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978-1-108-04307-6 - Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents Illustrating the History of Science in this Country before the Norman

Conquest: Volume 1

Edited by Thomas Oswald Cockayne

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Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, or The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, usually referred to as the 'Rolls Series', was an ambitious project first proposed to the British Treasury in 1857 by Sir John Romilly, the Master of the Rolls, and quickly approved for public funding. Its purpose was to publish historical source material covering the period from the arrival of the Romans to the reign of Henry VIII, 'without mutilation or abridgement', starting with the 'most scarce and valuable' texts. A 'correct text' of each work would be established by collating 'the best manuscripts', and information was to be included in every case about the manuscripts used, the life and times of the author, and the work's 'historical credibility', but there would be no additional annotation. The first books were published in 1858, and by the time it was completed in 1896 the series contained 99 titles and 255 volumes. Although many of the works have since been re-edited by modern scholars, the enterprise as a whole stands as a testament to the Victorian revival of interest in the middle ages.

Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England

This three-volume work, published in 1864–6, was edited by Thomas Oswald Cockayne (1807–73), a Cambridge graduate, much-published early member of the London Philological Society, and teacher of the philologists Walter Skeat and Henry Sweet. It is a collection of writings from pre-Conquest Britain on plants, medicine and the heavens, mostly in Old English with accompanying modern English translations. Volume 1 begins with a substantial preface outlining the Anglo-Saxon reception of Greek and Latin medical texts. The main work in this volume is an Old English version of the late Latin *Herbarium* formerly attributed to Apuleius, augmented by material deriving from Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*. The volume concludes with an Old English translation of the fourth-century Roman physician Sextus Placitus' writings on animal-derived medicines, and some short medicinal recipes in Old English and Latin taken from the fly leaves of manuscripts.

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Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England

*Being a Collection of Documents Illustrating
the History of Science in this Country
before the Norman Conquest*

VOLUME 1

EDITED BY
THOMAS OSWALD COCKAYNE



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RERUM BRITANNICARUM MEDII ÆVI
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OR

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DURING

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THE CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF HER MAJESTY'S TREASURY, UNDER
THE DIRECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

ON the 26th of January 1857, the Master of the Rolls submitted to the Treasury a proposal for the publication of materials for the History of this Country from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.

The Master of the Rolls suggested that these materials should be selected for publication under competent editors without reference to periodical or chronological arrangement, without mutilation or abridgment, preference being given, in the first instance, to such materials as were most scarce and valuable.

He proposed that each chronicle or historical document to be edited should be treated in the same way as if the editor were engaged on an *Editio Princeps*; and for this purpose the most correct text should be formed from an accurate collation of the best MSS.

To render the work more generally useful, the Master of the Rolls suggested that the editor should give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text.

a 2

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The works to be published in octavo, separately, as they were finished; the whole responsibility of the task resting upon the editors, who were to be chosen by the Master of the Rolls with the sanction of the Treasury.

The Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury, after a careful consideration of the subject, expressed their opinion in a Treasury Minute, dated February 9, 1857, that the plan recommended by the Master of the Rolls "was well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object, in an effectual and satisfactory manner, within a reasonable time, and provided proper attention be paid to economy, in making the detailed arrangements, without unnecessary expense."

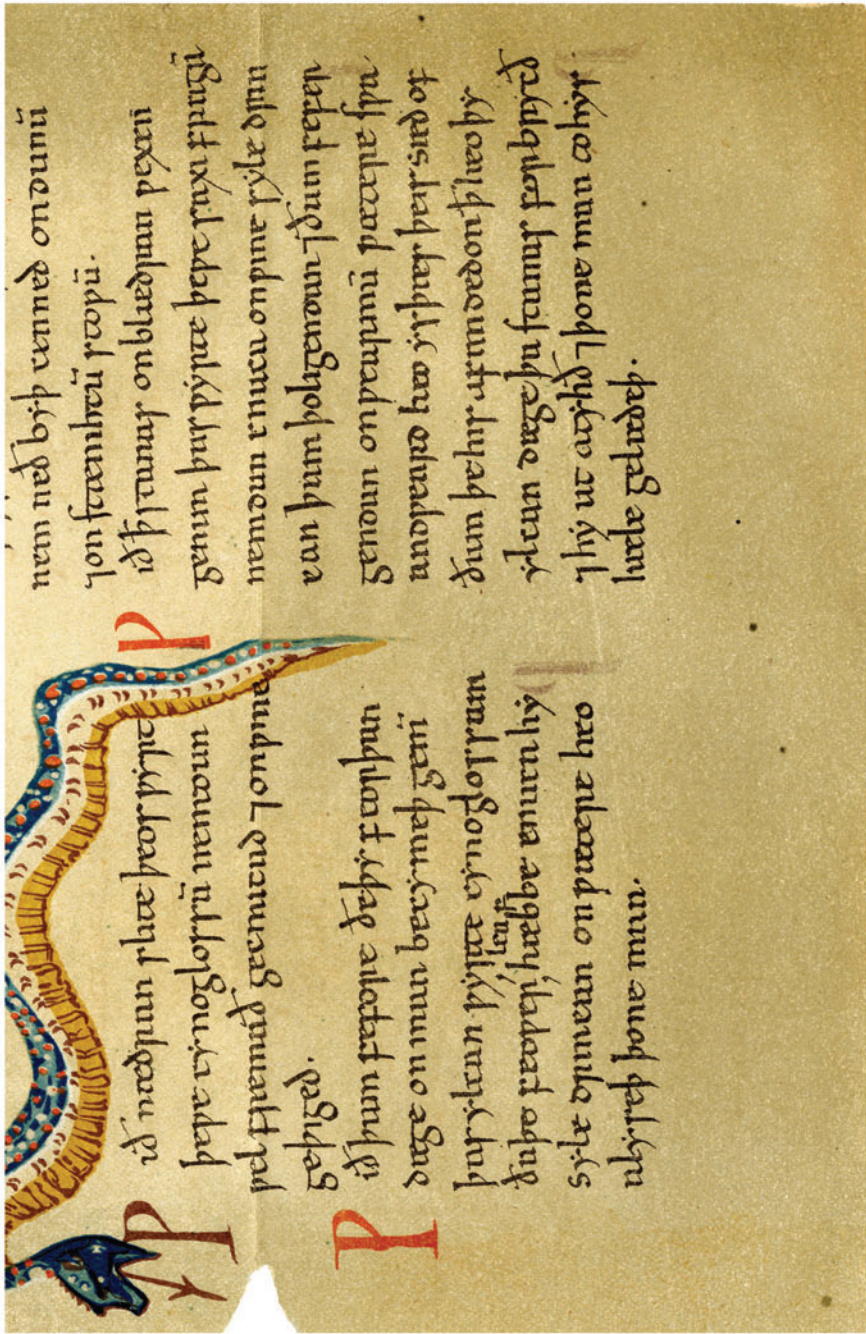
They expressed their approbation of the proposal that each chronicle and historical document should be edited in such a manner as to represent with all possible correctness the text of each writer, derived from a collation of the best MSS., and that no notes should be added, except such as were illustrative of the various readings. They suggested, however, that the preface to each work should contain, in addition to the particulars proposed by the Master of the Rolls, a biographical account of the author, so far as authentic materials existed for that purpose, and an estimate of his historical credibility and value.

*Rolls House,
December 1857.*

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LEECHDOMS, WORTCUNNING,
AND
STARCRAFT
OF
EARLY ENGLAND.





MS. BRIT. MUS. COTTON VITELL. c. iii. fol. 45 b

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COLLECTED AND EDITED
BY THE
REV. OSWALD COCKAYNE, M.A. CANTAB.
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P R E F A C E.



It will be difficult for the kindest temper to give ^{Prepossessions} a friendly welcome to the medical philosophy of Saxon days. As man has an ever recurring proneness to make himself the standard of truth, to condemn, sneer at, and despise all that he does not choose or is unable to comprehend, so in a greater degree every generation of men admires its own wisdom, skill, science, art, and progress; it calls its own, whatever it has learnt from men of former days, and counts the few improvements which have had their birth in its own time, as triumphs and distinctions which elevate it above all the past.

If we consider the history of the ages gone by, these ^{Our debt to} high pretensions will soon abate somewhat of their ^{past ages.} confidence. The progress of those contrivances towards our comfort, which we sum up in the term civilization, has been very creeping and laborious. Our great capitals are smaller than Rome, the fortunes of our men of millions are trifles to the wealth of a Crassus or a Lucullus, our houses are less carefully warmed in winter than the Roman villas, our poetry has no Homeros, our sculpture no Praxiteles, our architecture no Parthenon, our philosophy has never seen a century such as that between Perikles and Alexandros, those hundred years of Attic wit and wisdom have given us an education in dead languages, and in the lore and manners of two thousand years since, and are driving our native words from off our tongues and making them strange to our ears.

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X PREFACE.

The Saxons
accept Greek
and Latin
learning.

The same victory over future ages which puts into the hands of our children a Virgilius, a Demosthenes an Horatius, produced a similar effect upon our forefathers. When their driving, conquering, advancing spirit brought them into the island of the Britons and gave them the Keltic careless tribes for a prey, they also found it worth their while to inquire what was this system of Latin science, which raised fertile crops of wheat for the food of every mouth, built houses which gave warmth amid the tempest, and fetched from foreign distant lands aids and helps whether to health or to disease ; and they, like ourselves, became students of Latin and Greek. Something of course they had learned of southern arts before, but when they arrived in and became owners of territories improved by the southron, they could only enjoy their new acquisitions fully by understanding the method of ordering them.

Indigenous
botany of the
Teutonic
races.

The Gothic nations had a knowledge of their own in the kinds and powers of worts, that is they had the more useful practical part of botany ; this is plainly proved by the great number of native names of plants which are found in the works now printed, in glossaries, and in the Gothic languages generally. Their medicine must have consisted partly in the application of the qualities of these worts to healing purposes, for otherwise the study was of no real utility. The uses of hemp and liquorice were first learnt by the Hellenes, from the Skythians.¹ The Saxons evidently were also willing to rely much upon amulets and incantations, for while these resources are accepted by the later Greek physicians, they occur much more frequently as the northern nations obtained a wider footing in the Roman empire.

¹ Herodot. lib. iv. cap. 74. Theophrastos, Hist. Plant. lib. ix. cap. 15.

From the cradle modern Englishmen are taught to Charms. fight an angry battle against superstition, and they treat a talisman or a charm with some disdain and much contempt. But let us reflect that these play-things tended to quiet and reassure the patient, to calm his temper, and soothe his nerves; objects which, if we are not misinformed, the best practitioners of our own day willingly obtain by such means as are left them. Whether a wise physician will deprive a humble patient of his roll of magic words, or take from his neck the fairy stone, I do not know: but this is certain, that the Christian Church of that early day, and the medical science of the empire by no means refused the employment of these arts of healing, these balms of superstitious origin. The reader may enjoy his laugh at such devices, but let him remember that dread of death and wakeful anxiety must be hushed by some means, for they are very unfriendly to recovery from disease.

Some part of the prevailing superstition must have come from the Magi, for we find them ordering that the modern feverfue, the *Pyrethrum parthenium*, must be pulled from the ground with the left hand, that the fevered patients name must be spoken forth, and that the herbcrist must not look behind him.¹ Partly originating from the Magi.

Plinius says also,² that the Magi and the Pythagoreans had many foolish tales about the *eryngium*, known in England as sea holly.³ That they ordered the pseudo anchusa to be gathered with the left hand, the name of him, who was to profit by it to be uttered, and that it should be tied on a man for the tertian fever.⁴ They used the *ἀγλαοφωτὶς*, or pæony,⁵ for evocation of spirits.⁶ They got cures for

¹ Plin. xxi. 104 = 30.	¹ Plin. xxii. 24 = 20.
² Id. xxii. 9 = 8.	⁵ If it is the pæony.
³ <i>E. campestre</i> , being very rare.	⁶ Plin. xxiv. 102 = 17.

The Magi also taught to drink the ashes of a pigs pizzle in sweet wine, and so to make water into a dogs kennel, adding the words "lest he, like a hound, "should make urine in his own bed."⁷ If a man in the morning made water a little on his own foot it would be a preservative against mala medicamenta, doses meant to do him harm. For quartan fevers they catch with the left hand the beetle that has

⁴ Id. xi. 79.

and the like.¹ He taught that holding anethum, that is dill, in the hand, is good against epilepsy.² Pythagoras was the founder of the healing art among the Hellenic peoples.

Pythagoras taught that water would freeze with the herbs coracesia and calycia, also the flower of the aquifolia or holly.³ Chrysippus, that an animal, nobody knew anything about, the phryganium, was a good amulet for quartan fevers.⁴ Cato, that a man would go comfortably to sleep after eating hare; and says Plinius, there must be something in the general persuasion that after hare a man is good looking for nine days.⁵

Serapion. Serapion of Alexandria flourished (B.C. 278) forty years after the death of Alexander the Great, and was one of the chiefs of the Empiric school, who relied upon observation and experiment in preference to speculation and thoughtful reasoning; yet he in epilepsy prescribed the warty excrescences on the forelegs of animals, camels brain and gall, rennet of seal, dung of crocodile, heart of hare, blood of turtle, stones of boar, ram, or cock.

Soranos. Soranos, an early writer of the methodic school, while he refused incantations as cures for diseases, testifies in so doing to their prevalence: — “*Alii cantilenas adhibendas probaverunt, ut etiam Philistionis frater idem memorat libro xxii. de adiutoriis, scribens quendam fistulatorem loca dolentia decantasse, quæ cum saltum sumerent palpitando, discusso dolore mitescerent. Alii denique hoc adiutorii genus Pythagoram*

¹ Ἐἶναι πάντα τὸν ἀέρα ψυχῶν ἐμ-
πλεων· καὶ ὑπὸ τούτων πέμπεσθαι
ἀνθρώποις τοὺς τε ὀνείρους καὶ τὰ
σημεῖα νόσου τε καὶ ὑγίειας· καὶ οὐ
μόνον ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ καὶ προβάτοις
καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις κτήνεσιν. Εἰς τε
τούτους γίνεσθαι τοὺς τε καθαρούς,
καὶ ἀποτροπιασμούς μαρτυκῆν τε πᾶσαν
καὶ κληδόνας καὶ τὰ ὅμοια.
Diogenes, Laert. V. Pythag. 32.
² Plin. xx. 73.
³ Id. xxiv. 102. 72.
⁴ Id. xxx. 30.
⁵ Id. xxviii. 79.

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PREFACE.

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“ memorant invenisse : sed Sorani iudicio videntur hi
 “ mentis vanitate iactari, qui modulis et cantilena
 “ passionis robur excludi posse crediderunt.”¹

Plinius records that the rule is to sow basil with Plinius.
 curses and ugly words;² that pills of elaterium, the
 drastic juice of a wild cucumber, hung about the waist
 in rams wool, help parturition, if the patient knows
 nothing about the resource;³ he knew a man of præ-
 torian rank, a chief man in Spain, who was cured of
 intolerable disorders of the uvula by carrying hung to
 his neck by a thread a root of purslane;⁴ that Sappho
 fell in love with Phaon because he found a masculine
 root of *eryngium*;⁵ that an amulet of the seed of
 tribulus cures varicose veins;⁶ that tradition avers
 men afflicted with tertian fever are relieved of it
 if they tie on themselves a root of autumnal nettle,
 provided that when the root is dug the sick mans
 and his parents names are duly pronounced aloud;⁷
 that if a man carry a poplar wand in his hand he
 will not get his legs chafed;⁸ the herb selago, which
 was like savine, was gathered without use of iron,
 with the right hand, in pickpocket fashion, “ velut a
 “ furante,” poked through the left armhole of the tunic,
 in a white robe, with naked clean washed feet, after
 an oblation of wine and bread.⁹ Since ordinary “ clinic”
 medicine avails not in quartan fevers, he will tell us
 how to cure it by amulets; by the dust in which a
 hawk has been rolling himself tied up in a bit of
 cloth with a red thread; by the longest tooth of a
 black dog; by a solitary wasp caught in the left hand

¹ Cælius Aurelianus, Chron. lib.
 v. cap. 1, p. 555, ed. of 1709.

² Cum maledictis ac probris, xix.
 37=7.

³ Plin. xx. 3=1.

⁴ Id. xx. 81=20.

⁵ Id. xxii. 9=8.

⁶ Id. xxii. 12=10.

⁷ Id. xxii. 16=14.

⁸ Id. xxiv. 32=8.

⁹ Id. xxiv. 62=11.

and tied on; by the head of viper cut off, or its living heart cut out, in a piece of cloth; by the snout and tips of the ears of a mouse in a rose-coloured patch, the animal itself to be let loose; by the right eye of a living lizard poked out, in a bit of goats skin; by the ball rolling scarabæus (*s. stercorarius*);¹ a holly planted in (the courtyard of) a house keeps off witchcrafts;² they say that an amulet of the chamæelæa (*Dafne laureola*, *D. mezereum*) will cure pearl “albugo” in the eyes, provided that the plant be gathered before sunrise, and the purpose be outspoken;³ an herb picked from the head of a statue and tied up in a red thread will cure head ache;⁴ an herb by which dogs stale, if drawn untouched by iron, cures dislocations.⁵ Enough, perhaps, has been said to mark the character of Plinius collections.

Iosephos. With Plinius was contemporary Ioseph, or Josephus. The tales about the mandrake current much later, and found in the Saxon Herbarium,⁶ are traceable to what he says⁷ of the Baaras, an herb that runs away from the man that wants to gather it, and won't stop till one throws on it οἶνον γυναικὸς ἢ τὸ ἐμμητριον αἷμα, for nastiness is often an element of mysteries, and even then it kills the dog that draws it out. It is not certain that the mandrakes berries are meant in Genesis xxx. 14.

Philagrios. Philagrios (364 A.D.) thought it superfluous and unbecoming to add to a prescription a direction to spit once into the drug pot, once on the earth, with some barbarous names, since without the names it would be equally efficacious.⁸

¹ Plin. xxx. 30=11.
² Id. xxiv. 71=13.
³ Id. xxiv. 82=15.
⁴ Id. xxiv. 106=19.
⁵ Id. xxiv. 111=19.

⁶ Bell. Iud. VII. vi. 3=p. 117.
⁷ Art. cxxii.
⁸ Aetius, 607. c. in the Medicæ Artis Principes, unpublished in the original language.

Xenokrates, who, says Galenos, flourished two generations, or sixty years before himself, writes with an air of confidence on the good effects to be obtained by eating of the human brain, flesh, or liver; by swallowing in drink the burnt or unburnt bones of the head, shin, or fingers of a man, or the blood. He had also a good list of nasty prescriptions, for which the veil of a dead language is required.¹

Galenos is cited by Alexander of Tralles,² as doing a reluctant homage to incantations. His words, perhaps, do not go further than the conclusions of an unprejudiced physician of our own day might do, were he willing to brave the quick rising imputation of superstition. “Some think that incantations are like old wives tales: as I too did for a long while. But at last I was convinced that there is virtue in them by plain proofs before my eyes. For I had trial of their beneficial operation in the case of those scorpion stung, nor less in the case of bones stuck fast in the throat, immediately, by an incantation, thrown up. And many of them are excellent, severally, and they reach their mark.”

Pamphilos makes Galenos angry with his gipsy trickeries; “his old wives tales, his Egyptian quackeries, his babbling incantations used by the folk employed to collect the plants, his periapts, and his humbugs, not merely useless, not merely unprofessional, but all false; no good even to little boys, not to say

¹ Πόσις δ' ἰδρωτός τε καὶ οὔρου καὶ κατεμηνίου γυναικὸς ἀσελγῆς καὶ βδελυρᾶ, καὶ τούτων οὐδὲν ἤττον ἢ κόπρος, ἣν διακριομένην τε τοῖς κατὰ τὸ στόμα καὶ τὴν φάρυγγα μορ'οῖς εἰς τε τὴν γαστέρα καταπινομένην ἔγραψεν ὁ Ξενοκράτης ὅ τι ποτὲ πικρὸν δύνεται.

γέγραφε δὲ καὶ περὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ ὦτα ῥύπου καταπινομένου.

Galen. de simpl. mixt. et fac.,
lib. xx. vol. xii., p. 248, ed.
Kühn.

² Lib. ix. cap. 4, p. 538, ed 1556.

Alexander of
Tralles.

Alexander of Tralles (A.D. 550) frequently prescribes periapts, that is, amulets, and wise words: thus for colic, he guarantees by his own experience and the approval of almost all the best doctors, dung of a wolf, with bits of bone in it, if possible, shut up in a pipe, and worn during the paroxysm, on the right arm, or thigh, or hip, taking care it touches neither the earth nor a bath. A lark eaten is good. The Thracians pick out its heart, while alive, and make a periapt, wearing it on the left thigh. A part of the cæcum of a pig prepared with myrrh, and put up in a wolfs or dogs skin, is a good thing to wear. A ring with Hercules strangling a lion on the Median stone, is good to wear.² A bit of a childs navel, shut up in something of silver or gold with salt, is a periapt which will make the patient at ease entirely. Have the setting of an iron ring octagonal, and engrave upon it, "Flee, Flee, Ho, Ho, Bile, the Lark was searching;" on the head of the ring have an N³ engraved: this is potent, and he thinks it would be strange not to communicate so powerful an antidote, but begs it may be reserved from casual folk, and told

τους μύθους, μήτι γε δὴ τοῖς μετιέναι
σπεύδουσι τὰ τῆς ἱατρικῆς ἔργα. καί
μοι δοκεῖ πρὸς Ἱπποκράτους εὐθέως ἐν
ἀρχῇ τῶν ἀφορισμῶν εἰρῆσθαι ὁ βίος
βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρά, χάριν τοῦ
μὴ καταναλίσκειν τοὺς χρόνους εἰς
ἄχρηστα.

² A Gnostic device. See Montfaucon, plates 159, 161, 163.

³ The N on the ring is Gnostic ; see Montfaucon, t. cl., clxix., clxxvii.

only to such as can keep secrets, and are trusty (φιλαρέτους).¹ For the gout he recommends a certain cloth, κόρης παρθένου τὸ πρῶτον ἐκ τῶν καταμνηνίων ράκος μολυνθέν, also the sinews of a vultures leg and toes tied on, minding that the right goes to the right, the left to the left; also the astragali of a hare, leaving the poor creature alive; also the skin of a seal for soles; also a line of Homeros, τετρήχει δ' ἀγορή, ὑπὸ δὲ στοναχίζετο γαῖα, on gold leaf, when the moon is in Libra; also a natural magnet found when the moon is in Leo. Write on gold leaf, in the wane of the moon, "mei, threu, mor, for, teux, za, zon, the, lou, chri, ge, ze, ou, as the sun is consolidated in these names, and is renewed every day, so consolidate this plaster as it was before, now, now, quick, quick, for, behold, I pronounce the great name, in which are consolidated things in repose, iaz, azuf, zuon, threux, bain, chook, consolidate this plaster as it was at first, now, now, quick, quick."² Then bits were to be chopped off a chamæleon, and the creature living was to be wrapped up in a clean linen rag, and buried towards the sunrise, while the chopped bits were to be worn in tubes; all to be done when the moon was in the wane. Then again for gout, some henbane, when the moon is in Aquarius or Pisces, before sunset, must be dug up with the thumb and third finger of the left hand, and must be said, I declare, I declare, holy wort, to thee; I invite thee to-morrow to the house of Fileas, to stop the rheum of the feet of M. or N., and say, I invoke thee, the great name, Jehovah, Sabaoth, the God who steadied the earth and stayed the sea, the filler of flowing rivers, who dried up Lot's wife, and made her a pillar of salt, take the breath of thy mother earth and her power, and dry the rheum of the feet or hands of N. or M. The next day, before sunrise, take a bone of some dead animal, and dig the

¹ Lib. ix. p. 165, ed. 1548. { from some of their words nothing
² This is also probably Gnostic: { rational has been elicited.

root up with this bone, and say, I invoke thee by the holy names Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Eloï, and put on the root one handful of salt, saying, “As this salt “will not increase, so may not the disorder of N. “or M.” And hang the end of the root as a periapt on the sufferer, etc.¹ For agues, “the little animal “that sits and weaves with the view to catch flies, “tied up in a rag, round the left arm, is good.”² Trallianus mostly wrote very good sense. The Gnostics professed a medley of all the religions they could hear of.

Alexander Trallianus also recommends for epilepsy, from Asklepiades ὁ φαρμακευτής, a metal cross, ἤλον ἐσταυρωμένον, tied as a periapt to the arm. He obtains from Zalachthes and Osthanes, interpreters of the Magi, a recommendation to try jasper and coral, with root of nux vomica in a linen cloth. Demokrates, an Athenian, who consulted the Delfic oracle, was told to get some worms out of a goats brain. The occipital bone of an asses head in a skin is also a good periapt. Get a big rivet from a wrecked ship, make a broach of it, and insert a bone cut from the heart of a living stag.

Antiquity and
universality of
magic.

The arts of magic, real arts, with effects visible to the eye, sciences, if the modern latitude of language be allowable, had at a very early period arrived at high perfection in Egypt, when Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses and Aaron, turning their rods into serpents, and water into blood (1600 B.C.); in Syria, when the witch or ventriloquist of Endor promised her clients conferences with the dead (1100 B.C.); in Hellas, when Vlysses visited the spirit world, and Kirke turned men into swine (1100 B.C.); and in Persia, beyond chronological limits.

¹ Id. pp. 198, 199. That curious
Gnostic charm seemed to deserve
quotation at length.

² Id. p. 234, ζώφμιον.
³ Alex. Trall., lib. i. pp. 82, 83,
84, ed. 1556.