SOME NOTES ON OLD-TIME LEPROSY IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND.

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(These Notes were begun as part of a proposed review, being in their inception a criticism of some historical matter in a recently published volume on Leprosy. But the discussion, a pleasant diversion from less congenial tasks, expanded until its primary purpose was lost sight of, and most of what follows—excepting the remarks on the English leper laws—has no direct reference to the original project.)

Since "Leprosy" will be a standard text for years to come, one would like to see the evidence regarding leprosy in mediæval Britain discussed more fully and in a more critical spirit. According to the authors, graphic records exist of the English leper laws, and they quote from Sir James Simpson a digest of these measures. Unfortunately no reference is given either to original statutes, or to the source of the authors' abstract.

Every statement in the summary is open to criticism, but in order to avoid undue tediousness, only a few points will be considered, namely, "Anyone found to be suffering from the disease was separated from his family, divorced, and his wife allowed to marry again." "He had to live outside the gates of a town." "He was regarded as dead by civil law." In spite of considerable expenditure of labour, I have failed to find any such decrees in the statutory law of England. They seem to me to comprise foreign enactments, ecclesiastical ordinances and resolutions, as well as excerpts from the rules of leper-hospitals which had no authority beyond their own gates.

As regards segregation—it is true that a person aggrieved by the presence of a leper, under certain conditions, could obtain the writ De Leproso Amovendo which directed his removal to a place apart. But the writ applied only to town-dwelling lepers who persisted in obtruding themselves on public assemblies. Further, it was rendered nugatory as the leper could not be removed if he undertook to remain in his house, where he would come into still more prolonged contact with his family, thus replacing a slight risk of contagion by a very real danger.

Obviously such a cumbrous and lengthy legal procedure could be undertaken in special cases only,\(^1\) and the decree De Leproso Amovendo does not appear to have been in general operation at any period.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) See the curious inquisition concerning Johanna Nightynagle, of Brentwood, in Rymer’s Foedera (1710 edition), Vol. XI, p. 635, Anno 1468. This woman, accused of "the foul infection of leprosy," refused to depart from the company of her neighbours, as directed, and appealed to Edward IV. She was examined under the King’s warrant and found to be free from any blemish of leprosy.

\(^2\) The form of this writ is given in the several editions of the Natura Brevium by FitzHerbert (a Judge of Henry VIII’s reign), together with his commentary thereon. The latter is as follows: “The Writ de Leproso amovendo lieth, where
There was little real segregation, as we understand the term. Even the inmates of leper-hospitals systematically visited towns for the purpose of begging, and in certain localities they could exact toll of all corn and bread sold in the market, or, as in Shrewsbury, take a handful of corn from every sack offered for sale. The rules of the Sherburn leper-hospital expressly permitted the lepers to receive their friends, and those coming from a distance were allowed to remain all night. It is illuminating to read in these same rules that a rebellious leper, whose contumacy yielded neither to flogging nor to a diet of bread and water, would receive the dread and final penalty of—expulsion! There is evidence, moreover, that lepers could refuse to submit to hospital isolation, and the great difficulty of finding "so many lepers" (i.e., six!) willing to lead a subjugated life is given as a reason for the shortage of patients in St. Julian's leper-hospital in 1344 (quod vix seu raro inveniuntur tot leprosi volentes vitam ducere observantibus obligatam ad dictum hospitale concurrentes).

One severe mandate directed against lepers is that of 20 Edward III, 1346, which shows, incidentally, the unreality of the "absolute and strict segregation" to which Macnamara, quoted by the authors, attributes the eradication of the disease. This ordinance orders the withdrawal of all lepers then residing in London for the curious reason, stated in the (translated) preamble—"and some of them, endeavouring to contaminate others with that abominable blemish (that so, to their own wretched solace, they may have the more fellows in suffering) as well in the way of mutual communications, and by the contagion of their polluted breath, as by carnal intercourse with women in stews and other secret places, detestably frequenting the same, do so taint persons who are sound, both male and

"a Man is a Lazar or a Leper, and is dwelling in any Town, and he will come into the Church, or amongst his Neighbours where they are assembled, to talk with them, to their Annoyance and Disturbance,—then he or they may sue forth that Writ for to remove him from their Company. But it seemeth, if a Man be a Leper or a Lazar, and will keep himself within his House, and will not converse with his Neighbours, that then he shall not be moved out of his House. But there are divers Manners of Lepers; but it seemeth that the Writ is for those Lepers who appear to the Sight of all Men that they are Lepers by their Voice, and their Sores, and the Putrefaction of their Flesh, and by the Smell of them: But for those who are infected with that Disease in their Bodies, and it doth not appear outwardly upon their Bodies, Quere, whether such Writ lieth for to remove them." (8th Edition, p. 534.)

As regards these indications of "leprosy," it is noteworthy that the commentary was written subsequent to the great epidemic of the Morbus Gallicus—first definitely recorded for these islands, so far as I am aware, in 1497—and at a period long before the tertiary lesions of this disease were recognized as having any connexion with the earlier symptoms.

female, to the great injury of the people dwelling in the city aforesaid, and
the manifest peril of other persons to the same city resorting."  
It would be interesting to know what inspired this order of ejectment.
Was it genuine concern for the public health, as stated, or was the decree
merely a move in the age-long war of the authorities against the beggars,
whose lawlessness and tumult constituted an intolerable nuisance to
peaceable folk? To quote the words of the Act of 1530, beggars are
responsible for "contynuall theftes, murders, and other haynous offences,
which displeased God, damaged the king's subjects, and disturbed the
common weal of the realm." In the Middle Ages lepers, real or supposed,
were allowed to beg, a privilege ordinarily denied to most under
the heavy penalties of whipping, branding and even death, and this expulsion
from London must have given welcome relief to the citizens, whatever the
cause of its inception. We can be quite sure that not all the ejected were
victims of leprosy, probably not even the majority. It is also likely that
there was some proportion of impostors, for an imputation of leprosy
provided the easiest means of livelihood then available for rogues and
vagebonds.

"Anyone found suffering from the disease . . . was divorced and
his wife allowed to marry again." If the law of the land recognized leprosy
as severing the marriage tie, there would have been no necessity for two
ecclesiastical leper-hospitals (Ilford, in Essex; and St. Julian, in St. Albans)
to have included in their rules the respective provisions: "That no married
leper be admitted unless his wife at the same time become a nun"; and,
"That those admitted be single persons, or, if married, to part by
consent."  
It is noteworthy that there is here no question of the wife's admission to
hospital. Both these establishments were for men only: Ilford, founded
some time in the twelfth century, having provision for thirteen; and St.
Julian's, founded in 1135, for six.

Further, in a rather pathetic will, dated 1428, William Mannyng, a poor
leper inmate of Monkbridge Hospital, makes the following disposal of his
little property. Half a pound of wax (candles) to be burned over his body,
sixpence to York Cathedral, sixpence to the monks of Knaresburgh, and
"the residue to my wife, Agnes" (residuum Agneti uxori meae). It is
stated that Edgar, an Anglo-Saxon king of England, passed a law making
leprosy a valid cause for divorce—doubtless incited thereto by the

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1 For the full text of the mandate, in English, see Riley, T. H., "Memorials
of London in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," p. 230, from
which the above extract is taken.

2 The ancient nursery rhyme, "Hark! Hark! the dogs do bark, The beggars
are coming to town," was once something more than a meaningless jingle.

3 Dugdale, Sir W., Monasticon Anglicanum (1717 edition).

5 Testamentum Willielmi Mannyng Lazeri Domus de Munkbrig, Will No.
CCXCVIII in Testamenta Eboracensia, pts. 1 & 2; Surtees Society.
W. P. MacArthur

Venedotian and Dimetian Codes—but "leprosy" to the Anglo-Saxons may have meant anything. Judging from their chronicles, they did not distinguish even bubonic plague—recognized and named both on the continent and in Ireland—from other pestilences. The Plague of Justinian is not even mentioned in any English chronicle, and the great epidemic of 664, which we know from Irish sources to have been bubonic plague, is recorded, but unnamed. Thenceforth over several centuries we find a succession of nameless and unrecognizable epidemics, mainly ascribed to hunger, so that the "Anglorum fames" became a byword. The value of an early English diagnosis of leprosy may be imagined accordingly.¹ Edgar's law, whatever its implication, lapsed with the Norman Conquest, and here ended, so far as I can discover, the statutory recognition of leprosy as a cause for divorce in England.

"He was regarded as dead by civil law." As a condition of admission to certain lazar-houses, lepers had to take vows and submit themselves to whatever rules were laid down for their discipline. Various penalties were prescribed for breaches of these regulations, including expulsion in extreme cases. One of the articles of St. Julian's leper-hospital, St. Albans, dealt with wills, and directed that none of the brethren—i.e., the leprous inmates—might make a will "except by permission of the master" (of the hospital).² If lepers were dead in the eye of the civil law, they

¹ Sir James Simpson says: "In these early times, the very words employed to designate the disease show its extent and severity," and instances an Old English phrase, "sea mycle adl" (the great ill), as signifying leprosy. He names several authors in support of this interpretation, but the number is immaterial as they all borrow from Somner's Dict. Sax. Lat. Angl. (1659). Here sea micil adl is given as meaning "Elephantiasis the Leprosse, etc." The "etc." is suggestive. Somner's phrase, whatever its source, was not the common Old English term for leprosy, and is not included amongst the words for that disease in Ælfric's Glossary. The many references to leprosy—generally in a figurative sense—in Pope Gregory's Pastoral Care are rendered in the Old English translation by the usual derivatives and variants of hreof, which are also employed in the MS. on Leechcraft printed in the Rolls series. So too in the Gospels we have, Matt. viii. 3, —And hys hreofla was hrædlice geclaensod ("And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" —A.V.); and, Mark i. 42 — Sóna seo hreofnes him fram gewât ("Immediately the leprosy departed from him" —A.V.). Just as in other languages, "hreofla," etc., included scab, ulcerations and other morbid conditions in addition to leprosy.

² "Isti sunt articuli observandi inter Fratres professos Domus Sancti Juliani juxta Sanctum Albanum.

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De Testamentis.


The later articles enacted by the Abbot Michael, 1344, include directions for the drawing up of wills, under the heading, De forma testandi—Rubrica.—Gesta. Abbatum, Vol. II, p. 488.
could not have made wills, nor disposed of their property, and so there
would have been no point whatever in requiring the inmates to assent to
the rule given overleaf. The will of “William Mannya, lazar,” just quoted,
is additional evidence on this point, since it was admitted for probate in
the usual way.

With these remarks we may leave the question of the English leper
laws, and proceed to a general consideration of leprosy in its historical
aspect. Most of what follows has no direct reference to the volume which
introduced this discussion.

It is very difficult nowadays to determine the approximate prevalence
of leprosy in early times. That the disease existed is beyond doubt, but its
importance was exaggerated out of recognition by ignorance, and the fifty
biblical references to leprosy were a perpetual suggestion of an extensive
involvement far removed from actuality. A maudlin sentiment, fostered
by ecclesiastical teaching and example, regarded lepers as “Christ’s poor,”
the earthly representatives of the beggar who was carried by the angels
into Abraham’s bosom, and of that other Lazarus whom Jesus is recorded
as having loved and raised from the dead. The latter became the patron
saint of lepers by a series of gradations which illustrate the disordered
workings of the early monkish imagination. Needless to say, there is
no scriptural record that either the symbolical beggar of Christ’s parable, or
the real Lazarus of Bethany, suffered from leprosy. But this biblical
reticence helped rather than hindered diagnosis. The beggar was ulcersus,
full of sores, which then suggested leprosy only.¹ The nature of the
infliction thus satisfactorily determined, the beggar’s name, Lazarus (which
merely means, “Helped of God”), was identified with his supposed disease,
and “lazarus” or “lazar” became synonymous with “leper.” The
diagnosis of the saint’s ailment is now rendered simple. Since he was
called “Lazarus,” clearly he must have been a leper, and who more suited
than he to be their patron saint! And the general conception of mediæval
leprosy is based mainly on indefinite and unsupported testimony of men
who could think and argue along lines like these.

Since much of the evidence adduced by medical and other writers is of
the nature of mere textual mention of terms for the disease, it is well to
consider what the chroniclers meant by “lepra,” and its derivatives. First,
these words were used in the restricted sense of leprosy, and of what was
believed to be such. Making every allowance for habitual plagiarism, and
omitting much that is unintelligible, the writings of several early continen‐
tal physicians show evidence of first-hand acquaintance with leprosy.
But Gordonius’ precepts—judging by his protests not always followed by

¹ It is hardly necessary to add that the boils which afflicted the patriarch Job
were similarly identified. In a context which proves the specific signification of
“lepra,” the Gesta Abbatum has “… revocantes ad memoriam beati Job, quis
cum percussus esset lepra.”—Vol. II, p. 503.
those whom he addressed—are no mirror of the practice obtaining in mediæval England. Perforce the diagnosis was often decided by monks, overseers, or even by watchmen at some city gate. If these functionaries were to carry out a leper-hunt in an English hospital to-day, they would not come away empty-handed, and mediæval "lepers" doubtless included a mixed assortment of sufferers from various skin diseases, ulcers, tumours and deformities. But we have no evidence regarding the relative proportions of the true lepers, and the supposed, since most of the records are mere assertions of "leprosy," with nothing in the context to indicate the true nature of the ailment. Sometimes, however, we find an account of some unquestioned "leper," embellished with clinical details which prove the writer's undoing, for they suffice to show that the diagnosis given so complacently was absolutely wrong. The sad case of Marjory Bysseth in Elgin will bear repetition. This unfortunate old woman was charged with witchcraft by certain friars on the grounds that she had repeated her prayers backwards, and had transformed herself into a hare. To her tears and prayers of, "Pitie! Pitie! I am guiltless of ye fausse crymes, never sae much as thought of by mie," was added the evidence of a parish official who testified to her known good character. But suddenly the favourable atmosphere of the inquiry changed. A "Leper" came running from the neighbouring lazar-house, and passing through the crowd, he "bared his hand and his hail arm, ye which was wythered and covered over with scurfes, most puyeous to behold, and he said, 'At ye day of Pentecost last past, thys womyan did give unto me ane shell of oyntment, with ye which I annoynted my hand to cure ane inposthume [abscess] which had cum over it, and beholde, from that day furthe untyll thys, it hath shrunk and whynthered as you see it now.' . . . But ye said Marjory Bysseth cried puyeously, that God had forsaken her, that she meanyed gude only and not evill." But all this availed her nothing, since she had smitten a man with "leprosy." Thereupon the poor old creature was dragged "amid mony tears and cryes to ye pool . . . and soo they plonge her in ye water. And quhen as she went down in ye water, there was ane gret shoute; but as she rose agayne and raised up her arms, as gif [if] she wod have cum up, there was silence for ane space, when agane she gaed doune with ane bubblinge noise, and they shouted finallie—'to Sathan's kyngdome she hath gane,' and forthwith went their wavses."

Again, we find "leprosy" mentioned in some context which prevents any exact interpretation of the word. The great pandemic of plague, long afterwards named "The Black Death," broke out in England in August, 1348, and raged there until the end of 1349. Scotland escaped

1 "Lepers at the present day are very injudiciously diagnosed. Whoever therefore has ears, let him heed this, if he will."

in the main until 1350. In 1349, when England was prostrated by the
weight of the epidemic, the "exulting Scots" assembled an army in
Selkirk Forest in preparation for a massed assault on the stricken foe.
But plague, spreading slowly northwards, broke out in the Scottish army
and about 5,000 of the troops died, a disaster which effectively cooled their
warlike ardour. In the contemporary Chronicon Galfridi le Baker, this
outbreak—recognized as plague at the time—is called "lepra." The
writer was quite familiar with the buboes, hæmorrhages, and other plague
signs, and enumerates them on the same page of his chronicle. Obviously
he employs lepra as a general term for "affliction," just as both St.
Jerome and John Wyclif apply the epithet "leprous" to Christ, or at
any rate in a passage which they believed to foretell Christ's sufferings
on earth. But when Hubert de Burg, in a tirade against Henry III,
declares wildly that he squints, is a craven, has "a kind of leprosy"
(speciem leprae), and so on, forthwith Henry of England is pronounced a
leper! Then what of Le Baker's Scots and the earthly Christ? The
translators of King James's Bible, with an understanding of ancient usage
foreign to modern verbalists, rendered St. Jerome's leprosus by "stricken."
Even a more comprehensive employment of this word is found in the
pages of the older writers where, for example, we are told that "Myst
and fog . . . make the graine leprous," and are warned that "Olde
beefe . . . doth engender melancholye and leporouse humours."

The English noun "leprosy," like its Latin equivalent, had a similar
variety of meanings, and amongst others was ordinarily applied to mange
in animals. It is worth considering, further, what "leprosy" would have
meant to an Irish scribe, since the earliest references to leprosy in these
islands are cited from Irish sources. This point is important also, for
many of the early English clerics studied in Ireland, then the chief centre
of learning in Western Europe. The Erse words were as comprehensive
as the English and Latin. Lobhar could mean not only a leper, but also a
person afflicted with various distempers, and could even be used for one
who was merely of a delicate and wretched appearance. Clam (modern
claimhe), another word for leprosy, could also mean scurvy, and like the
English "leprosy" was commonly used for mange in animals.

Yet in spite of all this inexactness, vague and undefined mention of

(*) Isaiah, liii.
(2) Blundevil, The Order of curing Horses diseases (1580 ed.): "The cankered
mangenesse, most commonlie called of the old writers the Leprosie."—Ch. III, 2.
Sir James Simpson stresses the substitution of "Elephantuosi" for the usual
"Leprosi" in a mediæval MS. reference to lepers. He considers this "very
striking exception" as "confirmatory" of his opinion that those styled "Leprosi"
suffered from the elephantiasis of the Greeks, i.e., true leprosy. Unfortunately
for this argument, the main title of the chapter (cliiii) on Mange in the treatise
on Horses' Diseases just mentioned, is, "The Leprosie or uniuersall manginesse,
called of the old writers Elephantia."
"leprosy" is accepted as though purged and snuffed from ambiguity, and the equivalent of precise scientific usage.

Not only are we misled by subscribers to the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, but there is further darkening of counsel by seekers after leprosy whose assertions are not supported, even verbally, by the texts they cite. Newman¹ says of Ireland in the 6th Century, "It seems there was (what was termed) a pestilence of leprosy." As evidence of this he gives a reference to the Chronicum Scotorum, A.D. 550. Under this year the Chronicum has no entry of leprosy or any other disease, but a Mortalitas magna is recorded for the succeeding year, 551. This portion of the Chronicum is written in Latin with occasional explanatory interpolations in Erse. Regarding this mortalitas the scribe was at pains to insert two such glosses, one in the text and one in the margin, so that there may be no possible misunderstanding of the nature of the disease. The glosses are, respectively, "i. an Crom Conaill," and "i. in Buidi Conaill." These are both archaic Erse for Bubonic Plague, and are the terms commonly employed by the Irish annalists for the Plague of Justinian, of which the outbreak noted in the Chronicum Scotorum was an extension.

This allegation of extensive leprosy in the 6th Century is brought forward also by Belcher,² and it is curious that he, too, gives his authority as the Chronicum Scotorum, A.D. 550. He adds in English what is stated to be an extract from the chronic for that year, as follows: "The pestilence which is called samtrusg, the mange, scurvy, or leprosy, raged this year." This is obviously intended for the entry of the year 554, which reads in the original, "Pestis quae vocatur samtrusg." That is all. The gloss of samtrusg by "mange, scurvy or leprosy" is an addition by Belcher. The identity of the ailment called "samtrusg" in old Erse cannot be determined with certainty. It was some disease which appeared in epidemic form, and reached such proportions that its occurrence in several instances was the only event noted by a chronicler for the year. From a gloss appearing in one text, there appears to have been some obvious skin manifestation. Whatever samtrusg may have been, certainly it was not leprosy.

When we are asked to accept the theory of early widespread leprosy in Ireland, and by implication in England too, supported by evidence like the foregoing, there is a struggle between laughter and tears.

An examination of the question of mediæval leper-hospitals and lazarettes discloses similar exaggeration and special pleading. Lists of over a hundred leper-houses have been compiled by Simpson³ and others, and the simple-minded reader will be duly impressed by these imposing arrays. But

if he troubles himself to look up such records as still exist, the charters, where known, the reports of inquisitions, visitations and so forth, he will find his faith somewhat shaken, and will view with suspicion claims made for establishments where similar documentary evidence cannot be produced.

Some of the alleged “leper-hospitals” were almshouses, pure and simple, like that of St. John, in Aylesbury, established for the relief of the sick and poor of that town (ad sustentandum infirmos et degentes ejusdem villae).

Others were leper-houses only in part, and even then, frequently the leprosi constituted but a minority of the establishment. At an uncertain date before his death, which occurred in 1139, Thurstan, Archbishop of York, established a hospital at Ripon, “for the relief of all the lepers born in Richmondshire” (ad sustentandum omnes leprosos in Ripschire procreatos et genitos). The endowment provided for eighteen patients, but even this modest allotment for “all the lepers of Richmondshire” was not reserved exclusively for them, the poor having an equal claim for relief (ad sublevamentum tam pauperum quam leprosum). Ripon leper-hospital was empty of lepers at the time of Edward III’s commission (1341). In Henry VIII’s reign the same state of affairs is recorded, the hospital then containing two priests “and five pore people,” appointed to pray for all “christen sowlez.” Petrus Capellanus established St. Mary Magdalene’s at Lynn, in 1145, with provision for a prior, nine sound brethren and three leprous. I have not found any later account of this foundation, but if such exists, one might hazard a prophecy of a metamorphosis of the three leprous brethren to three whole brethren. At Oxford, St. Bartholomew’s was endowed some time during the reign of Henry I (1100-85), for a master, a clerk, two whole brethren, and six leprous or infirm brethren. But there were no leprous brethren in St. Bartholomew’s at the date of Edward III’s inquisition.

Again, hospitals established explicitly for lepers only might be alienated to other purposes, for one reason or another, but often because the required lepers were not forthcoming. King John’s lazaret-house at Stourbridge was applied to other purposes within fifty years of its foundation.

Twenty-five leprous sisters, a master, prioress, and three priests were provided for in St. James’s near Canterbury, founded in 1189. But Edward III’s commissioners found St. James’s occupied by twenty-five whole sisters.

Adam de Cherrynng founded a leper-house in Romney, Kent, about 1190, for an unstated number of lepers, probably very few as the establishment included only one priest. In 1363 the hospital is reported as “derelict and totally desolate,” “chiefly because no lepers were found, nor for long

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1 Most of the historical notes on the English leper-hospitals, following hereon, are taken from the various charters, depositions, and so forth, which appear in the Monasticon Anglicanum, Gesta Abbatis, and Bishop Tanner’s Notitia Monastica.
times past could any be discovered" (eo maxime quod nulli leprosi reperiebantur nec longis temporibus retroactis potuerunt reperiri). In this year, 1363, John Frauncys received a charter for a new foundation, providing for one master and one priest, the fruitless quest for lepers having been abandoned.

Reference was made in an earlier part of these notes to the rules of three leper-houses, Ilford, St. Julian’s, and Sherburn, and something in consequence should be said of their subsequent history. St. Thomas’s, at Ilford in Essex, was founded by Adeliza, Abbess of Berking, at an uncertain date during the twelfth century, for the support of three clerics and thirteen poor lepers. Edward VI’s commissioners found it empty of lepers: “The Hospital ther founded to find 13 pore men being lepers 2 Pryests and one Clerke whereof there is at this Daye but one Priest and 2 pore men.” The second of these three, St. Julian’s, had also a clerical founder, Jeffreys, Abbot of St. Albans, and was endowed for six lepers in 1135. It is recorded in 1344 that the revenues of St. Julian’s are too large for its needs, the accommodation not being in demand. “Clearly in general there are not above three (patients), occasionally two, and sometimes only one” (videlicet, unus tantum, aliquando duo, et, ut communiter nonnisi tres). The last, Sherburn near Durham, the largest leper-hospital in England, had as founder Bishop Pudsey of Durham, “the joly Byshop,” as Lambarde calls him. It was built in 1184 to accommodate the, then, enormous number of sixty-five patients, both male and female, together with a prior and prioress, three priests and four other clerics. Nothing is known of the history of Sherburn for over a hundred years, during which time we may assume, if we will, that the allotted number of lepers remained in enjoyment of the “joly Byshop’s” charity. We next hear of Sherburn when its charter was confirmed by Bishop Kellaw, with the direction that the constitution should be ever thereafter observed inviolably. Even if the terms of the original charter had been “observed inviolably,” certainly those of the confirmation were not, and finally the abuses and threatened ruin of the hospital were brought to the notice of the pope. In 1434, Bishop Langley promulgated new regulations for the better government of the hospital. Instead of the sixty-five lepers, the master was now charged with the “maintenance of thirteen poor brethren and of two lepers,” and regarding these latter there is the suggestive proviso—“if they can be found in these parts” (si in partibus reperiri possunt). Which is the last heard of leprosy in the Sherburn leper-hospital. The inference of the addendum is obvious, and it is hardly necessary to quote the evidence on this point given at a later inquiry, “and that ther cowide not so many Laiseris be found in that part of England.” In 1557, the charge was increased to “8 poore men and women, 4 Chaplens, 2 Deacons and 4 Choristers.” The later history of the foundation may be given in part, as it typifies the fate of so many of the “leper-hospitals:” “After this there is another Translacion obtained by one
Mr. Decar, and by that all the sixteene poor people were utterly expelled; and in their place two preestes, two Diacons and fower Children: so that by this Translacion on there should be six preestes, six Diacons and six Queresters. But is there neither poor man, nor poor woman, neither yet Priest nor Clerk, nor Child found of the Howse charge; saving only two priests, two Clerks, and two Children. . . . And all the residue of the Revenues of the Howse, being only poor men's Livings, goeth all together, to the private use of the Master."

It is hoped that the foregoing evidence proves that no alleged leper-hospital can be accepted as such in the absence of definite information regarding its original destination, and, further, some knowledge of the after-history of the foundation is essential. The mere label "leper-hospital" attached to an institution is no proof that it ever contained a single leper. Yet some establishments are claimed to have been lazarettes on no better evidence than a gossiping remark by some writer, perhaps years after the supposed leper-hospital had ceased to exist. That there were, as stated, 2,000 leper-houses in mediæval France is, to me, absolutely incredible. If 2,000 leper-hospitals existed there, what was the number of ordinary hospitals (including hospices and alms-houses), convents, chantries, and so forth? The total must have run into six figures.

To return to the extent of leprosy in England in the Middle Ages. I believe Creighton gives a reasonable estimate of the prevalence of this disease, at its worst, when he says: "There might have been a leper in a village here and there, one or two in a market town, a dozen or more in a city, a score or so in a whole diocese. Thus in the records of the city of Gloucester, under date 20 October, 1273, three persons are mentioned by name—a man and two women—as being leprous and as dwelling within the town to the great hurt and prejudice of the inhabitants." To assert, like one distinguished historian, that leprosy in mediæval England was a more terrible scourge than plague, is nothing short of ludicrous.

However tedious these notes may seem to the reader, they cannot conclude without mention of the famed Armagh leper-hospital, for it epitomizes much that passes as historical evidence regarding leprosy. This establishment finds an honoured place in the tables of such foundations, and in view of its antiquity often heads the list. Newman says: "The earliest notice of a leper-hospital in Ireland was in 869, when the hospital flourishing at Armagh was demolished and sacked during Arlaf's invasion."
There is no evidence of any leper-hospital at Armagh, flourishing or otherwise, so far as I can discover. No such foundation is mentioned in the Monasticum Hibernicum, nor in any of the chronicles where I have found the destruction of Armagh by the Danes recorded. But the mystery seems to be solved at last: Once clear of the maze of cross-copying from book to book, all statements regarding this foundation are ultimately traceable back to Belcher, who cites the Annals of Innisfallen as his authority. He obviously used the Latin translation of these Annals (of which more anon), where the entry relative to the sack of Armagh reads: "Vastatio Ard1nachae per Amlafu1n, ita ut combusta esset Civitas cum suis domibus et Nosoco~niis." Then follows the number of the slain. Belcher does not reproduce the Latin, but gives a translation, as follows: "Devastation of Ardmagh by Arlaf so that the city was burned with its houses and hospitals (nosocomii or leper-houses)." In the Latin there is not a single word about lepers from beginning to end, the gloss "leper-houses" being a distraction of Belcher's own imagination. Nosocomium is hospital, neither more nor less, and Belcher could have translated the word by "Hospital for Diseases of the Chest" with as much justification as by "leper-house."

But the end is not yet. The Annals of Innisfallen, cited by Belcher, is one of a number of ancient Irish historical texts translated into Latin by Dr. Charles O'Conor. To his stupendous task of collating, annotating and translating these annals, O'Conor brought wide learning and tireless

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1 Annals of the Four Masters; Annals of Ulster; Chronicum Scotorum; Annals of Innisfallen; Annals of Clonmacnoise; Fragmenta Annalium Hiberniae.

2 Belcher, loc. cit.

Charles O'Conor, D.D., in 1798 was appointed chaplain to the Marchioness of Buckingham, and librarian at Stowe. Between 1814 and 1826 he published the four large volumes of his monumental work, "Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores Veretes." Only 200 copies were printed, the cost of publication, £3,000, being borne by the Duke of Buckingham. "The text of the 'Annals' published by O'Conor ... was for the time a useful addition to the materials for the study of Irish history. ... But, by the unanimous opinion of experts since the date of publication, O'Conor has been pronounced incompetent for the task he undertook."—(Dict. Nat. Biog.) Dr. O'Conor was a grandson of O'Conor of Balanagare, who is now best known, perhaps, as the recipient of the two letters from Dr. Johnson, addressed under the style, "Charles O'Conor, Esq.," which are printed in Boswell's "Life." A profound Celtic scholar, O'Conor of Balanagare was said to be the only person then living who could interpret the technicalities of the ancient Brehon Laws. Unfortunately he was handicapped by deficient general learning, the result of youthful poverty caused by confiscation of the family estates. Later, portions of the Balanagare property were restored by the commissioners of the confiscated estates, and the kindly scholar was able to pursue his studies in comfort and affluence. If the two O'Conors could have collaborated, each would have counterbalanced the other's deficiencies, the elder possessing the necessary Celtic learning, and the younger, wide general scholarship. In 1820, the then O'Conor of Balanagare succeeded to the title of O'Conor Don which is borne by the blood representative of King Roderic O'Conor, last Monarch of Ireland.
Notes on Old-time Leprosy in England and Ireland

The interpretation of the archaic language and obsolete syntax of the manuscripts, obscured still further by a maze of contractions, called for a degree of exact and specialized scholarship which O'Conor did not possess. And as an unfortunate result of his shortcomings, the Latin translations cannot be relied on as necessarily expressing the meaning of the Irish text. If we compare the original entry describing the sack of Armagh in 869, with O'Conor's Latin translation, we find another of his errors, which I have not seen noted before: "Derthightibh," which he translates by "nosocomiis," has no connexion of any sort or kind with hospitals. It is merely the dative plural of the word for oratory. And so begins the legend of the Armagh leper-hospital! O'Conor, misunderstanding the original text, transforms oratories into hospitals. Belcher gilds the lily, and the hospitals become leper-houses. And the necessity for such foundations is adduced and accepted as valid evidence of the contemporary prevalence of leprosy.

O, History! what crimes are committed in thy name!

Rites are not wanting which may bring repose to the perturbed spirits of the dead. It is said there was even a special ritual for the restless souls of those poor little children who never lived. Perhaps it might serve to lay the weary ghost of this leper-house which never existed.

1 "Argain Ardmacha le h Amhlaoibh gur loisgeadh an baile gonaightibh T gona derthightibh."

Several other chronicles specifically mention the destruction of the oratories: "... coroloscadh cona derthaighibh" (Annals of Ulster); "... do losceadh cona dearthighibh uile" (Four Masters); etc. These structures, so famous under their nosocomial disguise, seem to have constituted one large monastery, for in the Frag. Ann. Hiberniae the scribe inserts the textual note, "... oratories, i.e. the great oratory of Mac Andaige" (... derthighibh. i. derthach mor mic Andaige).