

THE AMULET COLLECTION OF PROFESSOR
BELUCCI.¹

AN amulet is something which may be worn or carried as a remedy or protection against mischief, or to bring good luck. A talisman is a figure, more or less magical, cut or engraved under certain superstitious circumstances, usually having reference to holy things, and to which wonderful or supernatural powers are ascribed. It is believed to give the wearer certain advantages, such as preservation against accident, disease, the evil eye, etc., or to render him invulnerable in battle. Both amulet and talisman have beneficial effects only upon the wearer. Charms, on the other hand, may enable the wearer to obtain a power over others for good or for evil. A charm operates as a spell, an enchantment. It exerts an occult influence, and works by a secret power. It may subdue opposition or gain the affections. It may consist of a material thing, or of words or characters written or spoken. It may be an act which, though insignificant in itself, becomes of importance when performed at a given time or place, or under particular circumstances. Some objects may combine the qualities of amulets, talismans, and charms.

The principal evils against which amulets and talismans are a protection are lightning, fire, disease, shipwreck, drowning, ill-luck, the evil eye, etc.

Prof. Joseph Belucci, of Perugia, Italy, driving with Desor, the celebrated Swiss archæologist, the latter was led to remark that cab-drivers fastened to their whips pieces of badger-skin, and Belucci, inquiring into the reason of this practice, was answered by the coachmen that it was an amulet which brought good luck to the carriage and horses, and guarded them from disease and danger. He resolved to investigate the extent to which similar beliefs prevailed among the Italian people. The result of his efforts was the formation of a collection which, as exhibited at the Paris Exposition, numbered four hundred and twelve specimens. This success shows what may be accomplished by the labors of one individual. If it be considered how difficult it would be among our people to obtain, either by gift or purchase, a madstone, or the horse-chestnut which a man may have carried in his pocket for years, it will be perceived what such a gathering implies. The same persistent efforts employed in America in connection with the myths, legends, and folk-lore of North American Indians would suffice to found a collection quite as unique as important.

¹ Abstract of paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, November 29, 1890, by Thomas Wilson, Esq., of Washington, D. C.

The paper then described the collection, indicating in a manner more or less full the object employed, the manipulation required, and the particular virtue ascribed thereto. The space at command permits nothing more than a list of these.

1. Protection against lightning, thirty-two objects, — the *pierre de tonnerre*, or *pierre de foudre* (thunder stones or lightning stones). Polished stone hatchets, sometimes called celts. Arrow or spear heads or bits of stone, or material corresponding to them, fifty-one objects. Flint, shark's tooth. (Some of these were drilled for suspension as pendants, but the most are mounted in silver and provided with a ring for suspension.)

2. Against the bite of serpents or venomous reptiles, and counteracting any evil effect when bitten, fourteen objects. Serpentine or kindred material, some in form of polished stone hatchets, but principally natural pebbles, with hole for suspension.

3. Against venoms in general, bites of any animal, particularly *Locosides*, six objects. Rhinoceros claw in silver, pepperwood.

4. Against all venom, — *pierre de crapaud* (frog stone). These are natural formations found on the seashore.

5. For protection against or cure for nephritic or kidney diseases, seventeen objects. Nephrite, called *pierre nephritique*, or *du flanc* (reins), or some of its kindred material. Saussurite, jasper.

6. Against the evil eye and fascination, one hundred and forty-nine. Principally crystal or coral objects; heart-shaped, ithyphallic, thumb-like, eye-shaped, or, if of agate, with rings resembling an eye, etc. But it also includes teeth, horn, cock's foot, mole's foot, imitation toads or frogs, etc., made in silver or lead.

7. Against sorcery, thirty-nine objects. Amber, minerals drilled for suspension, usually flat, badger skin or bone, etc.

8. To arrest the flow of blood, twenty-eight objects. Bloodstone, red jasper, agate, or carnelian.

9. Against intestinal worms in children, forty-nine objects. Madrepore, fossils, or *pierres étoilées*.

10. Against hail and tempest, two objects. An oval bead of alabaster and a bronze medal of the cross of Saint Benoit.

11. Against toothache and vertigo, six objects. *Dentalium Elephantinum*.

12. Against hemorrhoids, five objects. Rhinoceros claw.

13. Against the bite of any animal, one object. Wood of pepper-tree from Egypt.

14. Against snake-bites, one object. The dried skin of a snake.

15. Against grief, one object. Garnet, frequently worn by widows as a brooch.

16. Against epilepsy, one object. A bit of human cranium.

17. Against hydrophobia, four objects. A dog's tooth and a wolf's tooth.
18. Against robbers, one object. Bronze medal of Saint Benoit.
19. Against shipwreck and drowning, one object. Silver medal of Saint George.
20. Against apoplexy, one object. Bronze medal of St. Andrea Avellino.
21. Protection of sheep against the disease *cacherie palustrie* (Ital. *goglio*), one object.
22. Against demoniac temptations, one object. Bronze medal of Saint Anastasia.
23. Protection of animals against disease, one object. Bronze medal of Saint Anthony.
24. Against puerperal fever, two objects. Ivory plaque.
25. Protection of infants against falls, fits, convulsions, eight objects. Including bronze and silver keys blessed by the Pope.
26. For good luck, especially in love, two objects. Orchis bulb, Brazil nut.
27. Good luck to hunters and gamesters, one object. Lizard with split tail.
28. Preservative of eyesight, ten objects. Including *pierres de hirondelles*, or swallow stones, — small pebbles found in the nests of swallows, credited with power to restore the eyes of their young when destroyed.
29. Aids in secretion of milk, thirty-four objects. *Pierres du lait*, including glass ball of milky color, milky agate, white madreperle, mother of pearl, etc.
30. To dry up milk, two objects. Fragments of polyporus and of cork.
31. To cure gravel, one object. Snail shell.
32. To cure headache. Swallow stones (same as 28).
33. To cure fever, six objects. Snail shell.
34. To cure erysipelas, two objects. Old silver coins.
35. To cure warts, four objects. Byzantine coins, called *scifato*.
36. Aids in dentition of infants, five objects. Pig's tooth, bone.
37. Aids to menstruation, two objects. Red coral, wrought and mounted.
38. To aid parturition, — *pietra gravida*. (These are concretionary, argillaceous limonite, in form of a hollow globe or ball, containing small detached pieces, believed to be the offspring of the stones. They are kept in a sachet, or drilled for suspension, and are in the beginning attached to the left arm, and during accouchment to the left thigh.)

Thomas Wilson.