

Manx Notes 431 (2020)

MANX HERB DOCTORS AN EXCHANGE OF OPINIONS (1887)

(1)

SIR.—Will you kindly spare me a small space in your valuable journal to expose a most pernicious system. Mostly everybody would be led to suppose that with the march of Religion, Education and Science the belief in witchcraft, and what is called the evil eye were things of the past. But it is not so. An old man belong to the North of the Island who stiles [*sic*] himself Charles Ballaquane's successor, and claims to be up in all Charles's secrets and cures, whither the disease be caused by what he calls the evil-eye or witchcraft. This man as witch and herb doctor visits monthly the South of this Island with his packages of chopped herbs, and m doing a roaring trade, not only amongst the labouring-classes, but he visits some very respectable farmers, and makes a nice thing out of his dups by selling his witch-curing and witch prevention herbs.

A married woman in Santon is also driving a paying trade in dispensing to ignorant and silly people her chop[p]ed herbs. Scarcely a day passes but what she has some customer for her curative herbs. I believe she claims some distant relationship with some of the late witch-doctors of the North of the Island.

—Yours obediently, ARGUS.

Pseud [signed as "Argus"], "[Letter to the Editor] To the Editor of the *Manx Sun*," *Manx Sun* 8 October 1887, 4g.

(2)

SIR,—In your last issue appeared a letter signed "Argus," in which a man at the north of the Island and a married woman in Santon were attacked, and their simple system of curing diseases—by the use of herbs—is called most pernicious. Before going further, let me ask—"Is 'Argus' one of the exceedingly juvenile doctors of Douglas?" If he is, permit me to tell him that some of the cures performed by these herb doctors simply put to shame the combined skill of all the licensed doctors put together. They have also this advantage,—they do not murder their patients with potent mineral poisons, or plant consumption in their blood by vaccinating them with the eggs of the Bacteria Bug, and then blaming their crime on intermarriage of relations, a thing almost unknown in the Isle of Man.

(2) None of the Manx herb doctors—that I am aware of—either sell herbs, or take payment for medical advice. If a person receives benefit from them, he is at perfect liberty to make them a present, and all the professional greed of M.D.'s cannot prevent it, however much it would like to do so. As they make no charge for their

skill or advise, and receive only what is given to them voluntarily, I fail to see either fraud or imposture, or their making of dupes.

(3) In regard to “Argus’s” charge of their pretending to cure witchcraft and the evil eye, I will ask him a plain question. If a man comes to a doctor, professing to be witched, and faithfully describes his symptoms, is the doctor to blame because he gives that man medicine that will cure his disease! What has the man’s notions to do with the matter? Is the doctor to blame because he sees the man suffering from nervous, or mental disease, and gives him herbs to cure him. The evil seems to be that the college doctors care jealous, and want a monopoly of making money out of suffering humanity.

(4) One matter in “Argus’s” letter amuses me, and shows his ignorance to perfection. He says “Mostly every body would be led to suppose that with the march of religion, education, and science, the belief in witchcraft and what is called ‘the evil-eye’ were things of the past” But it is not so. Can “Argus” have read the *Isle of Man Times* of October 1st? It contained about ten sermons. A worse exhibition of superstition and imposture I never read. Can superstition be dead when Father Walsh professes to be able to make holy water of sufficient power to drive the devil away from any place where he sprinkles it.... The fact is that both parsons and doctors want education. It is true, the herb doctors have never been coached through college, but they have acquired knowledge by transmission from father to son that it would be well for the boy doctors of Douglas to know and practice.

(5) In regard to witchcraft and the evil eye. If “Argus” disbelieves in their existence, he must throw up his Bible and renounce Christianity. Magic and sorcery are realities. The magi of Egypt, who stood before Pharaoh, were no impostors, as Moses found out, and as the mole-eyed ignorance of so-called Christian education will find out soon in our day. Moses made special laws against witchcraft, and sorcery, and necromancy. Would he have punished them with death, if they were merely impostures. I do not say that the ignorant country people are acquainted with the inner secrets of even necromancy, but in regard to the evil-eye. read Proverbs 23rd chapter 6 to 8 verse. It is not an imposture or superstition. Now for an exposure of doctor’s ignorance. There is a force in mankind called mesmerism, animal magnetism, statuvolence, and many other names. This power flows from certain individuals in a powerful manner. They are positive men. There are other persons who are susceptible to mesmeric powers—and even animals and birds can be acted on by it. There are laws by which this power can be concentrated on any person or thing, for good or evil, and God help any susceptible person who becomes the slave of any wicked man or woman’s mesmeric power, if through ignorance he does not know how to protect himself (true Christianity teaches the process). He may, indeed, be obsessed or witched, aye, by the power of the evil, covetous, magnetic eye. Only in the law of life can he be rescued, and his obsessor punished by turning his own evils on himself.

Now, the so-called fairy doctor knows that certain simple herbs, gathered and duly made apathetic to evil magnetisms, can, and do, afford relief in such cases by their tonic action on the nervous system. He gives the herbs, and good does often ensue from their use. Let it be perfectly understood there are impostors in this as in every thing else. I do not harmonise with those men and women who make up noxious herbs to do evil. Let those beware; a hidden rod hangs over them.

(6) By this “Argus” may see that the poor herb doctor may quite possibly know more about many of the mysterious nervous complaints that trouble humanity, and the cause of them, than a whole army of doctors, Bishops, and lawyers. The medical profession has not yet condescended to stoop from the pinnacle of its ignorance to acknowledge mesmerism, animal magnetism, or Statuviolence as worthy of a place in the *Materia Medica*. Strangely enough, our local doctors sometimes sign papers condemning men and women to a living death in the Asylum as having mental diseases of which they (the doctors) are very ignorant. It is a serious matter, and should be looked into. How many Manx doctors have a diploma for mental diseases. How many of them could tell mesmeric action from physical nerve disorder. Is there one? I sign my name to show that I am in earnest in what I have written. The mere fact of a herb doctor calling mesmeric force witchcraft, does not necessarily constitute him an impostor, or his practice as pernicious.—I am, Sir, yours truly,

Crosby, Marown.

W.C. LOCKERBY.

W.C. Lockerby, “[Letter to the Editor] Superstition—“The Evil Eye, &c.’
To the Editor of the *Manx Sun*,” *Manx Sun* 15 October 1887, 5e.

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