

The Countess of Kent's 'Choice manual' / by Hector A. Colwell.

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c.4

With kind regards

from

THE COUNTESS OF KENT'S

"CHOICE MANUAL."

Alb.

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BY

HECTOR A. COLWELL, M.B.

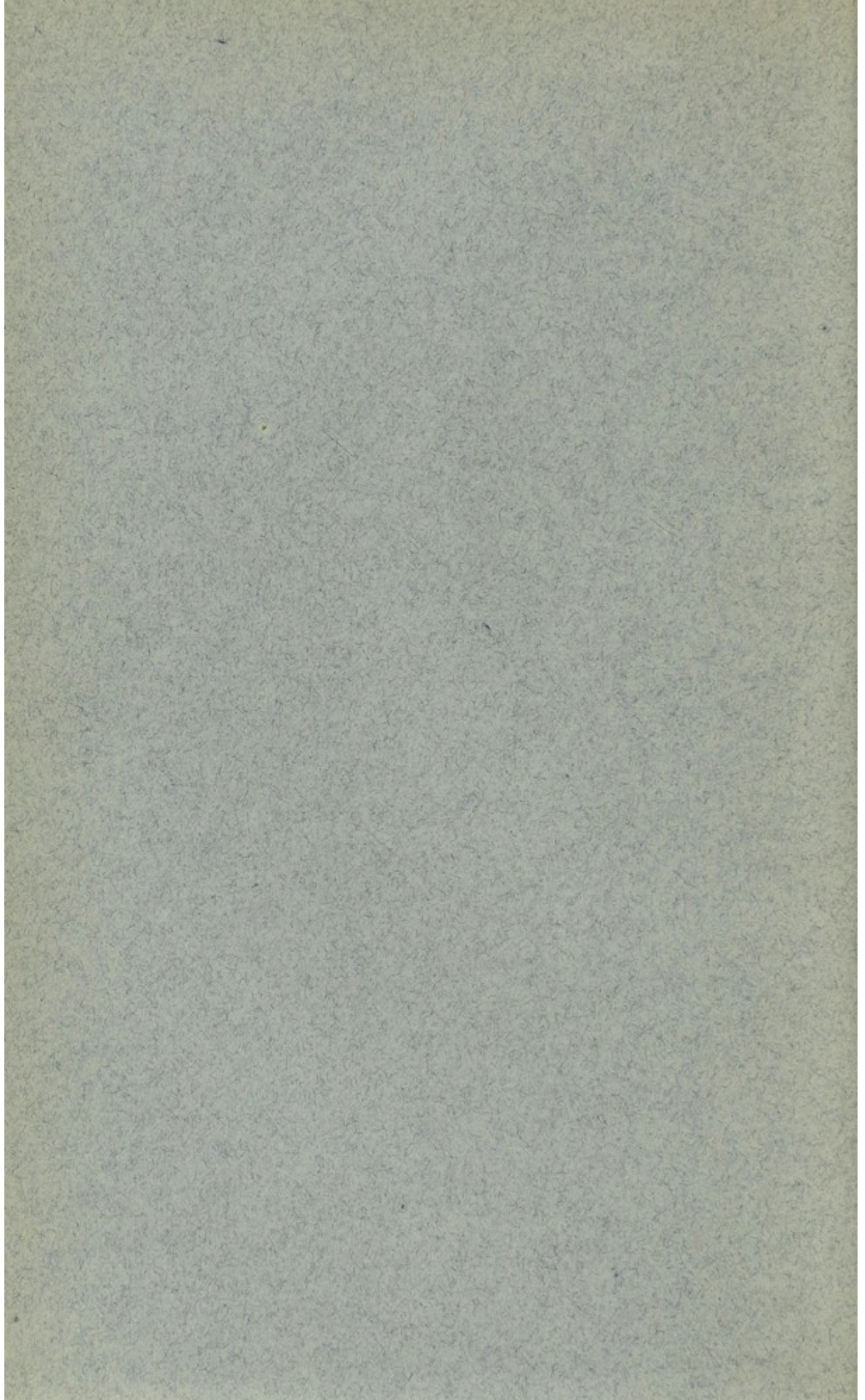


REPRINTED FROM "THE MIDDLESEX HOSPITAL JOURNAL," NOVEMBER 1913.

LONDON:

MITCHELL HUGHES & CLARKE, 140 WARDOUR STREET.

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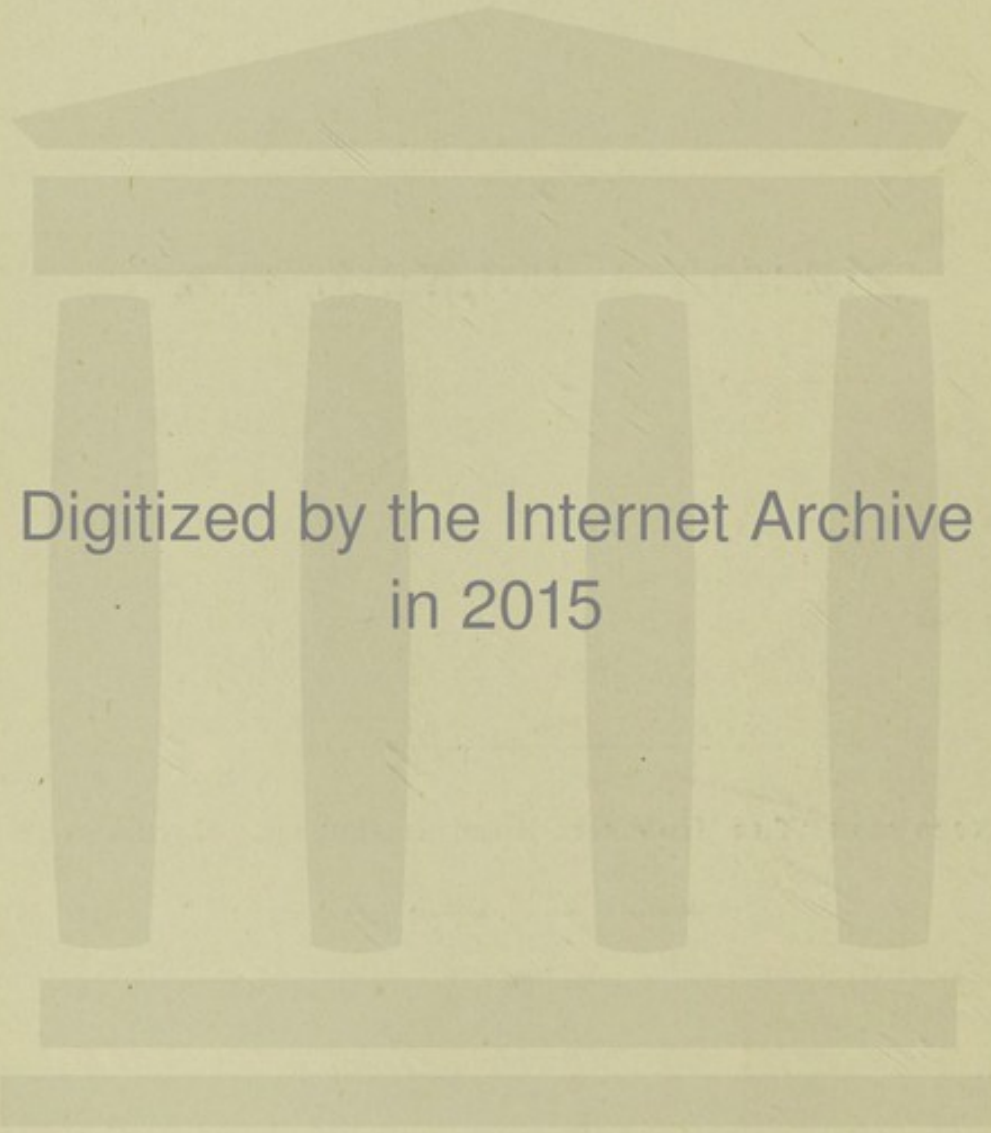
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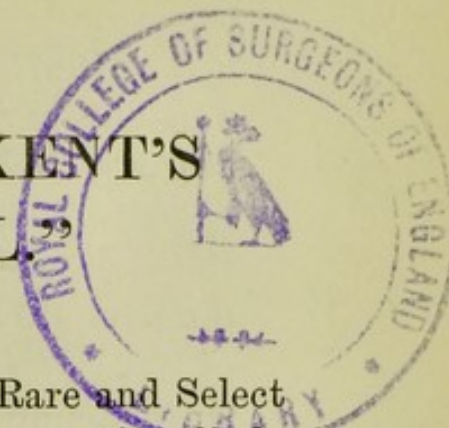
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THE COUNTESS OF KENT'S "CHOICE MANUAL."



THE Countess of Kent's "Choice Manual, or Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chirurgery," is an interesting little book for the widespread popularity it attained, and for the



ELIZABETH. *Late*
Countess of Kent

A
Choice Manual,
OR
Rare and Select
SECRETS
IN
PHYSICK
AND
CHIRURGERY:

Collected, and practised
by the Right Honourable
the Countesse of Kent, late deceased.
Whereto are added several
Experiments of the Virtue of Gascon
pouder, and Lapis contra Yarusum
by a Professor of Physick.
As also most exquisite ways
of Preserving, Conser-
ving, Candyng, &c.

The Sixteenth Edition

LONDON, Printed by A. M.
for Margaret Shears at the
Sign of the Blew-Bible in
Bedford-Street in Covent
Garden, 1670.

FRONTISPIECE AND TITLE-PAGE OF "CHOICE MANUAL."

long time that popularity lasted. The date of the first edition I have been unable to ascertain, but the second appeared in 1653, and the nineteenth and apparently the

last in 1687. It would seem, however, to have been used as a manual of domestic medicine until well on in the nineteenth century, and a reference is made to it in the first of the Ingoldsby Legends—"The Spectre of Tappington"—where the housekeeper is represented as having dosed some unfortunate maid with an approved julep from the Countess of Kent's "Choice Manual." The authoress was Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent (1581—1651), the second daughter of the seventh Earl of Shrewsbury. John Selden was apparently legal adviser to the Earl of Kent, and it is possible that after the Earl's death he married the countess. The latter is described as a lady full of good works, and in due accordance with the precept of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* of having been very pious. At any rate, she bequeathed all her property to Selden. The first part of her book consists of the various medical recipes, whereof some account will be found in the following pages; the second part is a collection of cookery recipes, some of them queer enough. Of these, necessarily, a mere man dare not write, but on glancing through them about half the dishes seem flavoured with rose-water; while even boiled duck and turnips, and the same dish flavoured with white wine, spice, onions, herbs, sugar, and *camphor* (!), do not exactly appeal to a twentieth-century palate. Boiled partridge has an unorthodox look, and one has hitherto resisted the allurements of a pie made of herrings, pears, raisins, rose-water, sugar, butter, and breadcrumbs. Of course at the present time popular treatises on medicine are nothing but a nuisance, but when travelling was difficult and doctors few, people were often largely left to their own resources or to the kindness of their better educated and wealthier neighbours. Some knowledge of matters medical was probably fairly common, especially among those who had travelled. Thus Evelyn, when on his continental tours, attended courses on anatomy, and some specimens which he presented to the Royal Society are now in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

In the "Choice Manual" the remedies follow one another with a sublime contempt for order, alphabetical or otherwise; sore eyes, bruises, corns, and cancer, jostle one another unconcernedly. Most of the prescriptions are com-

plicated, others are quaint, and not a few disgusting. Some remedies are obviously recommended in accordance with the “doctrine of signatures,” a scheme of treatment which had a large vogue in the Middle Ages. According to this, if a plant or animal bore any resemblance to some part of the human body or to some diseased condition affecting it, then that particular animal or plant was *par excellence* the remedy indicated by nature for diseases of the organ, or for the condition in question. A good example is that of the lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), whose elongated tubers were supposed to resemble hæmorrhoids, and therefore to be a remedy for them; hence one of the old names of the plant—pilewort. Similarly, the fact that the juices of the barberry and common celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) are yellow was held to indicate them as a remedy for jaundice. The following from the Countess’s book is based upon similar notions:—

“*A Proved Medicine for the Yellow Jaundice.*—Take a pint of muscadine, a pretty quantity of the inner bark of a Barberry Tree, 3 spoonfuls of the greenest goose dung you can get, and take away all the white spots of it, lay them in steep all night, on the morrow strain it, & put to it one grated nutmeg, one peniworth of Saffron dried, & very finely beaten, and give to drink in the morning.”

Powdered jet administered in beer is recommended as a cure for bruises upon the same grounds, as are also the gallstones of an ox for calculus, and the spinal cord of the same animal for weakness of the back. Traces of old astrological superstitions are seen when in one recipe crab’s claws are to be obtained when the sun is in cancer, there being undoubtedly imagined some connection between the animal and the zodiacal sign bearing its name. The claws form part of a “most excellent powder” of numerous virtues; among which it was supposed to bring out the small-pox, to be good for the plague, for a Hectick, for consumption, cough, ague, poisoning, and sickness after labour; for passion of the heart, or convulsions. In addition we have the gratifying information that there is no unicorn’s horn comparable to it.

Another piece of astrology which has strayed into the

third quarter of the seventeenth century occurs in a recipe for a complicated lotion for cuts or sores, where the various ingredients are to be boiled in two gallons of water from a stream that runs towards the East.

Empirical forecastings of antiseptics are not wanting, among which may be cited the use of camphor and frankincense as ingredients in a dressing for wounds, and the employment of mercury, corrosive sublimate, and camphor for ringworm, while an ointment containing sulphur was used for scabies. Of especial interest are the directions for making a mask to be worn by those nursing cases of plague. The nurse is directed to cover the mouth with a muffler of "double old cloth wherein is Wormwood, Rue, Fetherfew, crums of sower bread and Vinegar, and a little Rose water, beat all these together, and put it into the muffler, made new every day." The treatment prescribed for the patient is too long for quotation in detail, but it mainly consisted in promoting free diaphoresis, with the assistance of hot bricks in the bed, if necessary, and the administration of "an approved medicine for the Plague, called the Philosopher's Egg," consisting, among other things, of a dried egg mixed with nux vomica, saffron (Venice), treacle, and unicorn's horn, "or for want thereof harts-horn." In this connection it is of interest to note that at the present time, among the Chinese, hartshorn is credited with wonderful powers, and is regarded by them as one of the most powerful remedies in their pharmacopœia.

A remedy decidedly empirical in character, and which though nasty may have afforded a certain degree of relief, is one for pleurisy, in which three balls of horsedung are to be boiled in white wine, the mixture to be sweetened with a little sugar, and after straining the decoction is to be administered to the patient, apparently in half-pint doses. Perhaps the ammonia salts in the horsedung may have acted as a diaphoretic, and so been useful; liquor ammonia acetatis, however, seems a more "elegant preparation."

The animal kingdom was also laid under contribution in the search for remedies. Swallows had formerly a great reputation in medicine, and one or two of the prescriptions describe preparations of these birds. Thus, for stiffness of

the sinews one is directed to take "12 fledg'd swallows out of the nest, kill them, beat them feathers and all in a mortar with Thyme, Rosemary and Hop, then seeth them in *May* butter a good while, then strain them through a strainer as hard as you can, and it will be an ointment, take the strings that grow out of the Strawberries, and beat them amongst the rest." The strawberry runners appear to be an after-thought, but in another somewhat similar remedy rotten strawberry leaves form one of the ingredients. The swallows were lucky in being killed before being pounded, for there are numerous revolting recipes in books of this period (including the "Choice Manual") where birds are directed to be plucked and drawn alive and then killed. I have seen one in which frogs were to be baked alive, though one writer in a fit of humanity suggests that they might be suffocated with the fumes of burning brimstone first.

Why the swallow should have obtained such a reputation in medicine it is a little difficult to see. Possibly the mysterious disappearance of the bird in the autumn and its reappearance in the spring exerted some effect upon the susceptible minds of our ancestors. The fact of their migration from one country to another was unknown, and what became of them in the winter months was long a matter of speculation among the few who took an interest in natural history. More than a century after the publication of the little work we are now considering Dr. Johnson, in an oracular and characteristically unscientific manner, disposed of the question of the winter destination of swallows thus: "Swallows certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together, by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water, and lye in the bed of a river." Perhaps the notion originated in the north of Europe, and Gilbert White refers to a Swedish naturalist who talked "as familiarly of the swallows going under water at the beginning of September as he would of his poultry going to roost a little before sunset." Indeed, the wildest legends had been current about them from the time of Aristotle onwards, and Pliny, quoting him, states that the common celandine was used by them to impart sight to their

young, even after their eyes had been plucked out. Celandine, as a matter of fact, is frequently mentioned as an application for the eyes, in spite of the highly irritating character of its juice.

The lower jaw of a pike beaten to powder was regarded as a remedy for diarrhœa, and also a preventive of threatened abortion. Powdered mousedung mixed with plantain juice and sugar figures as a remedy for hæmoptysis, while practical obstetrics is represented by a goodly number of recipes, of which the following is reasonably typical: "*How to deliver a Child in danger.*—Take a date stone, beat it into powder, let the woman drink it with wine, then take Polipody and emplaister it to her feet, and the child will come whether it be quick or dead, then take Centory, green or dry; give it the woman to drink in wine, give also the Milk of another Woman." Date stones appear to have been a favourite ingredient of such preparations, and were also used to ensure delivery of the placenta. Menorrhagia was to be cured by burning a hare's foot, powdering the ash and administering it in stale ale, while hyssop and hot water will ensure safe delivery, even though the "child be dead and rotten."

Among medicaments derived from the animal kingdom were earthworms washed in white wine, dried and powdered; the powder was to be mixed with saffron and drunk in beer, as a cure for jaundice; also oil extracted from the fat of foxes and badgers was recommended for sciatica and pains of the joints and sinews, while foxes' lungs dried and powdered were used in phthisis. Perhaps, however, the gem of the whole collection is a prescription in which a live animal was to be used. "*For a pin or web in the Eye.*—Take two or three Lice out of one's head and put them alive into the eye that is grieved, and so close it up, and most assuredly the Lice will suck out the web in the eye and cure it, and come forth without any hurt." The tender solicitude for the welfare of the lice in the last phrase is amusing, but we are not informed whether they were to be returned to their original abode or not.

Numerous references are made to the employment of some of our common wild flowers as remedies for different dis-

orders, and indeed the collection and drying of these at suitable seasons formed an important part of the work of a housewife of those days. Our own proverbial expression of “cut and dried,” as a reference to an accomplished fact, is connected with the collection and drying of “simples.” Indeed, the word “drug” itself is derived from the Dutch *droog* (= dry), of which the plural *droogen* was used for the dried herbs or “drugs.”

A prescription which certainly has brevity to recommend it runs thus, “*For them that cannot hear.—Put into their ears good dried suet;*” while the recommendation to blow a mixture of dried chicken’s dung and ginger into the eyes as a cure for soreness has a decidedly homœopathic appearance, while the sore eyes may also be helped by the internal administration of pounded slugs mixed with beer.

Considerable ingenuity seems to have been exerted by various folk, medical and lay, in the invention of complicated waters or spirits, which should apparently cure everything. Of these preparations “*Doctor Stevens’ Sovereign Water*” may serve as an example. As regards composition it may be briefly said to be distilled from wine with a mixture of aromatics, such as ginger, nutmeg, thyme, rosemary, lavender, and several others, but as regards its virtues we had better quote the “Manual” verbatim. “It comforteth the Spirits Vital, and helpeth the inward diseases which come of cold; and the shaking of the Palsie, it cureth the contraction of Sinews, and helpeth the conception of Women that be barren, it killeth worms in the body, it cureth the cold Cough, it helpeth the toothach, it comforteth the stomach, it cureth the cold Dropsie, it helpeth the Stone, it cureth shortly a stinking breath, and whoso useth this water enough, but not too much, it preserveth him in good liking, making him young.” (Query: What on earth *did* Dr. Stevens die of?)

For epilepsy one has a choice of the administration of peony seed, peacock’s dung, or a pleasant powder compounded of gold dust, pearl, amber, coral, and powdered bone from a human skull. If the patient were a male the bone must be obtained from the skull of a woman, and *vice versâ*. This

odd prescription contains some points of interest. Precious stones were long considered to have extraordinary medicinal virtues either if administered internally or worn as amulets.

The origin of the use of pieces of skull as ingredients probably dates back to prehistoric times, whence skulls have been recovered which shew unmistakeable signs of trephining. The operation was doubtless sometimes conducted with the view of giving egress to the evil spirit which caused epileptiform seizures, and the portions of skull removed were worn as amulets; while after death further scraps were taken from the same skull and similarly utilized. It is no very far cry from wearing such a relic to powdering it and giving it internally. "Salt" extracted from human skulls was also used, and had a great reputation in cases of epilepsy.

A small sub-section contains a number of formulæ, mostly for the preparation of various cordial essences, which were reputed to have been composed by Sir Walter Raleigh during his imprisonment in the Tower, and also a medicine prescribed for Queen Elizabeth by Drs. Adrian and Lacy as a remedy for dropsy. As this appears of some historical interest I quote it verbatim. "Take Polipodium, Spikenard, Squat, Ginger, Marjoram, Galingal, Setwel *ana* a penniweight. Sena leaves and cods, so much as all the rest grosly beaten; put them into a bag, and hang it in an earthen pot of two gallons of Ale, and every four days cover the pot with new Barm, and drink no other drink for six days, and this shall purge all ill humours out of the body, neither will it let the blood putrifie, nor flegm to have domination, nor Choler to burn, nor melancholy to have exaltation, it doth Encrease Blood, and helpeth all evil, it helpeth and purgeth Rheum, it defendeth the Stomack, it preserveth the body, and ingendreth good colour, comforts the sight, and nourisheth the mind."

The foregoing excerpts are from a book which is of a definitely popular character; it is therefore a matter of considerable interest to turn to a collection of prescriptions by one who, though not a qualified physician, was one of the leading scientists of the age, and one of the founders of modern chemistry and physics, as distinct from alchemy and





THE HON. ROBERT BOYLE.

its train of absurdities—the Hon. Robert Boyle. His little work is entitled "Medicinal Experiments; or a collection of choice remedies, etc., for the most part simple and easily prepared." The book was issued with the imprimatur of the Royal Society, dated November 18th, 1691, and the publisher's preface indicates its general scope: "These receipts, taken out of a large collection, as consisting of a few safe ingredients, commonly to be found at easie rates in most places were sent to a learned Physician beyond Sea: to whom they were a welcome present, and answered without doubt the Ends he had in desiring them." He further adds that much persuasion was necessary before the author would consent to their publication—a statement probably made in perfect good faith, since it is in accordance with all we know of Boyle's modest disposition. Each prescription is marked with an initial letter A, B, or C. Those marked A are of the very highest order of efficacy, B of the second, while C indicates a remedy not to be despised.

Those who seek remedies of a more scientific character than the Countess's will be doomed to disappointment, for here again the prescriptions are frankly empirical. In his "Sceptical Chymist" Boyle laments how little "does the chymist teach the philosopher of the nature of purgation, if he only tells him that the purgative virtue of medicines resides in their salt." One or two of his prescriptions may be of interest. A remedy of the first order (A) is one "to give ease in the pains of the stone, even of the bladder. Take transparent *sparr* that grows upon the veins of *Lead ore*, and having reduced it to fine powder, give from half a dram to a whole dram of it at a time in any convenient vehicle." We have already come across earthworms as a remedy for jaundice; here they reappear as a cure for convulsions in children. This prescription belongs to the B category; the worms are to be washed (but not killed) in white wine, then dried on tiles and powdered. Ambergrice is to be added because the powder smells rank (!), and the dose is from a dram to a dram and a half. Curiously enough one or two amulets are also mentioned and placed in the A and B lists. Thus for agues, especially tertian, finely-chopped groundsel is to be put into

a small paper bag, four inches square; the side of the bag which is to be worn next the skin is to be perforated and covered with sarsenet or fine linen. It is to be worn over the pit of the stomach, and renewed two hours before the expected onset of every fit. Another amulet, recommended for cramp (*i.e.*, probably epilepsy), is a powdered root of Mechoacan enclosed in a bag of sarsenet and worn like the preceding.

Amulets and such like appear to have been in vogue as prophylactics or cures for a good many diseases. Thus, when James II. was at Salisbury in 1688 preparing to oppose the advance of the Prince of Orange, he was attacked by severe attacks of nose-bleeding, and after several vain attempts to arrest it, relief was finally obtained by use of a "sympathetick ash." The incident and the method of treatment are related by John Aubrey, F.R.S., in his "Miscellanies" thus: "*To staunch Bleeding.*—Cut an ash of one, two, or three years growth at the very hour and minute of the sun's entering into Taurus: a chip of this applied will stop it; if it is a shoot it must be cut from the ground. Mr. Nicholas Mercator, astronomer, told me that he had tried it with effect. Mr. G. W. says the stick must not be bound or holden, but dipped or wetted in the blood. When King James II. was at Salisbury, 1688, his nose bled near two days; and after many essays in vain, was stopped by this sympathetick ash, which Mr. William Nash, a surgeon in Salisbury, applied." The foregoing reference to James II. brings to mind the fact that when the Duke of Monmouth was captured after Sedgmoor one of the things found upon him was a little book containing spells and charms, which among other things were supposed to shew how a sickness should end, and also to be cures for various ailments.

Aubrey seems to have taken a good deal of interest in occult phenomena, and to have been credulous enough though quite honest both in his investigations and records. One more recipe from Boyle's little work must conclude our brief note of it. It is marked A, is intended "to clear the eyes, even from films," and consists of dried human fæces finely





LOCKYER'S MONUMENT IN SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL.

powdered; the said powder to be blown into the eyes twice or thrice a day.

It is not surprising that an age which saw countesses picking lice out of their heads to put into other folk's eyes, kings healed with magic sticks, and the foremost scientist of the time recommending dried fæces and powdered worms as sovereign cures, should have been a happy one for the perennial quack. Indeed, one who may be called the king of quacks—Lionel Lockyer—flourished exceedingly about this time. He was a famous pill-maker, and in addition to vaunting his nostrum as a cure for anything and everything, so far anticipated the doctrine of the conservation of energy—unconsciously no doubt—as to declare that his pills were extracted from the rays of the sun. His monument is still to be seen in the north transept of Southwark Cathedral, and his epitaph is a curiosity of impudence and doggrel.

“Here Lockyer lies interr'd, enough his name
Speakes one, hath few competitors in fame
A name so greate so gen'ral it may scorne
Inscriptions w^{ch} doe vulgar tombs adorne
A diminution 'tis to write in verse
His eulogies w^{ch} most men's mouths rehearse
His virtues and his PILLS are soe well known
That envy can't confine them under stone
But they'll survive his dust and not expire
Till all things else at th'universall fire.
This verse is lost, his PILLS embalm his safe
To future times without an epitaph.”

This precious inscription was repaired in October 1741, and a further note on the pediment gives the information that Lockyer “Deceast Aprill y^e 26^t, Anno Do: 1672. Aged 72.

An amusing episode in the career of Lord Rochester was his masquerading as a quack doctor. One of his numerous escapades had led to his forced retirement from Court, and by way of passing the time he assumed a careful disguise, and retiring to an obscure part of the City published bills announcing the “arrival of a famous German Doctor, who by long application and experience has found out wonderful

secrets and infallible remedies." His reputation spread rapidly, and among others who found their way to his consulting room were the chambermaids to the maids of honour, who were soon recognized by the "doctor."

Now, as a part of his programme was a description of past and a forecast of future events, it will be readily understood that Rochester, whose knowledge of the Court ladies was like Mr. Weller's knowledge of London—extensive and peculiar—made some remarkable revelations to the astonished servants. If the records of the past were amazingly accurate the predictions for the future were correspondingly alarming, even to the gay and sportive ladies of the Court of Charles the Second, and accordingly two of them disguised as orange girls set out to see the doctor for themselves. That, however, they were not destined to accomplish, for after having been nearly recognized by one or two gentlemen they encountered Mr. Harry Brouncker (brother of Lord Brouncker, P.R.S.), whose attentions became so extremely marked that they were glad to make their escape without achieving the object of their expedition.
