CHEROKEE

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

BY

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the identity of the *I hing* with the Masonic order. It is a belief in which they would receive much encouragement, as there is a popular tradition that lodges of native Freemasons exist in China, which is creditably received by members of the craft with whom I am acquainted.

Some thirty years ago a learned Mason from Zurich, Dr. Joseph Schauberg, expressed it as his conviction that the Chinese league was similar to freemasonry in its institutions.[1] The subject is reviewed at length by Schlegel, who shows no disposition to oppose the opinion expressed by Dr. Schauberg. Mr. Herbert A. Giles also discussed the subject from materials, he informed me, obtained from Schlegel's book on the Hung-League, in a paper read before the Ionic Lodge of Amoy.[2]

There is no question that many resemblances do exist in the institutions of the two fraternities, but from my investigations in another province of Chinese folk-lore, I am inclined to believe that they are found in ideas which the Chinese borrowed from their neighbors in Western Asia, and afterwards engrafted upon the ritual of their national society.

Stewart Culin.

[1] Dr. Joseph Schauberg, *Symbolik der Freimaurerei*, Zurich, 1861.
[2] *Freemasonry in China*, Amoy, China, 1886.

CHEROKEE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

One of the most prevalent errors in regard to the Indian is that he knows every plant of the field and forest, and that the medicine man outranks the white physician in his knowledge of the healing art. A moment's reflection must convince any intelligent person that the skill of the Indian doctor, whose knowledge is confined to the narrow limits of a single tribe, and who at best can consult with only half a dozen brother shamans, is not to be compared with that of the educated physician who has devoted years to study under trained specialists, who has the whole world for a pharmacopœia, together with all the mechanical aids invented by modern science, and whose libraries contain the combined experiences of the nations in a thousand years of medical progress. As a matter of fact, the medicine man's knowledge of herbal remedies is about on a level with that of the ordinary farmer's wife, while the best of them are far inferior to her in regard to nursing and the common-sense care of the sick.

Under the auspices of the Bureau of Ethnology the writer has spent three field seasons — aggregating about a year — with the Cherokees, investigating their botanic and medical knowledge, and studying the theories upon which their practice is based. For this purpose he became intimate with their most noted doctors, for weeks working and sleeping in the same room with them, and making frequent excursions with them into the mountains for the purpose of collecting their medicinal plants. In this way he was able not only to learn about all that could be told concerning the plants themselves, but was finally so fortunate as to obtain also the secret formulas and ceremonies which accompany every application. Nearly seven hundred species of plants (including trees and shrubs) known to the various doctors were collected, with their Indian names and uses, and it is probable that eight hundred species would include all known to the Cherokee specialist. This represents their aggregate knowledge, but from a careful estimate it would appear that no one doctor knew the names of three hundred species, including about one hundred trees and shrubs. Yet these men are the professional botanists of the tribe, and their country — the mountain region of western North Carolina — can probably furnish two thousand species of plants. Many of the most common plants and the brightest flowers have no Cherokee names, simply because the Indians do not use them for food or medicine. It may be remarked here that the Indian seems almost utterly lacking in appreciation of the beauty or fragrance of a flower. Of course they know nothing of the plants

outside the limits of their own tribe. Contrast this with the work of our own botanists, who are familiar with the forms and uses of plants throughout the known world, and who have classified and described fourteen hundred species within the District of Columbia, an insignificant tract of ten miles square!

While they generally agree upon generic terms, their specific classification is very defective, owing to the fact that they have never been called upon to define specific differences. Each doctor commonly knows but a few of the species included under one generic name, and when he needs any of these in his practice he simply goes himself and gets it. If somebody else wants to know it, the doctor gets it and shows it to him. Consequently, when obliged to distinguish different species having the same generic name, they are completely at a loss. Each man is apt to have a different basis of classification, and no one knows how many plants are included under the common name, or what descriptive term will sufficiently distinguish each one from the others. It is only by comparison of the plants brought in by each man that it is found that half a dozen distinct terms are intended to designate the same species. For instance, tobacco is *Tsâla*, and there are several other plants known as *Tsâliyústî*, "like tobacco," from their manner of seeding. One of these is the common mullein, which was described by different authorities as the blue, yellow, downy, and large Tsâliyustĭ. It is called blue because, according to the Cherokee idea, that is the color of its leaves.

The white doctor works upon a disordered organism. The Cherokee doctor works to drive out a ghost or a devil. According to the Cherokee myth, disease was invented by the animals in revenge for the injuries inflicted upon them by the human race. The larger animals saw themselves killed and eaten by man, while the smaller animals, reptiles, and insects were trampled upon and wantonly tortured until it seemed that their only hope of safety lay in devising some way to check the increase of mankind. The bears held the first council, but were unable to fix upon any plan of procedure, and dispersed without accomplishing anything. Consequently the hunter never asks pardon of the bear when he kills one. Next the deer assembled, and after much discussion invented rheumatism, but decreed at the same time that if the hunter, driven by necessity to kill a deer, should ask its pardon according to a certain formula, he should not be injured. Since then every hunter who has been initiated into the mysteries asks pardon of the slain deer. When this is neglected through ignorance or carelessness, the "Little Deer," the chief of the deer tribe, who can never die or be wounded, tracks the hunter to his home by the blood-drops on the ground, and puts the rheumatism

spirit into him. Sometimes the hunter, on starting to return to his home, builds a fire in the trail behind him to prevent pursuit by the Little Deer. Later on, councils were held by the other animals, birds, fishes, reptiles, and insects, each one inventing some new disease to inflict upon humanity, down even to the grubworm, who became so elated at the bright prospect in view that in his joy he sprang into the air, but fell over backward, and had to wriggle off on his back, as the grubworm does to this day. When the plants, who were friendly to the human race, heard what had been done by the animals, they held a council, and each plant agreed to furnish a remedy for some corresponding disease whenever man should call upon it for help.

While the great majority of diseases are thus caused by revengeful animal spirits, some are also caused by ghosts, witches, or violations of ceremonial regulations. When a child dies, its mother sometimes grieves after it and dreams of it night after night. This is because the spirit of the child is trying to take her away to itself in the Darkening Land of the west. To prevent this, the ghost must be driven away by the medicine man, who prescribes a course of treatment for the mother, ending with a ceremonial bathing at daybreak in the running stream. Sometimes an enemy shoots an invisible splinter into the body of a man, so that the victim lingers hopelessly, ignorant of the cause of the trouble, and at last dies unless relieved by the medicine man, who places his lips to the skin and sucks out the splinter or pebble, after repeating a formulistic prayer and ceremony. This is the cause frequently assigned for consumption, known among the Cherokees as the "dry cough." Again, a witch may "change the food" in a man's stomach and cause it to sprout within him, or take the form of a frog or lizard. Certain prohibitions also cannot be disregarded with impunity. Thus, walnut wood must not be put into the fire, because its inner bark is yellow, and if any of its ashes should go to make the lye used to season their corn gruel, the result to those partaking would be a yellow discharge or eruption. It is also held that the evil man does lives after him, and sickness may result from treading upon the haunted spot where an animal has been slain years before.

What is here said of the Cherokees will apply equally well to other Indians and to uncivilized tribes generally, and is not far different from the beliefs held by our own ancestors a few centuries ago. Such being the theory, we can hardly expect the practice to be very effective. Without going into details, it may be safely asserted that, of every ten herbs used by the doctors, one is the best that could be procured, two others help in a lesser degree owing to their soothing or tonic properties, and the remaining seven are worthless. Their

doctors are chiefly expert in the treatment of wounds and fractures, but with regard to internal ailments they are almost powerless. The herbs used are generally selected from some fancied connection between the plant and the disease animal, and four plants usually go to make up the decoction, four being their sacred number. Thus, for a sickness caused by the deer the doctor compounds a prescription of four plants known respectively in Cherokee as "Deer Eye," "Deer Ear," "Deer Shin," and "Deer Tongue" (*Rudbeckia, Hieracium*, and two other species not yet identified). In applying the medicine he prays to some natural enemy of the deer — usually to the dog — to come and drive out the deer spirit, and the patient is forbidden to eat deer meat for a certain period. If the rabbit be responsible for the illness, the doctor selects "Rabbit Food" (wild rose), and other rabbit plants, and prays to the hawk to drive out the rabbit spirit. If a snake has done the mischief, "Snake Tongue" (*Camptosorus rhizophyllus*) or "Snake Rattle" (*Brunella vulgaris*) is used; while if the evil spirit be a fish, the ailment must be treated with a decoction of "Fish Scales" (*Thalictrum anemonoides*), and the doctor calls upon some larger fish to come and drive out the smaller one.

Again, plants are selected from some connection between their appearance and the symptoms of the disease. Thus biliousness or indigestion — a very common complaint, owing to bad food and irregular meals — is called *Dalâ'nĭ*, or "yellow," on account of the yellow bile frequently vomited up. It is treated with a decoction of several plants also called Dalânĭ, from the color of the root, flower, or bark, chief among these being the dye flower or tickseed (*Coreopsis senifolia*). In the same way what are called heart troubles, which the doctors say are caused by the lungs becoming wrapt about the heart and thus impeding its action, are treated with a decoction of fern leaves, because these leaves when young are coiled up, but unwrap as they grew older. Ferns enter also into all rheumatism prescriptions, and by a similar process of reasoning are supposed to enable the patient to straighten out the constricted muscles of his limbs. In a formula for treating a snake-bite the doctor is directed to blow tobacco juice into the wound, and to rub his finger around the spot four times, from left to right, "because the snake always coils from right to left, and this is just the same as uncoiling it."

When one dreams that he has been bitten by a snake he must be treated the same as though actually bitten, or the same effects will follow a year or so later.

No special precautions are taken to secure the comfort of the patient during his illness, but great stress is laid upon the *Gaktû'ⁿta*, or tabu, which accompanies every important prescription. Salt and

hot food are the two things usually prohibited, but other regulations are added according to the nature of the case. Thus in scrofulous eruptions upon the throat the patient is forbidden to eat the flesh of the wild turkey, because the turkey seems to have a similar eruption on its throat. In many children's complaints the trouble is ascribed to the influence of birds, and the child is forbidden to eat any bird meat; while the mother must not allow it to go out of doors, lest the shadow of a bird flying overhead should fall upon it and *fan the disease back* into its body. In some cases the patient must have a separate chair for his special use. The tabu generally continues four days, — which is also the usual length of the course of treatment in slight illnesses, — but frequently lasts longer, and may even continue through life in regard to particular articles of food.

In all serious cases visitors are forbidden to enter the house, not, as one might suppose, to secure quiet, but in order to guard against the entrance of a pregnant or menstrual woman, or of any one who may have had the most remote contact with her, even to eating food prepared by her hands. The entrance of such a person would neutralize all the effect of the doctor's medicines. The writer once had a practical illustration of this law of the *Gaktû^{n}ta.* An old doctor named *Tsiskwa,* or Bird, who was far gone in what proved to be his last illness, sent word by his sister that he would like to tell what he knew to the white man. After several such messages the writer, with his interpreter, started one morning, and, after tramping several miles over a rough mountain road, arrived at the house to find that another doctor, called "The Mink," had been called in the same morning, and had just established a four days' tabu against visitors. We could not be admitted into the house, but neither doctor had any objection to our sitting immediately outside the threshold while the sick man lay just inside the open door, so near that he could have put out his hand and touched us, and kept up an animated conversation as far as his failing strength would allow. It was very evident that in this instance, at least, the tabu was not for the purpose of securing rest and quiet to the patient.

The dietary regulations seem to be all prohibitions. No light, appetizing or nourishing preparations, such as are commonly deemed necessary for sick people, are ever recommended, and, indeed, such a thing would be well-nigh impossible with the limited facilities of Indian cookery. In rheumatic complaints the skin is generally scratched with a bamboo brier or a rattlesnake's tooth before applying the medicine, which is then rubbed in while the blood is flowing freely. In toothache, pains in the stomach, etc., the ordinary treatment is rubbing, or simple laying on of the hands previously warmed over the fire. This fire is not the hearth fire, but one specially kindled for the

purpose. Sometimes the medicine is blown from the mouth of the doctor upon the body of the patient, according to certain rules. In one case, for instance, the doctor blows first upon the right hand, then upon the left foot, then upon the right foot, and finally upon the left hand, thus describing the figure of a cross. In every instance a prayer or sacred song accompanies the application.

There are a number of precautionary health-preserving ceremonies commonly observed, but these are religious rather than sanitary. Chief among them is "going to water," when the one for whose benefit the ceremony is performed goes down to the running stream, accompanied by the doctor, after fasting all night, and then, wading into the water, with his face turned to the sun just rising in the east, stoops down and bathes his head and breast, while the doctor, standing on the bank and holding a red and a white bead between the thumb and finger of his outstretched hands, recites an impressive prayer for the health and long life of the patient. This ceremony is performed before eating the first new corn in summer, after having had bad dreams, and by whole families at each new moon.

Diseases are named from their mythologic cause rather than from the symptoms, and the same physical ailment may be designated in a dozen different ways, according to the opinion of the doctor. This renders it extremely difficult to characterize a disease from their description. Thus diseases are classed as "when the dwellers in the forest make them sick" (caused by the large game animals), "when something is making something eat them" (a children's ailment, caused by the birds), "when the raccoon makes them sick," "when they dream of snakes," "when their food has been changed" (made to sprout in the stomach by magic arts), and so on.

In the study of this Indian medicine, disappointment at the misconceived ideas of disease, and the lack of practical therapeutic results, soon gives way to admiration of the systematic consistency of theory and practice, and respect for the deep religious spirit which animates it all. Every doctor is a priest, and every application is a religious act accompanied by prayer. In these prayers the doctor first endeavors to show his contempt for the disease spirit by belittling it as much as possible, so as to convey the impression that he is not afraid of it. Thus if the disease animal be a dangerous rattlesnake he may declare that it is only a rabbit. He then goes on to threaten it with the "red switches," and calls in, say, the Red Hawk from the Sun Land (the east) to drive it out of the man's body, and on toward the Darkening Land in the west, "so that it may never turn round to look back." The disease, being driven out, is forced along the black trail toward the west, but halts on reaching a gap in the mountain. The doctor then prays to the Blue Hawk in

the north to come and help the Red Hawk, asserting that the disease is "just what you eat." The two hawks drive it on to the second gap, where it again stops, and the doctor calls in the Black Hawk from the Darkening Land to come and help the others. It is now driven on to the third gap, when the doctor prays, "O White Hawk, reposing on high in the leafy tree-tops on Wăhălĭ (a mythic mountain in the south), draw near and listen. Arise quickly and drive the Intruder into the great lake in the Darkening Land." The White Hawk hears, and immediately swoops down to the assistance of the Red, Blue, and Black Hawks, and the four drive on the "intruder" to the fourth gap, where, with a final push, it is forced over into the great lake on the other side, from which it is never more to emerge.

James Mooney.