

Lloyd (J. H.)

FAITH-CURES

BY

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Philadelphia, Pa.*

Reprinted from THE MEDICAL RECORD, March 27, 1886



NEW YORK
TROW'S PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY

201-213 EAST TWELFTH STREET

1886



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To offer up sacrifices to the gods is human—at least the history of the human race would indicate this fact. The motive, no doubt, is usually some pressing self-interest; the circumstances have been, too often, the perversity and ignorance of self-esteem. The stern soul of Achilles, in its brutal and conceited grief, must immolate twelve captives on the pyre of Patroclus—to do what? The primitive man, we are told, never laughs; life is a burden to him, “roots are scarce,” and he is in daily conflict with his great enemy—nature; but he, too, has already taken up this habit of offering sacrifice. Disease is a demon to be exorcised; death is a hideous penalty to be averted; incantations are better than drugs. In the evolution of religious sentiment these things have doubtless changed; the law of the survival of the fittest has inevitably crowded out these crude and cruel systems. Whereas there were formerly idols, there are now ideals. The material sacrifices of other days are in a measure replaced by a self-consecration; the gifts of wine and bullocks are discarded for a state of mental erythism—a so-called spiritual effect.

It must be apparent to a careful inquirer, however, that there are what the biologists call *reversions* in these

modern forms of religious thought, which reversion proclaims infallibly their kinship to the older types. When Pieta proclaims that she has been cured of her neurasthenic spine by faith, *i.e.*, by a sort of ideal abandonment of self, with prayer and unreasoning confidence, to the divinity, she does not differ essentially, in her non-appreciation of the physical laws of disease, from the Egyptians who sacrificed in the temples of Canopus. The fundamental fact, in each instance, is that the devotee believes that the universal laws of nature are suspended for his or her special benefit by supernatural power. The zeal of some of these modern disciples is not unlike that of Elijah and the followers of Ahab, when they contended together to exhibit the power of prayer; and the presumption of the unfortunate priests of Baal appears greater, only because of its more tragic climax, than that of the faith-curer, who said that he furnished his house by prayer, even to the melodeon! We do not seem far removed from the classics when we read the story of the death of Dom Pedro's mother. The Empress, it seems, was devoted to a miraculous image of the Virgin, which performed cures; but the image was at last offended by being carried to the Empress when she was too ill to be carried to it, and not only allowed the imperial lady to die, but even killed off the Archbishop with cholera morbus.

A continued interest in this subject of faith-healing is perhaps excusable for several reasons. The mystery of the cases, and the astonishing results claimed, challenge the attention, and not unfrequently puzzle the understanding. They are generally so related also as to throw discredit and opprobrium upon the physicians who have happened to be in attendance upon the case. Then, again, they may lead to some astounding development in archæology, finance, or even in the dark sciences—as in the case at South Orange, N. J., where a woman, who had been a cripple for many years, was cured by faith; whereupon her husband immediately started a fund for \$20,000 to enable him to recover a certain stone in the

Sphinx, which is an infallible cure-all. Another reason is stated by the *Philadelphia Press*, which says that faith-cures are a good thing because, like the whipping-post in Delaware, they are cheap. But a more valid reason for interest in these cases, and the one which is the cause of this paper, is to endeavor to extricate a few of the exact facts from their perilous admixture with mysticism and fiction.

Some time in the early part of last year, the Society for Psychical Research, in Philadelphia, appointed a committee to investigate faith-cures. The writer was chairman of this committee, and in consequence has devoted more or less time to the subject. The object was intended to be entirely *psychical*, and not at all *polemic*. It was not proposed to enter into the general subject of answer to prayer, but simply to investigate these individual cases of alleged faith-cure. It was the personal belief of the writer that such investigations would lead to some interesting facts in psychology and, perhaps, psychiatry. Esquirol has said, "Generally, mental alienation is terminated by sensible crises," and it seemed a good thing to determine how far some of our remarkable cases were only these "sensible crises" occurring in a neurotic constitution. It was, of course, desirable to avoid the error of going over old ground entirely; it was well to be mindful of the hackneyed facts of the stock text-books and of the elaborated work of Tuke.¹ With the aforesaid object in view, the investigation was pushed with some vigor, and while it did not disclose the wealth of facts in matters psychical which had been hoped, it did bring to light a variety of interesting and even remarkable truths. A verbal report to the Society closed the committee's labors, and the chairman has felt free to record some of his observations.

First. The method pursued and difficulties met with
Two series of questions were proposed, as follows :

A. (To Faith-curer) : I. What diseases have you cured,

¹ Influence of the Mind upon the Body, by D. Hack Tuke.

especially *fevers?* (Typhoid, small-pox, scarlatina, measles, and graver forms of malaria?) *Nervous diseases?* (Paralysis, what form? Apoplexy, chorea, epilepsy?) *Tumors* (cancer and ovarian?) *Wounds and fractures?*

II. *Method?* (By faith alone, or were surgical or therapeutic means used in any cases?)

III. Patients' names and addresses, which would not be printed if so requested.

B. (To Patient): I. *History of case?* Cause, course, symptoms, duration, and treatment, with results? Condition just preceding cure? (Had patient been improving, growing worse, or stationary?)

II. *The cure?* Circumstances which induced application? Condition of mind at first—belief or doubt? Length of time to effect cure?

III. *Recent history.* Thoroughness of cure? Interval since cure? Relapses—how many? Is improvement more marked than that obtained by medical treatment?

The above questions were used for those who lived at a distance. In all cases where practicable a personal examination was requested; if such examination were not practicable the aid of the family doctor was solicited. It soon became apparent, in the search for cases, that the city of Philadelphia had not enjoyed the therapeutic benefits of faith in that superabundance which one might have supposed, and which seems to have been the fortune of more distant localities. What there is in the latitude and longitude of the Quaker City that predisposes its constitution to resist this mild remedy must be left for sanitarians to determine. It is certain, however, that, although the search was industrious, and even announced in the public press, and application made to the most distinguished practitioners of the cure (as shall be seen), there were only negative results obtained, which are nevertheless of value.

It did not seem difficult to obtain the addresses of cases in Boston, New York, and the West, but most of the letters written to them remain unanswered to this day, while some of the answers which were re-

ceived await our more detailed criticism. Captain R. Kelso Carter, quite a distinguished supporter of the doctrine, and who has been announced himself as cured of "fatal heart disease," very kindly wrote a letter containing the following extracts: "Doubtless some healed ones would innocently submit to a medical examination. I would not, believing it to be dishonoring to my great Physician. I give my testimony—and I say Jesus cured me. I do not propose to submit to tests, to endorse God's notes of promise by the signature of men." The reports written by the patients themselves proved to be always so inexact and loose jointed, that it was quite impossible often to make out the semblance of a diagnosis. Their likeness, indeed, to the cases advertised by the patent medicine men was very striking. They often, too, had a little of the tone of a modern clergyman's endorsement of soap.¹

Dr. Charles Cullis, of Boston, is no doubt one of the most prominent practitioners of this newest school. The writer addressed a letter to him and received a very brief and unsympathetic reply, in which he said that he had cured all the diseases mentioned "except perhaps *small-pox*," which had never been presented to him. The letter contained the following curious passage: "In regard to wounds and fractures, I should employ a surgical aid and trust the Lord to perform the healing." This seems to be a specimen of tergiversation; and moreover, it will presently appear that herein Dr. Cullis is not up to the traditions of his profession. Shortly after this letter an article in the *Century Magazine*² contained a very able criticism from the genuine orthodox standpoint, and taxed Dr. Cullis and his friends with lack of candor for not publishing lists, as our hospitals do, of the "dead" and "uncured" as well as "cured." Another letter was then addressed to Dr. Cullis soliciting such a list, but the letter has never been answered. If the doctor desires at some

¹ See advertisement by Rev. H. W. Beecher.

² Faith-cures, by A. F. Schauffler, December, 1885.

future day to make up such a list, he is at liberty to draw examples from this paper.

In October last a Convention of Faith-curites was held in Philadelphia. A letter was addressed to this body, which included many illustrious delegates, inviting their co-operation in this good work for humanity and the cause of truth. Cases were especially requested for examination. As no notice was taken of the letter a delegate was asked subsequently for the reason. He replied that the convention had tabled the letter because it did not consider such investigation to be part of its business. Rev. A. B. Simpson writes: "I should as soon expose the sanctity of my home life to the public eye, as the sacred work of God in human bodies . . . to scientific criticism;" but he appears to forget that the "sanctity of his home" is a purely personal matter to himself, whereas the healing of human bodies is of very near interest to every individual who has one; and that the subject is open to scientific criticism, and will stand or fall by it *alone*. Rev. John E. Cookman, who is an enthusiast, writes, "I do not say it in any captious or hypercritical way, but as an honest and fair criticism, . . . that a society for psychical research might have been formed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, or Galilee, in the days of our Divine Lord, to investigate the cases of healing wrought by Him, with as much pertinency as your present society." The various possible applications of this remarkable paragraph must be made by each reader for himself. Mr. Cookman was himself healed by faith of "nervous prostration;" and, with great latitudinarianism, in spite of the above paragraph, sent several addresses of patients.

Second. The results. It was not possible to give some cases thorough examination because of the delicacy of the subject. This was true of obstetrical cases, in some of which there have probably been remarkable and speedy "cures;" in fact someone has spoken of the whole subject as the "*miraculum naturæ*." One physician reported a case, which happened at a distance, of a woman who shut herself in her room when her pains

just as - but
 than the rest of
 miraculous
 stories would
 have been much
 curtailed -

came upon her, and relied entirely upon divine care in her delivery, but who unfortunately took to flooding and would have lost her life, had not a physician been called to her side. There may be other cases. But it is not remarkable that some of these ladies succeed in their rash enterprise, when we consider what a large percentage of women are delivered successfully every year, with no one but ignorant midwives in attendance.

The following case came directly under the writer's notice. An infant, aged a few months, had a very bad congenital vascular nævus of the upper lip, which was very disfiguring and caused the family much concern. Dr. Cullis came this way, and held meetings in a church edifice which was converted into a free dispensary for the treatment of all manners of disease by faith. Prayers were solicited for this child, and offered for it, but as every medical man would expect, the nævus got no better, but only worse. This was in every sense a crucial test. The failure could not have been due to a "lack of faith" (which is the favorite argument), because, as the infant was too young to bear this reproach, the faith of the friends would suffice, and even if that were lacking there was the vicarious faith of Dr. Cullis. The writer had the opportunity afterward of seeing Professor Agnew excise this growth and effect a *scientific* cure.

The following case is brought forward as a specimen of the rambling pathology, which renders a scientific diagnosis very hazardous. M. E. D—— has published her own case in a tract, and has further described it in a letter which was revised by her physician, who is a female doctor. She "inherited a weak back from her mother, who had spinal disease." She fell down-stairs, which added to her inheritance. Then she had "malarial fever;" then came "seven attacks of diphtheria," which went "down the passages and into the stomach," and caused a diphtheritic ulceration of the stomach "which continued for four years." Twice in that time there were abscesses (location not stated) "which discharged a pint from the diphtheria." "Also I had

paralysis." Then came a hyperæsthetic spine, and prospects of being "strapped to the bed," because "her limb was in continual motion." Then she had trance-like spells, with closed eyes, but perfect consciousness. Then the account becomes grewsome in the extreme. "I well remember the first attack of the kind. My doctor was away, and my father was away from home also; my mother was alone; for hours she waited, hesitating whether to send for the undertaker or to await the return of my father. I heard all that was said, and was in an agony of fear lest I should be put into an ice-casket alive. At last my mother discovered a slight motion of the eyes, and she continued working with me until I could speak." Then came lateral curvature of the spine; then the opium-habit; then contracture of leg-muscles; then anæsthesia of the skin; then the sum total of the pathology is given as "congestion of the spinal cord at the seat of the lumbar plexus." One is reminded of the poor ghost in Dante:

Thus one perhaps
Hath been by force of palsy clean transposed,
But I ne'er saw it nor believe it so.

A detailed criticism of such a case is, of course, not possible, but medical men will see at a glance that *Hysteria* is written in big letters all over it. Another, and parallel, case is that of Miss Carrie Judd, of Buffalo, as published by herself. It is probable that no layman, or woman, has ever written a more exact account of chronic hysterical invalidism, than has Miss Judd in her description of her own case.¹ She is to be complimented on the easy professional swing of her pen—up to that place where she said that her disease "had grown into blood consumption," which term savors too much of the patent-medicine puff. The patient was paralyzed, bed-ridden, hypersensitive and tyrannical to the last degree—as shown

¹ Have Faith in God. By Carrie F. Judd.

by the "silent house," as she calls her home, from which it was scarcely possible to bury her grandmother, because the patient was "so low." It is quite unnecessary to go into the details of her case; medical literature abounds in such, and in their not unfrequently sudden cure. The writer calls to mind at this moment cases in the writings of Laycock, Skey, Mitchell, and Emmet, which are more striking than that of Miss Judd.

It has always been the reproach of the faith-curers that their successes are with the mere *functional* disorders, and that they have never produced an effect upon serious *organic* affections. But they have recently had several champions come to the front with quite a formidable array of cases of cancers, fractures, and other severe ills. For instance, the Rev. R. L. Stanton has written a pamphlet of almost one hundred pages¹—a very trenchant work and well calculated to win a certain class of converts and propagate error; in which he parades the most startling cures of tumors, cancers, and broken bones. But if all of his cases are not more authentic than the one quoted below, let us hope that his book will be expurgated before it reaches another edition. The case referred to is that of a little son of Dr. Reed, a physician of Philadelphia, who fell and broke both the bones of his forearm. The account says that the patient insisted the following morning upon having the dressings removed, because Jesus had made it well; that the child was so confident and persistent that on the third day the surgeon, who was the boy's uncle, did remove the splints and exclaimed, "It is well, absolutely well;" and "hastened to the door for air to keep from fainting." This case has been so widely circulated, and in such good faith, that it was very desirable to know more about it. It so happens that the patient is now grown to manhood, and is himself a graduate in medicine from the University of Pennsylvania. A letter was addressed to him and

¹ Healing through Faith, etc.

the following very interesting and amusing reply was received :

“DEAR SIR : The case you cite, when robbed of all its sensational surroundings, is as follows :

“The child was a spoiled youngster who would have his own way, and when he had a “*green stick*” fracture of the forearm, after having had it bandaged for several days, concluded he would much prefer going *without* a splint. . . .

“To please the spoiled child the splint was removed and the arm carefully adjusted in a sling. As a matter of course, the bone soon united, as is customary in children, and being only partially broken, of course all the sooner. This is the miracle !

“Some nurse, or crank, or religious enthusiast, ignorant of matters physiological and histological, evidently started the story, and unfortunately my name—for I am the party—is being circulated in circles of faith-cures and is given the sort of notoriety I do not crave.

“I have been pestered with letters on the subject from ministers and members of the fraternity who seek to rob us of our patients, but have consigned all such letters to my waste-basket. . . . I take pleasure in giving you these few notes, trusting they will satisfy your mind in regard to this example of faith-cure.

“Very respectfully yours,

“CARL H. REED.”

The Rev. Mr. Stanton ought to make a dog-ear on this leaf for future reference, because this letter of Dr. Reed’s spoils the most interesting story of supernatural healing of a fracture that has appeared since the day when Diomedes threw a great stone at Æneas and caused a compound fracture of the femur, which is supposed to have been cured by Venus, the divine mother of the injured hero. This case is reported by Homer, and has probably not been investigated.

During the past autumn the writer's attention was several times called to a home for sick and injured in Philadelphia, where the treatment, support, and everything was by faith. It was kept by a medical graduate of Harvard, who is an ex-member of Congress, and was announced to contain a room in which were piled up the crutches and other surgical gear which patients had cast off after their miraculous deliverance from disease. The impression conveyed by reports was that troops of patients were daily cured, and that old cast-off canes were as plentiful as at the once notorious shrine of Knock. The writer visited this house, and was received graciously on two occasions; he was shown all over the establishment, and noted that no patients were there at that time. Inquiry was made for the room of discarded crutches, whereupon the proprietor smiled, as though he saw the joke, and said that that story had been somewhat exaggerated—in fact, he had but *one pair* of crutches, and that pair was from a patient who probably had never needed them! He then went on to describe the case. The patient was a woman, who had been diagnosed at a homœopathic hospital to have lateral curvature of the spine, but for his part he was not certain about it, because he doubted the homœopathic ability to make a correct diagnosis. When asked if he had not made his own diagnosis, he said he had not time to do that in his peculiar work, that he could not trouble himself about diagnoses, but still he thought he detected the curvature under the patient's dress; and as he prayed he felt it suddenly straighten. When asked if the patient was entirely cured he said, "No, she still has the curvature!" The address of this patient was withheld.

A lady in New England took great pains to report a case, and did it so well, that an important deduction can be drawn from it. It was a case of hip-joint disease, or bone disease, with large discharging sinuses, in which rubber drainage-tubes had been kept, as is customary, for a long period. The patient, a child with firm faith, attended a "novena" (a sort of nine days' devotion), at a

Roman Catholic church, and at the same time threw aside tubes and treatment. In about *two months* the sores had healed, but the leg remained stiff. The obvious criticism of this case is the fact that a miracle would not have taken two months, and that the cure was not much to boast of as divine, if the leg remained stiff. The physician to the case is reported as attributing the cure, very wisely, to a fortuitous removal of the tubes at just the right time.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott writes of the *mind-cure* (which is a kindred branch with faith-cure), that although it failed in her case, she is convinced there is a "great truth" in it, but she does not say what the great truth is. As for her, "homœopathy has worked more miracles than the mind-cure." This will probably confirm some of us in the suspicion that homœopathy is another branch of psycho-therapeutics.

The conclusion of the whole matter brings us to one more point. The mystical language used by these people is often responsible for many of their errors. This language can often be neither parsed nor translated. Said one good woman to the writer, "You cannot understand these things because they are spiritual, and you do not believe;" as though the alleged healing of the cancer in the Rev. Mahan's wife was not materialistic enough to be looked after. A clergyman wrote that he hoped the "ethical nature of disease" (whatever that is) would be explored. Some few of the advanced guard have forged ahead to the only one logical conclusion, and, with Stockmayer, proclaim that with one great combined, cumulative exercise of faith by the Christian Church death will be eventually abolished from the world.

Far be it from the writer to ignore the just claims of religious emotion upon the mind of man; but it is sometimes comfort to reflect, with Epicurus of old, that those are not undevout who deny the gods of the many, but those who attribute to the gods the opinions of the many.

