

Charms employed in cattle diseases / [Robert Day].

Contributors

Day, Robert.

Publication/Creation

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1910?]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/bpsgw8rm>



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

Arms employed in Battle & Disease

by Robert Day, F.S.A.

36642

British Museum
No 1709
for Charms
May Oct 18
14-11-0

B. 14. 17

Charms Employed in Cattle Diseases.

BY ROBERT DAY, F.S.A.



THE deep-seated belief in the attributes and existence of the fairies or good people so prevalent among the Irish peasantry has been recorded in the legends of Thomas Crofton Croker, and the popular writings of Carleton, Griffin, and Lover, who describe the potency of their spells, and the evil and mischief caused by them to the farmer's stock and household, but with the fairy stroke there is the antidote, with the disease the cure, with the wound the healing charm, in which the most implicit faith is placed by the people. Of such talismans there are various and many kinds. Pennant in his *Tour* (i., 115) relates how the stone arrow-heads of the old inhabitants are supposed to be weapons shot by fairies at cattle, to which are attributed any disorders they have. In order to effect a cure the cow is to be touched by an elf shot, or made to drink the water in which which one had been dipped; the same virtue is said to be found in the crystal gems and in the adder stone. Captain Archibald Campbell shewed Pennant one of the former, a spheroid, set in silver, for the use of which people came above one hundred miles, and brought the water it was to be dipped in with them, for without that, in human cases, it was believed to have no effect. It was an old-time belief that the toad carried in its head an antidote against its own poison, to which Shakespeare adverts in "As You Like It":

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."

Thus it became the popular idea that the uncanny influence which produced the ailment had with it the remedy against its own virulence. This is further exemplified in the *connock*, which is an exact representation of the murrain caterpillar. Two of these have been found in the county Cork, one at Doneraile, the other at Timoleague, which, from their workmanship and close resemblance one to the other, were probably made in Cork by the same silversmith. They are of silver, and set with paste of different colours to correspond with the markings on

the caterpillar. These caterpillars, when swallowed by the cattle, were supposed to be the cause of the distemper. Both of these connocks are in the Dublin Museum, and are illustrated in Windele's paper.⁽¹⁾ Here we have the arrow head on one hand and the caterpillar on the other, as the direct causes of certain ailments, used for the purpose of dispelling them, and restoring health to the smitten herd, reminding us of the plague-stricken Philistines, who made golden images of their emerods, and the snake-bitten Israelites, who on looking upon the brazen serpent were healed. In the northern counties of Ireland where stone arrow-heads are much more common than in the South, farmers have informed me that the fairies before using the elf-darts imbued them in the dew of the hemlock and mounted them on shafts of bog reed. Collins, in his ode on the popular superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland,⁽²⁾ says, when speaking of the fairies:

"There every herd by sad experience knows
How wing'd with fate their elf-shot arrows fly,
When the sick ewe her summer food foregoes,
Or stretched on earth the heart smit heifers lie."

Vallancey,⁽³⁾ in 1784, relates that in the highlands of Scotland there is a large crystal, of a figure somewhat oval, which priests kept to work charms by; water poured upon it at this day is given to cattle against diseases. Similar stones are now preserved by the oldest and most superstitious in the country; and adds: "they were once common in Ireland, and the Earl of Tyrone is in possession of a very fine one."

In the Museum of the Scottish Antiquaries at Edinburgh are four perforated stones or whorls,⁽⁴⁾ called snake stones, used in Lewis as charms against cattle disease; and in Galloway ancient perforated discs of black shale, five or six inches in diameter, are employed to counteract the supposed effects of witchcraft, especially in black cattle and horses. These amulets are not unlike the holy stone suspended in stables as a charm against nightmare, an affliction brought on by the nocturnal fiend Mara, and hence frequently denominated witch riding.

The Marquis of Waterford has an heirloom in his family, a large globular crystal, hooped with silver. When lent, it is placed by the

(1) "Kilkenny Journal," vol. v.

(2) London, 1788, p. 10.

(3) "Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicus," No. xiii., p. 17 Dublin, 1784.

(4) Aubreys "Miscellanies," p. 147.

Whorls when found by the peasantry of Ulster are called fairy mill-stones.

farmers in a running stream and the murrain-infected cattle drink lower down. For an account of the wonderful amulet known as the Lee Penny, see the preface to "The Talisman," by Sir Walter Scott.

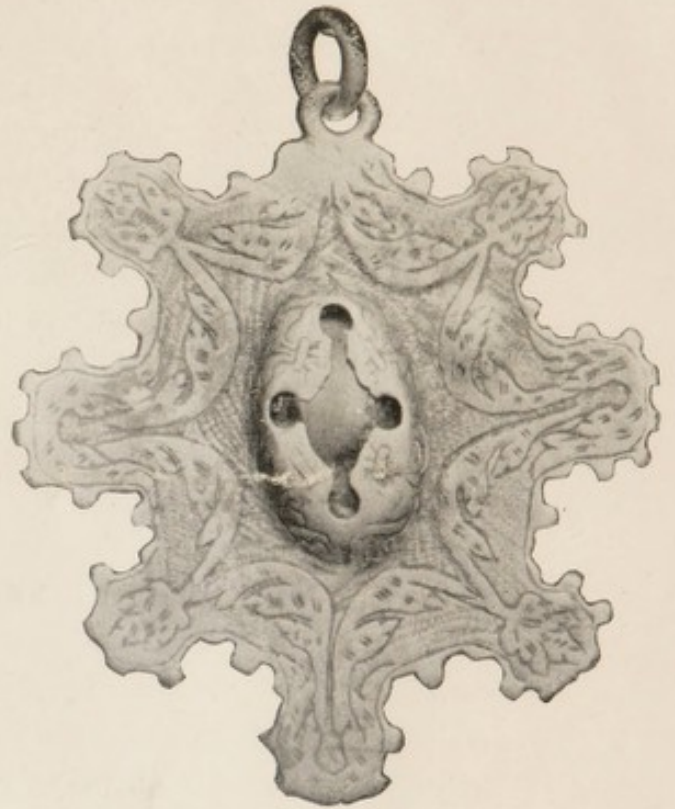
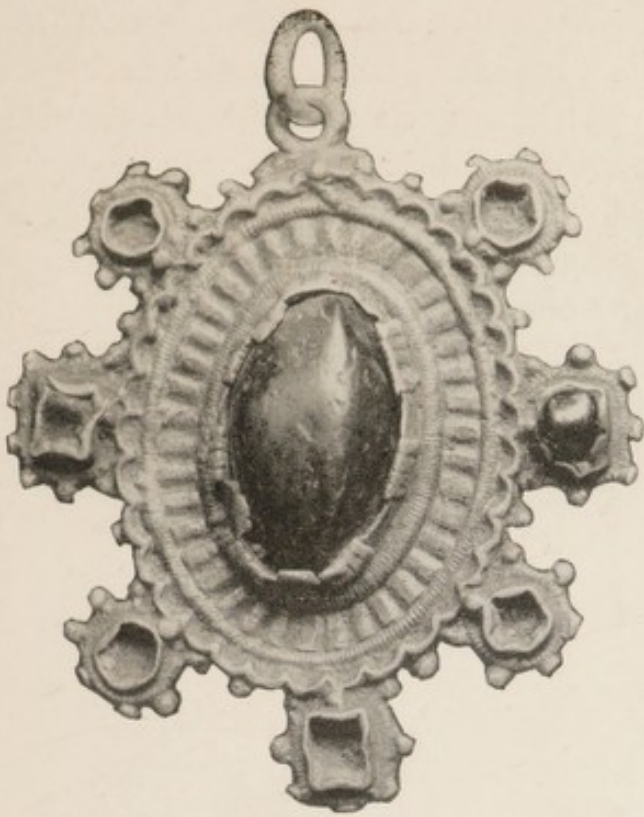
Among other stony amulets potent against the spells of witchcraft and the influence of the evil eye are the joints of the fossil encrinete called Sir Cuthbert's beads, and the pholas pierced globose zoophytes known as fairy or adder beads.

In the "Council Book of the Corporation of Cork," 25th November, 1618, the following entry concerning one of these talismans is recorded, in which it appears that the Corporation, acting as its custodian, for some unexplained reason placed it in pledge, with the condition that at certain times it should be produced for inspection; but this proviso not having been complied with by one David Pawnch, its mortgagee, the Council were compelled to have its value appraised, and it is probable that it did not again come into their custody, because Windele, in a paper published immediately after his death, on "Irish Medical Superstition" ("Journal of the Kilkenny Archæological Society," vol. v., new series, 1864-66), illustrates it as being then preserved by a branch of the Morgan family residing near Cork, to whom it was known as the "blood stone," and was traditionally believed to have been brought to Ireland from abroad by a former member of the family. It was regarded as efficacious in stopping the effusion of blood when suspended round the neck of persons so affected. In like manner the smaller stones were reputed to possess healing virtues distinct from the larger, and applicable to the cure of cattle. Here is the minute from the "Council Book":—"Adam Gould did produce in court, three several Mondaies, a silver jewell. In the midst thereof there was a darkish stone of aroime (sic) set and embroidered about with red stones, four of them three-square and eight four-square, which jewell was pawned unto him about a year and a day past, by one David Pawnch fzPatrick, for 40s., and as said David appeared not, being solemnly called in court three several Mondaies, the praisement of the said jewell was referred to Moris Gold fzJohn, merchant, and Richard Gold, goldsmith, who have returned the same jewell is worth 30s. ster."

In this paper Windele also figures another amulet in the ancient family of the MacCarthy of the Glen, a branch of the princely house of Muskerry, Lords of Blarney, then represented by John McCarthy O'Leary, Esq., of Coomlegane, near Millstreet, county Cork. This was believed to be possessed with healing qualities. It was of crystal, oval in form, and set in silver, with a ring for suspension. On April

15, 1840, its possession became the subject of a lawsuit at the police office, Cork, before Alderman Saunders, on a summons to show cause why a felony information should not be taken against a man named Cornelius Sheehan for unlawfully possessing himself of and detaining a murrain stone, the property of Mrs. McAuliffe, otherwise Meares, residing at Kyrls Quay, who claimed descent from the MacCarthys. In evidence it was sworn that MacCarthy More, King of Cork, when hunting one day was given this stone by one of the "good people," and that it had the virtue of curing cattle when sick, the sign of the cross being made with it on the animal's back on three successive mornings while fasting. The stone had been lent and the miracle of curing performed, when it was sent home by a boy, who mistook Mrs. McAuliffe's house and gave it to one Con Sheehan, who refused to return it, and would give the rightful owner no satisfaction, although told if he continued to retain it "he would thaw like ice." However, even this had not the desired effect, and the case was dismissed, the court having "no jurisdiction." The ancient family to whom this murrain stone originally belonged is fortunate in the possession of another, which has been treasured as an heirloom at Coomlegane for quite 400 years, during which time it was in frequent use among the farmers of Cork and Kerry as a medicinal cure for the murrain and other ailments to which cattle are liable. When so lent a formal receipt was given, which was signed by two responsible sureties, by whom it was afterwards restored to the owner. To effect the cure the stone was placed in a vessel of water, or in a stream immediately above where cattle drank, as it was believed that from the hidden virtues possessed by the stone, water in which it was placed became impregnated with its healing powers.

This highly interesting object is composed of a central stone set in a silver-gilt oval frame, with seven projecting rosettes, two having settings of carbuncle, which are wanting in the remaining five. These were probably lost by the farmers in the rough treatment to which the amulet was subjected. The stone, like others from the county Cork, is of reddish brown polished agate, striated with veins of a lighter shade. It forms the central object in a rayed vesica, surrounded by an engrailed border from which the jewelled bosses spring. The collets in all these spaces are hammered up, so as partly to hide the setting, which was the fashion in Queen Mary's reign. The reverse shews the back of the stone through a space formed by a cruciform opening in the metal, the surface of which is engraved with a floriated device terminating in each of the seven projections with fleur-de-lys. It has a ring for suspension,




I. & II. (*See page 5*).



III. (*See page 5*).

CHARMS EMPLOYED IN CATTLE DISEASES.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Wellcome Library

<https://archive.org/details/b30614909>

and was probably worn as a pendant neck ornament possibly to avert the baneful influence of the evil eye. Our Society is much indebted to Mr. MacCarthy O'Leary for so kindly lending this family heirloom for publication. See illustrations I., II.

In the "Journal of the R.S.A.I." for 1875,⁽⁵⁾ a coloured illustration will be found of the Imokilly Amulet, which has been from time immemorial in the family of the Fitzgeralds, Seneschals of Imokilly, and as the murrain stone was well known to the farmers of Castlemartyr, Killeagh and Youghal, who still avail of it as a cure in cattle disease. It had also the dual charm of curing hydrophobia in the human subject. It consists of a polished ball of dark reddish-brown brecciated or banded agate, spherical in shape, weighing 5 oz., and measuring 1 13-16 inch in diameter, pierced through the centre, which is of a red colour, clouded and streaked with white

"Concentric lines that fade away."

Bearing a close resemblance to No. 4 in Windele's paper (which was the cause of legal proceedings in 1840) is another of agate from the county Cork in the writer's collection. It is of reddish colour, beautifully striated, and closely resembling the Imokilly Amulet in its variegated colouring. It is longitudinally pierced in the centre for the reception of a gold bar that passes through it, having a gold ring at the upper end, and at the lower extremity a rosette of six projections that cover the orifice. It is one and a quarter inches long, and was, in 1870, purchased from a Cork dealer, who either did not know, or did not wish to say from whose family he obtained it, but it was sold as a magical stone for the cure of cattle disease, and no doubt was used for that purpose. See illustration III.

An amulet of amber incised with talismanic characters was found in the county Limerick and sold by James Graves, a Cork jeweller, to Lord Londesborough in 1850. It is figured in the "Kilkenny Journal," and was evidently a charm worn on the person. This beautiful substance was always much prized for talismanic purposes. Many years ago the writer acquired in Galway a silver crucifix set in a block of opaque amber, to which it was secured by silver rivets: possibly it was so used for its property of attracting light objects when excited by friction, and thus illustrating the attractive influence of the Redeemer's Cross.

(5) Vol. iii., fourth series, p. 440.

* The specimen is now in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum

The belief in the virtue of these murrain stones is so general and widespread among the peasantry, and their successful use in sickness must have been evident, and attended with marked success, otherwise the faith in their curative properties would soon have been dispelled and the medicinal virtues of the stones forgotten. Therefore the fact of one of these having been in use for four hundred years is strong presumptive evidence that the unbroken belief and abiding faith in their reality and potency must have been continued, confirmed and strengthened by the cures which, through faith in their agency, were effected. ⁶ For a recent reference to these healing stones, see "A Social History of Ancient Ireland," vol. i., p. 628, Longmans, London, 1903, by P. W. Joyce, LL.D.

⁶ Longmans, London, 1903.

