

not apparent, unless he had gone through the endless plants that seem more likely, in vain. It has lately been remarked that many of those mediæval prescriptions, so monstrously absurd or disgusting to us, are not altogether unreasonable, after all. The horrid ingredients supply in a measure those useful acids, alkalis, and so on, which we obtain, infinitely stronger, by chemical processes undreamed of then.

For instance, the *London Lancet* testifies that an old wife's remedy for ague—swallowing a spider and its web—is sound enough; the creature's body, and its web in especial, contain an albuminous substance closely akin to cinchona. Again, a decoction of toad, the favorite medicine for dropsy and other complaints, is justified on scientific grounds; in effect it resembles digitalin.

Notable among such eccentricities is Dr. Gaddesden's recipe for the treatment of smallpox, singled out for special ridicule these hundred years past, because that sage held the dignity of physician to King Edward I. One of the younger Princes was attacked. Gaddesden writes, in Latin: "I ordered his Highness to be wrapped in scarlet cloth, the bed and all the furniture of his chamber to be painted bright red, which practice not only cured him, but prevented marks. . . . I treated sons of the noblest houses in England the same way, and made good cures of all." One remembered this foolish fancy with interest when reading in the *British Medical Journal*, a few years ago, how the introduction of the "red light treatment" of smallpox, by Professor Finsen, had revolutionized the practice abroad. But how did poor old Dr. Gaddesden find the secret? In the curious work "Anglo-Saxon Leechdom," compiled by the Rev. Mr. Cockayne for the Master of the Rolls, it is mentioned that our forefathers pricked the pustules of smallpox with a thorn and rubbed in lees of wine. Authorities pronounce that such measures are commendable. One might suppose in haste that the use of a thorn was merely superstitious; but that is an unworthy suspicion, perhaps. The thorn would be antiseptic.

In all countries known to me outside Europe a proportion of the white residents, as intelligent apparently as their neighbors, incline to trust the native practitioner rather than their countrymen. Everyone familiar with the realms of savagery can

cite examples. They are specially common perhaps in Africa. A Blue Book of 1905 reported the evidence of magistrates, missionaries and traders, chosen for long experience and intimate knowledge of the Bantu population, upon various questions submitted. All agreed, I think, that the Kaffir doctors possess secrets of the highest value—which proves the faith of these gentlemen, at any rate. In West Africa, the great majority of traders consulted the white doctor for form's sake in my time—it was the proper thing; but they put their trust in the black. It must be said, however, that they themselves were mostly half-breeds. Whilst I was up country, a genial young giant from Devonshire took the fever and died. His employer, Mr. Selby, informed me that he would certainly have recovered in the hands of the black women. "Then why on earth did you not call them in?" I asked. "How could I have answered to his parents?" Mr. Selby replied with emotion. "They would have charged me with murder!" It was a reason to dwell in one's memory.

There is much more to say upon this curious subject, but I must conclude with a story reported at length in the *London Lancet* of February 2, 1902. It had been rumored for years in East Africa that the natives had a cure for the terrible black water fever. Dr. O'Sullivan Beare, vice-consul at Bemba, was first apparently to think of investigating the report. He looked up the medicine men, who proved to be most obliging. They revealed the secret at once—it was a decoction from the roots of a certain cassia unknown to botany, named *C. beareana* now in honour of this philanthropist. The remedy is so effectual that, if men still die of black water fever, it is because they cannot obtain a supply.

F. B.

The Importance of Inspection.

Sir:—More and more I am convinced that humane societies, in the discharge of their duties to the animals they have been organized to protect, must use the power committed to them, or the power it is possible for them to obtain, to protect at the same time the public health, if by no other way, at least by giving the largest publicity to the conditions they know exist where animals are killed for food, conditions that are constantly imperilling the lives of thousands and responsible for disease and death.