

THE FAITH THAT HEALS.

BY

WILLIAM OSLER, M.D., F.R.S.,

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY.

NOTHING in life is more wonderful than faith—the one great moving force which we can neither weigh in the balance nor test in the crucible. Intangible as the ether, ineluctable as gravitation, the radium of the moral and mental spheres, mysterious, indefinable, known only by its effects, faith pours out an unfailing stream of energy while abating nor jot nor tittle of its potency. Well indeed did St. Paul break out into the well-known glorious panegyric, but even this scarcely does justice to the Hertha of the psychical world, distributing force as from a great storage battery, without money and without price to the children of men.

Three of its relations concern us here. The most active manifestations are in the countless affiliations which man in his evolution has worked out with the unseen, with the invisible powers, whether of light or of darkness, to which from time immemorial he has erected altars and shrines. To each one of the religions, past or present, faith has been the Jacob's ladder. Creeds pass; an inexhaustible supply of faith remains, with which man proceeds to rebuild temples, churches, chapels, and shrines. As Swinburne says in that wonderful poem, *The Altar of Righteousness*:

God by God flits past in thunder, till his glories turn to shades:

God to God bears wondering witness how his gospel flames and fades.

More was each of these, while yet they were, than man their servant seemed:

Dead are all of these, and man survives who made them while he dreamed.

And all this has been done by faith, and faith alone. Christendom lives on it, and countless thousands are happy in the possession of that most touching of all confessions, "Lord! I believe; help Thou my unbelief." But, with its Greek infection, the Western mind is a poor transmitter of faith, the apotheosis of which must be sought in the religions of the East. The Nemesis of faith is that neither in its intensity nor in its effects does man find any warrant of the worthiness of the object on which it is lavished—the followers of Joe Smith, the Mormon, are as earnest and believing as are those of Confucius!

Again, faith is the cement which binds man to man in every relation in life. Without faith in the Editor of the JOURNAL I would not have accepted his invitation to write this brief note, and he had confidence that I would not write rubbish. Personally I have battered on it these thirty-six years, ever since the McGill Medical Faculty gave me my first mount. I have had faith in the profession, the most unbounded confidence in it as one of the great factors in the progress of humanity; and one of the special satisfactions of my life has been that my brethren have in many practical ways shown faith in me, often much more than (as I know in my heart of hearts) I have deserved. I take this illustration of the practical value of the faith that worketh confidence, but there is not a human relationship which could not be used for the same purpose.

And a third aspect is one of very great importance to the question in hand—a man must have faith in himself to be of any use in the world. There may be very little on which to base it—no matter, but faith in one's powers, in one's mission is essential to success. Confidence once won, the rest follows naturally; and with a strong faith in himself a man becomes a local centre for its radiation. St. Francis, St. Theresa, Ignatius Loyola, Florence Nightingale, the originator of every cult or sect or profession, has possessed this infective faith. And in the ordinary everyday work of the doctor, confidence, assurance (in the proper sense of the word) is an asset without which it is very difficult to succeed. How often does one hear the remark, "Oh! he does not inspire confidence," or the reverse! How true it is, as wise old Burton says: "That the patient must have a sure hope in his physician. Damascen, the Arabian, requires likewise in the physician himself that he be confident he can cure him, otherwise his

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physic will not be effectual, and promise withal that he will certainly help him, make him believe so at least. Galeottus gives this reason because the form of health is contained in the physician's mind, and as Galen holds confidence and hope to be more good than physic, he cures most in whom most are confident"; and he quotes Paracelsus to the effect that Hippocrates was so fortunate in his cures not from any extraordinary skill, but because "the common people had a most strong conceit of his worth."

Faith is indeed one of the miracles of human nature which science is as ready to accept as it is to study its marvellous effects. When we realize what a vast asset it has been in history, the part which it has played in the healing art seems insignificant, and yet there is no department of knowledge more favourable to an impartial study of its effects; and this brings me to my subject—the faith that heals.

Apart from the more specific methods to be dealt with faith has always been an essential factor in the practice of medicine, as illustrated by the quotations just given from Burton. Literature is full of examples of remarkable cures through the influence of the imagination, which is only an active phase of faith. The late Daniel Hack Tuke's book, *The Influence of the Mind on the Body*, is a storehouse of facts dealing with the subject. While in general use for centuries, one good result of the recent development of mental healing has been to call attention to its great value as a measure to be carefully and scientifically applied in suitable cases. My experience has been that of the unconscious rather than the deliberate faith healer. Phenomenal, even what could be called miraculous, cures are not very uncommon. Like others, I have had cases any one of which, under suitable conditions, could have been worthy of a shrine or made the germ of a pilgrimage. For more than ten years a girl lay paralysed in a New Jersey town. A devoted mother and loving sisters had worn out lives in her service. She had never been out of bed unless when lifted by one of her physicians, Dr. Longstreth and Dr. Shippen. The new surroundings of a hospital, the positive assurance that she could get well with a few simple measures sufficed, and within a fortnight she walked round the hospital square. This is a type of modern miracle that makes one appreciate how readily well meaning people may be deceived as to the true nature of the cure effected at the shrine of a saint. Who could deny the miracle? And miracle it was, but not brought about by any supernatural means. I had the good fortune to be associated for five years with Weir Mitchell, and saw much of the workings of that master mind on the sisters of Sir Galahad and the brothers of Sir Percivale, who flocked to his clinics. His extraordinary success, partly due to the rest treatment, was more largely the result of a personal factor—the deep faith the people had in his power to cure. And it is in this group particularly that the strong man armed with good sense, and with faith in himself, may be a power for good. And the associations count for much. Without any special skill in these cases or special methods, our results at the Johns Hopkins Hospital were most gratifying. Faith in *St. Johns Hopkins*, as we used to call him, an atmosphere of optimism, and cheerful nurses, worked just the same sort of cures as did Aesculapius at Epidaurus; and I really believe that had we had in hand that arch-neurasthenic of ancient history, Aelius Aristides, we could have made a more rapid cure than did Apollo and his son, who took seventeen years at the job!

Outside the profession faith has always played a strong rôle as a popular measure of cure. There are at present four plans, all of which illustrate phases of an old-time practice.

1. In England a small sect, the Peculiar People, carry out a consistent gospel system of faith healing. A pious, simple folk, only heard of when in collision with the law of the land, they base their belief on the plain sayings of Scripture, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name," etc. The prayer of faith is all they need, and in consequence, when one of their number dies, there is an inquest, and someone is sent to prison for criminal negligence. One of the recent cases was very pathetic, as both father and mother expressed the most touching confidence that what God willed was best for their child with scarlet fever, and

what they asked in prayer would be granted. This primitive Christian attitude towards disease has never lacked adherents in the Church, and mediæval literature is full of illustrations of a practice identical with that of the Peculiar People.

2. The Christian Church began with a mission to the whole man—body as well as soul—and the apostolic ministry of health has never been wholly abandoned. Through the Middle Ages the priests had care of the sick; many of the most distinguished physicians were in holy orders, and even after the Reformation in this country much of the ordinary medical practice was in the hands of the clergy. But the most characteristic development of Christian faith healing has been in connexion with certain saints and shrines. The early Church found the popular belief in Aesculapius so deeply engrained that many rites of the temples were deliberately adopted, such as incubation and the practice of votive offerings. The temple sleep, in which methods of cure were suggested in dreams, was continued until recent times, and indeed has not yet been abandoned. Certain saints had special powers—St. Cosmas and St. Damian became the patrons of surgery; St. Antony and St. Vitus had well known virtues. Belief in the healing power of relics became universal. The Reformation made a small section hostile, but a large majority of all Christians still believe strongly in the power of the saints to cure disease. The votive offerings which cover the walls of many Catholic churches on the Continent, accompanied with grateful inscriptions, are modern counterparts of the old practice in the Aesculapian temples. Miracles are still as common as blackberries, and new saints and new shrines are in active manufacture. The process may be studied in the history of Bernadette Soubirous, the 14-year-old ecstatic, who fifty years ago had visions of the Virgin at Lourdes, now the most popular faith resort in Europe. The cures are often genuine, and the miracles are of the same kind and as well attested as are those of Epidaurus. More people, it is said, frequent Lourdes than all the hospitals of France, and the same is true in Canada of the most popular shrine of the New World—St. Anne de Beaupré. In the English-speaking world and in Germany faith has been chilled by the Reformation, and even among Catholics this mode of healing is not much in favour. I do not know of a single popular shrine in the United States, the country of all others in which Roman Catholicism presents the most rapid development. In England there has not been an active medical saint for 300 years.

3. History repeats itself, and we are to day deep in the throes of an intellectual change quite as striking as that which came over the Graeco-Roman world when disbelief in the gods, started by the philosophers, filtered into common life. Men sought other resting places, some with Zeno and the Stoics, others with Epicurus, while thousands remained in the misty mid-region of uncertainty. The cults which had ministered to the religious wants gradually lost their hold on the people, while the new sects appealed chiefly to the intellectuals. Christianity came, and, winning its way from below upwards, swept away many cults, absorbed others, and gradually destroyed the sects. Once again old beliefs are in the melting-pot. Modernism, the culmination of the spirit of the Renaissance, has changed the fundamental aspects of humanity, and the new wine in the old bottles has had the usual effect. A great gulf has opened between pastor and flock, and the shepherdless sheep at large upon the mountains have been at the mercy of any one who could pipe new tunes. One result of this intellectual and spiritual unrest is of great practical interest to us as physicians, and of still greater interest to all students of psychology. A new cult has arisen, attractive and aggressive, unlike in many ways anything hitherto seen. It was only natural (and the punishment fits the crime!) that such a cult should come from the United States, the country which possesses a larger number of separate sects than any other in the world. That the founder should be a woman profoundly ignorant of theology and of science, without, indeed, a single bond between the professors of the one or the practice of the other, was in itself a favouring element. A disciple of an American spiritualist, Mrs. Eddy had one strong conviction—the paramount importance of the things of the spirit. Never before in a history surcharged with examples of

credulity has so monstrously puerile a belief been exploited. To deny the existence of disease, to deny the reality of pain, to disregard all physical measures of relief, to sweep away in a spiritual ecstasy the accumulated wisdom of centuries in a return to Oriental mysticism—these, indeed, expressed a revolt from the materialism of the latter half of the nineteenth century at once weird, perhaps not unexpected, and, to a student of human nature, just a bit comic. One cannot but smile to think that this has happened at the very time when the Goddess of Reason was priding herself on the brilliancy of the accomplishments of her devotees! It is, indeed, a salutary lesson in humility, and serves to remind us that our deliciously credulous human nature is still plastic and receptive. To some a sign of decadence, to me the growth of Christian Science and of Mormonism are among the hopeful indications that we are in the childhood of the race. Only in the welter of a new world, untrammelled by a past, and by regard for authority, among a keen people too much absorbed in business to work out for themselves any mental salvation could such a chaotic mass of rubbish have had any measure of successful acceptance. And, as I said, the punishment fits the crime. For generations the people of the United States have indulged in an orgie of drugging. Between polypharmacy in the profession, and quack medicines, the American body had become saturated *ad nauseam*, and here indeed was a boon even greater than homoeopathy! No wonder the American spirit, unquiet in a drug-soaked body, rose with joy at a new Evangel. In every county there were dyspeptics and neurasthenics in sufficient numbers to demonstrate the efficacy of the new gospel! But the real secret of the growth of Christian Science does not lie in the refusal of physical measures of relief or the efficacy of prayer, but in offering to people a way of life, a new Epicureanism which promises to free the soul (and body) from fear, care, and unrest; and its real lever is the optimism which discounts the worries of the daily round. It has done the profession good in awakening an interest in a too much neglected section of rational therapeutics. The tragic side of the story lies in the valuable lives sacrificed to the fanatical ignorance of so-called healers. The miracles of Christian Science are the faith cures which we all know so well. They are exclusively in the realm of functional disorders. I have not met with any case of organic disease permanently cured. I know of reputed cures of locomotor ataxia; two of these patients still take opium for the lightning pains.

4. And, lastly, there has arisen in the United States a form of faith healing known as the "Emmanuel Church movement," which originated in Boston with the Rev. Dr. Worcester, an able and distinguished clergyman of the Episcopal Church, who had had a good training in psychology under Fechner at Leipzig. Curiously the idea arose out of the success which had attended the organization among the members of his church of classes for the home treatment of tuberculosis by my friend and former pupil, Dr. J. H. Pratt. It was suggested that the Church might undertake the treatment of nervous troubles by mental and spiritual agencies. The method is as follows (I quote for brevity from Powell's *The Emmanuel Movement in a New England Town*, 1909):

The Emmanuel movement in Boston makes use of both the social uplift and the individual direction. There is a class for the prevention of functional ailments as well as a clinic for their cure. Any Wednesday evening from October until May you will find, if you drop in at Emmanuel Church—one of the most beautiful church interiors in the land, well filled with worshippers, to the astonishment of those who think the mid-week service a spent force in organized religious life. A restful prelude on the organ allures the soul to worship. Without the aid of any choir several familiar hymns are sung by everybody who can sing and many who can not. A Bible lesson is read. The Apostles' Creed is said in unison. Requests for prayers in special cases are gathered up into one prayerful effort made without the help of any book. One Wednesday evening Dr. Worcester gives the address, another Dr. McComb, still another some expert in neurology or psychology. The theme is usually one of practical significance, like hurry, worry, fear, or grief, and the healing Christ is made real in consequence to many an unhappy heart. Though the mass effect of the service, which is always followed by a purely social hour in the adjoining parish house, is prophylactic, it is not at all uncommon for insomnia, neuralgia, and kindred ills to disappear in the self-forgetfulness of such an evening.

But it is in the clinic, conducted every day by one or other of

the two head workers assisted by eleven helpers, that the treatment is direct and definite. Every applicant must first submit to diagnosis. If organic trouble is disclosed, he is not accepted as a patient. If the disease appears to be simply functional, the applicant is registered for treatment and passed on into the Rector's study. There he finds himself in an environment in which the very appointments of the room conduce to the disclosure of every fact, physical, mental, social, moral, spiritual, which bears in any way upon the situation. To the frankness which the family doctor's presence can evoke is added the confidence which the confessional inspires. All the conditions are for many a new patient immediately supplied which unlock the hidden wholesomeness of his inner life and lead by rapid stages to complete recovery.

Where more is needed than the full self-revelation—in itself curative—and the prayer and godly counsel which succeed it, the patient is next invited to be seated in a reclining chair, taught to relax all his muscles, calmed by soothing words, and in a state of physical relaxation and mental quiet the unwholesome thoughts and the untoward symptoms are dislodged from his consciousness, and in their place are sown the seeds of more health-giving thoughts and better habits. The spiritual result of such an experience outbuds all else. As week after week patients come for treatment, they frequently lose interest in the ailments which were once their torment and cease to think at all about them, physical health becomes a casual by-product of the spiritual uplift, and the sometime patient, well once more, one day goes on his way, like Jacob after Peniel singing to the world, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

But the patient has his share in applying the treatment. The cure is never permanent without his complete and constant co-operation.

As the Rev. Lyman Powell says, in the excellent book from which I have taken this extract, "The only magic known in the Emmanuel movement is the magic of a mind surcharged with faith, and operative within bounds set by the scientific doctor." Here, again, the success will depend in the individual character of the man conducting the movement. The class organization, the association with church services, and the confidence inspired by the co-operation of pastor and doctor have been favouring features. Only in existence for a few years, it is impossible to say what the future has in store, but it is an honest attempt to bring back that angelical conjunction, as Cotton Mather calls it, of phisic with divinity.

Briefly stated, this is the status of the faith problem in medicine to-day. Others will analyse its workings, the relation to suggestion, to the subconscious self, etc. Not a psychologist but an ordinary clinical physician concerned in making strong the weak in mind and body, the whole subject is of intense interest to me. I feel that our attitude as a profession should not be hostile, and we must scan gently our brother man and sister woman who may be carried away in the winds of new doctrine. A group of active, earnest, capable young men are at work on the problem, which is of their generation and for them to solve. The angel of Bethesda is at the pool—it behoves us to jump in!

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE OCCULT.*

BY

T. CLAYE SHAW, M.D., F.R.C.P.,

EMERITUS LECTURER ON PSYCHOLOGICAL MEDICINE,
ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL.

GENTLEMEN,—I am introducing to you a subject which is at present full of mystery, because the time is probably not far distant when we shall be much enlightened on the nature and application of these occult processes, and as you will possibly be in active practice during the new eventful years, I beg permission to place before you some ideas which strike me as being relevant to the subject, in the hope that your attention may be drawn to it with the view of assisting, as opportunity offers, the exploitation of phenomena the nature of which it is impossible to predicate at the present.

The Vibration Theory.

Through the vibrations of ether we become conscious of what is going on outside us, at any rate in the regions of sight and hearing, and it is to be assumed that in some way or other these vibrations of ether are transformed into a molecular conduction along the nerve paths to the central cells themselves, so that a cell which is energizing is a cell in motion in a definite way, and as long as this

* A lecture delivered at the London Polyclinic.