

CHARMS OR AMULETS

FOR SOME

DISEASES OF THE EYE.*

Read on 28th March 1894.

President—MR. H. A. ACWORTH.

FAITH in the virtue of charms and amulets is common to almost all nations and all ages. The belief has been prevalent at one time or another, among almost all countries. It is a common belief in many countries, even now, that the mere carrying of certain medical preparations or plants on the body of a person, has the power of healing diseases. They say, that similar faith has not entirely ceased in England, even at the present time. Pieces of parchment with passages from the Bible were carried about by the Jews on their bodies as amulets, and they were known as phylacteries. Pieces of paper with passages from the Koran are carried about by the Arabs under the name of Tāviz (amulets). One, very often, comes across such amulets among the Hindus.

The subject of this paper is a similar charm or amulet prepared by a respectable Parsee family at Nowsaree for a complaint of the eye known as *કુલ્લ* (ulcer of the cornea). The charm is known there by the name of *કુલ્લનો દોરો* i.e., the thread for the ulcer of the cornea. A large number of people afflicted with that complaint go to Nowsaree from adjoining villages to take the charm from the Parsee family. Further on, I will also give the text of a Persian amulet with passages from ancient Avesta texts. The use of that amulet is enjoined generally for all kinds of eye complaints.

As an instance of the still surviving belief in the virtue of amulets, is mentioned the case of the anodyne necklace

* Journal Vol. III, No. 6, pp. 338-45.

which is made up of beads formed from the roots of bryony and which is suspended from the necks of infants with the object of helping the process of their teething. It sometimes happens that the particular plant, used in the charm, is believed to possess the medicinal properties of curing a particular disease if taken internally. The popular belief, then transfers the efficiency of internal application to mere external application, and turns the medicinal plant into a mere charm or amulet. How far that is true in the case of the charm I am describing this evening, I leave it to medical members of our Society to determine.

The plant, whose root I have placed on the table for the inspection of the members of our Society, is known at Nowsaree as વાર મોગરો (vâr mogrô), and is used, as I have said, as a charm or an extraordinary cure for a complaint in the eye known as ડુડુ. It is identified by Dr. Lisboa as "*Jasminum Pubescens*," coming nearer to "*Jasminum Rottlenarum*." Dr. Lisboa says, that its uses are not known, and that like the flowers of all *Jasminums*, its flowers are more or less scented:

They say, that there lived in Nowsaree, about 50 years ago, a Parsee gentleman, named Sorabjee. One day a *fakir* happened to pass by his door and was pleased with his looks. To show him his liking for him, he taught him a cure for the ulcer. He showed him the plant in the adjoining gardens and fields and asked him to follow the following instructions to make the application of the plant perfectly efficacious as a cure. He also said that the cure could only be produced by Sorabjee or some male members of the family in direct line of descent from him.

The person who is in the direct line of male descent from Sorabjee has to go to the place where the plant grows, on a Saturday evening and invite the plant for the next morning. "તેને આણીઆવે" is the Gujarati phrase used at Nowsaree for the invitation. The process of this invitation consists in placing a few grains of rice at the root of the plant and in saying, "I will take you away to-morrow for the cure."

The man must go to the plant early in the morning the next day, *i.e.*, Sunday, before washing himself and dig out the root. The root, after its being dug and cut out from the plant, must, on no account, be allowed to touch again the mother earth. It must be dried and not allowed to touch any wood. It must be kept suspended from a wall by a nail. Women in their menses, men after their wet dreams, and persons in the state of such temporary uncleanness, must, on no account, touch these roots; otherwise they lose all their so-called medicinal properties.

To prepare the thread, it is necessary that the yarn must have been prepared by a spinster. Some say, that it is necessary to do so on the *Kālichowdas* કાલિકાવદસ day. Seven threads of the yarn are woven into one which is then put round the root, so as to pass thrice over it.

If the patient has the ulcer in the left eye, he is to put on the thread on the right ear and *vice versa*. Before so putting it on, the smoke of frank-incense must be passed over it.

The person carrying the thread for the patient should take care not to put himself in any state of uncleanness. Again, the patient must on no account let it fall on the ground or on his bed. If it falls on the ground, he is to send for another thread. If it falls on a sleeping bed it must be again submitted to the process of passing the smoke of frank-incense over it. It must be immediately removed when the patient is free from his complaint, otherwise it may further spoil the eye. The family, which inherits the right of producing the medicinal properties in the above described manner is prohibited from charging any fees to the patients for preparing the threads. But they sometimes ask the patients to feed the dogs of the streets, as an act of charity in return for the cure. It is said that hundreds of men of all religions from the adjoining villages go to Nowsaree to take the thread so prepared, for the patients afflicted with ulcers in their villages. It is very noticeable in India, that while at times illiterate people of

different religions knock one another's heads for their so-called zeal for their religion, at other times they resort to the priests of the hostile communities for the sake of charms and amulets. It is not rare for a Hindu to go to a Mahomedan Moola, a Parsee Mobad or a native Christian Padre, nor is it rare for a Mahomedan, a Parsee or a Christian to go to a Hindu Brahmin, and so on, to fetch from him a charm or an amulet, blessed by incantations from the scriptures of that very religion which they seem to hate with words and sometimes with blows.

The invitation to the plant in the above case on a Saturday evening, to be prepared to be taken away for the ulcer the next morning, seems to be something like an invitation to the spirit of the tree. It reminds us of the belief in the transference of a disease to a tree or to the spirit in the tree. In Ennemoser's History of Magic, we find the following reference to the belief which is somewhat akin to the invitation to the plant in our above story of Nowsaree.

"Amongst the forms of adjuration, we find the commencement thus:—'Twig, I bind thee; fever, now leave me.' Westendorp relates the following Netherlands practice:—Whoever has theague, let him go early in the morning to an old willow tree, tie three knots in a branch, and say, 'Good morning, old one! I give thee the cold; good morning, old one!' He must then turn round quickly, and run off as fast as he can without looking behind him."¹

This belief in the transference of a disease to something else reminds us of the so-called cure for another complaint of the eye, known as the અજિવણ (stye).

The best remedy believed in, for curing this, is the knocking at midnight, at the door of the house of a man who has two living wives. While doing so, he has to utter these words: "અજિવણ ઘર ભાંગણ. આજે મને તો કાલે તુંને" i.e., Stye! you are the breaker (of the peace) of a house. To-day it is my turn, to-morrow it will be yours."

¹ "The History of Magic" by Joseph Ennemoser, translated from the German by W. Howitt (1854) Vol. II, p. 206.

This cure for the sty (ଆଁନଭାଁ) reminds us of another cure for the same. The mere application of a dried bomaloe or Bombay duck upon the sty is believed to be efficacious, because the ଆଁନଭାଁ (sty) is said to be of the Brahmin caste (‘ଆହାଁମ-ଂଲୀ ଜାତି’). And as the Brahmins, being strict vegetarians, shudder at the sight of fish, so the sty being a Brahmin by caste, will shudder at the sight of a bomaloe and will immediately leave the eye of the patient on the application of that fish. ⁽¹⁾

The above story, of a charm for the eye prepared by a respectable Parsee priestly family at the direction of a *fakir*, naturally leads us to inquire, if there are any strictly Parsee charms or amulets for the eye spoken of in the old Persian books. We find nothing on the subject in the older books, but the later Persian Revâ-yats give a Tâviz or an amulet for curing all general complaints of the eye. I have taken the text of this amulet from the manuscript copy of the Revâ-yat-i-Burzô Kavâm-ud-din belonging to Mr. Edalji Kersaspji Antia, Zend teacher at the Sir Jamshedji Madressa. The text gives the following instruction as to how the amulet is to be put on:
 بر دست چپ بستن تا درد چشم دفع شود بواج بهرام ایزد گرفتن و بستن
i.e., “To be tied on the left hand until the complaint of the eye is cured. To tie and untie it with the Bâj of Beheram Yazad.”

¹ Compare the following :—

“A singular remedy is adopted against *dysponcea*, or fainting, which they call ‘mountain sickness.’ This they (the Kirghese) represent to themselves under the form of a young lady, before whom they utter to the patient the most obscene and disgusting expressions, thinking thereby to shock the lady’s modesty and drive her away.”—*Chinese Central Asia* by Dr. Lansdell, Vol. I, p. 124,

“As illustrative of treatment by symbol, it may be mentioned that if the melody reside in the lungs or liver, they give the patient the corresponding parts of an animal to eat, as, for instance, the roasted eyes of an ox to cure ophthalmia! Again, the treatment of intermittent fever and difficult parturition by fright are still more remarkable.” *Ibid* p. 124 note.

Now, it is worth inquiring, why Hvarê Khshaêta (the Sun), Tishtrya (the star Sirius), and Fredun, the well-known monarch of the Peshdâdyan dynasty, alluded to by Sir Walter Scott in his *Talisman*, are mentioned in this Persian amulet or talisman.

The reason why the Sun, the star Tishtrya (Sirius) and other stars are mentioned in the amulet for the eye, seems to be, that the old Persian books of the Avesta use a metaphorical language, in which these luminaries are represented as possessing good strong eyes. Poets very often compare eyes with the sun, the moon, the stars and such heavenly bodies. For example, the Sun is spoken of as the "bright eye and monarch of the world." So the Avesta speaks of the Sun and the Mithra as the eyes of Ahura Mazda. (سارندگ و گندگ سارندگ سارندگ)

((سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ) yaçna LXVIII, 22). Mithra the god of light is said to be the possessor of ten-thousand eyes ((سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ) yt. X. 7). The star Tishtrya is said to possess good strong eyes (سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ) Kurshed Nyâish 7).

The reason, why the name of Fredun is mentioned in this amulet, is this: To this renowned monarch of the Peshdâdyan dynasty of ancient Iran, are attributed, by later traditions the supernatural powers of curing many diseases by charms and amulets. This Fredun is the Thraêtaona of the Avesta, who is compared with the (देव) of the Vedas. He is spoken of in the Fravardin yasht (Yt. XIII—131), as having discovered some cures for fevers, snake-bite, &c. The Pahlavi Dâdistân-i-Dini alludes to this when it refers to him as a person knowing all kinds of medical cures ((سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ سارندگ) Chap. XXXVII

—35.) The Pâzend portion of the Vanant Yasht alludes to this fact. Mirkhond, in his *Ranzat-us-safa*, speaks of Fredun, as

being very friendly to physicians, and as being an ardent student inquiring into the nature of human constitution.¹ Later books say, that it is owing to his connection with all kinds of medicines and cures, that the name of Fredun is mentioned in various Persian charms and amulets.

I beg to lay on the table, for the inspection of members, a ring, which is the property of Dowager Lady Ruttonbai Jamshedjee Jejeebhoy. It is intended to be used as a cure for the ulcer in the cornea of the eye. It is made of a kind of stone having on one side the form of an eye with the eye-ball and the white of the eye clearly marked. This amulet is enjoined to be passed over the eye several times every morning by some person other than the patient, and it is believed to lessen the ulcer or the opacity of the cornea gradually.

¹ Shen's Mirkhond, p. 172.