

MEDIEVAL MEDICINE

A READER

edited by

FAITH WALLIS



University of Toronto Press

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LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Medieval medicine : a reader / edited by Faith Wallis.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4426-0169-7 (bound). – ISBN 978-1-4426-0103-1 (pbk.)

1. Medicine, Medieval. 2. Medicine, Medieval – Sources. I. Wallis, Faith

RI4I.M43 2010 610.902 C2010-900973-8

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The University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support for its publishing activities of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP).

Book design and composition by George Kirkpatrick.  
Printed in Canada

For n

30. *BALD'S LEECHBOOK AND LEECHBOOK III*

Source: trans. M.L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Michael Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London: Dent, and Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975). The source of each excerpt is indicated in the editorial title. Old English.

I. *Bald's Leechbook, Book I. External Disorders*

[*Surgery for Limbs Which Have Lost Circulation* (1.35; Cameron, pp. 170-71)]

About blackened and deadened body. The disease comes most often from \*erysipelas; after the inflammation of the disease has gone away, the body sometimes becomes blackened. Then, from the original inflammation, the disease is to be cooled and treated with cold things, and when the disease comes from outside without obvious symptom, then you must first cool the heat with pounded coriander, with bread crumbs moistened with cold water, or with the juice itself of the coriander, or with white of egg, or with wine, or with other things which have the same properties. When the inflammation and the heat are gone away and the part of the body has turned either somewhat pale or livid or something like that, then \*scarify the place (then you will improve it), and dry with a poultice such as is made with a \*cerote and warm barley and such things. He is not to be let blood from a vein but rather shall be tended with \*purgative \*potions, either \*emetic or diuretic, with which you can cleanse the \*corrupt \*humor and its red \*bile sickness. Indeed, even though the harm does not come from the inflammation of \*erysipelas the sharp potion is good for such patients. If the inflammatory livid or red condition come from outside, from wounds or from cuts or from blows, immediately treat the conditions with scarifying and poultices of barley; according to the way which physicians well know you will amend it. If the livid body is so deadened that there is no feeling in it, then you shall at once cut away all the dead and unfeeling part as far as the living body, so that there be nothing of the dead body left, nor of that which before felt neither iron nor fire. After that let the wound be treated as you would the parts which still may have some feeling and are not altogether dead. With frequent scarifyings, sometimes with many, sometimes with few, wean and draw off the blood from the deadened place. Treat the scarifyings thus: take bean or oat or barley meal, or of such meal that you think it will accept, add vinegar and honey, cook together and lay on and bind on the sore places. If you should want the salve to be stronger add a little salt, bind on at times and wash with vinegar or with wine. If there is need, give at times a herbal potion and at all times observe when you give the strong medicines what is the power and nature of the body, whether it is strong or hard and easily can

stand strong medicines, medicines. Apply the m there is a great difference in the constitution of a c and of one used to suffe bodies are softer and wea or cut off a limb from a power of the place, becau some feel the medicines diseased limb from a heal healthy body, but much ra that you may cure it bette take tender leek leaves and the fire is the sooner draw

[*Jan*

From bile disease, that is the most powerful of all di These are the symptoms: t like good silk and under l urine is yellow. Let him ble potion, stone baths [*that is, s* drink of dock in wine and drink a mulled drink; it wil

[*Pains in th*

If these symptoms continue ous and the patient cannot b this whether he ever was stru before he had fallen or got a to cure. If it comes from cold cause of that harder to cure. liver or in the lungs and the p dangerous. If it had been earl if he had earlier been wound from that, then that is very da the pain comes in the left side his spleen is sore or whether h that pain in the side comes fr By these symptoms you may u where not.

stand strong medicines, or is soft and tender and thin and cannot stand the medicines. Apply the medicines according to how you see the bodies, for there is a great difference between man's and woman's and child's bodies and in the constitution of a daily laborer and of the idle, the old and the young, and of one used to suffering and of one unused to such things. Also, pale bodies are softer and weaker than the dark and the red. If you wish to carve or cut off a limb from a body, then observe what sort of place it is and the power of the place, because some places putrefy if one tends them carelessly, some feel the medicines later, some earlier. If you must carve or cut off a diseased limb from a healthy body, then cut it (not) on the boundary of the healthy body, but much rather cut or carve on the healthy and living body, so that you may cure it better and sooner. When you set fire on a patient, then take tender leek leaves and pounded salt, lay over the places; then the heat of the fire is the sooner drawn away.

[*Jaundice (1.42; Cameron, p. 14)*]

From bile disease, that is from the yellow one, comes great misery. It is the most powerful of all diseases; then an excess of humor grows internally. These are the symptoms: that his body all becomes bitter and turns yellow like good silk and under his tongue strongly black and bad veins and his urine is yellow. Let him bleed from the lung vein, give him often a stirring potion, stone baths [*that is, saunas*] frequently. Prepare for him then a calming drink of dock in wine and water, and every morning in the bath let him drink a mulled drink; it will alleviate the bitterness of the bile.

[*Pains in the Side (1.46-50; Cameron, p. 15)*]

If these symptoms continue for a long time, then the ailment is too dangerous and the patient cannot be cured. Nevertheless, ask the one who suffers this whether he ever was struck in the side or stabbed or whether some time before he had fallen or got a fracture. If it were that, then he will be easier to cure. If it comes from cold or from harmful internal humors it will be because of that harder to cure. Then if he had earlier suffered from pain in the liver or in the lungs and the pain in the side comes from that then it is very dangerous. If it had been earlier in the spleen then it is easier to cure. Then if he had earlier been wounded in the lung and the pain in the side comes from that, then that is very dangerous. If it had been earlier in the spleen then the pain comes in the left side, that also has serious danger; ask him whether his spleen is sore or whether he has a sore throat. Thus you may understand that pain in the side comes from harmful humors and is very dangerous.... By these symptoms you may understand where the man is to be treated and where not.

[*A Sampler of Recipes, with Some Advice about Bloodletting* (1, 68–72; Swanton, pp. 181–82)]

1. 68. In case a poisonous spider – that is the stronger one – should bite a man, cut three incisions close to and running away from it; let the blood run into a green hazel-wood spoon, then throw it away over the road so there will be no injury. Again; cut one incision on the wound, pound a plantain, lay it on; no harm will come to him. For the bite of a weaving-spider, take the lower part of *æferthe* [an unidentified substance] and lichen from a black-thorn; dry it to powder, moisten with honey; treat the wound with that. For the bite of a poisonous spider: black snails fried in a hot pan and ground to powder, and pepper and betony; one is to eat that powder, and drink it and apply it. For the bite of a poisonous spider: take the lower part of mallow; apply it to the wound. Again; cut five incisions, one on the bite and four around about; in silence, cast the blood with a spoon over the wagon-road.

1. 69. For the bite of a mad dog: mix agrimony and plantain with honey and the white of an egg; treat the wound with that. For a wound from a dog: boil burdock and groundsel in butter; anoint with that. Again: bruise betony; apply it to the bite. Again: beat plantain; apply it. Again: seethe two or three onions; roast them on ashes; mix with fat and honey, apply it. Again: burn a pig's jaw to ashes; sprinkle on. Again: taken plantain root; pound it with fat; apply it to the wound so it casts out the poison.

1. 70. If a man be over-virile, boil water agrimony in Welsh ale; he is to drink it at night, fasting. If a man be insufficiently virile, boil the same herb in milk; then you will excite it. Again: boil in ewe's milk water agrimony, alexanders, the herb called Fernet's palm; so it will be as he most desires.

1. 71. For the dorsal muscle: seethe green rue in oil and in wax; anoint the dorsal muscle with it. Again: take goat hair; let it smoke under the breeches against the dorsal muscle. If a heel-sinew be broken, take Fernet's palm, seethe it in water, \*foment the limb with it, and wash the limb with it; and make a salve of butter; anoint after the fomentation.

1. 72. At which time bloodletting is to be avoided, and at which to be allowed. Bloodletting is to be avoided for a fortnight before Lammas [August 1] and for thirty-five days afterwards, because then all poisonous things fly and injure men greatly. Those doctors who were wisest taught that no one should drink a [medicinal] potion in that month, nor anywhere weaken his body, unless there were great need for it – and then to stay inside during the middle of the day, since the air is most infected then. Therefore the Romans

and all southern people heat and poisonousness. work, both for potions  
How one should av  
month [every day which  
teach that no one should  
a ten-night, and fifteen  
moon, but between each  
bloodletting as in early s  
ing winter are gathered  
trees and plants first spr  
the cavities of the body.

1. 87. If a man's hair fall  
per's bugloss, and the lov  
that plant and from all th  
If hair fall out, boil the  
hot. If a man should be  
see doc. 8] prescribes this r  
also – add oil to it; seethe  
and take willow leaves, pu  
over the coals, then strain

## 2. Bald's Lee

[*Liver Dis*

2. 17. For all liver disease  
the six things which cause  
plain symptoms respecting  
The liver extends on the r  
lobes and cleaves to the loin  
ing and nourishment. Wh  
to the liver; then they cha  
casts out the impurities wh  
it through four arteries; ch  
body to the furthest memb

Respecting six things w  
mor of the liver; second is  
the liver; fourth is surging  
fifth is a hardening of the st  
is a hardening of the liver

and all southern people made earth-houses for themselves because of the air's heat and poisonousness. Doctors also say that flowering herbs are then best to work, both for potions and salves and powder.

How one should avoid bloodletting on each of the six "fives" of the month [*every day which is a multiple of five*]; and when it is best. Doctors also teach that no one should be let blood at a five-night old moon, and again at a ten-night, and fifteen and twenty and twenty-five and a thirty-night old moon, but between each of the six "fives." And there is no time so good for bloodletting as in early spring when the evil humors which are imbibed during winter are gathered together, and best of all in the month of April, when trees and plants first sprout, when the bad pus and the bad blood increases in the cavities of the body....

1. 87. If a man's hair fall out, make him a salve; take great hellebore and viper's bugloss, and the lower part of burdock, and gentian; make a salve from that plant and from all these, and from butter on which no water has come. If hair fall out, boil the polypody fern, and foment the head with that very hot. If a man should be bald, the great doctor Pliny [*i.e., the Physica Plinii: see doc. 8*] prescribes this remedy: take dead bees, burn them to ashes - linseed also - add oil to it; seethe very long over the coals, then strain and wring out; and take willow leaves, pound them, pour into the oil, boil again for a while over the coals, then strain; anoint with it after the bath....

## 2. Bald's Leechbook, Book 2. Internal Disorders

[*Liver Diseases (2.17-18; Swanton, pp. 183-84)*]

2. 17. For all liver diseases, their origins and consequences, and concerning the six things which cause pain in the liver; and remedies for all those, and plain symptoms respecting both urine and lack of appetite, and their color. The liver extends on the right side as far as the pit of the stomach; it has five lobes and cleaves to the loins; it is the blood's material, and the blood's dwelling and nourishment. When foods are \*digested and attenuated, they come to the liver; then they change their color and turn into blood; and then it casts out the impurities which are there and collects the pure blood and sends it through four arteries; chiefly to the heart, and also throughout the whole body to the furthest members.

Respecting six things which cause liver-pain: first swelling, that is, a tumor of the liver; second is the bursting of the swelling; third is a wound of the liver; fourth is surging heat with sensitiveness and with a sore swelling; fifth is a hardening of the stomach with sensitiveness and with soreness; sixth is a hardening of the liver without sensitiveness and without soreness. You

may discern a swelling or tumor of the liver thus: the swelling in the liver occurs first under the soft rib on the right side, and there the man first feels heaviness and pain; and from that place the pain ascends over all the side as far as the collar-bone and as far as the right shoulder; and his urine is blood-red, as if it were bloody; and he is afflicted with lack of appetite and his color is pale, and he is somewhat feverish and constantly feels cold, and trembles as one does with typhus; he cannot keep food down; the liver enlarges and one cannot touch the pain with the hands, so severe is it; and when it is most severe one has no sleep. When the swelling bursts, then the urine is purulent like pus; if it runs out the pain is less.

[*Surgery for Liver Abscess (2.21; Cameron, p. 172)*]

*The description of the symptoms of liver abscess in Bald's Leechbook strongly suggests that it is caused by the parasite Entamoeba histolytica, which is responsible for dysentery. When it invades the liver, this parasite can cause abscesses that discharge into the colon, pleural cavity or body wall. The operation closely resembles one described in the Hippocratic corpus for removing pus from the pleural cavity.*

Yet if the swelling and the pus rise so that it seems to you that it can be lanced and let out, then prepare for him first a salve of dove's dung and such like, and beforehand bathe the place with sprinklings with the water and herbs that we wrote about before. When you consider that the swelling is becoming soft and subsiding, then touch him with the iron lancet and cut a little bit and skillfully so that the blood can come out lest a harmful pocket descend in thither. Do not release too much blood at any time, lest the sick man become too exhausted or die, but when you pierce or lance it then have a linen bandage ready so that you may bind up the wound at once, and when you wish to let out more afterwards remove the bandage; let it out thus little by little until it dries up, and when the wound is clean enlarge it so that the opening is not too narrow. Moreover, every day syringe it with a tube and wash with those things; afterwards lay on what may clean the wound. If it discharge very uncleanly, cleanse with honey and draw it together again.

[*Hemiplegia (Paralysis on One Side of the Body) (2.59; Cameron, p. 16)*]

The disease comes on the right side of the body or on the left; there the sinews are relaxed and have a slimy and thick humor, harmful, thick and plentiful. The humor must be removed with bloodlettings and potions and medicines. When the disease first comes on the patient, then open his mouth, look at his tongue; then it is whiter on the side on which the disease will be. Then treat him thus. Carry the patient into a very well enclosed and warm chamber, let him rest there very well sheltered and let warm coals be

brought in frequently. TH  
whichever one you find c

[*Head*]

In case a man ache in the  
a red fillet; let him bind t  
and rue, rub into oil, put  
water; he will be healthy.  
or butter; with that anoint  
head; even though his min  
headache, take salt and rue  
put into honey, and with it  
top of the head. For the sam  
chicks; take care that they c  
up three of them in whateve  
he will soon be well; they ar  
Devil's temptations, and gob  
and bewitching and evil en  
will find them. If a man ache  
put it into strong vinegar, a  
top. For the same: dig up plan  
bind the roots around the hea

[*Pregnancy and*]

In case a woman cannot brin  
part, boil in milk and in wate  
eat and the juice to sup. For t  
genitalia, the lower part of he  
that shall be done by a boy or  
herbs lest the innards come ou  
the woman, boil old fat bacon  
boil in ale brooklime or mallow  
child in a woman, boil brooklin  
to drink twice a day. A pregna  
should eat nothing salty or swe  
anything fat, nor drink to intox  
on horseback, lest the child be b  
much after birthing, boil the lov  
to eat, and the juice to sup.

brought in frequently. Then unwrap him and look at his hands carefully and whichever one you find cold, at once bleed him on the cold vein.

### 3. Leechbook III

[Headache (III.1; Swanton, p. 184-85)]

In case a man ache in the head: take the lower part of crosswort, put it on a red fillet; let him bind the head with it. For the same: take mustard seed and rue, rub into oil, put into hot water; wash the head frequently in that water; he will be healthy. For an old headache, take pennyroyal, boil in oil or butter; with that anoint the temples and over the eyes and on top of the head; even though his mind be turned, he will be healthy. For a very old headache, take salt and rue and bunches of ivy berries; pound all together, put into honey, and with it anoint the temples and the forehead and on the top of the head. For the same: look for little stones in the stomachs of swallow chicks; take care that they do not touch earth or water or other stones; sew up three of them in whatever you wish; put them on the man who is in need; he will soon be well; they are good for headache and for eye pain and for the Devil's temptations, and goblins, and typhus, and incubus and herbal seizure and bewitching and evil enchantments; it must be big chicks in which you will find them. If a man ache on one side of his head, thoroughly pound rue, put it into strong vinegar, and with that let the head be anointed right on top. For the same: dig up plantain, without iron, before the rising of the sun; bind the roots around the head with a moist red fillet; he will soon be well.

[Pregnancy and Childbirth (III.37, Cameron, p. 175)]

In case a woman cannot bring forth a child, take wild parsnip, the lower part, boil in milk and in water, put equal amounts of both, give the roots to eat and the juice to sup. For the same, bind on the left thigh, up against the genitalia, the lower part of henbane or twelve grains of coriander seed, and that shall be done by a boy or a girl; when the child is delivered remove the herbs lest the innards come out. If the natural afterbirth will not go out of the woman, boil old fat bacon in water, [and] with it foment the vulva; or boil in ale brooklime or mallow leaves, give it to drink hot. If there be a dead child in a woman, boil brooklime and pennyroyal in milk and in water, give to drink twice a day. A pregnant woman is to be earnestly warned that she should eat nothing salty or sweet, nor drink beer, nor eat swine's flesh nor anything fat, nor drink to intoxication, nor travel by road, nor ride too much on horseback, lest the child be born before the proper time. If she bleeds too much after birthing, boil the lower part of *dote* [unidentified herb] in milk, give to eat, and the juice to sup.



[*Charms against Various Ills* (III.57, 61, Swanton, p. 185)]

Against a woman's chatter: eat a radish at night, while fasting; that day the chatter cannot harm you.

Make thus a salve against the race of elves, goblins, and those with whom the Devil copulates; take the female hop-plant, wormwood, betony, lupin, vervain, henbane, dittander, viper's bugloss, bilberry plants, cropleek, garlic, madder grains, corn cockle, fennel. Put those plants in a vat; place under an altar; sing nine masses over it; boil it in butter and in sheep's grease; add much holy salt; strain through a cloth; throw the herbs into running water. If any evil temptation come to a man, or elf or goblin, anoint his face with this salve, and put it on his eyes and where his body is sore, and cense him and frequently sign him with the cross; his condition will soon be better.

[*Elf-Sickness* (III.62-63; Cameron, pp. 138-39, 154)]

For elf-sickness, take bishopswort, fennel, lupin, althone the lower part and lichen from a hallowed crucifix and frankincense, put a handful of each, tie up all the herbs in a cloth, dip in consecrated font-water three times, let sing over them three [votive] masses: one, *Omnibus sanctis* [in honor of all the saints], another *Contra tribulationem* [against tribulation], the third, *Pro infirmis* [for the sick]; then put coals in a brazier and lay the herbs on them, then cense the man with the herbs before tierce [9 a.m.] and at night and sing the *Litany* and *Creed* and *Pater noster* [the Lord's Prayer] and write a Christ's cross for him on every limb, and take a little handful of herbs of these same kinds similarly consecrated and boil in milk, drip holy water on them three times and let sup before his meal; he will soon be well....

If he has the *elfsogopa* [literally, "elf-sucked"], his eyes are yellow where they should be red. If you wish to treat the man, consider his behavior and observe which sex he is: if it is a male and he looks up when you first examine him and his face is dark yellow, that man you might cure completely if he has not been too long in it; if it is a woman and she looks down when you first examine her and her face is dusky red, you may treat her also. If it is longer by a day than twelve months and the appearance be like this, then you can improve it for a while, and yet cannot cure completely. Write this writing: *Scriptum est rex regum et dominus dominantium. byrnice. beronice. luslure. iehe. aius. aius. aius. Sanctus. Sanctus. Sanctus. dominus deus Sabaoth. amen. aleluiah.* [It is written: King of King and Lord of Lords. byrnice. beronice. luslure. iehe [In Greek] Holy. Holy. Holy. [In Latin] Holy. Holy. Holy. Lord God of hosts. Amen. Alleluia.] Sing this over the drink and the writing: *Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri ihesu christi. per inpositionem huius scriptura expelle a famulo tuo N. omnem impetum castalidum, de capite, de capillis, de cerebro, de fronte, de lingua, de sublingua, de guttore, de faucibus, de dentibus, de oculis, de naribus, de auribus, de manibus, de*

collo, de brachiis, de corde, omnium membrorum intus. Christ, by the imposition of sault, from the head, from from under the tongue, from from the nostrils, from the the heart, from the soul, from all the members within and sage, cassock, dracontia, soms, three cloves of ga amounts; write three times the ritual anointing of the d the writing, with it write omnipotens pater domini no gustum huius expelle diabolu Jesus Christ, by the imposit from your servant N.] Wet t on each limb and say: Sig [Preserve the sign of the cross to, bid the patient himself him cross him as best he of the devil.

III. 63. If one is in the wa his eyes watering and he v treatment: boarthroat, casso campane, marshmallow he horehound, dock, elder, ce Pour over with ale, add holy

For wounds I have bounc so that the wounds may n nor expand, nor multiply, nor wound grow, not lesic but to him [I] myself hold nor may it pain you more pain.

Sing this many times: "Earth This charm may be sung on v

collo, de brachiis, de corde, de anima, de genibus, de coxis, de pedibus, de compagibus omnium membrorum intus et foris, amen. [Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the imposition of this writing cast out from your servant N. every elfish assault, from the head, from the hair, from the brain, from the forehead, from the tongue, from under the tongue, from the throat, from the gullet, from the teeth, from the eyes, from the nostrils, from the ears, from the hands, from the neck, from the arms, from the heart, from the soul, from the knees, from the hips, from the feet, from the joints of all the members within and without. Amen.] Then make a drink: font water, rue, sage, cassock, dracontia, smooth plantain the lower part, feverfew, dill blossoms, three cloves of garlic, fennel, wormwood, lovage, lupin, all of equal amounts; write three times a cross with oil of extreme unction [oil used for the ritual anointing of the dying] and say: *Pax tibi* [Peace be with you]. Then take the writing, with it write a cross over the drink and sing this over it: *Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri ihesu Christi per inpositionem huius scripture et per gustum huius expelle diabolium a famulo tuo N.* [Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the imposition of this writing and by this drink, cast out the devil from your servant N.] Wet the writing in the drink, and write a cross with it on each limb and say: *Signum crucis Christi conservate in vitam eternam amen.* [Preserve the sign of the cross of Christ to everlasting life. Amen.] If you do not wish to, bid the patient himself or one who is most closely related to him, and let him cross him as best he can. This treatment is good for every temptation of the devil.

III. 63. If one is in the water elf-sickness, then his fingernails are livid and his eyes watering and he wishes to look downward. Do this for him as a treatment: boarthroat, cassock, the lower part of iris, yewberry, lupin, elecampane, marshmallow heads, fen mint, dill, lily, attorlothe, pennyroyal, horehound, dock, elder, centaury, wormwood, strawberry leaves, comfrey. Pour over with ale, add holy water, sing this charm over three times:

For wounds I have bound on the best of battle-bandages,  
 so that the wounds may not burn or burst,  
 nor expand, nor multiply, nor skip about,  
 nor wound grow, not lesion deepen;  
 but to him [I] myself hold out a cup of health,  
 nor may it pain you more than earth on eare [meaning unknown] would  
 pain.

Sing this many times: "Earth bear on thee with all her might and main."  
 This charm may be sung on wounds.