases the verse probably

[1] *Lacn.* 74 (CXXXIII).
[2] W. G. Black, *Folk-medicine*, 1883, ch. 2.
[3] See note 5 on p. 267.
[4] *Lacn.* 103 (CLXX).
[5] Black, op. cit., p. 46. See also Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins*, pp. 329–30.
[6] e.g. *Lacn.* 56 (XCIII).

represents the original pagan charm, while the prose was added by the Christian Church to make the remedy orthodox.

The epic introduction is a Teutonic feature, and is never found in genuine Celtic charms.[1]

Various themes have been taken as the subject of the epic introduction. Such are the staying of the waters of Jordan for the baptism of Christ and the piercing of Christ's side by Longinus; both of these precede charms for stanching blood. As the charms were handed down by word of mouth many variants occur, though the main motif is usually preserved. Genealogies of such charms can be traced from the earliest times. Their diffusion is wide, and English variants as well as German occur till the end of the Middle Ages.

An instance of such migration has been traced by the late Professor Robert Priebsch. The first line in the so-called *Wiener Hundsegen*, entered in the eleventh century in a Latin manuscript, runs: 'Christ uuart gaboren, êr uuolf ode diob' ('Christ was born before wolf or thief').[2] An English twelfth-century manuscript, formerly in the possession of Lord Ashburnham, contains the following charm in Early English:

God was iborin in Bedlem,
Ihangid he was in Jerusalem,
Ifolewid in þe flum Jordan,
Þer nes niemnid ne wolf ne þef.[3]

There is no doubt that the above-quoted line in the *Wiener Hundsegen* is recalled by the first half-line and the fourth line of the Early English charm. Priebsch concludes that that line originally ran: 'Wuotan was waltent er uuolf ode diob',[4] which would give in Anglo-Saxon 'Wodan wæs wealdend ær wulf oþþe þeof', and in Old Saxon 'Wodan was waldand er wulf efðo thiof', making in each case a perfect alliterative line, the sense of which would be 'Woden was ruling before wolf or thief'—that is, before there was any evil in the world. Such a line, being either a *Merkvers* or the beginning of a charm, should have originated in north-western

[1] G. Henderson, *Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland*, pp. 72–73.

[2] Müllenhoff and Scherer, *Denkmäler*, 1892, vol. i, p. 16.

[3] MS. CXX, appendix (dated 1182).

[4] The wolf and the thief were the greatest enemies of the shepherd. A Trier manuscript (MS. 40) of the tenth century contains the words: 'Ante fuit Christus quam lupus . . . Christus liberet canes istos et alias bestias de dentibus luporum, de manu latronum.'

Germany, where Woden was worshipped as the highest god, and have travelled with a Frisian or Saxon tribe to England, and also to the south of Germany, for the Old High German charm is written in the Bavarian dialect. If this holds good, this is another instance of the occurrence of the name of Woden, parallel to that in the Lay of the Nine Herbs.[1] The forms in which the two charms quoted above have survived date, however, from Christian times, and the name of Christ has supplanted that of Woden, so that the alliteration has been lost.[2]

With these charms may be compared a charm *contra latrones* in a Middle English manuscript in the British Museum:[3]

> God þt was y bore in bethleem
> & baptized in flum jordan
> þer inne was no þef, [etc.][4]

Narrative charms for arresting haemorrhage are common. Sometimes, as already mentioned, the story of Christ's baptism is told, the moral being, 'even as the water of Jordan ceased to flow for the ceremony, so may the blood now cease to flow'. This episode is apocryphal. The *Chronicon Paschale* says that Christ 'was baptized . . . by John in the river Jordan, and Jordan receded. The Lord said to John: "Say unto Jordan, stand! The Lord hath come to us." And at once the waters stood.'[5] An example of this motif occurs in MS. Hunter 100 at Durham: 'Sta, sta, fluxus sanguinis, sicut stetit iordan in quo iohannes $\overline{\text{xpm}}$ baptizavit.'[6] The only other known place where the 'Jordan-Segen' occurs in an Anglo-Saxon charm is that just quoted from the twelfth-century manuscript formerly belonging to Lord Ashburnham.

The 'Longinus-Segen' is also usually for the arrest of haemorrhage. The oldest example known is Anglo-Saxon. It runs: '*Wiþ*

[1] See p. 339.

[2] R. Priebsch, 'Zum Wiener Hundsegen', *Modern Language Rev.*, 1922, xvii. 80–84.

[3] Brit. Mus., MS. Addit. 2584, fo. 73*b*.

[4] Quoted by J. M. McBryde, 'Charms for thieves', *Modern Language Notes*, 1907, xxii. 168.

[5] *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. Dindorf, Bonn, 1832, vol. i, p. 422 (Corpus Script. Hist. Byzantinae).

[6] Durham MS. Hunter 100, fo. 121*a*. Compare also Brit. Mus., MS. Addit. 33996, fo. 96*b* (Heinrich: *Ein mittelenglisches Medizinbuch*, pp. 120–1). For 'Jordan-Segen' see Ebermann, *Blut- und Wundsegen*, pp. 24–35, and Brie, *Der germanische Zauberspruch*, pp. 30–32. Neither of these collections contains the Durham variant. The oldest variant (Latin) occurs in a ninth- to tenth-century manuscript in the Vatican Library (5359, fo. 30*b*).

gestice. Write Christ's mark and sing thrice over the place, together with the paternoster: "longinus miles lancea ponxit dominum et restetit sanguis et recessit dolor".'[1]

Narrative charms against toothache are also found,[2] e.g. the following Latin charm from the *Lacnunga*:

Christ sat upon a rock. Peter stood sad before Him, holding hand to jaw, and the Lord asked him saying 'Why are thou sad, Peter?' Peter answered and said 'Lord, my teeth hurt'. And the Lord said 'I adjure thee, O megrim or malignant drop [*gutta maligna*], by the Father and Son and the Holy Ghost, and by heaven and earth, and by the twenty orders of angels, and by the sixty prophets, and by the twelve apostles . . . that the devil may not be able to injure him the servant of God, neither in teeth nor in ears nor in palate, . . . that thou mayest have no power to harm him sleeping or waking, nor mayest touch him for sixty years and one day.' Rex pax nax in Christ the Son. Amen. Pater Noster.[3]

This may be compared with the following unpublished thirteenth-century Latin charm which occurs in one of the Sloane manuscripts in the British Museum:

St. Peter was sitting on a marble stone. He was holding his hands to his jaws. The Lord coming down from above, said: 'I conjure thee, *gutta maligna*, so that thou canst not abide in the teeth nor in any other part of the body of this man or of any other man [etc.].[4]

Peter is usually the sufferer in this connexion. Sometimes, however, he is replaced by St. Apollonia, who is especially connected with the teeth, since she suffered in her martyrdom by having hers extracted.[5] Her name does not occur, however, before the end of the fourteenth century. The following is a Breton example:

Saint Apollonia was sitting on a marble stone. Our Lord, passing

[1] Cockayne, vol. i, p. 393. He says, 'from a transcript forwarded by a friend', but gives no reference whence it comes.

[2] See also p. 279.

[3] *Lacn.* 100 (CLXVI). An almost identical charm occurs in Middle English in Brit. Mus., MS. Addit. 33996, fo. 91*b*. (Transcribed by Heinrich, *Ein mittelenglisches Medizinbuch*, pp. 102–3.)

[4] Brit. Mus., MS. Sloane 1580, fo. 44*b*–45*a*.

[5] As is portrayed, for example, in a gory fresco on the gallery of the castle of Fenis in the Val d'Aosta. She was martyred in Alexandria about the middle of the third century. There are a number of chapels and shrines dedicated to this saint in Picardy. Her lower maxilla was acquired by the little church of Radinghem in 1634, and still remains there in a gilded wooden reliquary. A chapel attached to the church of Isques near Boulogne is dedicated to her: in it wax teeth are hung up as votive offerings.

that way, said to her: 'Apollonia, what dost thou there?'—'I am here for my head, for my blood, and for my tooth-ache.'—'Return, Apollonia. If it is a *goutte* of blood, it shall fall, if it is a worm, it shall die.'[1]

The same charm, with St. Peter as the hero, is found in the Scottish Highlands, but usually in English or Latin, and not in Gaelic.[2] Sometimes, however, St. Columba takes the place of St. Peter.[3]

Charms in a foreign or unintelligible language were considered to be of special potency. In some cases the charms consist of corrupt passages of liturgical Latin.[4] Sometimes they can be deciphered in part, especially those in Greek.[5] This Latin charm, for instance, occurs in the Durham manuscript quoted on page 243: 'The following is to be written on a leaf [? of paper] and given to the patient: "Even as we truly believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary brought forth a child which is truly God and man, so do thou retain thy blood in thy veins, in the name of the Father. Stomen-Kaloc-Stomen-Meta-Fouu." '[6] These words are a corruption of *στῶμεν καλῶς· στῶμεν μετὰ φόβου*, from the Greek liturgy of St. Chrysostom. They occur again in a manuscript at St. John's College, Oxford (written in 1110, probably at Thorney), and in this case are to be written on the forehead as a charm against bleeding from the nose.[7]

Howard Meroney, the latest writer on 'Irish in the Old English charms', has discovered as many as seven in which Irish words occur. 'It is to be recorded', he says, 'that with more or less plausibility, about ninety early Irish words have now been recovered from the gibberish portions of these seven recipes.'[8] The most interesting

[1] L. F. Sauvé, 'Charmes de la Basse-Bretagne', *Rev. celtique*, 1883, vi. 74 See also Heinrich, *Ein mittelenglisches Medizinbuch*, p. 148, and *Archaeologia* 1844, xxx. 397, where St. Apollonia has secured from the Trinity the promise that he who shall carry her name on his person shall be freed from the tooth-ache.

[2] A. Macbain, 'Gaelic incantations', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, 1892, xvii. 252.

[3] W. Mackenzie, 'St. Columba in Highland folk-lore', *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Oct. 1895.

[4] e.g. in *Lacn.* 109 (CLXXVI). Lucan speaks of Egyptian hieroglyphs as 'magicas linguas', since they were unintelligible (*Pharsalia*, iii. 224).

[5] e.g. Sextus Placitus, i. 5; *Leechbook I*, lxiv.

[6] Durham MS. Hunter 100, fo. 121*a*.

[7] St. John's College, Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 175*a* (marginal gloss), quoted in Cockayne, vol. i, p. 394. Singer says these words are from the Greek mass of St. Chrysostom, and 'coming just before the elevation of the Host, had special significance' (Introduction to the *Leechdoms*, 1961, p. xxxii).

[8] H. Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English charms', *Speculum*, 1945, xx. 181.

of these words is *biran*, which occurs in the 'worm charm' in *Lacnunga* (10, XXVI). This he thinks to be a diminutive of the Old Irish *bir*, a spear.[1] If so, it is presumably the Old Irish word for elf-shot.

Singer remarks that 'a few Semitic anatomical and medical words as *idumas* (hands), *senis* (teeth), and *dulath* (fever) are traceable in the A.S. incantations, but the advent of these in England was unrelated to the "Arabian" scholastic learning'.[2]

(*d*) *The* Lorica

The various forms of the *Lorica* must also be described under 'Protective measures'. This word (literally signifying a breastplate) was used to denote lengthy charms to be recited as a means of protection from disease and various ills, known and unknown.

The *Lorica of Gildas* has survived in six different manuscripts dating from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.[3] The opening lines are as follows:

> Gildas made this Lorica to drive out those demons who pestered him. An angel came to him, and the angel said to him, 'If any man should recite it constantly, a period of seven years would be added to his life and a third part of his sins blotted out. On whatsoever day he should chant this prayer . . . men, demons or enemies cannot harm him, nor death touch him on that day.' Laidcend, son of Baeth the Victorious, came from him to the island of Ireland; he brought it over and placed it upon the altar of Saint Patrick the Bishop, to make us whole. Amen.[4]

The Lorica, as inserted between sections 34 and 35 of the *Lacnunga* (LXVIII), continues:

> Help, O oneness of Trinity,
> have pity, O Threeness of Unity . . .
> so that neither the mortality of this year
> nor the vanity of the world may draw me [down] with it.

This Lorica contains what is, for the period, an extraordinarily full list of the various parts of the body for which protection is required, beginning with the head and proceeding downwards.

[1] H. Meroney, op. cit., p. 178.

[2] Singer in Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, 1952, p. 5.

[3] Details by Singer in *From Magic to Science*, 1928, pp. 111–32, and also under 'Hisperic elements' in Grattan and Singer, pp. 68–71.

[4] MS. Harley 2965. See W. de Gray Birch, 'An ancient manuscript of the eighth or ninth century', *Hants Record Soc.*, 1889.

At the end comes the passage, 'Cover hairs, and other members / the names of which I have perchance omitted; / cover all of me, with my five senses / and with their ten finely fashioned doors.' Singer comments on this last line: 'The ten doors or portals of entry of sensations is a mediaeval commonplace. The mouth counts for two (oesophagus and trachea), the others being eyes, ears, nostrils, urethra and anus. Or the five senses may be more strictly followed and the hands reckoned as organs of feeling.'

It is also called the *Lorica of Loding* (in the *Book of Cerne*),[1] the *Lorica of Lathacan Scotigena* (in a manuscript in Cologne Cathedral Library, formerly at Darmstadt), and the *Lorica of Laidcend*, son of Baeth the Victorious (in the *Leabhar Braec*, in the library of Trinity College, Dublin). Gildas, if he is the same as the author of *De excidio Britanniae*, died about the year 570, Laidcend in 661. The 'mortality of this year', for which the Lorica was originally composed, was presumably one of the recurrences of pestilence which ravaged these islands in the sixth and seventh centuries;[2] the death of either reputed author would coincide with an outbreak.

The occurrence in this Lorica of Irish words has already been mentioned.[3] Other Irish Loricas have been published. That of St. Patrick, says the late Dr. Eleanor Hull, shows 'the complete Irish charm-form carried over into the Christian hymn, with its iteration of the same idea with slight changes of wording'.[4] Its preface says: 'It is a Lorica of faith for the protection of body and soul against demons and men and vices: when any person shall recite it daily with pious meditation on God, demons shall not dare to face him, it shall be a protection to him against all poison and envy, it shall be a guard to him against sudden death, it shall be a Lorica for his soul after his decease.'[5] Other Loricas are those of Mugron and of St. Columba.

Of a similar nature is the Irish metrical incantation found by Haupt in a *Codex Regularum* at Klosterneuburg, near Vienna. This specifies a number of *cingula* of divers saints for protection

[1] A. B. Kuypers, *Book of Cerne*, Cambridge, 1902, p. 232.

[2] The date of the *Lorica* and of the pestilence concerned is discussed on p. 133 (first note) of Grattan and Singer.

[3] See p. 46.

[4] E. Hull, 'The ancient hymn-charms of Ireland', *Folk-lore*, 1910, xxi. 430. The same iteration is a characteristic of Finnish charms.

[5] Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. ii, p. 49.

against various ills: a 'Lorica dei ad me protegendum a vertice meo ad plantam meam'.[1]

Charms which consign the different parts of the body to the care and protection of Old and New Testament personages have been dealt with.[2]

The Roman Catholic Church has provided a saint to be invoked for diseases in every part of the body as well as for diseases which affect the body in general. This practice is based on the idea that the saint in question had either himself suffered from the disease or had cured others who were suffering from it,[3] or possibly had suffered in his martyrdom as to that part of the body, as was the case with St. Apollonia.

(*e*) *Pagan measures to ensure health*

Various pagan practices apparently intended to secure health are expressly forbidden in the Anglo-Saxon penitentials.

Thus Archbishop Theodore says that 'the woman who shall taste her husband's blood as a remedy shall do penance for forty days on bread and water'.[4]

'If a woman shall have placed her son or daughter upon the roof or in the oven, for the sake of its health, she shall do penance for seven years.'[5] The roof was thought to be especially the seat of spirits, wherefore possibly the children would have a good chance there of recovery. The same prohibition occurs in the Penitential of Egbert.[6] The hearth (or oven) was originally the holy place of the house, where its guardian spirits dwelt. The seventeenth heading of the *Indiculus Superstitionum* is 'De observatione pagana in foco'.

Theodore also says (as already mentioned in connexion with the cult of the dead), 'If any one shall have burnt corn where a dead man lies for the health of those still living and of the house, he shall do penance for five years.'[7] This was to elicit the help of the dead by means of a present.

[1] Whitley Stokes, 'The Klosterneuburg incantation', *Rev. celtique*, 1873–5, ii. 112–15.

[2] See p. 227.

[3] David Riesman, in his *Story of Medicine in the Middle Ages*, gives many examples (pp. 310–12).

[4] Theodore, *Penitential*, I. xiv. 16.

[5] Ibid. I. xv. 2.

[6] Egbert, *Penitential*, viii. 2.

[7] Theodore, I. xv. 3.

And again, the First penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190 says, 'Anyone who in honour of the moon fasts on any grounds of health, shall do penance for one year.'[1]

The Second penitential in the same manuscript says that 'the woman who would cure her infant by any sorcery (*veneficio*), or draws it through the earth at the cross-roads, is to fast for three years'.[2] This and similar rites for attempting to transfer the disease have already been dealt with.[3]

[1] MS. C.C.C.C. 190, First penitential, xxvii. 26.
[2] Ibid., Second penitential, iv. 20.
[3] See p. 240.

CHAPTER XV

Sympathetic Magic

This chapter deals with those types of sympathetic magic which are not discussed in other parts of this book

(*a*) *Homoeopathic magic*

THE medieval mind, like that of the savage before it, worked according to a logic of its own. It had not the benefit of modern science to assist it, and therefore looked for guidance in all things to the Deity, or rather to its own conception of the Deity.

Since man was made on the last day of Creation, and since God created him in His own likeness, it logically followed that all things were subject to him and were created for his benefit. He therefore looked to inanimate nature for signs of the will of the Deity and for guidance in the treatment of disease. The colour of a plant, for instance, might be an indication for his guidance, so that red flowers or berries were chosen to arrest haemorrhage.[1]

Since, in the opinion of Pliny, plants were primarily of use for curative purposes, they often showed this purpose in their form. After describing the lithospermum as having a row of small white stones adhering to its stalk and saying that its use was the expulsion of stone from the bladder,[2] Pliny continues, 'indeed there is no plant which so instantaneously proclaims, at the mere sight of it, the medicinal purposes for which it was originally intended'.[3]

The anthropomorphic shape of the mandrake was thought to be indicative of its therapeutic uses. Thus St. Hildegard, writing in the century after the close of our period, says in the chapter on the mandrake in her *Physica*: 'If a man suffers from any infirmity in the head, let him eat of the head of this plant: or if he suffers in the neck, let him eat of its neck: or if in his back, from its back: or if in his arm, from its arm: or if in his hand, from its hand: or if in his knee, from its knee: or if in his foot, let him eat from its

[1] See p. 219. [2] For the Anglo-Saxon equivalent see pp. 400–1.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxvii. 74.

foot: or in whatsoever member he suffers, let him eat from the similar member of its form, and he will be better.'[1]

Similarly, the remedy prescribed in *περὶ διδάξεων* for *bula* 'which arise between skin and flesh, and break out on a man's forehead as great as beans', is black beans, beaten small and bound on the wound.[2]

The underlying idea of this approach (of which there is a surprising dearth of examples in Anglo-Saxon recipes) is the Latin adage *similia similibus curantur*, 'like cures like'. Two animal examples occur in Sextus Placitus. 'For bite of a mad dog, take the worms which be under a mad dog's tongue, cut them away, lead them round about a fig-tree, give them to him who hath been bitten, he will soon be whole'.[3] And again, 'for madness and menace of hounds, he who hath a hound's heart with him, against him hounds shall not be fierce'.[4]

Both these prescriptions are derived from Pliny. In one passage Pliny says, 'There is a small worm in a dog's tongue . . . if this is removed from the animal while a pup, it will never become mad. . . . This worm, after being carried thrice round a fire, is given to persons who have been bitten by a mad dog, to prevent them from becoming mad.' And again, in the same chapter, 'Dogs will fly from anyone who has a dog's heart about him.'[5]

Often the mere assonance suggests the use to which a herb was to be put. Thus the plant called neck-wort was used in recipes for neck-tumour.[6]

The plant called hare's lettuce perhaps derived its name from another assonance. The legend says it was named from the use to which it was thought the hare put it. 'Of this wort, it is said that the hare, when in summer by the vehement heat he is tired, doctors himself with this wort.'[7]

Sometimes a connexion was thought to exist between a remedy and the object for which it was to be employed, if the words for the two were similar. For instance, Pliny tells us 'that hare's flesh

[1] St. Hildegard, *Physica*, i. 56, in Migne, *Patrologia Lat.*, vol. cxcvii, col. 1151.
[2] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 3–4.
[3] Sextus Placitus, ix. 11.
[4] Ibid. xiii. 13.
[5] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxix. 32.
[6] *Lacn.* 4 (xiv). The daisy was called banwort, because, according to Turner (1548), 'it helpeth bones to knyt agayne'. Other examples are lung-wort, throat-wort, and spleen-wort.
[7] *A.S. Herbal*, cxiv. 1.

taken as a diet... confers beauty for nine days on those who use it'.[1] The connexion is but an assonance based on the resemblance of *lepos*, grace, to *lepus*, a hare.

Fleabane, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, 'kills gnats and midges and fleas',[2] and 'adderwort is produced in places where the adder is.... If any man has this wort with him he is secure against all kinds of adders.'[3] Similarly wenwort was a cure for wens, and lithwort (dwarf-elder) for diseases of the joints (A.S. *lith*).

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* often gives the source, or supposed source, of a herb's name. Thus it derives mugwort (artemisia) from Artemis,[4] feverfew and other Centaureae from the centaur Chiron, their finder,[5] peony from Peonio, its discoverer,[6] and yarrow (achillea) from Achilles, 'the ealdorman', who found it.[7] Each of these was associated with the idea of healing in classical times.

(*b*) *Diminishing charms*

'Diminishing charms' are those which begin by enumerating a number of persons or objects, usually nine: one of these is subtracted in each line until none are left. The same motif exists in the nursery rhyme of the Ten little nigger boys.

The best Anglo-Saxon example occurs in the *Lacnunga*, and is 'for swollen glands (*cyrnel*), and for scrofula (*scrofell*)[8] and for worm, and for every evil'. It runs: 'Nine were node's (*noðþæs*) sisters; then the nine became eight, and the eight became seven', and so on until 'and the one none' is reached.[9]

There is a similar charm in Marcellus Empiricus, whence presumably this is derived. It begins, *novem glandulae sorores*, and ends, *nulla fit glandula*.[10] 'Node' was used as an equivalent of 'glandula'.

[1] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxviii. 79.

[2] *A.S. Herbal*, cxliii. 1.

[3] Ibid. cxxxi. 1. See also chapter XX, below, on poison.

[4] Ibid. xiii. 4. Pliny, on the other hand, gives the alternative that artemisia was named from Artemisia, wife of Mausolus, since she adopted the plant (*Nat. Hist.* xxv. 36).

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, xxxvi. 1. Cf. also Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 30.

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, lxvi. 1. Cf. also Pliny, ibid. xxv. 10. See *Iliad*, Bk. V, l. 401.

[7] *A.S. Herbal*, xc. 1. Cf. also Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 19.

[8] Cf. for the same idea, Pliny, ibid. xxx. 12: 'Some . . . attach to the patient as many earthworms as there are scrofulous tumours, the sores drying as the worms dry up.'

[9] *Lacn.* 95 (CLXII).

[10] Marcellus Emp., xv.

If this is the case, there is an interesting comparison in a charm for warts given by James Hardy: 'Count most carefully the number of warts: take a corresponding number of *nodules* or knots from the stalks of any of the cerealia, . . . wrap these in a cloth, and deposit the packet in the earth.' All this is to be done secretly. 'As the nodules decay, the warts will disappear.'[1]

An Irish charm is also quoted by Hardy: 'Find a straw with *nine* knees: bury the knots: as they rot, so will the warts.' Among the Romans a deity names Nodotus presided over knots of the stalks of corn.[2]

There is a similar Breton charm for a tumour, which is probably also derived from Marcellus: 'The gland has nine daughters—from nine they became eight—from eight to seven' and so on to 'from one to none'.[3] This is to be repeated nine times, and at the beginning of each recital a cross is to be traced on the tumour with the left thumb. This action is again reminiscent of Marcellus, who precedes his charm with the instructions 'digito medicinali ac *pollice* continens eas dices'.

A Cornish charm begins 'Tetter, tetter, thou hast nine brothers'. These are reduced verse by verse until he is an only child, and he is then ordered to be gone.[4] It is noticeable that in each example the relationships to the chief character differ.

(*c*) *Warts and wens*

The orthodox way of curing warts and wens has always been by the use of charms, especially diminishing charms. The Anglo-Saxons did, however, have recipes for them, and a collection of these appears in section lviii of the first *Leechbook*.

Bacon says, 'the taking away of warts by rubbing them with somewhat that is put to waste . . . is a common experiment'.[5] There is a Welsh charm 'for a wart' which is comparable: 'Take an eel and cut its head off, anoint the parts where the warts are situated with the blood and bury the head deep in the earth: as the head rottens, so will the warts disappear.'[6]

[1] *Folk-lore Record*, 1878, i. 221.
[2] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, iv. 8.
[3] L. F. Sauvé, 'Charmes . . . de la Basse-Bretagne', *Rev. celtique*, 1883, vi. 70–71.
[4] R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, 1881, p. 414.
[5] Bacon, *Sylva Silvarum*, 1651, p. 216.
[6] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, § 215.

Wasting of warts and wens is often to be effected by means of sympathetic magic, with or without a rhyme. For instance, the following in an eleventh-century hand occurs at the end of an eighth-century vellum codex in the British Museum. The mistakes which occur in the original text of the charm show that it has been copied from an older manuscript, the language of which the scribe could not understand.

Wen, wen,
Here shalt thou not build
But thou shalt fare
northwards[1] from here
Where thou, poor one, hast
He shall lay thee
Under foot of wolf,
Under eagle's claw,
Pine thou even as
Shrivel thou even as
And dwindle even as
So little mayst thou become
Even as a hand-worm's
And so little mayst thou become

Wend thee hence,
Nor any holding have:
To the nearest hill,

One brother.
A leaf at thy head,
Under feather of eagle,
Ever may'st thou wither,
Coal on hearth,
Excrement on a wall,
Water in a pitcher;
Even as a grain of linseed,
Hipbone, and much less:
That thou become nothing at all.[2]

There are a large number of charms against wens in Anglo-Saxon.[3]

Wen-wyrt was the name given to a plant which was supposed to be good for wens. Two varieties are mentioned, one being called *clufeht* (bulbed) and the other *cnéoeht* (knotty). Cockayne equates the former with *Ranunculus ficaria* and the latter with *Coronopus ruellii.*

[1] The north was the abode of the heathen gods: see p. 133.

[2] MS. Royal 4 A. XIV, fo. 106b, transcribed by Birch in *Trans. Roy. Soc. Lit.*, 1878, 2s. xi. 485. Amended by R. Priebsch, whose version I here translate.

[3] e.g. *Leechbook I*, lviii (obviously for a stye); *Leechbook III*, xxx (a 'shooting wen'); *Lacn.* 12 (XXX), 41 (LXXV) (a 'shooting wen'), 52 (LXXXIX), 61 (CXIX), 114 (CLXXXIII).

PART 6

Diseases and Conditions Treated by Magical Means

CHAPTER XVI

Mental Disease and Devil-possession

MENTAL disease was usually regarded by the Anglo-Saxons, as it was in the New Testament, as the result of possession by a devil. Epilepsy, hysterical fits, insanity, or merely fits of violent passion, all come into this category. From the various descriptions of the symptoms and of the cures effected, it is usually impossible to say exactly which of these conditions was meant.

Epilepsy was known to the Romans as *morbus sacer* and later by various names such as *morbus daemonius*, *m. puerilis*, *m. caducus*, *m. mensalis*, *m. sancti Valentini*, *m. sancti Ioannis*, &c.[1] Abbot Ælfric's vocabulary (tenth century) equates the two Anglo-Saxon words *fylle-seóc* (which is derived from *fyllan*, to throw down) and *bræc-cóðu* (*from bræc*, a breaking) with 'epilepsia, uel caduca, uel laruatio [cf. *larva*, a ghost or hobgoblin], uel comitialis'.[2] It was called *morbus comitialis* since its occurrence was considered ominous and meetings of the senate were suspended if anyone present had an epileptic fit. The word epilepsy is derived from ἐπιλαμβάνειν, to seize, get possession of.

Other words signifying mental disease are *deófol-seóc* which means possessed by a devil, and *mónaþ-seóc*[3] which may mean lunatic or epileptic. Possibly, since the shorter form *món-seóc* also occurs, the latter word is more closely connected with *móna*, moon, than with *mónaþ*, month. *Wan-seóc* signifies epileptic: *wan* (absent, wanting) when compounded indicates deficiency.

The adjective *wód* signifies mad (*insanus*), and the noun *wóda* an insane person or one possessed. The derivative *wód-þrág*, frenzy-state, is used in the Anglo-Saxon version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* to describe the condition of Saul when David played to him. The word *dreám* signifies joy, ecstasy, but the compound *wódendreám*

[1] A long list of names by which it has been known is given by J. R. Whitwell in his *Historical Notes on Psychiatry*, 1936, p. 105.

[2] Ælfric's *Vocabulary*, col. 112, 26–27 (Wright–Wülcker, vol. i, 1884).

[3] This word may also signify suffering from *mónaþ-ádl*, i.e. a disease that occurs at intervals of a month.

signifies madness, fury. The connexion of these and other cognate words with Wóden, the god of the frenzied, is obvious.

The noun *ge-wit-leást* means not only folly but also madness, as is shown in the prescription in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*: 'for the disease which the Greeks call frenésis or in our language *ge-wit-lést*, which is when the head boils [*a-weallen*: Cockayne translates 'in on fire'], then take . . . peucedanus [A.S. *cammoc*], pound in vinegar, souse the head with it: it benefits greatly'.[1]

Hippocrates regarded insanity as resulting from disease of the brain, and his ideas continued until the end of the classical period, during which they were developed by Celsus and Galen. But Hippocrates 'also believed', to quote the words of Zilboorg,[2] 'in the physiological theory, in our days represented by psychiatric endocrinology, which claims that certain body juices are responsible for madness. . . . In mental diseases, bile (yellow and black) played a predominant role (hence choleric and melancholic temperaments).' Aristotle differed from Hippocrates in thinking that black bile was not in itself the cause, but rather heat and cold, of which it was the carrier: the brain had another function. In classical times the patients were treated with sympathy and consideration. But from the time of Celsus[3] onwards through the Dark and Middle Ages, and indeed till the end of the seventeenth century, another theory, that of demoniacal possession as the cause, held sway. It was not until modern times that it was recognized that insanity is often the result of physical disease.

It has already been said that the cure of demoniacal possession was the function of the Church, which employed an exorcist for the purpose.[4] If exorcism was of no avail and the devil was obstinate, more drastic measures were taken. Attempts to punish the demon led to harsh treatment of the victim whom he had possessed. It seems strange that experience should not have demonstrated that this treatment, which could but aggravate the mental disease, was wrong.

The Church formulated various theories of the manner in which a devil enters into a man. One was that it might be inhaled, another

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xcvi. 4.

[2] G. Zilboorg, *History of Medical Psychology*, 1941, pp. 46, 49; see also p. 57.

[3] Celsus says that 'it is proper to confine those who conduct themselves violently, lest they injure themselves and other persons' (*De re medica*, iii. 18). This indicates the beginning of a harsher treatment of the insane.

[4] See p. 172.

that it might enter when he was asleep. Or possibly it might be absorbed with food. The following curious story from the *Exempla* of Jacques de Vitry illustrates this last possibility: 'Saint Gregory tells of a nun who ate a lettuce without making the sign of the cross, and swallowed a devil. When a holy man tried to exorcise him the devil said: "What fault is it of mine? I was sitting on the lettuce, and she did not cross herself, and so ate me too".'[1] Similarly in the case of the demon in the milk-pail when St. Columba reproves the youth Columban. He says, 'Thou hast acted negligently . . . for thou hast not cast out the demon that was lurking at the bottom of the empty pail by making on it the sign of the Lord's Cross before pouring in the milk'.[2] The milk would presumably have been affected but for the saint's action.

The following records of cases seem to indicate that the treatment of the insane was considerate in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. The English laws as late as the time of Henry I enact that 'insanos et ejusmodi maleficos debent parentes sui misericorditer custodire'.[3]

Violence, in later times, may have been employed partly in self-defence owing to the dangerous behaviour of the patient,[4] but it was more probably employed in order to drive out the devil. Beating was sometimes employed as a remedy in the Anglo-Saxon period. A recipe in the third *Leechbook* runs: 'If a man be *mónapseóc*, take the skin of a porpoise (*mere-swín*), make it into a whip, beat the man with it: he will soon be well.'[5] An early-thirteenth-century window in Canterbury Cathedral depicts the cure of a maniac. In the first scene he is being dragged by his friends to the shrine of St. Thomas; he is tied up with ropes and belaboured with birch-rods. In the second scene he is represented as sane and returning thanks.

The following narratives from Bede and others show the nature of mental disease as it appeared to the Anglo-Saxons, together with examples of how they attempted to deal with it.

Bede says of Eadbald, who succeeded his father Æthelberht as

[1] Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, cxxx. (Folk-lore Society.)
[2] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, ii. 16.
[3] *Leges Henrici I*, lxxviii. 7.
[4] Cf. the description of the 'two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass that way', in Matthew viii. 28.
[5] *Leechbook III*, xl.

king of Kent in 616, that 'he often was afflicted with insanity (*wédenheortness*) and with attacks of the unclean spirit'. He considers this to have been divine punishment and correction, since Eadbald had married his stepmother.[1]

Bede describes various cures of cases of possession. One has already been mentioned among the cures effected by the instrumentality of St. Oswald's relics, but it may be quoted again for the sake of clarity. There was a guest at Bardney Abbey

> who was wont often in the night to be on a sudden grievously tormented with an evil spirit. He was hospitably received; and after supper lay down on a couch. Then he was suddenly seized by a devil and began to shout and grind his teeth and to foam at the mouth, and he began to twist his limbs with all sorts of movements. None being able to hold or bind him, a servant ran and . . . acquainted the abbess. She . . . calling a priest, desired he would go with her to the sufferer. . . . The priest chanted and recited exorcisms and did all that he could to allay the fury of the wretched man, but he produced no effect in spite of his exertions. [The abbess then sent a servant for some of the dust on which the water in which St. Oswald's bones had been washed had been spilt, and as soon as it arrived in the room] he was suddenly silent and laid down his head as if released for sleep, stretching out all his limbs at rest. [After some time he fetched a deep sigh, and said that he was restored to his senses.] Then the abbess gave him a little of that dust, and the priest recited an exorcism and they prayed for him: and he spent a most quiet night. Nor from that time onwards did he suffer any fear or vexation from his ancient enemy.'[2]

Another passage tells of a cure through the agency of St. Chad. The saint was buried in St. Mary's church at Lichfield in 672, and his bones were later translated to that of St. Peter. Frequent cures were wrought in both places. 'And of late', says Bede, 'a certain distracted person (*sum bræc-seóc man*), while running about and wandering from place to place, came there in the evening, while the guardians of the place either did not know or did not heed, and he rested there all night; and then in the morning he rose in his sound senses and went out.'[3]

Bede says that when the body of St. Etheldrida was exhumed

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 5. That such a union would be specially obnoxious to Bede is shown by his quoting Gregory's answer to Augustine's fifth query as to his procedure in some cases of doubt: 'to marry one's stepmother is a heinous crime' (ibid. i. 27).

[2] Ibid. iii. 11.

[3] Ibid. iv. 3.

sixteen years after her death, 'all the linen clothes in which her body had been buried appeared entire and as fresh as if they had been that very day wrapped about her chaste limbs. . . . It happened that by the touch of that linen, devils were expelled from bodies possessed, and other distempers were sometimes cured.'[1]

Two cures of mental disease occur in the Anglo-Saxon *Life of St. Guthlac.*

> There was in the land of the East Saxons a man of noble kin whose name was Hwætred. . . . The accursed spirit entered into him, so that he went out of his wits. . . . He wounded his own body with iron as well as with his teeth. . . . A great multitude gathered together that they might bind him. Thereupon he took an axe, and with it smote three men to death. . . . It was four years that he was sorely afflicted with this madness. He was at last taken by his relations and brought to the holy monastery to the end that mass-priests and bishops might wash and cleanse him from his madness. They, however, with many expedients, could not drive out the evil powers of the accursed spirit. [His friends then brought him to St. Guthlac.] He took the sick man and led him into his church and there remained three days incessantly at his prayers. When the sun rose on the third day, he bathed him in holy water and blew in his face, and with that all the power of the accursed spirit over him was shattered. And this same man was as though he had awakened from a deep slumber, and he received his health again and went home; and the illness never ailed him afterwards as long as he lived.[2]

The second story is of a man named Ecga who also was disquieted by the accursed spirit. He too was brought to St. Guthlac. 'As soon as he came to him, he girded him with his girdle. [Then] all the uncleanness departed from him, and the illness never after ailed him.'[3]

It is natural that treatment by means of herb remedies in mental cases would not be of such avail as they might be in the case of bodily ills. Herbs, if used, are therefore of the unusual kind, and their administration is accompanied by magical or religious ceremonial of such a nature as would make an impression upon the mind of the sufferer.

The four recipes that follow are from the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal.* 'For lunacy (*mónoð-seócness*), if a man lays the wort peony over the lunatic as he lies, soon he lifts himself up well: and if he has it with

[1] Ibid. iv. 19.
[2] Felix of Crowland, *Life of St. Guthlac,* xli.
[3] Ibid. xlii.

him, the disease never again approaches him.'[1] It will be remembered that the abbess of Bardney gave her patient some of her magic dust to keep by him. And again, 'for a lunatic (*mónoð-seóc*), take [clovewort] and wreathe it with a red thread about the man's neck, when the moon is on the wane', in April and in early October.[2] The mandrake, being a specially magical plant, was naturally used in such cases as a remedy: 'for *ge-wit-leást*, that is for *deóful-seócniss*, take from the body of this same wort mandrake by weight of three pennies: give to drink in warm water'.[3] Mugwort, another magical herb, also puts to flight *deóful-seócniss*.[4] An animal remedy from Sextus Placitus runs: 'Lest a child be falling, that is *fylle seóc*, or meet with a *scínlác* [possibly an apparition, or *delusio mentis*], draw the brain of a mountain goat through a golden ring, give it to the child to swallow before it tastes milk: it will be healed.'[5]

Other remedies are : aristolochia (dry it, and smoke the sick man with it) for *deóful-seócniss*;[6] berries of asterion (to be eaten when the moon is on the wane and when the sun is in Virgo: the herb also to be hung round the patient's neck) for *fylle-seócniss*;[7] wolf's flesh (to be eaten, well prepared and sodden) against *deóful-seócniss* and against an evil vision.[8]

The first *Leechbook*[9] gives two recipes for a fiend-sick man, i.e. 'when the devil feeds upon (*féde*)[10] a man and rules him within with disease'; in one case the concoction is to be drunk out of a church bell. It also gives one recipe *wiþ bræc-seócum men*, and another *wiþ wéden-heorte*, i.e. madness, frenzy.[11] Cognate with this last term is *wéde-berge* [mad-berry?], the Anglo-Saxon name for hellebore, since this plant was largely used in cases of madness.[12]

A collection of various herbs is given as a recipe against *ungemynd* (dementedness) and against *dysgung* (foolishness) in the 66th chapter of the first *Leechbook*.

The first section of the second *Leechbook* says that 'from disease of the stomach come many and various diseases of burst wounds and cramp and epilepsy (*fylle-wærc*) and *fiénda-ádl*'. Raymond Crawfurd in his article on 'The blessing of cramp-rings'[13] equates

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, lxvi. 2. [2] Ibid. x. 2. [3] Ibid. cxxxii. 5.
[4] Ibid. xi. 1. [5] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. v. 12. [6] *A.S. Herbal*, xx. 3.
[7] Ibid. lxi. 3. [8] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. ix. 1. [9] *Leechbook I*, lxiii.
[10] If this is the correct translation: *fédan* means either to feed or to produce.
[11] 'A light drink for *wéden-heort*' occurs in *Leechbook III*, lxviii.
[12] *A.S. Herbal*, cxl. 1.
[13] In Singer's *Studies in the History and Method of Science*, vol. i, 1917, p. 180.

'cramp' in this connexion with epilepsy, convulsions, and rheumatism. The last quotation combines these. The Anglo-Saxon for cramp or spasm is *hramma*.

It would appear that *ælf-sogoða*, from the form of prayers prescribed for its cure, indicated some sort of devil possession. The term occurs only in the following passage: 'If a man has *ælf-sogoða*, his eyes are yellow, where they should be red.' To cure, one must observe his behaviour. In the case of a man, if he looks up when first observed and his face is yellow-black, he may be cured 'if he be not too long therein'. In the case of a woman, if she looks down when first observed, and her face be 'livid with a red tinge' [*reáde wan*: note that *wan-seóc* signifies epileptic], she may also be cured. The charm to be sung includes the words 'Deus omnipotens . . . expelle a famulo tuo omnem impetum castalidum, de capite, de capillis, de cerebro [etc.]'[1]

[1] *Leechbook III*, lxii. See also p. 163, above.

CHAPTER XVII

Childbirth

THE Anglo-Saxon word for childbirth, *beorpor*, also means a foetus. It occurs in such phrases as *beorpor-cwelm*, meaning an abortion or miscarriage, and *beorpor-þinen*, a birth-maidservant or midwife. The phrase *cild-hama*, meaning child-covering, or the womb, occurs occasionally in glossaries.

'There is abundant evidence in the writings of Hippocrates, Soranus and Celsus', says Findley, 'that physicians in ancient times assisted midwives in difficult cases, particularly where an operation was required.'[1] But from the third until the sixteenth century obstetrics were the concern of the midwife rather than of the doctor. It has been said that the reason for this was largely female modesty, and that only when a sufficiently high degree of civilization has been reached, such as was the case in ancient Athens, at times in Rome, and now again in modern times, has this difficulty been overcome and justice been done to women in this respect.

Male interest was rather to be found in such matters as divination, to ascertain if the pregnant woman would bear a boy or a girl, than in any sympathetic endeavour to alleviate her sufferings. The following details of Anglo-Saxon 'obstetrics' reflect this attitude and show that the writings of Greek and Latin authors on obstetrics had not penetrated to this island, and that knowledge of the subject was at its lowest ebb.

In ancient Ireland some provision seems to have been made for the welfare of both mother and child. That such was the case is indicated by the practice, occurring in Irish myths, of the woman giving birth on an island. This, apart from taboo, would have secured for her some seclusion. Children were also born at a well or beside a stream; this would secure the availability of water. The prophecy that Ethne, Columkille's mother, would bear him on a flagstone floating on the lake indicates the provision both of seclusion and of water.[2]

[1] P. Findley, *Priests of Lucina: the Story of Obstetrics*, 1939, p. 41.
[2] *Zeitschr. f. celtische Philol.*, 1901, iii. 557.

(*a*) *Formation of the foetus*

The following passage showing the ideas of the Anglo-Saxons as to the formation of the foetus occurs in a mid-eleventh-century manuscript from Christ Church, Canterbury, which is now in the British Museum.[1] It deserves to be quoted in its entirety.

Here beginneth to tell of a man's nature, how in his mother's womb he grows to be a man. First the man's brain is formed in his mother's womb, then the brain is covered over with a membrane (*reóma*) in the sixth week. In the second month, the arteries (or veins) are formed: they are divided into 365 shorter and longer ones, and the blood then flows into the feet and hands, and he is then divided into limbs and assembled into one. In the third month, he is a man without a soul. In the fourth month, he is stable in his limbs. In the fifth month he quickens and grows, and the mother is senseless; and then the ribs are formed; and then many troubles occur for her when the body of the foetus is being formed in her womb. In the sixth month, he is provided with a skin and the bones are growing. In the seventh month, the toes and the fingers are growing. In the eighth month, his breast organs are growing, and the heart and the blood, and he is all firmly put together. In the ninth month, the woman knows for certain whether she may conceive. In the tenth month, the woman will not escape with her life if the child is not born, since it becomes a fatal disease in her belly—most often on a Tuesday night.

(*b*) *Male child*

Great interest has always been shown regarding the sex of an unborn child, and magic was practised to secure the birth of a male.

The mid-eleventh-century Cotton manuscript quoted above exhibits the Anglo-Saxon method of divination.[2] If the mother walk slowly and has hollow eyes, she will bear a boy. If she walk quickly and has swollen eyes, she will bear a girl. If she choose a lily rather than a rose, when offered both, she will bear a boy rather than a girl, and vice versa. If she walk more on her heels than her toes she will bear a boy, if on her toes more than on her heels, a girl.

[1] Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III, ff. 40*b*–41*a* (formerly ff. 38*b*–39*a*). The passage was printed by Cockayne in his *Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 146. It was dated for me by Mr. Neil Ker.

[2] Brit. Mus. MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III, ff. 42*b*–43*a* (formerly ff. 40*b*–41*a*. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 145).

The following is a charm to secure a male child: 'A hare's uterus dried and cut into slices or rubbed into a drink, let them both [man and wife] drink it. If the wife alone drinks it, then she will bear a hermaphrodite.'[1]

Pliny says that birthwort[2] (aristolochia) is prescribed for securing a male child, and that its name is derived from its being ἀρίστη λοχούσαις.[3] He also says, in another place, 'By taking thelygonon in drink, they say, the conception of female issue is ensured. . . . By taking [arsenogonon] in drink, male issue may be ensured—that is if we choose to believe it.'[4]

(*c*) *Pregnancy*

There is an endless variety of charms (*a*) to excite love, (*b*) to secure pregnancy, (*c*) to facilitate or ensure a safe delivery, (*d*) in case a child be born dead, and (*e*) for removal of the placenta.

(*a*) *To excite love.* Many examples of this, for both sexes, will be found in Sextus Placitus, the generative organs of some animal being used in each recipe.[5] Recipes to restrain lust (A.S. *wyrt-forbor*) occur in Anglo-Saxon writings. Since this subject was dealt with by Cockayne in the preface to his first volume,[6] there is no need to repeat the details here. Examples of both these abound in the classics, e.g. in Pliny.

(*b*) *To secure pregnancy.* The Red Sea cowrie (*Cypraea pantherina*),[7] which has been found in Anglo-Saxon women's graves on Kingston Down and Sibertswold Down in Kent,[8] and in a grave near Wingham, also in Kent,[9] was probably worn as an amulet, as it was by the women of Pompeii, to prevent sterility.[10]

Three of the most interesting charms belonging to this category are found in the *Lacnunga*, and are as follows:

[1] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. iv. 12. Cf. also ibid. iv. 13. The same remedy appears in Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxviii. 77.

[2] The history of birthwort as a drug is traced through twenty-three centuries by Warren R. Dawson in his *Bridle of Pegasus*, 1930, ch. vii.

[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 54.

[4] Ibid. xxvi. 91.

[5] e.g. Sextus Placitus, op. cit. ii. 13–14; iii. 10, v. 11; viii. 8, xi. 14 (in the Anglo-Saxon version only, not in the Latin).

[6] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, pp. xli–xliv.

[7] Already mentioned (see p. 234) as a periapt.

[8] B. Faussett, *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, 1856, pp. 68, 92, and 133.

[9] *Archaeologia*, 1844, xxx. 551.

[10] J. W. Jackson, 'Use of cowrie shells for . . . charms', *Manchester Memoirs*, 1916, lx. iii. Cf. also T. C. Lethbridge, 'The meaning of the cowrie . . . Saxon England', *Man*, 1941, xli, no. 37.

The woman who cannot nourish[1] her child [in the womb]. Let her go to the grave of a dead man, and step then thrice over the grave, and say then thrice these words:

Be this my aid 'gainst hateful slow birth;
Be this my aid 'gainst dour monstrous birth;
Be this my aid 'gainst hateful misbirth.

And when the woman is with child and she goeth to her lord to bed, then let her say:

Up I go, over thee I step;
With a living child, not with a dying one;
With a full-time one, not with a doomed one.

And when the mother feeleth that the child quickeneth, then let her go to church, and when she cometh before the altar then let her say:

To Christ I have declared this child announced.[2]

Grattan and Singer explain this as follows: 'By the first jingle the woman buries her misfortune in the earth. . . . Then when she is again with child she reverses the former charm by stepping over a living man, instead of a dead one. Thus she acquires by sympathetic magic a virtue corresponding to the burden which she has lost.'[3]

The second charm runs:

The woman who cannot bring her child to full time (*afedan*): Let her herself take a piece of her own child's grave [i.e. of her first child], then wrap it up in black wool and sell it to traders, and then say:

I sell it; buy ye it,
This black wool, and seeds of this sorrow.[4]

In the next section of the *Lacnunga* occurs the third charm:

The woman who cannot bring her child to full time (*afedan*). Let her take in her hand milk of a cow of one colour, and then sip it up with her mouth, and then go to running water and spew therein the milk, and then lift up with the same hand a mouthful of the water and swallow it. . . . When she goeth to the brook, then let her not look round, nor again when she goeth thence; and then let her go into another house than that which she went out from, and there let her taste of food.[5]

[1] *afedan*.
[2] *Lacn.* 103 (CLXIX).
[3] Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, p. 191, note 1.
[4] *Lacn.* 103 (CLXX).
[5] *Lacn.* 104 (CLXXI). This is Charm No. 10 in Storms's *Anglo-Saxon Magic*. He says that 'the meaning of it partly rests on the meaning of O.E. *afedan*', which I have translated 'bring to full time'. Storms remarks that 'the causes of

Examples of periapts are frequent in this connexion:

For a woman's conception, a bone is found in a hart's heart, sometimes in its belly; that same effects it; if thou hangest that bone on a woman's fundament,[1] and tiest it sharply, quickly she conceiveth.[2]

The following is an interesting example of sympathetic magic from Sextus Placitus. It shows again the working of the primitive mind and its curious faculty for associating extraneous objects with the matter in hand, provided they have one property in common, though a useless one:

To make a woman pregnant, give to drink in wine a hare's rennet by weight of four pennies to the woman from a female [hare], to the man from a male [hare] . . . then quickly will she be pregnant; and for meat she shall for some while use mushrooms, and instead of a bath, smearings: wonderfully will she be pregnant.[3]

Mushrooms are presumably prescribed owing to the rapidity of their production, and that without effort. The use of the hare is noteworthy, for Apollonius of Tyana is said to have treated delay in labour by making the husband carry a hare round and round the patient.[4]

(*c*) *To facilitate delivery*. There are two examples of the use of coriander in this connexion. 'In case that a woman may not bring forth a child . . . bind on her left thigh . . . twelve grains of coriander seed, and that shall give a boy or a maiden.'[5] And 'that a wife may quickly bring forth, take seed of this same coriander, eleven grains or thirteen, knit them with a thread on a clean linen cloth: then let a chaste boy or a maiden take them and hold at the left thigh.'[6] In each case the same herb is to be applied to the same

miscarriage . . . could hardly ever be ascertained' in Anglo-Saxon times, and that 'the death-rate among new-born babies must have been great'. Such charms were therefore the mother's only insurance against miscarriage. Storms explains the psychology of the charm in detail. Grattan and Singer translate *afedan* as 'nourish the child [in the womb]'. I questioned the correctness of this translation with Professor Grattan just before his death, but he was by then too ill to consider the matter. I agree, however, with Dr. Storms's view of the psychology.

[1] Reading *ears*, not *earm* (Cockayne), so as to make sense. From a letter dated 1901, from Mr. Colley March to Sidney Hartland, in my possession.

[2] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. ii. 17. Cf. ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἡ τῶν ἵππων καρδία ὀστοῦν . . ., Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, II. xv. 6. The animal here is changed.

[3] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. iv. 14.

[4] Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, III. xxxix.

[5] *Leechbook III*, xxxvii.

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, civ. 2.

place, and in each case it is to be removed as soon as it has accomplished its purpose.[1]

Here is a narrative charm, from a mid-eleventh-century manuscript in the Bodleian Library, intended to secure a quick delivery:

> Mary, a virgin, bare Christ; the barren Elisabet bare John the Baptist. I charge thee, infant, if thou be male or female, by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that thou come forth. . . . The Lord, seeing the sisters of Lazarus weeping at his tomb, wept in the presence of the Jews and exclaimed, 'Lazarus, come forth'. . . . Write this on wax which has not been used for any work, and bind it under [the mother's] right foot.

The instructions are in Anglo-Saxon, the charm itself in Latin.[2]

Fleabane[3] and fieldmore[4] are also prescribed in order to facilitate delivery.

(*d*) *In case the child be stillborn.* Various remedies may be found, especially in Sextus Placitus.[5] There is one recipe for use 'if a child be misborn', in which case it is to be washed with sodden cucumber root.[6]

(*e*) *Removal of placenta.* In this connexion the following may be quoted: 'Goat's gall, drunken in wine, removes women's afterbirth (*halan*) for them and heals them.'[7] The danger from retained placenta was known from ancient times. Constantine the African says of garlic that it 'expels the after-birth if the woman sits in a bath made with its decoction'.[8] Examples are frequent in Pliny.

(*f*) *Monsters.* The birth of monstrosities must have been especially terrifying, and an explanation was sought. It was believed that these could be procreated only through the agency of demons. This seems to be the most rational origin for stories of incubi and succubi and of demon lovers. It may explain also the various charms against 'nocturnal visitors', such as that in the third *Leechbook* (lxi), '*wið ælfcynne and nihtgengan and ðám mannum ðe deófol mid hæmð.*'

[1] For another example of the use of coriander in connexion with a male child, see *Leechbook III*, xlvii.

[2] MS. Bibl. Bodl. Junius 85. Quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 392.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, cxliii. 3.

[4] Ibid. lxxxii. 2.

[5] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. iv. 4; ix. 7. *A.S. Herbal*, xciv. 7.

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, cxv. 3.

[7] Sextus Placitus, op. cit. vi. 25.

[8] Constantinus Africanus, *Opera*, Basiliae, 1536, p. 382. See also Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum*, Lib. I (*Opera*, ed. C. G. Kühn, vol. ii, 1826, p. 671).

'There are three days in the twelvemonth, with three nights, on which no woman is born', according to one of the Cotton manuscripts. One is in the latter half of December, and the other two are early in January, 'but few there are who know or understand these mysteries'.[1]

[1] MS. Cotton Caligula A. XV, fo. 127*a* (Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 154).

CHAPTER XVIII

'King's Evil'

THERE are four main points which I wish to make in this chapter:

1. 'King's Evil', in Anglo-Saxon *cynelíc ádl* and in Latin *morbus regius*, was a disease so called because it was curable by a king or through the agency of a king.
2. The cures were effected in classical and in early medieval times owing to the saintly character of the king rather than owing to his kingship.
3. The method of healing was by the king's personal touch, or through the agency of water in which his hands had been washed.
4. The identity of King's Evil varied in different ages. Edward the Confessor and his contemporaries are said to have cured scrofula and blindness, but in classical times the disease is to be equated with jaundice.

The term *cynelíc ádl* occurs three times in Anglo-Saxon prescriptions.[1] One passage merely states that fleabane cures it; the second advocates as a recipe 'the head of a mad dog pounded and mingled with wine for a drink'; the third runs, 'For *cynelíc ádl* which is named aurigo, which in our language is spasm of the sinews and swelling of the feet, take savine', &c.

In each case Cockayne translates the name of the disease as King's Evil. The history of this disease (scrofula during the Middle Ages and later) has been traced by Raymond Crawfurd.[2] He points out that, although cure by touch was employed by ecclesiastics at an earlier date, it was not used by a king until the eleventh century. Two princes who were brought up at the court of Robert the Pious (996–1031) are also said to have been able to cure by their touch: these were Edward the Confessor and Olaf the Holy of Norway. All three kings were notable for their saintly reputation, and they

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, cxliii: Sextus Placitus, xiii. 4; *A.S. Herbal*, lxxxvii. 1.
[2] R. Crawfurd, *The King's Evil*, 1911.

therefore probably owed their supposed healing power rather to their sanctity (as did the ecclesiastics before them) than to their kingly character. In fact, William of Malmesbury expressly says of Edward that it was owing to his holiness,[1] and not to his royal inheritance.[2]

The saintly character of the healer is stressed in two instances of healing of the King's Evil by royal saints who were not kings. One cure of *morbus regius*, dating from about 1065–7, was effected by the agency of St. Edith. The passage occurs in the *Vita Sancte Edithe virginis* by Goscelin, written about the year 1080, and the patient was Ælviva, abbess of Wilton. It runs: 'hec oculum dextrum regio morbo inflata, non solum de visu, verum etiam de vita periclitabatur.'[3] The connexion of *morbus regius* with the eye is interesting, considering the fact that two of the cures attributed to Edward the Confessor, to be mentioned later, were also of blindness.

The other cure is through the instrumentality of relics, and is narrated by William of Malmesbury when speaking of cures at the tomb of St. Milburga at Wenlock. He writes that 'none departed without either a perfect cure or considerable abatement of his malady, and some were even cured of the King's Evil through the merits of the virgin when medical assistance was unavailing'.[4] The words 'regius morbus, medicis sane incurabilis' might be so rendered, or they might possibly bear the interpretation 'since this disease was incurable by leeches', meaning that this was not their function.

The following are records of the cures effected by St. Olaf and Edward the Confessor. *St. Olaf's Saga*[5] tells how the son of a widow who had an abscess on his neck was cured by the king. The

[1] The prestige of Edward the Confessor for saintliness was such that he was regarded as the patron saint of England until 1222, when he was displaced by St. George (see J. Parker, *Calendar of the Prayer Book*, p. 38).

[2] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ii. 222. It may have been, however, that this expression of opinion by William of Malmesbury was called forth by the growing belief that Henry I (the reigning sovereign) had the power to heal owing to royal inheritance. The problem is discussed by G. H. Gerould in his article, 'King Arthur and politics' (*Speculum*, 1927, ii. 43): he adds that 'Henry undoubtedly profited'—politically—'by this belief, as he did by the rise of the cult of St. Edward'—whose grand-daughter he had married—'which accompanied it'.

[3] Quoted by R. W. Southern, 'The first life of Edward the Confessor', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 1943, lviii. 391.

[4] William of Malmesbury, op. cit. ii. 216.

[5] Ch. 200.

patient's life was despaired of as he could not swallow any food. The king at first declared that he was not a leech, but at length was persuaded to attempt a cure. He stroked the abscess until the boy made a wry face. He then took bread, laid it in the shape of a cross in his hollow palm, and put it into the mouth of the boy, who swallowed it down. From that time all pain ceased and in a few days the boy was well. This was St. Olaf's first miracle, but 'later his working of wonders became known to all folk'.

Two cures are attributed to Edward the Confessor in the *Vita Æduuardi regis*.[1] The former cure was presumably a case of tuberculous disease of the glands, of which various details are given. 'Juvencula quaedam . . . patiebatur circa fauces et sub ipsis maxillis quas ad similitudinem glandis nuncupant glandulas.' She was shown in a dream that she might be cured by means of water in which Edward had washed. 'Allato aquae vase rex manum intingit, porrectisque digitis faciem mulierculae et contacta morbo loca perungit. Hocque agens frequentius iterat; interdum etiam cruce signat.' We learn that as a result the skin was softened and that worms and corrupt matter flowed out. 'Item pius rex sancta dextera promens, et educens saniem, nec abhorret in infirma muliere hunc pati foetorem, donec medicante manu omnem illam noxiam elicuit pestem. Lubet deinde eam quotidie regia stipe ali, donec integre restitueretur sanitati.'

The other cure is that of a blind man. He also was convinced by a dream that he might be cured if his face were bathed in water in which the king had washed his hands. Edward, being told of this, derided the possibility, but his servants tried the experiment when he was at prayer and ignorant of their doings. As a result the man was cured.

It is to be noted that in each case intense anticipation brought about by a dream preceded the miracle. Presumably faith may have aided the cure—at least in the second instance.

Later chroniclers also relate these cures, usually adding 'corroborative detail'. Malmesbury also gives an account of the cure of a man named Wulfwin who had been blind for seventeen years, owing, as he believed, to 'the blood stagnating about the eyes'. After visiting shrines in eighty-seven churches, in the hope of obtaining a remedy from the saints, he importuned Edward to heal him. This was accomplished by the king dipping his hands in water and

[1] *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, ed. H. R. Luard, pp. 428–30 (Rolls Series).

placing them on the blind man. 'On the same day,' the passage ends, 'from the same water, three blind men and a man with one eye received a cure, the servants, full of faith, administering the healing water.'[1] This last instance of healing conforms to one of the usual rules in the case of relics, already mentioned, and indicates the genesis of a source of permanent supply of the healing agent for use when the leech was not present. The water in which either the king's hands or relics had been washed was considered to be impregnated with the required healing virtue, and was applied to those who had faith, as and when required.[2]

The use of the term King's Evil (*morbus regius*) occurs in classical times, but as far as my knowledge extends, the first time that it is associated with scrofula[3] is in connexion with Edward the Confessor. Now, since Edward's cures date from the middle of the eleventh century, and the Anglo-Saxon manuscript (Brit. Mus., Cotton Vitellius C. III) whence the three recipes quoted above are taken dates from about the year 1000, it follows that the disease there mentioned as *cynelíc ádl* probably did not refer to scrofula. The word in the original Greek of Dioscorides[4] which has been translated in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* as *cynelíc ádl* is ἴκτερος, jaundice. Du Cange says of *morbus regius*, 'Icterus recentioribus, antiquioribus vere lepra'. It is, however, as has been said before, extremely difficult to identify many of the diseases of early times. The important point is that the idea of King's Evil—that is to say diseases curable by kings—had been formulated long before kings of England or of France[5] pretended to cure by their royal touch.

A recipe for *morbus regius*, for instance, occurs in Damigeron: 'Lingurium lapis optimum tutamentum est in domo . . . resistit autem et morbo regio portatus aut contritus cum vino et potatus.'[6] Celsus devotes a chapter to 'De regii morbi curatione'. Therein he says: 'This disease may be diagnosed by the colour, especially of

[1] William of Malmesbury, op. cit. ii. 224.

[2] Edward's healing miracles (including posthumous ones) are enumerated by Grace Edna Moore in her thesis 'The Middle English verse life of Edward the Confessor', 1942, pp. xxvi–xxix.

[3] *Scrofell*, the Anglo-Saxon word for scrofula, occurs in § 95 (CLXII) of the *Lacnunga*, where the charm 'Nine were node's sisters' is used as 'a medicine' for it. See p. 252.

[4] Dioscorides, iii. 126.

[5] The only cure attributed to Robert the Pious by his biographer is that of a blind man (quoted by R. W. Southern, op. cit., p. 390).

[6] Damigeron, *De lapidibus*, 31.

the eyes, in which that which should be white becomes yellow.'[1] It is also spoken of by Scribonius Largus[2] and by Marcellus Empiricus of Bordeaux:[3] the explanatory name used for it by both these authors is *aurigo*. Pliny says: 'According to Varro, the jaundice has the name of "morbus regius" given to it, because its cure is effected with honied wine.'[4]

Individual cases of cures effected by royalty in the classics are very rare, according to Marc Bloch, and his remarks on the subject are interesting:

> Quelques empereurs passèrent pour des thaumaturges: Vespasien,[5] proclamé en Orient, dans un milieu chargé d'espérances messianiques, fit quelques guérisons, mais c'était à Alexandrie, sur une terre habituée depuis des millénaires à vénérer des chefs comme des dieux . . . Adrien,[6] disait-on, avait guéri une aveugle. Les exemples sont isolés.[7]

Vespasian, using his spittle as agent, is said to have cured one man who was blind and another who had a diseased hand. Tacitus, however, is very sceptical on the subject.

An Irish instance of a supposed cure through the agency of a king is given by Keating:

> Fiachaidh Muilleathan was treacherously slain by Connla Clamh. . . . And the reason why he did that deed of treachery was that when Connla was a youth with Cormac, son of Art, learning manners and accomplishments, leprosy or mange came upon him, and no medical treatment whatever availed him. Cormac told him on that occasion that there was no cure destined for him, until he should wash himself in the blood of a king, and that were he to do that he would be healed of his mange. Soon after this Connla took his leave of Cormac, and went into Munster to visit his kinsman Fiachaidh Muilleathan, who was then king of Munster. . . . Connla . . . stabbed Fiachaidh with his spear as he swam, and thus slew him.[8]

With this may be compared the story of the healing of Takt, the third son of King Brian of Connaught. 'Brodir [the Viking] hewed

[1] Celsus, *De medicina*, iii. 24.
[2] Scribonius Largus, *Compositiones medicae*, 110.
[3] Marcellus Empiricus: *De medicamentis*, 20.
[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxii. 53.
[5] For Vespasian, see Tacitus, *Hist.* iv. 81; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7; Dio Cassius, 65. 8.
[6] For Hadrian, see *Vita Hadriani*, ch. 25.
[7] Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges*, 1924, p. 63.
[8] G. Keating, *History of Ireland*, vol. ii, pp. 323–5 (Irish Texts Soc., vol. viii, 1908).

at the king. The lad Takt threw his arm in the way, and the stroke took it off and the king's head too, but the king's blood came on the lad's stump, and the stump was healed by it on the spot.'[1]

Irish chronicles tell that in the year 1361 there was a pestilence called 'Cluithe an righ', 'the King's Game'. The nature of this pestilence is unknown, but O'Donovan notes that the name is comparable to 'King's Evil'.[2]

Tradition, has, however, especially associated the King's Evil with Edward the Confessor, and Shakespeare's lines will always help the tradition to persist: 'There are a crowd of wretched souls that stay his cure . . . but at his touch, such sanctity hath heaven given his hand, they presently amend.'[3]

[1] *Njal's Saga*, trans. Dasent, § 156.

[2] *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1856, vol. iii, p. 621. The same entry (1361) occurs in the *Annals of Ulster* and in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*.

[3] *Macbeth*, IV. iii. 141–5.

CHAPTER XIX

The Doctrine of the Worm

THE source to which a great many diseases, rightly or wrongly, were ascribed in Anglo-Saxon times was worms.

The 'doctrine of the worm' is one of Singer's four 'characteristic elements' which distinguish native Teutonic magic and medicine.

The word *wyrm* has various meanings. It may signify (*a*) a worm, (*b*) an insect, and (*c*) a snake or dragon. The last meaning naturally does not come within the scope of this work.

(*a*) *Worms*

The word may be used in the same way as it would be today. For instance: 'If worms trouble a man within, take the juice of plantain, pound and wring it and give it to him to take; and take the same herb, pound it, lay it on the navel and bind it thereto very securely.'[1]

But the word is used with many prefixes to denote the particular kind responsible for the disease in question. Most of them are intestinal. The following are some varieties:

(i) The word *ana-wyrm* occurs in § xlvi of the first *Leechbook* and is translated by Cockayne as 'On's worm' on the analogy of *anasott* (death from old age) which occurs in *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga Saga*, xxix), since King On died of old age. Possibly the word is cognate with the Old High German *ana*, [great-]grandmother, and *ano*, [great-]grandfather: cf. Latin *anus*, an old man. *Ana-wyrm* would then signify an 'old-age worm', the cause of some senile complaint, if such there be. Bosworth–Toller translate 'an intestinal worm'. Shrewsbury suggests 'anal worm', i.e. threadworm or tapeworm.

(ii) *Deáw-wyrm*, literally 'dew-worm', is ringworm or 'tetter'. The first *Leechbook* prescribed as the remedy for this that the patient shall step on hot coal—'as hot as he hottest may'.[2]

(iii) A *flǽsc-wyrm* is a flesh worm, or maggot.[3]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, ii. 10. [2] *Leechbook I*, l (3 remedies). [3] Ibid. li.

(iv) A *hand-wyrm*[1] is supposed to produce disease in the hand. This worm occurs in the charm, already quoted, for causing 'wens' to vanish:[2] the wen is conjured to become as small as a handworm's hip-bone, before it vanishes altogether.

(v) *Reng-wyrm*[3] is a worm of the intestinal tract, i.e. a 'maw-worm'. Cockayne translates a 'round worm', which is presumably the ascaris.

(vi) *Smeá-wyrm* carries the idea of penetration, the word being derived from *smeáh*, creeping in. For this an unpleasant concoction is to be prepared and smeared on the wound: 'the salve will first enlarge the wounds and eat off the dead flesh and soften the swelling, and it will do the worm to death therein, or drive it off alive, and will heal the wounds'.[4] This statement appears to point to some form of ulceration.

(vii) The first *Leechbook* speaks of a *þeór-wyrm* in the foot.[5] Perhaps this was a ringworm of the smooth skin of the foot, since it was thought by the ancients to be caused by the presence of a worm.

The following quaint passage occurs in the first section of the second *Leechbook*, when dealing with diseases of the stomach (*maga*): 'and sometimes worms from the lower parts visit the upper parts next to the stomach (*maga*): they also cause heart-disease (? disease of the stomach, *heort-cópu*)[6] and anguish and swoonings; so that sometimes some men die from the biting of the worms'.

It was thought by the Anglo-Saxons that *fíc-ádl* (? piles) was

[1] Ibid., l. The *O.E.D.* equates with the itch insect, *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Professor Shrewsbury has called my attention to the following passage in Rabelais's genealogy at the beginning of Book 2.—*Pantagruel*: 'Hercules, who begat Enay, the most skilful man that ever was in the matter of taking the little worms (called cirons) out of the hands'. (Trans. Thomas Urquhart (Tudor Translations), vol. i, 1900, p. 203.)

Moufet describing the siro in his *Theatrum insectorum* (p. 266) says: 'Animalculum est omnium minutissimum, solens innasci caseo . . . et cuti item humanae: . . . in homine *wheale wormes* dicuntur: sub cute habitat . . . praecipue manibus.'

R.P. du Tertre, in his *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* (1667, bk. ii, p. 353, 'Des chiques'), says: 'Je ne sçay ce que la terre de toutes ces Isles a de malin: mais il s'y engendre & se leve de la poussiere la plus volage & la plus echauffée du Soleil, certains petits atomes animez (s'il faut ainsi dire) que les habitans appellent *Chiques*. Ces petites bestes ne sont guères plus grosses que des cirõs, & toutes semblables à de petites puces.'

[2] See p. 254.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, lxv, civ: cf. also ibid. xlvi. 3.

[4] *Leechbook III*, xxxix.

[5] *Leechbook I*, xlvii. 2. See p. 411.

[6] See p. 399, note 2.

caused by worms, as the following recipe described as 'a drink for *fíc-ádl*' shows. A concoction of various herbs is to stand for a night before being drunk. A fomentation by means of a stone-bath is to follow, 'then the *fíc*-worms will fall on the fomentation, and it will soon be well with him'.[1] A 'herb rite' in the *Lacnunga*[2] begins: 'If the worm or the bleeding fig have turned downwards.' Grattan and Singer comment: ' "The worm turning downwards" is anal fistula, a common accompaniment of haemorrhoids.'

The word *hundes-wyrm*, a dog's worm or parasite, occurs in glossaries.

Apart from intestinal worms, *wyrm* may be the cause of disease in the hand (as already mentioned), in the eye[3], in the ear,[4] or in the teeth. There is a collection of remedies in the first *Leechbook*, 'if a worm eat the teeth'.[5] In one case a candle is to be made of acorn meal and henbane-seed and wax, and lighted; 'let it smoke into the mouth; place a black cloth underneath: then the worms will fall on to it'. A very similar charm occurs again in Middle English in a manuscript in the Harleian Collection. One is to make a 'candil . . . and lyght it and hold þi teth ouer þe candel þat þe hete may come to þe teth: and vse it often, and wormys shal falle out'.[6] There are many other Middle English charms to 'sle the wormes and do a-way the ache'.

Charms against tooth-worms are found in the Scottish Highlands. One, with a narrative introduction, contains the following:

> Abraham said to Jesus Christ
> As they walked on the slope of Bethris:
> 'I have not the power of walking
> Or of riding because of the toothache.'
> Said Jesus Christ to Abraham:
> 'Toothache will not be in that head;
> Out the toothache! Out the toothache! . . .
> Known to thy King is thy disease,
> Toothworm and toothache to be placed under earth.'[7]

The last line is an example of the healing power accredited to the earth.

[1] *Leechbook III*, xlviii.
[2] *Lacn.* 47 (LXXXIII).
[3] e.g. *Lacn.* 2 (x) and *Leechbook I*, ii. 23. See p. 382.
[4] e.g. *A.S. Herbal*, xcii.
[5] *Leechbook I*, vi.
[6] MS. Harley 2378, p. 243 (Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century*, p. 112).
[7] A. Macbain, 'Gaelic incantations', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, 1892, xvii. 255.

As has already been pointed out, the 'doctrine of the worm' is a special feature of Teutonic magic and medicine, as contrasted with the Greco-Latin magic. It was, however, of great antiquity, as is shown by parallels in the *Vedas*, notably in the *Atharva-veda* and in ancient Babylonian material. The Vedic method of slaying worms was to crush them. 'With Indra's great millstone, that crushes all vermin, do I grind to pieces the worms, as lentils with a millstone. . . . I have crushed the visible and the invisible worms. . . . The worm that is in the entrails, and him that is in the head, likewise the one that is in the ribs . . . do we crush with this charm.'[1] And again: 'Him that moves about in the eyes, that moves about in the nose, that gets to the middle of the teeth, that worm do we crush.'[2]

An Old High German charm to remove worms from bone marrow has been preserved in a ninth-century manuscript:

> Go forth, worm (*nesso*), with your nine little worms,
> Out of the marrow and into the bone,
> Out of the bone, into the flesh,
> Out of the flesh, into the skin,
> Out of the skin, into the arrow.
> O Lord, make it so![3]

This is also said to be paralleled by Vedic sources.[4]

A peculiarity of these Vedic worms is the various colours specified. 'The variegated worm,[5] the four-eyed, the speckled, and the white—I crush his ribs, and I tear off his head.'[6] And again: 'the two of like colour, the two of different colour; the two black ones and the two red ones; the brown one and the brown-eared one . . . are slain. The worms with white shoulders, the black ones with white arms, and all those that are variegated, these worms do we crush.'[7] May not these descriptions really refer to lice?

The element of colour occurs again in a Middle High German narrative charm for a sick horse: 'This is a good blessing against

[1] *Atharva-veda*, ii. 31. (Müller, p. 22). [2] Ibid. v. 23.

[3] Müllenhoff and Scherer, *Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa*, vol. i, p. 17.

[4] A. Heusler, *Altgermanische Dichtung*, para. 8, p. 56, and A. Kühn, *Indische und germanische Segenssprüche*, pp. 64 ff.

[5] *Fág-wyrm*, literally variegated worm, is the word used for translating *basiliscum* in the Anglo-Saxon version of the psalter which is preserved in MS. Cotton Vespasian A. I (90. 13). *Fáh wyrm* is also the seducer of Eve (Genesis, 899).

[6] *Atharva-veda*, ii. 32. [7] Ibid. v. 23.

a blistering (*blasende*) worm:[1] The good lord Saint Job was lying in the muck. He complained to the holy Christ how his bones were eaten up by little worms. The holy Christ said, "If nobody is better [able to help you than I am], I command you, worm, be you white or black, yellow or green or red, instantly be dead in the horse." In the name of God, Amen.'[2] This last charm against a *blistering* worm is reminiscent of the *Lacnunga* charm against the different kinds of blister, which follows the list of various coloured venoms.[3]

Wyrm-melu appears as an ingredient in the first *Leechbook*.[4] This is translated by Bosworth–Toller as 'dust of dried worms powdered', and by Cockayne 'worm meal'. Grattan and Singer say they 'have no certainty that "worm-meal" denotes powdered worms, but [they] cannot improve upon this conjecture'.[5]

(*b*) *An insect*

To this category the following charm from the first *Leechbook* belongs: 'If one drink a *wyrm* in water,[6] then let him at once cut open a sheep, and drink the sheep's blood, hot.'[7] A collection of mostly unintelligible words, beginning with the Irish 'Gonomil orgomil marbumil', are prescribed in the *Lacnunga* for recitation in case a man or beast drink a *wyrm*, and was known as 'the worm-charm'.[8] The worms are spoken of as being male and female: if the worm 'be of the male kind sing this lay . . . into the [patient's] right ear; if it be of the female kind sing into the left ear'.[9]

This tradition is also paralleled from the Vedas. A charm in the *Atharva-veda* runs: 'Of all the male worms and of all the female worms do I split the heads with the stone, I burn their faces with fire.'[10]

[1] Professor Shrewsbury thinks that this probably refers to the larva of the horse bot-fly.

[2] Codex Palatinus, 367, § 173^{v} (quoted by Kühn, *Indische und germanische Segenssprüche*, p. 142).

[3] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXXI). See p. 339.

[4] *Leechbook I*, xxxii. 4.

[5] Grattan and Singer, p. 116, note 7.

[6] This may possibly refer to the leech, which, of course, may readily be taken when drinking from a pond or stream.

[7] *Leechbook I*, xlv. 6.

[8] *Lacn.* 10 (XXVI), 29 (LXIII).

[9] Grattan and Singer (p. 107, note 4) say that 'Maleness is associated with the right side and femaleness with the left in Hippocratic literature. . . . Singing into the ear frightens the possessing spirit and is in the A.S. exorcist manner.'

[10] *Atharva-veda*, v. 23.

CHAPTER XX

Poison

Most Anglo-Saxon snake-lore is imported from southern Europe and elsewhere and is applied *en bloc* to imaginary snakes in England. Although the adder is the only poisonous snake in this country, other reptiles and toads were then —and usually are still—considered to be poisonous. The occurrence of so many prescriptions against the bites of adders and other reptiles may also perhaps indicate the extent to which this country was infested by them in Anglo-Saxon times, before it was cleared and drained and cultivated.

A plague of snakes in Sussex is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 774. It is mentioned also by Florence of Worcester and by Henry of Huntingdon. Many fanciful details are mentioned by Gaimar.[1]

The word for poison in Anglo-Saxon is *átor*. The expression *wið fleógenum átre* is usually translated 'against flying venom', and may signify 'against infection' in general. Nine kinds of *átor* are mentioned in the *Lay of the Nine Magical Herbs* in the *Lacnunga*. They are to be distinguished by their colours, against which the nine herbs are said to avail.[2]

Bede says of Ireland that 'almost everything from that country is efficacious against all poisons. In proof of this, men have been seen who were bitten by vipers: shavings have been taken from leaves of books brought over from Ireland and put into water and given to the men to drink, and at once the poison was overpowered, and the men cured.' This is because 'no poisonous reptile is to be seen [in Ireland], nor may any viper live there; for vipers have been brought on board ship from Britain, but they died as soon as they smelt the air of the land'.[3]

All kinds of diseases were attributed to poison, and there are countless prescriptions for poisons in Anglo-Saxon recipes. Any

[1] Geffrei Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engleis*, ed. A. Bell (A.N.T.S. xiv–xvi), Oxford, 1960, pp. 63–64.

[2] See p. 339.

[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 1.

drawing of a snake inserted in a medical manuscript[1] betokens that a remedy against poison follows; or if a plant is portrayed with a snake twined amongst its roots,[2] this shows that the plant is prescribed as an antidote. The snakes have been beautified in bright colours in the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and are now as unidentifiable as the flowers.

Usually the remedies for poison are to be drunk or smeared, but in the case of southernwood, not only is it to be administered in both these ways as an antidote, but it appears that the plant is distasteful to the snake itself, since the recipe adds that the 'seed of this wort, scattered about or set on fire, strongly disposes snakes to flight'.[3]

The herb which is most closely connected with snakes, as might be expected from its name, is adderwort, which Cockayne equates with *Polygonum bistorta*. The illustration in MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III has no less than three snakes twined about its root.

> This herb [says the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*], which is named basilisca[4] and by another name adderwort,[5] is produced in the places where the adder is, which is named by the same name, basiliscus. . . . They are of three kinds, one is olocryseis, that is . . . that it shines all in gold; then there is another sort, stillatus . . . spotted. . . . The third sort is sanguineus, that is blood-red. . . . If then one has this herb with him, none of these kinds of adders may do him harm. The first adder olocryseus . . . blows upon and sets on fire whatsoever it sees. . . . Stillatus, . . . whatsoever it sees withers and dies. . . . The third is named hematites, . . . whatsoever this one sees or touches, it flows away, so that nought remains thereof but the bones. . . . If any man has this wort with him, he is secure against all kinds of adders.[6]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* also gives the name *nædre-wyrt* to another plant which it also calls viperina, and which is to be used as a remedy for the bites of adders:[7] 'it heals the bite and drives away the poison.'

[1] e.g. waybread, *A.S. Herbal*, ii—before section 8 (in Cotton Vitellius C. III).

[2] e.g. adderwort, *A.S. Herbal* cxxxi, in the same manuscript.

[3] Ibid. cxxxv. 4.

[4] The *O.E.D.* says of basil, 'the Greek name of the plant was *βασιλικόν*, "royal", . . . perhaps because the herb was used in some royal unguent, bath or medicine. In Latin this seems to have been confused with *basiliscus*, on the supposition that it was an antidote to the basilisk's venom.'

[5] These five words are in the Anglo-Saxon but do not occur in the original Latin (Howald and Sigerist, p. 218).

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxi. 1.

[7] Ibid. vi.

Coles, writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, says of adderwort: 'The wreathed form of the root is a sign that [it] is good against the bitings of Serpents.'[1]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes betony for a man who has swallowed poison. He must boil three drachms (*trymesan*) of it in four cups of wine and drink. If he has been bitten by an adder, the herb must be applied externally to the wound as well, the dose being one drachm of the herb in three cups of red wine.[2] This remedy is derived from Pliny, who says that 'betony in particular is used as an external application to the wound', its virtues being such that 'if a circle of it be traced round a serpent, it will lash itself to death with its tail. The seed of this plant is also administered in doses of one denarius to three cyathi of wine: or else it is dried and powdered, and applied to the wound in the proportion of three denarii of powder to one sextarius of water.'[3]

Pliny prescribes vervain, bruised in wine, as a remedy for the stings of serpents: this is the only medicinal use he gives for this plant.[4] The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* recommends that this herb be carried entire to ward off all serpents, and that the leaves be bruised in wine for the bites of poisonous spiders (*wið áttorcoppan bíte*).[5]

The herb cammoc (peucedanum), according to the *Herbal*, had the power to put snakes to flight by its smell.[6] Bramble[7] and elderwort[8] (with a charm beginning 'Omnes malas bestias canto') were also used in recipes for snake-bite. Southernwood, already mentioned, is a remedy against scorpions and against 'poisonous creatures called spalangiones'.[9]

There is a charm in the *Lacnunga* in which many sources of poison are gathered together:

> If the man be swollen within so that he cannot swallow the liquid, sing into his mouth: 'Then the Blessed John, fearless and constant, taking and making the sign of the cross, while they lay dead who had drunk poison, said to me: "My God, . . . when we call upon Thee in our need, by the hearing of Thy Name the serpent is stilled and the dragon fleeth, the viper ceaseth to hiss, and that toad, which is called Rubita, goeth quietly to rest, the scorpion is vanquished, and the Regulus [a small poisonous snake] is conquered, the Spalangius [a poisonous fly] ceaseth

[1] W. Coles, *Adam in Eden, or the Paradise of Plants*, 1657, p. 75.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, i. 22–24.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 55.
[4] Ibid. xxv. 59.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, iv. 8–9.
[6] Ibid. xcvi. 2.
[7] Ibid. lxxxix. 6.
[8] Ibid. xciii. 2.
[9] Ibid. cxxxv. 5.

to work harm, and all venomous and hitherto ferocious creatures turn from their fierceness.'' '[1]

The following charm appears in the index to the first *Leechbook* as 'In case a man take poison, and a prayer of the holy thane of Christ, Iohannes, and an incantation, and also another Scottish proved incantation [&c.]'. The recipe itself runs:

wiþ fleógendum átre and every poisonous swelling, on a Friday churn butter which has been milked from a neat or hind [all] of one colour, and let it not be mixed with water; sing over it nine times [this incantation]: 'acrae aercrae aernem nadre' [&c.].[2] That is valid for all, even for deep, wounds. Some teach [us] against bite of adder, to speak one word, that is Faul: it may not hurt him. Against bite of adder, if [the man] procures and eats rind which comes out of paradise, no venom will damage him. Then said he that wrote this book, that it was difficult to get.[3]

Some herbs, such as 'polios', otherwise known as omnimorbia, were prescribed to keep away snakes either by being burnt or by being spread about in the house.[4] Pliny says that polium has a strong smell; he also says it should be kept on the person as an antidote to poison and that it should be strewn beneath the bed or burnt to keep away serpents.[5] Less useful is the instruction in the *Herbal* to hang the herb 'acanta leuce' round a man's neck to keep away snakes.[6]

There are also many Anglo-Saxon charms and recipes to counteract the poison from the bite of a mad dog, from scorpions,[7] from spiders—not only the *áttorcoppe* already mentioned, but also (?) *hunta*,[8] the 'hunting spider', and *gongel-wæfre*, the 'ganging weaver' variety, and from other venomous creatures, many of which point to southern origin. Some centuries later, the dancing mania in Italy was attributed to the bite of the tarantula.

[1] *Lacn.* 34 (LXVII).

[2] This 'Scottish', i.e. Irish, incantation is given at the end of my article, 'The dissimilarity of ancient Irish magic from that of the Anglo-Saxons', *Folk-lore*, 1926, xxxvii. 271–88, together with the explanations and comments of Zimmer and of Professor E. F. Gwynn upon it. Aernem 'stands for Old Irish, *ar neim*= "against poison" ' (Singer, introduction to the *Leechdoms*, 1961, p. xxxvii).

[3] *Leechbook I*, xlv. 5.

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, cli. 4.

[5] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxi. 21, 84.

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, cliii. 6.

[7] Scorpions were known from representations in the signs of the zodiac. They appear, in colour, in the text of MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III.

[8] But see Henry Bradley's note on '"Spider" in Old English', *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 1916, xi. 214. He reads *swiþra* (not *spiþra*, Cockayne).

A charm *contra venenum* occurs on folio 151*a* of the *Lacnunga*; it was omitted by Cockayne in his edition but restored in theirs by Grattan and Singer (LXVII). It also occurs in the ninth-century *Book of Nunnaminster*; and, since it has an illuminated initial letter to call attention to it, was probably considered especially efficacious.[1] The following are the peculiarly venomous creatures which are enumerated in it: serpent (*draco*), viper, the bramble-toad (*rubeta*)[2] which is called *rana*, the scorpion, the small serpent (*regulus*), and the venomous fly (*spalangius*).

Probably the most famous remedy against poison in history was tyriaca. Abbot Ælfric's vocabulary (tenth century) translates: '*tiriaca: drenc wyð áttre*'.[3] Among the recipes sent by Helias patriarch of Jerusalem to King Alfred, which appear at the end of the second *Leechbook*, is one for the use of tyriaca. It is here a remedy for inward tenderness, not specifically for poison. The patient is required to fast until midday, 'and let not the wind blow on him on that day'. After sitting in a bath till he sweats, he is to drink warm water that has had a small amount of the tyriaca mixed with it.[4]

The word 'tyriaca' is derived from the Latin *theriacum*, itself derived from the Greek θηριακὰ φάρμακα, antidotes against the bite of poisonous animals. In the Middle Ages the word took the form of 'triacle', and survives in the modern 'treacle'. The history of this sovereign remedy has been traced by Corner in his 'Mithridatium and theriac'.[5] It was ascribed to Mithridates of Pontus and called after him 'mithridatium'. It was improved upon by Andromachus, physician to the Emperor Nero, who added to its already overnumerous ingredients opium, viper's flesh (as might be expected in an antidote against poison), and honey so as to make the whole more palatable. Galen discourses extensively upon its virtues in his *De antidotis*, from which fact was probably derived its reputed infallibility as a cure throughout the Middle Ages. The next link in the chain is the occurrence in Anglo-Saxon medicine. It is spoken of by Chaucer as a remedy carried by the Canterbury pilgrims, and it is mentioned in *Piers Plowman* ('For trewthe

[1] MS. Harley 2965, fo. 37*a* and *b*.

[2] For Pliny's references to the *rubeta*, see Grattan and Singer, p. 131, note 1.

[3] Wright–Wülcker, *Anglo-Saxon Vocabularies*, 1884, vol. i, 114. 19.

[4] *Leechbook II*, lxiv.

[5] G. W. Corner, 'Mithridatium and theriac', *Johns Hopkins Hosp. Bull.* 1915, xxvi. 222–6.

telleth that loue is triacle of heuene').[1] At this time it was sold by itinerants who bore the name of triacleurs. The final blow to this medicine was struck by William Heberden, who in 1746 published a treatise exposing it, and then forced a vote through the College of Physicians excluding it from the *London Pharmacopoeia*. 'Thus came to an ignominious defeat in an English committee room after a glorious career of 2,000 years the greatest medicine of all the world.'

Pliny has a note of a theriaca, which he describes as 'a very famous preparation extracted from [garden plants] as an antidote against the stings of all kinds of venomous animals: it is inscribed in verse upon a stone in the temple of Æsculapius at Cos'.[2] He concludes by saying that it was employed by Antiochus the Great, but does not mention Mithridates or Nero. In a later book, however, he speaks of, and ridicules, the Mithridatic antidote.[3]

An association with this medicine is preserved even today in the names mithridate pepperwort and mithridate mustard for two herbs of the Cruciferae. Parkinson says of the latter that it used 'to be used in Treakle and Mithridatum'.[4] Churl's treacle, Countryman's treacle, English treacle, Poor-man's treacle, Towers treacle, Treacle mustard, Treacle wormseed and Treaclewort are also suggestive names: these must have been either traditional ingredients of the triacle or else were possibly regarded in themselves as all-powerful healing agents.

[1] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus I, line 146.
[2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xx. 100.
[3] Ibid. xxix. 8.
[4] Parkinson, *Theatrum botanicum*, 1640, p. 839.

CHAPTER XXI

Prognostic Methods

MANY charms include the result to be expected from their operation and the signs which tell whether the patient will recover.

'If a man be under observation[1] [as a patient] and you are about to treat him, see that [his face] be [turned] toward you when you go in, then may he live; if [his face] be [turned] from you, do not approach him at all. If there is a chance of his recovering . . .'—here follows a prescription.[2]

Various prognostications occur in an early-twelfth-century manuscript at St. John's College, Oxford:[3] 'It is a sign of death when the forehead grows reddish and eyebrows sink, the left eye decreases, the tip of the nose becomes white, the chin falls [&c.].' And again: 'To know whether a sick man will live. Smear his hands with must. Then give it to a dog to eat. If he eats it, the man will live, if not he will die.'

There are several fourteenth-century charms which may be compared with these: 'For to wete yf a seke man sal lyve or dy . . . Qwen his broues hildes doune; the lefte eigh mare than the ryght ye; neyse ende waxes sharp;[4] his eres waxes calde; his eighen waxes holle; the chyn falles; his eighen and his mouth es opon; . . . this er the takenynges of dethe, forsothe witte thu wele he sal noght leve thre dayes.'[5]

In another fourteenth-century manuscript the following occurs: 'Si velis scire vtrum vulnerati possint viuere uel non. Gyf hym to

[1] A.S. *gegýmed*: Cockayne translates 'overlooked.' See, *ante*, p. 105.

[2] *Leechbook III*, 65.

[3] St. John's College, Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 2*b*, quoted in C. Singer, 'A review of the medical literature of the Dark Ages', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1916–17, x (Sect. Hist. Med.), 153.

[4] Cf. Hostess's much-discussed description of Falstaff's death, 'I knew there was but one way: for his nose was sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields' (*Henry V*, Act II, sc. iii).

[5] From a manuscript in the possession of J. O. Halliwell (no. 335). Quoted in Wright and Halliwell, *Reliquiae antiquae*, 1841, vol. i, p. 54.

drynke letuse with water [variant, cristal, i.e. probably ice-cold water] and gyf he spewe he schal be dyd.'[1]

In a third fourteenth-century charm vervain is used as the instrument of divination: 'Take verueyne in thy right hand, and take his ryght hand in thyn, and let the herbe ben betwen, that he ne wete it nought'. If he says he thinks he will live, he will; if he despairs then 'for certen he schal dyen of that Iuel'.[2]

The magic circule of Petosiris[3] was also a contrivance for finding if the patient would live or die. Singer prints a device known as a Circle of Pythagoras to discover whether a patient will live or die. It comes from a manuscript written in the ninth century at Echternach, in a monastery which was founded by the English saint, Willibrord.[4]

Various prognostics as to the course and result of illness are given in the British Museum eleventh-century manuscript Cotton Tiberius A. III, fo. 38*a*. Such are: 'When the moon is one night old, he who is attacked by disease, will be dangerously attacked. If disease attacks him on a two-night-old moon, he will soon be up. If sickness attacks him when the moon is three nights old, he will be confined to his bed and will die.'[5] And so on, up to the thirtieth night.

Death portents, especially in Celtic tradition, date back to this period. Baring-Gould says that 'The Demetian tradition of the death portent known as *canwyll gorff* (corpse candle) is that it was specially granted through the intercession of St. David to the people of his Diocese.' This 'precedes the funeral of a person whose death it forebodes, and moves from the house to the Church in the same way exactly as the actual funeral, and finally disappears at the spot where the grave is to be. Its colour and brightness vary with the age, sex and strength of the doomed person.'[6] St. David died in 589 according to the *Annals of Inisfallen.*

[1] Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century*, p. 25.
[2] MS. Harley 2378, p. 84 (Henslow, pp. 98–99).
[3] See p. 157.
[4] Singer, *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1919–20, ix. 348–50; also in Grattan and Singer, pp. 39, 41.
[5] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 182.
[6] S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints*, vol. ii, p. 313.

PART 7

Remedial Measures

CHAPTER XXII

Remedies and Applications

(*a*) *Introduction*

A WORD used by the Anglo-Saxons for a medical prescription is *cræft*. Its primary meaning is power, knowledge, or 'virtue'. It was the object of the leech to obtain as much power as possible over the spirit of disease so as to overcome it—in the same way that the magician endeavoured to obtain power over the hostile forces he had to combat.

Sigerist notes that the only remedies known in the early Middle Ages—and therefore to the Anglo-Saxons—were small surgical operations (such as blood-letting and cupping) and drugs.[1] The literature of remedies consists of antidotaries and herbals. In Anglo-Saxon times the same person, the leech for want of a better name, would use both: later the former would be the textbook of the practitioner and the latter that of the pharmacist.

The seven antidotaries printed by Sigerist as 'Rezeptliteratur' are all anonymous. They consist of the same material though the incidentals are different, which demonstrates the popular demand for such formulae. Though two out of the seven are now in English libraries, none is of Anglo-Saxon provenance; but much of the material current at the period was doubtless more or less common to the peoples of western Europe. Visitors to the Continent like Benedict Biscop brought back with them to England many books for the use of their monasteries, and it is obvious that medical works were often among these. Since these books were all written in Latin, they would in general be useful only to ecclesiastics. Works such as the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* which were translated into the vernacular, or collections such as the *Leechbooks* and the *Lacnunga* which were written in it, would be available for those laymen who could read.

It is interesting to note the many uses to which single drugs or

[1] H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur*, 1923, p. 168.

collection of drugs could be put. Many drugs were not for the treatment of localized disease but were to benefit the whole system; or they were to be used against evil humours in general (*ad malos humores*).[1]

Each prescription specifies its use, the constituent drugs with the weight of each, and the method of administration—in the morning, in the evening, before or after meals, after a bath, or at what season of the year. The quantities sometimes varied according to the sex, age, or strength of the patient. Antidotes are administered in powders, pills, decoctions, or infusions.

Wine is often prescribed as the liquid in which drugs are to be taken, since its digestive virtue was known in the Middle Ages. John of Gaddesden, quoting Averroës, says that it 'prevents the food from swimming about the stomach, dispenses the flatulence, provokes the urine and the sweat, and helps nature to expel excess matter'.

(*b*) *Blood-letting*

Perhaps the chief remedy for all ills in Anglo-Saxon times was blood-letting (*blód-læswu*: *blód-lætan*, to bleed). As Sir Norman Moore has neatly summed up, it was employed 'nearly always, nearly everywhere, and nearly for everything'. Thorndike quotes a twelfth-century manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale which well illustrates its universal application:

> It [blood-letting] contains the beginning of health, it makes the mind sincere, it aids the memory, it purges the brain, it reforms the bladder, it warms the marrow, it opens the hearing, it checks tears, it removes nausea, it benefits the stomach, it invites digestion, it evokes the voice, it builds up the sense, it moves the bowels, it enriches sleep, it removes anxiety, it nourishes good health.[2]

In the days before the discovery of the circulation of the blood it was supposed that the blood was stationary. The particular vein from which blood was to be taken was therefore important, and certain veins were specified to the opened for the cure of certain diseases.

The theory that excess of blood was the chief cause of disease originated with Erasistratus of Chios in the third century before

[1] Sigerist, *Rezeptliteratur*, p. 176.

[2] Bibl. Nat., MS. nouv. acq. 229, ff. 1*a*–10*a* (quoted by L. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. i, 1923, p. 728).

Christ. The diminishing of the local supply by blood-letting, though not used by his School, was therefore the logical treatment of a local disease, and was the most popular one both in his time and in the succeeding Dark Ages. It persisted until Anglo-Saxon times and much later. Unfortunately it was applied without consideration of the patient's condition, and according to prescribed formulae rather than according to reason, so that many patients who were already debilitated must have died in consequence.

Blood-letting seems to have been connected with the doctrine of the humours; an evil humour could be eliminated from the system by bleeding. To keep the body healthy blood-letting had therefore to be employed at intervals so as to drain off the evil humour as it accumulated.

Figures showing the proper points for blood-letting are frequently found in medieval manuscripts. For example, an Oxford manuscript, dated *c.* 1110–12,[1] gives a list of twenty-four points for blood-letting, each to be used for the relief of a particular malady. Almost all are either in the head or upper limbs. These points were derived ultimately from Galen.

Sudhoff gives details of the various English manuscripts of the Middle Ages which describe and give illustrations of blood-letting, but they all belong to a later period than the Anglo-Saxon.

One illustration which he reproduces is, however, of great interest and gives, I believe, in spite of its later date, a fairly good idea of what may also have been the Anglo-Saxon practice.[2] It is from a fourteenth-century manuscript.[3] The patient is being bled from the right arm, and his right foot is in a 'blood-letting basin'. His right hand grasps a stick; this is useful both as a support and to prevent disturbing contractions of the arm muscles. There is a bandage bound round the upper end of the stick, and a 'blood-letting bandage' round the arm.

Some of the later figures of patients are covered with the signs of the zodiac, indicating the connexion between blood-letting and astrology. In a fifteenth-century manuscript[4] the instructions to the operator indicate that he is to bleed from the right side of the body in spring and summer, and from the left side in autumn and winter

[1] Oxford, St. John's Coll. MS. 17. Quoted by Singer, *Proc. Royal Soc. Med.*, 1916–17, x (Sect. Hist. Med.), 152–3.

[2] K. Sudhoff, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Chirurgie im Mittelalter*, vol. i, plate 54 (4), described on p. 164.

[3] Brit. Mus., MS. Harley 3719.

[4] Brit. Mus., MS. Sloane 963.

('Ver estas dextris autumpnus yempsque sinistris'). There is no figure in this case, but there are two columns of instructions and between them another column which gives the signs of the zodiac. But, as I have already said, astrology was as yet undeveloped in Anglo-Saxon times.

The place specified in the first *Leechbook* for blood-letting in connexion with *þeór-ádl* was below the ankle.[1] Sometimes it was to be first below one ankle and then below the other.[2] A recipe for vomiting runs: 'Let him blood from both feet beneath the ankle; let the blood be so let that the sick man faint not . . . and the second blood-letting, by which thou shalt cure the sick, is that thou shalt let him blood under the tongue . . . and after the blood-letting has been performed, thou shalt scarify him; then take salt and rub the wounds with it.'[3] In another passage we are told that 'it is good to let blood in early Lent from the left arm'.[4] The following fourteenth-century charm shows the futility of specifying the site for blood-letting: 'Pro lapide . . . lete hym bloud in the grete to, ȝif þou myȝt vynde any veyne þer-Inne; and ȝif þou myȝt fynde non, lete hym bloud in þe arme.'[5]

Saint Cassius was the patron saint of patients undergoing venesection. In a twelfth-century hand on a fly-leaf at the end of a manuscript is the following charm: 'St. Cassius had a venisection and he prayed the Lord that whoever should carry his name with him, should not have this evil.'[6]

There is no apparent reason in the dates of the days called 'Dies Ægyptiaci'. 'The old leeches', says an Anglo-Saxon manuscript, 'laid it down in Latin books that in every month there are ever two days which are very dangerous for drinking any drink or for blood-letting: because there is one hour on each of those days on which, if any vein is opened, it is loss of life or long suffering. A leech tested this and let his horse blood on that hour and it soon lay dead.'[7] A list of the days is then given. Another list is as follows: 'A man shall forgo blood-letting on each of the six fives of the

[1] *Leechbook I*, xlvii. 1.
[2] e.g. ibid. xlvii. 2.
[3] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 63.
[4] *Leechbook II*, xliii.
[5] Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century*, 1899, p. 42.
[6] Brit. Mus. MS. Royal 2 A. XX, fo. 52*a* (unpublished).
[7] Brit. Mus. MS. Cotton Caligula A. XV, fo. 126*b* (Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 152). Perhaps this might be regarded as the first recorded instance of an experiment carried out on an animal in this country.

month', that is to say, on the 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, and 30th. 'Leeches teach that no man on the five nights old moon, and again on the ten nights [old], and fifteen, and twenty and twenty-five and thirty nights old moon should let blood, but between each of the six fives.'[1]

Of these days there are many versions.[2] Many of the lists show a Byzantine origin. The list of propitious and unpropitious days given by Hesiod, however, shows the idea to have been current some thousand years earlier still,[3] though there is nothing to show that Hesiod connected them with Egypt.[4] The name 'Dies Ægyptiaci' dates from the first half of the fourth century of our era. 'Non observetis dies qui dicuntur "Ægyptiaci" ', says St. Augustine of Hippo, when denouncing pagan practices in the fifth century.

Bede tells how he accompanied St. John of Beverley on a visit to a nunnery at Watton in Yorkshire, where one of the nuns was lying very sick. She had been bled in the arm, which in consequence was swollen and painful. The bishop's first inquiry was as to the day on which she had been bled. On being told, he said, 'You did very indiscreetly and most unskilfully to bleed her on the fourth day of the moon, for I remember that Archbishop Theodore, of blessed memory, said that bleeding at that time was very dangerous, when the light of the moon and the tide of the ocean are increasing.'[5]

The *Lacnunga* mentions only three days which are dangerous—the Monday nearest to the end of April, the first Monday in August, and the first Monday after the end of December. It also specifies on which day following such letting of blood the man (or beast)will die.[6] 'Blood-letting', says the first *Leechbook*, 'is to be forgone fifteen nights before Lammas, and after it for five and thirty nights, since then all poisonous things fly and injure men.'[7]

The tract entitled *De minutione sanguinis, sive de phlebotomia*, attributed to Bede, begins by saying that the best time for blood-

[1] *Leechbook I*, lxxii.

[2] They have been collected by R. Steele, *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1918–19, xii (Sect. Hist. Med.), 108–21.

[3] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ll. 765–828.

[4] The ancient Egyptians had a list of lucky and unlucky days. They are specified in the Papyrus Sallier iv, which dates from the time of Rameses II. (F. Chabas, *Le Calendrier des jours fastes et néfastes de l'année égyptienne* [*c.* 1891].)

[5] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 3.

[6] *Lacn.* 117–18 (CLXXXIX).

[7] *Leechbook I*, lxxii.

letting is from 25 March to 26 May, 'because then the blood is undergoing increase'. The greater portion of this tract deals with the appropriate sites for bleeding for pains in various places, and specifies which days of the moon are dangerous in each month. In the last paragraph, however, the tract points out that phlebotomy may be practised at all times, 'si necessitas urget'.

In Wales various days were considered to be dangerous:

> The third Monday in January, the first Monday in February, and the second Monday in October: whoever is bled on these days will be in danger of death. There are three days in the year on which no one should be bled, or take any medicinal potion. These are the last day of April, the first Monday of August, and the last Monday in the month of September. Whosoever is bled on one of those days will die by the fifteenth or seventh day. . . . And he who shall eat of the flesh of a goose, will die in three days' time, etc.[1]

On the other hand, some days, in Wales, were considered especially lucky for bleeding, for 'whosoever is bled in the right arm on the eighteenth day of March, and the twentieth day of the month of April in the left arm will never be blind, for it has been often proved'.[2]

Among the Arabs, Wednesdays in which a 4 occurs are unlucky (i.e. 4th, 14th, &c., of the month).[3]

Sometimes the prohibition of blood-letting was connected with holy days, which presumably must not be polluted. For instance, 'no man should live who had blood let from him on All-Hallows Mass-day, or if he were then wounded'.[4] On the other hand, the Anglo-Saxons considered certain days to be especially propitious for blood-letting. Such were, according to the first *Leechbook*, 'the Kalends of April best of all, when trees and herbs first up-sprout and when the evil phlegm increases, and the evil blood in the hollow parts of the body'.[5]

The 'Dies Ægyptiaci' are often stated to be unlucky, apart from the letting of blood. It was unlucky, for instance, to make a feast, or to plant a vineyard, or to go on a journey, or to get married. The three unlucky days in the *Lacnunga*, mentioned above, were also

[1] *Meddygon Myddfai*, part 1, § 91–2.

[2] Ibid., part 2, § 812.

[3] Maçoudi ['Alī ībn Ḥusain, *al-Mas'udi*], *Les Prairies d'or*, ed. de Meynard and de Courteille, Paris, vol. iii, 1864, ch. lviii, p. 416.

[4] Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Caligula A. XV, fo. 127*a* (Cockayne, vol. iii, p. 155).

[5] *Leechbook I*, lxxii.

fatal for taking any draught; and 'he that on these days tasteth flesh of goose, within a space of forty days he shall end his life'.[1] Bede also says that 'if anyone shall taste of goose in these days, he will die on the fifteenth day'.[2]

According to Maçoudi, the Persians add one month to each period of 120 years: this is because they have lucky and unlucky days, and if they introduced one day every four years, it would alter the date on which the lucky days fell, and so lucky and unlucky days would become mixed.[3]

(*c*) *To produce warmth*

The use of baths for medicinal purposes was taken over by the Anglo-Saxons from the Romans. Bede says that Britain 'has both salt and hot springs, and from them flow rivers which furnish hot baths, proper for all ages and sexes, and arranged accordingly'.[4]

Both *baðian* and *beðian* signify 'to bathe'. Since, however, each has a secondary meaning 'to foment', it is clear that hot and not cold water was indicated, and that each word usually had a medical significance relative to some part of the body, such as the eye. *Baðian* is, however, the word used by Bede when he tells us that St. Etheldrida but rarely had a bath.[5] The word *bæþ-hús* (bath-house) is found in glossaries only.

The usual form of hot bath employed by people who do not possess the amenities of an advanced civilization is the stone-bath. The word may signify a steam-bath and a hot-water bath: the latter was produced by dropping red-hot stones or iron[6] into water.

The steam-bath is, however, far more important than the other. From the various examples mentioned in Anglo-Saxon recipes, it seems that the stones were heated red-hot and laid in a trough, and that water was thrown over them to produce steam. The patient then had to sit on a stool over the steam. Herbs were often placed

[1] *Lacn.* 118 (CLXXXIX).

[2] Bede, *De minutione sanguinis* (Giles, *Opera*, vol. vi, p. 350). Also in MS. Cotton Titus D. XXVI (quoted by Birch, *Proc. Roy. Soc. Lit.*, 1878, 2 s. xi. 473).

[3] Maçoudi, op. cit., ch. lviii. Other Anglo-Saxon references to phlebotomy are Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Titus D. XXVII (i), fo. 2*a*–3*a* (tenth century); Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Tiberius A. III, fo. 32*b*–35*b* (eleventh century. Latin text in E. Svenberg, *De Latinska lunaria*, 1936, pp. 24–82: Anglo-Saxon text in Cockayne, vol. iii, pp. 184–96. Older foliation given by Cockayne is 30*v*–33*v*).

[4] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i. 1.

[5] Ibid. iv. 19.

[6] e.g. *Lacn.* 59 (CVI), 'for eruptive rash'.

in the trough over the stones. The following occurs in the *Lacnunga*: 'Have a great quernstone taken and heated and laid under the man, and have wallwort and brooklime and mugwort taken and laid upon the stone and under it; and pour cold water thereon, and let the vapour steam upon the man, as hot as he can bear.'[1]

The hot-air bath was in common use amongst the ancient Irish, and many 'sweat-houses' of a bee-hive shape still remain. They were used for curing rheumatism, but were heated by burning fuel more often than with stones. The door was closed with a screen, and a small hole in the roof with a stone when the fire was lighted.[2] Magical cures by means of medicinal herbs placed in the baths are also mentioned.[3]

The following words of Merlin to Aurelius Ambrosius concerning the stones called the Giants' Dance on Mount Killaurus in Ireland—as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth—are suggestive:

> In these stones is a mystery and a healing virtue against many ailments. Giants of old did carry them from the furthest ends of Africa and did set them up in Ireland what time they did inhabit therein. And to this end they did it, that they might make baths therein whensoever they ailed of any malady, for they did wash the stones and pour forth the water into the baths, whereby they that were sick were made whole. Moreover they did mix confections of herbs with the water, whereby they that were wounded had healing, for not a stone is there that lacks in virtue of leechcraft.[4]

The stones, says Geoffrey, were brought to England by Merlin and set up as Stonehenge.

The use of the stone-bath for medicinal and for cleansing purposes is very widespread. In Finland it is still employed. It is described by Acerbi, writing in 1798, who says that the bath was heated to 70 or 75 degrees centigrade.[5] The bath-house stands apart from the house itself, and every family of any standing possesses one of its own. In rune 45 of the *Kalevala*, when the Nine

[1] *Lacn.* 48 (LXXXIV). Other references to the stone-bath are: *Leechbook I*, xvii. 2, xxvi, xli, xlvii. 2; *Leechbook III*, xlviii; *Lacn.* 42 (LXXVI), 115 (CLXXXV).

[2] W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, vol. ii, pp. 161–6.

[3] P. W. Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, vol. i, pp. 618–19.

[4] Geoffrey of Monmouth, viii. 11. See also *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. i, p. 245 (Rolls Series).

[5] G. Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden, Finland and Lapland*, Lond., 1802, vol. i, p. 298.

Diseases are sent from Lapland upon the people of Finland, Vainamoinen heats the bath-rooms. He also rubs his patients with balsam obtained from magic herbs, and sprinkles them with healing vapours.

The Anglo-Saxons had other means than baths of producing warmth for the benefit of the sick and infirm. The second *Leechbook* prescribes, as a recipe for the patient who has a 'stomach which is of a cold or moist nature', that it is 'helpful to him that a fat child should sleep by him, so that he should always put him near his stomach'.[1] The same treatment was prescribed by classical medical writers such as Oribasius and Paulus Aeginetus.[2] Thus Oribasius, who was physician to the Emperor Julian, speaking of patients who have a cold constitution and to whom he wishes to apply warmth, says: 'It is also of use to these that a well-set-up boy should sleep with them in such a way that his belly should be in continuous contact.'[3] The first Book of Kings opens with the passage describing the treatment of David in his old age in a similar way.

A recipe 'for heat' at the end of the second *Leechbook* runs as follows: 'Petroleum (*petra oleum*). . . . Smear on outwardly on a winter's day, since it has very much heat: hence one shall drink it in the winter.'[4] This recipe was sent by the patriarch of Jerusalem to King Alfred, and was therefore presumably used for this purpose in Palestine at that time, but since petroleum was not obtainable in those days in England, it unfortunately could not be used as a remedy by Alfred's subjects.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* has a remedy 'in order that you may not suffer from cold' (*cýle* or *céle*). It is to 'take nettle, sodden in oil: then smear the hands and all the body: you will not perceive the cold on all your body'.[5] The first *Leechbook* gives the following recipe: 'This shall [avail] against a chilblain (*æcelma*), and against a man becoming so cold that the skin comes off his feet.' Various herbs are to be pounded to dust and mixed with honey, and the cure effected therewith.[6]

[1] *Leechbook II*, xxvii.
[2] Paulus Aeginetus, sect. 22 (Sydenham Soc., vol. i, p. 104).
[3] Oribasius, *Synopsis*, v. 53.
[4] *Leechbook II*, lxiv.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxviii. 7. A similar recipe ('seethe nettles in oil', &c.) occurs in *Leechbook I*, lxxxi.
[6] *Leechbook I*, xxx.

(*d*) *Miscellaneous*

The methods of application of remedies, themselves unscientific, seem to the modern practitioner to be in most cases rough and ready in the extreme.

From the prescriptions themselves much may be learnt of the manner of their administration. Herbs were usually dried and rubbed to powder, or pounded and thenmixed with other ingredients such as fat or honey to make them adhere.[1] If not applied as a plaster or rubbed into the skin, they could be swallowed as pills (*posel*, *posling*), or else taken in water or more often in wine.

The following examples will serve as illustrations:[2] 'If a man's body be hardened, then take plantain, pound (*gecnuca*) it with grease (*smeru*, cognate with *smirwan*, to smear, anoint) without salt and work it to a *clam*, lay it on where it is hard: it will soon make it soft and improve it.'[3] 'For all swellings, take the flowers of . . . cabbage, pound them with old fat (*rysel*) and mix as you would work a poultice (*clýðа*), put it on a thick linen cloth, lay it to the sore.'[4]

Sealf is a salve or ointment. The word is found in compounds according to its nature, e.g. *smeoru-sealf*, a grease salve, and *ele-sealf*, an oil salve, or to the area to which it is to be applied, e.g. *eág-sealf*, a salve for the eye, and *neb-sealf*, face-cream (equated with *stibio*).

Two *Benedictiones unguentum*, in Latin, occur at the end of the *Lacnunga*.

Emetics and purgatives are constantly prescribed in Anglo-Saxon recipes. The phrase 'drink a strong drink that will run up and down' seems to denote one that will be effective for both purposes at once. *Spiw-drene* and *wece-drene* are terms for emetics.

Honey was known as a mild laxative from the time of the ancient Egyptians. Recipes for purgative draughts occur in the *Lacnunga* (18–20, XLII–XLV). Grattan and Singer interpret the 'purgative seeds' (*libcorna*) there mentioned as those of the castor-oil plant, *Ricinus communis*,[5] which was cultivated in western Europe from the thirteenth century, but which was available only as an

[1] For details, see p. 317.

[2] See also the prescription for hare-lip (p. 392), and the poultice applied to St. Cuthbert's knee (p. 405).

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, ii. 11.

[4] Ibid. cxxx. 1.

[5] This occurs in the *A.S. Herbal*, clxxvi, where it is to be hung up in the house or on a ship as a safeguard from tempests. Its use as a purgative is not mentioned.

import from the Near East in Anglo-Saxon times. The word *lybb*, as has already been mentioned,[1] signifies both a drug and a poison, and often implies the use of witchcraft. Its compound *libcorn* is defined by Cockayne in his glossary as 'a grain of purgative effect, especially the seeds of various euphorbias, probably also the seeds of some of the gourds'. The more specific interpretation of Grattan and Singer is probably correct.

Cauterization was practised thousands of years ago in surgery, and it was used as a remedy in Anglo-Saxon times. But it was in common use not only in connexion with wounds but also when it could have had no practical utility. 'That the practise was very largely a superstition', says Lynn Thorndike, 'is evident from the fact that one part of the body often was cauterized for a complaint in another or opposite portion or member.'

Cauterization is well illustrated in a manuscript of the first half of the twelfth century in Durham Cathedral Library. The upper half of the drawing, which is treated in red and green, shows cautery of the temples with irons. The lower half shows these being heated. The flames of the fire were probably intended to be filled in in red. Singer notes that neither the leech nor his assistant is tonsured. The seat on which the patient rests is of classical design, which suggests that this illustration was copied from an earlier manuscript.[2]

An eleventh-century manuscript in the British Museum contains a kind of primitive anatomical atlas indicating where the cautery was to be applied.[3]

Cupping was practised in Anglo-Saxon times to draw off secretions as well as blood. An instance occurs in the second *Leechbook* in connexion with the treatment of a swollen liver. The secretion is to be drawn off at intervals 'with glass or horn' (*teóh mid glæse oppe mid horne*).[4] The use of the horn of an animal is still employed for cupping in primitive races.

(*e*) *Weights and measures used in Anglo-Saxon times*

During the Middle Ages there was a lack of precision in measurement, whether of a dose of medicine or of the size of a tree.

[1] See p. 147. [2] Durham Cathedral Library, MS. Hunter 100, fo. 122*a*.

[3] Brit. Mus., MS. Sloane 2839, ff. iv–3, 'Liber cirrurgium cauterium Apollonii et Galieni'. See L. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. i, 1923, p. 723, and K. Sudhoff, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Chirurgie im Mittelalter*, Leipzig, 1918, vol. ii, pp. xv–xvi. [4] *Leechbook II*, xviii.

A large tree, for instance, is defined by the laws of Ine, king of Wessex (early eighth century), as one under which thirty pigs can stand.[1]

The Anglo-Saxons had no exact means of weighing the ingredients of their prescriptions, yet these constantly mention the quantities to be used. The use of the fingers gave a very rough method. For example, 'Take of cummin as much as you may lift with three fingers';[2] or, 'take of white salt as much as one may pick up with four fingers';[3] or again, 'as much as thou mayest grip between forefinger and thumb'.[4] A *Lacnunga* recipe prescribes 'of pure honey one eggshell (*æg-scyll*) full'.[5] The form *hennescill* (which is probably an abbreviation for *henne-ægscill*) is also found as a means for measuring melted butter in a recipe for *lungen-ádl* in an eleventh-century manuscript now in the Wellcome Library.[6]

But the most usual and more exact method was to weigh by means of coins.[7] For tasting of poison . . . take also roots of the same herb [feverfew] by weight of ten pennies';[8] or 'for devil-sickness take . . . mandrake by weight of three pennies';[9] or 'for erysipelas . . . take twenty shillings weight of litharge, and twenty shillings weight of new lime, and a half sester of vinegar, and four shillings weight of oil of myrtle and mingle together'.[10]

Scales and weights have been found in Anglo-Saxon graves. 'In some of the graves which have been opened . . . in the Isle of Thanet', says Houghton, 'there have been found the remains of a small weighing balance and a set of weights most of which have been formed by rubbing down Roman coins with great care to the required weight.' He also notes a 'set of scales and weights found in an Anglo-Saxon grave at Gilton Down, Kent'.[11]

Similar methods of weighing were in use in Wales in ancient times. A recipe runs: 'Take as much as will stand on three golden crowns.'[12]

[1] Laws of Ine, 44.
[2] *Leechbook I*, xxxvii.
[3] Ibid. lix.
[4] *Lacn.* 5 (xvii).
[5] Ibid. 6 (xviii).
[6] Napier, 'Altenglische Miscellen, 111*b*.' *Herrigs Archiv*, 1890, lxxxiv. 325.
[7] It is perhaps worth noting that the modern apothecaries' weight still retains the term 'pennyweight'.
[8] *A.S. Herbal*, xxxvi. 6.
[9] Ibid. cxxxii. 5.
[10] περὶ διδάξεων, 2.
[11] J. F. Houghton, 'Money scales', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1941, 4s. ix. 218–19.
[12] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, § 25, cf. also 26.

A table of weights occurs at the end of the second *Leechbook*: 'a pint (*pund*) of oil weighs twelve pennies less than a pint of water; a pint of ale weighs six pennies more than a pint of water', &c.[1]

The instruction to take a certain number of drachms (*trimes, trimessa*) often occurs. The phrase 'four spoons (*cucleras*) full . . . in a bowl (*bolla* = cyathus) full of wine' occurs in the first *Leechbook*.[2] The word *cucler-mæl*, a spoon measure, is also found.

The *ámber* was a dry measure of four bushels, also a liquid measure. A *mitta* was both dry and liquid. Apparently a *mitta* was equal to two *ámbers*, since a passage in one of the charters speaks of 'thirty *ámbers* of good Welsh ale, which are equal to fifteen *mittas*'.

MS. Hunter 100, at Durham, contains (ff. 78*b*–81*b*) various extracts 'de ponderibus' from Isidore of Seville.[3] On folio 81 is a 'ratio ponderum vel mensurarum medicinalium'.

The measuring of time was difficult before the introduction of watches and clocks. Miss Ida B. Jones, writing of medical magic in fourteenth-century England, makes the interesting suggestion that the repetition of prayers and psalms up to a certain specified passage or a certain number of times in ecclesiastical prescriptions may in some cases have been an attempt at measuring time. She instances that 'John Arderne gives the following instructions in the making of a Nerbon plaster: "late it stande stille without mouyng for the space of a pater noster and one ave maria"—Fistula in Ano, p. 91, E.E.T.S., 139.'[4] This method would apply equally to Anglo-Saxon times.

[1] *Leechbook II*, lxvii. A table of weights and measures also occurs in St. John's College, Oxford, MS. 17, fo. 2*b*.

[2] *Leechbook I*, xliii.

[3] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia*, xvi. 25–27.

[4] I. B. Jones, 'Popular medical knowledge in fourteenth-century English literature', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1937, v. 438.

CHAPTER XXIII

Herb Remedies

(*a*) *Introduction*

THE Anglo-Saxon word *wyrt* signifies a wort, plant, or herb, and especially a herb for food. The compound *læce-wyrt* signifies a herb having medicinal virtue.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a wort as a 'plant or herb used for food or medicine'. The word is now archaic, but survives as a suffix, and serves to indicate herbs which used to be employed for medicinal or culinary purposes. It also survives as a technical term in brewing.[1]

The constituents of Anglo-Saxon prescriptions are mostly plants; animal and mineral substances are by comparison few.

One of the proverbs of Alfred says that there is no herb which grows in the woods or the fields which does not promote life. The same belief has been held in many places until the present day. 'Among the Irish peasantry', says G. H. Kinahan, 'there is a more or less fervent belief in the efficacy of plants to produce cures—in some cases to such an extent that until all plants fail, a medical man will not be called in.'[2]

The Irish belief dates back to ancient times. Diancecht, god of medicine and physician of the Tuatha Dé Danaan, obtained victory for his people against the Fomorians at the second battle of Moytura by placing 'one of every herb that grew in Erin' in a well called Slāne near the battlefield and singing spells over the well. Into it all the mortally wounded of the Tuatha Dé Danaan were placed, and from it all came forth healed and ready once more to join in the battle.[3] Diancecht had a son named Midac. After the death of the latter 365 herbs grew from his grave, one from each joint and sinew of his body, and each able to cure disease in the same part of the human body. Unfortunately mankind was prevented from

[1] See p. 358.

[2] G. H. Kinahan, 'Irish folk-lore—medical plants', *Folk-lore Journ.*, 1887, v. 11.

[3] Whitley Stokes, 'Second battle of Moytura', *Rev. celtique*, 1891, xii. 95–97.

benefiting from this, for after the herbs had been gathered and placed in order by Diancecht's daughter, they were mixed up by Diancecht himself in a fit of jealousy.

An example of the indiscriminate use of herb remedies occurs in the *Lacnunga*.[1] This recipe runs: 'Arestolobius was the name of a king. He was wise and skilled in leechcraft. Wherefore he prescribed a good morning draught for all infirmities that agitate man's body within or without.' The seeds of no less than twenty-nine plants are then named: an equal amount of each is to be taken, in the form of a very fine dust, in cold wine after the night's fast. A list of the infirmities themselves follows, so diverse as to include headache, lung-disease, jaundice, dimness of the eyes, heaviness of the chest and swelling of the belly, pain in the small guts, pain in the thigh, foot-swelling, itching, and every poison, and ending with 'for every infirmity and every temptation of the fiend'.

Pliny, quoting Democritus, tells of a wonderful plant called 'theobrotion', which was used by the kings of Persia. They took it 'in their food or drink, for all maladies of the body and derangements of the mind'. It was probably used thus because of its striking appearance, since it had the 'varied tints of the peacock' as well as a notable smell.[2]

Yet another comparable panacea for many ills was the bezoar stone. This, unlike Arestolobius' concoction, was an animal product. It was a concretion found in the intestines of certain animals, especially the Persian wild goat. This was the *lapis bezoar orientale*, which was especially valued for its efficacy. Less valued varieties of bezoar stones were obtained from the llamas of Peru, and also the chamois of Switzerland. The 'stone' was really a calculus consisting of successive deposits of phosphate of lime round a nucleus of hair or the stone of some fruit. Young says that the bezoar stone 'was supposed by the Arabian doctors to be a general cure for every malady, and in consequence of its high estimation by them was sold at an immense price'.[3] But bezoar stones were originally used as antidotes to poisons. Later they came to be used in the treatment of fevers, and then for most types of skin diseases. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the price of bezoar stones in London was from £3 to £5 per ounce. Despite the fact that Paré had shown their worthlessness two centuries earlier, they

[1] *Lacn.* III (CLXXVIII). [2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxiv. 102.
[3] G. F. Young, *The Medici*, Lond., 1913, vol. ii, p. 332, note 1.

remained popular for at least a further century.[1] Francesco I of Florence, who dabbled in the chemistry of his day, attempted to cure himself with this medicine during his last illness, but he expired 'after forty-eight hours of great agony'.

A feature of some prescriptions is the great number of herbs they contain. In the draught of Arestolobius in the *Lacnunga*[2] mentioned above there are twenty-nine herbs. The 'green salve' in *Lacnunga*[3] contains thirty-seven named herbs, and the 'holy salve'[4] contains as many as fifty-eight.

It need hardly be said that most of the herbs mentioned have long ceased to be used medicinally. Dracontea, for instance, which, we are told, grows on the tops of mountains and in the land of Apulia, is prescribed by the Anglo-Saxons as efficacious against the bites of poisonous snakes and to draw broken bones from the body.[5] It is now used in medicine only as a colouring agent of plasters and of tooth-powders.

'The interpretation of the English names of plants', says Cockayne, 'rests on the same basis generally as the rendering of any other obsolete words.' If, as will be shown, it was generally impossible to recognize a plant from the illustration provided or from its name, the practical value of the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* must have been slight. Since the Anglo-Saxon texts are the chief sources for the dictionary, it is frequently reduced to saying merely 'the name of a plant'. *Bulentse* and *ryden* are examples of this.

Cockayne took infinite pains to identify the plants indicated in the *Herbal*, not only by comparing each with its Latin equivalent in the text of Apuleius and with the various Anglo-Saxon glossaries, but also by independent evidence. The notes and glossary to the second volume of his *Leechdoms* provide a wealth of erudition. But, as Singer has shown, it is doubtful whether much of this material is of practical value.

Many names of plants in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* and in *περὶ διδάξεων*, though written in Anglo-Saxon, are translated from works composed in southern Europe. It will therefore be noticed that many of the plants and animals mentioned are not found in Britain. Thus *Strychnos manikos*[6] (which, incidentally, the Anglo-Saxon

[1] For the history of the bezoar stone see A. C. Wootton, *Chronicles of Pharmacy*, 1910, vol. ii, pp. 15–19.

[2] *Lacn.* 111 (CLXXVIII).

[3] Ibid. 4 (XV).

[4] Ibid. 29 (LXIII).

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, xv.

[6] Ibid. cxliv.

translator has erroneously equated with the fox-glove) is not an English plant. Nor is dittany, which is said to grow only in Crete. The mandrake, which of all plants has perhaps most glamour attached to it, is a native of Italy and of Greece,[1] and does not grow in Great Britain.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* usually mentions first the name by which each plant was called in the original, followed by that by which it was known in the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. But in some cases, e.g. in section 176, which deals with the castor oil plant, the text runs 'this herb which is called ricinus and by its other name . . .'. A blank is left here; presumably there was no equivalent name in Anglo-Saxon. Since the plant does not grow in this country, there was naturally no reason for the name to exist in the vernacular.[2]

Similarly the *áttorcoppe* was a poisonous spider which was not found here, and recipes against its bite[3] would therefore not be of any practical use to the Anglo-Saxons.

A salutary warning against the waste of effort in attempting to identify the plants named in the Anglo-Saxon texts has recently been given by Singer, who points out that no Anglo-Saxon could have had any knowledge of any of the six suppositions on which the Linnaean system of identification is based. He notes that some of Cockayne's identifications are founded merely on verbal associations. Singer gives a list of twenty-seven plants which can be fairly safely identified in the Anglo-Saxon texts, out of the large number of plants which are actually named.[4] Storms, on the other hand, is much less cautious, and in his glossary he attempts to give modern botanical identifications to 157 plants mentioned in Anglo-Saxon texts.[5]

(*b*) *The* Anglo-Saxon Herbal *and its illustrations*

The first 132 sections of the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* are taken from pseudo-Apuleius and the rest are from Dioscorides. These two herbals, as has already been stated in the chapter on sources, are

[1] I have found it, for instance, on the island of Delos, where it is noticeable for its yellow flowers and orange berries.

[2] Cockayne (*Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. 309) erroneously equates 'ricinus' with the croton oil plant, when it is clearly the castor oil plant, *Ricinus communis*, which is referred to. Others have made the same mistake. The croton oil plant is *Croton Tiglium*, and its seeds resemble slightly those of the castor oil plant.

[3] e.g. *A.S. Herbal*, iv. 9, and Sextus Placitus, op. cit., iv. 10.

[4] Singer, in Grattan and Singer, pp. 80–91.

[5] G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, The Hague, 1948, pp. 319–28.

usually found together; but in course of time more and more accretions of botanical lore were added, so that the Dioscorides or pseudo-Dioscorides of the twelfth century is a very different work from the Dioscorides Latinus of the sixth century or from the original Greek.

The Anglo-Saxon translator has added his own explanations and the names of the plants in his own tongue. The *Herbal* is arranged under herbs and not under the diseases for which they were to be used. It is our chief source of information on the herb remedies which our ancestors were prepared to apply in the treatment of major as well as minor ailments.

Withington has well summed up the change in tone from the original pseudo-Apuleius to that which was provided for Anglo-Saxon use.

> Apuleius was a pagan [he says] and in the oldest manuscripts, the names of various herbs are followed by prayers and incantations to be recited on gathering them, handed down perhaps from the old Greek or Tuscan herbalists: but the monkish transcribers have converted him into a Christian by the simple process of slightly altering these prayers; while in later editions they are either omitted altogether, as in the Anglo-Saxon version, or replaced by the Creed and Pater Noster, which the canons of the Church declared might alone be repeated on such occasions.[1]

Singer describes a herbal as 'a collection of descriptions of plants put together for medical purposes'. He adds: 'Most herbals are quite devoid of any rational basis. It may be taken for granted that the writer of a herbal is unable to treat evidence on a scientific basis.'

In his article on 'The herbal in antiquity'[2] from which this quotation has been taken he traces the history of plant illustration and, incidentally, shows the relation of the figures in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* to those of its predecessors and also to those of later date. As he has dealt in so much detail with this very complicated problem, there is no need here to give more than the briefest outline of it.

Krateuas, the medical attendant of Mithridates VI, the king of Pontus who was conquered by Pompey, was the first writer of a herbal in which the plants described were also illustrated. The still

[1] E. T. Withington, *Medical History from the Earliest Times*, 1894, p. 177.

[2] C. Singer, 'The herbal in antiquity, and its transmission to later ages', *Journ. Hellenic Studies*, 1927, xlvii. 1–52. See also Grattan and Singer, pp. 77 ff.

surviving Viennese codex of Dioscorides, called the *Juliana Anicia Codex* after the daughter of Anicius Olybrius, Emperor of the West, to whom it was presented, was written about the year 512 and contains material from the work of Krateuas. This herbal, which has been reproduced in facsimile, is profusely illustrated by a Byzantine artist, and some of the figures were used by Gunther to illustrate his edition of the Greek herbal of Dioscorides.[1] Singer gives a chart of the manuscripts of Dioscorides (of which the *Juliana Anicia* manuscript is the earliest extant) from the point of view of their illustrations. He gives another chart of the illustrated manuscripts of pseudo-Apuleius, elaborating in this respect the work of Howald and Sigerist already mentioned. This latter herbal (pseudo-Apuleius) was illustrated from a very early date. MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III is included in the chart in the South Italian group.

It is interesting to note the contacts between the scribes and artists of Carolingian France, of Italy, and perhaps more remotely of Byzantium on the one hand, and those of England on the other. It has already been mentioned that English monks such as Benedict Biscop who visited the Continent brought back with them many manuscripts to instruct their English brethren and to enrich the libraries of their monasteries. These manuscripts, together with their illustrations, were then copied in this country, this being, of course, the sole means of duplication before the invention of printing. The natural tendency, during the process of copying, was to improve the text by the addition of more information from the experience of the individual copyist, and for the artist to improve on the illustrations by modifying and enriching them according to his own fancy.

The illustrations in the herbals, from MS. *Juliana Anicia* onward, therefore change and develop. But botanic illustration during the Dark and Middle Ages made no useful progress. There is no appeal to nature, and each manuscript is copied from its predecessor. Singer believes that there was a direct line of descent from this *Juliana Anicia* manuscript through the Middle Ages to the fifteenth century.

'Pictures', says Pliny, 'are very apt to mislead. . . . The diversity of copyists from the original paintings, and their comparative degrees of skill, add very considerably to the chances of losing the

[1] R. T. Gunther, *The Greek Herbal of Dioscorides*, Oxford, 1934.

necessary degree of resemblance to the originals.'[1] Consequently the same inaccuracies recur.

In only one case is there any attempt to re-examine nature. This is in a Bodleian manuscript of pseudo-Apuleius (MS. 130), which has a Latin text.[2] It was written and illustrated by a monk of Bury St. Edmunds about 1120. Singer suggests that this monk had before him a herbal of South Italian origin from which to copy, that he identified such species (e.g. mugwort and henbane) as grew in this country as well as in Italy with their nearest equivalents in his own monastery garden, and then illustrated the latter.

Much has lately been written on the knotty and very complicated problem of the manuscript used by Philip de Lignamine for the version of pseudo-Apuleius which he printed at Rome in 1481—the first printed book in which plant illustrations are found. It is again necessary to give only the briefest summary of the problem here.

According to one theory MS. Addit. 17063 in the British Museum, of about the year 1460, is likely to be the manuscript made by Lignamine from which to print. Its illustrations were copied from one in Beneventan script, from which also—or from a sister manuscript—Cotton Vitellius C. III was copied. There is also in the British Museum another manuscript of pseudo-Apuleius (MS. Addit. 21115) which is very closely allied to that of *c.* 1460, both in script and in illustrations. This, since it bears a dedication by Lignamine, was probably copied for him about the year 1500 from his printed version. Howald and Sigerist, in the introduction to their edition of pseudo-Apuleius (p. xiv), agree with Singer that these two fifteenth-century manuscripts are the nearest existing relations of Cotton Vitellius C. III.

Another theory has, however, been put forward by F. W. T. Hunger. He has printed, together, the edition of Lignamine and a ninth-century manuscript of pseudo-Apuleius in the abbey of Monte Cassino, Codex Cassinensis 97,[3] but there is no evidence of identity. The question is now impossible to decide, but the interest lies in the close relationship between the Anglo-Saxon and printed versions.

Though they are alike in many respects, it is interesting to note

[1] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 4.

[2] Published by the Roxburghe Club in 1925.

[3] *The Herbal of Pseudo-Apuleius* . . . described and annotated by F. W. T. Hunger, Leyden, 1935.

the differences and stages of degradation in the three versions, i.e. (i) the Anglo-Saxon Cotton Vitellius C. III, (ii) the fifteenth-century MS. Apuleius, and (iii) the earliest printed form. The plants originally illustrated were, of course, natives of southern Europe, and therefore to see how far each illustration differs from nature it is best to inspect only such plants as have a wide range of distribution. 'Those who used the herbals', says Singer, 'had no idea of plant distribution. The conception that flora had local peculiarities had been familiar enough to Aristotle and Theophrastus, and traces of it can be found in Pliny and Dioscorides, but the idea had been almost lost in the Middle Ages.' It is obvious that the reason for illustrating a manuscript was to provide the reader with the means of identifying the plant mentioned in the text. Amongst the letters of Boniface and Lullus, who succeeded him at Mainz after his martyrdom in 754, there is one to the latter from Cyneheard, bishop of Winchester, desiring some books *de medicinalibus*. Cyneheard says that they had plenty of such works in England, but that 'the foreign drawings [reading *pigmenta*, instead of *sigmenta*] which they found therein were unknown to them and [the plants?] difficult to acquire'.[1]

Good examples of such differences are shown by the illustrations of betony and waybread (plantain), which are the first two plants to occur in Apuleius. Both are common all over temperate Europe, and therefore equally well known in south Italy and in England. *Betony*: In (i) the flowers are damaged, but the colour is correct; in (ii), however, they are dark grey, tipped with brown. In (i) they are freely drawn, on four stalks; in (ii) and (iii) they are conventionalized, symmetrically drawn on three stems, and in (iii) they resemble leaves rather than blossoms at all. The leaves in (i) are gracefully drawn, four on each side on the main stem, dentate, and each on its own petiole. In (ii) they are still dentate, but are symmetrical and sessile. In (iii) the dotted lines of the top of the leaf are the only indication remaining that they were once dentate. The roots in (i) are fibrous and coloured light red; in (ii) they have become concentrated into three main tap roots and are coloured brown; while in (iii) they are represented as three thick lines—almost tuberous.

[1] *Monumenta Moguntina*, ed. P. Jaffé, 1866, pp. 269–70 (Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum). The chief reason why Caesalpinus was neglected for nearly a hundred years was that no figures accompanied his work.

In the *plantain*, the illustration in the 1460 manuscript is again closer to the Anglo-Saxon than is the printed version. In (i) the flowers are blue and green, outlined with red, or in one case white, dots. In (iii) they are symmetrical and have become a chequer of black and green: but they are more recognizable as the plantain than in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript. In (ii) and (iii) a scorpion has been added between the flowers: also in (ii) and (iii) there is a serpent across the roots. In the Anglo-Saxon the figure of a snake occurs before § 8 ('for adder's bite'), and that of a scorpion before § 9 ('for scorpion's wound').

Many more comparisons could be given. In each case the later the version the more conventionalized the illustration, and, usually, the farther from nature. The illustrator not merely copied but strove rather for artistic merit in his composition than for scientific accuracy. The purpose for which the illustration was originally provided was therefore entirely lost, and the Anglo-Saxons were led even farther astray by the fantastic illustrations than by the unscientific text.

(*c*) *Gathering*

i. *Historical background*

Plant magic has been practised from the earliest times and is still used in folk-medicine of the present day. In later Roman and in medieval times the ceremonies connected with the gathering of plants were most elaborate and lengthy. It is difficult for the modern practical person to look upon these rites except with feelings of pity and contempt. The futility of the proceedings themselves and the rigmarole connected with them appear to us to have been but a waste of time and energy; but the study of them has some value from the point of view of psychology, for the instructions which have survived in so many manuscripts would not have existed and developed unless their value had been real to the medieval mind.

These rites have been described in detail by Delatte in his treatise *Herbarius*.[1] We are at present concerned with the position of the Anglo-Saxon link in the chain.

The earliest instance of plant magic mentioned by Delatte occurs in the *Odyssey*, when Hermes gives the herb moly to Odysseus in

[1] A. Delatte, *Herbarius: recherches sur le cérémonial usité chez les anciens pour la cueillette des simples et des plantes magiques*, Liège, 1938.

order to protect him from the enchantments of Circe. Homer remarks that 'to uproot it is a difficult task for mortals, but nothing is difficult for the gods'. These difficulties were threefold: first, all the virtue of the plant had to be conserved to secure its efficacy; second, the danger incurred by the gatherer; and third, the operation had to be made according to certain mysterious prescriptions. These last were known only to the gatherers, who were called ῥιζότομοι by the Greeks and *herbarii* by the Romans.

Various rites and ceremonies are described by Ovid when speaking of their performance by Medea. These same rites recur in the instructions for the gathering of plants which are given in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, and they will be described later.

The Greek usage was so old that its discovery was ascribed to gods and heroic personages. Paean was the 'medicine-man' of the gods in Homer, and it is natural that specially magical qualities should be ascribed to the peony which was named after him.[1] These survive in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*. Other writers name Apollo, Asclepios, and Chiron as the inventors of herb medicine. The brightly coloured illustration at the beginning of the *Herbal* in MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III depicts three figures which are labelled 'Escolapivs', 'Plato', 'Centaurus'. Plato holds a book, which obviously represents medical art: the centaur is in the attitude of giving it and Aesculapius in that of receiving it.[2]

The works of the ancient rhizotomists have been lost, but their contents have been largely preserved by Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Pliny, and pseudo-Apuleius. The fact that two copies at least of the translation of the last mentioned into the vernacular have survived suggests that it was well known in this country at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Whether the prescribed ceremonies were actually carried out by our ancestors is uncertain, but the presumption is that they were, since similar prescriptions occur also in the *Leechbooks* and in the *Lacnunga*, which are both native writings for use by laymen and are not translated from southern antecedents.

Delatte has shown by many comparisons drawn from the manuscripts of other countries and of later dates that such ceremonies continued throughout the medieval period and even later. They

[1] See also Pliny, *Hist Nat.* xxv. 10 and xxvii. 60.

[2] Reproduced by Singer as Pl. IV in his *Studies in the History and Method of Science*, vol. ii, 1921 (in colour), and in Grattan and Singer, p. 8 (in line).

became more elaborate as time went on, and this was especially the case when they were connected with astrology.[1]

Attempts were made from time to time by the Christian Church to suppress the incantations which were uttered at the time of gathering. For example, they were condemned in the sixth century by the Council of Braga and as late as 1310 by the Council of Trèves. Hence we find that in Christian times prayers were substituted for the pagan incantation[2] and that instructions for the recitation of the *Ave*, *Paternoster*, *Credo*, and *Benedicite* were then included in the recipes.

It has already been shown that it was the practice of Christianity to accustom the people to the rites of the new religion by equating these as far as possible with the pagan ones already existing, and with which they had long been familiar. The same method was employed with regard to the ceremonies connected with the gathering of plants. For instance, in pagan times the rhizotomist was directed to gather a plant at the summer solstice, but when the recipe came under Christian influence the night of St. John was substituted, since the Christian festival had been made to synchronize with the pagan one. If in pagan times the virtue of a plant was retained by the drawing of a magic circle round it, in Christian times the same object might be achieved by a prayer for its preservation. In the words of Delatte: 'Les cérémonies chrétiennes remplacent ou renforcent les rites du paganisme. Aux prières païennes et aux incantations magiques se substituent des prières chrétiennes; les cérémonies cathartiques et les sacrifices font place à des exorcismes, à des consécrations, à des bénédictions.'[3]

ii. *Season and hour*

It has been aptly said that gathering ceremonies were intended 'to propitiate disturbed forces of nature' and also to 'preserve or even augment the desired properties of the various herbs'.

A passage in the Welsh *Physicians of Myddvai* (thirteenth century, and then probably traditional) shows how herbs were gathered at the correct period of the year and then preserved for use when

[1] This connexion, however, may date from the earliest times. Sir Arthur Evans figures rings (reproduced by Delatte) which represent rhizotomists at work. The presence of the milky way seems to indicate, says Delatte, that the gathering is being performed under the patronage of the astral divinities.

[2] See, for example, the gloss in the Breslau MS. mentioned on p. 120.

[3] Delatte, op. cit., p. 159.

needed. This practice applied equally to the Anglo-Saxons and to the Welsh:

A potion prepared by Divine Authority for the help of a wounded man. . . . Take [various herbs]. . . . If you collect the above ingredients in the month of May, or at furthest at Midsummer, pounding in a mortar, making into small pills, and drying without much wind or sun, you will be able to have them at hand, when they could not otherwise be had.[1]

A similar passage occurs in the *Third Leechbook*: 'Work thyself dust enough [i.e. herbs rubbed down to dust] in harvest, when thou hast the herbs, use it when thou hast need.'[2]

The following instructions occur in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* with regard to betony: 'When thou hast gathered it, shake off the mould till none adheres, and then dry it in the shade very thoroughly, and with its roots reduce it completely to dust, then use it and taste of it when thou needest.'[3]

The following from the *Lacnunga* is a typical example of application of a vegetable remedy: 'For a swelling: Take roots of lily and helenium shoots and porleek leaves, and shred very small and pound thoroughly, and put on to a thick cloth, and bind on.'[4]

A fourteenth-century manuscript gives the general directions that herbs 'schullen be gaderid whanne thei been fulle of moistnesse or thei begynne to schrynke. Rootis schullen be taken whanne the leues fallen . . . tho erbis that growen in the feeld ben bettere than tho that growen in the toun and in gardynes and of tho that growen in the feelde tho that growen on hillis ben the beste.'[5]

Pliny says that the length of time that herbs preserve their efficacy varies. Elaterium preserves its properties the longest, namely two hundred years; black chamaeleon, forty years; centaury, twelve; peucedanum and aristolochia, six; and the wild vine, one year.[6]

The medieval herbalist maintained that 'the leafage [of a plant] heals from the Annunciation (March 25th) to Peter and Paul (June 29th), the stalk from the Nativity of St. John the Baptist

[1] *Physicians of Myddvai*, part 2, 679. For the gathering and preparation of the uice of the poppy, see Pliny, *Hist Nat.*, xx. 76.

[2] *Leechbook III*, xii.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, i. 1.

[4] *Lacn.* 9 (xxiv).

[5] Brit. Mus., MS. Sloane 2584, p. 174 (Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century*, 1889, p. 131).

[6] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xx. 3, xxvii. 118.

(June 24th) to Michaelmas (Sept. 29th), the root from the Conception of St. John the Baptist (Sept. 24th) to the Annunciation again'.[1]

Almost every month in the year is prescribed in Anglo-Saxon recipes as the gathering-time peculiar to some herb. The numbers in each month increase as the summer advances, and decrease again as the winter draws on.

According to Pliny, the magi used to gather the anemone at the very earliest moment of the year.[2] Anchusa[3] must be gathered in March, adderwort[4] and clovewort[5] in April.

The next important gathering date is midsummer.[6] For neck-tumour, according to the *Lacnunga*, the specific worts are to be collected, 'an equal amount of each, three nights before summer set in, and make them with Welsh ale into a drink. And then, on the eve of the first day of summer, the man who intends to drink that drink must wake all night.'[7]

The following herbs must be gathered at midsummer: vervain,[8] tunsing-wort[9] (white hellebore, an Anglo-Saxon addition in the *Herbal*, since this herb is not in the Dioscorides of 1528), and clivewort.[10] According to some accounts the mandrake is also to be gathered at midsummer. A fourteenth-century recipe says: 'For the *rancle* and *bolning* [sore and swelling] tak the rede netylles on Myssomer even, and dry them, and make pouder of tham, and do in the wounde.'[11] And again: 'For the goute . . . tak leves of the henbane on Mydesomer evene.'[12]

Grimm gives various examples of herbs to be gathered at this time. One of them, Walpurgiskraut, 'blooms exactly at midnight on St. John's eve', and the 'picking is attended by storm and thunder; but whoever gets possession of it becomes rich, and can prophesy'.[13] Midsummer Day is particularly devoted to exorcism

[1] R. Flower, 'Popular science in mediaeval Ireland', *Ériu*, 1921, ix. 67. See Brit. Mus., MS. Addit. 30512.

[2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxi. 94.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, clxviii. 1.

[4] Ibid. vi. 2.

[5] Ibid. x. 2.

[6] As to the magical plants of Midsummer Eve, see J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough: Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii, pp. 45–75.

[7] *Lacn.* 4 (XIV).

[8] *A.S. Herbal*, iv. 5.

[9] Ibid. cxl. 1.

[10] *Leechbook I*, xv. 3, and *Lacn.* 113 (CLXXXII).

[11] Quoted by Wright, *Reliquiae antiquae*, 1841, vol. i, p. 53.

[12] Ibid., p. 55.

[13] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. iii, p. 1211.

in China, as disease and mortality increase with the greatest heat. 'Medicines and drugs, derived from the vegetable kingdom [such as mugwort]', says De Groot, 'are especially efficient if gathered on that day, and above all they are of the highest order if plucked then at the hour of noon, which corresponds to our 11 a.m., till 1 p.m., for in this case they possess the greatest amount of *shen* [divinity or soul] which the course of time or order of the universe can possibly implant in them. Such medicines are especially good for fever.'[1]

Dracontea should be gathered in July.[2] According to the *First Leechbook*, during the last half of this month, 'fifteen nights ere Lammas', 'leeches say that blossomed worts are then best to work, either for drinks, or for salves, or for powder'.[3] More herbs, however, should be gathered in August than in any other month.[4]

After August there are few herbs that have to be gathered. The clovewort is to be taken for a lunatic in the early part of October;[5] and 'for all liver diseases . . . five and twenty bunches of ivy, gathered in the month which is called Januarius in Latin, and in English the second Yule', should be given after the night's fasting.[6]

In the *Züricher Arzeneibuch* (twelfth or thirteenth century) there is a 'potio plurimum valens', in the preparation of which an additional herb has to be added each month: 'adde et eadem potione utere'. Operations begin in March, and the drink is not complete till the following February.[7]

A certain number of herbs were gathered on festival days, such as everlasting (*Gnaphalium*) on Ascension Day, as a charm against lightning,[8] and, in ancient Wales, pennyroyal on Whit-Sunday or the Eve of St. John the Baptist, for the benefit of a 'person who has lost consciousness or speech, in consequence of illness'.[9]

Besides the season or feast-day on which the gathering should take place, the day of the week, and also the hour, is important. Friday is especially prescribed: helenium, for instance, must then

[1] De Groot, *Religious System of China*, vol. vi, pp. 1078–9.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, xv. 3. [3] *Leechbook I*, lxxii.
[4] August is called *weód-mónaŏ* in the *Menologium poeticum* from the number of weeds that abound in that month.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, x. 2. [6] *Leechbook II*, xxiv.
[7] Staatbibliothek zu Zürich, HS. c. 58/275, fo. 87*b*–88*a* (*Münchener Texte*, viii, *Kommentar*, 1918, pp. 149–50).
[8] T. F. T. Dyer, *Folk-lore of Plants*, 1889, p. 54.
[9] *Physicians of Myddvai*, pt. ii, 634.

be gathered, though the attendant ceremony must be begun on the Thursday evening.[1] Of the mandrake it is said that the diggers must go forth on the day of Venus [i.e. Friday] before sunrise.[2]

The most important hours for gathering are before or at sunrise, and at midday, which is the optimum time.[3]

Some plants are gathered before sunrise with the dew still on them. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes in the case of sea-holly: 'And when thou shalt take up this wort with its roots, then beware thou that no sun shine upon it, lest its beauty and its might be spoiled through the brightness of the sun.'[4] A perfect specimen, or one at its prime, would be more efficacious than a bruised one. Groundsel may be taken either at early morning or at midday.[5] Mandrake apparently must be gathered at night, when it may be distinguished because of its shining like a lamp.[6] That the dew shall have disappeared from the plant is sometimes provided for by prescribing that it shall be 'facing the morning sun'.[7] Similarly, in another charm, the bark must be taken from the eastern side of ash and oak trees in order to be efficacious.[8] This custom of securing the part of a plant which faced the east is widespread among Germanic and Indo-European peoples.

Sometimes the position of the moon is important for gathering. Periwinkle must be plucked 'when the moon is nine nights old, and eleven nights, and thirteen nights, and thirty nights, and when it is one night old'.[9] The mulberry must be picked, for flux of blood, 'when to all men the moon is seventeen nights old, after the setting of the sun, ere the rising of the moon'.[10] Melilot must be taken up

[1] *Leechbook III*, lxii.

[2] Schmidel, *Dissertatio de mandragora*, 1671, § 53 (quoted by Randolph, *Proc. Amer. Acad.*, 1905, xl. 493). Similarly, for flying venom, the butter which is to play the material part in the charm must be churned on a Friday (*Leechbook I*, xlv. 5).

[3] 'Undoubtedly plants have optimum times', a botanist friend tells me, 'but these times refer to the series of changes which go to the formation of reproductive cells. In ferns midday is the optimum. In fungi there are two, noon and midnight: the latter may be related to the fact that fungi, being parasitic, are independent of light and may therefore be simply periodic in their processes. In gardening books it is recommended that the artificial cross-pollination effected in greenhouses and frames by putting pollen in contact with stigmas should be done about midday, as in vines and melons and cucumbers. Fusion of pollen and egg-cells is most likely to take place when the reproductive cells are active.'

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxxii. 2.

[5] Ibid. lxxvii. 3.

[6] Ibid. cxxxii. 1.

[7] e.g. waybread, *Lacn.* 46 (LXXXII).

[8] *Lacn.* 12 (XXXI).

[9] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxix.

[10] Sextus Placitus, op. cit., i. 5.

'in the waning of moon, in the month which is called August',[1] and wood-thistle when the moon is in Capricorn.[2]

The idea that the influence of the moon over herbs is harmful is derived from the classics. According to Lucan the moon could be called down, and she hovered over the herbs and shed a poisonous foam on them.[3] 'All vegetable productions', says Pliny, 'are cut, gathered and housed to more advantage while the moon is on the wane than while it is on the increase'.[4]

iii. *Ceremonies and taboos*

Apart from times and seasons, various ceremonies had to be performed and taboos observed at the time of gathering.

Ovid in the seventh book of his *Metamorphoses* details with meticulous care the ceremonial employed by Medea to rejuvenate Aeson. She has to find and gather the herbs with whose juices she must replace the dried-up blood of the old man. But it is the rites which accompany the gathering which are of paramount importance in securing their efficacy. These rites have persisted and recur in the Anglo-Saxon instructions for gathering. Their performance was thought to ensure that the herbs would retain their healing virtues.

The implement with which the plant is to be gathered is usually specified. In the case of the mandrake the plant may not be touched with iron and so the ground is to be dug with an ivory staff.[5] For other plants the most usual implement is of metal, and in this the Anglo-Saxons followed the precedents set in classical times. Both Medea[6] and Dido[7] used bronze scythes; and a bronze sickle, used at midnight, is prescribed by Ovid in the *Fasti*.[8] Macrobius says that copper is to be preferred to bronze.[9] In Anglo-Saxon recipes the prohibition of the use of iron is mentioned for betony,[10]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxxiii. 1. [2] Ibid. cxi. 3.

[3] Lucan, *Pharsalia*, vi. 506, 669.

[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xviii. 75. 'The only experimental evidence for the existence of lunar influence on the growth of land plants is that published by L. Kolisko [in her *The Moon and the Growth of Plants*, 1936]. All other investigators in many parts of the world have been unable to discover any consistent correlation between the moon and the vital processes of land plants; some admit that if a lunar effect does exist it is so obscure as to have no value in agricultural practice.' (C. F. C. Beeson, 'The moon and plant growth', *Nature*, 1946, clviii. 573.)

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1. [6] Ovid, *Metamorph.* vii. 227.

[7] Virgil, *Aeneid*, iv. 513. [8] Ovid, *Fasti*, ii. 577.

[9] Macrobius, v. 19, 8–13. [10] *A.S. Herbal*, i. 1.

mandrake,[1] 'waybread',[2] 'ironhard',[3] and burdock.[4] On the other hand, the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says that sea-holly (*Gorgonion*) must be carved off 'with a crooked and very hard iron'. The gatherer must avert his head, since he may not look upon the root unharmed.[5]

Most herbs must be gathered in silence after the operator has cleansed himself; or he must pull the plant up with the left hand and in so doing make use of the ring finger.

Often the gatherer must state at the time the express purpose for which, or patient for whom, he is taking the plant. This, for instance, is the case with mugwort: the traveller 'when he will pluck it, let him first say these words, "Tellam [*sic*] te, artemesia, ne lassus sum." Sign it [with the sign of the cross] when thou pullest it up.'[6] This ritual (except for the sign of the cross) is derived from the classics.[7]

Many plants must first have a circle drawn round them, in order to keep the plant and its efficacy from escaping before it is gathered. Such a plant is the mandrake.[8] One circle, scratched with iron, is sufficient according to the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, but Theophrastus prescribes (such is the potency of the plant) that 'one must make three circles' around it 'with a sword, and dig looking towards the west. Another person must dance about in a circle and pronounce a great many aphrodisiac formulae.'[9] Pliny also prescribes the three circles and the facing towards the west.[10]

Delatte seems to consider this rite to be important. He says:

> Le tracement du cercle magique, ou le circuit que l'on fait autour de la plante, me paraît donc viser un triple but. D'abord et essentiellement, il signifie une prise de possession de la plante avec ses vertus et sa personnalité: la plante est 'cernée', comme on dit en Bretagne. D'autre part, il purifie la plante et la rend plus apte en dégageant ses qualités de toute souillure naturelle ou démoniaque, à produire l'effet médicinal ou magique auquel on la destine. . . . Enfin, il la protège contre les influences étrangères qui pourraient annihiler ses vertus ou, tout au moins, en frustrer l'herboriste: antipathie, ensorcellement, action vengeresse

[1] Ibid. cxxxii. 1.
[2] *Leechbook III*, i.
[3] *Lacn.* 4 (XIV): plant unidentified.
[4] Ibid. 44 (LXXVIII).
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxxii. 2.
[6] *Leechbook I*, lxxxvi. Cf. also *A.S. Herbal*, xciii. 2 and clxxix.
[7] e.g. in Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxi. 94.
[8] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1.
[9] Theophrastus, IX. viii. 8.
[10] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 94.

des divinités propriétaires ou des démons protecteurs des plantes, hostilité de ces bêtes malfaisantes (malae bestiae[1]) que le ps.-Apulée (92. 8) voit rôder autour de l'herboriste et qu'il cherche à enchanter.'[2]

The verb *bewrítan* (to scratch or inscribe) is also used in connexion with fiveleaf or cinquefoil. 'For head sore, take the herb fiveleaf, scratch it three times with the least finger and with the thumb; heave it up then from the earth, and rub it very small and bind it on the head: then the ache will be lessening.'[3]

The ceremony to be performed at the gathering of helenium is complicated and includes many points of interest which I have italicized in the translation:

> Go on Thursday evening, *when the sun is set*, where thou knowest that helenium stands; then *sing* the Benedicite and Paternoster, and a litany, and *thrust thy knife into the wort*, and let it remain therein and go away; go back again next day *when day and night just divide*; at that same twilight *first go to church* and cross thyself and commend thyself to God; then go *in silence*, and though anything soever of an awful sort[4] or man approach thee, say not thou to him any word, ere thou come to the wort, which on the evening before thou markedst; then sing the Benedicite, and the Pater noster, and a litany, delve up the wort, let the knife remain sticking in it; go back as quick as thou art able to the church, and *lay it under the altar* with the knife; let it lie till the sun be up, *wash it* then and make it into a drink, and bishopwort and *lichen off a crucifix* . . . and *score with a sword round about* it on four sides a cross, and [let the man] drink the drink after that: it will soon be well with him.[5]

Various herbs require prayers to be said over them at the time of gathering. Such are the wallwort (dwarf elder, *Sambucus ebulus*)[6] and the castor-oil plant.[7] For wallwort the charm runs: 'Ere thou carve it off, *hold it in thy hand*, and say thrice nine times, "Omnes malas bestias canto", . . . then carve it off with a very sharp knife into three parts, and the while that thou be doing this, *think of the man* whom thou wouldst heal with it, and when thou goest thence, *look not about thee*' (italics mine). The operator is to pause while he repeats his formula, holding the plant as if to make it cognizant of his wishes; he is also to think of his patient—again so as to

[1] See third paragraph below.
[2] A. Delatte, *Herbarius*, p. 78.
[3] *A.S. Herbal*, iii. 4.
[4] i.e. elf or devil. The rather clumsy phraseology is probably due to a desire to avoid infringing the name taboo.
[5] *Leechbook III*, lxii.
[6] *A.S. Herbal*, xciii. 2.
[7] Ibid. clxxvi.

particularize the use to which the charm is to be put. The castor-oil plant is to be addressed thus: 'Herb ricinus, I pray that thou be present at my incantations, and that thou avert hail and lightning and all tempests, through the name of Almighty God, who did cause thee to be born.' This is first given in Latin and then translated into Anglo-Saxon.

When the *Paternoster* is to be recited, the plant is in each case to be wrenched up at the phrase 'deliver us from evil', the closing words of the prayer.[1] It appears from penitentials that the Church approved of the recitation of Christian prayers, e.g. the *Paternoster*, at the gathering of herbs. If a man used other charms he was doing what was unlawful. Such are included as malefactors in the penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus, bishop of Exeter (1161–86): 'Qui in colligendis herbis medicinalibus aliquod carmen dixerit excepto divino S. Pater Noster et Credo in Deum, et hujusmodi.'[2]

The famous prayer to the Earth quoted by Singer[3] was apparently used on the occasion of gathering, since it is preceded in the Montpellier version by the words 'Incipit precatio terre quam antiqui pagani obseruabant uolontes colligere herbas'.[4] At the end of the *Lacnunga* there are two Latin herb benedictions.[5]

iv. *Locality*

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* often makes a point of the habitat of a plant, since its efficacy was increased when the locality was unusual or difficult of access. Herbs from 'holy places' were naturally held in great esteem. A foreign plant (so often the case in the *Herbal*, since pseudo-Apuleius wrote in the south of Europe) had greater prestige than a native, though foreign plants would naturally not be available in England at that period. Knotgrass[6] is produced on barrows,[7] and in other places; this connexion with

[1] e.g. *Leechbook I*, xlvii. 1, and *Lacn.* 47 (LXXXIII).

[2] Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Faustina A. VIII, fo. 32 (quoted in Wright, *Reliquiae antiquae*, vol. i, p. 286). Cf. also the second Penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, ii. 23: 'homini Christiano certe non permissum est herbarum collectionem cum incantatione aliqua, nisi cum "Pater noster", et cum "Credo", vel cum prece aliqua quae Deo convenit'.

[3] Singer, *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1919–20, ix. 372–3. See also Grattan and Singer, pp. 45–46.

[4] Montpellier MS. F. 277: cf. A. D. Nock, 'Some Latin spells', *Folk-lore* 1925, xxxvi. 93–95.

[5] *Lacn.* CXCI, CXCII.

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, xix. 1.

[7] *Beorg*, possibly only a mound or a hill.

the dead gave it greater efficacy. Similarly 'lithewort'[1] 'is produced about burial-places [*byrgen*] and on barrows, and on walls of houses which stand against downs'. 'Wall-pennywort'[2] 'is produced on roofs and on barrows'. Walls or roofs of houses, being unusual places, also increased the efficacy. 'The red nettle that groweth through into a house' appears in the *Lacnunga* as an ingredient of a recipe for elf-shot.[3] Dittany 'is produced in the island which is called Crete, and on the mountain which is called Ida'[4]—holy ground in ancient days. Pliny says 'this plant grows nowhere but in Crete', and even there 'is found growing in a very limited locality'. He goes on to say that

> there has long been this impression with reference to Crete, that whatever plant grows there is infinitely superior in its properties to a similar plant, the produce of any other country; the second rank being given to the produce of Mount Parnassus. In addition to this, it is generally asserted that simples of excellent quality are found upon Mount Pelion in Thessaly, Mount Teleuthrius in Euboea, and throughout the whole of Arcadia and Laconia.[5]

The connexion with Pelion is obvious, since this was the home of Chiron, a traditional founder of Greek medicine. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says that Chiron was the first to use mugwort for healing purposes,[6] and that feverfew and the herbs then known as the 'centaureae' were named after him as their discoverer.[7] Thessaly is otherwise traditionally the home of magic and sorceresses.[8] Suidas says that, according to tradition, Medea in her flight dropped there her basket of magic herbs, and that they took root.[9]

(*d*) *General magical properties of plants*

i. *Sex in plants*

Various plants are mentioned in Anglo-Saxon recipes as being both male and female, but these terms did not mean what we imply by them today.

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xxix. 1.
[2] Ibid. xliv. 1.
[3] *Lacn.* 75 (CXXXIV).
[4] *A.S. Herbal*, lxiii. 1.
[5] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 53.
[6] *A.S. Herbal*, xiii. 4.
[7] *A.S. Herbal*, xxxvi. 1. The *Herbal* indicates that the herb 'feverfuge' was then called 'centaurea minor'. The figure of a centaur carrying a plant appears also on a stone at Meigle on the borders of Perthshire and Forfarshire. It is illustrated by J. Romilly Allen in *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, 1903, vol. iii, p. 298.
[8] Horace, *Epodon*, 5. 45–46; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 2.
[9] Suidas, *Lexicon*, vol. i, 1834, col. 1888: *φασὶ δὲ ὅτι ἡ Μήδεια φεύγουσα κίστην ἐξέλαβε φαρμάκων ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀνέφυσαν.*

Thus of pulegium (pennyroyal) it is stated: 'This wort is of two kinds, male and female. The male has white blossoms, and the female has red or brown; either is beneficial.'[1] The same is the case with southernwood, and here again 'they have in all things alike might against the things' for which the plant is prescribed.[2] Presumably the herb *hymele* was also known to have two sexes, since the female (*eówo-humele*) occurs in a prescription.[3]

As with pulegium, so with mugwort, the sex may be detected by the difference in colour of the blossoms. 'If one is to have mugwort for a remedy, then let one take the red for the cure of a male and the green for the cure of a female.'[4] In colour symbolism, red signifies the male principle, while green signifies the human mother and fertility. The colours here, therefore, are those one would expect.

Virgil hints at the difference in sex being made use of for sympathetic magic, in the passage: 'Burn resinous twigs and male frankincense [mascula thura], that I may try by magic rites to turn my [male] lover's sense from sanity.'[5]

Both Pliny and Dioscorides refer to a male and female species of mandragora. Pliny tells us that the leaves of the former are large like those of the garden sorrel, while those of the latter are small and 'narrower than lettuce'.[6] The fruit of the male is twice as large as that of the female. Medieval illustrations of the mandrake sometimes show the root as a male body, sometimes as a female one. For example, that in MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III, fo. 57 is male, while that in MS. Harley 5294, fo. 43 (twelfth century) is distinctly female, and has long hair flowing over the shoulders.[7] Writing of Assyria Campbell Thompson says that sex in plants was recognized, but apparently only in the date palm properly. He points out that the term 'male' is applied to the mandrake (*Namtar*).[8] The sex of plants before the advent of modern science has been dealt with by Singer, who concludes that, with the possible exception

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xciv. 1.
[2] Ibid. cxxxv. 7.
[3] *Leechbook III*, 61. See p. 360.
[4] *Lacn.* 111, (CLXXVIII). See p. 220.
[5] Virgil, *Ecl.* viii. 65–67.
[6] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xxv. 94.
[7] This illustration is reproduced by J. F. Payne as Fig. 5 of his *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 1904. MS. Ashmole 1431 has two illustrations of the mandrake, male and female. They are reproduced in Plate 2 of *The Herbal of Apuleius Barbarus* (*MS. Bodley 130*), 1925 (published for the Roxburghe Club).
[8] R. Campbell Thompson, *The Assyrian Herbal*, 1924, pp. xix–xx.

of the group which includes the palms, descriptions of so-called males and females in the classical ancient literature relate usually to different species.[1] This was the extent of the knowledge possessed by the Anglo-Saxon writers.

ii. *Luminous plants*

Several plants are mentioned in Anglo-Saxon recipes as shining by night. One is called 'asterion'. The plant was evidently not found in England, and in the manuscript of the *Herbal* a blank space is left for the vernacular name. The *Herbal* says that it 'shines at night as a star in heaven, and he who, not knowing [what it is], sees it, supposes that he sees an apparition, and being thus frightened, he is ridiculed by herdsmen and by such men as know the virtues of the wort'.[2] The peony, named according to the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* after 'Peonius, the chieftain' (*ealdor*), is also 'most often met with and gathered by herdsmen at night', since 'it shines at night as a light vessel'.[3] Pliny says of the peony that it should be gathered at night, but does not mention its shining.[4]

The herb which is called 'aglaophotis' in the *Herbal* is stated to shine at night as a flame,[5] but the whole description is taken over from Dioscorides, and the writer evidently did not equate the plant with any native herb. Cockayne suggests[6] that it may have been the peony. The mandrake 'shines at night altogether like a lamp', by which it may be recognized by the intending gatherer.[7]

Delatte[8] points out that plants which shine by night are especially connected with the moon and that they are used medicinally for curing diseases, such as lunacy and epilepsy, which are affected by the moon. All the plants just mentioned, except 'aglaophotis', are prescribed by the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* as antidotes for mental diseases.

This shining is a rare occurrence in plant magic. It occurs, however, with the herb 'baaras' which is described by Josephus[9] and also with the 'cynospastus' or 'aglaophotis' of Aelian,[10] both of which may have been variants of the mandrake.

[1] Singer, *Studies in the History and Methods of Science*, vol. ii, 1921, p. 86.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, lxi. 2.
[3] Ibid. lxvi. 1.
[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 10 and xxvii. 60.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxi. 1.
[6] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. 301, note (*b*).
[7] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1.
[8] Delatte, *Herbarius*, p. 145.
[9] See p. 331.
[10] See p. 332.

'It is possible', says Gesner, 'that even as among other natural objects which shine only by night, so also herbs may shine during the night although hitherto unknown to us.' Gesner is the author of a tract entitled *De raris et admirandis herbis, quae, sive quod noctu luceant, sive alias ob causas, lunariae nominantur* (1669).[1] In this he also repeats the classical descriptions of 'aglaophotis' and 'baaras'.

Phipson discusses the possibility of plants being luminous.[2] He says that the daughter of Linnaeus observed luminous radiations from a bed of orange nasturtiums at twilight in June and July of the year 1762, and that the same phenomena have been seen by other naturalists, again in the case of yellow flowers, and especially at sunset. This, however, was only when the air was highly charged with electricity. The phenomenon was apparently due to the state of the atmosphere and not to inherent qualities of the plants themselves.

Sir James Frazer says that 'the Arabs call the mandrake "the devil's candle" on account of its shining appearance in the night, from the number of glow-worms which cover the leaves. . . . The Moors of Andalusia called the plant . . . "lamp of the elves" because its stalk shone by night.'[3] The presence of the glow-worm appears to be another practical explanation of 'plants which shine by night'. Possibly the 'asterion' and the 'peony' also possessed something which especially attracted glow-worms.

(*e*) *Plants with particular magical properties*

Pecularities of form, such as were supposed to be found in the root of mandrake, attracted special attention; and when a plant had acquired a magical reputation other magical powers were attributed to it, though these had no original connexion with it. Complicated ceremonies were naturally popular with the rhizotomists, as they would tend to strengthen the belief in the magical powers of a plant and so add to its 'commercial value'.

i. *Mandrake*

Probably the most important of all these plants is the mandrake or mandragora. *Mandragora officinarum* belongs to the order Solanacea, and is one of the potato family.

[1] Published at the end of T. Bartholinus, *De luce hominum et brutorum*, Hafniae, 1669.

[2] T. L. Phipson, *Phosphorescence*, 1862, pp. 79–87.

[3] J. G. Frazer, 'Jacob and the mandrakes', *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1917, viii. 72.

The mandrake was known to the Babylonians and Hebrews. It occurs in the Hippocratic pharmacopoeia, is mentioned by most classical and post-classical writers on medicine, such as Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Celsus, Pliny, Apuleius, Paul of Aegina, and Avicenna, and occurs throughout the Dark Ages and medieval times. Magical practices associated with it increased as time went on.

Mattioli says that 'both kinds are frequently found in several parts of Italy, but especially on Mount Garganus in Apulia'.[1] The mandrake does not grow in England, and the Anglo-Saxon therefore had no personal acquaintance with it. His illustrations were copied, and his information about it was translated, from classical sources.

No description of the plant itself is given in the Anglo-Saxon text, except that it 'is great and distinguished of aspect'.[2] (It is obvious from this that the plant had not been seen.) An illustration was therefore desirable. Nothing that could really be called a stem is shown in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript, or any other illustration that I know of. This is correct if the ancient mandragora is the same as the modern mandrake. Dioscorides described it as having no stem, but Pliny incorrectly states that it has one.

The illustration in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript,[3] in that of 1460,[4] and also in the earliest printed pseudo-Apuleius (by Philip de Lignamine, Rome, *c.* 1481), all show the root as a human body. In the 1460 manuscript there are hands and fingers, while the Anglo-Saxon shows a number of small roots at the ends of the arms and legs. The hips are more pronounced in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript; but there are no knees, though in the fifteenth-century manuscript the knees are fairly clearly defined.

All three illustrations follow the classical tradition, since the mandragora is called *ἀνθρωπόμορφον* by Pythagoras.[5] Avicenna says it is called mandragora because it bears the likeness of a man.[6] Campbell Thompson, however, makes an interesting suggestion as to the real origin of the name. In Assyria, he says, the word Namtar (mandrake) means

[1] P. A. Mattioli, *Commentarii in Dioskoridem*, Basle, 1674, p. 759.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1.
[3] Brit. Mus., MS. Cotton Vitellius C. III.
[4] Brit. Mus., MS. Addit. 21115.
[5] Dioscorides, iv. 76.
[6] Albertus Magnus, *On Plants*, 6. 2. 12.

the 'plague-god plant', or as we may say 'devil-plant', frequently defined as male, used in some sickness where sleep is concerned, and especially as an anodyne for toothache. . . . Our word 'mandrake' is thus merely the Assyrian word Plague-god plant slightly changed by the merchants who introduced the word into Europe as *Μανδράγορα*; truly a very little way from NAM. TAR. IRA by a simple inversion of *n* and *m*'.[1]

The root of the mandrake is large and striking in form. It is thick and bulbous at the top and is forked so as to suggest legs.

The Anglo-Saxon manuscript shows the dog attached to one of the rootlets which form the left foot; the 1481 edition shows it attached to the right leg, while the fifteenth-century manuscript does not show a dog at all. The earliest extant manuscript showing a dog is the early sixth-century MS. Juliana Anicia. On fo. 4*b* of this manuscript there is an illustration which shows the goddess Discovery (Heuresis) offering a mandrake to Dioscorides. To the right leg of the mandrake a dead dog is attached by a cord.[2]

In the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* there is little that is magical about the mandrake except the instructions for gathering it and for its use in expelling all evils from a house.[3] Its anthropomorphic appearance is indicated in the text as well as in the illustration. For gout one is required to 'take of the right hand of this wort, and of the left'. For spasmodic action of the sinews one is to 'take from the body of this wort'. The instructions for gathering given in Cotton Vitellius C. III are as follows (italics mine):

> Thou shalt in this manner take it: when thou comest to it, then thou perceivest it by this, that it *shines at night* altogether like a lamp. When first thou seest its head, then do thou instantly *make a scratch around*[4] *it with iron*, lest it fly from thee. Its virtue is so great and so splendid, that it will immediately *flee from an unclean man* when he comes to it; hence . . . do thou make a scratch around it with iron: and so shalt thou delve about it, that thou *touch it not with the iron*, but thou shalt earnestly with an ivory staff dig the earth. And when thou seest its hands and its feet, then tie thou it up. Then take the other end, and *tie it to a dog's neck*, the dog being hungry: next cast meat before him, so that he may not touch it, unless he jerk up the wort with him.[5]

[1] R. Campbell Thompson, *The Assyrian Herbal*, pp. 188–90.

[2] A reconstruction of this illustration is given by Singer in his *Studies*, vol. ii, p. 62.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 7.

[4] A.S. *bewrit*, inscribe, but presumably a clerical error for *bewrīð*, begird, since the Latin original is *circumducere*.

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 1. The Anglo-Saxon version omits the following, which appears in the Latin version: 'If any one has to have a limb amputated or

This passage contains five points of importance as regards the magical properties of the mandrake: It shines by night; the gatherer must be clean; it must be marked round with the all-powerful iron, partly to keep it within the circle since it was considered to be a demon and partly for the practical reason that the circle would keep the iron, which must not touch the plant itself, at a sufficient distance; it must be dug up with an ivory staff because of the iron taboo;[1] and it must be jerked out of the ground by a dog. This version does not mention the consequent death of the dog—presumably as a substitute for the man who removed the plant from the ground[2]—or the shriek emitted by the plant, both of which occurrences are mentioned in other versions. According to Grimm[3] the dog employed must be black and without a single white hair on him.[4] The shrieking of the mandrake is also referred to by Ben Jonson in the passage, 'I last night lay all alone on the ground, To hear the mandrake groan'.[5] The words are spoken by a witch after she has been gathering mandrakes.

The Irish *trein-luibh* ('herb of power') must be removed from the ground by having a dog or cat tied by a thread to its stump. It was used for curing the falling sickness, the animal having convulsions instead of the patient.[6]

The three following stories resemble the Anglo-Saxon version so closely that, though the plants mentioned are different in name, they obviously refer to the mandrake of romance. I have italicized certain points of resemblance. Josephus tells the following story:

In the valley which encompasses the city [of Macherus], on the north side, there is a certain place called Baaras, which produces a root of the same name with itself. Its colour is like that of flame, and *towards the evening it sends out a certain ray like lightning*. This is not easily taken by such as would do it, but recedes from their hands, nor will yield itself to be taken quickly [except under certain conditions], and then *it is certain death to those that touch it*, unless anyone take and hang the root

cauterized or cut, let him drink an ounce and a half in wine and he will sleep so long that the limb may be cut off without pain or feeling.' This is printed in the Lignamine edition. Payne thinks it is the earliest notice of surgical anaesthesia in a Latin book, though the original observation came from Dioscorides.

[1] See p. 229.

[2] Pliny says of the plant 'cynocephalia', that 'if a person takes it out of the ground entire, he will die upon the spot' (*Hist. Nat.* xxx. 6).

[3] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. iii, p. 1202.

[4] See p. 216.

[5] Ben Jonson, *Masque of Queens*, ll. 163–4.

[6] J. Windele, 'Irish medical superstition', *Proc. Kilkenny Archaeol. Soc.*, 1865, n.s., v. 317–18.

itself down from his hand, and so carry it away. It may also be taken another way without danger, which is this: they *dig a trench quite round* about it till the hidden part of the root be very small, then they *tie a dog to it*, and when the dog tries hard to follow him that tied him, this root is easily plucked up, but the dog dies immediately, as if it were instead of the man that would take the plant away: nor after this need anyone be afraid of taking it into his hands. Yet after all this pain in getting, it is only valuable on account of one virtue it has, that if it be only brought to sick persons, it quickly drives away those called demons, which are no other than the spirits of the wicked, that enter into men that are alive and kill them, unless they can obtain some help against them.[1]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* also gives the mandrake as a remedy for devil sickness or demoniacal possession.[2]

The second story is told by Aelian.[3] The plant is called 'cynopastus '(i.e. 'dog-dug') or 'aglaophotis' which shines by night. It is recognized by its shining, and marked that it may be known again by daylight. The diggers next take a hungry dog, tie him to the plant and then throw him meat. He pulls up the plant, but dies 'if the sun sees the roots'. He is buried with secret rites by the diggers, since he has died for their sake. This plant also is said to be a remedy for 'devil sickness' (possibly epilepsy).

The third story, that of the Kâhîna (i.e. splendid) root, is told by Budge when dealing with Syrian native prescriptions:

Know thou that this root was the firstborn of all the roots which came up from the earth, and King Solomon was wont to use it. . . . When thou wishest to pull up this root, *cleanse thyself* from impurity . . . and keep fasting until thou seest the stars. And come thou to this root on the sixth day of the month îyyâr, and say thou to it, 'Peace be to thee, O Kâhîna Root'. . . . And every evening when thou goest to it thou shalt say unto it, 'Be thou well, O splendid root, with beneficent health'. . . . And on the fourth day come in the morning before sunrise, and *dig up the ground on all four sides* of it, to the depth of a cubit on each side. Then bring a *black dog*, and tie one end of a rope round his neck, and tie the other end of the rope to that root, and then smite the dog until he pulleth this root up out of the ground. And when thou hast pulled it up, bring a thin plate of gold or silver, and tie it up in a piece of new, clean linen, and bury it in the place where the root was,[4] and cover it over.[5]

[1] Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, vii. 6 (iii).
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 5.
[3] Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, xiv. 27.
[4] i.e. compensation, instead of the life of the dog.
[5] E. A. Wallis Budge, *Syrian Anatomy . . . or the Book of Medicines*, vol. ii, 1913, p. 708–10.

The root is a panacea for many evils. For example,

> If thou goest a journey, and dost wear it on thy person, thou shalt not be afraid of devils or of thieves. . . . It will also heal the bites of snakes. . . . If it be placed in a ship, it will drive storms away from it. If they place it under the threshold of a house, it will not permit any evil thing to enter therein.

Theophrastus says, 'One should draw three circles round the mandrake with a sword, and cut it with one's face towards the west; and at the cutting of the second piece, one should dance round the plant, and say as many things as possible about the mysteries of love.'[1] And again he says, 'the leaf of this they say . . . is useful . . . for sleeplessness and for love potions.'[2]

These last two passages introduce another magical attribute—the fact that the mandrake is supposed to excite love. For this reason it is dedicated to Aphrodite throughout the East. Hence also it should be gathered on Friday, the day of Venus.[3] A Middle English *Bestiary* of about the middle of the thirteenth century, speaking of elephants, says 'they are so cold by nature that they think of no lasciviousness till they partake of a plant whose name is mandragora'.[4] The passage goes on to say that they beget but one offspring, nor do they have a second even if they live for three hundred years. This bestiary closely resembles the *Physiologus*, where the corresponding passage runs as follows: 'The female seeks out the so-called mandragora plant and partakes of it: straightway she is inflamed, and going to the male, she gives him the plant.'

The best-known story of the use of the mandrake as a love-charm occurs in the Bible.[5] The plant is found in the fields by Reuben, and given by him to his mother Leah on the night of the conception of Issachar. Rachel tries to beg it from Leah, hoping thus to cure her own sterility.[6]

[1] Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants*, IX. viii. 8. [2] Ibid. IX. ix. 1.

[3] See p. 320, and Rendel Harris, *Ascent of Olympus*, Manch., 1917, pp. 131 ff.

[4] Bestiary in Brit. Mus. MS. Arundel 292, ll. 610–13, in *Old English Miscellany*, ed. R. Morris (E.E.T.S., o.s. 49, 1872).

[5] Genesis xxx. 14 ff.

[6] See J. G. Frazer, 'Jacob and the mandrakes', *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1917, viii. 57. The ginseng, according to De Groot, is the Chinese representation of the mandrake—thus widely is its magical reputation spread. This plant is thought to be from the fragments of a bright star, and is therefore *luminous*. Its roots are forked, and therefore remind one of the *human shape*. Like man again, it has a dual soul, one borrowed from the earth and the other from heaven. It 'owes

ii. *The nine magic herbs of the* Lacnunga

The *Lacnunga* contains a cycle of pagan charms in which nine herbs are dealt with individually.[1] The last section of this cycle[2] is in prose and contains instructions for the use of the preceding charms. It also contains the names of nine herbs, and there is a difference between the two lists. The order of the herbs in each recipe is as follows:

Entry LXXIX: (i) Mugwort. (ii) Waybroad. (iii) Stune. (iv) Stithe. (v) Attorlothe. (vi) Maythe. (vii) Wergule. [(viii) Chervil. (ix) Fennel.]

Entry LXXXII: (i) Mugwort. (ii) Waybroad. (iii) Lambscress. (iv) Attorlothe. (v) Nettle. (vi) Maythe. (vi) Crabapple. (viii) Chervil. (ix) Fennel.

Grattan and Singer suggest that the two lists may most easily be brought into concord by supposing that, in Entry LXXIX, section (v) on Attorlothe has been displaced.[3]

The text of this charm cycle is corrupt in several places. In the past it has been commented on and emended by several scholars, notably by Cockayne, Wülker, Bradley, Grendon, Magoun. The latest critical commentaries are by Storms and by Grattan and Singer respectively. In the following comments on the herbs mentioned I have followed Grattan's text, but the suggested alterations of Storms and his comments have been borne in mind.

I have dealt with the ten herbs mentioned in the two lists given above in the following order: (i) Mugwort. (ii) Waybroad. (iii) Stune. (iv) Lambscress. (v) Stithe (nettle). (vi) Attorlothe. (vii) Maythe. (viii) Wergule (Crabapple). (ix) Chervil. (x) Fennel.

Storms points out that the charm probably consisted of nine parallel passages, each dealing with a separate herb, but that only the first three passages are apparently now complete. In each of these three passages the story of the herb's power over poison, infection, the evil thing wandering through the land, is described.

its supposed curative virtue to an animation borrowed from the earth'. It is a panacea for most ills, promotes vitality, and is considered, again like the mandrake, to be a powerful stimulant of the sexual organs, and is therefore taken to increase progeny and as a cure for impotence. It is said to wail like a child, especially when it is uprooted, an echo of the mandrake when the dog drags it from the ground. (De Groot, *Religious System of China*, vol. vi, pp. 315–16.)

[1] *Lacn.* LXXIX–LXXXII.

[2] Ibid. LXXXII.

[3] Grattan and Singer, p. 151, note 4.

Hence it can now prove sovereign against these evils. Chervil and fennel were imported plants and did not therefore possess the legendary power which the others had in England. The Christian reviser who wrote the last, extant, version hence added to their supposed power by stating that each was created by Our Lord as he hung upon the cross.[1] Grattan also notes that these two plants are the only two in the list which are of Latin origin.[2] Since, however, this passage begins 'Then took Woden nine twigs of glory', it seems to me equally probable that the words 'These herbs did the wise Lord create, Holy in the heavens when he hung' might refer to Woden as much as to Christ. Cf. *Havamal*, § 138, 'I know that I hung on a windswept tree for nine whole nights, wounded with a spear and given to Óðinn, myself to myself, on a tree about which no one knows from the roots of what (tree) it springs'.

(i) *Mugwort* (A.S. *mucgwyrt*). The opening stanza dealing with mugwort (ll. 1–6) is as follows:

> Have thou in mind, Mugwort, what thou didst reveal,
> What thou didst establish at the mighty denunciation.
> Una is thy name, oldest of herbs.
> Thou art strong against three, and against thirty.
> Thou art strong against venom, and against the onflight
> Thou art strong against that evil She, that fareth throughout the land.

Mugwort seems to have been some species of *Artemisia*. Bosworth and Toller identify three species in the *Leechdoms*, *A. vulgaris*, *A. dracunculus* (tarragon), and *A. Pontica*. This is evidently taken from Cockayne's notes on the *Herbal*, sections xi–xiii. But only the first of these is a native of England. Storms accepts without comment the identification *A. vulgaris*, which fits the description of the native species given in section xi of the *Herbal*. While Singer does not specifically rule out this identification, he accepts that of *A. absinthium* for 'wormwood' (*wermod*).[3]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, as is mentioned above, devotes three sections (xi–xiii) to mugwort. Of the native species (*A. vulgaris*) it says that if a man carries this plant with him on a journey, he will not feel much toil therein.[4] It also says that 'it puts to flight devil sickness . . . and also it turns away the eyes of evil men'. Of the

[1] G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 1948, pp. 193–95.
[2] Grattan and Singer, p. 155, note (1).
[3] Ibid., p. 88.
[4] *A.S. Herbal*, xi. 1. This is derived from Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxvi. 89: 'artemisiam alligatam qui habet viator negatur lassitudinem sentire'.

third variety it says 'if the root of this herb be hung over the door of any house, then may not any man damage the house'.[1]

These two uses occur again in a fourteenth-century Middle English manuscript now at Stockholm. Mugwort here appears under the name of *modirworth*.

> Who so in his hond it bere,
> Trawayle of weye schall hym non dere [hurt]:
> And lete it be leyd in ony hows,
> As seyth mayster botanicus,
> It schall out caste þe deuelis myth
> And tornyn wickyd mannys syth.

The manuscript also says later:

> But modir wort moste gaderyd be
> Whyll ye sonne is in ariete.[2]

The magical powers reputed to mugwort seems to have been world-wide. Marcellus says of it, 'Thou shalt gather it in the morning before sunrise, with the left hand.'[3] In France it is called the herb of St. John, and must be gathered fasting before sunrise. In Bohemia and Germany, when worn as a girdle on the eve of St. John, it served as a protection against ghosts, magic, and misfortune. After wearing, if the plant is thrown into the midsummer bonfire, the misfortunes of the wearer are burned with it.[4]

(ii) *Waybread* (A.S. *wegbráde*) (Grattan and Singer prefer the form 'waybroad'). The relevant section in the charm (ll. 7–13) is as follows:

> And thou, Waybroad, mother of herbs,
> From eastward open, mighty within.

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xiii. 2.

[2] F. Holthausen, 'Medicinische Gedichte aus einer Stockholmer Handschrift [MS. Misc. xiv. 4°].' *Anglia*, 1896, xviii. 314.

[3] Marcellus Empiricus, xvi.

[4] J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough: Balder the Beautiful*, vol, ii. pp. 58–61. In China, 'by implanting mugwort (*ngai*), life may be prolonged and agility with a strong constitution acquired'. It was used for exorcizing purposes at midsummer. 'On the 5th day of the 5th month i.e. midsummer . . . they [the Chinese] pluck mugwort, and make dolls of it, which they suspend over their gates, in order to expel poisonous airs or influences. This exorcising virtue was possibly owing to the strong flavour of the plant.' (De Groot, *Religious System of China*, vol. vi, p. 1079.) See also E. A. Armstrong, 'Mugwort lore', *Folklore*, 1944, lv. 22–27, for the spread of the use of mugwort, especially in the East and in Mexico.

Over thee have chariots rumbled, over thee have queens ridden,
Over thee have brides cried out, over thee have bulls snorted.
All didst thou then withstand and dost confound:
So do thou withstand venom and the onflight
And that evil thing that fareth throughout the land.

Waybread is the plantain, and almost certainly *Plantago major*. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* has a section containing twenty-two recipes for waybread, which include two against poison (both of adder and scorpion). There are also many recipes in the *Leechbooks*. The phrase 'from eastward open', or 'facing the morning sun', as it is expressed in the prose version, presumably signifies 'to secure the plant being free from dew'.[1]

(iii) *Stune* (*Stime*). The relevant section in the main charm (LXXIX) is as follows (ll. 14–15):

Stune is this herb named, on stone hath she grown.
She standeth against venom, pain she assaulteth (*stunað*).

Cockayne translates *stíme* in the verse by 'steem', and explains this in his note as 'water-cress'. But in his glossary he identifies it with the nettle. If *stithe* is identified with nettle, it is unlikely that this plant would be included twice, under two different names, in the same charm.

Stune is the name given by Grattan and Singer, *stíme* that by Cockayne—the four upright strokes in the manuscript between *st* and *e* allow for either spelling. But the presence of the verb *stunað* in the next line inspired Grattan to correct Cockayne's rendering.

(iv) *Lambscress* (A.S. *lombes cyrse*, *lambes cerse*). This name occurs in the list of nine plant names in the prose section (LXXXII), and no further particulars are given. It occurs again in the first *Leechbook* (i. 17), where it is equated with cress-seed. Bosworth and Toller identify it with *Cardamine hirsuta*, and Storms accepts this.

(v) *Stithe*. The textual difficulties are perhaps brought to notice more sharply by this herb than by any other. Adopting Grattan and Singer's version, the relevant passage in the main charm (LXXIX) is as follows (ll. 16–20):

Stithe is her name, venom she confoundeth,
She driveth forth the evil things, casteth out venom.
This is the herb which hath fought against snake.

[1] See p. 320.

This is strong against venom, she is strong against the onflight,
She is strong against those evil things that fare throughout the land.

As the numbering of the lines shows, this follows the two lines on *stune* in Grattan and Singer's version, and is followed by the two lines on *attorlothe*. *Stith* means literally stiff or hard. In Cockayne's version the first two of the above lines (ll. 16–17) are made to apply to *stune*, which is said also to be 'stiff'; and the next three lines (ll. 18–20) apply to *attorlothe*, according to his note. He then numbers these three lines as if they applied to the fourth herb, so that instead of describing nine herbs, the charm describes only eight. *Stithe* is regarded as an adjective by Cockayne, and it does not appear as a herb. It is also clear from the punctuation of Cockayne's translation that he thought *stithe* referred to *stune*. Yet in his glossary under *stithe* he refers to this passage and equates the plant with the nettle.

Storms translates *stithe* by 'unyielding', and as he gives each herb a stanza to itself, he obviously regards the word as an adjective referring to *stune*. This leaves him with eight herbs; and in order to make up the nine he displaces two lines (G. and S., ll. 34–35) so as to make the Apple follow 'Wergulu'. It is clear that the Apple becomes his seventh herb. In his notes he does not refer to this displacement, or to his own conception of the names of the nine herbs.

Bosworth and Toller translate *stíþe* by lamb's cress or nettle.

(vi) *Attorlothe*. The relevant lines (ll. 21–22) in the main charm are as follows:

Rout thou now Attorlothe, the less rout the greater,
The greater the less, until to him be remedy from both.

Attorlothe means literally 'venom-loather', and this name is therefore descriptive of its magical properties. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* (sect. XLV) specifically says that it is 'galli crus', and Cockayne identified it with *Panicum crus galli* (cockspur grass). Bosworth and Toller follow this identification. Britten and Holland[1] thought that the herb was the nightshade, and not cockspur grass. It is an ingredient in many Anglo-Saxon recipes.

(vii) *Maythe* (A.S. *maegthe*). The relevant lines (ll. 23–26) are:

Have thou in mind, Maythe, what thou didst reveal,
What thou didst bring to pass at Allerford,

[1] Britten and Holland, *A Dictionary of Plant Names*, p. 19.

That never for flying ill did he yield up his life
Since for him Maythe was made ready for his eating.

The plant is identified as *Anthemis cotula* by Britten and Holland.[1] The significance of the allusion to Allerford is not known.

(viii) *Wergule* (A.S. *wergulu*). The relevant lines (ll. 27–29) are:

This is the plant that Wergule is named,
This did the seal send forth over the high sea,
As cure for the wrath of another venom.

Both Cockayne and Singer[2] equate with the crab-apple (*Pyrus malus*). Storms does not attempt an identification, but thinks the plant here should be *netele* (the nettle).

(ix), (x) *Chervil* and *fennel* (A.S. *fille* and *finule*). The relevant lines (ll. 36–44) run:

Chervil and fennel, great and mighty two,
These herbs did the wise Lord create,
Holy in the heavens when he hung;
He stablished and sent them into the seven worlds,
For poor and for rich, for all a remedy.
This standeth against pain, this assaulteth venom,
This is strong against three and against thirty,
Against bewitchment by little beings.

It has already been mentioned that these are the only two plant names in the list that are of Latin origin. Most editors agree that these lines have been displaced, and that they should really follow line 29.

The recital of the virtues of the herbs is followed by the 'Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden', which in its turn is followed by the 'Pagan Lay of the Magic Blasts' as they have been termed by Grattan and Singer. The former lay begins:

These nine darts against nine venoms.
A snake came crawling, nought did he wound;
Then took Woden nine twigs of glory [*wuldortánas*]
Smote then that adder that in nine bits she flew apart.

It ends:

Now these nine herbs avail against nine spirits of evil,
Against nine venoms and against nine onfliers.

This is followed by a list of the nine venoms which are identified

[1] Ibid., p. 327. [2] Grattan and Singer, p. 56.

by being of various colours: these have already been described in detail when dealing with the magic of colour.

The 'Nine Magic Blasts' are potent against the blisters (*geblǽd*) which the onfliers produce. For a discussion of these passages the reader is referred to Singer's commentary.[1]

A parallel to this Anglo-Saxon lore may be found in rune 45 of the Finnish *Kalevala*, which tells of the Birth of the Nine Diseases.

The instructions for the use of the Nine Herbs charm occur at the end of the next recipe (section LXXXII): 'Work the plants to dust . . . . Sing the charm upon each of the plants . . . and sing into the man's mouth and both ears and into the wound that same charm before the salve be applied'.

iii. *Other magical plants*

Since the mandrake and some of the other herbs to which especially magical properties were attributed do not grow in this country, it seems feasible that their attributes should have been transferred, as time went on and the need arose, to various herbs which did grow in England.

Such plants were mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), which heads the list of the nine magical herbs, and 'vervain' (possibly *Verbena officinalis*, which is common in this country), of which the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says that 'sorcerers (*dryas*) use it for their crafts'.[2] Most of the recipes given by Pliny for this plant are for ceremonial or magical purposes, and various rites are mentioned in connexion with its gathering.[3]

Of 'feltwort' (*Verbascum*, mullein) 'it is said that Mercurius gave this herb to "Iulixe, the ealdorman" [i.e. Ulysses], when he came to Circe, and he after that did not dread any of her evil works'.[4]

[1] Grattan and Singer, pp. 52–56.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, lxvii. 3.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 59.
[4] *A.S. Herbal*, lxxiii. 1.

CHAPTER XXIV

Animal and Mineral Remedies

(*a*) *Animal remedies*

THE number of animal remedies employed in Anglo-Saxon times was few compared with the number of herbal remedies. The *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* of Sextus Placitus is arranged under the animals from which the remedies were derived and not under the diseases which were to be cured, and it was therefore useless to the practitioner for ready reference.

The animals dealt with in this treatise are the badger, hart, fox, hare, goat (both male, *bucca*, and female, *gát*), ram, boar, wolf, lion, bull, elephant, and dog. There seems to have been no reason for translating the section concerning the lion into Anglo-Saxon, since it was unlikely that portions of that animal would be imported so as to be available for medicinal purposes. The only part of the elephant which is mentioned is ivory. On the other hand, the various birds which follow in the Latin version, many of which are found in this country, might have been used by our ancestors in their recipes.

The *Medicina* of Sextus Placitus specifies which part of each animal is to be used and for what purpose. For example, the blood of the badger may be mixed with a little salt for horses which are suffering from murrain, or its brain boiled in oil may be used as a remedy for headache after a bath. Other recipes make use of his liver, hide, &c.

The various animal parts are prepared for internal or external application by mixing them with oil, wine, vinegar, or honey, so as to dissolve them or to make them into salves. The horns of animals are prepared for use by powdering or burning them. Marrow may be dissolved in hot water. Grease may be swallowed in the form of pills; goat-fat, for example, is thus used as a remedy for dropsy.

But the methods employed can hardly have disguised the ingredients, which, considering their extreme nastiness in many

cases, must have often been most obnoxious to the patient. Many would have been more useful as emetics than as medicine.

(*b*) *Mineral remedies*

Minerals were also not commonly used for therapeutic purposes. They may be divided into two main categories: (i) stones, including precious stones, and (ii) metals.

i. *Stones*

The classical authors whose works were read by the Anglo-Saxons mention stones as curative agents. Dioscorides classifies medicinal stones according to the form in which they are to be administered to the patient: the more friable are to be powdered and given in emulsions or potions, but the harder stones are to be worn as phylacteries.

Few stones occur in Anglo-Saxon prescriptions, with the exception of the agate (*gagátes*). This stone belongs to the first category of Dioscorides, as may be judged from the following recipe from the *Second Leechbook*: 'Against an elf and against an unknown charm.[1] Rub myrrh in wine and as much white incense, and shave off a part of the stone agate into the wine, let him drink this for three mornings after his night's fast, or for nine, or for twelve.'[2]

The next chapter contains a long and circumstantial account of the agate. It runs:

> Of the stone which is called agate. It is said that it has eight virtues. One is when there is thunder, it does not injure the man who has this stone with him. Another virtue is, in whatsoever house it is, therein a fiend may not be. The third virtue is, that no venom may injure the man who has the stone with him. The fourth virtue is that the man who has on him secretly the loathly fiend, if he takes in liquid any portion of the shavings of this stone, then soon is shown openly in him, that which before secretly lay hid. The fifth virtue is, he who is afflicted with any disease, if he takes the stone in liquid, it is soon well with him. The sixth virtue is, that sorcery does not hurt the man who has the stone with him. The seventh virtue is that he who takes the stone in drink, will have so much the smoother body. The eighth virtue of the stone is, that no bite of any kind of adder may injure him who tastes the stone in liquid.[3]

[1] A.S. *sidsa*, the only occurrence of the word. Cf. Icelandic *siða* 'to work a charm'. Cockayne translated as 'visitor'.

[2] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 5.

[3] Ibid. lxvi.

Here the first three and the sixth virtues suggest that the stone was carried as an amulet; the fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth that it was soft enough to allow of its being scraped. It is clear that, in these latter cases, the stone now known as the agate cannot have been in the mind of the writer of the charm, since it is excessively hard. Bosworth and Toller give for *gagátes* an alternative rendering 'jet'. This may have been the stone indicated. It was well known to the Romans and is frequently found in their graves. Bede says that jet is found in Britain: 'if put in the fire, adders fly from it'.[1] Both agate and jet are found in other ancient charms as antidotes to poison.[2] The closely allied jasper was also thought to be useful for detecting poison, since it sweats when brought near it.[3]

According to Dr. Joan Evans, 'The belief in the virtue of engraved gems, ridiculed by Pliny, is found neither in Carolingian France nor in Anglo-Saxon England. Its first western manifestations appear in the middle of the twelfth century.'[4] The engraving of charms on gems was the final and perfected stage of magic in the way of periapts, for the requisite prayer could thus be carried and be, theoretically, in continual operation.

Though precious stones were little used in Anglo-Saxon medicine they became important in the magic of Anglo-Norman times, and Dr. Evans gives many examples from the thirteen different Anglo-Norman lapidaries which have come down to us. Most of them derive from the second-century Damigeron.

In one of the recipes which Helias, patriarch of Jerusalem, sent to King Alfred, a white stone with magical properties is mentioned. It is of of the friable variety. The recipe says:

> The white stone is powerful against *stice*,[5] and against flying venom, and against all unknown maladies: thou shalt shave it into water and drink a large quantity, and shave thereto a portion of the red earth, and the stones are all very good to drink of, against all unknown things. When the fire is struck out of the stone, it is good against lightnings and against thunders, and against delusion of every kind: and if a man has gone astray in his way, let him strike himself a spark before him, he will soon be in the right way.[6]

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* i, introduction.

[2] e.g. in the Anglo-Norman version of Marbode's *Lapidary* (12th cent.): xviii (*de gagete*), ll. 442–4.

[3] Brit. Mus., MS. Sloane 1784, fo. 3.

[4] Studer and Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, 1924, p. xvii.

[5] See p. 160.

[6] *Leechbook II*, lxiv.

The part of this charm against lightning is reminiscent of the first virtue of the agate quoted above. Presumably the production of a spark of fire by a human being is sympathetic magic against the fire from heaven.

Special magical properties are connected with stones found in the gizzards of swallows. The *Third Leechbook* says:

> For [*headache*]: seek in the maw (*maga*) of young swallows for some little stones, and mind that they touch neither earth, nor water, nor other stones. Look out three of them; put them on the man . . . he will soon be well. They are good for headache, and for pain of the eyes, and for the fiend's temptations, and night-goers, and *lencten-ádl* and [night]-mare, and *wyrt-forbor*, and bewitching (*malscra*), and incantation (*gealdor*) by evil crafts. It must be big nestlings in which thou shalt find them.[1]

This belief dates back to classical times. Pliny says: 'In [the *maw*] of young swallows there are found little white or pink pebbles, known by the names of "chelidonii", and said to be employed in magical incantations.'[2]

It may be mentioned here that the nests of swallows were used by the Anglo-Saxons as a remedy for eruptions and ulcerations. 'Take a swallow's nest, and break all up together, and burn . . . and rub to dust and mix with vinegar, and smear therewith.'[3] Swallows' nests are prescribed by Pliny for quinsy,[4] and also occur as a remedy in early London pharmacopoeias.

ii. *Metals*

(*a*) *Copper and brass* occasionally appear in prescriptions. The *Lacnunga* gives the following prescription for an eye-salve: 'Take [various herbs and] scrape up small. And lay fresh dairy-butter in water; take then a broad whetstone and rub up the butter with copper on the whetstone that it be right stiff; add then a part of the plants thereto. Smear into a brazen vessel . . . put afterwards into whatsoever vessel thou wilt.'[5] A prescription for headache describes how nine specified herbs should be prepared and then 'put in a brazen vessel: leave therein until it be dark-coloured'.[6]

[1] *Leechbook III*, i.

[2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xi. 79. See also Marcellus Empiricus, viii. 45 (amulet against pains in the eyes). Cf. also Damigeron, xiv; Marbode's *Lapidary*, ll. 255, &c., and the *Physicians of Myddvai*, part ii, § 811.

[3] *Lacn.* 58 (CV).

[4] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 12.

[5] *Lacn.* 16 (XXXVII).

[6] Ibid. 23 (XLIX).

(*b*) The most magical metal was undoubtedly *iron*, probably because of its magnetic qualities. Iron was regarded as being especially capable of inflicting injuries, and charms and remedies are therefore plentiful against blows from iron. For instance, yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) was thus employed, since 'it is said that Achilles the ealdorman . . . healed them who with iron were stricken and wounded'.[1] Agrimony[2] and groundsel[3] were used in the same way.

Some herbs must be gathered by means of iron, while with others iron is taboo. An instance of the former is the sea-holly, for one is required to 'carve it off with a crooked and very hard iron'.[4] Similarly a wound must be opened with iron before the application of this herb for the sting of a scorpion.[5]

Since iron was magical, one also finds special remedies prescribed for wounds caused by it, as distinct from those caused by any other weapon. 'If any one be struck with iron, take [groundsel] at early morning or at midday.'[6] Ritual was also attached to the use of weapons made from iron, the ceremony of gathering helenium being an example.[7]

The smith, as the forger of iron weapons, was invested with magical powers. The charm in the *Lacnunga* which describes the onset of the witches with their darts, says:

> Sat a smith, a knife he sledged,
> Small the iron, woeful the wound.
> Out little spear, if herein it be;
> Six smiths sat; battle-spears they wrought.
> Out, out, spear! not in spear!
> If herein be of iron a fragment,
> Hag's work, it shall melt away.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Take then the knife; put into wet.[8]

Iron taboo has been dealt with under the heading of taboo.[9]

(*c*) *Precious metals*, as such, do not seem to have had special magical properties attached to them, though gold rings occur several times. 'For sore of eyes', the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* says, one

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xc. 1. Cf. also xc. 3.
[2] Ibid. xxxii. 8.
[3] Ibid. lxxvii. 3.
[4] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxxii. 2.
[5] Ibid. clxxiii. 5.
[6] Ibid. lxxvii. 3.
[7] *Leechbook III*, lxii, quoted at length on p. 323.
[8] *Lacn.* 76 (cxxxv).
[9] See p. 229.

should go to knotgrass before sunrise, 'scratch it round about with a golden ring, and say that thou wilt take it for leechdom of eyes.'[1] This idea is still current in certain parts of England.

Sextus Placitus says, 'Lest a child . . . be ill of the falling sickness [i.e. epilepsy], or dream of an apparition, draw a mountain goat's brain through a golden ring, give it to the child to swallow before it tastes milk: it will be healed.'[2]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xix. 5. [2] Sextus Placitus, op. cit., v. 12.

PART 8

Food, Drink, and Diet

CHAPTER XXV

Food, Drink, and Diet

(*a*) *Food supply*

In Anglo-Saxon times the great bulk of the population was engaged in producing food. The eleventh-century *Rectitudines singularum personarum*, which treats of the management of estates, enumerates the services of the oxherd, the shepherd, the cowherd, and the goatherd, and also of the cheese-maker.

Before the days when food was imported into this country from abroad, the physical condition of England's countryside determined to a considerable extent the nature and amount of the food produced. The soil and climate of this country are particularly favourable for mixed farming. The farms were divided, as now, into meadow, pasture, arable land, and woodland. An extensive survey of Anglo-Saxon agricultural conditions, which might be obtained from charters, place-names, and other sources, would be required to show what crops were grown in various parts of the country, and a further survey of the forests, which covered so much more of the surface of England than they do now (together with the extent of the clearings in them), would also be essential. Much of this information, at least for the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, is to be obtained from the Domesday survey.[1]

A great deal of research of this nature has already been done by G. B. Grundy. 'The grazing grounds', he says 'were usually in the more open parts of the woodland, and the dryer parts of the marshes.' He has shown that, from the frequent occurrence of *-denn*, swine-pasture, as a place-name suffix in the Kentish part of the Andredsweald, it may be concluded that this was especially a pig-breeding district in Anglo-Saxon England. Probably pig-meat was commoner in the cottages of the peasants than beef or mutton, which were the diet of the richer folk. But pigs were bred in other forests also, including the New Forest before it obtained that name. 'In Hampshire as elsewhere', says J. C. Cox, 'the Saxon kings

[1] See the series of monographs on Domesday now being issued by Professor H. C. Darby.

reserved large tracts of country, well supplied as a rule with woods and thickets, for the purpose of sport and hunting, whilst at the same time they realised the importance of preserving the woodlands for the pannage of the swine.'[1]

The value of the pasturage was assessed according to the thickness of the bacon on the pig that was bred there. One of the laws of Ine says: 'If pannage is paid in pigs', that is to say, if payment for pasturage is paid in kind, 'every third pig shall be taken when the bacon is three fingers thick, every fourth when the bacon is two fingers thick, and every fifth when it is a thumb thick.'[2] Woodland in Domesday was measured for some counties in terms of the swine it could feed, some villages having woodland sufficient for as many as two thousand swine.[3]

Manwood enumerates five 'beasts of the forest': the hart, the hind, the hare, the wild boar, and the wolf. It is to be assumed that the king and his followers hunted for food as well as for pleasure. Venison, the flesh of the hart and the hind, must also be included among the meats eaten by the upper classes.

One has occasional glimpses of the condition of the countryside in early medieval times. William of Malmesbury, for instance, speaks of the fertility of the vale of Gloucester. He says:

> The whole earth is fertile for produce, here favoured by nature alone, there owing to skill in husbandry. . . . One may see public paths clad with fruit-bearing trees, not grafted by hand of man, but thanks to the quality of the soil itself. . . . It is a region more thickly planted with vines than any other district of England: they are richer in growth and more delightful in flavour. For the wine does not twist the mouth by its tartness, and it falls little short of the sweetness of the French vintages.[4]

Much of the more fertile parts of the country would naturally be reserved for crops. But the soil in those days was often undrained and waterlogged, and the undergrowth of the forest

[1] J. C. Cox, *The Royal Forests of England*, 1905, p. 305. The Anglo-Saxon word for pannage is *æfesen*.

[2] Laws of Ine, 49, § 3. See F. L. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 1922, p. 53. The *O.E.D.* gives 'finger' as a measurement of thickness as ¾ inch. The earliest usage quoted is *c.* 1400.

[3] H. C. Darby, 'The clearing of the English woodlands', *Geography*, 1951, xxxvi. 74.

[4] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, iv. 153, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, 1870, pp. 291–2 (Rolls Series). There are 38 entries in Domesday relating to vineyards.

always tended to creep in on the ploughed lands. Therefore, to quote Grundy again, 'the wide stretches of grassland typical of the chalk downs of the south of England were largely under the plough in Saxon times. The Saxon farmer cultivated light dry soil wherever he could find it, as the Saxon charters of Berkshire show.'[1] Modern agricultural economy has shown that our hills are complementary to our lowlands, and that the two must not be considered apart.

As was stated in the chapter on epidemics, the food supply was often precarious owing to constant harrying of the countryside by the Norsemen, and even by unscrupulous English earls in later days. A typical passage occurs in the *Chronicle* under the year 1010 concerning the Danes in East Anglia: 'For three months they harried and burned, ay, even into the wild fens they went, and there slew men and cattle and burned throughout the fens.' Under the year 1065 the *Chronicle* tells how Morkere and his horde from the north harried Northamptonshire and 'burned houses and corn, and took all the cattle they might come at, that was many thousand . . . so that the shire, and the other shires that are nigh there, were for many winters the worse'.

The scarcity of both corn and cattle after such raids often resulted in a bad famine. The same effect was produced, as in the reign of Edward the Confessor, by a succession of hard winters.

(*b*) *Diet in general*[2]

The general health of a people depends to a large extent on its diet. Before dealing in detail with the diseases of the Anglo-Saxons (and especially their skin diseases), their food and drink must be considered.

Subnormal health and poor physical development follow an insufficiency of health-protective foods (milk, vegetables, fruit, and eggs) and of energy-producing foods (cereals, sugar, and fats). Which of these did the Anglo-Saxons possess and which did they lack? What was their condition of health and physique in consequence?

The diet of the Anglo-Saxons consisted in the main of meat, a certain amount of bread, fish, butter, and eggs, together with beer,

[1] G. B. Grundy, 'The development of the meaning of certain Anglo-Saxon terms', *Archaeol. Journ.*, 1942, xcix. 90.

[2] This section should be read in conjunction with the remarks on digestion: see pp. 397–400.

mead, water, possibly milk, and some wine for the rich. During the summer months they added to these such fresh fruit and vegetables as were grown on the spot.

During the winter months the lack of fresh fruit and of many vegetables must have caused a serious deficiency of vitamins A and C, and a consequent deterioration of health and a lessening of powers of resistance to disease. Our ancestors were aware of this defect in their diet and wished to remedy it if possible. 'One must cleanse away the evil humours before the evils come and grow in the winter and run through the limbs', runs a passage in the *Second Leechbook*.[1] In the early spring, therefore, green herbs were eaten and cooling beverages also were drunk so as to purify the blood. The following passage from the *Vita Samsonis* relates to the monastery of Llantwit which was presided over by St. Illtyd, and presumably the same practice prevailed in others: 'It was the custom . . . to bruise herbs from the garden, such as were beneficial for the health, in a vessel and serve it out in small porringers by means of a small siphon for their health's sake, so that when they came in from saying Terce they found the mixing vessel already prepared with garden herbs.'[2]

It has been said that faulty food, deficient in vitamins, accounts for about a quarter of man's total illnesses. To maintain his biological equilibrium he requires a variety of vitamins, and a severe shortage of any one of them might produce deleterious results. Thus in Anglo-Saxon times a condition of mild scurvy must have afflicted the bulk of the population during the winter owing to a deficiency of the antiscorbutic vitamin C. This was a chronic state until the regular supply throughout the year of fresh food from other parts of the world remedied the deficiency. The Anglo-Saxons knew of the existence of such supplies in other countries, though they could not obtain them themselves in winter. Bede, speaking of the Egyptians, says longingly that 'in the middle of our winter their fields bloom with worts, and their orchards are filled with apples'.[3]

The condition of the teeth, as is known from those found in burials throughout this period, is an indication of the presence of sufficient Vitamin D.

[1] *Leechbook II*, xxx.
[2] T. Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol*, London, 1925, p. 23.
[3] Bede, *De temporum ratione*, 4.

The recurrent famines and consequent murrains among cattle, especially in eastern England during the period of the Danish invasions, must have caused a serious decline in the supply of meat, milk, and butter.

Even during normal times there was a deficiency of vitamin A except during the summer months. The position was stated by Drummond and Wilbraham as follows:

> If, however, as in the case of the medieval [and therefore of the Anglo-Saxon] peasant, little or no green vegetables are eaten, a proper intake of animal fat becomes essential in order to ensure a sufficiency of the vitamin. It must be appreciated that vitamin A passes into milk or egg yolk only if the diet of the cow or hen contains ample supplies of this vitamin. If the supplies fall off the amount of vitamin found in the milk or eggs will decrease and may disappear entirely. Usually the vitamin A value of dairy produce is highest when the cows are out at pasture and the hens running loose on grass. Cows in stall in winter, fed on dried hay . . . yield a milk which tends to become progressively poorer in vitamin A. This is one reason why conditions arising from vitamin A deficiency are more prevalent in the early spring. . . . The general impression we have formed is that the summer was the period when the poor country people were getting sufficient vitamin A. In winter the supply was greatly reduced and in consequence the reserves in the body would be depleted. By the early spring many of these people must have been in a condition of mild or sub-acute A-deficiency.[1]

Information is forthcoming from various sources to show what was eaten and what was drunk in Anglo-Saxon times, especially in the monasteries.

There has survived an amusing dialogue, in Latin with a continuous interlinear gloss in Anglo-Saxon, which was compiled by Abbot Ælfric and his disciple Ælfric Bata.[2] It was intended as an exercise for teaching Latin, but some of the questions and answers are incidentally instructive regarding the diet in a tenth-century monastery. For instance, to the question 'What do you eat each day?' the answer is 'Meat, also herbs and eggs, fish and cheese, butter and beans'. It is noticeable that bread is not included in the list. This suggests that the diet was rich in

[1] J. C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*, 1939, pp. 91–92.

[2] *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway, 2nd ed., 1947. (Methuen's Old English Library.) Also in Wright and Wülcker, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, 1884, vol. i, pp. 88–103.

proteins but poor in carbohydrates. To the question, 'And what do you drink?', the answer is 'ale (*cervisia*) if I have it, or water, if I have no ale.' 'Don't you drink wine?'—'I am not so rich that I can buy myself wine, and wine is not drunk by boys or fools, but by old men and wise ones.' It is noticeable that milk is not mentioned.[1] In another place are enumerated the various kinds of fish which are caught to be sold, presumably as food, to 'town-dwellers'. The river-fish mentioned are 'eels, pikes, minnows, eel-pouts, trout (*sceóta*), and lampreys'. The sea-fish are 'herring, salmon, porpoise, sturgeon, oysters, crabs, mussels, periwinkles, cockles, plaice (*fagc*), sole (*flóc*) and lobsters'. In his statement of the products of Britain in the first chapter of the *Ecclesiastical History* Bede also mentions salmon and eels ('et quidam praecipue issicio abundat et anguilla'). Various other shellfish were known to the Anglo-Saxons: whelk (*weoloc*—the word also signifies the dye obtained from the fish), mussel (*muscelle*), sea-snail (*sǽ snǽgl*), and cuttle-fish (*wásescite*).

There are other records of the meat and drink consumed in monasteries. The Rule of St. Benedict was introduced into Anglo-Saxon monasteries in the seventh century and reintroduced in the reign of Edgar the Peaceful, when the work of their reformation was undertaken by Dunstan and Æthelwold.[2] It contains instructions which regulated the meals, specifying not only what was to be eaten and drunk, but also the hours at which they were to be taken. The information is much fuller than that in Ælfric's Colloquy quoted above. Since the Rule was translated into Anglo-Saxon and rigidly enforced by Æthelwold, it is probable that we have here a true account of what obtained in monastic establishments during the latter half of the tenth century and later.

Chapter 39 of the Rule[3] deals with 'the amount of food', and is as follows:

We believe that it is enough to satisfy just requirements if in the daily meals, at both the sixth and ninth hours, there be at all seasons of the

[1] The twelfth-century *Vita Oswaldi* says that when King Ceowulf became a monk of Lindisfarne in 854 the monks were allowed to drink wine or ale, 'for before that they were wont to drink nothing except milk or water, according to the old tradition of St. Aidan'. (Printed in Simeon of Durham, vol. i, app. 3, p. 361, Rolls Series.)

[2] See pp. 23–24.

[3] *The Rule of St. Benet*, ed. by H. Logeman, 1888, pp. 70–74 (E.E.T.S., o.s. 90). In this version the Anglo-Saxon follows the Latin closely. I have used the translation of the Rule by Cardinal Gasquet, but with the addition of the Anglo-Saxon terms where they are of interest.

year two [different] cooked dishes [*twá gesodene syflian*, a dish to be eaten with bread: Latin, *duo pulmentaria cocta. Twá gesodene sufel* in Schröer's text], so that owing to the infirmity of the various inmates, he who cannot eat of the one may make his meal of the other. Therefore two dishes of cooked food must suffice for all the brethren, and if there be any fruit or young vegetables, these may be added to the meal as a third dish. Let a pound weight of bread suffice for each day, whether there be one meal or two, that is, for both dinner and supper. . . . If, however, the community has been occupied in any great labour, it shall be at the will and in the power of the abbot, if he think fit, to increase the allowance, so long as every care be taken to guard against excess [*oferfyll*: Latin, *crapula*], and that no monk be incapacitated by surfeiting. . . . And the same quantity shall not be given to young children, but a lesser amount than to those older: frugality being maintained in everything. All, save the very weak and sick, are to abstain wholly from eating the flesh of quadrupeds.

This quotation has been given at length because it is of interest as a very human document. It shows St. Benedict's care for his flock, and seems applicable equally to a monastery in our northern climate and to his own at Monte Cassino in the south. The inclusion of fruit and vegetables, when available, is to be noted.

Chapter 40 of the Rule is headed 'Of the measure of drink', and the same consideration is shown for the sick as in the last chapter:

Everyone hath his proper gift from God, one thus, another thus. For this reason the amount of other people's food cannot be determined without some misgiving. Still, having regard to the weak state of the sick, we think that a pint [Latin, *emina*] of wine a day is sufficient for anyone. . . . If either local circumstances, the amount of labour, or the heat of summer require more, it can be allowed at the will of the prior, care being taken in all things that gluttony [*oferfyll*] and drunkenness creep not in.

Chapter 41 deals with 'the hours at which the brethren are to take their meals'. These differ according to the season, 'but from Whitsun, throughout the summer, if the monks have not to work in the fields, nor are oppressed with any great heat, let them fast on Wednesdays and Fridays till None'.

In his monumental work on early Irish monasticism Ryan gives a succinct and documented account of the food in early Irish monasteries.[1] It was considered that food should be taken in

[1] J. Ryan, *Irish Monasticism, Origins and Early Development*, 1931, pp. 386–91.

moderation and should be sufficient to keep body and soul together but no more, otherwise it would 'burden the stomach and suffocate the soul'. That advocated by St. Columban (died 614) was 'vegetables [e.g. peas and beans], flour mixed with water and a little loaf of bread'. At the Irish monastery of Bangor, under St. Comgall, 'bread, vegetables and water constituted the meal', but more variety was introduced later, including milk and milk foods. 'Some of the saints objected on principle to the use of milk, butter and flesh in the monasteries, but this was unusual. None, as far as can be discovered, objected to the use of fish where such could be procured, and few objected to the use of game whose tender flesh, it was argued, was not likely to excite bodily appetites.'

(*c*) *Foods*

The meats[1] which supplied the Anglo-Saxons with their proteins were the flesh of the ox (*hríðer*), sheep, pig, calf (*ȝeong hríðer*), and hart, that is, beef, mutton, bacon, veal, and venison. The flesh of the she-goat is mentioned in the *Second Leechbook* as being slowly digested, and that of the kid (*ticcen*) as being readily digestible.[2] Of birds they ate chickens, geese, ducks (*ened*), and pigeons (*culfre*).

The meat might be boiled (*gesoden*) or roasted (*a-hyrst*). The common folk probably laid in good supplies of salted mutton and bacon (*flicce*, cf. flitch) before the winter began. It has been suggested that as there was always a tendency in the Middle Ages towards an excessive protein diet, the institution of fast-days by the Church was a deliberate attempt to modify this excess.

Whitley Stokes composed a similar list of flesh-foods eaten in ancient Ireland, as far as they are mentioned in the *Book of Lismore*. They include beef, veal, fresh pork, bacon, sheep, and he-goat; also salt meat and fish, especially salmon. He says that the seal appears to have been eaten in Ireland, as it was till lately in Harris.[3]

Goats' milk and ewes' milk were drunk as well as cows' milk. Ælfric's dialogue, already quoted, says that the shepherd milked his ewes twice a day and that he made butter and cheese from their

[1] A.S. *flǽsc*. The A.S. word *mete* signifies food in general. Cf. 'I was an-hungered, and ye gave me *meat*: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink' (Matt. xxv. 35).

[2] *Leechbook II*, xvi. 2.

[3] *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. Whitley Stokes, p. xcvii.

milk. *Cealre* (pressed curds) is mentioned several times in Anglo-Saxon recipes. It seems to have been a jelly made from curds, and may have been the equivalent of the *skir* of the Norseman and of the milk-cheese of today. The word *flét* for cream or curds is cognate with *fleótan*, to float.

Whitley Stokes gives the following milk-products for ancient Ireland: butter, curd, curd-cheese, a hard cheese, and pressed cheese-curds.

For their fats our ancestors were well supplied with butter and nuts. Oil is constantly mentioned in recipes, but the nature of the oil is usually not specified.

Before the introduction of the potato, bread was the chief source of carbohydrate. Various cereals were available, but the more primitive agriculture of those days produced smaller and more uncertain crops than those of today. Barley was probably the staple food-grain in Anglo-Saxon times. It was also used as a fodder for the cattle. *Bere-hláf* signifies barley-bread. It is interesting to note how often barley (*bere*) occurs in place-names, for example, in Berwick (*bere-wíc*) and Barton (*bere-tún*), which both signify barley-village.

The results of research by Jessen and Helbaek have shown the relative frequency of the use of various cereals in Great Britain in prehistoric and early historic times. Husked barley takes the lead in the Anglo-Saxon period, with oats as second in importance.[1]

Anglo-Saxon bread was generally made of wheat. Both *hwæte-gryttan*, coarse-grained meal, and *hwæte-smedeme*, fine wheaten flour, were used. Meal was made also from oats (*áte*), beans, and rye. The same four cereals (wheat, barley, rye, and oats) are mentioned in *Domesday Book* as those then cultivated. The Anglo-Saxons made their meal into a thick *bríw* or porridge, as well as using it for bread.

It must be remembered that honey was the only sweetening agent before the introduction of sugar. Apiculture was therefore an important occupation in Anglo-Saxon times.[2] Honey was obtained from the wild bee (*feld-beó*) as well as from the domesticated variety. That from wild bees is twice prescribed in the *Third Leechbook*.[3]

[1] K. Jessen and H. Helbaek, 'Cereals in Great Britain and Ireland in prehistoric and early historic times', *K. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Biol. Skr.*, 1944, 3, ii. [2] See pp. 428–30. [3] *Leechbook III*, ii. 3 and vi.

The chief fruits available—when in season—were apples, pears, cherries, peaches, and plums. Wild berries, such as the blackberry, could, as now, be had for the gathering. Among the vegetables were peas (*pisan*), beans, lettuces (*lactuca*), parsnips (*feldmore*), and leeks (*porr*). *Enneleác*, onion, is found in glossaries.

(*d*) *Drinks*

There was naturally far less variety in drinks than there is today, and the Anglo-Saxons had but few of the imported drinks which now figure on the menu. But it is possible that the herb gardens of the well-to-do provided materials for drinks as well as for culinary flavourings. It is probable also that various fermented drinks were made from wild flowers and fruits. The Anglo-Saxon word *wyrt* is the same as the modern word 'wort' and signifies the hot-water infusion of any plant. Yeast may have been added to produce fermentation, or the infusion may have been left to ferment naturally.

The composition of a 'light drink' which is prescribed in the *Second Leechbook* for lung disease is interesting in this connexion: 'Take sweet gale (*gagel*: cf. German *gagel*, a myrtle-bush), boil it in wort (*wyrt*), let it stand a little, remove the gale, then add new yeast (*gist*), cover it over that it may rise well, then add helenium, wormwood, betony, marche, and ontre (? radish): give to drink.'[1] Another drink—for wounds—prescribes three herbs, carline thistle, meadow-sweet (*medu-wyrt*), and agrimony: 'boil the herbs in ale, ferment them with yeast (*gebirm mid giste*), give to drink'.[2]

But the favourite drink then was beer (*beór*), which occurs in written records from *Beowulf* onwards. The Anglo-Saxon word for barley is *bere*, that for malt (i.e. dried barley which has germinated and thus softened) is *mealt*, a word cognate with *meltan*, to soften. *Mealt-hús* signifies the malthouse in which it was prepared and stored. They presumably produced their wort (A.S. *mæsc-wyrt*, i.e. the wort in the mash-tub) by mixing the crushed malt with hot water, as is done now. This was fermented by adding to it *beorma* (barm, yeast) so as to produce ale (*ealu*) and beer (*beór*). The word *swátan* (beer) occurs once, in the *First Leechbook*. It is equated, like *beór*, with the *cervisia* which Pliny says was made from cereals in Gaul.[3]

[1] *Leechbook II*, li. 1.
[2] *Leechbook I*, xxxviii. 10.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, xiv. 29.

To produce a stronger 'twice-brewed' (*twi-browen*)[1] ale, the wort would be used instead of water in a second mixture with malt, and this second wort thus formed would be left to ferment. An interesting survival of this term is the 'Twice-brewed' inn near Housesteads on the Roman Wall.

Whether the Anglo-Saxons hopped their beer is a very disputable point. Stowe says in his *Chronicle* that hops were introduced into England from Artois in the reign of Henry VIII. But it seems probable that hops were collected from wild growths and used, together with other herbs, long before they were cultivated in England for brewing purposes.

Professor Nils von Hofsten of Uppsala supports Stowe's evidence. He says that wild hops 'grow more abundantly in England than, for instance, in Northern Europe': nevertheless 'hops were cultivated [here] very late, though not so late as was often believed, but at least in the beginning of the 15th century'.[2]

Cockayne attempts to prove that the herb called *hymele* in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* is the hop-plant, which, as he says, grows wild in English hedges.[3] But the evidence he uses is not convincing. He argues that hops were then grown in Worcestershire, for example, at Himbleton (A.S. *Hymel-tun*) and at Hopwood, for local use, but were not sent to London or the south owing to the difficulties of transport, and that 'the Kentish hops may be a gift from Germany'. He is, however, wrong in deriving Hopwood (A.S. *Hopwuda*, eleventh century) from *hopu* hops, since this name signifies 'the wood in the valley';[4] and though he tries to equate A.S. *hopu* with hops, yet he himself translates the word as *lygistra*, which is privet. The only equivalent which Wright gives for *hymele* is in his eighth vocabulary (tenth or eleventh century) where it is equated with 'uoluula' (? convolvulus).

Grattan and Singer say that 'the plant-vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons was largely, perhaps mainly, of Latin origin'. They equate 'hop' with 'hymele' and 'himulus'.[5] Professor von Hofsten also reminds me that medieval herb-lore, including, of course, Anglo-Saxon, 'is mostly taken from Greek and Latin authors, and has very little or nothing to do with plants of the compiler's own country and their medical use there'. Toller, also, says (in the supplement to

[1] *breówan* is 'to brew'.
[2] Personal communication.
[3] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. ii, pp. ix–x, 392–3.
[4] English Place-Name Society: *Worcestershire*, 1927.
[5] Grattan and Singer, op. cit., pp. 83–84.

his Dictionary) that 'the word [*hymele*] translates several foreign plant-names', and gives as an example 'Hymele volvula' (quoting Wright, see above).

Despite this unsatisfactory evidence Cockayne's interpretation may be supported by these arguments. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* equates *hymele* with bryonia, and then adds that it 'is so praiseworthy that men mix it with their usual drinks'.[1] Cockayne says in a footnote that this remark 'was not said of bryony in the Latin text', but he thinks that in this case the translation refers to *humulus*, the hop-plant.

Bosworth–Toller equate the hop-plant with the A.S. *hymele*, giving as comparisons the Icelandic *humall* and the Danish *humle*.

From the occurrence of the compound *hege-hymele* it is obvious that this plant grew wild in the hedges in Anglo-Saxon times; from that of the compound *eówo-hymele* (female hop-plant?) it would appear that the Anglo-Saxons were aware that it was dioecious, though this is also true of the common bryony with which it is equated in the *A.S. Herbal*.

The evidence forthcoming is not conclusive, but seems to show that the Anglo-Saxons found their beer too sweet for their taste, and that they therefore boiled various herbs with the beer made from the weaker worts. We know that *hymele* was included among these herbs to render the beer more bitter and more thirst-quenching.

The *Promptorium Parvulorum* (1440) defines *bere* as 'a drynke: Hummulina, vel hummuli potus, aut cervisia hummulina'. This also connects beer and hops before the reign of Henry VIII.

The word *beór* is also equated with the *hydromeli* of Pliny, a drink made of honey and water 'exposed to the rays of a hot sun for forty days',[2] and with *mulsum*, which was made from honey mixed with wine or with grape-juice.

Móraþ was a drink formed by boiling down and sweetening wine with mulberries (*mór-beám*). With this word should be compared the Middle High German *móraz*, mulberry wine. The *First Leechbook* prescribes for *circul-ádl* 'a dock that will swim' boiled in old *móraþ*.[3]

Some ale seems to have been imported in Anglo-Saxon times. The compound *wilisc-ealu* occurs several times, but it is difficult

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, lxviii.
[2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, xiv. 20.
[3] *Leechbook I*, xxxvi.

to say if this signifies foreign ale or merely Welsh ale. This and *alomalt* are both found in prescriptions for drinks for *peór*-disease.[1] *Grút*, the wet dregs of malt liquor, is found as an ingredient in recipes, such as that in *Lacnunga* LXXI (see note 1 below).

The Anglo-Saxons also drank mead (*medu*), which was made from fermented honey and water.[2] Tickner Edwardes says:

> There were three kinds of liquor brewed from honey in Anglo-Saxon times. The commonest, or mead proper, which may be taken as the usual drink of the masses, was made by steeping in water the crushed refuse of the combs after the honey had been pressed from them. This would be strained and set aside in earthen vessels until it fermented and became mead. And the longer it was kept, the more potent grew the liquor. Another kind, made from honey, water and the juice of mulberries, was called Morat [see above]; and this, presumably, was the beverage of the more well-to-do. A third concoction, known as Pigment, was brewed from the purest honey, flavoured with spices of different sorts, and received an additional lacing of some kind of wine. Probably this was the mead served at the royal table.[3]

Mulled drinks are mentioned in recipes: two, for instance, are prescribed for liver wounds.[4] In the one case the patient is required to 'drink "mulsa" that is mulled (*gemilscede*)[5] drinks every day, and boiled (*gesoden*) goat's milk and water in which good worts have been boiled'. In the other case he is also to have a 'mulled drink, that is a great deal of boiled (*bewylled*) water in a good deal of honey: from this the scum (*rot*) shall be frequently removed while it is boiling until there be none there: then let it cool and give it to drink'.

Milk was possibly not regarded as a man's drink, though good for infants and invalids. It occurs constantly in recipes.

Wine should naturally be added to this list of drinks. Bede mentions in the first chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History* that Britain produced vines in some places. Grapes would have been grown in monastery gardens so as to provide the wine for the Eucharist.

[1] For *peór*: 'Take quickbeam bark and ash bark and barley stalk. Boil in water; take ale-malt along with the water; brew with the grout (*ʒryt*) along with the water a bowl full of ale; strain; then let stand one night, sweetened with honey. Let him drink nine mornings and . . . take no other liquid' (*Lacn.* 37 (LXXI)).

[2] Mead is still made in England. Mr. S. K. Thorpe told me that in 1938 he obtained some from a cottager in a remote village in Sussex.

[3] T. Edwardes, *The Lore of the Honey-bee*, 8th ed., London, 1917, pp. 17–18.

[4] *Leechbook II*, xix and xx.

[5] Possibly connected with *mel*, honey.

Awilled wín or *ceren*[1] was the term used for new wine just pressed from the grape or boiled down till one-third or one-half was evaporated.

Cockayne says that *hluttor-drenc* (clear drink) was made from wine, honey, aromatic herbs, and spices.[2] He cites a prescription (for making the comparable German *luter dranck*) from the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century).[3]

Lastly, there was always water which might be drunk—as the disciple answers Abbot Ælfric, 'Ale, if I have it, or water, if I have no ale.' There is evidence that during the period of the Roman occupation much of this island was supplied with water by means of pipes and aqueducts, but during the Anglo-Saxon period these amenities no longer existed. But presumably many of the wells from which the Romans had ultimately obtained their water survived, and water from them, together with river water, was obtainable.

As has been mentioned when dealing with paganism, wells, which could have been used for drinking as well as for medicinal purposes, were allowed to function again when they had been blessed by the bishop.

> In Saxon England [says F. W. Robins] natural springs and dug wells probably formed the sole supply. A well, said to be Saxon, lined with chalk blocks, was found in the Magdalen Hospital at Winchester, a city in which numerous old wells, ranging from 11 to 150 ft. in depth, have been found, and a number of wells were found on the site of Saxon Southampton, to the north-east of the mediaeval town.[4]

Whitley Stokes notes the following drinks in the above-mentioned Old Irish source: water, milk (from both cows and ewes), ale, mead, and wine. The word for malt also occurs.

(*e*) *Drunkenness*

Heavy drinking and consequent drunkenness is a charge which is often brought against our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. The drinking of beer is a Teutonic trait: in Germany the 'Bräuhaus' took the

[1] *Ceren* is cognate with Latin *carenum* and Greek *κάροινον*. It is prescribed in *Leechbook I*, i. 17, in a lotion for cleansing the head.

[2] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. ii, pp. 393–4 (Glossary).

[3] St. Hildegard, *Physica*, xxx. ciii (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. cxcvii, cols. 1142, 1170).

[4] F. W. Robins, *The Story of Water Supply*, London, 1946, p. 91.

place of the French café—at least until the Second World War. The scene in the beer-hall of the heroic age as depicted in Anglo-Saxon literature (as 'when Hrothgar's daughter bore the ale-cup to the earls') is one of inebriation alike for the chieftain and for his followers. There were often untoward results.

The position in the ideal monastery was different. Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical records show successive attempts to combat this vice which at intervals gave the monasteries a bad name. The matter is dealt with as early as the latter half of the seventh century in the Penitential of Theodore. The first section of the first book is entitled *De crapula et ebrietate.*[1] It imposes penalties varying in severity, from deposition for a bishop who is habitually drunk to a mere three days' penance for a monk who vomits as a result of overeating and drinking.

The Penitential of Bede, which dates from the first half of the eighth century, includes six clauses *De ebrietate* in its sixth section.[2] Bede deals leniently with the monk who is the worse for drink owing to illness, no penalty being imposed: nor is there any penalty for the monk who vomits as a result of abstinence and not from over-eating.

There seems to have been a recrudescence of drunkenness (as well as of other evils) in the monasteries during the eighth century. In 747 Archbishop Cuthbert held a synod at Clovesho (now identified as probably Mildenhall, Suffolk) 'in order to promulgate canons for the guidance of the Church in Britain'. It was there enacted that 'monks shall not be addicted to the vice of drunkenness, but they shall avoid it as a deadly poison, since the Apostle says that "the drunkard shall not possess the kingdom of God" '.[3]

Sidelights on this period are provided in letters from Boniface and Alcuin to ecclesiastics in England. In these letters there are constant references to excessive drinking among the English monks. Hodgkin quotes, for instance, from a letter written from Germany by Boniface to Archbishop Cuthbert in 747, the year in which the Synod of Clovesho was held: 'In your dioceses, it is said, the evil of drunkenness has greatly increased, so that some bishops, so far from checking it, themselves become intoxicated through excess of drink, and by offering cups unduly large, force others to drunkenness. . . . This evil, indeed, is peculiar to the

[1] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, pp. 177–8.
[2] Ibid., p. 331.
[3] Ibid., p. 369.

heathen and to our race. . . . Let us crush out this sin, if we can, by decrees of our synods.'[1] 'Sint tibi epule non in ebrietate sed in sobrietate', says Alcuin in a letter written in 793 to Higbald, bishop of Lindisfarne;[2] and again in a later letter to the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow: 'Avoid secret drunken orgies as you would the pit of hell . . . for at such feasts devils are present.'[3]

The Penitential of Egbert, which also dates from the latter half of the eighth century, confirms and extends the penalties prescribed in that of Theodore. Both enact that 'if a monk shall vomit owing to his being drunk, he shall fast for thirty days'. In the case of a presbyter or deacon the period is increased to forty days. Egbert adds that 'if a monk or deacon, owing to drunkenness or greediness, shall vomit the Eucharist, he shall do penance for 60 days'. The period of penance is extended to 70 days for a presbyter and 80 days for a bishop. Such provisions indicate a low standard in the Church at the period. Egbert considers delinquents to be drunk when they 'change their mind, when they stutter in their speech, and their eyes are wild and they have vertigo and distension of the belly and pain follows'.[4]

The Rule of St. Benedict again 'insisted on the austerity of the monastic meals' two centuries later.

There are various Anglo-Saxon recipes to cure drunkenness. The following, from the *First Leechbook*, if effective, might have been useful before a carousal. 'In case a man should make himself drunk (*fordrince*)', betony is prescribed 'in water, to be drunk before his other drink. . . . Again, take a swine's lung, roast it, and at night, fasting, take five slices always.'[5] This clearly derives from classical sources. Pliny, in one recipe, prescribes 'a sheep's lights, roasted, eaten before drinking', as a preventive of drunkenness;[6] and in another says that 'the lights of a swine, roasted, are an effective preservative against drunkenness; they must, however, be eaten fasting and upon the same day'.[7]

[1] R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 2nd ed., 1939, vol. ii, pp. 420 and 697, note 6.

[2] Alcuin, Letter 25 in *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, p. 192 (Bibl. Rerum Germanicarum, ed. P. Jaffé, vol. vi, 1873).

[3] Alcuin, Letter 27, ibid., p. 200. See also pp. 191, 194, 251, 841, 846.

[4] Penitential of Egbert, xi. 10. See Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. iii, p. 427.

[5] *Leechbook I*, lxxx.

[6] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, xxx. 51.

[7] Ibid., xxviii. 80.

(*f*) *Impure food*

The Anglo-Saxon penitentials all deal with impure food. It is to be noted that in the more primitive codes of law it is the Church which enforced such precepts as these for the health of the people. Penances were imposed upon those who wittingly, and to a less extent also upon those who unwittingly, contravened the laws of health. Section VII of Bede's Penitential is *De carne immunda*, and runs as follows:

1. He who eats impure flesh, or that of an animal which has died, or one which has been torn to pieces by wild beasts, shall do penance for 40 days, [but] 2. The penalty shall be lighter if this has been rendered necessary through hunger. 3. If a mouse shall have fallen into liquor, let it be lifted out and let the liquor be sprinkled with holy water. If the mouse be dead, all the liquor should be thrown away and not consumed. 4. But if it were a large amount of liquor into which the mouse—or a weasel—fell and died, let it be purified, and let it be sprinkled with holy water, and let it be consumed if it should be expedient.[1]

The Penitential of Egbert further specifies: 'If a mouse or weasel be found dead in flour or in any food or drink, or in curdled milk, let all that part which is adjacent to it be thrown away; what remains may be eaten.'[2]

The eating of horse-flesh was in general forbidden among Germanic peoples in early times. The Penitential of Theodore, however, modifies this by saying: 'Horse[-flesh] is not forbidden, though the custom is not to eat it.'[3] Theodore gives other similar instructions and prohibitions:

Animals which have been mangled by wolves or dogs must not be eaten, nor deer, nor goat, if they have been found dead. . . . Birds and other creatures if they are strangled in nets are not for human consumption, . . . but fish may be eaten since they are of another nature. . . . It is allowable to eat hare, and it is good for dysentery and its hide is to be mixed with pepper for pain.[4]

This injunction concerning fish is modified in the Second Penitential in the eleventh-century MS. C.C.C.C. 190, which says: 'If any one finds a dead fish in a fish-pond and eats it, he shall fast for four weeks . . . but if the dead fish be found in a river, it may be eaten.'[5] Circumstances alter cases, and the law alters as thought alters.

[1] Cf. also Penitential of Theodore, I. vii. 8.
[2] Penitential of Egbert, xiii. 10. [3] Penitential of Theodore, II. xi. 4.
[4] Ibid. II. xi. 1–3 and 5. [5] Second penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, iv. 31.

PART 9

Organic (and a few other) Diseases and their Treatment

CHAPTER XXVI

Skin Diseases

IT becomes obvious from a study of Anglo-Saxon medicine that, generally speaking, the interior of the body was then practically unknown, and that its exterior claimed most of the attention of the leech. The number of recipes for skin diseases is therefore large.

(*a*) *Causes: Neglect of personal hygiene*

There is abundant evidence that personal hygiene was little practised during the Anglo-Saxon period, and it is therefore not surprising to find that skin diseases of various kinds were prevalent.

Abstinence from washing was a regular feature of the ascetic life. A passage in Bede relating to St. Etheldrida of Ely gives some idea of the conditions under which this saint lived:

> It is reported of her that, from the time of her entering into the monastery, she never wore any linen but only woollen garments, and would rarely wash in a hot bath, unless before any of the great festivals, as Easter, Whitsuntide, and the Epiphany, and then she did it last of all, after having, with the assistance of those about her, first washed the other servants of God there present: besides, she seldom did eat above once a day, excepting on the great solemnities, or some other urgent occasion, unless some considerable distemper obliged her.[1]

On the other hand Eddius says that St. Wilfrid 'made it his custom to wash his body during the night hours, winter and summer alike, with blessed and holy water, until Pope John advised him to put an end to this rigour out of consideration for his age'.[2]

St. Cuthbert used to spend the first part of the night in prayer, standing in the sea with the water as far as his neck.[3] This practice, in spite of its severity, at least kept him fit, but in his later life,

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 19.
[2] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 21.
[3] W. Bonser, 'Praying in water', *Folk-lore*, 1937, 48, 385–8.

when settled on Farne, his habit seems to have been the same as that of St. Etheldrida. Bede says

> so entirely had he put off all care as to the body . . . that when once he had put on his long hose, which was made of hide, he used to wear them for months together. With the exception of once at Easter, it may be said that he never took them off again for a year until the return of Easter, when he was unshod for the ceremony of washing his feet, which is wont to take place on Maundy Thursday. Hence on account of his frequent prayers and genuflections, which he performed when thus hosed, it was discovered that he had an oblong and extensive callosity at the juncture of the feet and legs. After this . . . he shut himself up in his monastery . . . rarely holding converse with those without, and this only by the window. This he at first opened . . . but in process of time, he shut this up also, and never unclosed it except for the sake of giving his blessing, or for some other assured necessity.[1]

These, it is true, are examples of the mode of life of the extreme ascetic, but it is to be feared that the life of the ordinary cleric, and probably of the layman also, of which naturally no such details have survived, resembled it in the general lack of personal cleanliness.[2] The modern bathroom was derived from the Romans, and from our Danish, rather than from our Anglo-Saxon, ancestors.

The dirty and unsanitary conditions which obtained were conducive to the spread of fleas, lice, and other ectoparasites of man. William of Malmesbury records that Elfhere—or Elferius—the ealdorman who buried the body of the murdered King Edward the Martyr at Shaftesbury, 'vermibus quos pediculos dicimus consumptus est'.[3]

Recipes for the destruction of both these kinds of vermin naturally occur. Examples for fleas are as follows: 'Take [gorse] with its seed, sodden: sprinkle it into the house: it kills the fleas.'[4] Fleabane, as its name implies, was used to destroy fleas, and also gnats and midges.[5] Examples for lice are: 'Make a salve for lice: Boil in butter the lower part of hemlock, and wormwood or rosemary. Smear the head therewith. The salve will have the effect that there will be fewer lice there.'[6] And again: 'For lice,

[1] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 18.

[2] It has been said that the Church employed incense in places of worship from early times in order to counteract the stench arising from the many unwashed persons crowded there. A benediction for this purpose dates from the time of Charlemagne: 'May the Lord bless this incense to the extinction of every noxious stench, and kindle it to the odour of its sweetness.'

[3] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, II. 9.

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, cxlii. 7. [5] Ibid. cxliii. 1. [6] *Lacn.* 71 (cxxx).

a salve: "Cammoc", crowfoot, radish, wormwood. . . . Pound to dust. Knead thoroughly with oil. Smear the whole body therewith.'[1] 'Against lice: pound oak-rind and a little wormwood in ale and give to the sufferer to drink. Against lice: quicksilver and old butter.'[2] And yet again: 'Against lice: give him to eat sodden cabbage (*cawel*) at night fasting, frequently: he will be defended against lice.'[3]

(*b*) *Leprosy*

The medieval conception of leprosy was strongly influenced by the biblical usage of the term. In the Bible 'leprosy' is a generic word embracing a number of different diseases, and the Latin use of the plural *leprae* shows the comprehensiveness of the term in Roman times. The term 'leprosy' as used in the Middle Ages cannot therefore be taken as implying the specific disease leprosy in the present restricted sense of the word. As usual, it is difficult to be certain of the precise meaning of the Anglo-Saxon words used for various skin diseases.

Bosworth and Toller translate *prust-fell* as 'a cutaneous disease, leprosy', cognate with the Gothic *pruts-fill*, leprosy, and the Icelandic *proti*, a tumour.

It is also possible that the word *hreófl*, which signifies scabbiness, may have signified leprosy. It was used in the Anglo-Saxon Gospels[4] to translate the comprehensive word *lepra*. But though *lepra* became the accepted medical term for leprosy, λέπρα was never used for it by Hippocrates or the older Greeks.[5] λεπρός means scaly; hence skin diseases with scales or scabs were wrongly identified as varieties of leprosy.

Gilbert, writing about the year 1250, says that the *lepra* of the Greeks was of four varieties: *elephantia*, from the appearance of the skin being like that of the elephant; *leonina*, from the ferocious aspect of the patient; *tyria*, from the serpent Tyrus; and *alopecia*, from the hairs falling off like those of a fox. The symptoms of the tubercular leprosy of the Middle Ages as detailed by Bernard de Gordon, writing in the first decade of the fourteenth century, and by Guy de Chauliac, writing some half a century later, prove

[1] Ibid. 77 (CXXXVI).
[2] *Leechbook I*, lii.
[3] *Leechbook III*, xliv.
[4] Matthew viii. 3 and Mark i. 42.
[5] F. Hebra and M. Kaposi, *On Diseases of the Skin*, vol. iv, 1875, p. 119 (New Sydenham Soc., 63).

conclusively that this disease was identical with the *elephantia* variety (i.e. *elephantiasis Graecorum*). No doubt these physicians would have recognized true leprosy in its more characteristic forms, but their inclusion of symptoms and signs—such as itching and turbidity of the urine—which are not found in true leprosy, indicates a confused diagnosis.

Ælfric in his homily on St. Matthew says that the saint's antagonist, Hyrtacus, the king of Ethiopia, suffered from '*seó miccle cóðu* [the great disease], which leeches call elefantinus morbus'.[1]

'The inclusion of smallpox', says MacArthur, 'as a type of leprosy as in "lepra gravissima in Hibernia que vocatur bolgcach"[2] was no doubt suggested by the extensive scabbing which accompanies the drying of the pustules. Thomas Phayer, the English scholar and physician, describes this stage of smallpox: "sometimes as it were a drye scabbe or a lepry [leprosy], spredying ouer all the members"'.[3] The *Annals of Ulster* record under the year 768 'morbus leprae multos invasit'. As leprosy is not an epidemic disease, the term here probably indicated smallpox.

Both the adjective *leprosus* and the word *lobhar* (leper) of the Irish *Annals* were often used loosely, and may mean only infirm. The word 'lazar', now archaic, signifies 'a poor and diseased person, especially a leper', and is, of course, derived from the Lazarus of the Gospels. But 'there is no scriptural record', as MacArthur points out, 'that either the symbolic beggar of Christ's parable, or the real Lazarus of Bethany, suffered from leprosy. . . . The beggar was *ulcerosus*, full of sores, which then suggested leprosy only'.[4] Lazarus, however, became the patron saint of lepers. The last sentence of the quotation is again especially significant as showing the loose way in which this word also was used.

A guarded statement regarding the prevalence of the disease in Ireland is made by R. A. S. Macalister:

> Leprosy, or at least some severe cutaneous disease so called, was common in ancient Ireland; and there are numerous stories . . . that tell how the saints associated with its victims as an act of self-abasement. . . . Brigid healed lepers by washing and Ruadan cleansed lepers with the

[1] Ælfric, *Homilies*, trans. Thorpe, vol. ii, p. 480, line 10 (Ælfric Soc.).

[2] See p. 83.

[3] Sir W. P. MacArthur, 'The identification of some pestilences recorded in the Irish annals', *Irish Hist. Studies*, 1949, vi. 184.

[4] Sir W. P. MacArthur, 'Some notes on old-time leprosy in England and Ireland', *Journ. Roy. Army Med. Corps*, 1925, xlv. 414.

waters of a spring which he opened miraculously. . . . The miraculous opening of a spring is a common incident in Irish hagiography.[1]

Although leprosy was prevalent in Europe from about 1000 to about 1400, and was certainly present in England after the Conquest, there is no more evidence from the chroniclers than there is from linguistic evidence that it actually existed in England in Anglo-Saxon times. Most records of it break down when traced back to their original sources. For instance, William Hunt says of Ælfweard, bishop of London, that 'at the close of his life he fell sick of leprosy'.[2] Ælfweard is said to have retired from his see as unfit, being a leper, to administer his diocese. He had formerly been abbot of Evesham and desired to retire thither, but the monks refused to receive him, such was their dread of leprosy. He therefore sought and was granted admission to the abbey of Ramsey, where he had originally been a monk. He took much treasure with him to this abbey, and there he died in 1044. The *Chronicon abbatiae de Evesham*, however, merely speaks of him as 'in aegritudine constitutus',[3] and Simeon of Durham says he sought asylum 'pro sua infirmitate',[4] but in neither case is leprosy mentioned. But the thirteenth-century *Chronicon abbatiae Ramesiensis* says: 'gravi corporis valetudine tactus est, qua curationis desperationem adducente . . . cujus valetudinis causam quamlibet chronica taceant, hanc tamen fuisse quorundam relatio serit.' It then tells the story of how he opened the tomb of St. Osyth and attempted to carry off her remains as relics. As a result of this impiety 'papulae totam viri faciem confuso ordine repleverunt, quibus per moram dierum desiccatis scabra cutis candorem leprae visa est induisse'.[5]

The story of a miraculous cure of a 'leper' ('quidam leprosus ulceribus plenus') by Edward the Confessor is told by Roger of Hoveden. The king had just been crowned, and was proceeding from his palace to the monastery (presumably at Westminster) when he encountered this man by the wayside. The 'leper' besought the king to carry him on his shoulders into the church. This he did, praying that the man might be restored to health. 'His prayers were heard, and the "leper" (*leprosus*) was made whole

[1] R. A. S. Macalister, *The Latin and Irish Lives of Ciaran*, 1921, p. 127.
[2] *D.N.B.*, Ælfweard.
[3] *Chronicon abbatiae de Evesham*, 1863, p. 85 (Rolls Series).
[4] Simeon of Durham, *Historia regum, sub anno* 1044, p. 163 (Rolls Series).
[5] *Chronicon abbatiae Ramesiensis*, 1886, p. 157 (Rolls Series).

from that hour.'[1] The cure of the leprosy of Arnulf, the only son of King Egbert, by St. Modwenna seems to be a myth.[2]

It is possible that the waters of Bath were used for the treatment of leprosy, real or supposed, during the Anglo-Saxon period. Tradition says that their virtues were discovered by the British king Bladud, who was reputed to be a leper, and who found that diseased swine who wallowed in them were cured. The use to which the waters were put in Roman times is well known. The concluding lines in the Anglo-Saxon fragment known as 'The Ruin' are usually supposed to refer to Bath.

Although there were probably no leper houses in England before the Conquest, several were founded just after it. One, dedicated to the Holy Innocents, was founded at Lincoln by Bishop Remigius, who died in 1092. Another was founded at Chatham by Bishop Gundulph of Rochester about 1078. One was said to have been founded by the Conqueror at Northampton and dedicated to St. Leonard,[3] and one, dedicated to St. James, was founded, according to Tanner, 'in the fields near Westminster' for fourteen leprous women 'beyond the memory of man, and (as some think) long before the Conquest'.[4]

Leprosy was a cause for divorce in Old Welsh law. The relevant passage in the laws of Hywel Dda runs: 'Should her husband be leprous (*leprosus*) or have fetid breath . . . if therefore she leave her husband, she is to have the whole of her property.'[5]

(*c*) *Other morbid conditions of the skin*

Many Anglo-Saxon terms are used to denote skin diseases, and

[1] Roger of Hoveden, *Chronica*, 1868, vol. i, pp. 110–11 (Rolls Series).

[2] Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd ed., 1730, vol. ii, p. 1107 (under Polesworth).

[3] It is noticeable that many leper hospitals, especially in the early period, were dedicated to St. Leonard. Such were (besides Northampton): Chesterfield (founded before 1208); Kirby, Westmorland; Lancaster (founded *c.* 1190); Leicester; Lowcross, Yorkshire; Peterborough (founded before 1154); Towcester (founded *c.* 1200). The hospital of St. Leonard near Alnwick was founded between 1155 and 1216. St. Leonard was a medical saint: he was the patron of sick animals and of women in childbed as well as of maniacs and of prisoners. See note 5, p. 119.

[4] J. Tanner, *Notitia monastica*, 1744, p. 197.

[5] *Laws of Hywel Dda—Venedotian code*, ii. 1 (10). See also *Dimetian code*, ii. 18. 21 and *Gwentian code*, ii. 29. 26. The Welsh words for 'leprosy' in the three codes are *clauur*, *oglauri*, and *glauŷri*. The modern Welsh word for leprosy is *gwahanglwyf*, which signifies 'the disease which separates'.

they have a large variety of meanings. The identification of the various diseases is therefore very difficult.

Mention has been made elsewhere[1] of a general deficiency of vitamin content in the diet of the Anglo-Saxons, owing to the fact that no green vegetables were available during the winter months. This may have caused an increased liability to septic infections of the skin or have led to the skin becoming rough and dry, a condition known in the East as 'toad-skin'. Any of these infections could be equated with several of those about to be mentioned.

The word *hreófl* signifies roughness or scabbiness of the skin. Bede uses it of the dumb youth who 'had so much scurf and scabs on his head (*swá mycel hreófla*, tanta scabies), that no hairs ever grew on the top of it'. This youth came under the notice of St. John of Beverley, who 'ordered the physician to take it in hand. He did so, and . . . a good head of hair grew as the flesh was healed'.[2] This description seems to fit the parasitic disease favus, or, perhaps, a neglected case of ringworm.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes against scabbiness the eating of horsemint[3] and smearing with the berries of lacterida, sodden with tar.[4] It is worth noting that this tar would be of vegetable origin. The efficacy of tar as a treatment for skin diseases is well known.

A case of roughness of the skin ('scabies' is the word used here) is described by Bede, the patient being an anchorite named Felgild who inhabited Cuthbert's cell on the island of Farne. The roughness was apparently partly due to exposure, since Bede mentions that Æthelwald, who used the cell in the period between the occupancies of Cuthbert and Felgild, had nailed up a calf's skin to keep out the wet. Felgild's face became covered 'deformi rubore simul et tumore'. Aggravated by the severities of his daily life, this developed into a burning tumour. He put part of the calf's skin into water, and washed his face with it: at once the whole tumour and *scabies foeda* departed.[5]

The following animal remedy is curious: 'For *hreófl* and for a body that has breakings out upon it (*wið tóflogen líc*), take the water that is inside a goat, and which at times pours out, mingle the wet with honey and salt, and always wash and rub the head and body with it in the evening.'[6]

[1] See p. 353. [2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 2. [3] *A.S. Herbal*, xcii. 2.
[4] Ibid. cx. 4. [5] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 46.
[6] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vi. 10.

The same word, *hreófl*, was used for disease in animals. The *Lacnunga* gives a recipe 'for scab in sheep' (*wið sceápa hreóflan*).[1]

The thirty-second section of the *First Leechbook* deals with 'leechdoms for *blǽce* and baths'.[2] The baths are of course a method of treatment against the disease, to be used with or without the external applications described. *Blǽco* is derived by Bosworth and Toller, in their dictionary, from *blǽc*, pale, livid, and 'paleness, leprosy', is suggested as a translation. In the supplement *blǽce* is defined as an *itching* skin-disease. The various passages in the *Leechbooks* in which the word occurs suggest that if it was of an itching variety, the noun had to be defined by an adjective.

It is difficult to accept the fact that *blǽc* means both 'pale' and 'livid'. In medical terminology 'livid' indicates a dull-bluish colour, or, as the *O.E.D.* says, 'black and blue'. Skin lesions which are characterized only by pallor are rare. In most instances pallor of one area of the lesion is accompanied by erythema or lividness of others. Cockayne consistently translates *blǽce* by 'blotch', and it is clear that he visualized the lesions as being of a dark colour. There seems to be a case for regarding *blǽce* as being cognate with *blæc*, black, swarthy. The word probably covered several skin conditions. Urticaria and certain forms of dermatitis suggest themselves, but the word was probably not applied to true leprosy.

In the treatment of the condition many remedies are prescribed. Those given in chapter 32 of the *First Leechbook* will serve as an example. The chief remedy specified is a bath. Various herbs are to be boiled ten times and placed in a barrel over which the patient is to sit. He, and the stool on which he sits over the barrel, are to be covered with a blanket lest the vapour escape. The concoction is to be stirred with a stick if it is required to be hotter.

A *pocc* is translated by Bosworth and Toller as a 'pock, pustule, ulcer', and is equated with the Latin *ulcus*. The word is not common in the leechdoms. In one instance Cockayne translates 'erysipelatous inflammations', but this is unlikely. True erysipelas does not give rise to vesicles or pocks which burst. On one occasion the word[3] is used to denote a pock in the eyes. The most likely interpretation of the word *pocc* is 'a vesicle or pustule of a septic type'.

[1] *Lacn.* 81 (CXLIV). See p. 426.

[2] The six succeeding paragraphs form a personal communication from Dr. E. A. Underwood.

[3] *Leechbook I*, ii. 22.

The disease *poc-ádl* is mentioned in one section of the *First Leechbook*,[1] and six prescriptions are there given for its cure. Cockayne says that the disease was smallpox. Though this opinion has been disputed, it is now held that the disease was indeed variola. It may be noted that the *Leechbook* advises that the pocks should be evacuated with a thorn, and that wine should then be poured on them. This treatment was similar to that employed by Avicenna in the tenth century.

Wæter-geblæd, water-blister, is one of the conditions to be treated by the Nine Magic Herbs of the *Lacnunga*.[2] The word is defined by Bosworth and Toller as 'a blister with water in it(?); or a blister made by boiling water (?)'. Although it is tempting to assume that the term refers to the contents of the blister, and thus to make it apply to any vesicle or vesicular eruption, such as herpes, varicella, or even variola before it reached the pustular stage, the context of the word in the charm seems to render this interpretation improbable. All vesicles or blisters contain a watery fluid at an early stage of their development. If therefore the word 'water' referred to the contents of the blister, there would be no point in specifying nine different types of blister. It would seem that, as the thorn-blister and the thistle-blister were caused respectively by prick of thorn or thistle, the water-blister was that form produced by a scald.

A *spring* is a carbuncle or pustule. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes *foxesfót* (bur-reed) as a remedy 'against strange *springas* which are produced on the body'.[3]

Býl, similarly, is a carbuncle, blotch, or sore: the word is cognate with the German 'Beule'. The form *bula* appears in the third section of *περὶ διδάξεων*, and seems to signify boils. They 'arise between skin and flesh and on a man's forehead [and] break out as great as beans'.

Blegen also means a blister or ulcer (blain). The *Lacnunga* gives the following recipe to cure a black blain:

> Work a good poultice (*clíðа*). Take of coarse salt the measure of one egg and burn in a cloth so that it be burnt up; grate it then to dust and take then the yolks of three eggs and mingle with the dust so that it be so stiff that it will stick well; and let the head of the boil be then opened and the poultice bound to the swelling when need be. Work him then

[1] Ibid. xl.
[2] *Lacn.* 45 (LXXXI).
[3] *A.S. Herbal*, xlvii. 1.

a healing salve. Take [four herbs]; pound all together and boil in fresh butter.[1]

A recipe 'ad papulam id est *blegne*' occurs on fo. 106*v* of MS. Hunter 100 at Durham.

The word *on-feall* signifies a swelling, fellon. A passage in the *First Leechbook* shows that this may be *innan*, as well as on the surface.[2]

Wearg-bræde is to be equated with the Latin *impetigo*, *ulcus*, or *carcinoma*. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes plantain juice as remedy for this when situated on the nose.[3] It also prescribes the application of aristolochia, cypress, dracontea, and honey, pounded together; the honey might help to desiccate the growth.[4] A rodent ulcer on the nose is probably indicated here.

The disease named *circul-ádl* has a long section devoted to it in the *First Leechbook*, and it is also mentioned in the Contents to that work. Bosworth and Toller translate 'the shingles'. It might equally well describe a ringworm of the body. Various concoctions are prescribed in the *First Leechbook* as remedies.[5] With regard to diet in this disease one of these recipes says: 'Do not let him eat new cheese or fresh goose or fresh eel or fresh pork (*fersc swín*) or aught of that which comes out of *mórap*[6] [? has been cooked with wine and mulberries]; of fish without shells, or web-footed birds. If he eat any of these let it be salted, and let him by no means drink beer, and wine and ale in moderation.'

The Anglo-Saxon term for itch is *gicða*, also spelt *gihða*. It is used by Ælfric of the unbearable irritation with which Herod was afflicted over his whole body.[7] A prescription in the *Second Leechbook* runs: 'Against *gicða*, and that all the body may be of a clean hue and glad and bright: take oil and dregs of old wine equally, put them into a mortar, mingle well together, and smear the body with this in the sun.'[8] Another recipe prescribes dock, worms, and

[1] *Lacn.* 53 (xc). See also recipe from MS. Cotton Titus D. XXVI, fo. 16*b*, quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 380, 'Against *blégene*, take nine eggs and boil them hard', &c.

[2] *Leechbook I*, xli.

[3] *A.S. Herbal*, ii. 18. Cf. also twice in *Leechbook I*, xxxiv. The Latin has *carcinomata*.

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, xx. 8.

[5] *Leechbook I*, xxxvi.

[6] For *mórap*, see p. 360.

[7] Ælfric, *Homilies*, trans. Thorpe, vol. i, p. 86, l. 12 (Ælfric Soc.). Thorpe translates 'palsies'.

[8] *Leechbook II*, lxv. 5.

salt: also 'ship-tar,[1] and ivy-tar and oil' to be rubbed together and smeared on, together with a third part of salt.[2]

Gealla, 'gall', signifies a fretted place on the skin, especially of a horse.[3]

Wearr is used to describe a piece of hard skin—a callosity—especially on the face, hands, or feet. Sextus Placitus prescribes, for the removal of *wearras*, black ram's wool, dipped in water and then in oil, and laid on the place.[4] The word is cognate with the Latin *varus*, a tumour.

A *cyrnel* is a hard growth in the flesh and was doubtless meant to imply an enlarged lymphatic gland, in which sense it is still often used. The word occurs frequently in recipes, e.g. in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*, where iris illyrica is prescribed for *cyrnels* and all glandular swellings (*cumulu*).[5]

There are various recipes against *teter*. Against this and a 'pimply body', the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes smearing with mint pounded with sulphur and vinegar,[6] while Sextus Placitus prefers the application of burnt hartshorn mixed with vinegar.[7]

Óman is the usual Anglo-Saxon word signifying erysipelas, though *berstende líc*[8] is the translation given by the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* of ἐρυσιπέλατα of Dioscorides. The *Herbal* prescribes a poultice of sempervivum.[9] Section xxxix of the *First Leechbook* consists of twenty-eight recipes for this and similar affections. It includes the following: 'against *ómena geberste* let the patient sit in cold water till the sore be numbed . . . then strike four scarifications about the pocks outside and let the sticky matter run as it will'. It is clear from this suggested treatment that in this case some septic condition other than erysipelas is meant. This recipe also occurs in the *Lacnunga*, where it is followed by others, such as the following:

Take roasted eggs; mix with oil. Apply and bind up with beet leaves. Again. Calf's dung warm, or that of an old ox, and apply. Again. Take shavings from a hart's skin, scraped off with pumice, and moisten with vinegar, and smear therewith. . . . For the same. Take a swallow's nest, and break all up together, and burn with dung and all, and rub to dust

[1] Tar is used thus in modern medicine.
[2] *Leechbook I*, lxxvi.
[3] Ibid. lxxxviii.
[4] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vii. 1.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clviii. 5: cf. also ibid. cxliv. 3.
[6] Ibid. cxxii. 1.
[7] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, ii. 9.
[8] *A.S. Herbal*, cxlvii. 1.
[9] Ibid. cxxxix. 2.

and mix with vinegar, and smear therewith. Again. Make cold water thoroughly hot with iron, and foment therewith frequently.[1]

Another word which has been translated 'erysipelas' is *ban-cóða*, literally, the baneful disease (from *bana*, a killer).

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* has a prescription against scurf (A.S. *scorf* or *scruf*) and scabs: 'Take seed of stanis agria and roses, pound together, lay on the scurf, it will be healed.'[2] Sextus Placitus gives as a remedy against scurf, ram's grease, mixed with soot and salt and sand.[3]

The word *læl* is used as the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of οἴδημα in Dioscorides.[4] The original meaning is a twig, whence a weal left by a blow from a twig, and finally the resultant bruise or swelling.

Under this section burns may also be mentioned. The Anglo-Saxon used various ingredients, mostly of a vegetable nature, with the instructions 'boil in butter', 'boil in sheep's grease', and smear therewith. Similar oily dressings were employed until the advent of antiseptic methods.

The Anglo-Saxons naturally had no cognizance of cancer as the word is used today, but the words *cancer* (or *cancer-ádl*) and *carcinoma* constantly occur in recipes, signifying a growth on the skin. Carcinoma, as already mentioned, is equated with *wearg-bræde*. The three prescriptions 'for *cancer*' given in the thirty-sixth section of the *Third Leechbook* appear to be for external application to a fungating *cancer* (*dolh*, a wound).

The *First Leechbook* prescribes against *cancer-ádl*, that is *bíte*, a biting disease: 'if the *bíte* grow on a man, make a jelly of pressed curds and lay it on: cleanse the wound with it'.[5]

That a *cancer* was known to be painful is shown by the prescription of a poultice (*cliða*) to 'blind' it (*ablendan*), i.e. deaden or benumb.[6] Pounded centaury is prescribed for wounds and for *cancor*, since it 'does not allow the sore to spread further'.[7]

[1] *Lacn.* 58–59 (CI–CIII, CV–CVI)
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxxi. 3; see also clxxxiv. 4.
[3] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vii. 4.
[4] *A.S. Herbal*, cliii. 4.
[5] *Leechbook I*, xliv. 1.
[6] *A.S. Herbal*, iii. 9.
[7] Ibid. xxxv. 2.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Body, from the Head Downwards

(*a*) *Head*

THE first section of the *First Leechbook* treats of 'all infirmities of the head', and especially of headache and 'a half head's ache', i.e. megrim.

The causes of the latter are given: 'the disease comes from evil humour flowing, or vapour, or from both'. The remedy is to first let blood, and then give a 'wort drink'. If the disease is caused by heat, it is to be cured with cold leechdoms; if by cold, it is to be cured by hot leechdoms.[1]

A remedy given for headache is to 'burn a dog's head to ashes, cut the head [presumably that of the patient] and lay on'.[2] Another animal remedy, from Sextus Placitus, says: 'For headache, a new goat's cheese bound to it; it heals.'[3]

The *First Leechbook* also gives various recipes 'for broken head'. One prescribes various herbs, such as betony, to be taken and then continues, 'and if the brain protrude, take the yolk of an egg, and mix a little with honey, and fill the wound, and bind up with tow and leave it thus: and again after about three days syringe (*gespæt*) the wound'.[4]

The last part of this section gives various prescriptions for the internal cleansing of the head. One is as follows: 'Work thus a washing to cleanse the head': mustard, twenty peppercorns, vinegar, honey, and various herbs are to be held in the mouth for a long time: 'then runs the phlegm (*gillistre*) out'.[5]

Sections 8 to 16 of *περὶ διδάξεων* also deal with the head, sores, ulcers, cleansing, &c.

Vertigo (A.S. *swinglung*) is included in Anglo-Saxon leechdoms among diseases of the head. Sextus Placitus prescribes 'for men that suffer from vertigo, a hare's lung and liver mingled together,

[1] *Leechbook I*, i. 13.
[2] Ibid. i. 6.
[3] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vi. 6.
[4] *Leechbook I*, i. 15.
[5] Ibid. i. 17.

and myrrh by weight of 4 pennies, and three of beer and one of honey: this shall be boiled in good vinegar and then soaked in sweetened wine: and after that let them drink; it soon heals'.[1] Another recipe runs: 'Ad vertiginem. Take betony and boil thoroughly in wine or in old ale, and wash the head with the wet mixture [literally, juice, *wós*]: then lay the herb so warm about the head and bind up with a cloth: let it be so all night.'[2]

Section 13 of *περὶ διδάξεων* gives a recipe for vertigo, or as the Anglo-Saxon expresses it for 'the man to whom it seems that his head turns about or who fares with turned brains'. The remedy prescribed is to bathe the head with warm wool which has been specially medicated.

(*b*) *Diseases of the eye*

(A.S. *eáge*: eyelids, *brewas*, *eág-hringas*: pupil, *æppel*)

The second section of the *First Leechbook* and the second section of the third are devoted to eye complaints: sections 20 to 26 of *περὶ διδάξεων* also deal with the eyes.

Various remedies are prescribed for dimness (*mist*, *dimnes*) of the eyes, which is equated in *περὶ διδάξεων* with *γλαυκώματα*, for 'eye-ache' (*eág-ece*), for 'a white speck'[3] which spreads over the eye (*fleó*, *fleah*, or *flíg*) which is equated with the albugo of Pliny, for sty (*wenn*), for lacrymation, for contraction of the pupil (*æ-smael*), for 'worms in the eyes', for *peór-ádl* in the eyes,[4] for thick eyelids and 'if red spongy excrescences grow on the eyes'. *Ge-figo* was apparently a disease with fig-shaped swellings 'which in Latin [i.e. in a foreign language?] is called cimosis [i.e. *σύκωσις*]'.[5] The second section of the *Lacnunga* prescribes the 'noblest eye-salve' for a similar list of complaints.

A few remedies may be quoted.

For 'worms in the eyes', the patient is to sit with a saucer of water on each side of him and to jerk his head hither and thither so that the worms may fall into the water.

[1] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, iv. 8.

[2] Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, p. 379.

[3] This possibly represents cataract. Prof. Shrewsbury has drawn my attention to the probable occurrence of cataract in Anglo-Saxon times owing to the lack of vitamin A in the diet.

[4] See p. 410.

[5] *Wiþ þeórádle on eágum þe mon ge-figo hæt* (*Leechbook I*, ii. 23).

In many cases the eyes are to be bathed and smeared with various concoctions: sometimes these are to be put into the eyes by means of a feather.

Several prescriptions for 'dimness of the eyes' (*mist* or *dimnes*) occur. Salves for this include celandine juice, betony juice, hare's gall, and 'the fat of all river-fish melted in the sun and mingled with honey'. For this the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes the leaves of rue, either to be eaten fasting or else to be drunk in wine.[1] Rue, mixed with honey, is also prescribed for dimness in the *First Leechbook*.[2] The use of rue for the eyes was derived from Pliny: he says that 'many persons have dispersed films on the eyes by rubbing them with a mixture of the juice of rue with Attic honey'.[3]

Another prescription for dimness which occurs in the *Herbal* is also derived from Pliny. It says: 'Take the juice of celandine (chelidonium) or the blossoms wrung out and mixed with honey: mix hot ashes[4] gently with it and boil together in a brazen vessel.'[5] Pliny says of celandine that 'the juice is extracted while it is in flower and is boiled gently in a copper vessel on hot ashes with Attic honey, being esteemed a sovereign remedy for films upon the eyes'.[6]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* has a prescription for 'sore (*sár*) of the eyes, that is when one is blear-eyed (*toren-íge*).'[7] This latter is the equivalent of the Latin *lippitudo*, or inflammation of the eyes. *Περὶ διδάξεων* prescribes for bleared eyes new cheese pared into boiling water and then made into little cakes (*cicles*) and bound to the eyes for one night.[8]

Περὶ διδάξεων also prescribes for a sty 'which the "Greeks" call ordeolum' the application of barley (*hordeum*) meal kneaded with honey. 'This leechcraft', it says, 'has been tested by many men.' (Barley is also recommended by Paul of Aegina.)[9] An alternative remedy is the application to the eyes of bean meal and soap.[10] *Stígend* is equated with *ordeolus* in Abbot Ælfric's vocabulary (tenth century).[11]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xci. 6.
[2] *Leechbook I*, ii. 1.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xx. 51.
[4] As these would be ashes from wood, they might be of some value as an eye-wash because of their alkali content.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, lxxv. 3.
[6] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 50.
[7] *A.S. Herbal*, xvi. 3.
[8] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 21.
[9] Paulus Aegineta, iii. 22 (Sydenham Society, 1, 1844, p. 414).
[10] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 25–26. For *hordeolus*, a sty, see Marcellus Empiricus, 8.
[11] Wright–Wülcker, *Vocabularies*, vol. i, col. 422. 2.

Eágan wenn also seems to signify a sty. It is equated in Wright's eleventh vocabulary (eleventh century) with impetigo, and by Bosworth and Toller with the τύλος of Dioscorides. The *First Leechbook* prescribes *holcærse*, which Cockayne equates with gentiana campestris: 'roast it, apply to the eye as hot as possible'.[1]

The condition of the eyes known as nyctalopia (night-blindness) is now recognized to be due to a deficiency of vitamin A. It has been shown that this deficiency existed during the winter months in Anglo-Saxon times owing to a lack of sufficient green vegetables. The following prescription from Sextus Placitus might have had some value: 'For sore of eyes, a hare's liver, sodden, is good to drink in wine, and to bathe the eyes with the broth. For the men who from the tenth hour [of the day] see not, let them receive the smoke of the same drink with their eyes. . . .'[2] The use of liver as a treatment for the eye was prescribed in ancient Egypt: the *Ebers Papyrus*, which dates from about 1600 B.C., says, 'For the eyes, liver of ox, roasted and pressed, give for it.' Similarly Hippocrates prescribes ox-liver and honey as a remedy, and Paul of Aegina the liver of a goat. Sir Jack Drummond said he could find no trace of the use of liver for night-blindness during the later Middle Ages.[3]

Περὶ διδάξεων has a prescription 'for *nectalopas*, that is in our language, the men who are able to see nothing after sunrise till it goes again to its setting'. *Nectalopas* is obviously a corruption of nyctalopia. It is a well-known fact that persons suffering from cataract find it difficult to see in sunshine owing to the contraction of the pupils, but towards evening, when the intensity of the daylight wanes, the pupils dilate and thus allow more distinct vision. 'This', continuing the quotation from περὶ διδάξεων, 'is the leechcraft that belongs thereto. Take a *hwurf-bán* [literally, a bone which turns: ? = vertebra or patella] of a he-goat and roast it; and when the roast sweats, take the sweat and smear the eyes with it, and after that let [the patient] eat the roast.' He is then to apply warmth to the eye.[4] The original Latin text of this passage, whence

[1] *Leechbook I*, ii. 17.

[2] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, iv. 18–19. In the Latin version these two recipes (iv. 18, 19) belong to the goat. Those for the hare stop at iv. 17. The second recipe, in the Latin, runs: 'ad oculorum nictalopas, id est ad eos qui ab hora decima nihil incipiunt videre'.

[3] But he promised me he would have included my Anglo-Saxon evidence in any new edition of 'The Englishman's Food'.

[4] περὶ διδάξεων, 24.

the Anglo-Saxon translation was derived, reads 'the *liver* of a hedgehog'. This may be associated with the hibernation of the hedgehog, with the consequent accumulation of fat in the body.

For contraction of the pupil (*æ-smael*) and for all pain of the eyes, the *Third Leechbook* prescribes: 'Chew wild teazle, then wring through a purple woollen cloth on the eyes when he wishes to rest, and in the morning apply the white of an egg.'[1]

Περὶ διδάξεων prescribes for tenderness of the eyes 'which are sores of the eye-roots' (*æg-moran*). Presumably this refers to the optic nerves. The prescription runs: 'Take *myrta* [Cockayne translates myrtle berries] and lay them in honey, and then take the *myrta* and lay them to the eyes that the eyes may swell up: and then take rue and pound it and mingle ashes with it and afterwards lay them to the eyes: then first it bites them: swill the eyelids (*brewas*): and after that it heals them well.'[2]

The following reputed cures for affections of the eye are found in various chronicles.

Bede gives two miraculous cures of blindness and one of a diseased eye. St. Augustine restored sight to a blind man who was presented to him by the priests of the Britons at the conference at 'Augustine's Oak' in 603. The patient had previously obtained neither benefit nor cure from the efforts of the British priests.[3] The second cure was that, by faith, of the wife of a certain chief (*ge-síþ*) who prayed in the cemetery which was attached to the monastery at Barking that her sight might be restored to her. She had first been 'afflicted with a weakness (*untrymnes*) in her eyes: and then for days they were so sore and so blind that at last she could not see daylight'.[4] The story of the third cure was given to Bede by the patient himself. He was a brother in the monastery on the banks of the river Dacore. He had a great tumour on the eyelid (*brég*), which growing 'daily increased and threatened the loss of the eye. His leeches tried and were anxious to soothe the tumour with salves and fomentations, but they could not.' The patient, however, obtained possession of some of the hair from the uncorrupted body of St. Cuthbert and 'applied it to the affected eyelid, and for some time he pressed and soothed the angry tumour with it. . . . It was then, as he is wont to relate, about the second hour of the day; but he, being busy about other things that belonged to that day,

[1] *Leechbook III*, xlvi.
[2] *περὶ διδάξεων*, 23.
[3] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 2.
[4] Ibid. iv. 10.

about the sixth hour of the same, touching his eye on a sudden, found it with the lid as whole and sound as if there never had been any swelling or deformity on it.'[1]

An eye cure is given in the Anglo-Saxon version of the *Life of St. Guthlac* by Felix of Crowland. 'There was a certain boatman whose eyes had been for twelve months overspread *mid fleó* [i.e. albugo] and dimness. His friends brought him to Crowland.' Guthlac's sister Pega 'led him to the church wherein the venerable body of Guthlac was: she took some of the hallowed salt which Guthlac himself had formerly blessed and wetted it and dropped it in his eyes . . . and he went home whole and sound'.[2]

Of Edward the Confessor it is said that he 'had grace especially above all saints . . . to cure all the blind by his prayer and his virtue'. Various cures of blind men are given in the *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* by the king himself, using as a medium the water in which he had washed his hands: six blind men are also cured after his death by praying at his tomb.[3] The cures of blindness given by William of Malmesbury have been quoted in detail elsewhere.[4]

It was thought that an object blessed by a saint might have a beneficial effect in cases of eye trouble. 'A certain Colga, son of Cellach', says Adamnan, 'asked and received from the saint [Columba] a piece of rock-salt, blessed by him, for the benefit of his sister and nurse, who was suffering from a severe attack of ophthalmia (optalmiae gravis languor).' She hung it up on the wall over her bed, but there is no record of its effect on her.[5]

Bede says that the coffin in which St. Etheldrida was first buried 'is reported to have cured some of distempers in the eyes, who, praying with their heads touching that coffin, presently were delivered from the pain or dimness in their eyes'.[6]

(*c*) *Diseases of the ear*

The third section of the *First Leechbook* deals with all 'soreness and ache of the ears', including deafness (*deáfu*), the removal of purulent discharge (*wyrms*) and of worms (*wyrmas*) and earwigs from the ear, and with humming in the ears (*gif eáran dynien*).

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 32.
[2] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, liii.
[3] *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, ll. 2690–3128, 4029–66 (Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, 1858, Rolls Series).
[4] See p. 273.
[5] Adamnan, *De vita S. Columbae*, ii. 7.
[6] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 19.

The remedies prescribed are the dripping of various herbs pounded in warm water, and other things—many of them unpleasant—into the ears. One ingredient is crushed ants' eggs, also the gall of boar, bull, and goat in equal quantities mixed with honey.

For humming, the prescription runs: 'Take oil, apply with ewes' wool and close up the ear with the wool when you wish to sleep and remove it when you wake.' Ewes' wool, if taken straight from the fleece, contains much fatty matter, which, when refined, yields a large proportion of lanolin. This largely consists of a hydrated form of the wax cholesterol, which would possibly have a beneficial effect in some cases of 'humming' by softening the plug of hard wax that had accumulated in the ear.

(*d*) *Teeth*

The teeth of the Anglo-Saxon population appear to have been, in general, free from caries. The evidence for this statement was obtained, for example, from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, which was excavated during the years 1921 to 1923. Dr. John Humphreys,[1] who carried out this work, gives the following account of the teeth. He says that the skulls he exhumed had

> splendid teeth with but little evidence of dental caries.[2] The surfaces of the crowns of many of the molars were worn considerably, the closure of the teeth in front being generally edge to edge, and not as in modern European races, with the upper front teeth closing over the lower. In some instances the surfaces of the teeth were greatly eroded, occasionally exposing the pulp or nerve chambers, and now and then causing an abscess from infection by bacteria. But usually, side by side with rapid wear of the enamel and dentine, the pulp became protected by a formation of secondary dentine or ivory over the nerve cavity, keeping pace with the excessive erosion and protecting the nutrient organ of the tooth from injury; of this process there are some remarkable examples. . . . The arrangement of the teeth was also strikingly symmetrical, set in a swepeing curve with an absence of crowding.[3]

[1] He founded the dental museum of the University of Birmingham.

[2] His son, Professor Humphrey F. Humphreys, puts it as low as 15 per cent. of the population—in contrast to 'over 90 per cent. of adults under the dietary conditions of western civilisation'. *Brit. Dental Journ.* 1951, xci. 217.

[3] J. Humphreys and others, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire', *Archaeologia*, 1923, lxxiii. 94.

It may be remarked that when excessive grinding of the teeth due to mastication of exceedingly coarse food is avoided, such food appears to have a beneficial effect on the growth and maintenance of teeth, especially in young and vigorous people.

Reports on the teeth found in other cemeteries than Bidford also persistently stress their wear from coarse food. For example, that by Miss Miriam Tildesley on the sixth-century Saxon cemetery at Roche Court Down, Wiltshire, says:

> The very considerable wear of the teeth demonstrates that the food of these people required hard chewing and was probably gritty. . . . Yet the progressive formation of secondary dentine has by no means succeeded in keeping pace with the wear in all instances; of the six skulls whose age is estimated as over thirty-five, three (nos. 22, 27, 28) had lost most of their back teeth, probably owing to this cause, while those in the lower jaws of nos. 37 and 24 were rapidly going.[1]

Dr. N. Gray Hill, reporting on the late Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Stockbridge Down, Hampshire, says:

> The teeth generally were in good condition, but both the molars and incisors were ground down to an extent never seen at the present day. This was doubtless due to the mastication of bread made from very coarsely ground flour. In a certain number of cases there was evidence of dental caries, the first molar in the upper or lower jaw being the tooth most frequently affected. A certain number of teeth, chiefly first or second molars, had been removed during life—apparently by some crude form of dentistry.[2]

Helen E. Donovan[3] and G. E. Dunning say of the teeth found in the Saxon burials at Foxcote Manor, Andoversford, Gloucestershire, that they 'show considerable wear. The crowns of the first molars are worn flat, exposing large areas of dentine; the third molars were lost before death, and the pockets partly absorbed.'[4]

The same condition is reported by Frank Stevens with reference to the sixth-century Saxon skeleton found at Perham Down,

[1] M. L. Tildesley, 'The human remains from Roche Court Down [Wiltshire]', *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, 1932, xlv, 584.

[2] N. G. Hill, 'Excavations at Stockbridge Down, 1935–36', *Papers and Proc. Hants Archaeol. Soc.*, 1937, xiii. 249.

[3] Now Mrs. O'Neil.

[4] H. E. Donovan and G. C. Dunning, 'Saxon burials at Foxcote Manor, Andoversford, Gloucestershire', *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Archaeol. Soc.*, 1936, lviii. 170.

Wiltshire: 'Teeth in good condition, but much worn from eating coarse food.'[1]

Other reports on the teeth found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries contain interesting points: the following are worth quoting here.

Drs. John Thurnam and J. B. Davis give the following particulars of the teeth found at Long Wittenham, Berkshire:

Grave 2. Teeth much eroded, and one of the molars carious.
Grave 7. Teeth slightly eroded.
Grave 8. The teeth are thickly encrusted with tartar, a condition observed in the five other skulls from this cemetery. The crowns of the teeth are slightly eroded; the upper incisors and their alveolar processes large and prominent.
Grave 25. Crowns of teeth much eroded, in the flattened form so distinctive of Anglo-Saxon skulls.
Grave 61. The teeth, thickly crusted with tartar, are much ground down by severe use.[2]

Much information with regard to the skull of the old man in the last-mentioned grave is given in the section on archaeology (*q.v.*, pp. 29–30).

Duckworth makes the following report on the teeth found in the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Mitcham, Surrey: 'Persons of tall stature and powerful physique. Teeth usually large and sound and well preserved, but some with signs of caries and dental abscesses.'[3]

Sir Arthur Keith[4] makes the following general remarks with regard to the teeth found in the pagan Saxon cemetery at Broadchalke in Wiltshire:

The condition of the teeth in this Saxon cemetery is remarkable. Altogether there are the lower jaws of seventeen individuals; three of them being juveniles. Of the fourteen adult jaws, . . . seven retain their original complement of teeth; in three a single molar has been lost from disease; in two a premolar and molar have been lost from the same cause; in one, three teeth have been lost, and in another, five teeth. In only one jaw was actual caries observed. Atrophy of the alveolar border, probably from pyorrhoea, was noted in five: in all there was tartar adherent to the

[1] F. Stevens, 'Saxon skeleton found at Perham Down', *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, 1940, xlix. 114.

[2] J. Thurnam and J. B. Davis, 'Notes on skulls from Long Wittenham'. *Archaeologia*, 1860, xxxviii. 348–49.

[3] W. L. H. Duckworth, 'Notes on a collection of crania and bones from Mitcham', *Archaeologia*, 1906, lx. 60–68.

[4] Sir A. Keith, 'A pagan Saxon cemetery at Broadchalke; report on bones', *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, 1925, xliii. 97–100.

necks of the teeth, showing that the healthy condition of the teeth was not due to anything of the nature of a tooth brush. There was not a single edentulous person. The average age of the adult man and woman I presume to be under 50 years. In eight jaws a tendency was noticed to crowding or irregularity of the lower incisor teeth. In three jaws the wisdom teeth had failed to develop on both sides; in one on one side only. In at least five the modern or overlapping bite was present. From these skeletons it is inferred that this community of Saxons came of a stock whose ancestors had long been living under easy conditions of life with a plentiful supply of food.

Keith pays special attention to the teeth of the 'big-brained man' whose skeleton was found in grave 2.[1]

The upper jaw is somewhat broken and some of the teeth have been lost, but there is every reason to believe that at death this man retained in a sound condition every one of his thirty-two teeth; there is not a trace of caries and he was certainly 40 years of age. The teeth, too, are coated with masses of tartar. The incisor teeth tend to project forwards, a condition which is not uncommon in Saxon skulls: their bite was overlapping, as is the rule in modern English mouths, and there is a slight degree of crowding of the lower incisors. These are conditions we do not meet with amongst primitive races. The parts to which the muscles of mastication were attached are weakly developed and the crowns of the teeth are but little worn.

A. J. E. Cave, reporting on the teeth found in the recently excavated cemetery at Petersfinger, near Salisbury, says:

The teeth, almost uniformly shapely and healthy, are retained in full till death. They are generally very much crown-worn, the incisors and molars being in most cases entirely denuded of enamel on their occlusal surfaces. The 'bite' is invariably of the edge-to-edge variety. Dental caries occurs but once (no. 21), associated with dental abscess. Parodontol disease is notably absent, being incipient in only one specimen (no. 17 A).[2]

The Anglo-Saxons had recipes for 'sore of teeth', for toothache, and for looseness of the teeth.

Toothache was ascribed to the teeth being eaten by worms. Thorndike quotes Galen's 'recommendation to fill cavities in the teeth with roasted earthworms', and says that such use of them

[1] For particulars of this man, see p. 30.

[2] E. T. Leeds and A. de S. Shortt, *An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Petersfinger, near Salisbury, Wilts.* Salisbury, 1953, p. 63.

'continued to be a feature of mediaeval dentistry'.[1] I suggest that this is another instance of like curing like.

Various remedies for toothache are prescribed in the sixth section of the *First Leechbook*: one should boil an old holly leaf, for instance, together with various other ingredients in water, pour into a bowl, yawn over it, 'then the worms shall fall into the bowl'.[2] Again, from the same section, 'for the upper toothache, take leaves of convolvulus (*wipo-winde*), squeeze out on the nose: for the lower toothache, slit the gums with a bramble-spine[3] till they bleed'. The *Third Leechbook* says one should chew pepper frequently with the teeth, when they ache, 'it will soon be well with them'.[4] There may have been some value in this last recipe, as the pepper might have had some anaesthetic effect in the mouth.

Various vegetable remedies are prescribed for the benefit of the teeth. For instance: 'For sore of teeth, if they wag, take purple (*hæwen*) hydele: it, out of some wonderful might, helps. Its ooze and its dust are to be preserved in winter . . . its ooze thou shalt preserve in a ram's horn: dry also the dust and preserve it.' It is to be taken in wine.[5]

Bán-wyrt (a viola), mixed with honey, is prescribed for '*cancor* of the teeth, from which the teeth often fall out'. The word *cancor* appears to be the equivalent of the ἄφθα of Dioscorides.[6]

'Against looseness (*wagunge*) of the teeth, a hart's horn burnt and pounded strengthens them', according to Sextus Placitus.[7] The same writer also says that 'if you frequently smear and touch children's gums with bitches' milk, the teeth grow without sore'.[8]

The thirty-second paragraph of περὶ διδάξεων is a remedy 'ad ginciuas . . . that is the flesh which is produced about the teeth and makes the teeth wag and agitates them'. The prescription is a mouth-wash, as hot as the patient can bear, composed of leek, vinegar, and honey.

'If the teeth are hollow', the *Third Leechbook* prescribes that one should 'chew rosemary roots with vinegar on that part'.[9] The same

[1] L. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. i, New York, 1923, pp. 573–4.

[2] *Leechbook I*, vi. 3. See under *wyrm* for other examples (p. 279).

[3] Reading *Slit mid þéfeþorne*, Henry Bradley's emendation of *mid þe foþorne* (= *tenaculum*) in Cockayne's text, which was accepted by Bosworth and Toller. See *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 1916, xi. 214.

[4] *Leechbook III*, iv.

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, xxx. 3.

[6] Ibid. clxv. 4.

[7] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, ii. 3.

[8] Ibid. ix. 8.

[9] *Leechbook III*, iv.

ingredient is prescribed by the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* for toothache, and the patient is to 'hold the juice in his mouth'.[1]

Cinquefoil is prescribed as a mouth-wash by both Pliny[2] and the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal.*[3]

The words for gums are *tóð-rima* (tooth-rim = border) and *tóð-reoma* (tooth-membrane) in Anglo-Saxon. *Sextus Placitus* prescribes for the swelling of the gums.[4]

Narrative charms against tooth-ache have already been dealt with.[5]

(*e*) *Hare-lip*

(A.S. *Hær-sceard*: *sceard* = notched)

The following remedy is prescribed for hare-lip in the *First Leechbook*: 'Pound mastic (*hwit-cwudu*,[6] literally white cud) very small, add the white of an egg, mingle as you would *teáfor* [i.e. a pigment used for colouring], cut with a knife, sew fast with silk: then smear with the salve without and within before the silk rots. If it draws together, arrange it with the hand: smear again soon.'[7]

The gum of the mastic would doubtless form a plaster dressing.

(*f*) *Neck*

The fourth section of the *First Leechbook* deals with the neck and its complaints.

There are two words for neck in Anglo-Saxon: (*a*) *heals*, whence *heals-ome*, a humour in the neck, and *heals-gund*, a swelling in the neck (*gund*, mostly thus compounded, signifying matter, pus); and (*b*) *sweora*, whence *sweor-bán*, neck-bone, *sweor-cópu*, quinsy [?], and *sweor-hnitu*, a nit that breeds at the back of the neck.

Περὶ διδάξεων has two sections on *heals-gund*, which it defines as 'the sore which grows around the ears'. It says that it is of two kinds—one easy to heal and producing no scar (*dolh*), the other, which the Greeks call *cacote*,[8] that is, cursed, which is produced from the black humour, and shows red.[9]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, lxxxi. 2.
[2] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 105.
[3] *A.S. Herbal*, iii. 3.
[4] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, xiii. 12.
[5] Pp. 244–5.
[6] Bosworth and Toller say 'an odoriferous gum from the mastic-tree, which was called by Linnaeus *pistachia lentiscus*. This gum was used for chewing in the East: mastiche = *μαστίχη*'.
[7] *Leechbook I*, xiii.
[8] *Κάκωσις* is used by Hippocrates of the evil effect of disease. Cockayne glosses 'malignant'.
[9] *Περὶ διδάξεων*, 18.

The *First Leechbook* describes at least three pathological conditions of the neck region.[1] The first description fits in with an acute abscess, and less probably with a tuberculous gland: 'If you would know whether it be *heals-gund*, take a red worm (*angel-twicce*, i.e. such as is used as a bait in angling) entire, lay it on the place where the annoyance is and wrap it up above fast with leaves: if it be corruption in the neck, the worm will become earth, if it be not the patient will be whole.' The other two conditions are described in the second passage, which says that *heals-gund* or *geagl-swile* (swelling of the jaw or jowl) may be of two kinds. It is not dangerous if, when you look into a man's mouth, it is swollen and red about the uvula (*hræc-tunge*), if his breathing is difficult, he cannot swallow and has lost his voice. This is probably a simple quinsy. It is dangerous when the swelling is both on the neck and tongue, and if the patient cannot talk or breathe or lean forward far enough to see his navel. If not attended to quickly, he will be dead in about three days. The disease is the more dangerous if there are no external symptoms. This description suggests fulminating diphtheria.

Περὶ διδάξεων prescribes 'for the evil in a man's neck', that is to say for one 'whose neck with the sinews is drawn together' or contracted, 'so that he has no power over it'.

> This disease [it further explains] is of three kinds: the one kind the Greeks call 'tetanicas' [i.e. *τέτανος*], those are the men who go upright with the neck stretched out and cannot bend because of their infirmity. And the second disease thus affects the neck that the sinews pull from the chin to the breast, and the man is not able to open his mouth for the contractions of the sinews, and this the Greeks call brostenus. And the third disease sits so on the neck that the sinews pull from the chin-bone to the shoulder, and draw the mouth crooked.[2]

The remedies prescribed are a soft bed, a warm fire, and the inevitable bleeding. The Anglo-Saxon word equated with tetanus is *oferbæc-geteung*.

Various remedies for quinsy (*sweor-cóðu*) are also given. The neck of the patient is to be smeared with various ingredients such as the grease (*ge-lynd*) of a bull and wax. His mouth is to be swilled with various hot concoctions such as the chaff of rye boiled in sweetened water, and he is to be let blood under the tongue or from the arm.[3]

[1] *Leechbook I*, iv. 2–4.
[2] *Περὶ διδάξεων*, 43.
[3] *Leechbook I*, iv. 6.

St. Etheldrida suffered from a swelling in the neck (tumor sub maxilla) which was lanced by the 'medicus' Cynifrid three days before she died.[1] Sir Norman Moore, writing in 1913, suggests that this was a case of tuberculosis.[2] From the expression *ac solita dicere*, used of the saint in her meditations on her condition, he considers that the swelling was not an incident of an acute disease but had existed for some time, and that such a swelling is rarely other than tuberculous. But Shrewsbury suggests that, if the swelling was below the maxilla—as Bede's description implies—this hardly conforms to the location of a tuberculous swelling of the cervical lymphatic glands. The description is too vague to permit identification of its nature; but a sub-maxillary swelling of long duration might be a case of actinomycosis, a parotid tumour, or a cystic swelling that has become infected. Actinomycosis is a fungoid infection, and the primary lesion is commonly located in the region of the maxilla.

The miraculous cure of a 'young and beautiful lady' who had swellings in her neck is given in a life of Edward the Confessor, but it was probably written as late as about 1245. The swelling had 'putrified, swollen and was full of matter': she had become barren, and 'by her long illness and giving ear to physicians, she had done nought but expend money'. She is, however, then commanded, while 'she is securely asleep', to go to King Edward 'at the great palace at Westminster'. At her request 'he takes of the water of which he had washed, sprinkles the spot that pained her, strokes the swellings and the sores, which are foul with the disease, and gently washes them with the water'. As a result 'worms issue from the matter, the blood is at once purified, . . . her flesh is entirely restored . . . and she who was barren till this time afterwards had a beautiful infant'.[3]

(*g*) *Diseases of the chest and respiration*

Sections xv to xviii of the *First Leechbook* and sections 51 to 53 of *περὶ διδάξεων* deal with the diseases of the chest.

The Anglo-Saxon word *nirwett* (or *nyrwyt*) signifies oppression of the chest or difficulty in breathing, and is cognate with *nearu*,

[1] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 19.

[2] Sir N. Moore, *The Physician in English History*, 1913, pp. 1–4.

[3] *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* (H. R. Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, Rolls Series, ll. 2606–79.)

narrow, confined. The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* provides two recipes for this complaint: in one case cummin is to be mixed with water and vinegar and used as a drink,[1] in the other the roots of fennel are to be pounded in wine and drunk.[2] Fennel was thought to be a carminative, and therefore might have afforded some relief.

Section 51 of *περὶ διδάξεων* gives a leechdom for asthma (*on hyra brósten nearuwe*). The symptoms given are that the patient is afflicted with great oppression (*nearuysse*); he brings up blood, writhes as if troubled by a dwarf, and much saliva is produced in his throat. Various remedies follow, after blood-letting, and include the making of 'a poultice of the earth which is called *nitro*, which is found in Italy', with pepper added to it. Section 52 prescribes for 'the man who is ill in the breast'. Possibly the most effective recipe given is the making of a 'spew drink, so that all the evil which is in his heart and his breast shall come out' and he will be cleansed: after this he is to fast as regards flesh. Another remedy, given in section 53, is chicken-meat seethed in wine, to which is to be added oil made from French nuts.

The *First Leechbook* gives two 'wound salves' for lung disease (*lungen-ádl*). The first is composed of brooklime (*hleomoc*) and goose-dung, the second contains golden lungwort as an ingredient.[3] The *Lacnunga* gives two recipes for a *bríw* against *lungen-ádl*, the ingredients being cropleek, radish, helenium, barley-meal, and white salt.[4] It also prescribes various herbs as a salve for the lungs (*lungen-sealf*).[5] The *Leechbook* also includes hiccough and coughs in this section. The Anglo-Saxon for cough is *hwósta*. 'For cough and lung disease', one should (according to the *Third Leechbook*) 'take *swegles æppel* and sulphur and incense, in equal parts, mix with wax, lay on a hot stone, drink the reek through a horn, and afterwards eat three pieces of old lard or of butter and sip with cream'.[6] The symptoms as well as the remedy for a cough are given in the *Lacnunga*: 'For a cough, how variously it befalleth a man, and how it is to be treated: The cough hath a manifold approach according as the humours are various. At times it cometh of immoderate heat, at times of immoderate cold, at times of immoderate moistness, at times of immoderate dryness.[7] Work a draught for a cough: Take mashwort, seethe in a copper kettle and

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, clv. 2. [2] Ibid. cxxvi. 1. [3] *Leechbook I*, xxxviii. 4.
[4] *Lacn.* 24 (LI). [5] *Lacn.* 14 (XXXIII).
[6] *Leechbook III*, xiv. 1. [7] This occurs again in *Leechbook I*, xv. 1.

boil till it be very thick.' Give to drink at midday with various other worts, 'and let him forgo [what is] sour and everything salt'.[1]

The Anglo-Saxon for hiccough is variously spelt *gesca*, *geocsa*, *geohsa*, *geoxa*, and *gihsa*. The *First Leechbook* says that hiccough 'comes from a very chilled stomach or from a too much heated one, or from too much fullness or from too much emptiness, or of evil wet tearing and scarifying the stomach. . . . An emetic then is good for the man that hiccough attacks on account of repletion', &c.[2] Cockayne compares this passage with a similar one from Paul of Aegina.[3]

The word *sogopa* is variously translated hiccough or heartburn.

Bede says that Ceolfrid, who succeeded Benedict Biscop as abbot of the two abbeys of Jarrow and Wearmouth, suffered from 'a baneful and incurable affection of the lungs'.[4]

(*h*) *Diseases of the liver and the bile*

The Anglo-Saxons held the functions of the liver to be as follows:

> It is the material (*timber*) of which the blood is formed, and the house of the blood and also its nourishment. When there is digestion and thinness of the foods, they enter the liver and then change their appearance and turn into blood. It then rejects the impurities that are there, and collects the clean blood and sends it to the heart through four arteries (*ædra*), through all the body and also to the extremities of the limbs.[5]

Pliny also assigns to the liver the function of receiving the blood from the heart and then dispersing it in the veins.[6]

Sections xvii to xxiv of the *Second Leechbook* are concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the liver. Such are swelling of the liver, wounds of that organ, liver abscess, and cirrhosis.

Section xxiii deals with diet in liver complaints: no broth, no eggs because their moisture is fat and makes more heat, nothing moist or greasy, no oyster patties (*oster-hláfas*), and no sweet things which cause puffing up. 'Let him lie on his right side, and lay his right hand stretched out under his head for half an hour', says a recipe in section xxiv. A similar passage occurs in an Italian

[1] *Lacn.* 112 (CLXXX).
[2] *Leechbook I*, xviii.
[3] Paulus Aegineta, ii. 56. (Sydenham Society, 1, 1844, p. 320.)
[4] Bede, *Historia abbatum*, 10.
[5] *Leechbook II*, xvii.
[6] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xi. 74 (end).

manuscript of the ninth to tenth century in the Hunterian Collection in Glasgow. 'For the liver: eat berries [*bacas*: ? = olives here, as Italian] 77 grains, pepper 75 grains, made into a powder as much as you can lift with three fingers, put into wine: then let him [the patient] lie with his right arm stretched under his head, on his right side, for two hours.'[1]

The Anglo-Saxon word for bile is *ealla* or *gealla* (gall). There are several recipes 'for effusion of the bile': one is to administer the herb 'buoptalmon' in drink, with the result that the patient 'will be of such a colour as if he had come out of a very hot bath'.[2] Another says that struthium 'comforts the inwards against effusion of the bile'.[3]

There are two Anglo-Saxon words for jaundice.[4] One is *geolo-ádl*, derived from *geolo*, yellow, and the other is *geal-ádl*, derived from *gealla*, bile.

The symptoms of jaundice as given in the *First Leechbook* are as follows: 'The body becomes sour and yellow as good silk, and he has under his tongue very black veins and evil, and his water is yellow.' The remedy prescribed follows: 'Let him blood from the lung vein (*lungen ædre*), give him often a stirring drink, stone baths repeatedly. Work him then a composing drink of sorrel in wine and in water, and in the bath every morning a mulled (*milisc*) drink. It will better the bitterness of the bile.'[5]

Various prescriptions *wiþ þære geolwan ádle* occur in the seventy-second section of the *Third Leechbook*.

(*i*) *Diseases of the digestive tract*

Various words which occur in the *Leechbooks* refer to this part of the body. Equivalents are given for them in the various Anglo-Saxon and Latin vocabularies, but these do not always help to clarify what part is meant by the Anglo-Saxon text.

The words for the stomach are *maga* (always equated with *stomachus* in the vocabularies) and *wamb*: that for gut is *þearm* (cf. modern German *Darm*). This last word is compounded with others to signify specific portions: thus *smæl-þearm* is the small intestine and *snǽdel-þearm* (from *snǽdan* to take food) is the large

[1] Codex Hunter T. 4. 13, fol. 146*r*. Published in H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur*, Leipzig, 1923, p. 112.

[2] *A.S. Herbal*, cxli. 2.

[3] Ibid. cxlvi. 2.

[4] See also p. 274.

[5] *Leechbook I*, xlii.

intestine. *Blind-pearm* occurs in a tenth-century vocabulary and is equated with caecum: *bæc-pearm* and *innelfe* (or *inylfe*) signify the bowels. The word *bæc-pearm* does not occur in the *Leechbooks* but in vocabularies only. In the eighth century it is equated with exta, praecordia, in the tenth with extales, and in the eleventh with anus. *Innelfe* is equated in the tenth to eleventh centuries with both exta and viscera. These equations demonstrate the lack of precision of the Dark Ages, since in classical Latin *exta* signifies entrails (heart, lungs, liver) as opposed to *viscera* (stomach and lower intestines).

Mid-hriðere may with some probability refer to the omentum: *ropp* signifies the colon.

The Anglo-Saxon word for digestion is *meltung* (literally the 'melting' of food), which is cognate with *miltan* (to melt and to digest) and presumably also with *milte*, the spleen.

The following are specimen passages dealing with diseases of the stomach and intestines.

The symptoms for *wamb-ádl* are given in the *Second Leechbook* as follows: 'The stomach turns itself (*went*) and is fevered (*hryt*) and feels sore when the man eats meat, and prickings, and loss of appetite for meat. The knees halt, the loins are heavy and there are spasms between the shoulders, and all the body piece-meal is heavy, and the feet are slow, and the fleshy parts of the loins are sore.' The remedy prescribed is a day's fasting, but 'if the disease still increases, let him fast for two days together', or partake of a light diet, such as eggs.[1] The symptoms given in another passage for 'disease in the stomach, colon (*ropp*) and small guts' are thirst and loss of appetite, alternate diarrhoea and constipation, inability to digest and dropping of blood.[2] Another recipe runs: 'Baths for diseases of the stomach, they must be of salt water: if none can be had, let their meats be salted.'[3]

Another leechdom runs: 'If a man's bowels (*innelfa*) prolapse, pound *galluc* (comfrey), wring through a cloth into warm cow's milk, wet your hands therein: put the bowels [back] into the man, sew up with silk: boil him the comfrey for nine mornings unless there be need for a longer time: feed him with fresh hen's flesh.'[4]

The first section of the *Second Leechbook* deals with the diseases of the *maga*: symptoms, course, complications, and treatment. The earliest symptoms of 'diseased stomach' are frequent spitting,

[1] *Leechbook II*, xxv.
[2] Ibid. xxxi.
[3] Ibid. xxxii.
[4] *Leechbook III*, lxxiii.

retching, and vomiting, with a feeling of distension and great thirst.

From disease of the stomach come many and various diseases, as broken wounds and spasms (*hramma*) and epilepsy and fiend-disease (*fienda-ádl*) and much anxiety and gloominess without need, and erysipelas and immoderate desire for food and immoderate disinclination and daintiness, and painful internal diseases of the womb and the feet [? pudenda] and the bladder and dejection and immoderate sleeplessness and senseless words.

Section xxvii of the *Second Leechbook* deals with 'the various nature of the *wamb* and its imperfection, how a man may recognize it'. It deals with the *wamb* when it is hot, cold, or moist. The first condition is conducive to good digestion, but a cold *wamb* engenders disease of the brain (*brægenes-ádl*) and madness. Excessive appetite (*friclo*) may arise from cold disease of the stomach.

Meats which are slowly digested are prescribed for excessive hunger, which is produced by 'immoderate heat of the stomach'. The following are hints as to what flesh should be chosen in this connexion:

Beef, she-goat's flesh and venison digest slowly: the flesh of the he-goat is worst, also that of the ram, the ox, and of quadrupeds which are very old, and of birds which have hard flesh [such as] peacock, swan, duck. To those that have a cold *wamb* thou shalt give well-digesting meats—shell-fishes, young pigeons, chicken and goose wings, they are the better as they are fatter and fresher. Pigs' trotters are easy of digestion, and veal and kids: sweet wine digests better than the dry.[1]

And again: 'For a disordered stomach (*heort-cóðu*)',[2] there is a list of 'foods that digest slowly: salmon (*leax*) and fishes which digest slowly: goose-giblets (*góse innelfe*) and pigs' trotters'[3]. It will be noticed that the last item occurred in the former list also, where it was mentioned as easily digested. Perhaps the method of cooking, though not prescribed, should be taken into consideration. The same recipe also prescribes a 'cooling and strengthening diet', such as 'apples, not too sweet, but having a mixture of sour and sweet in taste (*surmilisc*), and pears, and peaches, and bread put into hot or cold water according to the preference of the patient'.

[1] *Leechbook II*, xvi. 2.

[2] *Heort* here should presumably be translated stomach rather than heart, since the section is dealing with the diseases of the *maga*. There seems to have been no knowledge of disorders of the heart as such. It may be noted that καρδία signifies stomach as well as heart: whence καρδιακός means dyspeptic.

[3] *Leechbook II*, i. 1.

For the 'hot and inflamed' stomach, the following diet is prescribed: 'Bread in cold water or in vinegar and very hard-boiled eggs', also lettuces and chicken lightly boiled, goose-feet, and 'fishes that have hard flesh and winkles and oysters (*ostre*)': also pears and mild apples.[1]

Sections xxxvi to xlv of the *Second Leechbook* are devoted to *milte-wærc* (pain in the spleen). Among the symptoms noted are that the patients are 'lean and gloomy and pale of aspect, though before they were fat and are still disposed this way. . . . The urine is not healthy, but is black and green . . . and the breathing is laboured.'[2] It is difficult to determine the question whether malaria existed in England in Anglo-Saxon times, but this association of pallor and spleen disorders is suggestive. It must, however, be remembered that much of the Anglo-Saxon medical lore ultimately derived from Greek sources through transmission from translations, and the symptoms of malaria were well recognized in Greece.

We are told that the eating of apples, nuts, and peas produces distension of the spleen and blows out the colon, the small intestine, the stomach, and the intestines (*inne-foran*). The remedy prescribed is a mixture of pepper, cummin, honey, and salt.

Another of the remedies given for disease of the spleen is: 'First three clusters of berries of black ivy, then five, then seven, then nine, then eleven' and so on to twenty-one: 'to be drunk in wine. If the man have fever also, give him the grains of the ground ivy in hot water to drink.'[3] Presumably the increasing doses of ivy were intended to act as a diuretic.

(*j*) *Stone*

A deficiency of vitamin A is now considered to be a possible cause for this condition, and perhaps for other diseases of the urinary tract, and it has already been shown that the Anglo-Saxons suffered from this deficiency. Unfortunately the recipes for stone, though mentioned in the list of contents of the *Second Leechbook*, are missing from the manuscript.

Two recipes for stone, neither of any practical use, occur in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*. In one, saxifrage[4] (otherwise known as

[1] Ibid. xvi. 1. [2] Ibid. xxxvi. [3] Ibid. xxxix.

[4] Saxifrage is prescribed because it breaks up the surface of the rocks over which it creeps.

sundcorn) is to be pounded in wine: 'it breaks the stones the same day and tugs the mout'.[1] The other recipe concerns lithospermon ('stone seed'): 'In the height of it, it has stones white and round as pearls and of the size of peas, and of the hardness of stone, and they cleave together and are hollow within and the seed is within.' In case stones wax in the bladder and a man may not pass water, the recipe says that these stones should be taken to the weight of 5 pennies and given to drink in wine: 'it breaks the stones and leads forth the water'.[2] This prescription is derived directly from Pliny.[3]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes ivy as a diuretic: seven or eleven berries are to be pounded in water and given to drink. 'Wonderfully it gathers the stones in the bladder, and breaks them and draws them forth through the urine.'[4]

For retention of urine or incontinence, various remedies, mostly of an animal nature—such as the eating of a fried goat's bladder—are given in chapter xxxvii of the *First Leechbook*.

(*k*) *Joints*

(A.S. *lith*, a joint: *liþ-seáw* and *liþule*, synovial fluid)

'If the synovia [*liþule*] runs out, take the netherward part of marche [apium graveolens] and honey and wheaten meal and *wicggan innel* [Cockayne suggests *Innelge* and translates 'the bowels of an earwig']: rub them together and lay on.'[5]

Lithwort, dwarf elder, is also prescribed. Presumably it obtained its name owing to its being used for this purpose.

(*l*) *Hair*

The Anglo-Saxons had prescriptions intended to make the hair grow and also to remove it.

For the former, a prescription runs: 'If hair fall off, boil polypody [*eofor-fearn*] and wash the head with that, so warm.'[6]

There are, however, more prescriptions to secure the opposite result, though perhaps the possibilities of thus obtaining it would

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, xcix. 2. Cf. also *Leechbook III*, xx, where sundcorns again are to be used, and Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxii. 30.

[2] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxx. 1–2.

[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxvii. 74. Quoted on p. 250.

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, c. 1. See also the recipe at the end of the last section.

[5] *Leechbook I*, lxi. 2.

[6] Ibid. lxxxvii. 1.

have been but slight. 'If hair be too thick, take a swallow, burn it under a tile, and let the ashes be scattered on it.'[1]

Sextus Placitus prescribes 'for disagreeable hairs, to do away with them', thus: 'If you take a wolf's marrow and straightway smear with it the places from which the hairs have been pulled, the smearing will not allow them to grow again.'[2] With this may be compared the following prescription which is given by Pliny: 'juice of goat's lettuce applied with oil after pulling out the hairs'.[3]

Another leechdom, again derived from Pliny, occurs in the *First Leechbook*: 'In order that the hair may not grow, take ants' eggs, rub them together, smear on the place: never will any hair grow up there.'[4] Pliny, sympathizing with the vanities of the youth of his day, says that 'to prevent the armpits of young persons from becoming hairy, they should be well rubbed with ants' eggs'.[5]

[1] *Leechbook I*, lxxxvii. 3.
[2] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, ix. 6.
[3] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxvi. 93.
[4] *Leechbook I*, lxxxvii. 2.
[5] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxx. 13. See also xxx. 46 for 'various kinds of depilatories'.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Other Diseases

(*a*) *Fever* (*fefer, drif*)

VARIOUS kinds of fever are mentioned in Anglo-Saxon literature and recipes.

Besides the usual word *fefer* one finds the word *hrið*, which is cognate with the Old High German *rito*. The verb *hriðian* signifies to shake, as well as to have a fever. The form *ridesoht* (= *hrið-suht*?) is used of the fever of Simon's wife's mother in the Anglo-Saxon version of St. Mark's gospel.[1] The word for this illness used by St. Matthew is *drif*.[2] *Drif* is also used in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to describe the epidemic which attacked England in 1087.[3] Fever was also named *bryne-ádl*, burning disease, after its outstanding symptom.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes the herb *glycyrida*, boiled in warm water *wiþ þone drigean fefor*[4] (for the 'dry' fever), presumably referring to a high fever with dry skin and thirst. It also prescribes *conize* in oil *wyþ ða cólan feforas*[5] (for the 'cold' fevers).

Prescriptions for two of the eight fevers which Hippocrates mentions in his first book of the epidemics are given in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*. These are tertian (τριταῖος) and quartan (τεταταῖος), so named from their day of recurrence. But, because these two fevers are mentioned in the *Herbal*, it does not follow that either occurred in Anglo-Saxon England. It must be remembered that the *Herbal* was translated into Anglo-Saxon from late Latin material derived ultimately from Greek writers, who prescribed for the malarial fevers prevalent in their own country.

[1] Mark i. 31. [2] Matt. viii. 15.

[3] See p. 93. Cockayne prints a charm *wið gedrif* from MS. Cotton Caligula A. XV, fo. 125 (*Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 295): it consists of a number of unintelligible words, at least two of which appear to be Old Irish. This word also occurs in a charm in MS. Regina 338, fo. 88*b*, in the Vatican, which runs: *Þis man sceal wið þ. gedrif writan on þréom léac-bladan his naman; þærmid* Eugenius, Stephanus, Portarius, Dionysius, Sambucius, Cecilius et Cyriacus. (Quoted by F. Holthausen, 'Fieberzauber', *Archiv Stud. neueren Spr.*, Bd. 99, 1897, p. 424).

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, cxlv. 1. [5] Ibid. cxliii. 4.

The prescriptions for quartan fever ('for the fever which comes on man on the fourth day') include dosing the patient with hypericum pounded in wine,[1] and juice of delphinium pounded with pepper—an odd number of peppercorns being used, 31 on the first day, 17 on the second, 13 on the third.[2] As a preventive measure against an attack of quartan fever the patient should drink the juice of plantain, pounded in water, two hours before the attack is expected. Plantain is also prescribed as a remedy for fevers that come on the third and on the second day.[3]

Lencten-ádl should be included in this section. The phrase is translated 'typhus fever' by Bosworth and Toller, and Cockayne appears to hold the same view. Since there is no evidence that typhus occurred in England until the later Middle Ages, this identification is probably wrong. It is safest to interpret the word as referring to a fever which is prevalent in spring (Lent). Quaking —i.e. shivering—is noted as a symptom: the phrase 'he quakes (*cwacaþ*) as a man does in *lencten-ádl*' occurs in the *Second Leechbook*.[4] It is probable that ague was prevalent in the Fens and in other districts of England before the reclamation of the marshes. MacArthur identifies *lencten-ádl* with malaria and ague. 'One peculiarity of the malaria that flourished in England', he says, 'is that in infected persons the parasites tend to lie dormant during the winter, later becoming active once more, with the result that the approach of early spring is heralded by an outbreak of relapses —Sydenham's spring intermittents.'[5]

The little boy who was ill at the monastery of Bardney and whose recovery, according to the narrative of Bede, was effected owing to his sitting close to St. Oswald's tomb, was suffering from *lencten-ádl*.[6] Bede also says in connexion with this disease that the litter of St. Earconwald, bishop of London, 'in which he was wont to be carried when sick, is kept by his disciples and continues to cure many sick of the fever [*febricitantes*: A.S. version, *lencten-ádl*] and other distempers'.[7]

A prescription for *lencten-ádl* is found in the *First Leechbook*: thirteen herbs are to be drunk in ale and holy water.[8]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, clii. 2.
[2] Ibid. clx.
[3] Ibid. ii. 12, 14, 15.
[4] *Leechbook II*, xvii (end).
[5] Sir W. P. MacArthur, 'A brief history of English malaria', *Brit. Med. Bull.* 1951, viii. 78.
[6] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 12. See the present work, p. 184.
[7] Ibid. iv. 6.
[8] *Leechbook I*, lxii. 2.

Various charms against fever (including that already quoted from MS. Regina 338), employ the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Though usually used against insomnia, these names would also be naturally connected with fever, since two of its symptoms are restlessness and delirium.[1]

(*b*) *Gout*

The word *fót-ádl* (with the variants *fót-cóðu*, *fót-ece*, and *fót-swyle*) has been identified with gout (podagra).

Two great men of the Anglo-Saxon period are said to have suffered from gout, Abbot Mellitus and St. Cuthbert. Our authority for the former is Bede.[2] Goscelin in his life of Mellitus, written in the twelfth century, says that the miracles wrought at his tomb were especially for the cure of the gout: a woman who had the gout in her hands, for instance, sent waxen models of them to the tomb of Mellitus, and was cured.[3]

The *Early South English Legendary* says of Cuthbert

> Þat þare cam a goute
> In his kneo, of Anguische gret.[4]

Cuthbert practised severe asceticism in his later years, but this illness occurred in his youth. The passage in Bede's life[5] is as follows: 'His knee was seized with a sudden pain and began to swell in a grievous tumour: the sinews in his thigh (*poples*) contracted, so that he first carried his foot hung in the air, limping; then, the trouble increasing, he was unable to get about at all.' One day he was approached by a 'horseman clad in white vestments', who examined the knee, and told him to boil some wheaten flour in milk and to apply this hot poultice (*confectio*) to the tumour; he would be healed. Cuthbert did so, and after a few days he was well. Whatever the condition was, it certainly was not gout or arthritis. The fact that the word *poples* is used in describing the site, and the course of the illness, suggests an acute abscess in the soft parts of the popliteal space. The application of heat is a valuable form of treatment for diseases of the joints.

[1] For examples, see my article, 'The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and later recipes,' *Folk-lore*, 1945, lvi. 254–6.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* ii. 7.

[3] Hardy, *Descriptive catalogue of materials* (Rolls Series), 1862, vol. i, p. 219.

[4] *Early South English Legendary*: Cuthbert, lines 39–40 (Early Eng. Text Soc., o.s. 87, 1887, p. 360).

[5] Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. ii.

La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei (a very late 'source') says that Harold had an attack of 'la gute' before the battle of Stamford Bridge:

> King Harold is in anguish,
> Nor knows what he can do;
> For his thigh is much swollen,
> And his leg is now festering.[1]

But Edward the Confessor, at his prayer, makes him

> entirely cured:
> Now he has no more anxiety nor pain,
> But that he may conquer the Norwegians.

The *Lacnunga* gives a prescription, as follows:

For the great discharging foot disease, which leeches call podagra. The disease is swollen and it oozeth matter and quittor;[2] the sinews are distorted, and the toes shrink up. Take groundsel that groweth on buildings, and the red wood-chervil, of both an equal amount. Pound with old hoglard; work to a paste. Apply to the feet. Bind with a cloth at night and wash off again in the morning and dry with a cloth; smear with the white of a hen's egg. Make again a new paste. Do so for seven days: then will the sinews be straight and the feet sound.[3]

Dr. Underwood comments: 'The condition described bears no resemblance to gout. It was certainly a septic condition, possibly a chronic osteomyelitis: gangrene is also possible. It is unlikely that the treatment described would be of any value.'[4]

Other remedies for 'gout' are the following: Scordias (water germander) pounded in vinegar or water, as a drink;[5] betony, boiled in water and drunk, and the pounded plant applied locally;[6] mugwort, eaten in honey;[7] mandrake ('take of the right hand and of the left, of either hand by three pennies weight, work to dust, give to drink in wine for seven days');[8] eryngium (sea holly), 'which mollifies gout if taken in early stages';[9] datulus, or great cow garlic ('take heads and dry . . . grind to dust, and add two egg-shells full of

[1] Lines 4163–6, 4182–4. Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (Rolls Series).

[2] The Anglo-Saxon word is *gilstre*, a hapax legomenon. Gratton and Singer note that in the manuscript it is glossed *quiture*, probably in a thirteenth-century hand. They translate by 'quittor'. Cockayne translates by 'corruption'.

[3] *Lacn.* 68 (CXXVII).

[4] Personal communication.

[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxiii. 5.

[6] *Lacn.* 67 (CXXVI).

[7] *A.S. Herbal*, xii. 4.

[8] Ibid. cxxxii. 4.

[9] Ibid. clxxiii. 5.

wine');[1] hartclover, drunk in wine;[2] marsh mallow, pounded with lard;[3] pellitory (*dohlrune*) ('seethe in water, bathe feet and knees: pound with lard, put in a cloth, and lay to feet and knees').[4] This last prescription is 'against *fót-ádl* and against *cancor*' in the Anglo-Saxon, though the Latin version had 'gonagram' (gout in the knee) and not 'cancor'.

The word *liþ-ádl*, from *liþ*, a joint, also signifies gout. It occurs but once and the remedy prescribed is that the patient should frequently bathe in a bath in which a fox has been boiled till only the bones are left: the treatment to be repeated annually, with the addition of oil in the bath.[5]

(*c*) '*Rheum*'
(*dropa*)

Grattan and Singer translate the word *dropa*, where it occurs in *Lacnunga* 9 (XXIII) among 'miscellaneous remedies', as 'rheum'. They give the following note:

> The A.S. *dropa* doubtless renders Latin *gutta*, a condition in which humours were supposed to collect in the diseased part. The word rheum will yield a corresponding meaning if taken in its medieval sense. *Gutta* appears in modern English as *gout*, and a gout-like state is indicated in . . . [*wiđ fót-ádle & wiđ þone dropan*, Cockayne, i, p. 376]. *Gutta maligna* [appearing in the charm for pains in the teeth, *Lacn.* 100 (CLXVI)] was a common term for a painful spot as in a joint.

The word *gutta* in medieval Latin (French, *la goutte*) is interesting. Its basic meaning, as in the case of the Anglo-Saxon word *ædre*, seems to be a channel (*canalis*, *rivus*):[6] but Du Cange gives various specialized meanings also, equating it with *catarrhus*, with *fluxio*, with *fistula*, and with *podagra*[7] ['*arthritis quaelibet*']. *Gutta ciata* (*goutte sciatique*) localizes it as *ischiadicus dolor*, pain in the hip. *Gutta cadiva* is translated epilepsy.[8]

Cockayne translates *dropa* as 'paralysis of a limb', and adds, 'the original sense remains in the "dropped hands", "wrist-drop" of painters, paralysis of the extensor muscles of the wrist'. Bosworth

[1] (12th cent.) Fly-leaf leechdoms, Cockayne, vol. i, p. 377.
[2] *A.S. Herbal*, xxv. 4.
[3] Ibid. xxxix. 2.
[4] Ibid. lxxxiii. 2.
[5] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, iii. 11.
[6] See p. 10.
[7] See p. 406.
[8] Du Cange, *Glossarium*, vol. iv, 1885, pp. 142–3.

and Toller more cautiously say 'a disease, paralysis?', while the *O.E.D.* translates *drop* as 'a disease: in 1559 and probably in 1000, *gout*'. The two instances of 1000 A.D. occur in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*: one remedy was two cupfuls of 'knee-holly' mixed with honey,[1] the other was marjoram.[2] Another remedy for *dropa*, that to which Grattan and Singer's note quoted above is appended, prescribes five herbs to be handled in the autumn: 'shred them small and dry them, and hold them over winter, and use them when thou hast need. Boil them in ale.'[3]

(*d*) *Dropsy*

There are three words for dropsy in Anglo-Saxon, *wæter-ádl*, *wæter-bolla* and *wæter-seócness*. The last is equated in Ælfric's Glossary with *ydrops*. The word *wæter-full*, dropsical, is also found.

The remedies prescribed are as follows: For *wæter-ádl*, the patient is to swallow goat's grease, squeezed into pills, and he is to drink cold water with it.[4] For *wæter-bolla*, betony pounded in warm water is to be drunk, and vervain or wall-wort (dwarf-elder = ebula), four spoonfuls in a bowl[5] full of wine.[6] For *wæter-seócness* also elder is prescribed for checking the onset of the disease,[7] also twenty berries (*corna*) of ivy, pounded in a sextarius of wine: 'the infirmity will be annulled through the urine'.[8] The use of ivy as a diuretic in cases of dropsy is also to be found in Pliny, who says that 'Erasistratus prescribes twenty of the golden coloured berries of the ivy which we have mentioned as the chrysocarpus[9] to be beaten up in one sextarius of wine, and he says that if three cyathi of this preparation are taken for dropsy, it will carry off by urine the water that has been secreted beneath the skin'.[10] It may be recalled that ivy (*hedera nigra*) is employed in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* as a diuretic also in cases of stone.[11] None of the herbs mentioned is effective as a diuretic.

The term *wæterælf-ádl* also occurs in the *Third Leechbook*. The symptoms given are livid fingernails, eyes tearful, and the patient

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, lix. [2] Ibid. cxxiv. 2. [3] *Lacn.* 9 (XXIII).

[4] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vi. 15.

[5] *A.S. Herbal, Bolla*: equated with cyathus: cf. quotation from Pliny in text above (note 10, below).

[6] *Leechbook I*, xliii. [7] *A.S. Herbal*, cxlviii. 1.

[8] Ibid. cxxi. 2.

[9] Cf. *A.S. Herbal*, cxxi. 1, 'ivy called crysocantes because it bears berries like to gold'.

[10] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxiv. 47. [11] *A.S. Herbal*, c. 1. See p. 401.

'will look downwards'. The prescription for this includes nineteen various herbs, ale, holy water, and a charm to be sung thrice.[1]

(*e*) *Dysentery*

The Anglo-Saxon word for dysentery is *útsiht*, from *siht*, flowing. The word *mete-útsiht* signifies a disease which causes food to pass the bowels without digestion.

Two outbreaks of dysentery were mentioned in the section on Epidemics,[2] namely, that of 987, which is called by Simeon of Durham *scitta*, and that of 1010 which attacked the Danish invaders in Kent. The 'bloody flux' (*riuth fola*) which occurred in Ireland in the eighth century was also dysentery.[3]

Section lvi. 4 of the *Second Leechbook* deals with dysentery. In that section meats that restrain (*nearwian*) the stomach (*wamb*) and do not hurt the maw (*maga*) are prescribed. Examples are peas, broth, and vinegar, or old cheese sodden in goats' milk together with goats' grease. 'Make him an application (*onlegen*) wrought to a clammy consistency (*clam*), barley—or wheaten—meal, sodden with honey.'

The *Lacnunga* gives a charm against dysentery. 'This epistle did the angel bring to Rome, when they were grievously afflicted with loose bowels. Write this on a vellum sheet as long as may surround the head, and hang it on the neck of whatsoever man needeth it. He will soon be better.' The 'epistle' is a short passage of gibberish in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Cockayne suggests that the sickness referred to was the 'plague' at Rome in the time of Gregory the Great.[4]

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes achillea, drunk in water, as a remedy against dysentery,[5] and the *Lacnunga* a hen's egg which has been lying in vinegar for two days.[6]

(*f*) *Peór*, *Peór-ádl*

This word provides one of the most interesting of the minor problems of Anglo-Saxon medicine. It has usually been translated 'dry-disease'. This is owing to a possible linguistic affinity with the Greek τέρσομαι, be, or become, dry.

[1] *Leechbook III*, xliii.
[2] See p. 90.
[3] See p. 85.
[4] *Lacn.* 102 (CLXVIII).
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxxv. 4.
[6] *Lacn.* 17 (XXXVIII). This is derived from Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxix. 11.

The evidence as to *peór* is summed up by Bosworth and Toller as follows: 'It seems to denote an inflamed swelling or ulcer; it is mentioned in connection with wens' [for *peór* and for a 'shooting' wen—i.e. one causing a sharp pain, the *Third Leechbook* prescribes various herbs to be drunk in good ale];[1] 'in reference to the eye it is said to be the same as "fig"' ['against *peór-ádl* in the eyes which is called *gefigo*, and in Latin is called cimosis'—Cockayne glosses *σύκωσις*—3 herbs and yolk of egg are prescribed];[2] it is mentioned in close connection with the same disease' [in the *Lacnunga*].[3] Grattan and Singer note that '*theor* seems usually connected with the chest and is then perhaps roughly "bronchial trouble"'.[4]

The forty-seventh section of the *First Leechbook* gives many prescriptions with many and various ingredients for *peór*, including Christian incantations. In one, purgative and emetic drinks are to be taken—or, as the Anglo-Saxon naïvely puts it, 'afterwards drink a strong drink that will run up and down'. In another various herbs are to be made into a 'salve' of the consistency of dough, placed on a linen cloth and warmed, together with the body, at the fire; the concoction is then to be smeared on the part affected. In a third the patient is to be bled under each ankle in turn. In a fourth, a cupping-horn is to be used 'where the disease has settled'. In two of the recipes the patient is instructed to cover himself so as to be warm after he has taken the dose of medicine prescribed. In some cases the cure is a matter of time, and the application is often complicated. One concoction, for instance, after having stood for three nights, is to be drunk for thirty nights in all. In another leechdom frequent fomentations are prescribed: ivy and three other herbs are to be poured and laid on a hot stone in a trough, a little water is to be poured upon them, so as to 'let it send forth steam on the body where need is': this again is to be 'if *peór* remain in one place'.[5]

The word *peór* is also found compounded with other words: *peór-drenc*, for instance, is a drink for *peór-ádl*, while *peór-gerid*

[1] *Leechbook III*, xxx.

[2] *Leechbook I*, ii. 23. Bosworth and Toller define *gefigo* as 'a disease with fig-shaped swellings'.

[3] *Lacn.* 37–43 (LXXI–LXXVII) (*peór*), 44 (LXXVIII) (*uíc*, 'fig', i.e. a fig-shaped swelling, which here at least = haemorrhoids).

[4] See Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, p. 110, note 2.

[5] *Leechbook III*, xxx: cf. also *Lacn.* 42 (LXXVI).

probably signifies the inflammation accompanying *peór*. The latter is found in only one passage, namely in section CLXXVIII of the *Lacnunga*,[1] where it is mentioned as one of the many diseases to be cured by a panacea in the shape of 'a good morning drink' invented, it says, by a king called Arestolobius.[2]

Peór compounded with *wenn* signifies an inflamed wen. *Peór* compounded with *wyrm* according to Bosworth and Toller is a worm in a boil. Since, however, the Anglo-Saxons considered that worms were one of the chief sources of disease, possibly it might be translated 'inflammation caused by a worm'. A recipe in the *First Leechbook* runs: 'Against *peór-wyrm* in the foot, take the red nettle, pound it, add water to it, lay it on a hot stone, make it froth, bind it on the foot for the space of a night.'[3]

The herb *peór-wyrt*, equated by Cockayne with ploughman's spikenard (*inula conyza*), is an ingredient to be used in a *peór-drenc*.[4]

(*g*) *Haemorrhoids*

(*Fíc, Fíc-ádl*)

Cockayne has a long note on *fíc* in his glossary to the second volume of his *Leechdoms*. He says, 'it affects all parts of the body which have hair, especially the eyebrows, beard, head, and anus: and it was sometimes called marisca'. He gives references to many classical writers, Dioscorides, Celsus, Paul of Aegina, Hippocrates, Oribasius, and others, and adds that 'the name was in constant technical use among mediaeval medical writers'. But Bosworth and Toller translate 'haemorrhoids', and Grattan and Singer also say that '*Haemorrhoid* is the right rendering of A.S. *fíc*. The medical associations of the word *ficus* in Latin medical writings, from Celsus (1st cent.) onward, leave no doubt on this.'[5]

A recipe in the *Lacnunga*, immediately following several for *peór*, is for *uíc*: this is the case to which Grattan and Singer's note just quoted is appended.

If the *uíc* become firmly established on a man's rump: Then do thou take burdock roots—the large ones—three or four, and smoke them on hot embers; and then pull out one from the hearth, and pound, and

[1] See p. 307.
[2] *Leechbook III*, lix.
[3] *Leechbook I*, xlvii. 2.
[4] *Leechbook III*, xxx. Also in *Lacn.* 40 (LXXIV).
[5] Grattan and Singer, p. 102, note 8.

make like a little cake; and apply to the rump as hot as thou canst bear. . . . Wash not with water, but wipe clean with a cloth, and put a very thin cloth between the rump and the cake.[1]

The term 'bleeding fig', in section xix of the *Lacnunga*, again obviously indicates a haemorrhoid: the remedy is to swallow nine slices of 'myrrh the plant', with honey on top of each, the process to be continued nine mornings and nine nights, unless cure comes sooner. Bosworth and Toller translate the A.S. *murra* by 'cicely', but Grattan and Singer think that *murra ða wyrt* cannot be identified.[2]

A salve 'for wens and for the flowing (? discharging) *fíc*' is to be found in an eleventh-century manuscript fragment which was discovered in a book-binding in the collection of Viscount Clifden and is now in the Wellcome Library. The remedy consists of the roots of cucumber and other plants boiled in malt for ale (*on mealtealop*), wrung through a linen cloth, and boiled in virgin honey (i.e. honey distilled from the comb, without squeezing: *hunig-teár*).[3]

The *First Leechbook* has two recipes *wiþ seóndum omum* which it equates with *fíc*; one prescribes a daily application of butcher's broom with bullock's gall mixed with honey and soot; the other, an ointment made of various ingredients.[4]

That worms were thought to be the cause of haemorrhoids is seen from the following prescription for *fíc-ádl*: 'Work a fomentation (*beðing*) thus: take the red "ryden", put it in a trough, heat stones very hot, lay them within the trough, and let [the patient] sit on a stool over the fomentation that it may reek him well, then the fig-worms will fall on the fomentation.'[5]

(*h*) *Insomnia*

The two plants best known as remedies against wakefulness in Anglo-Saxon times and throughout the Middle Ages were mandragora and poppy. The instructions for application of the former are to take the juice and smear the forehead,[6] of the latter to rub down in oil and to smear not only the forehead but the whole body also.[7]

[1] *Lacn.* 44 (LXXVIII). [2] Grattan and Singer, p. 102, note 9.

[3] A. Napier, 'Altenglische Miscellen, III.d.' *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 1890, Bd. 84, pp. 325–6.

[4] *Leechbook I*, xxxix. 3.

[5] *Leechbook III*, xlviii. A similar fomentation occurs in *Lacn.* 48 (LXXXIV).

[6] *A.S. Herbal*, cxxxii. 2. [7] *Leechbook I*, lxxxii.

The use of mandragora as a narcotic is derived from Pliny. He also speaks of its further use as an anaesthetic: 'It is given', he says, 'before incisions or punctures are made in the body, in order to ensure insensibility to the pain.'[1] But since this plant is a native of Italy, there was no point in including it in prescriptions for the Anglo-Saxons.

Pliny also tells us that 'the black poppy acts as a soporific, by the juice which exudes from incisions made in the stalk. . . . If obtained from the poppy in sufficiently large quantities, this juice thickens, after which it is kneaded out into lozenges, and dried in the shade.'[2]

The two following remedies are purely magical and have no scientific value, unless possibly by suggestion. 'For sleep, a goat's horn laid under the head turns waking into sleep.'[3] 'For sleep lay a wolf's head under the pillow. The unhealthy shall sleep.'[4]

The charms against sleeplessness which mention the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus have already been dealt with.[5]

A recipe for a sleeping-draught (*slæp-drænc*) occurs in the *Lacnunga*. It consists of radish, hemlock, wormwood, and henbane pounded and put into ale.[6]

Singer says that '*belenan*, *beolone*, henbane, henebelle', which he identifies with *Hyoscyamus niger* L., 'is one of the few members of the drug list that have any effective hypnotic action'.[7]

(*i*) *Paralysis*

(*Lyft-ádl*)

A good many cases of 'paralysis' are recorded by Bede and by the later chroniclers. The descriptions of the symptoms are usually vague, and in most cases no accurate diagnosis can be made. Where true paralysis was present, it must have been in many instances of a functional type, due to hysteria. As usual, the purpose of the chronicler is in each case to glorify the saint whose relics were regarded as having effected a cure.

An example may be given of a disease which was obviously not characterized by paralysis. The so-called *History of Abbot Ingulf of Croyland* gives details of an epidemic which prevailed at the Council of Kingesbyry in 851. 'In this council God wrought a celebrated

[1] Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, xxv. 94.
[2] Ibid. xx. 76.
[3] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, vi. 2.
[4] Ibid. ix. 2.
[5] See p. 226; cf. pp. 403, 405.
[6] *Lacn.* 28 (LXII).
[7] Grattan and Singer, p. 89.

miracle in honour of his most holy confessor St. Guthlac', which caused many pilgrims to go to Croyland.

> Now it chanced that many who were present, both small and great, were labouring under a certain disease, like paralysis, which that year was wearing away the whole of England. It affected men, women, and children with a sudden and severe chill, more intense than that of an eastern winter, and an intolerable pain in the diseased members was an infallible sign of its approach. No remedy or application was of any avail, but for the most part it attacked the hands and arms, and withered or disabled them.

Ceolnoth, archbishop of Canterbury, was one of those afflicted. In the midst of the council, he 'cried out with a loud voice that he was cured and freed from his disease by the merits of . . . Guthlac. Others also . . . who had been labouring under the same disorder, exclaimed that they now, by the grace of God, and the merits of the most holy Guthlac, felt no pain whatever in any of their limbs. . . . Now when an innumerable throng of sick persons kept daily flocking . . . to the tomb of St. Guthlac . . . so that oftentimes in one day more than one hundred of these paralytics were cured, the abbot Siward was so much enriched and became so excessively powerful' that 'his old age became far more fruitful and twice as prosperous as the beginning'.[1]

Bede records a miraculous cure for 'paralysis'. It is of a man named Bethwegen, who was cured, after prayer, at the tomb of St. Cuthbert. The symptoms were these:[2]

> He was seized with a sudden distemper in his body, insomuch that he fell down, and having lain some time, he could scarcely rise again. When at last he got up, he felt one half of his body, from the head to the foot, struck with palsy 'paralysis langore'—or in the Anglo-Saxon *mid þa ádl . . . þe Grécas nemnað paralysis ꝛ wé cweðað lyft-ádl*], and with much difficulty got home by the help of a staff.

This is very probably a case of apoplexy.

Another case, again called 'languor', occurs in Eddius's *Life of Wilfrid*. He relates how when the bishop had been put into prison 'in the royal borough of Brono'—so far unidentified—'the wife of the reeve of this town was suddenly overtaken by

[1] Ingulf: *Croylandensis historia*. In Rerum Anglicarum scriptorum veterum Tom. 1, 1684, pp. 16–17.

[2] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 31. Cf. also the story told in his *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 45, quoted on p. 189.

"languor";[1] all her limbs became nerveless, she was rigid, her body grew cold, her eyes closed, her mouth foamed'. The reeve appealed for help to Wilfrid. He 'standing over her, sprinkled her face with holy water, imploring the help of God in prayer: then, drop by drop, he bedewed her face till it was wet with the holy water. Then she opened her mouth, drew in long breaths, unclosed her eyes, recovered consciousness and understanding, and shortly afterwards, her limbs became warm'.[2] This was obviously a case of epilepsy.

Bede gives the following account of the death of Benedict Biscop, abbot of the monastery of St. Peter, Wearmouth, which occurred in 690. 'Benedict died of a palsy (*paralysi dissolutus est*) which grew upon him for three years, so that when he was dead (*praemortuus*) in all parts of his lower extremities, his upper ones alone—without the life of which a man cannot live—were spared to show his patience and virtue.'[3] This was probably a case of paraplegia, due to a lesion of the spinal cord.

Leofstan, abbot of Bury, was crippled with paralysis and sent to Edward the Confessor for a leech. His treatment by the Frenchman Baldwin has already been mentioned.[4] Leofstan recovered his sight and speech, but not the use of his hands. When he died, the monks, on the recommendation of Edward, elected Baldwin as their abbot.[5]

Two instances of distinguished persons suffering from paralysis are noted in the *Annals of Ulster*. One, under the date 859, is that 'Niall, sone of Iallan, who suffered from paralysis (*passus est paralisin*) during XXXIV years, and who was disturbed by frequent visions, as well false as true, rested in Christ'. The other entry records that in 866 'Muiredach, son of Cathal, king of Ui-Cremthainn, died of prolonged paralysis'.

Manny, abbot of Evesham, who died in 1066, was incapacitated by paralysis for the last seven years of his life: from 1059, *dissolutis omnibus membris*, he had been unable to carry out his duties as abbot.[6]

[1] 'Alligata langore.' Colgrave translates 'palsy'.
[2] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 37.
[3] Bede: *Historia abbatum*, § 11.
[4] See p. 194.
[5] Arnold, *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, vol. i, 1890, p. 134 (Rolls Series). See p. 129.
[6] *Chronicon abbatiae de Evesham*, ed. W. D. Macray, 1863, p. 87 (Rolls Series).

There are two Anglo-Saxon words which have been translated as paralysis, namely *lyft-ádl* and *dropa*. The former word has already been quoted[1] in the passage from Bede: it also occurs in the *First Leechbook*, where the prescription is to make the patient sick by means of boiling water, oil, and salt and by putting a finger down his throat, and by letting blood in the morning and scarifying.[2] Again 'for *lyftádl*, if the mouth be twisted or livid (*wóh, oððe won*)', various herbs and fomentations are prescribed, also a bath in which red ants have been boiled.[3] The probably erroneous idea that *dropa* meant paralysis has already been dealt with.[4]

The word *neurisn* occurs once, in the *First Leechbook*, and has been thought to signify a kind of paralysis: possibly, says Cockayne, it is the equivalent of *νευρών πάρεσις*. A recipe for this is the application of pounded earthworms.[5]

The idea of paralysis is also conveyed in the expression '*wið slápende líce*', for numbness of the limbs. For this the remedy is a bath, certain ingredients pounded and added to the dregs of mead, and warmth to the patient.[6] This treatment would at least comfort the sufferer.

The adjective *lama*, lame, is used with the special significance palsied, paralytic. It occurs, for instance, in the fifth chapter of St. Luke's gospel of the man who 'was taken with a palsy', and who was brought into Christ's presence by being let down through a hole in the roof of the house where He was.

Léf signifies weak, whence *léfung*, want of power, and so 'paralysis', a word used, once, by Ælfric.

(*j*) *Hemiplegia*
(*Healf-deád ádl*)

The 'contents' to the 59th section of the *Second Leechbook*[7] runs as follows: 'Leechdoms for the half-dead disease and whence it comes, and how a man shall treat it: applications and potions made from herbs . . . and that the disease does not come to a man

[1] On p. 414.
[2] *Leechbook I*, lix.
[3] *Leechbook III*, xlvii.
[4] See pp. 407–8.
[5] *Leechbook I*, lix.
[6] Fly-leaf leechdom, quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 380.
[7] This Section is contained in the British Museum manuscript Harl. 55, ff. 1–3. It has been inserted by Cockayne in the hiatus in MS. Royal 12 D. xvii, between Sections lvi and lxiv of the *Second Leechbook*. See p. 25. The 'contents' only remain in the Royal MS.

before forty or fifty winters: and of the southern acid potion (*súðerne wyrt-eced-drenc*) made with herbs. One and twenty virtues.' A prescription for preparing the 'southern acid drink' is given in the section itself (lix. 12–13): it runs 'oxumelli,[1] a southern acid drink, a mixture of vinegar, honey and water'—one part vinegar, two of honey, well cleansed, one of water. A radish is to be added and allowed to stand for a night.

The particulars of the 'half-dead disease' are amplified at the beginning of the section. The condition is described as coming 'on the right half of the body or on the left, where the sinews get paralysed and are [afflicted] with a viscid and thick humour. The humour must be removed by blood-lettings and drinks and leechdoms. When the disease first comes on the man, then open his mouth, look at his tongue: then it is whiter on that side on which the disease is about to be.' The treatment is the application of heat, and 'at intervals lay on and bind on to the sore and swollen sinews goats' droppings mixed with honey or sodden in vinegar: then the "sleepy" and swollen sinews are reduced'.

Other drinks prescribed for hemiplegia are water in which peas have been boiled for a prolonged time—this cleanses the system; or a full bowl of water in which beet with its roots, without salt, has been boiled.

(*k*) *Diseases of women*

Section 60 of the *Second Leechbook* is missing from the manuscript, but the table of contents which precedes it shows that it dealt with the diseases of women. This runs: 'Remedies for obstruction of the organs of generation (*gecynde*) of women and for all tendernesses of women: if a woman may not bear a child or if a child become dead in a woman's womb (*innoðe*) . . . for haemorrhage of women and if a woman be out of her mind . . . or if her womb (*cwiþ*) be overgrown, or if she suddenly be silent.'

Section 38 of the *Third Leechbook* prescribes for menstrual obstruction. 'If a woman's menses (*mónaþ-gecynd*) are hindered' a hot drink in a hot bath is to be given, also a poultice (*clam*) is to be applied to the vulva when she leaves the bath. This is to be done whenever the menses recur.

Child-birth has already been dealt with in Chapter XVI.

[1] No doubt this is referred to as the *southern* acid drink since it is the ὀξύμελι of the Greek physicians.

(*l*) *Rabies*

There are many prescriptions 'for the bite of a mad dog'. In each case they are for healing the wound which the dog has inflicted.

Section lxix of the *First Leechbook* contains seven examples of these; one is 'mix agrimony and plantain with honey and the white of an egg, and dress the wound with that'. The latter herb may also be used pounded and applied with lard, so as to 'scrape' the poison away.

The *Anglo-Saxon Herbal* prescribes vervain for various poisonous bites, including that of a mad dog. It is to be applied to the wound in conjunction with wheaten corns, wetted to make them soft. The corns are to be given to a hen: if, however, transference of the consequences is not to be secured by the hen eating the corns, another application of the same mixture is to be made to the wound itself so as to draw away the poison.[1]

[1] *A.S. Herbal*, iv. 10.

PART 10

Veterinary and Agricultural Magic

CHAPTER XXIX

Veterinary Medicine and Charms for Livestock

(*a*) *Introduction*

THE chief occupation of the Anglo-Saxon peasant, apart from cultivation of the fields, was the rearing of cattle and sheep. Second only to this were pig-breeding and the keeping of bees. The comparative values of farm animals at the time of Athelstan are mentioned in one of his laws: 'An ox shall be valued at a mancus [30 pence], a cow at twenty pence, and a sheep at a shilling.'[1]

The Domesday Survey (1086) gives invaluable information as to the amount of livestock then in England, except for the north, and particulars are often added which relate to the time of Edward the Confessor.

If there were no fresh vegetables or fruit for human consumption during the winter months, still less was there any supply of root-crops on which to feed the animals. Owing to the large area not yet reclaimed from fen and forest, the amount of land preserved as meadow was probably restricted in Anglo-Saxon times, and consequently the amount of hay grown for winter pasturage was also restricted. Many animals which were not essential would therefore be killed at the end of the autumn and their carcasses salted down for winter use.

This condition of things prevailed until the 'agricultural revolution' in the eighteenth century. The enclosure then by hedges of fields in which sheep and cattle could be pastured on good grass produced a larger and healthier animal than when it was allowed to obtain what food it could from the common or from the stubble left in the cornfields. The winter supply of salted meat was now replaced by fresh beef and mutton.[2]

[1] Laws of Athelstan, vi. 6, § 2 (F. L. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 1922, p. 161).

[2] *See* G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 3rd ed., 1946, pp. 299, 377–8.

The occurrence of murrain in Ireland and in pre-Conquest England, which was especially prevalent after the ravaging of the countryside by the Norse invaders, has already been chronicled in the chapter on Epidemics.

Sir Frederick Smith says it would be 'permissible to speak of an ecclesiastical period in veterinary medicine'. The Anglo-Saxon period undoubtedly comes within it.

The various remedies and charms which are prescribed for diseased animals show that our ancestors appreciated the need for looking after their beasts, but that veterinary science was in a very elementary condition. Perhaps the chief ingredient in veterinary recipes was holy water. This doubtless acted as a stimulus for the human patient when faith was an important factor, but naturally it could have no similar use in connexion with animals.

It is noticeable that there are hardly any passages relating to diseased livestock in the Anglo-Saxon laws, but that far more occur in contemporary Welsh laws. Those of Hywel Dda, which date from the middle of the tenth century, contain many, and these will be quoted later. Sir Frederick Smith says that Owen, the editor of the two volumes published by the Record Commission on the Ancient Laws of Wales, 'believes the Briton to have been a better horsemaster than the Anglo-Saxon, for it was he who was specially selected to take care of the horses of the king. We may suppose', he deduces, 'that the veterinary practitioners were also drawn from among the Britons'.[1]

Charms for sick cattle are found, especially in cases of pleuro-pneumonia: there are a few for ailing sheep, and one for sudden death in swine. There are a number of charms for horses: for sprains, for erysipelas, for one that is elf-shot, and even for one that has corns on its feet.[2]

The carbuncle was regarded in Anglo-Norman times as efficacious for sick animals. 'The animals which drink of the water in which the carbuncle is washed, are cured of their complaints', runs a passage in one of the Sloane manuscripts in the British Museum.[3]

The water in which cattle had drunk was sometimes used for curing purposes. In the fragment of a Celtic leechbook published

[1] Sir F. Smith, *The Early History of Veterinary Literature*, vol. i, 1919, p. 64.

[2] This last, in *Lacn.* 96 (CLXIII), is composed of unintelligible words and need not therefore be quoted.

[3] MS. Sloane 1784, fo. 2.

by Whitley Stokes occurs the passage, 'Aqua residua in qua asinus aut bos biberit potui sumpta efficaciter sanat.'[1]

The Penitential of Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter (1161–86), prescribes penance for those who make 'amulets or incantations and bewitchments by charm, with sorcery, and conceal them in the grass, or in a tree, or at the cross-roads (*in bivio*), in order that their own animals may be freed from injury'.[2]

The Council of London in 1075 ordained that a man shall not practise divination or similar arts, nor hang up the bones of dead animals to ward off diseases of cattle.[3]

(*b*) *Cattle*

The following occurs in the laws of Ine, king of Wessex, which date from about 693: 'If a man buy any kind of cattle, and he then discover any kind of unsoundness in it within XXX days, then let him throw the cattle on his [i.e. the vendor's] hands, or let him [the latter] swear that he knew not of any unsoundness in it when he sold it to him.'[4] A passage in the laws of Hywel Dda runs:

> Whosoever shall sell a steer to another, it is right for him to be answerable for the three disorders incident to cattle:[5] and further for the mange, until the feast of St. Patrick [i.e. 17 March]: the person who shall buy it is to keep it in pasture, and in a healthy place, and in a building wherein no mange has previously occurred for seven years: and for the staggers, three dew-falls.[6]

Bede says that cattle—as well as men—could be cured by drinking the water containing slips of the cross set up by King Oswald before the battle on the Heaven-field.[7]

There are two Anglo-Saxon charms for lung trouble in cattle,[8] both thoroughly ecclesiastical in flavour. In one, various herbs have

[1] *Zeit. f. celt. Philologie*, 1897, i. 18.

[2] MS. Cotton Faustina A. VIII, fo. 32. (Quoted in Wright and Halliwell, *Reliquiae antiquae*, vol. i, p. 285.)

[3] Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels*, vol. i, p. 310.

[4] Laws of King Ine, 56.

[5] Laws of Hywel Dda. These are staggers, strangles, and farcy (cow) according to the Dimetian code, Bk. II, ch. xxvii. 17; and staggers, glanders and farcy (ox) according to the Gwentian code, Bk. II, ch. xi. 6. (*Ancient Laws of Wales*, vol. i, 1841).

[6] Ditto, according to the Venedotian code, Bk. III, ch. vii. 6.

[7] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* iii. 2. Quoted on p. 183.

[8] *Wiþ lungen ádle hriðerum*: pleuro-pneumonia of cattle was a sequel of famine in Ireland.

to be burned together 'on the side where the wind is', so that the smoke is blown towards the cattle. Then five crosses are to be made of hassock grass; they are to be set on the four sides of the cattle and one in the middle, and various litanies and the paternoster chanted. The charm ends with the payments demanded by Holy Church for its part in the ceremony: 'Let the cattle be valued. Give the tenth penny for God; after that leave them to mend; do thus thrice.'[1]

The other charm is defective, the beginning having been lost. It runs: '. . . and burn to ashes'—presumably certain herbs as in the last charm—'on midsummer-mass day: add holy water and pour it into their mouths on midsummer's morrow: and sing these three psalms over them: "[Miserere] nostri", and "Exurgat dominus" and "Quicunque vult"' (i.e. Psalms 51 and 68, and the Athanasian Creed).[2] As the charm now stands, presumably there was no remedy if the disease attacked the cattle at any other time than midsummer, but the first part, now lost, may have been a specific one against 'disease of the lungs', the last part being a preventive charm to be used at midsummer to keep the cattle free from disease throughout the ensuing year.

The tradition of psalm-repetition died hard. As late as the seventeenth century Minderer advised the plague doctors to repeat the 22nd psalm every time they approached a patient.[3]

The last-quoted manuscript contains another defective charm to be used for the general good health of cattle: '[Sing] over thy cattle every evening to be a help to them "Agios, agios, agios". [Take two] four-edged sticks, . . . and write on either stick, on each end, the paternoster to the end: and let fall the inscribed stick on the floor, and the other . . . .'[4]

Another charm, to be employed 'if cattle are dying', is to put groundsel and three other worts into holy water, and pour into the mouth.[5]

A Latin charm which occurs in what was probably a monk's common-place book dating from about the year 1300, although it is later than our period, may be mentioned as relevant since it is typical. It may be rendered thus:

[1] *Lacn.* 79 (CXLI).
[2] MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII (quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 388).
[3] F. H. Garrison, *History of Medicine*, 1929, p. 287.
[4] Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, fo. 13*b*. (Quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 386.)
[5] *Lacn.* 78 (CXL).

An excellent and tried charm against the disease in cattle which is termed 'lorichot'. First the litany is to be chanted: then water is to be hallowed, then a rogation mass is to be celebrated and the ritual of the Holy Cross and of St. Hippolytus. Then let the priest, bearing holy water and wearing a stole, go to the fold, and walking round it repeat such psalms as the 'Benedicite omnia' and 'Benedictus dominus deus', [&c]. At the same same time, he sprinkles the animals with holy water. Next he shall recite the gospel 'In principio', turning first to the west in the first corner, with the animals standing opposite to him. In the second corner, let him recite 'cum esset desponsata'. In the third corner, 'Recumbentibus'. In the fourth corner, 'Respiciens ihesus' which is said on the vigil of All Saints. Next let the priest turn again to the first corner, and send forth the animals from the fold, sprinkling them the while with holy water. And afterwards let him say this prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, who didst set free the Three Children from the furnace of burning fire, even Sidrac, Misac [and] Abenago, we pray thee . . . that thou save and liberate these beasts from all evil and pestilence.' Amen.[1]

This begins as a charm against 'lorichot', and ends as a prayer to protect the cattle from all evil and pestilence. It is reminiscent of some Roman festivals, and especially of the Parilia, a shepherd's festival in honour of Pales, which is described by Ovid and Tibullus. The sheepfolds were purified and the sheep fumigated, and the shepherd, facing the east, four times repeated a prayer for the aversion of evil and for the fertility of the flock.[2] Such ceremonies have continued until the present day. One, for instance, was celebrated on 25 June, on top of the Col Chécruit, on the opposite side of the Val Véni to Mont Blanc, and discontinued only in 1916 when a new priest of Courmayeur entered into office. The cattle were sprinkled with holy water in the same way as is enjoined in the above charm. The blessing of the cattle still takes place annually at Carnac on the day of S. Cornély, the patron saint of horned animals. This is without doubt the persistence of an ancient pagan rite.

There are various Irish instances of purification of cattle both by fire and by water, especially on 1 May. At Clonmany in Donegal the ceremony took place on 9 June, the day of St. Columkille, since the people 'formerly drove down their cattle to the beach on that day and swam them in that part of the sea into which runs the

[1] MS. Bodley 57 (2004), fo. 10*b*. *Unpublished.*

[2] W. R. Halliday, *Lectures on the History of Roman Religion*, 1922, p. 49.

water of St. Columb's well, which is thereby made holy water'.[1] Water which had been consecrated was considered especially efficacious for curing murrain. The famous Imokilly amulet was known as the murrain-stone. It was a polished ball of brecciated or banded agate, red and green streaked with white lines, and pierced for suspension. It was placed in a vessel containing water, and the water was then used for curing cattle.[2]

Two charms for spoilt milk may also be included with charms for cattle. In one case three herbs are to be bound together and laid on the milk-pail: the vessel must not be set down on the earth for seven nights.[3] In the other, four worts are to be hallowed and put into or under the vat, and also under the door.[4]

The counterpart of S. Cornély in this country was perhaps, St. John of Beverley, who was reputed to be a protector of the cattle and a healer of cattle-plague. We read in the 'Miracula Sancti Johannis episcopi':

> It often happened that pestilence attacked the animals and cattle: but the inhabitants of the surrounding parts were able to obtain protection when they dedicated an animal from their herd to St. John for the liberation of the rest from such pestilence: the latter were wont to regain their health at once and the pestilence departed from them, the men paying with their offerings to St. John at Beverley.[5]

(*c*) *Sheep*

A recipe to be used 'if sheep be ailing'—the precise nature of ailment not being specified—requires the practitioner to take 'a little new ale', and pour it into the mouth of each of the sheep, and manage to make them swallow it fairly quickly; that will prove of benefit to them.[6]

Other charms for diseases in sheep occur in the *Lacnunga*. One is 'for a broken-down sheep, and for sudden mortality'. Five worts are to be worked to a dust and put into holy water. 'Pour into the broken-down sheep, and sprinkle on the others thrice.' This is followed by a similar recipe 'for pocks and scab (*poccas and hreófla*)

[1] W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, 1902, vol. i, pp. 281–2.

[2] G. M. Atkinson, *Journ. Roy. Hist. and Archaeol. Assoc. Ireland*, 1875, 4s. iii. 440–44.

[3] *Leechbook III*, liii.

[4] *Leechbook I*, lxvii.

[5] 'Miracula alia Sancti Johannis episcopi [end]' in James Raine, *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, vol. i, 1879, p. 325 (Rolls Series).

[6] MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII (quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 388).

in sheep', and the dose is to be administered 'into the mouth with a spoon'.[1]

The laws of Hywel Dda say: 'The qualities (*teithi*) of a sheep are, to give milk and to bear lambs; and she is to be warranted against the rot until the calends of May, when she shall have satiated herself three times with the new herbage.'[2]

(*d*) *Swine*

The *Lacnunga* also gives a recipe 'for sudden death in swine'. Give various herbs to eat, 'sing four masses over them, drive them into the sty, hang the plants on the four sides and on the door; burn the plants; add incense to them; make the smoke stream over the swine'.[3]

This is very similar to the first-quoted charm for lung disorder in cattle. In each case the smoke is to be made to reek over the beasts, though the herbs specified are not the same. The placing of the worts (in both cases) on all four sides of the affected animals, besides disinfecting them by securing complete fumigation, seems to confine and localize the cure, to prevent the evil from escaping, and to destroy it on the spot. This marking of boundaries, often the four points of the compass, is a common theme in magic.[4]

The following passage occurs in the laws of Hywel Dda: 'The qualities of a sow are, that she be not always brimming, and that she do not devour her pigs; and to be warranted three nights and three days against the quinsy.'[5]

(*e*) *Horses*

The following are charms for horses that are diseased. 'If a horse is sprained, then shalt thou say these words: "Naborredus,

[1] *Lacn.* 80, 81 (CXLIII, CXLIV).

[2] Laws of Hywel Dda, Venedotian Code, Bk. III, ch. ix, § 4.

[3] *Lacn.* 82 (CXLV).

[4] e.g. in *Lacn.* 74 (CXXXIII), obviously with a view to confining the infection; 'For flying venom, smite four slashes with an oaken brand, toward the four quarters', before singing the charm. The name of each of the four evangelists being used as each scratch is made, emphasizes the four points. Compare also the charm in Sextus Placitus: 'Take his [the badger's] liver, divide it, and delve it down at the turnings round of thy land boundaries . . . and hide the heart at thy gates; then thou and thine shall be released in health to go about and return home in peace; all pestilence (*wól*) shall be driven away', &c. (Sextus Placitus, i, 3). Clearly here also the burying is to prevent the evil from crossing the boundary line.

[5] Laws of Hywel Dda, Venedotian Code, Bk. III, ch. viii, § 6.

unde uenisti?" three times; "credidi propter" [i.e. Psalm cxv of the Vulgate, or cxvi. 10 of the Authorized Version], three times; "Alpha et ó, initium et finis", "The cross is my life and thy death, O enemy"; Pater Noster.'[1]

If a horse be afflicted with *hors-óman* certain unintelligible words together with part of the last-quoted charm are to be sung thrice nine times evening and morning in its left ear, in running water, and its head is to be turned against the stream.[2]

Sextus Placitus says of the badger: 'Smear with his fat horses which are in a fever, or in any ailment; it shall retire from them, and the hour of life shall be prolonged to them.'[3]

And again he says: 'Mingle [badger's] blood with a little salt for horses and mules and any four-footed beasts (*neát*) which are suffering from murrain (*wól*) or with any evil: administer it by mouth by means of a horn according to the beast's ability, and so for about three nights: they will soon be well.'[4]

Only one veterinary charm occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Herbal*. It runs: 'If a horse be injured in the back or shoulders and [the wound] be open, take [centimorbia] all dried and pounded to a very small dust, sprinkle it on the sore: it will heal it. Thou shalt wonder at the benefit.'[5]

There are various charms for horses which have been elf-shot: these have already been dealt with.[6]

The laws of Howel Dda ordain that 'a horse is to be warranted against three disorders: against the staggers, for three dew-falls; against the black strangles, for three moons; and against the farcy for one year'.[7]

(*f*) *Bees*

The onomatopoeic word *ymbe* signifies a swarm of bees, *ymbhaga* a bee-enclosure, and *beó-ceorl* a bee-farmer.

Before the introduction of sugar, honey was the only substance used for sweetening. It was also used as an ingredient of mead, which was the chief drink of the common folk in Anglo-Saxon times. Rents might be paid in the form of honey (*hunig-gafol*). The importance of bees—and of healthy bees—cannot therefore be too strongly stressed.

[1] *Lacn.* 94 (CLXI).
[2] *Lacn.* 109 (CLXXVI).
[3] Sextus Placitus, *Med. de quadrupedibus*, i. 2.
[4] Ibid. i. 3.
[5] *A.S. Herbal*, clxii.
[6] See p. 160.
[7] Laws of Hywel Dda, Venedotian Code, Book III, ch. iv, § 13.

It is noticeable how often honey forms a constituent of herbal and other remedies. The contemporary Hebrew physician Donnolo (tenth century) also emphasizes its medicinal value. He gives precise instructions in his *Precious Book* as to the mixing of herb potions with honey.[1] Sigerist says that honey was used as a basis in prescriptions and also as an ingredient in drugs so as to make them more palatable: it was also considered a good preservative.[2]

There are several Anglo-Saxon charms which relate to bees.

Two passages in connexion with the use of honey in medicine occur in section 31 of the First Penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190. Section 8 runs: 'If a mouse or a hen or similar creature, has fallen into oil or into honey, and there be found dead, let the oil be used for a lamp, and the honey for medical purposes (*in medicinam*), or in any other useful way.' Section 18 runs: 'If bees kill a man, they must be killed speedily: but let the honey be weighed out for medical purposes, or employed in other useful ways.'

A defective charm against theft of bees runs: 'Put a plant of madder on your hive: then no one will lure away your bees, nor can they be stolen while the plant is on the hive.'[3]

Beewort (*veneria*) derives its name from its connexion with bees: 'That bees may not fly away, take this same herb . . . and hang it to the hive, then they will be stationary.'[4]

An eleventh-century Cambridge manuscript gives a charm for catching a swarm:

> Take earth. Throw it with thy right hand under thy right foot and say: 'I take under foot, I am successful. Lo, earth has power against every creature whatever and against malice.' . . . Throw over [them] gravel when they swarm, and say: 'Sit, ye ladies (*sige wif*—a name also applied to the Valkyries), sink, sink to earth. Never fly wild to the woods. Be ye as mindful of my good as is every man of food and estate.'[5]

With this should be compared a ninth-century Old High German Lorscher Bienensegen in the Vatican Codex Palatinus 220:

[1] J. Leveen, 'A pharmaceutical fragment of the 10th century in Hebrew by Shabbethai Donnolo', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1927–8, xxi (Sect. Hist. Med.), 69.

[2] H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur*, 1923, p. 172.

[3] MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, fo. 13*b*. (Quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 397.)

[4] *A.S. Herbal*, vii. 2.

[5] MS. C.C.C.C. 41, p. 202, margin (quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 384). Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, iv, ll. 86–87. Charm no. 1 in Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 132–41, *q.v.* for his notes.

Christ, the bees are out! Now fly thou, my beastie, hither in holy peace into the shelter of God, that thou shouldst come home hale. Sit thee down, O bee: St. Mary commands thee. Thou shalt not have leave: thou shalt not fly to the wood, nor mayst thou escape me, nor shalt thou set thyself free from me. Sit thee down very quietly, do the will of God.[1]

The last line signifies 'produce wax for the candles used at His service'.

The following recipe in Anglo-Saxon occurs over a circle with a cross inside it in an eleventh-century manuscript in the Cotton collection in the British Museum: 'This is the circle of St. Columcille. Inscribe this circle with the point of thy knife on a soft stone and strike a stake into the middle of the bee-enclosure (*ymbhagan*), and lay the stone above the stake so that it is all under ground except that which is inscribed.' Inside the circle are the words: 'contra apes ut salui sint et in corda eorum'.[2]

In an eleventh-century Greek manuscript at St. Mark's, Venice, is a later gloss which runs:

Make a cross and write this charm upon the cross or upon a stake and place it in the middle of the bee-enclosure. . . . Assemble the little ones, assemble them and journey round the flowers of the mountains, the flowers of a thousand sweetnesses. . . . I adjure you . . . that nothing hurtful to the bee-enclosure may have permission to approach the bees of the servant of God, N.[3]

The *Annals of Ulster* chronicle under the year 950 'a mortality of bees', and again under 992 'great mortality among men, and upon cattle and bees throughout all Ireland this year'.

[1] Müllenhoff and Scherer, *Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa*, 3rd ed., Berlin, 1892, vol. i, pp. 34–35 (no. 16). Translated for me by the late Prof. R. Priebsch. Schönbach gives an interesting collection of five fourteenth–fifteenth-century bee-charms from manuscripts at Munich in 'Eine Auslese altdeutscher Segensformeln', *Analecta Graeciensia: Festschrift*, &c. Graz, 1893, pp. 29–31.

[2] MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, fo. 13*b* (quoted by Cockayne, vol. i, p. 395, but wrongly translated).

[3] MS. Marcianus 299, fo. 3*a*.

CHAPTER XXX

The Earth, and Charms for the Fertility of the Fields

OUR clearest information about the religion of the Ingaevonic tribes, including the ancestors of the Angles and Saxons [says R. H. Hodgkin], is a famous description given by Tacitus of the worship of 'Nerthus, that is Mother Earth'. . . . In historic times the cult [of Nerthus] passed from the Danish islands to the Swedes, where the place of Nerthus was taken by the god Frey, the son of Njorth, that is of Nerthus. The Scandinavian traditions tell of a war between the Njorth–Frey family ('the Vanir') and the family of Odin ('the Anses'). . . . It was a struggle between the cult of Mother Earth on the one hand—bountiful Mother Earth with her gods who gave peace and who blessed agriculture with plentiful increase—and on the other hand the heroic gods, the gods of war who gave victory.[1]

The introduction to the *Ynglinga Saga* says that 'the first age is called the Age of Burning. . . . But after Frey had been laid in a howe at Uppsala, many chiefs raised howes as often as memorial stones in memory of their kinsmen'. The practice of inhumation further associates the worshippers of Nerthus and Frey with Mother Earth.

The worship of Nature lies behind a great many charms, even those which are apparently Christian. The primary source of nature is Earth, the Great Mother. Invocations to her and reference to her purifying and protecting powers, as well as to her fruitfulness, are still traceable.

A Latin prayer to the Earth has survived in a late eleventh- or early twelfth-century herbal of English workmanship in the Harleian collection.[2] 'Earth, divine goddess, Mother Nature, who generatest all things . . . thou indeed art duly called great Mother of the gods. . . . Those who rightly receive these herbs from me, do thou make them whole', &c. This prayer is perhaps unique in its

[1] R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 2nd. ed., 1939, vol. i, pp. 28–29.

[2] MS. Harley 1585, ff. 12*b*–13*a*. Translated by C. Singer in 'Early English magic and medicine', *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1920, ix. 372–3.

pagan character, though it is known that many such pagan invocations did exist in manuscripts, and have been deliberately erased. The version quoted is that found in the Harleian collection, but there are other cognate versions, dating from the sixth century onwards, in manuscripts at Breslau,[1] Florence, Montpellier, and Vienna.

Closely connected in spirit is the early eleventh-century prayer, in Anglo-Saxon, from one of the Cotton manuscripts[2] which begins: 'Erce, Erce, Erce, Mother [of ?] Earth. May the All-Wielder, ever Lord, grant thee acres a-waxing, upwards a-growing, plenteous in strength, productive of bright millet,[3] productive of broad barley and productive of white wheat.' It ends with a prayer against sorcerers and witches, 'Grant the owner, God Almighty . . . that his farm . . . may be embattled round against baleful blastings every one which sorcerers may through a land sow.' The Romans dreaded the actual removal of their crops by the sorcerers, and not merely injury by them, for Servius, commenting on Virgil's line[4] 'atque satas alio vidi traducere messes', writes: 'magicis quibusdam artibus hoc fiebat, unde est in XII Tabb. "Neve alienam segetem pellexeris".'

There has been much discussion over the name Erce, but without much result. Singer suggests that possibly the Irish *erc* (heaven) is connoted. Possibly she represents Nerthus ('vectam bubus feminis'), despite the phonetic difficulties.

The Erce charm has much pagan feeling in it, despite its Christian veneer. Its setting is the most important relic that has survived to show what an ancient Teutonic agricultural rite was like.[5] The

[1] Breslau University Library Codex III. F. 19, fo. 21 *a–b*. This version is printed by J. Klapper in *Mitteil. d. schlesischen Gesells. f. Volksk.*, 1907, Heft xviii, p. 15, 'Precacio terre' followed by 'Precacio omnium herbarum'.

[2] MS. Cotton Caligula A. VII, fo. 171*a*–173*a*. Printed by Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. i, pp. 402–4. See on this ceremonial the comment of Storms in his *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 178–87. He stresses the essentially pagan elements and points out that the first half consists of the blessing of the grassland with the sun-god, and the second of the blessing of the arable land, when the goddess Mother Earth takes his place.

[3] Reading (with Hoops and Kluge) *scíra herse wæstma*, and not (with the MS. and as printed by Cockayne) *henre scíra wæstma*. The former say that *herse* (cf. modern German *Hirse*, millet) was not found outside Upper Germany, and was not cultivated by the Anglo-Saxons. Schlutter, however, thinks that this passage is evidence that they did grow it, together with barley and wheat. See O. B. Schlutter, 'Anglo-Saxonica', in *Anglia*, 1907, xxx. 125–7.

[4] Virgil, *Eclogues*, viii. 99.

[5] Cockayne, vol. i, pp. 398–405. Also Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, pp. 405–8.

whole charm is described as *bōt* for fields (1) that are not productive, (2) that have suffered through *drýcræft* or *lyblác*.[1] The final part deals with the ceremonial at the first ploughing.

Omitting many of the Christian elements, the rite consists in the taking of four pieces of turf, one from each boundary of the field to be treated: in their place is to be dropped a mixture of various ingredients, the most important of which are oil, honey, yeast, and milk. The turves are to be taken to the church and placed so that their grassy sides are turned towards the altar, while masses are sung. They must be returned to the places whence they came before sunset. Four crosses of quickbeam, on which the names of the four Evangelists have been written,[2] must be placed in the holes before the turves are put back in them. A prayer, beginning 'I stand towards the east', must then be said, the invocator bowing nine times and then turning himself three times *sunganges*. Then, after various Christian hymns, 'let unknown seed be taken from beggars, and let there be given to these twice as much as one takes from them, and gather together all the ploughing utensils. Then bore in the plough beam [a hole, and put in it] frankincense and fennel[3] and hallowed soap and hallowed salt. Take then the seed and set it in the body of the plough.' The prayer to Erce follows, and the first furrow is made. The following prayer is next said: 'Hail to thee, Earth (*folde*), mother of men, be thou fertile in God's embrace, filled with crops for the benefit of men.' In the furrow a loaf kneaded with milk and holy water is to be laid. The ceremony ends with another prayer and the repetition three times of the words, 'Crescite, in nomine patris, sit benedicti.'

Much of this practice, as shown by E. H. Meyer,[4] is derived from older Indo-European sources, and much has survived, especially in Germany, till more modern times. The ceremonial at the first ploughing was to remove the impurities of the winter, and also to bring fertility and a blessing for the coming year. The date of it was about the time of the vernal equinox. In Pomerania and in

[1] See p. 147.

[2] Cf. the Byzantine charm in the tenth-century Geoponica to remove dodder ('lion's grass') from a field: 5 potsherds, each bearing a picture in chalk of Herakles strangling a lion, must be put at the four corners of the field and in the middle. (Quoted by H. J. Rose, 'Folklore of the Geoponica', *Folk-lore*, 1933, xliv. 69.)

[3] One of the 'nine magical herbs' of the *Lacnunga*.

[4] E. H. Meyer, 'Indogermanische Pflügebräuche', *Zeit. d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, 1904, xiv. 1–18, 129–51.

East Prussia it was to be not later than 25 March; in Vedic times and among the Greeks the time was determined by the position of the stars.

To milk and honey, the symbols of fruitfulness among the ancient Hebrews, the Anglo-Saxons added yeast (*beorma*) and oil. Yeast is reminiscent of a comment of Columella on Virgil: 'neque enim aliud est colere, quam resolvere et *fermentare* terram.' The oil is probably a Christian addition. In St. Ambrose's description of paradise, the four rivers are filled with milk, oil, wine, and honey.[1] 'At the first ploughing,' says Meyer, 'the Indians, like the Germans, offered as sacrifice milk and honey into the fields. As "piamentum" or "placamentum terrae" the Romans poured mead and honey into the earth when they dug up any herb.'[2]

The four turves are taken as symbolic of the entire field to be blessed. The names of the four Evangelists, placed in the holes whence the turves were taken, imparted a blessing from them to the soil. The writing of their names on four crosses of quick-beam again shows a Christian addition to the original heathen practice.

In pagan times it was believed that the blessing was to be obtained for the turves from the elements, earth and water; the Christian Church persuaded the ploughman to bring the turves to the church for this purpose. In Baden, instead of the turves being turned with their green side towards the altar, the altar itself was covered with a green altar-cloth.[3] In the Upper Palatinate, against enchantment of fields, a man takes out pieces of turf from his field before sunrise, as was done in Anglo-Saxon times, but instead of taking them to the church, he places them on his head in order that he may thus learn the author of the mischief.[4]

Wyatt says that the turning *eást-weard* points originally to a prayer to the sun god.

The incident of turning *sunganges* in the Anglo-Saxon may be derived from an earlier custom of a similar nature in Vedic times. Before the plough was used for the first time, the Brahman touched

[1] In *Salamon and Saturn*, ed. Kemble (Ælfric Soc.), p. 191.

[2] E. H. Meyer, op. cit., p. 133. Thus, for instance, with vervain. Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* xxv. 59) says that it 'should be gathered about the rising of the dog-star, when there is neither sun nor moon. Honey and honeycomb should be offered to appease the earth.'

[3] E. H. Meyer, *Badische Volksleben*, p. 157.

[4] Wuttke, *Deutscher Aberglaube*, § 378.

it and prayed to the four points of the compass, turning from left to right and reciting portions from the *Rigveda*.[1] The Roman shepherd, when commending his cattle to Pales in spring, prays towards the east:

> Haec tu conversus ad ortus
> Dic ter, et in vivo prolue rore manus.[2]

Before the seed was put into the soil in Uist, 'the person reciting the consecration hymn went sunwise (*deiseil*) and chanted, "I go forth to sow the seed In name of him who makes it grow. I will set my face to the wind, And throw a gracious handful on high."'[3]

The practice of taking unknown seed from beggars, Meyer says, was to ensure that the field did justice to every kind of seed that was put into it, whether known or unknown. This is paralleled by, if not derived from, a similar practice in the time of the Vedas, where the sower put a stone on the cornsack, and sang three verses, sprinkling the stone at each verse. He put a handful of corn on the stone, and 'another person', the equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon beggar, had to put three handfuls on it.

The Anglo-Saxon put incense, fennel, hallowed soap, and hallowed salt into the hole he had bored in the plough-tail. In Prussia the peasant puts fennel and field cummin with salt and dill, or bread and honey, into the cloth containing the seeds in order that the seed may grow and that the envious neighbour may do it no harm.[4]

Many other modern German ploughing customs of a similar nature are described by E. H. Meyer. One from south Germany includes the bath of the plough in the Danube, which is reminiscent of that of Nerthus's chariot. This took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on Shrove Tuesday.[5]

Gregory of Tours tells a similar story of the image of Berecynthia at Autun. 'Bishop Simplicius was present when they were carrying this [image] about in a waggon to secure the welfare of their fields and vineyards, . . . and saw them at no great distance singing and

[1] E. H. Meyer, *Indogermanische Pflügebräuche*, pp. 6–7.
[2] Ovid, *Fasti*, 4, 777–8.
[3] A. Carmichael, 'Uist Old Hymns', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Glasgow*, 1887–91, i. 41.
[4] Wuttke, op. cit., § 652.
[5] E. H. Meyer, *Indogermanische Pflügebräuche*, p. 144.

playing in front of the waggon.'[1] Berecynthia has been identified by Frazer with Cybele.[2]

In the island of Rügen there is a lake called Hertha-See, which legend still connects with Hertha, the goddess of fertility, who went through the island in her car each spring.

Baring-Gould and Fisher, in dealing with SS. Derien and Neventer, two British colonists who settled in the fifth century in Léon to the north of Elorn in Britanny, tell the story of Elorn, a pagan native chief, and his son who afterwards became St. Rioc. Elorn, like King Aegeus of Athens, the father of Theseus, was compelled to supply, by drawing lots, a human victim each year to be devoured by a dragon. When none were left to him except his wife and one son, Rioc, he threw himself into the river—also called Elorn afterwards—rather than see his child devoured. He was rescued by the two saints, who then destroyed the dragon. Elorn refused to give up his paganism, but Rioc was surrendered to be educated in the Christian faith and eventually became a monk in the monastery of Landévennec. 'These dragon stories', say the two editors, 'are based on the practice of the early dusky race to make sacrifice annually to their pagan deities to obtain fertility to their fields and increase to their cattle; and the manner of making the sacrifice was to enclose the victim in a wicker-work figure of a monster and consume it by fire, and then to take the ashes and distribute them about the fields.'[3]

Such festivals were rigorously forbidden by the Christian Church. 'Si qui simul celebrant', says the first penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, 'festivitatem in locis abhominandis gentilium', they shall suffer the penalties that follow.[4]

One of the headings in the Saxon *Indiculus Superstitionum* (eighth century) is 'De simulacro quod per campos portant'.[5]

The Church, however, often converted such ceremonies into Christian ones. A tenth-century German abbess established ritual at Whitsun which was to take the place of the former 'heathen

[1] Gregory of Tours, *De gloria Confessorum*, ch. 77 (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, vol. lxxi, col. 884).

[2] J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, vol. v (*Adonis, Attis and Osiris*, vol. 1), p. 279, note 4. Lucretius says the Phrygian Great Mother is drawn in a wagon (*De rerum nat.*, ii. 597 ff.).

[3] S. Baring-Gould and John Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, 1908, vol. 2, p. 337.

[4] First penitential in MS. C.C.C.C. 190, xxvii. 5.

[5] *Indiculus Superstitionum*, § 28.

processions about the fields'. A vigil was to be followed by a solemn procession in the morning, and the bearing of relics about the fields.[1]

The following fourteenth-century German charm was evidently to protect the field from bad weather:

'Contra tempestatem, isti tres versus scribantur in cedulas quatuor, et ponantur subter terram in quatuor partes provincie:

✠ Sancte Columquille, remove mala queque procelle,
✠ Ut tunc orasti, de mundo quando migrasti,
✠ Quod tibi de celis promisit vox Michahelis.'[2]

The 'quatuor cedulae' recall the four crosses of quickbeam in the field-blessing mentioned above.

St. Columba (Columkille) seems to have been especially connected with field charms.[3] Adamnan, in his Life of the saint, says:

About fourteen years before the date at which we write, there occurred during the spring a very great and long continued drought in these marshy regions. . . . We therefore . . . took counsel together, and resolved that some of the senior members of the community [i.e. Iona] should walk round a newly ploughed and sown field, taking with them the white tunic of St. Columba, and some books written in his own hand, that they should raise in the air and shake three times the tunic which the saint wore at the hour of his death. . . . When these directions had been executed . . . copious rain fell day and night, and the parched earth . . . yielded the same year a most abundant harvest.[4]

Very occasionally traces are found among the Teutons of the practice of distributing the members of a dead king or saint so as to produce fertility. Thus the *Heimskringla* records of King Hálfdan the Black that 'his reign had been more fortunate in the seasons and crops than those of all other kings. So much trust was placed in him that, when they learned he was dead and his body carried to Hringaríki to be buried, there came influential men from Raumaríki and Vestfold and Heiðmörk, all begging to have the

[1] Pfannenschmidt, *Erntefeste*, pp. 50–84. For conversion of heathen to Christian ceremonies, see ch. 8.

[2] Codex lat. Monacensis, 7021. (Quoted by Schönbach: 'Eine Auslese altdeutscher Segenformeln', No. 30. *Analecta Graeciensia: Festschrift*, &c., Graz, 1893, p. 45.)

[3] Mrs. Banks, in *British Calendar Customs: Scotland*, Folk-lore Society, 1941, iii. 8–10, says: 'Spells from the Western Isles invoke Columba as a patron of cattle.' Various charms follow.

[4] Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, ii. 44.

body and to bury it in their own district; for they thought that it would ensure prosperous seasons if they could obtain it. So it was decided that they should divide the body between four places; the head was laid in a howe at Stein in Hringaríki, and each man bore home a part of the body and laid it in howe; these howes are called "the howes of Hálfdan".'[1]

The following stories are also suggestive:

(i) In that of St. Andrew, as given in the *Blickling Homilies*, the devil encourages the people to put the saint to death, and adds: 'When he is dead, let us divide his body among our townsfolk.'[2]

(ii) This story of Gerbert, before he became pope,[3] is related in the *Flores Historiarum*. He went to Spain to learn astrology, and did homage to the Devil. He then entered the schools in France, 'where he had many pupils in the aforesaid science'. When dying, 'he ordered that he should be cut in pieces and scattered to the winds, adding "let him have the use of my members who had their homage, for my mind never consented to that profane act".'[4]

(iii) The story of the dismemberment of Hewald *the Black* by the pagan Germans he was attempting to convert, and the throwing of his limbs into the Rhine, is told by Bede.[5] Bede continues that his body and that of Hewald *the White* who was martyred at the same time 'were carried against the stream for the space of almost forty miles', and that 'a long ray of light, reaching up to heaven, shone every night over the place where they arrived', a phenomenon which has been mentioned before. They were buried by order of Pepin of Heristal in Cologne. Their relics were distributed to various churches in Germany, but this distribution was by the Christian Church which was thus, perhaps unconsciously, continuing a pagan custom.

The distribution of relics, including the dismembered body of King Oswald, has been dealt with in Chapter XI.

The belief in the power of the Earth, both for healing and purifying, is shown in various Anglo-Saxon charms and practices.

[1] *Heimskringla: Saga of Hálfdan the Black*, ch. 9. I have used the translation of Dr. Hilda Ellis (*The Road to Hel*, p. 100) which brings out the points which are pertinent: these are missed among the mannerisms of William Morris's translation.

[2] *Blickling Homilies*, Early Eng. Text Soc., p. 240.

[3] Gerbert was pope for ten months in 998 as Sylvester II.

[4] *Flores Historiarum*, vol. i, 1890, pp. 524–5. (Rolls Series.)

[5] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 10.

'If a man be in the water-elf disease (*wæter ælfádl*), . . . sing this many times, "May Earth bear upon thee with all her might and main".'[1] Singer comments, 'A water-elf has perhaps attacked one waterlogged with dropsy, and the earth will perhaps soak up the water.'[2]

Possibly the 'new crock' (mentioned in a prescription occurring in MS. Cotton Faustina A. X) which is to be 'set in the earth up to the brim' and filled with herbs for the preparation of an eye-salve, was to be so placed in order that the healing power of the earth might be brought into operation.[3]

The practice, already mentioned, of drawing children through a hole in the earth so as to rid them of disease, which proved especially obnoxious to framers of penitentials, showed the belief in the efficacy of the earth as the element to which ailments could most safely be transferred.[4] This belief was derived from Latin antecedents and has parallels from Germany and elsewhere.

Saserna's charm for gout, for instance, given by Varro in his *De re rustica*, was to touch the earth, spit downwards, and sing twenty-seven times fasting: 'O Earth, keep thou the pain, and health with me remain in my feet.'[5]

Alexander of Tralles records the following charm, also for gout: 'Dig round the sacred herb Hyoscyamus [henbane] before sunset with the thumb and medicinal finger . . . and address it . . . "Take unto thyself the spirit and power of the Earth, thy mother, and dry up the rheum of this man or woman".'[6]

Mogk notes the German belief that sick persons are to be laid down on the ground to be cured, and that the newborn child only acquires vital power when it is laid upon the ground. It has been the custom in Scandinavia from the oldest times to lay a child down on the earth as soon as it is born, and this is still a current Germanic observance.[7]

The 'Precatio Terrae Matris' was quoted at the beginning of this chapter in connexion with the blessing of fields. But it is also a prayer to the mother of nature which produces and regenerates all

[1] *Leechbook III*, lxiii.
[2] Introduction to *Leechdoms* (1961), p. xxxiv.
[3] MS. Cotton Faustina A. X, fo. 115 *b* (quoted by Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. iii, p. 292).
[4] See p. 240.
[5] Varro, *De re rustica*, i. 2. 27.
[6] Alexander of Tralles, ed. Puschmann, 1879, vol. ii, p. 584.
[7] E. Mogk, Article 'Mutter Erde', in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, p. 626.

things. It is therefore natural that the gatherer of herbs should address Mother Earth to ask her permission to gather her products.[1]

> Whatsoever herb thy power do[th] produce, give, I pray, with goodwill to all nations to save them and grant me this my medicine. . . . Ye [herbs] whom earth, parent of all, hath produced . . . this I pray, and beseech from you, be present here with your virtues, for she who created you hath herself promised that I may gather you with the goodwill of him on whom the art of medicine was bestowed, and grant for health's sake good medicine by grace of your powers.[2]

Two thoroughly Christian Blessings of Plants, in Latin, occur at the end of the *Lacnunga*.[3]

[1] Cf. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xxv. 21, where 'the person about to cut black hellebore turns towards the East, and offers up a prayer, entreating permission of the gods to do so'.

[2] Quoted by Singer in 'Early English Magic and Medicine', *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 9, 1920, p. 373.

[3] *Lacn.* (CXCI, CXCII).

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