

STRANGE MEDICINES.

QUICKLY—by far too quickly for the sake of the student and the archæologist—is the wave of foreign influence oversweeping Japan, ruthlessly effacing all the most marked characteristics of native manners and customs, and substituting the commonplaces of everyday European life.

Already this tendency to exalt and to adopt foreign novelties meets the traveller at every turn, and only he who turns aside from the tracks most subject to foreign influence can hope now and then to find some staunch Conservative, who in that nation of ultra-Radicals (albeit most loyal Imperialists) has the courage to adhere to his own old-fashioned ways.

I had the good fortune to meet with such a one in the very interesting old city of Osaka—a compounder of just such strange medicines as were administered to our British ancestors in the Middle Ages. So rapidly has the scientific study of medicine been taken up by the Japanese medical practitioners, that the survival of such a chemist of the pure and unadulterated old school is quite remarkable, and I was greatly struck by the evident annoyance of a Japanese gentleman to whom I expressed my interest in this mediæval chemist, and who evidently felt it humiliating that a foreigner should have seen such a relic of the days of ignorance.

The quaint old man whose loyal adherence to the customs of his ancestors afforded me such an interesting illustration both of old Japan and old Britain was a seller of *curoyakie*, i.e. carbonised animals, in other words, animals reduced to charcoal, and potted in small covered jars of earthenware, to be sold as medicine for the sick and suffering. Formerly all these animals were kept alive in the back premises, and customers selected the creature for themselves, and stood by to see it killed and burnt on the spot, so that there could be no deception, and no doubt as to the freshness of their charred medicine. Doubtless some insensible foreign influence may account for the disappearance of the menagerie of waiting victims and their cremation-ground; now the zoological backyard has vanished, and only the strange chemist's shop remains, like a well-stored

museum, wherein are ranged portions of the dried carcasses of dogs and deer, foxes and badgers, rats and mice, toads and frogs, tigers and elephants.

The rarer the animal, and the farther it has travelled, the more precious apparently are its virtues. From the roof hung festoons of gigantic snake-skins, which certainly were foreign importations from some land where pythons flourish, Japan being happily exempt from the presence of such beautiful monsters. I saw one very fine piece of a skin, which, though badly dried and much shrunken, measured twenty-six inches across, but it was only a fragment ten feet in length, and was being gradually consumed inch by inch, to lend mystic virtue to compounds of many strange ingredients. I was told that the perfect skin must have measured very nearly fifty feet in length. I saw another fragment twenty-two feet long and twelve inches wide; this also had evidently shrunk considerably in drying, and must, when in life, have been a very fine specimen.

There were also some very fine deer's horns (hartshorn in its pure and simple form), a highly valued rhinoceros horn, and ivory of various animals. My companion was much tempted by a beautiful piece of ivory about ten feet in length. I think it was the horn of a narwhal, but the druggist would only sell it for its price as medicine, namely ten cents for fifty-eight grains, whence we inferred that the druggists of old Japan, like some nearer home, fully understand the art of making a handsome profit on their sales. Some tigers' claws and teeth are also esteemed very precious, and some strips of tigers' skin and fragments of other skins and furs proved that these also held a place in the pharmacopœia of Old Japan, as they continue to do in China (the source whence Japan derived many branches of learning, besides the use of letters).

Unfortunately for the little lizards which dart about so joyously in the sunlight, they too are classed among the popular remedies, being considered an efficacious vermifuge; so strings of their ghastly little corpses are hung in festoons in many village shops, where I have often looked wonderingly at them, marvelling in what broth of abominable things they might reappear. So lizards and dried scorpions (imported as medicine) also found a place in this strange druggist's shop—an 'interior' so wholly unlike anything I have ever seen elsewhere, that the recollection of it remains vividly stamped on my memory—the multitude of earthenware jars containing the calcined animals all neatly ranged on shelves, the general litter of oddities of various sorts strongly resembling an old curiosity shop, and, in the midst of all, the eccentric old man, who might have passed for a Japanese wizard rather than a grave physician. It was a strangely vivid illustration of what must have been the general appearance of the laboratory of the learned leeches of Britain in the days of our forefathers.

Before glancing at these, however, it may be interesting to note a few details of kindred medicine-lore in China, on which subject a member of the French Catholic Mission writing from Mongolia says: 'May Heaven preserve us from falling ill here! It is impossible to conceive who can have devised remedies so horrible as those in use in the Chinese pharmacopœia; such as drugs compounded of toads' paws, wolves' eyes, vultures' claws, human skin and fat, and other medicaments still more horrible, of which I spare you the recital. Never did witch's den contain a collection of similar horrors.'

Mr. Mitford has told us how, also at Peking, he saw a Chinese physician prescribe a decoction of three scorpions for a child struck down with fever; and Mr. Gill in his *River of Golden Sand* mentions having met a number of coolies laden with red deer's horns, some of them very fine twelve-tine antlers. They are only hunted when in velvet, and from the horns in this state a medicine is made, which is one of the most highly prized in the Chinese pharmacopœia.

With regard to the singular virtues supposed to attach to the medicinal use of tiger, General Robert Warden tells me that on one occasion when, in India, he was exhibiting some trophies of the chase, some Chinamen who were present became much excited at the sight of an unusually fine tiger skin. They eagerly inquired whether it would be possible to find the place where the carcass had been buried, because from the bones of tigers dug up three months after burial, a decoction may be prepared which gives immense muscular power to the fortunate man who swallows it!

I am indebted to the same informant for an interesting note on the medicine folk-lore of India, namely, that while camping in the jungle, one of his men came to entreat him to shoot a nightjar for his benefit, because from the bright prominent eyes of this bird of night an ointment is prepared which gives great clearness of vision, and is therefore highly prized.

Miss Bird, too, has recorded some very remarkable details on the *materia medica* of China and Japan. When in a remote district of Japan, she became so unwell as to deem it necessary to consult a native doctor, of whom she says:—

He has great faith in *ginseng* and in rhinoceros horn, and in the powdered liver of some animal, which, from the description, I understood to be a tiger—all specifics of the Chinese school of medicines. Dr. Nosoki showed me a small box of 'unicorn's' horn, which he said was worth more than its weight in gold.

She adds:—

Afterwards, in China, I heard much more of the miraculous virtues of these drugs, and in Salangor, in the Malay peninsula, I saw a most amusing scene after the death of a tiger. A number of Chinese flew upon the body, cut out the liver, eyes, and spleen, and carefully drained every drop of the blood, fighting for the possession of things so precious, while those who were not so fortunate as to secure any of these cut out the cartilage from the joints. The centre of a tiger's eyeball is supposed to possess nearly miraculous virtues; the blood, dried at a temperature

of 110^o, is the strongest of all tonics, and gives strength and courage, and the powdered liver and spleen are good for many diseases, . . . and were sold at high prices to Chinese doctors. A little later, in Perak, I saw rhinoceros horns sold at a high price for the Chinese drug market, and was told that a single horn with a particular mark on it was worth fifty dollars for sale to the Chinese doctors.

One of the said rhinoceros horns was, as we have seen, among the most valued treasures of the old druggist of Osaka. This horn and that of the unicorn (which seems generally to mean the narwhal¹) have ever been held in high repute throughout the East as an antidote to poison, and cups carved from these horns were used as a safeguard because they possessed the property of neutralising poison, or at least of revealing its presence.

And indeed the same virtue was attributed to it by the learned leeches of Europe. At the close of the sixteenth century the doctors of medicine in Augsburg met in solemn conclave to examine a specimen of unicorn's horn, which they found to be true *Monoceros*, and not a forgery; the proof thereof being that they administered some of it to a dog which had been poisoned with arsenic, and which recovered after swallowing the antidote. They further administered *nux vomica* to two dogs, and to one they gave twelve grains of unicorn horn, which effectually counteracted the poison; but the other poor dog got none, so he died. Similar statements concerning this antidote, and also concerning the value of elks' and deer's horns powdered as a cure for epilepsy, appear in various old English medical works of the highest authority.

Very remarkable also is the efficacy supposed to attach to antediluvian ivory, more especially the tusks of the mammoths, which have been so well preserved in Siberian ice that their very flesh is still sometimes found untainted. There they have lain hermetically sealed for many a long century, and now, when the rivers from time to time wash away fragments of the great ice-cliffs, they reveal the strange treasures of that wonderous storehouse—sometimes a huge unwieldy hippopotamus, or a rhinoceros, or it may be a great woolly elephant with a mane like a lion and curly tusks; and the hungry Siberian bears and wolves fight and snarl over these dainty morsels, which are still as fresh as though they had fallen but an hour ago.

Here, in these marvellous ice-fields, lie inexhaustible stores of finest ivory, and this it is which the learned professors of the Celestial medical hall value so highly. So these precious tusks are dragged forth after thousands of years to be ground down and boiled to a jelly for the cure of vulgar Chinese diseases of the nineteenth century! Alas, poor mammoth!

Nor are these the only antediluvian relics which are thus turned to account. Professor H. N. Moseley tells us of the 'dragon's teeth and bones' which he bought from the druggists of Canton, where they

¹ *Monodon monoceros*.

are sold by weight as a regular medicine, and are highly prized in the materia medica both in China and Japan as specifics in certain diseases. They proved on examination to be the fossil teeth and bones of various extinct mammalia of the tertiary period, including those of the rhinoceros, elephant, horse, mastodon, stag, hippotherium, and the teeth of another carnivorous animal unknown.

He obtained a translation of the passage in the medical works of Li She Chan which specially refers to the use of this medicine. It states that 'dragons' bones come from the southern part of Shansi, and are found in the mountains.' Dr. To Wang King says that if they are genuine they will adhere to the tongue. 'This medicine is sweet and is not poison. Dr. Coon certainly says that it is a little poisonous. Care must be taken not to let it come in contact with fish or iron. It cures heart-ache, stomach-ache, drives away ghosts, cures colds and dysentery, irregularities of the digestive organs, paralysis, &c., and increases the general health.'

Another medical authority, *The Chinese Repository*, published in Canton A.D. 1832, states that the bones of dragons are found on banks of rivers and in caves of the earth, places where the dragon died. Those of the back and brain are highly-prized, being variegated with different streaks on a white ground. The best are known by slipping the tongue lightly over them. The teeth are of little firmness. The horns are hard and strong; but if these are taken from damp places, or by women, they are worthless.

From his examination of these so-called relics of the dragon (which prove to belong to so many different animals, which in successive ages have crept to the same cave to die), Mr. Moseley points out how some imaginative person probably first devised a fanciful picture of the mythical animal, combining the body of the vast lizard with the wings of a bat, the head of a stag, and carnivorous teeth, which has become the stereotyped idea of the dragon in all lands.

Even in Europe fossil bones thus found together in caves were long known as dragons' bones, and accounted useful in medicine. Indeed so great was the demand for these and similar relics, that our museums and scientific men have good cause to rejoice that their ancestors failed to discover what stores of old bones lay hidden in our own seaboard caves—as, for instance, in that wonderful Kirkdale cavern, where the mortal remains of several hundred hyenas were found, guarding the teeth of a baby mammoth, a patriarchal tiger, a rhinoceros, and a hippopotamus; or the caves along the Norfolk coast, where Hugh Miller tells us that within thirteen years the oyster-dredgers dragged up the tusks and grinders of five hundred mammoths; or those wonderful zoological cemeteries where the fossil bones of cave lions, cave hyenas, elephants, mammoths, hippopotami, woolly rhinoceros, red deer and fallow deer, oxen, sheep, and horses,

have lain so securely, stored for untold ages beneath Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square.

After all, this reduction of prehistoric bones and ivory to vulgar powders for medicinal use is not more strange than the fossil food which forms so large a part of the daily bread of multitudes of our fellow-creatures in Lapland, Finland, and Sweden, in Carolina and Florida, on the banks of the Orinoco and of the Amazon, where vast tracts of earth are found composed wholly of myriads of microscopic shells, and this strange mountain-meal, being duly mixed with meal of the nineteenth century, is freely eaten by the people. In Lapland alone, hundreds of wagon-loads are annually dug from one great field, and there are men who eat as much as a pound and a half per diem of this curious condiment. We hear of fields, as yet untouched, having been discovered in Bohemia, Hungary, and other parts of Europe; so perhaps we may ere long add these primeval atoms to the delicacies of our own tables.

Of the firm belief of the Chinese in the efficacy of medicines compounded of the eyes and vitals of the human body we have had too terrible proof; for it is well known that one cause which led to the appalling Tientsin massacre in 1870 was the widespread rumour that the foreign doctors (whose skill all were forced to admit) obtained their medicines by kidnapping and murdering Chinese children and tearing out their hearts and eyes. As this nice prescription is actually described in their own books as a potent medicine, the story obtained ready credence, as we all remember the result. Moreover, the same accusation has repeatedly been spread on other occasions of popular excitement against foreign teachers.

I am not certain whether the Lamas of Peking have there introduced the fashion of administering medicine from a drinking-cup fashioned from the upper part of a wise man's skull; but such medicine-cups are greatly esteemed in Thibet, where they are mounted in gold, silver, or copper.

Such details as all these are apt to sound to us strangely unreal as we read them somewhat in the light of travellers' tales, with reference to far-away lands; but it certainly is startling when, for the first time, we realise how exactly descriptive they are of the medicine-lore of our own ancestors—in truth, to this day we may find among ourselves some survivals of the old superstitions still lingering in out-of-the-way corners. Thus it is only a few years since the skull of a suicide was used in Caithness as a drinking-cup for the cure of epilepsy. Dr. Arthur Mitchell knows of a case in which the body of such a one was disinterred in order to obtain her skull for this purpose.

It was, however, accounted a more sure specific for epilepsy to reduce part of the skull to powder and swallow it. Even the moss which grew on such skulls was deemed a certain cure for various