



## 7. The Power Doctors

Very different from the yarb doctors described above are healers of another type, who make no pretense to scientific knowledge but depend entirely upon charms, spells, prayers, amulets, exorcisms, and magic of one sort or another. These are the so-called "power doctors," backwoods specialists, each claiming to be endowed with supernatural power to cure certain specific ailments. They seldom attempt any general practice, and most of them take no money for their services, although they may accept and even demand valuable presents on occasion. Some of these people, usually old women, can cool fevers merely by the laying on of hands; others draw out the fire from burns by spitting or blowing upon the inflamed areas, while still others claim to heal more serious lesions by some similar hocus-pocus. One old lady who specializes in burns says that she always mutters a few words which she "l'arnt out'n the Book"—the Bible, that is—but refuses to tell me what particular text is used.

A gentleman near Crane, Missouri, has enjoyed a great success in relieving the pain from superficial burns. He just blows gently upon the burned place, touches it with his finger tips, and whispers a little prayer. The prayer may be told to persons of the other sex, but never imparted to one of the same sex. This man said he had learned the magic from Mrs. Molly Maxwell, an old woman who lived in Galena, Missouri. Since he could not tell me, I asked a young woman to get the secret words from him. This is what she heard:

One little Indian, two little Indians,  
One named East, one named West,

The Son and the Father and the Holy Ghost,  
In goes the frost, out comes the fire,  
Ask it all in Jesus' name, Amen.

In teaching this prayer to a member of the opposite sex, the healer said, one should whisper it three times and no more. If a person cannot learn the prayer after hearing three repetitions, I was told, "he aint fit to draw out fire nohow!"

Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, of Springfield, Missouri, knows how to "draw out fire" from a burn. She learned it from Harry N. Force, an old-time druggist who spent many years in Cotter, Arkansas. You just mutter: "Two little angels come from Heaven, one brought fire and the other brought frost, go out fire and come in frost." As you say the last word you blow gently on the burn. This "sayin'" is supposed to be a great secret and must be learned from a member of the opposite sex.

I met an old-time healer near Gainesville, Missouri, who cured sores, sprains, and bruises in this way: he laid his right hand on the wounded place, and his left hand on a corresponding part of his own body. Then he shivered for a moment, threw back his head, and muttered some gibberish under his breath. Many people declared themselves benefited by this treatment. I asked the old man if the magic words were from the Bible. "No, they *shore* aint!" said he.

There used to be a woman at West Plains, Missouri, who had a great reputation as a "blood stopper." A wounded man was brought to her home in a wagon. The whole wagon bed seemed to be covered with blood, and the man's friends were unable to stop the bleeding from two deep knife cuts. The woman looked at the patient, then walked out to the barn alone, with a Bible under her arm. In about three minutes the bleeding stopped, and the healer returned to her house. She would take no money for "blood stopping," and she would not discuss the method. She was not a religious woman, and rarely looked at the Bible except when she was asked to stop the flow of blood. The old woman confided to a friend that she had already imparted the

secret to three persons, and that if she ever told a fourth the "power" would be taken from her.

"About this blood-stopping charm, it really works," wrote Otto Ernest Rayburn, of Eureka Springs, Arkansas. "We had a neighbor at Caddo Gap, who could do it. Our eleven-year-old son had a severe case of bleeding, and we were unable to stop it by ordinary methods. We told our neighbor and he asked the boy's full name, then went out into the yard and repeated a few words—we couldn't hear them. And lo and behold, the bleeding stopped! I do not know how to explain such things, but they *do* happen." Later on Rayburn reports his encounter with another power doctor who stops bleeding; this man "repeats a certain verse from the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. He walks toward the East while repeating the lines. . . . A man who has the power may tell the secret to three women; a woman may tell three men. Some think they will lose the power if they tell the secret to the third person."

Mrs. Anna L. Coffman, of Marshfield, Missouri, says that to stop bleeding you repeat the sixth verse, sixteenth chapter, of Ezekiel: "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."

Mrs. Callie Brake, Seymour, Missouri, used the same verse, adding: "You call the person by name and the wound by name and walk toward the sunrise repeating God's Word and the bleeding will stop. My daddy always kept that chapter at hand so he could find it right quick. He would read it if we cut ourselves dangerously and the great God of Israel would stop the bleeding. There is no 'charm' about this stopping blood, it is God's own words."<sup>1</sup>

Another old woman, perhaps the best blood stopper in McDonald county, Missouri, simply held up both hands and cried:

Upon Christ's grave three roses bloom,  
Stop, blood, stop!

<sup>1</sup> Springfield (Missouri) *News*, July 29, 1940.

An old gentleman who told a girl reporter the secret of blood stopping cautioned her never to write it down or publish it, as in that case the charm would lose its efficacy. Several blood stoppers tell me that the secret can only be passed to a person of the opposite sex, and one said that he could tell it to three persons, and no more. He had already told two women, and was saving the third telling for his little granddaughter.

In a letter to Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, written by Mrs. M. R. Smith, Marionville, Missouri, dated March 7, 1941, Mrs. Smith says :

Speaking of stopping blood, I can do it. I have on several occasions. My mother had cancer of the face, and it would bleed till she would almost pass on. So my brother-in-law told us about an old man in the neighborhood who could stop blood, and all he needed was to be *told*—did not have to see the person. So we sent him word one day and the blood just stopped, all at once. Why or how you will have to decide for yourself, but it did stop. So my mother wanted that I should learn how, and this old man taught me, and I stopped my mother's face bleeding many times. Last time I tried it I stopped my son-in-law's throat bleeding when he had his tonsils taken out and they started bleeding after he had worked too hard and got too warm. So between me and my God, it *will work*. I can tell only one more person, and that takes the charm away. A woman tells a man, who is not a blood relative, and a man tells a woman, who is not a blood relative. Can only tell three, and the third one takes the charm.

An old man in Joplin, Missouri, told me that perhaps "all that Bible stuff" was necessary to stop serious hemorrhage, as when somebody had cut his throat, but an ordinary nosebleed could easily be "chipped off" without any religious monkey business. You just catch a number of drops of the blood on a chip—one drop for each year of the patient's life. Put the chip with the blood on it in a dry, safe place—on a high rafter, for example, or seal it up in a dry glass jar. As long as the chip is not disturbed, the nose will not bleed.

If a patient is suffering from a deep cut or knife thrust, some power doctors burn the sole of his shoe and apply the ashes to

the wound. This is said to stop bleeding and make the cut heal without "blood poisoning." If the cut is on the right side of the body, the right shoe is burned; if the left side of the body is injured, the healer burns the left shoe. In case a man received a knife wound in the exact center of his chest, I don't know just what the power doctor would do; I asked one backwoods healer about this, but he smiled thinly and made no reply.

One hillman of my acquaintance treats boils, ulcers, and the like in this wise: he reaches behind him, picks up a stone without looking at it, and spits upon it. Stirring the saliva about with his finger, he repeats the words:

What I see increase,  
What I rub decrease,

and with that he rubs a little on the growth, which is supposed to disappear in a week or so. All this must be done, however, when the moon is waning; if it should be attempted before the full moon the sore would grow larger and larger instead of wasting away.

One way to cure boils, according to an old neighbor, is to rub a greasy string on a rusty nail and then throw the nail away where it will not be found. Hang the string on the inside of the cabin door, and touch the boil with the string several times a day.

A woman in Stone county, Missouri, is known far and wide as a healer of goiters, boils, carbuncles, tumors, open sores, and even skin cancers—though she says modestly that she can't cure the latter unless she gets them in the early stages. She uses no drugs nor herbs, just makes a few magic passes and mutters some secret old sayin's, supposed to be adapted from the Bible. She says she is "not allowed" to tell how it's done; the secret is handed down in the family; her mother was a healer and "blessed her with it"; she intends to pass the knowledge on to one of her own daughters before she dies. This woman makes no charge for her services, but if somebody offers her a present, such as a

new dress or a side of bacon, she seldom refuses the gift. It is said that those who do not reward her liberally always come to some misfortune shortly afterward. She must know the name of the disease before she can treat it; therefore many of her patients go to the local M.D. for diagnosis and ask him to write the medical name of their ailment down on a piece of paper. The whole business is very hush-hush for some reason. I lived next door to this woman for several months before I learned that she was a power doctor.

Warts are common enough in the Ozarks, but it is surprising that so many of these folk remedies should refer exclusively to warts. Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, Springfield, Missouri, has collected and written down 125 wart cures. There is a high degree of specialization in these matters, too. I once visited a renowned wart witch and showed her an infected tick bite on my ankle. "I'm the best wart taker in this country," she said, "but that thing on your leg aint no wart—it's a *risin'*. I don't never monkey with risin's. You better go to town an' git Doc Holton to lance it for ye."

John Proctor Gentry, in Springfield, Missouri, assured me that he could "conjure" warts. He refused to tell me how it was done, but Mrs. Gentry says he just touches the wart and mutters something which begins "hocus-pocus" and ends in "unintelligible gibberish."

Mr. Rube Cummins, of Day, Missouri, eighty-five years old, tells me that he has been curing warts in the neighborhood since he was a boy. "I just tetch 'em, an' then I say a little *ceremony* to myself. I don't never tell nobody what the *ceremony* is." Asked if the ceremony was something out of the Bible, he said emphatically that it was not.

There used to be a wart witch at Seneca, Missouri, who tied a string around the wart, muttered a few words under her breath, and pulled the string off with a great flourish. Then she presented the string to the patient and told him to bury it in the ground where nobody could find it. If the string lay un-

disturbed for nine days and nights, she said, the wart would soon shrivel and gradually disappear.

Another old-timer tells me that it is only necessary to tie a woolen string around the wart, then spit on the wart and rub it with the finger tip. This done, remove the string and burn it secretly.

Warts may be disposed of by hiring some boy to "take them off your hands"—two or three more warts don't matter to a chap who has a dozen or so already. Just give the boy a penny or a nickel for each wart, and they will pass from you to him as soon as he spends the money.

Some specialists go through a kind of wart-buying ceremony, but no money actually changes hands. You show the man your wart, and he says: "Want to sell it?" You answer "Yes, sir." Whereupon the wart taker produces a big safety pin with many buttons strung on it. He selects one of these and hands it to you saying: "Carry that there button in your pocket till the wart's gone. Hit's mine now, 'cause I done bought an' paid for it."

Another way to "pass" a wart is to spit on it, rub a bit of paper in the spittle, fold the paper, and drop it in the road; the wart is supposed to pass to the first person who picks up the paper and unfolds it. Children are always trying this, and one can find these little folded papers in the road near most any rural schoolhouse.

Some hillfolk prefer to lose their warts at a crossroad, or better still at a place where the road forks three ways. Take a grain of corn for each wart and place each grain in the road under a small thin stone. The warts will be taken over by the person or animal that moves the stones and uncovers the grains of corn.

Or you may put as many pebbles as you have warts in a paper bag, walk down the road alone and throw the whole thing backward over your right shoulder. Whoever picks up the bag and counts the stones will fall heir to the warts.

One old lady who has cured warts for a large family says

that she just lets 'em alone until she happens to dream of a man, then seeks this fellow out and induces him to spit some tobacco juice on a penny; after rubbing the warts with the penny she gives it to the man, and as soon as he spends the coin the warts drop off. I asked her if the warts "passed" to the men who spit on the coins. She looked a bit disturbed by this query but answered stoutly that she "never had no complaints."

The exact number of warts is important in some of these ceremonies. When a hillman tries to remove warts by applying stump water he repeats this formula:

Stump water, stump water,  
Kill these —— warts!

The dash represents the number of warts that the patient has, and it is essential to state this number correctly. If a man says *six* when he has only five warts, the warts will not be cured, and another one will appear in a few days.

An old man near Bentonville, Arkansas, had quite a local reputation as a wart specialist, though he made no secret of his method, and said that anybody could perform similar cures if they only "knowed how." He told me that he just fastened a bit of cloth to the wart, blindfolded the "warty feller," and turned him around seven times; then he buried the cloth in the ground, and very seldom did the wart last more than three or four days thereafter.

One school of wart catchers place their trust in dirty dishrags, and some healers say that they require *stolen* dishrags. After touching each wart with the rag, one either buries it secretly in the earth or hides it under a flat rock, being careful to replace the rock in exactly the position in which it was found. Sometimes the patient is told that the wart will disappear in three days, or seven days, or nine days, or twelve days. More conservative practitioners say rather that as the dishrag decomposes, the wart will grow smaller and finally disappear. A



variation of this procedure is to steal a dishrag and burn it secretly, then rub the ashes on your warts, and rest assured that they will soon be gone. But it is essential to avoid telling anybody that you have done this, else the warts are likely to come back.

An old man in Pineville, Missouri, told me as a great secret that he could cure any wart by squeezing a drop of blood out of it on a grain of corn and feeding the corn to a red rooster. According to another version of this story, it is best to rub the wart with two grains of corn, feed one to the rooster, and carry the other in your pocket. When you lose the grain from your pocket, the wart will be gone. The losing must be accidental, but that is not difficult; most cabins are full of rodents, and a grain of corn in the pocket of one's overalls will soon "turn up missin'."

Another "sleight" for getting rid of a wart is merely to prick it with a thorn until it bleeds, then throw the thorn over the left shoulder and walk away without looking back.

If the weather conditions are favorable, one has only to hold a hailstone against his warts; as soon as the hailstone melts, the warts will crumble and fall away. If no hailstone is at hand, just wet your finger and mark a circle about the wart, and then make sure that your hand doesn't get wet again for twenty-four hours. A schoolteacher in Barry county, Missouri, believes that the best way to get rid of warts is to rub them with a green bean leaf until each wart looks green and then go to bed without washing your hands. Another common theory is that it is only necessary to touch a wart with nine beans and then throw the beans one at a time over the right shoulder. Or cut a small potato in two equal parts, and rub the wart with *the same half* for three mornings in succession. Or you may just rub the wart with a piece of onion, then throw the onion backward over your right shoulder and walk away without looking back. Another school contends that it is best to touch your

wart with a whole red onion; then you cut the onion in two, eat half of it and bury the other half; when the buried part decays, the wart will disappear.

The stick-notching treatment used for many other ailments is also adapted to the removal of warts. A little boy near Hot Springs, Arkansas, showed me a green switch with four notches in it, tied to the end of an old wooden gutter; each notch represents a wart, he said, and as the water rushes over the notches, it gradually dissolves away the warts.

Other hillfolk say that it is best to use an elderberry stick, and to cut the notch carefully so that it just fits over the wart to be cured. Then bury the stick on the north side of the cabin and never mention it to a living soul.

A prominent Arkansas lawyer tells me that in his boyhood the essential thing was to cut big notches in a stranger's apple tree with a stolen knife, one notch for each wart to be removed. This was quite an undertaking, for knives were highly prized and hence difficult to steal. Even more serious was the fact that the people in the neighborhood were all acquainted, so that a boy had to travel a considerable distance before he could find a stranger's apple tree.

Some hillfolk say you can remove warts simply by spitting on a hot stovetid—one expectoration for each wart. Another method favored in some quarters is to get up exactly at midnight and make faces at yourself in a mirror; if you do this on three successive nights your warts will disappear within a fortnight. Dr. W. O. Cralle was told in Taney county, Missouri, that the best way to cure warts is to smother a mole and hold the dead animal above your head for a moment.

I know several healers in McDonald county, Missouri, who pretend to do the job by letting a big grasshopper or katydid bite the wart. They just hold the critter's head up to the wart, and he'll bite it all right. It is painful for the moment, but they tell me that the wart soon dries up and falls away.

A group of old-timers in Phelps county, Missouri, contend

that the best way to dispose of warts is to carry a black cat, freshly killed, into a graveyard at night. Some say that the dead cat must be placed on the grave of a person buried the same day, and if this person has led a wicked life, so much the better.

Or one may kill a toad, rub its intestines on the wart, then bury the entrails under a stone. All this must be kept secret, otherwise it won't work. The boy who acquainted me with this method still had several large warts; when I asked why the toad's guts hadn't cured them, he explained that he had told his mother what he was doing, in order to escape punishment for killing the toad. The mother was opposed to killing toads in the dooryard; she said it was an unlucky and senseless practice and might make the cows give bloody milk.

At the funeral of a close friend, a "warty feller" is supposed to touch his warts and repeat the following jingle:

They are ringing the funeral bell,  
What I now grasp will soon be well,  
What ill I have do take away  
Like —— in the grave does lay.

This is believed to benefit tumors, sores, boils, and even cancers as well as warts.

There is a widespread belief that warts can be "charmed off" by touching them with the hand of a corpse. I have seen this tried several times. The warts disappeared after a while, just as they generally do under any other treatment, or with no treatment at all. On the other side of the balance, I have met an undertaker who handles many bodies every year, and both his hands are covered with warts!

Ringworms are no trouble to an old-fashioned power doctor. He just draws a life-sized picture of the ringworm in the soot on the bottom of a mush pot and burns off the picture in the presence of the patient. I was once in a cabin where this was being done, and the "doctor" himself described it to me a few

minutes later, but they would not let me witness the treatment because my unbelieving gaze might somehow spoil the charm. I came back two weeks later to see the ringworm and found that it had almost disappeared.

Otto Ernest Rayburn reports a variation of this method of curing a ringworm. "Go to a tea kettle of boiling water," he writes, "rub your thumb in a circle the size of the ringworm on the inside of the lid, and then around the ringworm. Do the same with the forefinger, then with the thumb again. Do this with all the fingers on that hand, alternating each time with the thumb. When through, go away and do not look back at the tea kettle."<sup>2</sup>

Many healers can cure a sore or a boil by drawing a circle around it with a burnt stick, and marking a cross in the middle of it. Others do the job by sprinkling a little line of dust to form the circle and the cross. Some people charm off a corn by spitting on the forefinger of the left hand and marking a cross on the corn three times. Sometimes they mutter something as they do this, but what magic phrase they use I do not know.

A family near Noel, Missouri, has inherited an "old sayin'" which is guaranteed to cure boils, old sores, pimples, and even blood poisoning. Just cross your hands behind your back and repeat three times: "Bozz bozzer, mozz mozzer, kozz kozzer!" The old woman who told me this said that originally her kin-folk knew what the words meant, and they were supposed to be Dutch. But somewhere along the line, an ancestor of hers got the idea that the meaning must be kept secret, and therefore died without revealing it. "And now," said the old woman, "there aint nobody livin' that knows, 'less'n it would be in one o' them Dutch countries across the water!"

The best way to cure a bunion is to rub it three times with a stone and repeat: "Bunion, bunion, if you be one, leave my foot and take to this stone." Then bury the stone in the dust of a

<sup>2</sup> *Ozark Country*, p. 259.

main-traveled road, not too deep. As soon as the dust is washed away by rain, or blown away by wind, or worn away by traffic, so that the stone is fully exposed, your bunion will disappear. An old man at Harrison, Arkansas, told me that this might work, all right, but that he had cured his own bunions simply by turning his shoes upside down every night.

For a pain in the side, pick up a flat rock, spit under it, and put the rock back exactly where you found it. Some say you must walk away without looking back; if you ever see that rock again and recognize it, the sideache will return.

A persistent headache may be "conjured off" by putting a lock of one's hair under a stone and not mentioning either the hair or the treatment for seven days. I met a witch doctor in Little Rock, Arkansas, who cured headaches and eyestrain simply by writing MOTTER FOTTER on a piece of paper and letting the patient burn the paper in the presence of three witnesses. For a "misery in the back" a friend of mine just waits till he hears the first whippoorwill call in the evening, then lies down on the ground and rolls over three times. To remove a "j'int felon" one goes out on a cold night, draws a deep breath, and runs seven times round the house without exhaling. It's a good trick if you can do it.

I have been told that a bath in a flowing stream before day-break on Easter morning will relieve the most stubborn case of rheumatism, but none of my neighbors have ever tried this remedy, so far as I can find out.

To cure malaria, chills, fever, and ague all you need is a hickory peg about a foot long. Drive it into the ground in some secluded place, where you can visit it unseen. Do not tell anyone about this business. Go there every day, pull up the peg, blow seven times into the hole, and replace the peg. After you have done this for twelve successive days, drive the peg deep into the earth so that it cannot be seen, and leave it there. You'll have no more chills and fever that season. If the cure doesn't work, it means that you have been seen blowing into the hole,

or that you have inadvertently mentioned it to somebody.

Here is another way to cure chills: take a piece of silk thread, tie a knot for each chill that the patient has had, and bury the string under the drip from the roof of a barn. This must be done secretly, and the healer must not be a blood relative of the patient, or of the same sex. If the patient has another chill after the string is buried, somebody must dig it up and tie another knot. Some healers make a great show of using a silk string for infants but claim that a piece of woolen yarn is better for grown-ups. Others tie the knotted string around a persimmon tree, instead of burying it.

"Tying off chills" was still practiced in Christian county, Missouri, as late as 1934. You take a string and measure the patient's girth at the chest, then go into the woods alone, never looking back, and find a tree of exactly the same measurement. First tying one knot in the string for each chill that the patient has had, you fasten the string about the tree at the height of the patient's chest. Do not look back at the string after it is tied around the tree, and do not tell anybody about the matter until you are sure that the patient has fully recovered.

If a child does not grow fast enough, back him up against a tree and cut a notch in the bark, on a level with the top of his head. Put some of the child's hair in the notch. On two occasions I have seen this tried, and one of the children *did* appear to grow very rapidly thereafter.

Three drops of cat's blood, in a jigger of whiskey, is said to cure malarial fever quite as well as any of this complicated tree magic, but the patient mustn't know that there's anything unusual in the whiskey, or it won't work. Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, of Springfield, Missouri, says that some people gather dirt from the nest of a mockingbird that is setting on three eggs—no more, no less. They dissolve this dirt in lukewarm water for a gargle, which is supposed to relieve any sort of throat trouble.

To cure asthma, bore a hole in a black-oak tree, at the height

of the patient's head. Drive a little wooden peg into the hole, so as to hold a lock of his hair. Cut the hair and peg off flush with the trunk. When the bark grows over the hole so that the peg is no longer visible, and the patient's hair grows out to replace the missing lock, the asthma will be gone forever.

Otto Ernest Rayburn reports a case in which asthma was cured by tying a live frog on the patient's throat. The frog "completely absorbed the disease" and was left in position until it died.<sup>3</sup> Rayburn says also that some hillfolk treat asthma by killing a steer, cutting it open and thrusting the patient's bare feet into the warm body cavity, and keeping them there until the entrails cool.

What the hillman calls "sun pain" is a terrible headache which lasts all day but doesn't keep the patient awake at night. It must be some sort of sinus trouble, which is relieved in the prone position. Sometimes the pain persists for many days and is so severe that the country m.d.'s, usually conservative in prescribing narcotics, administer large doses of morphine or codein. Mrs. Coral Almy Wilson, of Zinc, Arkansas, tells me that people in her neighborhood treat sun pain by bathing their heads in a stream which flows toward the east. The old-timers used to stir up a certain kind of fungi or green mold and "breathe the stink" in nine deep inhalations, on nine successive days; this was supposed to relieve head catarrh, which we call sinusitis nowadays.

The body of a buzzard is somehow used to treat cancer, but this must be done secretly, for the killing of a buzzard means seven years of crop failure for the whole countryside, and the man who shoots one of these birds is naturally unpopular. Dr. Oakley St. John, of Pineville, Missouri, tells me that a farmer who killed a buzzard some years ago, to treat his daughter's cancer, so enraged his neighbors that they threatened him with bodily harm, and several people came into town to see if he could not be punished by the county officers.

<sup>3</sup> *Ozark Country*, p. 256.

I have copied the following *literatim* from an old letter, dated 1869, belonging to Miss Jewell Perriman, Jenkins, Missouri.

A RESEPT TO CURE CANCERS

Git up soon and dont speak tell you git to a bush and ef hit is a post oak or aney othor kinde of oak you must say Good morning Mr post oak and then say Good morning Sir then say I have came to git you to cure a cancer on my ———. And take your rite hand and brake off a lim and then turn your back to the bush and thro the lim over your left sholder and don't look back. . . . And you must go before sun up and not speak tell you git to the bush.

Any posthumous child can cure the croup simply by blowing in the patient's mouth; one of my neighbors happened to be born several weeks after his father's death, and although he ridicules the healing power himself, he is frequently called out of his bed at night by distracted parents who want him to save their children. The same treatment is used for sore mouth in babies, a white, cotton-like eruption which is called thrash or thresh.

In certain backwoods settlements in Arkansas it is believed that all one need do to cure thrash is to have a preacher blow in the child's mouth. A preacher I know tells me he has done this hundreds of times, although he has little faith in the remedy. "They git well, all right," he said, "but I can't see as they git well any quicker'n them which I *don't* blow in their mouth. But there aint no harm in it, an' I aim to 'commodate folks whenever I can."

Some power doctors cure thrash without blowing into the child's mouth; they even profess to do it at a great distance, by mail or over the telephone. But it appears that the healer always wants to know the child's full name. In one case the baby's name had not been fully decided upon, but the man would do nothing about the thrash until the baby's parents had agreed about the name. A granny-woman of my acquaintance must have not only the full name but also the date of the child's birth: she goes outdoors and repeats the magic words three



mornings in succession, before sunup, and the thrash is gone. She would not tell me the formula, but said that it had nothing to do with the Bible, and that God was not mentioned in it.

Dr. W. O. Cralle tells of a woman at Theodosia, Missouri, who treated thrash by holding the child extended in her arms while she repeated: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I command you to leave this child's mouth and enter the mouth of some dumb beast!"

An old woman in Washington county, Arkansas, told me that all these spells and charms are "just ignorant foolishment," adding that she had reared eleven children and never had any difficulty in keepin' 'em clear o' thresh. "An' no monkey business, neither. All I ever done was to make 'em drink rain water out of an old shoe. The only thing is, you got to make *sure* that the shoe aint never been wore by any o' the baby's kinfolks."

A granny-woman in the Cookson Hill country of eastern Oklahoma treated thrash simply by putting crushed green oak leaves in the child's mouth every three hours, and the babes in her charge recovered about as quickly as those submitted to supernatural spells. If no green leaves were handy, she used sage tea, with some honey and a little alum in it, which seemed to work about as well as the oak leaves.

There is no excuse for a properly reared mountain baby ever having thrash anyhow, since it can be prevented by carrying the newborn babe to a small hole in the wall or chinking and allowing the sunlight which streams through to enter the child's mouth.

A woman at Noel, Missouri, told me that an old charm to kill intestinal worms had been passed down in her family for at least three generations. All you have to do is look the patient in the eye, cross your fingers behind your back and say:

God's mother Mary walked the land,  
She held three worms all in her hand,  
One white, one black, an' t'other'n red,  
For Jesus' sake the worms are dead!

Trachoma is very common in the Ozark country, and there are many superstitions about sore eyes, granulated lids, and other "eye troubles." The tail of a black cat, drawn across the eye every day, is the prime remedy for granulated eyelids; some healers even claim to have cured cataract with this simple remedy, reinforced by a few "old sayin's." In treating what is known as a sty, it is necessary to cut the end of the cat's tail a bit and apply a few drops of the blood to the sty itself, repeating this performance daily until relief is obtained. Another method is for the sufferer to go alone to a crossroads, exactly at midnight in the dark of the moon, and cry:

Sty, sty, leave my eye,  
Go to the next feller passin' by!

Certain minor eye troubles are treated with a weed called eyebright, but I have not been able to learn just how this plant is used. If a baby's eyes are sore, the mother's milk is regarded as the best possible lotion. Sassafras tea, not too strong, is also regarded as a good eye wash. Young girls often rub sweet cream into their eyes, but I am not sure if this is a medicine or a cosmetic.

The hillfolk try to avoid looking directly at a person who has sore eyes, fearing that their own eyes may be affected. They do not realize that trachoma is infectious, however, and use towels, wash basins, and the like without any fear of contracting the disease. I have heard a highschool teacher insist that girls with "pinkeye" should wear colored glasses, not for the sake of their own eyes, but to keep other students from catching the disease. When the schools at Blue Eye, Missouri, were closed because of an epidemic of pinkeye the fact was mentioned by newspapers all over the country. The citizens of Blue Eye were not pleased, since they think pinkeye is caused by uncleanness.

A girl from Cape Fair, Missouri, once told me that a woman can peel or cut up raw onions without making her eyes smart,

simply by holding a needle in her mouth while she does the job. And in other backwoods towns I have heard that a needle in the mouth is generally believed to be good for sore or watery eyes, no matter what the cause of the irritation. Akin to this perhaps is the idea that an object held in the mouth somehow affects the inner ear and the organs of equilibrium. A sober and educated woman, the wife of a preacher in Yell county, Arkansas, told me that she could never walk a certain difficult footlog until some "peckerwood gals" showed her how. "All you have to do," she told me, "is to hold a little stick crosswise in your mouth!"

I have known old people who went to a great deal of trouble to obtain pieces of hornets' nests, which they used to wipe their spectacles. Not only does this stuff clean the lenses better than the finest cloth or paper, they say, but it is somehow good for sore and tired eyes.

Many backwoods people believe that a man with weak eyes should always grow a mustache, as hair on the upper lip strengthens the eyes. One man told me that when one of his eyes was injured, the pain in his upper lip was worse than that in the eye itself, so that it was quite impossible for him to shave the upper lip for several weeks.

Wearing a green ring is good for people who have weak or defective eyesight. I once met a blind street singer in Little Rock, Arkansas, who wore two rings with large green stones in them. Asked if he expected these rings to restore his sight, he said "No, but I got the damn' things before I went blind, figgerin' they might strengthen my eyes. It didn't do me no good, but I got 'em, so I might as well wear 'em."

Piercing the ears is supposed to prevent or cure certain types of eye disease. Even little boys' ears are sometimes pierced for this reason, although I have never seen an Ozark boy wearing earrings. It is said that the child who can spit on a lightning bug in full flight will enjoy good vision all his life.

When a foreign body gets into the eye, just press a big white button against the eyelid and wink repeatedly; the object which

is causing the trouble will pass out through one of the holes in the button. Near Day, Missouri, a small boy got some sawdust in his eye. A friend cut a small pearl button off his shirt, washed it carefully, and somehow placed it *under* the boy's eyelid. I was told that the poor chap walked about for several minutes, with the big bulge in his eyelid plainly visible. It must have been terribly painful, but he stuck with it until the tears washed the sawdust away.

I have heard some talk in Searcy county, Arkansas, of an eyestone. This thing is said to work like a madstone, except that it is very small, no larger than a BB shot. One man told me that he had seen several of these eyestones, and that they looked like opals. You just wet the stone and slip it under the eyelid; in a few minutes it is supposed to draw any foreign substance out of the eye.

The madstone treatment for rabies was once popular in many parts of the United States and is still well known in the Ozarks. The madstones I have seen are porous and resemble some sort of volcanic ash, but the natives all claim that they were taken from the entrails of deer. These stones are rare now, and they are handed down from father to son, never sold. No charge is made for using the stone, although the patient may make the owner a present if he likes. I have never seen the madstone in actual use, but they tell me that if the dog was really mad the stone sticks fast to the wound and draws the "pizen" out. After awhile the stone falls off, and is placed in a vessel of warm milk, which immediately turns green. The stone is then applied to the wound again, and so on until it no longer imparts a green color to the fresh milk. Virtually every old-time hillman believes that if the madstone is applied soon enough and sticks properly, the patient will never suffer from rabies, even if the dog was mad.

J. J. Hibler, veteran real-estate dealer in Springfield, Missouri, kept a madstone in his office for many years; it was famous in the nineties, and people came from all over southwest Missouri to use it.

Homer Davis, of Monett, Missouri, used to have a madstone, shaped like a half-moon. The old-timers say that it was always dipped in hot milk before applying it to a wound. It was a porous stone, said to have been taken from the stomach of an albino deer more than seventy-five years ago.

Many old people allege that the madstone in a deer is always found in the stomach, while others place it in the intestines or the bladder, or in the udder of a doe, or even "betwixt the wind-pipe and the lights." Uncle Lum Booth, of Taney county, Missouri, who had given the matter considerable thought, said that so long as the deer was *white* it made no difference in what part of the body the stone appeared.

Even in Kansas City, Missouri, madstones were still in use as late as 1931, according to the *Kansas City Journal-Post*, Aug. 4, 1935. A stone belonging to Mr. Noel E. Jackson, aged pioneer, is said to have been brought from Scotland in the early days by a man named Bates. It looks like whitish limestone, about an inch and a half long, with a sort of honeycomb structure; it has the appearance of a fossil, though Mr. Jackson thinks it came from the stomach of a deer. He says he has seen this stone used hundreds of times and has never known it to fail. He has never charged a cent for the use of it. In 1931 Mr. S. T. Dailey of Strasburg, Missouri, was bitten by a rabid mule. The stone adhered to Dailey's wound for nine hours. Jackson says the stone is often applied to the same patient several times. In the case of a little girl from Independence, Missouri, it stuck for fifty-five minutes and then fell off. Jackson cleaned the thing in sweet milk, dried it carefully, and two days later he applied it again. This second time the stone adhered for thirty-five minutes. Several days later it was tried again, but failed to stick at all, which the neighbors regarded as evidence that the child was safe from rabies.

Miss Naomi Clarke, of Winslow, Arkansas, writes me that madstones are applied to the bites of poisonous snakes as well as dog bites in her neighborhood. I have seen nothing of this

myself and have so far been unable to learn anything definite about it.

"A hair of the dog that bit you," in the Ozarks, does not mean simply a morning shot of whiskey to repair a hangover. People actually do swallow hair from a dog that has bitten them. I once knew a man who was in some doubt as to which of two dogs had bitten his little girl; finally he killed both of the animals, and forced the child to eat a few hairs from each dog's tail. This man would not admit that he believed such a procedure would prevent rabies. He said that the dogs ought to be killed anyhow, and that the business of swallowing the hairs was a very old custom, and there *might* be something in it.

The idea that rabies is especially prevalent during the "dog days" of late summer, under the influence of Sirius the dog star, is pretty well exploded in most sections of the United States. But it is still widely accepted in the Ozarks, and I am told that some towns, in both Missouri and Arkansas, have passed ordinances forcing the citizens to confine their dogs at this season. Many hillfolk believe that it is dangerous to go swimming in "dog days," especially if one has cuts or open wounds in the skin, since the water is poisonous and may produce an infection akin to rabies. A lot of intelligent people in Sebastian county, Arkansas, are convinced that the green scum which appears on ponds in summer has something to do with rabies. "I know the doctors don't believe it," an old farmer told me, "but the doctors aint *always* right."

Some woodcutters who live on Sugar Creek, in Benton county, Arkansas, believe that a mad dog never bites a man who carries a piece of dogwood in his pocket, according to an old gentleman I met in Bentonville. "The folks up that way are all damn' fools, though," he added thoughtfully, "an' maybe there aint nothing to it." Another Benton county man told me that sensible people are seldom bitten by rabid dogs anyhow. "If you just hold your breath," said he, "a dog caint bite you, whether he's mad or not."

To stop a toothache, one has only to walk into the woods with a friend of the opposite sex, not a blood relation. Stand up against the biggest ironwood tree you can find, while your friend drives a little wooden peg into the tree at the exact height of the aching tooth. I have seen many of these "toothache pegs," and when I pulled one out invariably found some brown gummy substance in the hole. But people who do this trick tell me that the peg is perfectly clean when it is driven into the tree. To check this matter I drove some pegs into an ironwood tree myself, without any toothache or magical mumbo jumbo; I pulled these out later, at intervals varying from a few weeks to a year, but never found any gummy stuff on *my* pegs. There may be more to this toothache-peg business than I have been told, but I am setting down such information as I have, for the sake of the record.

Another way to cure toothache is to find the skeleton of a horse or mule. Be sure that nobody is watching you. Pick up the jawbone with your teeth and walk backward nine steps, being careful not to touch the thing with your hands, and then let it fall to the ground. This done, walk away without looking back, and do not mention the matter to anybody. If the pain doesn't stop within thirty minutes or so, it means that somebody *did* see you with the mule's jaw in your mouth. In that case, the only thing you can do is to hunt up another skeleton and go through the whole business again.

A man in McDonald county, Missouri, showed me a big tooth fastened to a leathern string, hanging over the fireplace. "That there," he said solemnly, "is the blind tooth of a big boar hog. Whenever one o' the childern gits the toothache, I make 'em wear that tooth round their neck till the ache's plumb gone." The blind tooth, I found out later, is the hindmost upper molar, but why this particular tooth is required for a cure I do not know. A boar's tusk, which is the canine or eye-tooth, carried in the pocket is said to relieve toothache. If the aching tooth is on the right side, carry the tusk in the right-hand pocket; if on

the left, carry it in the left-hand pocket. The tusk treatment serves a double purpose, since the carrying of a boar's tusk is also believed to protect the carrier against venereal disease.

Some people believe that a man who always puts his left shoe on first will never have a toothache; it appears that most men put on the right shoe before the left. I know several families who always keep a supply of toothpicks made from a lightning'-struck tree; the use of these splinters is believed to stop the teeth from aching, and prevent decay. The hillfolk sometimes deaden an aching tooth by filling the cavity with gunpowder—they say it's very painful for a minute or so, and then the tooth feels fine for several hours. Aunt Mary Johnson, of Theodosia, Missouri, is quoted as saying that the best plug for a holler tooth is a bit of wax from the patient's ear. Another method of treating toothache is to tie knots in a string, one knot for every tooth which *doesn't* ache. If all else fails, the tooth is extracted, either by a regular dentist or an old-time "tooth jumper" who does the job with a specially made punch and mallet.

Some say that it is good luck to place one of your own teeth under your pillow at night—this is supposed to prevent further dental decay. But to lose such a tooth, or have it fall into the hands of an unfriendly person, may bring disaster to the whole family.

To make teething easier, backwoods babies often wear necklaces of elder twigs, cut into short sections and dyed brown; a woman told me that the twigs were brown because they had been boiled in possum grease, but it looked more like walnut stain to me. A silver coin hung round the child's neck is said to help in cutting teeth. Some people think that a string of dried berries is better for teething babies, and that a necklace made of Job's-tears is best of all. Job's-tears are the seeds of *Coix lachryma* and used to be sold in country drugstores.

In some parts of Arkansas, when a babe has a hard time in cutting its teeth, they kill a rabbit and rub the fresh brains on the child's gums. Another way to make teeth come easier is to



give the child a mole's foot to play with. The old tradition is that it should be the left hind foot, but the big fleshy front paws are the only ones I have actually seen given to babies. I have heard hillfolk say that the best thing for a teething baby is to put butterfly eggs on its throat, but am not sure that this is meant to be taken literally.

Parents sometimes collect a child's milk teeth as they are shed and bury each one separately under a stone; they believe that this will prevent dental decay in later life. "Whatever you do," an old woman told me, "don't *never* leave a child's baby tooth lay around where the hogs can git at it. If a hog swallows one o' them teeth, a great big *tush* will grow in its place!" When a child's tooth is extracted, he is told that a fine new gold tooth will replace it within a week, provided that he refrains in the meantime from probing the cavity with his tongue.

A bright new dime, placed inside the upper lip in front of the teeth, will often cure bleeding gums or even stop nosebleed. People in Stone county, Missouri, use a folded bit of brown paper instead of the coin. A white bone button, held in the mouth, is recommended for any pain above the tongue, especially headaches and earaches.

Some mountain folk cure the earache, it is said, by putting a brass button in the patient's mouth and then unexpectedly discharging a gun behind his back. There are several more or less funny stories about this treatment, one in particular about a boy who swallowed the button when the gun went off. The earache was cured, but he had a terrible pain in his throat. Later on he complained of cramps in the stomach and was dosed with May-apple root, which is a drastic purgative. Still later came a severe pain in the bowels, and finally he screamed with agony as the big button was discharged from the rectum. The boy sighed with relief for a moment, just after the button was expelled. Then he sprang to his feet and howled again—the earache was just as bad as ever.

Another common treatment for earache is to prick a betsey

bug with a pin and put a drop of its blood into the ear. There seem to be several species of insects called betsey bugs or bessy bugs; one is a big black beetle, nearly two inches long, found in old stumps and rotten wood. People subject to earache sometimes keep several of these betsey bugs alive in a glass jar, to be used as needed.

Some families are accustomed to treat chills-an'-fever by placing an ax under the patient's bed. Since this procedure is also used in "granny-cases" to relieve the pains of childbirth, there are many jokes and wisecracks about it. I once went to see a very fat man, who had malarial fever. He stayed in bed as the doctor ordered and took the doctor's medicine, but his wife held to the old superstition and insisted on putting an ax under the bed. I noticed this when I came into the room, and asked: "What's that ax doing there? You expecting burglars?" He laughed and clasped both hands over his great paunch, twisting his face in a ghastly imitation of a woman in labor. "Naw," he answered, "just expectin'!"

Many people think it is a good idea to burn feathers from a black hen under the bed of a fever patient. I have seen the feathers of black chickens dried and saved in little paper bags for this purpose. For night sweats some hillfolk put a pan of water under the bed; I have known the wife of an M.D. to do this in her own home, without the doctor's knowledge. May Stafford Hilburn says that "if the case was persistent we sprinkled black pepper in the water. Usually in three nights an improvement could be noticed, but in some cases it might take a week. This remedy seldom failed. In fact, I do not know of a case where it did fail." <sup>4</sup>

Most Ozarkers are much afraid of the painful disease called shingles, since it is commonly believed if the inflamed area ever completely encircles the body, the patient will die. Regular physicians say that this never happens, since shingles always follows certain nerve sheaths, which do not quite come together

<sup>4</sup> *Missouri Magazine* (September, 1933), p. 21.

in front. The old-timers insist that they have *seen* men die of the shingles, and they continue to fear this ailment above many more serious diseases. A lawyer in Joplin, Missouri, tells of being awakened in the middle of the night and induced to drive forty miles into the country to make a will for a dying man. When he got there he found that his client had shingles, and since the red spots came near meeting in front, the poor fellow was convinced that he had only a few hours to live.

A power doctor near Fayetteville, Arkansas, says that in order to cure shingles one has only to cut off the head of a black chicken and smear the blood thickly over the affected parts. Wrap the patient in sheets and let the whole mess dry. Next morning you just soak the wrappings off, and the shingles will be gone.

Miss Jewell Perriman, of Jenkins, Missouri, reports that in her neighborhood a black cat is sacrificed to treat shingles. She knew a man whose shingles had "nearly gone around" him, but the power doctors cured him by killing a black cat and applying the blood.

In some places one finds people who believe that the blood of black birds or animals has some special virtue as a treatment for any sort of skin eruption. Only a few miles from the city of Hot Springs, Arkansas, two young girls stole a black dog and killed it, in order to use the blood as a remedy for smallpox; they believed that by smearing their faces with the dog's blood they could avoid being pitted or scarred by the disease.

At many points in Missouri and Arkansas country folk treat chickenpox by bringing a black hen and chickens into the sick-room and making them walk over the patient's body as he lies in bed. Near Bentonville, Arkansas, I knew a woman who brought a black rooster into her house and placed it again and again upon the bed where a little boy lay sick with chickenpox. I asked a local M.D. what he thought of this treatment. "Well, it can't do any harm," he said, "the bed was dirty anyhow." There are several funny stories about the black-chicken-on-the-bed

business, and it may be supposed to accomplish something beyond the cure of chickenpox.

Mrs. C. P. Mahnkey, of Mincy, Missouri, tells me that one of her neighbors treated a goiter by baking a toad in the oven till the oil ran out of it and putting a little of this toad oil on the goiter every day. It got better, too, says Mrs. Mahnkey. Another goiter treatment is to wear a little packet of salt on a string round the neck. The salt is renewed every day, and the used salt buried in the ground each night. Some people believe that the only way to cure a goiter is to rub it with a dead man's hand. A small-town undertaker tells me that an old woman in the neighborhood is always coming to his place, wanting to try this. A goiter is said to be reduced by applying the two halves of an apple, after which the patient eats one half and buries the other half in a cemetery. Some old-timers contend that the part buried must be put into the coffin of a friend of the opposite sex, with whom the patient had been intimate.

It is said that a tongue-tied child may be cured by making him drink rain water out of a new bell. I know of several families who actually tried this, but without any benefit so far as I can see.

Grease from the mountings of a church bell, put into the ears at intervals, is believed to cure deafness. In answer to my question, two old ladies told me plainly that the grease from a school bell would *not* do. Well, I persisted, what about the Fair Grove bell? Everybody knows that Fair Grove is a schoolhouse on weekdays, and a church house on Sundays, and they have only one bell. This disturbed the old folks for a moment, but then they answered that the bell at Fair Grove was a school bell, and the "meetin'ers" used it on Sundays only because they *didn't have no church bell*. It served the purpose of calling the worshippers together, but it was not a church bell, and grease from its mountings would *not* cure deafness.

The best way to stop hiccoughs is to run around the house

seven times without drawing one's breath. Or you can just stand on one leg and cry "Hick-up, stick-up, lick-up, hick-up" three times without pausing for breath. Some healers claim to cure hiccoughs by rubbing a rabbit's foot on the back of the patient's neck—unexpectedly. If all else fails, just stick your fingers in your ears, and have a person of the opposite sex pour nine cups of rain water down your throat.

As recently as 1942, in a modern hospital at Springfield, Missouri, a patient insisted upon treating his hiccoughs by naming three grains of corn for three friends, and then putting the corn into a vessel of water which was to be suspended above his head.

A woman in Greene county, Missouri, used to tell her family that, in the early 1880's, she saw a child "ground in the hopper" to cure some sort of paralysis. The whole family went to a primitive neighborhood grist mill, and the miller placed the sick girl in some part of the machinery. The thing spun round and round, and when the little patient was lifted out and placed upon the floor, she became dizzy and vomited. The others stood and watched in silence. There were no comments and no questions. It was a solemn occasion. The miller took it all quite seriously too and had evidently been called upon for the same service before.

Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, of Springfield, Missouri, tells of a novel treatment for colic in infants. You just take nine honeybees, alive in a tin can, and roast them in a hot oven. When the bees are absolutely dry, grind them up into a fine powder and feed it to the baby in syrup. Mrs. McCord learned of this "cure" from Mrs. George Roebuck, of Morrisville, Missouri, and Mrs. Roebuck had it from some elderly people in the Boston range of the Arkansas Ozarks.

Another way of curing colic is for the mother to hold the baby upright, walk three steps backward without speaking, and then give the child a drink of water from a brass thimble. If the

child has convulsions or "spasms," they may be relieved temporarily at least by wiping the child's face with a greasy dish-rag.

Fred Starr, of Greenland, Arkansas, has a sure cure for leg cramps, learned from a granny-woman in Washington county, Arkansas. All you have to do, he says, is to stick the toe of one shoe inside the other when you go to bed, and leave 'em that way all night. An old gentleman who lives in Hickory county, Missouri, tells me that he wards off cramps and leg pains by carrying a dried puffball in his pocket.

To relieve neuralgia or neuritis, especially if the pain is in the back or the legs, one has only to walk around the room three times every morning, without a stitch on but the left sock and shoe. A lady in Little Rock, Arkansas, told me that this had been known in her family for at least four generations and was taken very seriously by the older people.

There are several very strange notions about venereal disease in the hill country. Nearly all of the old-timers are convinced that gonorrhoea and syphilis are simply two different stages of the same ailment, and that gonorrhoea will invariably turn into syphilis if not properly treated. It is generally believed that all prostitutes are diseased, and that any woman who has sexual intercourse with seven different men will acquire a "bad sickness," even though all the men are free from venereal infection. Many country folk believe that venereal disease is much less likely to be contracted when the moon is in its last quarter than at any other time. Some hill people think that the best way to cure a "dose" of syphilis or gonorrhoea is by communicating it to as many other persons as possible—a theory that is responsible for untold misery in the Ozark country.

Every old woman has heard that owls' eggs are a sure cure for alcoholism. Owls lay their eggs in March, and it is said that many Ozark children are kept out of school and sent by their mothers to search for owls' nests in the tall timber. Many

a hillman has been fed owls' eggs, scrambled or disguised in one way and another, without knowing what he was eating.

Another way of curing drunkards is to put a live minnow in whiskey and let it die there. The poor chap who drinks this contaminated whiskey doesn't notice anything wrong with the taste, but it is supposed to destroy his appetite for liquor.

It is said that some Ozark temperance workers have advocated placing a pawpaw in the hand of a dying person; if a drunkard, not knowing of the "cunjure," can be persuaded to eat this pawpaw, he will quit drinking in spite of himself. My wife and I knew an old woman who, when the doctor told her she was dying, called for a pawpaw. She held the fruit for a moment, then asked that it be fed to her youngest son after her death. This was done, but the boy was still a booze fighter the last I heard of him.

The hill people have singular notions of the best means of preventing disease, and many of them carry charms or amulets of one sort or another. A prostitute in Little Rock, Arkansas, always wore two or three turns of fine wire around her leg; she said this was a protection against venereal disease. I observed, however, that she also used the conventional prophylactic measures favored by the girls who do not wear wires round their ankles.

Dr. Hershel Shockey, an osteopath who practiced in Stone county, Missouri, during the Second World War, told me that he saw a young man with some rare skin disease brought into an osteopathic clinic in Kansas City. This patient was a hill-billy from southwest Missouri. Told to strip, he took off everything but a piece of copper wire wound about his arm. Jokingly one of the physicians tried to remove this wire, but the patient wouldn't have it—offered to fight the whole hospital staff rather than take off that little twist of wire.

A copper ring, or a piece of sheet copper carried next the skin, is believed to ward off attacks of rheumatism as well as venereal infection. I have seen old men in Arkansas with long

pieces of copper wire wound round their ankles, under their socks. In the early days it is said that the telegraph companies had considerable difficulty with hillfolk who cut off pieces of telegraph wire for this purpose. Some young people now contend that an ordinary brass finger ring works just as well as pure copper, but the old-timers still cling to their wire anklets.

Nails taken from a gallows are supposed to protect a man against venereal disease and death by violence. Country blacksmiths used to secure these nails and hammer them out into finger rings. As recently as 1943 there were boys in the Army wearing rings of metal taken from a gallows at Galena, Missouri, where "Red" Jackson was hanged for murder in 1936.

I have known hillmen to spend hours and even days searching the rivers for very large crawpappies in order to get the two circular lucky-bones found in their bodies. These are carried in the pockets to ward off syphilis. The bigger the bones the better, and really large lucky-bones are rare.

Some mountain men wear wide leather cartridge belts, not to carry cartridges in, but because they believe that the wearing of such belts prevents rheumatism and arthritis. One school contends that a potato carried on the person keeps off rheumatism as well as anything. Others think that a buzzard's feather is best of all, a belief attributed to the Cherokees; an old woman near Southwest City, Missouri, painfully bent and twisted by rheumatism, assured me that the black feather she always wore in her hair "had done more good than twenty year o' doctorin'!" A man in Washington county, Arkansas, credited his freedom from rheumatiz and neuralgy to a nutmeg which he carried for many years; he had induced a jeweler to drill a hole through the thing and wore it on a black shoestring round his neck. "In central Missouri," says Fanny D. Bergen, "rheumatism is prevented by carrying in the pocket a nutmeg or a walnut, *Juglans nigra*."<sup>5</sup> I have inquired about this, but have never found an Ozarker who used a black walnut as a pocket piece.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of American Folklore*, V (1892), 20.



Many Ozark hillmen carry buckeyes in their pockets, and this practice is not confined to the backwoods districts. The two most important bankers in Springfield, Missouri, are buckeye carriers; so is the head of one of the biggest corporations in St. Louis, and also a recent mayor of Kansas City, Missouri. At least one governor of Arkansas not only carried a buckeye but was also known to flourish it publicly on occasions of great emotional stress.

There is an old saying that no man was ever found dead with a buckeye in his pocket, but this is not to be taken seriously. Most people who carry buckeyes regard them as a protection against rheumatism, or hemorrhoids. One of the most successful physicians in southwest Missouri always carries a buckeye; when it was mislaid once he was very much disturbed and let an officeful of patients wait until his pocket piece was recovered. It is very bad luck to lose a buckeye. I asked this doctor about it once. "No, I'm not superstitious," he said grinning, "I just don't want to get the rheumatism!"

To some people the buckeye means more than mere protection from piles and rheumatism. I once saw a young fellow with a very old truck, about to attempt the crossing of Bear Creek, in Taney county, Missouri. The water was high, and the ford was very bad. The boy looked the situation over carefully, then set his jaw and climbed into the driver's seat. "Well, I've got a buckeye in my pocket," he said quite seriously. "I believe I can make it!"

There is a persistent story that the custom of carrying buckeyes came from the Osage Indians, who used them in poisoning fish. But the Osages tell me that it was the *root* of the buckeye tree, not the nut, that they used to kill fish. And I have never found an Osage who would admit that he carried a buckeye for luck.

Wearing a green penny in a sack round the neck is supposed to prevent "lung trouble"—which usually means tuberculosis. A large bullet hung at the throat wards off catarrh, but it must

be an old-fashioned bullet of solid lead; the modern bullets with copper or steel jackets are worthless for this purpose. A piece of rhubarb root, worn on a string round the neck, will protect the wearer against the bellyache. It is said that a pair of crawpappy pincers sewed into a man's clothing has the same effect.

Dr. C. T. Ryland, of Lexington, Missouri, told me that he was called to see a sick infant in a family from south Missouri. The child had what was called "summer complaint," with a high temperature. Noticing a string of yellow wooden beads around the baby's neck, Dr. Ryland was told that "them's bodark, to keep fever away from the brain."

I once met a very old man on the road near Sylamore, Arkansas, wearing a string of large red glass beads. I asked five or six of his neighbors about it, and they all told me that he wore the beads as a remedy for nosebleed. "Oh yes, I reckon it works all right," said one young fellow in answer to my question, "but I'd ruther *have* nosebleed as to pack them fool beads all the time!"

Some Ozarkers believe that epileptic fits may be prevented, or at least made less violent, if the afflicted person carries a human tooth in his pocket, but the tooth must be that of a person not related to the patient by ties of blood. It is believed in some quarters that an epileptic may postpone his attacks by "packin' a flintrock," especially if he can find a lucky flint with a hole in it.

Ozark children, in many isolated sections, still wear little packets of asafetida all winter to protect them from the common diseases of childhood. When spring comes, with sassafras tea and other internal prophylactics, the child is permitted to discard the asafetida. Small boys are sometimes forced to wear little bags of camphor sewed to their shirts, to prevent their catching meningitis or infantile paralysis. Others have flat leather bands or red woolen strings round their necks, or even dirty socks under their collars to ward off colds and influenza.

A little iron wire worn as a necklace, according to some power doctors, will protect a child from whooping cough. A piece of black silk around the neck is regarded as "liable to keep off croup."

Otto Ernest Rayburn says that "in grandmother's day a mouse's head tied around the baby's neck prevented certain ills,"<sup>6</sup> but I have never been able to learn just what these ills were, or to get any definite information about this matter. In one settlement I found the children coming to school with little round pieces of porous stone sewed into their garments; it is said that these stones are taken from the bladders of deer, and are supposed to protect the wearer against violence and financial loss as well as diseases.

Many backwoods women wear red yarn strings about their abdomens. Some say that this is in order to prevent cramps. I am not sure that this is the true explanation, but it is a fact that red woollen strings are worn, particularly by young unmarried women.

Some say that the dried skin of a mole, stuck fast to the chest with honey, will prevent or even cure asthma. I once persuaded one of my neighbors to try this, but it didn't seem to do him any good. Women sometimes wear a mole skin, or the dried foot of a mole, between their breasts in the belief that it prevents cancer.

The best way to avoid getting the mumps is to cut a chip off an old hog trough, carry it in your pocket, and rub it over your jaws and throat every day. The adult male Ozarker is afraid of mumps, because he fears that the disease may "go down" on him and damage his testicles. Some men think they can prevent this calamity by smearing the parts with marrow from a hog's jaw. Other hillmen wear a little sack of salt, tied around the waist with a string. A country lawyer told me, in all seriousness, "I never knew a man who carried salt to have the mumps go down on him. Probably it's just a coincidence, but just the

<sup>6</sup> *Ozark Country*, pp. 253-254.

same—" he unbuckled his belt, pulled up his shirt, and showed me the little package fastened around his middle with a neat cotton band. It is said that when a hillman actually *gets* the mumps he may still prevent the disease from "going down" by soaking a woolen string with hog manure and tying it round his neck. But a man in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, tells me that he gave this measure a fair trial, and "there aint nothin' to it."

In some parts of eastern Oklahoma, when a man comes to the place where a horse has just been rolling on the ground, he spits—this is supposed to ward off backache or lumbago. I knew a farmer near Harrison, Arkansas, who was careful to spit in the road whenever he saw a big woolly worm or caterpillar; he said that failure to do this always caused him to have a chill within twenty-four hours. Mrs. May Kennedy McCord, of Springfield, Missouri, used to say "kiss a mule, cure a cold," but I'm not certain that she meant it to be taken literally.

A big red onion tied to a bedpost is said to prevent the occupants of the bed from catching cold. A famous politician in Arkansas had an onion fastened to his bedpost as recently as 1937. When I asked him about this he laughed rather sheepishly. "That's just one of Maw's notions," he said, referring to his mother-in-law. "She lives with us, and she's getting old, and we try to humor her. Of course, I don't believe in such things myself."

One often hears hillfolk say that wearing a piece of dog fennel in the left shoe will prevent the wood ticks from biting your legs.

A great many Ozarkers believe that a live minnow swallowed by a baby will prevent it from ever having the whooping cough. Miss Jewell Perriman, Jenkins, Missouri, tells me that this is not a superstition but a well-known fact, and she has seen it demonstrated several times. Other hillfolk think that it isn't necessary for the child to swallow the minnow; they just put it inside the infant's mouth and pull it out again by a string attached for that purpose. Once, in Washington county, Arkan-

sas, I saw a power doctor put a live minnow into a baby's mouth; his purpose in doing this was not made clear to me, but the child did not catch whooping cough. It died about four months later from some other ailment, which the parents diagnosed as "summer complaint."

Most backwoods healers believe that night air is poisonous and advise their patients to shut every door and window tight, although a large family sleeps in a small cabin. If it were not for the chinks in their clumsily built shanties, and the draught of their great chimneys, some of these folk might easily be suffocated. Many old-timers are convinced that malaria is somehow caused by stagnant water, but nearly all of them laugh at the idea that mosquitoes have anything to do with it.

It is generally believed that chills are caused by eating watermelons or muskmelons or cucumbers too late in the autumn, and that it is dangerous to eat any sort of fruit or vegetables out of season. In one southern Missouri county the relief agency distributed fine shipped-in carrots in the winter of 1940; the people were hungry, too, but I saw bunches of these carrots in the ditches along the road, where my neighbors had thrown them away. One farmer gathered up a lot of carrots and fed them to his pigs, "so's to be sure the childern wouldn't git a-holt of 'em!" The relief office in the same village gave away a lot of grapefruit also, but many of the people had never seen grapefruit before, and some of them threw the stuff to the pigs rather than take a chance with it. Several families boiled their grapefruit, since it never occurred to them that fruit could be eaten raw in the wintertime.

There is a very general notion in the hill country that the instrument which caused a wound is still a part of the situation and must be somehow included in the treatment given the wound itself. Thus when a mountain man cuts himself accidentally, he hastens to thrust the offending knife or ax deep into the soil, believing that this will stop excessive bleeding and make the wound heal faster.

A boy at Harrison, Arkansas, stepped on a nail which passed entirely through his foot. After his father had dressed the wound with vinegar he took the boy on a horse and went back to the place where the accident occurred in order to *find the nail*. The father wanted to take the nail home, wash it in kerosene and put it away in a dry place. "If the nail rusts," said he, "the wound will fester."

Miss Jewell Perriman, Jenkins, Missouri, tells me that the people in her neighborhood, if injured by a rusty nail, apply turpentine to the nail before they put it on the wound. Boys in some parts of Arkansas carry the nail home and thrust it into a bar of soap, to the same depth that it was accidentally stuck into the foot; it is not clear exactly why they do this, but it is evidently connected with the idea of preventing rust, which is associated in the hillman's mind with tetanus, or lockjaw.

In dressing gunshot wounds, doctors are often requested by the patient to put a little salve or antiseptic on the bullet which caused the injury, in order to prevent blood poisoning. I knew one man who always carried the bullet which had been cut out of his leg; whenever he felt a twinge of pain, he would take the bullet out of his wallet and put a drop of skunk oil on it. He laughed a little every time he did this, and never admitted that he believed in the efficacy of such a procedure.

Something of the same sort is shown in the treatment of snake bites. Several miles west of Hot Springs, Arkansas, I came upon some small boys. They had built a rousing fire by the roadside and were burning a large copperhead. This snake had bitten one of the boys, whose leg was already badly swollen. I asked why they didn't do something for the boy, but they replied that their chief concern was to burn the snake "plumb to ashes." As soon as the body of the snake was entirely consumed, the boys told me, they were going to take the injured lad to the doctor in a nearby village.

I have known educated hillfolk, who depend upon regular physicians for ordinary ailments, surreptitiously to consult a

backwoods magician when bitten by a poisonous serpent. Dr. W. O. Cralle, Springfield, Missouri, tells of an old woman who warned him never to go to an m.d. in case of snake bite. The doctor might fix it up temporarily, she said, but the bite would always hurt on the anniversary of the day it occurred, so long as the patient lived. An old-time healer, on the other hand, would cure it in his own fashion, and it would never cause any further trouble.

Miss Jewell Perriman, of Jenkins, Missouri, tells me that her Uncle Bill had a secret method of curing snake bite, and people came from miles around for treatment. Uncle Bill belonged to a family of which it was said "them folks don't kill snakes." This is very unusual in the Ozarks, where most people do kill every snake they see. When a large copperhead was found in the Perriman house, Uncle Bill caught it with the tongs, carried it out into the orchard, and released it unharmed. His cure for snake bite was known in the family for at least a hundred years. Uncle Bill had it from his father and told it to his eldest son. The son was an educated fellow, an m.d. from a great university, and he did not believe in this magic stuff. So the young doctor never used the family treatment, but he did not laugh at it, and he never told it to anybody, so far as is known. The secret is lost now, for Uncle Bill is long dead, and his son died suddenly without issue. All that Miss Perriman knows of the snake-bite cure is that the snake must not be injured, and that Uncle Bill had a strip of ancient buckskin in which he tied certain knots as part of the treatment. She showed me the buckskin. It was about half an inch wide, perhaps twelve inches long, carefully rounded at the ends. Three knots had been tied in it, one in the middle and one at either end.

Another Ozark youth, a member of a clan which doesn't kill snakes, was startled into shooting a water moccasin one day, when he was fishing. Immediately the boy began to see moccasins everywhere. He shot and killed about thirty in two hours and then became a little frightened, as there seemed to be some-

thing supernatural in the sudden appearance of so many poisonous serpents. When he told his father what had occurred, the old man just looked at him solemnly and said nothing at all. That boy was terribly nervous for several weeks, and he never killed another snake as long as he lived. He would not admit that he was in any degree superstitious but said several times that there was "something funny" about his family when it came to "messin' with snakes."

Some backwoods Christians of the wilder Holy Roller cults—adherents of the so-called "new ground religion," "pokeweed gospel," or "lightnin'-bug churches"—do not believe in doctors and will not take any sort of medicine. Their preachers say that the Word is ag'in physicians, and quote James 5:14-15: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick."

I have seen seven or eight backwoods preachers kneeling about a sick man's bed, shouting the gibberish they call "the unknown tongue." As soon as these fellows knew that I was present they stopped yelling, since they believe that the presence of an unbeliever breaks the charm. They claim some remarkable cures of inoperable cancer and the like. I know personally of cases where they have attempted to raise the dead; in one instance they "wooled the corpse around" for several hours, even pulling the body off the bed by their frenzied "laying on of hands."

In Taney county, Missouri, I knew an old woman who was very ill and sent word to the nearest meetin' that she wanted the preachers to pray for her, but did not want them to come to her house because the family was opposed to the "pokeberry religion." Several of the preachers knelt down in the church, took bottles of holy oil from their pockets, poured a little of the stuff on a handkerchief, and prayed over it in the unknown tongue. The old woman applied the handkerchief to her ab-



domen next the skin and wore it for several days; then she announced that she was miraculously healed, and the preachers claimed to have effected the cure at a distance of two and one-half miles, without even seeing the patient. The woman died a few weeks later.

In cases of difficult childbirth the "buck-brush parsons" sometimes try to help, and their prayers are so loud as to drown out the screams of the wretched woman; this scandalizes the conventional midwives, who feel that men should not be present at such times.

Rex Thomas, newspaperman of Lamar, Missouri, told me about the Rev. A. D. Etterman, an evangelist who was "run out" of Newport, Missouri, in October, 1934. The villagers claimed that Etterman's family spread the itch through the whole community, so that the public school had to be closed for two weeks. It was said that Etterman could cure leprosy by supernatural means, but the lowly scabies was apparently beyond his powers.

These Pentecostal fanatics do not patronize the backwoods herbalists or power doctors or granny-women, at least not openly. Sometimes it may be that a Holy Roller weakens under the lash of pain and visits a nonreligious healer in secret. But when a "new ground" religionist calls a doctor he generally insists upon a licensed M.D. from town. Physicians in the Ozark communities tell me that when they are called to a Holy Roller cabin they usually find somebody at the point of death. "Such people don't want treatment," one doctor said grimly, "they just want me to examine the patient, so that I can sign a death certificate!"

