

## NOTES ON MEDICINE IN CHINA.

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THE Chinese describe particular diseases according to particular planets, portioning out their relations to these, and to the five elements, colors, tastes, points of the compass, viscera, etc., and gravely assign every disease to the prominence of one or the other, and treat them accordingly. No Chinese treatise on medicine would be perfect without a most elaborate and complete cosmogony, with which it invariably begins. The action of the two principles, male and female, must be clearly laid down, and each disease attributed to one or the other of them. This lies at the foundation of a correct knowledge of their mysterious and absurd doctrine of the pulse, to which we may refer in a subsequent article.

In the present paper we shall refer to magic merely, as applied to healing, reserving cure by charms and gymnastics for a future paper.

The arts of magic have always occupied the chief part of the religion and philosophy of the lowest races of men. Among the Africans we find amulets in great use as objects of worship on account of their imaginary supernatural influences. Among the Turanian races (and the Chinese belong to this family) we find incantations and witchcraft or Shamanism occupying their place. Formerly diviners were maintained at the public expense at the court of the "Son of Heaven." Now, under the "Great Pure Dynasty," mandarins of the first and second rank are especially appointed to confer about the lucky days and *fengshui* of the imperial tombs, etc. In China magic has held sway more than four thousand years; and with this people, highly educated, but of a low type, if ever abandoned, it will be done slowly and with reluctance even before the advance of christian civilization. Yet all China is not given to such superstitions. The present Chinese dynasty banished healing by magic and charms from the medical college in Peking over two hundred years ago, and have made it a punishable offense to practice these *depraved* methods. Were the arts of magicians confined simply to the healing art, the government would tolerate them; but in too many cases they are made the occasion to deceive the people, who are enticed thereby to enter into societies and embrace tenets which are hostile to the peace and stability of the throne.

The whole art of healing by sorcery and charms is included in the term *depraved religion or doctrine*. It is something deflected from the proper and perfect line of rectitude. In the time of Confucius these demoniacal arts and false doctrines existed, and were exercised chiefly by women who were able to cure disease and see and recall spirits. Whatever spirit may have produced the malady, these enchantresses

had the power of driving them out. They were termed witches, and by this name they were always called in ancient times. We abstain from tracing their history through the successive dynasties down to the present time, as being uninteresting to general readers out of the "Middle Kingdom." But the subject is replete with amusement if not instruction.

In China, as in all countries, the magicians, the so-called *vos estis Dei* of some, pretend to cure the *omnia mundi mala* by means of cabalistic words or characters, spells, philters, incantations, jugglery, etc. Disease is looked upon as a punishment for sin in this or a former life, and therefore the spirits who are supposed by Heaven's permission to inflict these punishments by sending diseases must be appeased. If they cause so can they cure disease. We often hear the Chinese remark that they are expatiating their sin in their disease; that it is the just retribution of Heaven. They are thus ever anxious and ready to resort to the temples to burn incense, to discover the fates or appease the gods, and avert or remove some malady. The people have more faith in their *gods* than their *doctors*; for although they sometimes seek relief from their native physicians (if such they deserve to be called), yet they quite as often resort first to the temples. If the patient recover, it is attributed to the mercy of the god consulted; if he die, it is ascribed to fate. A large and increasing number from all classes, who find no relief from their idols and gods, come at last—often, alas! too late—to the foreign hospital.

China too has had her particular deities for particular affections—her special temples, where special divinities who preside over medicine, small-pox, infantile diseases, etc., have incense burned and worship paid to them. The fictitious Empress Pan-chen, supported by ten elder brothers and ten elder sisters, is the goddess of the "heavenly flowers" (small-pox); Tsi-sheng and Sung-sheng preside over the birth, sex, and diseases of children, and are always surrounded by numerous little clay images; Lii-tsu over all diseases in general; and Yao Wang (Prince of Medicine), by the name of *Tsun*, over medicine. It is related of this last that an empress of the Tang dynasty, during a case of difficult and tedious labor, called this physician after all the court physicians had been consulted in vain, and he, by means of a rope twenty feet long attached to the imperial wrist (he was not permitted to see her), pronounced it from the pulse indications a case of the fetus grasping the heart of the mother. Having once made a true diagnosis, the remedy was instantly applied, and six inches of steel soon caused the child to loosen its hold; and so the fetus was delivered and the doctor was deified. Several celebrated doctors in the various past dynasties have been made the objects of worship in the temples.

A common mode of consulting the oracles or deities, both in the temples and on the streets, is by casting lots with a bamboo tube containing a hundred sticks. Each slip has a number corresponding to a stanza of poetry which is consulted to discover the mind of the presid-

ing spirit, or it may refer to some medical work for the decision or prescription of the divinity; and thus the balm is applied. The object sought is discovered in a variety of ways through the means of this tube and slips. The tube is shaken until a slip jumps out; and this is sometimes repeated until a favorable answer is obtained.

Another method adopted to ascertain the curability of the disease, and to disclose the *arcana fatorum*, is to take three copper coins and throw them from a dice-box on the table. Certain conclusions are derived from these: thus, if the three turn up together, as reverse or obverse in six throws, uncertainty is the inference; if two obverse and one reverse or one obverse and two reverse occur three times in six throws, it is considered fixed and certain; and so on. Others practice by means of round pieces of wood with characters inscribed on them, which, from their position in relation to their theories of cosmogony, the "heavenly stems" or "earthly branches," the male and female principles in five elements, etc., delineated upon diagrams before them, are made to shadow forth the intentions of Providence in regard to the patient.

There is also the plan of operating by means of a medium, akin to spirit rapping. Women often act as mediums; they get possessed of some god or goddess, and through it the divinity prescribes. The usual method of eliciting information from the spirit is to sit round a table, while two persons take hold of a round board to which a pen is attached at right angles. The table is covered with fine sand rolled even and smooth so that characters may easily be traced upon it. Some charm written on yellow paper is either burnt over kelbat or at the door of the house, or at the temple of the divinity whose presence is desired. The whole thing is conducted with the utmost ceremony, exactness, and faith. The spirit appears and delivers responses to the subjects submitted to its consideration by tracing more or less legibly in the sand. At the presence of a foreigner it complains and refuses to communicate.

In one form the spirit comes at the mention of his name; in another, the patient or seeker must first walk a hundred steps, and that spirit which is first met is invited; as, for example, if thunder be heard on going out, the spirit presiding over thunder would be invited. The remaining processes are the same.

Many of the gods of medicine are consulted in a very practical and tangible way. The patient rubs the part of the image which corresponds to the affected part in order that the god may know where his services are required. Outside one of the eastern gates of this city there is a bronze mule, the patron of the *literati*, which is quite burnished by the frequent rubbings of the people in search of health. The patients never reflect that the mule is only a Nehustan, and nothing more.

A practice common in some parts of China is to beat the bedstead with peach and willow branches for the cure of the sick. The Jesuits have written much about cures of this kind in China; and holy water

has done good service in Japan. One relates that he cured a mad woman by hanging St. John's gospel about her neck.

Another practice is to invite the Taurist and Buddhist priests to the sick-chamber to expel the deadly influences proceeding from evil spirits. Mirrors are hung upon the walls to frighten them. Some of the spirits are active in creating disease in order to obtain food; and so food and fruit are always placed before these hungry gods to appease them. The priests besides chant their formulas and meaningless prayers, burn paper and incense, ring bells, beat gongs, and sprinkle water on the affected part or on the sick person generally. The water is used with the notion of purifying the patient, either preparatory to the spirit entering to cure or to cause the exit of the evil spirit. The Chinese use water so sparingly, being actually afraid that its use produces disease, that they may be said to be genuine hydrophobists. To abstain entirely from liquids or beverages is prescribed as a recipe for longevity. When thirsty the tongue must be so manipulated in the mouth as to cause a copious flow of saliva, and this goes directly to nourish the original and vital principle. The soul even after death—for the Chinese do die notwithstanding—requires looking after from the priests, if we may judge from the noise and time taken to perform the ceremonies before interment is respectable or the soul made happy. Nothing to residents in a Chinese city is more disagreeable than the incessant jinglings, lamentations, and gongs; and in case of epidemics of cholera, typhus, small-pox, diphtheria, etc., no custom is more hurtful. Seven, fifteen, or more days are sometimes devoted to incantations in a rich family. In a family of twenty-seven I have known twenty-six die within a month of diphtheria.

The following will illustrate how a celestial sometimes obtains practice. N. was very poor, and took to divining on the streets under a mat awning, or by an open table when the weather permitted. (Within a mile of this hospital there are a dozen such fellows.) In his house, above the cupboard, there was the usual medical idol, Lii-tsu, and one night he dreamed that this god advised him to take to healing by charms, and promised to instruct him. Next morning, much to his astonishment, he found a volume on the subject, full of drawings of charms, beside the idol. My friend, with the god's assent and assistance, commenced practicing the writing of the charms; and when he became somewhat proficient, he began his craft, adding to it his divination and geomancy. He was soon called to attend one of the princes, when he correctly divined the disease by the eight *diagrams*, and prescribed the efficacious charm. All the prince's followers and retainers became his patients and disciples; and on his birth-day, and that of his wife, they present him yearly with tokens of their regard and gratitude. His fame has become immense, and he runs great risk of being either knighted or deified.

In concluding these brief and desultory observations on this branch of the Chinese healing art, we cannot do better than quote a single

sentence from the preface of one of their own works on divination : "The augurs and magicians are prompted by the desire of gain, and sorcery is practiced with a view of ensnaring the people." They are often in collusion with the priests, and the gains are frequently mutually shared between them. Their exactions are sometimes almost too heavy to be borne. To the rich, the meritorious deeds to be done are increased; to the humble, the burdens laid upon them bring them to the verge of poverty, and they often pawn everything to appease the gods. But this charlatanism and quackery exists also very often between diviner and physician. Quacks join a league to increase their practice, and the sorcerers by their divinings indicate (as by the will of the gods) the physician to be consulted. These alliances are said to be the plague of every city.—[*American Practitioner*.