

1600
83

AN
ACCOUNT
OF THE
NATIVE AFRICANS
IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF
SIERRA LEONE;
TO WHICH IS ADDED,
AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
PRESENT STATE OF MEDICINE AMONG THEM.



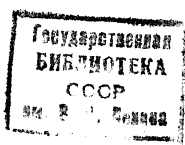
Come fanciul ch'a pena
Volge la Lingua e snoda;
Che dir non sa, ma 'l piu tacer gli è Noia
Così 'l desir mi mena
A dire: _____
Mi palpita il cor! _____ ma forse diran
_____ che un primo. Errore
Punir non si dovea; che un Ramo inferno
Subito non recide saggio Cultor.

BY
THOMAS WINTERBOTTOM, M. D.
PHYSICIAN TO THE COLONY OF SIERRA LEONE.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM,
Dean Street;
AND SOLD BY JOHN HATCHARD, 199, PICCADILLY,
AND J. MAWMAN, POULTRY.

1803



и 40981-50

CONTENTS.

VOLUME II.

CHAP. I.

	Page
<i>Introduction—Origin of Medicine—First Physicians—Union of Medicine and Magic—Practice of Medicine in Africa—General Division</i>	1

CHAP. II.

GENERAL DISEASES.

<i>Fever—Remedies for the Thirst, Vomiting, and Head-ach which attend it—Remittents—Mode of Cupping—Intermittents—Enlargement of the Spleen—Edema of lower Extremities—Mania—Idiotism—Epilepsy—Worms—Lethargy</i>	13
---	----

CHAP. III.

<i>Venereal Disease—Gonorrhœa—Phlegmone Testis—Hernia—Coup de Soleil—Tooth-ache—Scurvy—Ear-ach—Dysentery on board of Slave Ships; on Shore—Diarrhœa—Cholic</i>	32
--	----

CHAP. IV.

<i>Elephantiasis.....</i>	50
---------------------------	----

CHAP. V.

<i>Dracunculus or Guinea Worm—Chigres.....</i>	82
--	----

CHAP. VI.

<i>Enlargement of the Scrotum—Enlargement of the Legs—Gout—Rheumatism—Pleurisy—Diseased Liver—Scrophula—Phthisis—Anorexia—Spitting of Blood</i>	110
---	-----

CHAP. VII.

<i>Diseases of the Eyes—Nyctalopia—Case of Croup—Sore Throat—Corpulency—Small Pox—Inoculation—Measles</i>	127
---	-----

CONTENTS.

CHAP. VIII.

	Page
<i>Yaws</i>	139

CHAP. IX.

<i>Herpes—Krankra—Mottled Appearance of Skin—Effects of Fish Poison—Nostalgia</i>	163
---	-----

CHAP. X.

<i>Bite of Snakes—Of Scorpions—Of Tarantulas</i>	176
--	-----

CHAP. XI.

<i>Burns and Scalds—Ulcers—Recent Wounds—Fractures</i>	193
--	-----

CHAP. XII.

THE DISEASES OF WOMEN—WITH THE SEXUAL PECULIARITIES IN AFRICA.

<i>Hysteria—Catamenia—Labours—Expulsion of the Placenta— Abortion—Miscarriage—Milk Breasts—Pendulous Bel- lies—Suckling</i>	205
---	-----

CHAP. XIII.

THE DISEASES AND MANAGEMENT OF CHILDREN.

<i>Treatment after the Birth—Locked Jaw—Method of carrying Children—Eruptions—Indistinct Articulation—Tinea Capi- tis—Weakness—Wasting—Diarrhœa—Protrusions of the Navel—Rickets—Prolapsus Ani—Dirt-eating—Large Bel- lies</i>	219
--	-----

APPENDIX. No. I. <i>An Account of Circumcision as it is prac- tised on the Windward Coast of Africa</i>	229
---	-----

APPENDIX. No. II. <i>An Account of the African Bark</i>	243
---	-----

APPENDIX. No. III. <i>Remarks suggested by the Perusal of Mr. White's Work on the regular Gradation in Man</i>	254
--	-----

APPENDIX. No. IV. <i>Remarks of Professor Blumenbach upon Negroes</i>	275
---	-----

AN ACCOUNT OF THE
PRESENT STATE OF MEDICINE
AMONG
THE NATIVES
OF
SIERRA LEONE.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION. ORIGIN OF MEDICINE. FIRST PHYSICIANS. UNION OF MEDICINE AND MAGIC. PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN AFRICA. GENERAL DIVISION.

THE following attempt to sketch a history of the present state of medicine among the natives of Africa, and to give some account of those diseases to which they are more peculiarly liable, was undertaken during the calamitous and distressed state to which the colony of Sierra Leone was reduced, in consequence of the depredations committed there by the French, in the year 1794. It was resorted to with the view of restoring some degree of activity to a mind broken down by sickness, and afflicted by the

scenes of distress which daily presented themselves. This account must unavoidably prove very defective ; partly from a want of knowledge of the different languages spoken by the nations who are the subject of it, and partly from the great unwillingness which they shew to disclose the secrets of their medical art. The inconveniences which are produced by the former circumstance, are but imperfectly remedied by the assistance of an interpreter ; and the difficulties which result from the latter are well pointed out by Dr. Rush, who is so deservedly eminent as a physician and philosopher, in his *Inquiry into the Natural History of Medicine among the Indians of North America* *. “ By what arts,” says he, “ shall we persuade them to discover their remedies? and how shall we come at the knowledge of facts in that cloud of errors in which, the credulity of the Europeans, and the superstition of the Indians, have involved both their diseases and remedies? These difficulties serve to increase the importance of our subject. If I should not be able to solve them, perhaps I may lead the way to more successful endeavours for that purpose.”

An inquiry of this kind, were the obstacles which oppose its prosecution entirely removed, would no doubt prove sufficiently interesting. We are indebted to the experience of nations, more rude than those of Africa, and inhabiting countries which possess fewer natural advantages, for some of our most valuable remedies. We have

* *Medical Inquiries*, vol. i.

therefore some reason to hope, that as Africa, though hitherto too much neglected, has already enriched many European arts by its productions, so it may have in store for future observers some articles which may become important acquisitions to the *materia medica* ;

Some " herbs, and potent trees, and drops of balm,
Rich with the genial influence of the sun,
To brace the nerveless arm, with food to win
Sick appetite, or hush th' unquiet breast *."

Considerable pains have been taken to discover those remedies upon which the natives place their chief dependance for the cure of diseases ; and to prevent, as much as possible, any ambiguity arising in default of scientific names, as many of the native names of vegetables, &c. as could be procured, have been inserted. For the Linnæan names of medical plants which have been mentioned, I am indebted to my learned friend Dr. Adam Afzelius, demonstrator of botany in the university of Upsala, who has kindly promised to supply such as are wanting, in the elaborate work which he is now preparing on the natural history of Sierra Leone.

Although the present account relates chiefly to the Timmanees and Bulloms, who inhabit the banks of the Sierra Leone and its neighbourhood, yet the customs of other nations, particularly those dwelling to the northward of that river, will be occasionally noticed, where an opportunity has occurred of observing any striking

* Akenside.

differences between them. Indeed it is highly probable that the same medical customs will be found to prevail, more or less, for several hundred miles along the coast of Africa, as a very great similarity of manners prevails among the inhabitants, although divided into so many different nations.

The origin of medicine has probably been the same in every country, and its progress towards perfection has been equally slow and gradual in all. To relieve the body from sickness and pain must early have excited the attention of mankind. The rudest nations we are acquainted with have a knowledge of medicine. Pliny observes, that if at any time there have been people without physicians, yet they have not been without medicines; and the science remained at Rome, even after the physicians had been banished from the city. It is in the savage state, or the state of nature as it is called, that that part of medicine which attends chiefly to accidents is more peculiarly requisite*; for men, whilst engaged in hunting wild beasts, or while roaming over an uncultivated country, covered with impenetrable forests, are more exposed to wounds, bruises, and other accidents, than those who live in a more civilized state; hence it is probable that some degree of medical experience must have been coeval with the origin of mankind. Quintilian

* *Medicina quondam paucarum fuit scientia herbarum, quibus sisteretur fluens sanguis, vulnera coirent paulatim. Seneca Epistol. 95.*

remarks, "Medicina ex observatione salubrium atque his contrariorum reperta est; et ut quibusdam placet, tota constat experimentis. Nam et vulnus deligavit aliquis antequam hæc ars esset: et febrem quiete et abstinencia, non quia rationem videbat, sed quia id valetudo ipsa coegerat, mitigavit *."

As it is more obscure in its nature than other arts, so medicine has been slower in its progress. In some instances we are said to have been indebted to the practice of animals for the knowledge of particular remedies; in other instances to accident, or to a fancied resemblance between a plant and the disease it was supposed to cure †. Even at this time many medicines are retained in the materia medica of European nations from some such fanciful notion of their virtues. Among the many histories of accidental discoveries of

* Institut. II. xviii.

† Pliny says "Hippopotamus in quadam medendi parte etiam *magister* exstitit. Assidua namque satietate obesus, exit in litus, recentes arundinum cæsuras speculatum: atque ubi acutissimum videt stirpem, imprimens corpus, venam quandam in crure vulnerat, atque ita profluvio sanguinis morbidum alias corpus exonerat, et plagam limo rursus obducit.

Simile quiddam et volucris in eadem Ægypto monstravit, quæ vocatur ibis: rostri aduncitate per eam partem se perluens, quæ reddi ciborum onera maxime salubre est. Nec hæc sola a multis animalibus reperta sunt, usui futura et homini; for which consult Pliny Lib. viii. c. 27.

In another place he observes, "Torpescent scorpiones aconito—Auxiliatur his elleborum album—Tangunt carnes aconito, necantque gustatu earum pantheras:—at illas statim liberari morte, excrementorum hominis gustu, demonstratum.—Pudendumque rursus, omnia animalia, quæ sint salutaria ipsis, nosse, præter hominem," L. xxvii. c. 2.

remedies, that of the purgative effects of hellebore by Melampus bears at least an air of probability, as also does that of the Peruvian bark.

From history we learn, that the practice of medicine formed a part of the duties of religion among the chief nations of antiquity ; perhaps from this consideration, that the priests of the gods were alone thought worthy to practise an art so much beyond the reach of human genius to discover, and of which they boasted that the gods themselves were the inventors. Kings were formerly instructed in this art, and philosophers considered medicine as one of the chief objects of their attention ; among others, Aristotle is said to have practised medicine before he applied to the study of philosophy.

The first account we have of physicians is contained in the sacred writers, where they are also said to be embalmers of the dead. The " art of the apothecary is also frequently noticed ; but though they might occasionally have practised physic, they appear to have been chiefly venders of drugs, myropolæ ; and afterwards, when physic became a distinct branch of science, this art fell into contempt, and probably became that of a mere perfumer, unguentarius*.

At the same time quackery may have drawn its origin : a kind of gypsies or fortune-tellers, called by the antients agyrtæ, æruscatores †, præstigiatores, &c. pretended to cure diseases by

* Cic. Offic. i. 42.

† Calepin Dict. und. Ling.

charms, and by a variety of mysterious ceremonies. These people also, like the greegree men in Africa, or the obia professors in the West Indies, wreaked their vengeance upon those who offended them, by the recital of magic verses. “Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet.”

In all the uncultivated nations of antiquity, medicine has been held in the highest esteem, and even considered as a divine art. Homer often speaks of the peculiar respect paid to those who were skilled to dress a

Wound with drugs of pain assuaging power;

an art which had not been neglected by the haughty * Achilles.

Medicine, as well as many other useful arts, appears to have been very early cultivated in Egypt, as is evident in the sacred writings. *Homer* calls Egypt the land of physicians, and says,

—————Egypt teems with drugs, yielding no few,
Which, mingled with the drink, are good, and many
Of baneful juice, and enemies to life.
There ev’ry man in skill medicinal
Excels, for they are sons of Pæon all †.

Pliny also says, *medicinam Ægyptii apud ipsos volunt repertam: alii per Arabum, Babylonis et Apollinis filium: herbariam et medicamentariam a Chirone*; hence it appears that we are indebted,

* See the story of Democedes, related by Herodotus, iii. 129 also Ecclesiasticus, ch. xxxviii.

† *Odyss.* iv. 288, by Cowper.

for at least the rudiments of this art, to the Africans, despicable as their knowledge of it may appear to us at present.

This union of medicine with the ceremonies of religion, which occurred during the early ages of mankind, among all those nations of whom we have any records, is also found to prevail amongst all those with whom navigation has lately made us acquainted; and both appear to have been universally connected with those superstitious practices, the *magicæ vanitates*, which from time immemorial have kept the minds of mankind in a constant state of alarm. Pliny, speaking of this triple union, says of magic in particular, "*Natam primam e medicina nemo dubitat, ac specie salutaris irrepsisse velut altiore sanctioreque medicina: ita blandissimis desideratissimisque promissis addidisse vires religionis, ad quas maxime etiamnum caligat humanum genus**." The dependency of medicine upon magic, or at least upon the same disposition of mind, is not yet broken, and if formerly they "with incantation staunch'd the sable blood," the same natural effect is frequently, at the present day, attributed to causes equally trifling and ridiculous. The Druids were priests and physicians among the Gauls and ancient Britains. In North America, the priests of the Indians are at the same time their physicians and their conjurors; whilst they heal their wounds, or cure their diseases, they interpret their dreams, give them protective charms, and satisfy that de-

* Lib. xxxi. c. 1.

sire which is so prevalent among them of searching into futurity *. It is curious to remark, that the same notion respecting medicine prevails among the islanders of the South Seas. At Otaheite, a physician is called tahauwamai, a word compounded of tahauwa, a priest, and mai, pain. Thus we see that all nations, while in similar states of cultivation, possess nearly the same ideas, though cut off from all communication by immense tracts of ocean.

Respecting the practice of medicine in Africa, there is reason to imagine that it is not at present in a progressive state of improvement, but that it remains nearly as it was some centuries ago. This arises chiefly from their great repugnance to change customs which long usage has rendered venerable. They plant their rice, build their houses, and manufacture their cloth in exactly the same manner as their forefathers, and they answer every objection, by saying it is "country fashion." This attachment, however, to long established customs, though probably strengthened in tropical climates by the enervating power of heat, is not peculiar to the Africans: it is observed to prevail in all countries partially civilized. Thus the manners and customs of the Asiatics, as described in scripture, are nearly the same as those which are observed in the East at the present day †.

* Carver's Travels in North America.

† Spirit of Laws, xiv. 4.

The notions respecting the effects of medicine are, in Africa, so much blended with a regard to magical ceremonies and incantations, that it is often difficult to discover on which they chiefly rely for success. Although they imagine that every disease attended with danger is occasioned by witchcraft or poison *, yet they readily admit that sickness may occur independently of these causes. In support of this opinion they argue, that if a vessel of any kind be filled with clean water every day, and be not washed out, it must at length become foul ; hence, say they, arises the necessity of washing the stomach from time to time with some medicine, although unattended with any operative effects. Another reason why they suppose the stomach to be the chief seat of disease, is the loss of appetite, which so frequently attends it, and which is to them the most alarming symptom. When the body is disordered, from whatever cause, they do not believe that it can be again restored to health simply by its own powers, or by the powers of nature as they are called, of which they have not the smallest notion.

In collecting medicines for use, they pay no regard to the phases of the moon, nor do they refer any of their diseases to the influence of this

* The Bulloins have a saying among them, that a Bullom man cannot die unless his death be occasioned by poison or witchcraft. Van Helmont appears to have entertained the same notion, when he says, *Deus non fecit mortem*.

planet. Those who live upon the coast are of opinion, that people can only die at high or low tide. The influence of the tide upon departing life has long been credited ; Piso says, during the six hours of the increase of the tide, diseases are exacerbated and pains are greatly increased ; but that they gradually abate during the reflux. The same author appears firmly persuaded that men die only during the ebb tide. Dr. Haller supposes that Piso was the first who formed this opinion ; but Aristotle fell into the same error, and asserts that no animal dies during the increase of the tide *.

It is very common for those who are indisposed, to go and reside for some time in a distant village †, in order to take medicines from some one who has acquired celebrity for the cure of a particular disorder ; this is frequently some old woman, to whom even Europeans will often trust themselves in preference to their own countrymen ‡.

* Haller Bib. Med. Pract. iii. 1.

† Jeremiah xlv. 11.

‡ Atkins gives an instance of this adherence to the superstitious practices of the natives, in a governor of Cape Coast Castle, General Phips. "The general," he observes, "has taken a *consa*, which by the negroes is understood a temporary wife ; she is a mulatto-woman, begot by a Dutch soldier at des Minas, by whom he has four children, of *fair flaxen hair* and *complexion*. He dotes on this woman, whom he persuades now and then to our chapel service, and she complies without devotion, being a strict adherer to the *negrish* customs. I attended the illness of one of her children, and afterwards on the General himself, who, on both occasions, I found, was so weak or so wise, as to give the preference of *fetishing* to any physical directions of mine,