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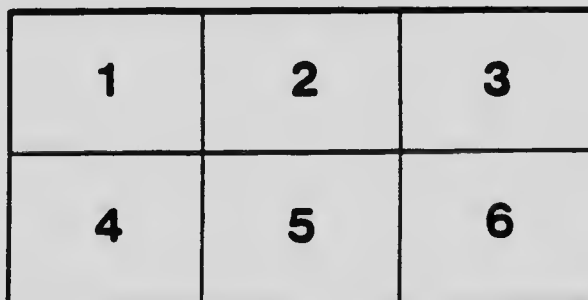
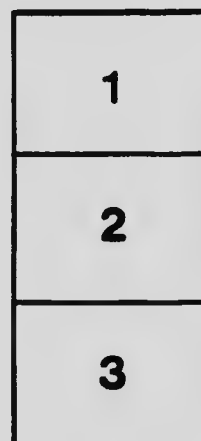
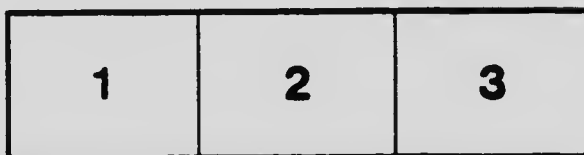
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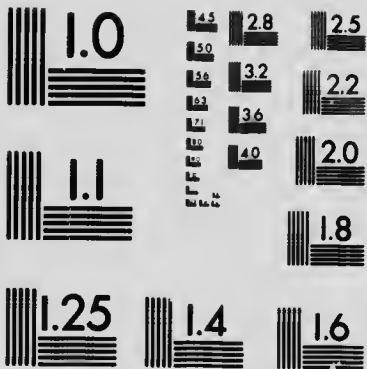
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# Wesley's System of Medicine



BY  
WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL, LL.D., F. B. S. (Edin.).  
TORONTO, ONTARIO



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## WESLEY'S SYSTEM OF MEDICINE.

BY THE HONORABLE WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL,  
B. SC., F. B. S., EDIN.,

Toronto, Canada.

The celebrated John Wesley, founder of Methodism, confined his attention to preaching; like his brother in divinity, the Reverend Doctor Hare, he wrote and published a book on the practice of medicine. The first edition was issued in 1747, shortly before his first and memorable visit to Ireland; and at least three subsequent editions appeared during his lifetime. After his death, in 1791, the work continued to be reissued from time to time and had great vogue among his followers. A copy still turns up now and then; my own was printed at Leeds "near the old Church" by George Wilson, in 1813, and purports to be "a new edition." The work is entitled *Primitive Physic or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing most Diseases*, by John Wesley, M. A., and contains an alphabetical list of diseases or disorders, 288 in all, with their appropriate remedies, 824 in number.

In his preface, the reverend author attributes all sickness to Adam's fall: "The heavens, the earth and all things contained therein conspire to punish the rebels against their Creator; the sun and moon shed unwholesome influences from above; the earth exhales poisonous damps from beneath; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea are in a state of hostility, the air itself that surrounds us on every side is replete with the shafts of death; yea, the food we eat daily saps the foundation of that life which cannot be sustained without it."

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He thinks that physicians have unduly imported various kinds of learning into their practice, and that simple remedies, the value of which is known by experience, may be taught to the common people. He gives accordingly a long list of diseases with the remedies appropriate to each; he sets "down in most cases several remedies for each disorder, not only because all are not equally easy to be procured at all times and in all places, but likewise because the medicine which cures one man will not always cure another of the same distemper, nor will it cure the same man at all times, therefore it is necessary to have a variety." He recommends using first that which is placed first on the list, and if that fails, using the others in succession; but he marks with an I "those medicines which some think to be infallible." "In a complication of disorders," he says, "you would do well to apply to a physician that fears God." In the preface to the editions of 1755 and 1780 he repeats this advice: "In complicated cases or where life is in immediate danger, let everyone apply without delay to a Physician that fears God; from one who does not—be his fame ever so great—I should expect a curse rather than a blessing." This tenderness of conscience (which some would call bigotry), forbidding the employment of any but a Godfearing physician, was not at all to be wondered at; many of his immediate disciples "felt that they could not go to the Lord's Table where the clergyman was a worldly man; others went, but with much fear and doubt." No doubt Wesley knew of and believed in the proverb, *Ubi tres Medici, ibi duo Haeretici*.

As was to be expected, the author has not got quite out of the realm of magic. An Ague may be cured by a bag of Groundsell worn on the pit of the stomach or by "six middling pills of Cobwebs," or by applying to the wrists a plaster made of Yarrow boiled in new milk, or a "plaster of treacle and foot," the dregs of oil after refining. Cramp may be prevented by laying a roll



of brimstone under the pillow, and cured by holding a roll of brimstone in the hand. "I have frequently," says Mr. Wesley, "done this with success." Applying green dock leaves to the joints and soles of the feet, changing them once a day, is sovereign for the Dropsy; while laying a thin slice of raw beef on the nape of the neck is a tried remedy for "hot or sharp Humours." In case of a Fever, "smear the wrists five or six inches long with warm treacle and cover it with brown paper," or "apply treacle plaisters to the head and the soles of the feet changing them every twelve hours"; a Delirium is often cured by applying a treacle plaister to the top of the head; for Gout in foot or hand, apply a raw lean beef steak, changing it every twelve hours, this is a tried remedy; for Jaundice, wear leaves of celandine upon and under the feet. Celandine (*Chelidonium*) is still used as a chologogue in jaundice, but internally. To prevent the bite of a viper, "rub the hands with the juice of radishes." "Scrape peony roots fresh digged. Apply what you have scraped off to the soles of the feet. It helps immediately in Convulsions in children. Tried." For the Iliac Passio*n* (*ileus, volvulus*), Wesley approves Doctor Sydenham's treatment: "hold a live puppy constantly on the belly."<sup>1</sup> This, however, may be quite reasonable as supplying a steady heat and at the same time giving the patient something to think of beside his abdomen. Some reason can also be found in the prescription to prevent Rheumatism: "wear washed wool under the feet"; and for Shrunk Sinews, "rub the part every morning with fasting spittle"; this had been tried; also that for Skin rubbed off "apply a bit of white paper with spittle."

Doctor Hancocke had, a quarter of a century before, found cold water taken internally the universal febrifuge, if not a panacea; and Wesley is a be-

<sup>1</sup>What Sydenham's English version as translated by Dr. John Pechey, says is "I order a live Kitling to lie always upon the naked Belly." Fourth edition, London, 1705. p. 34.

liever in its virtues in many diseases. In his preface he says, "Water is the wholesomest of all drinks, it quickens the appetite and strengthens the digestion most." For Ague, he recommends to drink a quart of cold water, then go to bed and sweat; for Asthma, a pint of cold water every morning; for Cholera Morbus, "two or three quarts of cold water, if strong, of warm water, if weak"; for a Cold, a Cough or a Cholic, Palpitation of the Heart, or a sore Throat, a pint of cold water lying down is a tried remedy, while for a fever, "I never knew it to do hurt." For a Bloody Flux, "drink cold water as largely as possible, taking nothing till the flux stops." He knew a gentleman who was cured of Gout in the Stomach many times by a draught of cold water; and cold water alone drunk largely will not only stop Profuse Sweating, but it has even cured the Plague. Half a pint of cold water every morning will prevent Stone in the Kidneys, a pint will cure Palpitation of the Heart; but to prevent or cure Stone in the Bladder the sufferer should "drink largely of water impregnated with fixed air." He gives a method of making this: "Dissolve fifteen grains of salt of tartar in six spoonfuls of water, to which add as much water acidulated with oil of vitriol as will neutralize the salt. They are to be gradually mixed with each other so as to prevent the effervescence or dissipation of the fixed air as much as possible."

The greatest triumph of cold water, however, is this: "A Farmer aged seventy in a confirmed ascites was given over for dead. Being desperate, he drank three quarts of cold water every four and twenty hours. His whole food meantime was Sea biscuit, sometimes with a little butter. For sixteen days he seemed worse. Then he discharged for near a week a vast quantity of water and was soon free from his disease, which never returned."

Warm water is prescribed for the prevention of Stone, a pint daily just before dinner, preferably with a large onion sliced in it. It is used also as

an emetic. Sea Water every other day will cure Swelled Glands in the Neck; for Shingles, "drink sea water for a week every morning, toward the close, bathe also."

About the time of the first edition, or shortly before, the well known Bishop Berkeley had strongly advocated the use of tar water; and Wesley is warmly in favor of it for many diseases. He gives a direction for making it thus: "Put a gallon of cold water to a quart of Norway tar. Stir them together with a flat stick for five or six minutes. After it has stood covered for three days, pour off the water, clear, bottle and cork it." It is recommended for St. Anthony's Fire externally and internally, internally for Asthma. "A Cancer under the eye was cured by drinking a quart of tar water daily, washing the same with it, and then applying a plaister of tar and mutton suet melted together. It was well in two months though of twenty years' standing." Drunk twice a day it has cured Dropsy; a large glass warm every hour cures Fever; half a pint morning and evening for three months is a Specific for the Falling Sickness and the Scurvy, and cures the Palsy; a glass taken warm every half hour is good for Pleurisy, and less frequently for Stoppage in the kidneys. All these pale into insignificance, however, when compared with the following: "Take tar water morning and evening; this is a tried medicine for Old Age and will probably renew the Strength for some years."

It is at least curious that tar water is not recommended for smallpox, for which it is especially urged as a remedy by Berkeley.

The cold bath is an especial favorite with Wesley; he recommends it for Ague, Tertian or otherwise, Apoplexy, Cancer in the Breast ("this has cured many"), Chin Cough or Hooping Cough, Nervous Cholic (i. e., "a cholic with purging, some term them watery gripes"), Consumption ("cold bathing has cured many deep Consumptions, Tried"), Convulsion, Corns, an Inveterate Cough

("it seldom fails"), Deafness, the Dropsy (after purging), the Falling Sickness, a slow Fever, Hemicrania, Leprosy ("in this disease the skin in many parts is covered with rough whitish scaly pustules, if these are rubbed off, with a kind of scaly scurf"), the Palsy, Sciatica, Scorbutic Atrophy ("also . . . all Scorbutic pains"), Stone in the Kidneys, Vertigo, Torpor or Numbness of the Limbs, Tympany or Windy Dropsy, involuntary Urine. It will be seen that he in his medical directions applied his own well known maxim: "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." It is curious, however, that sea bathing is not more in favor. Very rarely indeed is a warm bath advised, i. e., for the Iliac Passion and St. Anthony's Fire.

After water, warm lemonade is the favorite drink. "For Bilious Cholic drink warm lemonade, I know nothing like it," also for Hysteric Cholic; in an Intermitting Fever, "drink warm lemonade in the beginning of every fit, it cures in a few days. Tried"; the Stranguary; Urine by Drops with Heat and Pain, and Suppression of the Urine are all benefited by drinking warm lemonade, and it is useful to produce and "continue a long sweat in Quartan Agues." Wesley does not seem ever to have used cold lemonade.

Apple water made by pouring boiling water on sliced apples is recommended in Asthma.

Curiously enough, milk as a beverage receives little notice. A pint of new milk taken morning and evening has cured an inveterate Asthma; milk and milk porridge are the proper breakfast for children, and milk should be given warm from the cow every morning in Hooping Cough; in Consumption, "use as a common drink Spring water and new milk each a quart" or "a pint of Skimmed milk with half a pint of small beer." But in the last stage, "suck a healthy woman daily. This cured my father." In diabetes, "let your drink be milk and water." To cure Night Sweats, "drink a gill of warm milk at lying down."

I have within this present year known apple water made in this way with Spitzenberg apples administered for rheumatism, apparently with good effect—or was it simply imagination?

Perhaps there should be mentioned here a prescription which Wesley quotes but does not vouch for. "Dr. Chyne says a total Ass milk diet, about two quarts a day without any other food or drink will cure a confirmed cancer." ("Dr. Chyne" was Dr. George Cheyne (1671-1743), one of the earliest vegetarians, who, born in Aberdeenshire and educated at Edinburgh under Pitcairn, practised at London and Bath. He wrote on Mathematics as well as Medicine, Dietetics, and Natural Theology, 'an all-round man.') Wesley's tried remedy for a cancer is "Take horse spurs (a kind of warts that grow on the inside of the horse's forelegs), dry them by the fire, till they will beat to powder. Sift and infuse two drachms in two quarts of ale; drink half a pint every six hours, new milk warm. It has cured many. Tried.

In the preface, he advises to take always such a sort and such a measure of food as sits light and easy on the stomach, eschewing pickled or smoked or salted food and all that is high seasoned. For studious persons about eight ounces of animal food and twelve ounces of vegetable in twenty-four hours is sufficient; strong, and more especially spirituous liquors, are a certain, though slow poison, and experience shows that there is very seldom any danger in leaving them off at once. In the body of the book not much is said about diet in sickness. "One in a deep Consumption was advised to drink nothing but water, and eat nothing but water-gruel without salt or sugar. In three months' time he was perfectly well." "Take no food but new buttermilk churned in a bottle, and white bread. I have known this to succeed in Consumption." For scurvy, "live on turnips for one month"; for Costiveness, "live upon bread made of wheat flour, with all

*Riddell: Wesley's System of Medicine.*

the bran in it"; for a Raging Madness, "let him eat nothing but apples for a month," and in Nervous Disorders, a full dietary is given. So also in a Dry Asthma, the patient is to use "food light and easy of digestion, Ripe Fruit baked, boiled or roasted, are very proper." For the Asthma, "live for a fortnight on boiled carrots only; it seldom fails." For the Falling Sickness, "use an entire milk diet for three months; it seldom fails." For Extreme Fat, "use a total vegetable diet. I know one who was entirely cured of this by living a year thus; she breakfasted and supped on milk and water (with bread) and dined on turnips, carrots, and other roots, drinking water"; in a Dysentery, "feed on rice, saloup, sago, and sometimes beef tea, but no flesh"; in a Raging Madness, "let him eat nothing but apples for a month" or "nothing but bread and milk. Tried." For Rheumatism, "live on new milk, whey, and white bread for fourteen days; this has cured a desperate case." "In a Stubborn Rheumatism, let your diet be barley-gruel, with currants, roasted apples, fresh wheys and light puddings." "In smallpox, let your whole food be milk and water united with a little white bread" or "milk and apples."

Wesley has very few medicines whose virtues consisted simply in their nastiness. Dry Zibethun Occidentale, i. e., *Stercus humanum* for films on the eye, *Stercus bovinum* warmed and spread on leather, used hot as a topical application for a Windy Rupture, Ear wax for White Specks in the Eye, and Goose Dung and Celandine on a plaster for cancer, exhaust the list.

He has many of the usual remedies which were in vogue at the time and most of which will be found in Buchan; and he applied them in no manner differing from others. Tarter Emetic and Ipecacuanha, Valerian and Wormwood, Horseradish, and *Carduus Benedictus*, Quince, Bramble and Burdock Leaves, Pennyroyal and Magnesia, Balm

*Riddell: Wesley's System of Medicine.*

of Gilead, Balsam of Peru, Cinquefoil Tea, Sweet Oil and Balsam of Capivi, and scores of others which call for no remark.

He is thoroughly convinced, however, that electricity comes the nearest to a universal medicine of any yet known in the world and recommends it on almost all occasions—for Bruises, Baldness, Burns, and Scalds, Deafness, Dropsy, Epilepsy, Headache, Lunacy, Obstruction of the Menses, Nervous Disorders, Palpitation of the Heart, even for the Tooth Ach, etc., etc.

Wesley's views of infection are worth noticing: "To prevent catching any infectious fever do not breathe near the face of the sick person, neither swallow your spittle in the room. Infection seizes the Stomach first."

Some of his prescriptions are models. For example, his first for Costiveness is simply, "rise early in the morning"; for the Whites, "live chaste-ly, Feed sparingly, use exercise constantly. Sleep moderately, but never lying on your back."

Of exercise, in the body of the work, our author has not much to say. In the preface, he seems almost to look upon the penalty "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" as a blessing, for that is "one grand preventative of pain and sickness of all kinds . . . the power of exercise both to preserve and restore health is greater than can well be conceived, especially in those who . . . observe both that kind and measure of food which experience shows to be most friendly to health and strength." He adds, "A due degree of exercise is indispensibly necessary to health and long life . . . walking is the best exercise for those who are able to bear it, riding for those who are not . . . the studious ought to . . . exercise at least two or three hours a day."

In the body of the book, those troubled with nervous disorders are advised to rise early, and as soon the dew is off the ground, walk; those with the Whites to exercise constantly, and also those

with the Quartan Ague or Dry Asthma; but the value of exercise for the sick is not otherwise emphasized. No doubt, Wesley thought the advice in his preface sufficient.

One element in his *Materia Medica* would excite a smile in any one unfamiliar with the conceptions of *vis medicatrix* at the time; the ash of scarlet cloth blown into mouth or throat seldom fails in Cancer in the Mouth or Thrush. It must not be supposed that Wesley followed the usual practice slavishly. If one were to take a contemporary work on the practice of medicine, he would be certain to find the remedies most in vogue, pretty much in this order: bleeding, purging, vomiting, salivation, opiates, Peruvian bark, steaming.

Bleeding is not generally recommended by Wesley; we find it directed only for a Tertian Ague; for Apoplexy (if not after a full meal); in a Fever "if the Stomach is uneasy, vomit; if the bowels, purge, if the pulse be full hard of Strong, bleed"; and Menses Nimii.

Purging is advised in the case of a Tertian Ague after Measles. For obstruction of the Menses, "eight or ten grains of Calomel both vomits and purges," Palsy of the Hands, the Sciatica, Tympany or Windy Dropsy.

A Vomit (gentle) is recommended for Ague, for Apoplexy (if after a meal), a Dry Asthma, sometimes in Heart Burning; for Vertigo, "take a vomit or two."

Salivation is not advised at all. Quicksilver is recommended in its metallic form for Twisting of the Guts. "Many at the point of death have been cured by taking one, two, or three pounds of quicksilver," for which Pareus (i. e., Ambrose Paré) is cited as authority, and there is inserted for the sake of innocent sufferers a cure for Lues Venerea: "Take an ounce of quicksilver every morning and a spoonful of Aqua Sulphurata in a glass of water at five in the afternoon. I have known a person cured by this when supposed to be at the



point of death, who had been infected by a foul nurse before she was a year old." In the Green sickness, take an ounce of quicksilver every morning; for the Iliac Passion, "take once by ounce, a pound or a pound and a half of quicksilver," following Doctor Tissot's prescription; for Worms, "boil four ounces of quicksilver an hour in a quart of clear water, pour it off and bottle it up; you may use the same quicksilver again and again. Use this for a common drink . . . for a week or two. . . . For Asthma or the Whites, take an ounce of quicksilver every morning and a spoonful of Aqua Sulphurata at five in the evening, and in Nervous Cholic take these daily for a month."

Opiates are very seldom recommended. In the hot fit of an Ague, if it should be violent, eight or ten drops of laudanum are prescribed; in an Hysterical Cholic, twenty drops in the form of a clyster; in Epilepsy, "five or six drops . . . fasting for six or seven mornings. This has cured many." In a Bloody Flux, four drops; for Inability to Sleep, opium is forbidden and camphor prescribed in its stead.

Bark is directed to be chewed and the spittle swallowed so long as it is bitter, in case of a cough; to prevent profuse Sweating, a tincture of Peruvian Bark in spirit of vitriol; for "Falling of the Whomb," the same; for Scorbutic Gums, wash them daily with a decoction of the Peruvian Bark."

Steaming was always much in vogue with empirics on this side of the Atlantic. Wesley does not seem to have built much on it. For Strangury, "sit over the steam of warm water"; "Indolent Sweatings are often cured by warm steams."

In one of his prefaces he says: "I have omitted (together with Antimony) the four Herculean medicines, Opium (except in a very few cases), the Bark, Steel and most of the preparations of Quicksilver" which are "far too strong for common men to battle with" Antimony he prescribes only once and that in its most mitigated form; Sul-

*Riddell: Wesley's System of Medicine.*

phur of Antimony on a chafing dish of coals, and the fumes received by a funnel, in Obstruction; Steel filings ground into a powder with red sugar candy are given in Green Sickness as an infallible remedy; Opium, the Bark and Quicksilver we have already discussed.

Another favorite treatment of the time, i. e., the Seton, is advised only once—in the neck to prevent a relapse in cases of Apoplexy; as it is accompanied by a direction for low diet, it is probable it would do no great harm. An Issue in the Thigh, he says, will cure a Quinsy of the Breast.

He gives a formula for Daffy's Elixir and Turlington's Balsam—the latter under the name of Friar's Balsam was in every farm house fifty years ago. He recommends Doctor Hardwicke's fever powder at one shilling an ounce instead of Doctor James's powder at half a crown a packet—"if it be not the same, it will answer the same end."

Wesley is not dead to the importance of calling in a skilled physician or surgeon. We have seen what he said in his prefaces. In Apoplexy, after giving the remedies to be applied, he adds: "But send for a good physician immediately"; in case of the Bite of a Mad Dog, he says: "N. B. Immediately consult an honest physician"; while his directions in case of wounds are only to be followed "if you have not an honest surgeon at hand." What a "good or honest physician or surgeon" is, appears by what he says in his prefaces.

It will be found that Wesley's treatment of diseases was at least as reconcilable with common sense as that of the contemporary regular practitioner, much more so in most cases. Of it, at least, it could be said (what he says of cold water in fever) "it did no great harm."

A remark interesting to Americans is his statement about Nettle Rash: "In Georgia, we call it 'The Prickly Heat'; he had not forgotten and never did forget his sojourn in the "Southern Colony."

OSGOODE HALL.

