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978-1-108-07452-0 - On Superstitions Connected with the History and Practice of
Medicine and Surgery
Thomas Joseph Pettigrew
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It is sobering to realise that as recently as the year in which *On the Origin of Species* was published, learned opinion was that diseases such as typhus and cholera were spread by a 'miasma', and suggestions that doctors should wash their hands before examining patients were greeted with mockery by the profession. The Cambridge Library Collection reissues milestone publications in the history of Western medicine as well as studies of other medical traditions. Its coverage ranges from Galen on anatomical procedures to Florence Nightingale's common-sense advice to nurses, and includes early research into genetics and mental health, colonial reports on tropical diseases, documents on public health and military medicine, and publications on spa culture and medicinal plants.

On Superstitions Connected with the History and Practice of Medicine and Surgery

The surgeon Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865) was interested in all aspects of antiquity, and gained fame in London society through his mummy-unwrapping parties. (His *History of Egyptian Mummies* is also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection.) His interest in the early history of medicine is evidenced by this work, published in 1844, which describes the various forms of superstition which the science of medicine had always attracted since ancient times. Pettigrew considers alchemy and astrology, and the use of talismans, amulets and charms, as well as the history of Egyptian, Greek and Roman medicine, and some modern developments, including 'sympathetical cures' and the rejoining of severed fingers and ears. A chapter is devoted to the belief in the efficacy of the 'royal touch' against the King's Evil (scrofula), and another to the seventeenth-century faith healer Valentine Greatrakes, of whose alleged cures Pettigrew takes a robustly sceptical view.

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“ But I am over-tedious in these toys, which howsoever in some men’s too severe
censures they may be held absurd and ridiculous, I am the bolder to assert, as not
borrowed from circumforaneau rogues and gipsies, but out of the writings of
worthy philosophers and physicians.”

BURTON.

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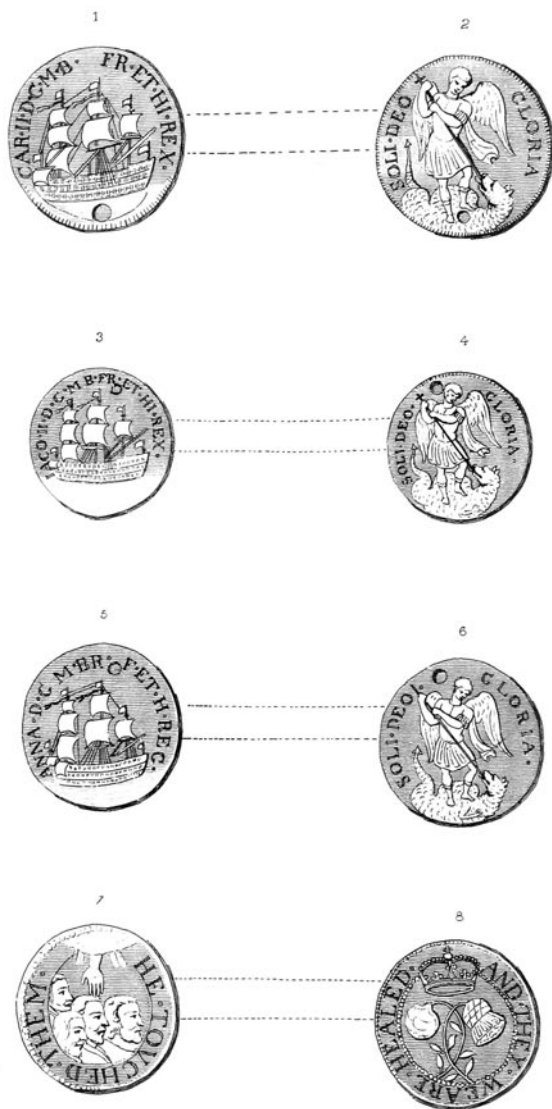
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ROYAL TOUCH PIECES.

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ON
SUPERSTITIONS
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HISTORY AND PRACTICE
OF
MEDICINE AND SURGERY.

BY
THOMAS JOSEPH PETTIGREW, F.R.S. F.S.A.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GÖTTINGEN,
SURGEON TO H. R. H. THE DUCHESS OF KENT,
TO THE ASYLUM FOR FEMALE ORPHANS,
&c. &c. &c.



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Dedication.



TO

HUDSON GURNEY, ESQ. F.R.S. V.P.S.A.

&c. &c. &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

I eagerly embrace the opportunity afforded me by the publication of these pages on the Superstitions connected with the History of Medicine and Surgery, to inscribe them to one, whose varied information and powerful intellect qualify him to form so able a judgment on the subject. Had I not, however, equal assurance of the benevolent disposition of your mind as of your ability, I should fear the result of my boldness.

Whatever may be the opinion your knowledge of History and Antiquities may lead you to form of my little production, written amidst the interruptions of a professional life, it is extremely gratifying to me to have the opportunity of publicly recording with what regard and esteem,

I have the honour to be,

Your most faithful and obliged servant,

T. J. PETTIGREW.

Saville Row, Oct. 28, 1843.

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ERRATUM.—Page 3, line 15, *for* explained *read* exclaimed.