

I.

THE LEE PENNY. By THOMAS REID, M.A., F.S.A.Scot.

The Lee Penny (fig. 1), the history of which forms the subject of the present communication, is the name of a charm, amulet, or talisman, preserved at Lee Castle, the seat of the ancient family of Lockhart. The Lee is an estate situated about two miles distant from the royal burgh of Lanark.

This talisman has had for a very long period the reputation of being endowed in some mysterious way with miraculous powers of healing, and many are the tales told of its curative effects in respect both of human maladies and cattle plagues.

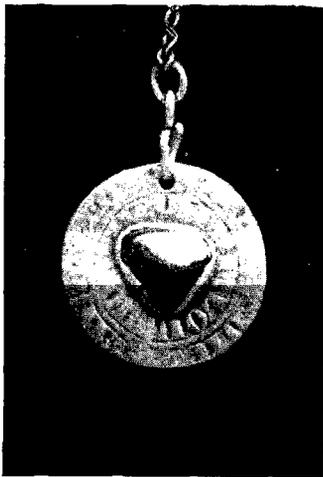


Fig. 1. The Lee Penny. (4.)

Its history, to some extent legendary, extends over nearly six centuries, dating from the time of the expedition of the Good Lord James of Douglas, when he carried furth of Scotland the heart of Bruce to make war against the Infidel—an enterprise undertaken in accordance with King Robert's dying request in 1329.

And what is the outward appearance of the Lee Penny? It simply consists of a small stone set in the centre of a silver coin—a setting which it has retained since its first arrival at its Lanarkshire home—for it is not a stone native to Scotland, it came from the sunny fields of Southern Spain. There is nothing in its appearance to recommend it to the eye of the connoisseur in precious stones. It possesses none of the glitter of a cairngorm to dazzle the sight of the spectator. It presents a dull, unattractive look, and has acquired widespread notice solely from its alleged virtues as a powerful talisman for curing disease in man and beast.

A careful examination of the stone reveals the following particulars:—it is of a dark red colour, semi-transparent, triangular in shape, somewhat resembling a human heart, slightly fractured on one side, and measuring $\frac{1}{3}$ of an inch each way. It is said that lapidaries to whose expert examination it has been submitted have been unable to assign its composition to any recognised classification of precious stones.

The silver coin in which the stone is set is now after the lapse of centuries considerably defaced. From a few letters still remaining, and

the cross which was at one time plainly discernible on it, the coin, which seems to have been a groat, has been assigned to the reign of Edward I. of England. Hence from its local habitation and its having been mistaken for a silver penny, this charm has become widely known in Scotland as the Lee Penny, and in the popular speech of Northumberland and Yorkshire as the Lockerlee Penny.

The traditional story of its discovery and the revelation of the healing virtues ascribed to it is as follows. Among those who took part in the Douglas expedition, mentioned above, was Sir Symon Loccard of The Lee. He had already distinguished himself on the patriotic side of the War of Independence and had been knighted by the hand of The Bruce. The expedition in the course of its outward journey reached the coast of Spain. There the little band of Scottish warriors became aware that Alphonso, King of Castile and Leon, was waging war with the Saracens of Granada, led by Osmyn, the Moorish Governor. In the opinion of the Scottish leader, the occasion was one which called for his active participation on the side of Alphonso, since the conflict was with the forces of the Unbeliever, and so was in accordance with the express object of the expedition.

In one of the skirmishes with the foe Sir Symon Loccard chanced to capture an Arab prince, for whose ransom his wife, coming to the Christian camp, offered a large sum of money. In counting out the stipulated price she happened to let drop from her purse a small pebble, and showed such intense eagerness in the attempt to recover it that Sir Symon's attention was attracted by the Moorish dame's haste in snatching it. He naturally deemed the stone to be a gem of rare value and demanded it as part of the redemption price; otherwise, he declared, the captive would not be set free. Thereupon the lady reluctantly complied. At the same time she informed the Scottish knight of the mysterious virtues of the stone in curing all manner of disease in man and beast.

Such is the story of the acquisition of the amulet as preserved in the Lee family. A perusal of this narrative prompted Sir Walter Scott to write his Eastern romance entitled *The Talisman*, and suggested the scene in which El Hakim performs an important part. It will be seen from a reference to the Introduction of *The Talisman* that the novelist, in giving his version of the story, differs slightly from the family traditional narrative. Beyond the name "Talisman" and the scene with El Hakim the novel has no further connection with the amulet of Lee.

The interview with the Moorish lady must have taken place somewhere on the borders of Andalusia and Granada, where the opposing

forces had so many encounters. It was in one of these that the Douglas fell, near the town of Theba, just over the Andalusian border, and within the territory of Granada. His death induced the expedition to return to Scotland. In this return Sir Symon Loccard must have taken a conspicuous part under Earl Keith. In remembrance of his services in bringing back to Scotland the "Heart of Bruce," Sir Symon Loccard, according to the Lee family tradition, had his name changed to Lockheart or Lockhart, and was permitted to add to the family coat of arms a heart within a fetterlock. The heart of Bruce was, as is well known, deposited at Melrose, and the Moorish lady's charm found henceforth a domicile and a renewed reputation for healing virtues at Sir Symon's Lanarkshire home of The Lee.

After arriving in Scotland the Lee Penny entered on a long course of remedial usage, extending over both Catholic and Protestant times. The method of employing the talisman for curative purposes was this. No form of words of incantation was spoken, such as sorcerers, witches, and charmers were wont to mutter in practising their magical spells. The charming, if it may be so called, lay in the strict adherence to the mode of procedure in preparing the medicated medium through which the cure was to be administered. No deviation therefrom was permissible, otherwise the remedial effect was destroyed. The method employed was one of extreme simplicity. The celebrant, holding the "Penny" with its magic gem by the chain attached to it, proceeds to plunge the amulet three times into pure spring water and then gives it a swirl round once, but no more, a procedure popularly known as "three dips and a sweep." This process formed an essential and indispensable part of the administration. In the course of years some other ceremonies were in the popular imagination deemed highly desirable and added to the primitive practice. The following, composed by a Lanark bard about the beginning of last century, will explain these additional rites:—

" See, see the dame with port divine,
 Approach before the holy shrine;
 And see her soon the stairs descend,
 And soon the precious Gem suspend;
 A laver next from crystal spring
 Her fair officious maidens bring;
 Beside the vase the Priestess stands,
 The sacred symbol in her hands,
 Which thrice she plunges in the tide,
 And twirls it once from side to side.—
 Now all is done—the feat is o'er,
 And you've the panacean cure!
 Then fill your bottles, haste away,
 Unless decline the beams of day;

But first it is her high behest,
 You must partake the genial feast ;
 Or, if grim night her curtains spread,
 With sleep enjoy the silken bed,
 Until the morning's russet gray
 Unbars the golden gates of day ;
 Then by the dawn you may depart
 With the best blessings of her heart :—
 And other caution gives she none
 But, 'See it touch not earth or stone.'
 The hallowed water will afford
 Health to the peasant and the lord ;
 But chiefly to the bestial kind
 A sure protection you will find."

Instances will be mentioned later on in which some of these additional rites were faithfully observed.

The present writer several years ago had an opportunity of testing the potency of the Lee Penny in communicating a peculiar flavour to water into which it had been dipped. One day I happened to be making a call at the Commercial Bank in Lanark. The banker informed me that at the time he had the custody of the Lee talisman; for in the absence of the Lockhart family from their Castle their prized heirloom was entrusted to his bank for safe keeping. The banker kindly offered to submit the following test experiment. Filling two tumblers with pure water, he invited me to taste both in order that I might be satisfied that their contents were from the same source and be able to distinguish any subsequent difference. Then withdrawing to his private room, he gave, as he explained, the orthodox "three dips and a sweel" to the water in one of the tumblers. He then returned with the same two glasses for further testing. With the taste of the pure water on my palate, I experienced no difficulty in singling out the one into which the Penny had been dipped; it had a perceptibly peculiar flavour. I can give no opinion upon the healing virtues of the water so treated. I had no ailment at the time to cure. The draught certainly did me no harm.

There exists no extant record of the employment of the Lee Penny as a talisman for healing purposes during those years that elapsed from its arrival in this country in 1330 down to early Protestant times. That it was so used in Catholic Scotland may be safely inferred not only from the attitude of the Mediæval Church towards occult and mysterious powers of remedy believed to be by divine express purpose inherent in many natural phenomena, but also from the hostile attitude evinced by the Reformed Church of Scotland against every practice that savoured of charming. The older ecclesiastical authorities would doubtless view with favour the healing virtues imputed to the Lee charm, and would

regard the popular faith reposed in its curative powers as it viewed the universal trust placed in the medicinal effects of water drawn from a holy well, and an unqualified blessing would be pronounced on its usage by the Catholic priesthood.

The prevalence of its employment in pre-Reformation times receives confirmation from consideration of an attempt made some years after 1560, on the part of a few strict Presbyterian partisans to prevent through the Church courts the use of the Lee Penny as a talisman. Their action presupposes a well-known and long-continued practice in Catholic times.

It was at an Assembly "holden at Glasgow" in 1638 that an attempt was made to pronounce ecclesiastical censure on the Lee amulet, at the instance of one Gavin Hamilton, supported by the ministers of Lanark. The minute of Assembly embodying the charge against the Lee Penny and the decision of the Church court thereanent is as follows. "Quhilk Dye amongst the Referies of the Brethern of the Ministrie of Lanark it was proponit, to the Synode, that Gawen Hamilton of Raploche had preferit ane complaint before them against Sir James Lockhart of Lee anent the Superstitious using of ane Stone, set in silver, for the curing of diseased Cattel, qlk the said Gawen affirmed could not be Lawfullie Used, and that they had defferit to give ony decisionne therein till the advise of the Assemblie might be had concerning the same, the Assemblie having inquired of the manner of Using thereof and particularlie onderstood be examinationne of the Laird of Lee, and otherwise that the custome is only to cast the stone in sune water and give the diseasit cattell thereof to drink and yt the same is done without using onie wordes such as charmers and sorcerers use in their Unlawful Practicess and considering that in nature they are many thinges sain to work strange effect qr of no humane wit can give a reason, it having pleased God to give unto stoness & herbes a special Vertue for the healings of mony Infirmities in man and beast, advises the Brethern to surcease thair process as qrin they perceive no ground of offence and admonishes the Laird of Lee in the Using the said stone to tak heed that it be Ust heir after wt the least scandall that possiblie may be. Extract out of the Bookes of Assemblie Holden at Glasgow and subscribed by thair Clerk by their Command. M: Robert Young Clerk to the Assemblie at Glasgow."

Whether in consequence of the Assembly's favourable decision, harmonising, as it did, with the popular belief in this amulet's efficacy, or not, the instances of which record has been kept of its use in post-Reformation times testify to an increased popularity in its reputed remedial virtues, and are fairly illustrative of the manner

of using it and the ailments for which it was supposed to be an infallible cure.

The earliest recorded instance of its actual use belongs to the first half of the seventeenth century. When the plague visited Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the reign of Charles I., the Corporation of that town borrowed the Lee Penny and deposited the sum of £6000 as a security for its safe return. So convinced were the borrowers of its beneficial effects that they expressed their willingness to forfeit their pledge, large as it was, in order to retain possession of so powerful a charm. Sir James Lockhart, at that time Laird of Lee, had no hesitation in declining the proposal. This is the same Sir James as noticed above. He was a stout cavalier, and the charge of necromancy urged against him in granting the use of his "Penny" would be grounded as much on political as on religious considerations.

It was in cases of hydrophobia in man and beast that the "dipt" water of the Lee Penny was considered a sure remedy. The most remarkable instance of its use as a cure for this distemper occurred about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Lady Baird of Sauchton-hall, near Edinburgh, had been bitten by a mad dog and had begun to exhibit all the symptoms of that terrible disease. Her husband procured the loan of the Lee talisman, and the lady was made to drink copiously of the medicated water and to bathe repeatedly in water similarly treated. After several weeks of the application of this method of cure Lady Baird is said to have recovered her wonted health. An old servant of the Lockhart family of that period was in the habit of relating, years afterwards, that when she had regained her strength, Lady Baird and her husband entertained the Laird of Lee and his lady for many days, in the most sumptuous manner, on account of her miraculous recovery and in gratitude for the generous loan of the Lee Penny.

About the year 1817 a farmer and his son came all the way on horseback to Lee from Northumberland, each carrying two small kegs attached to the saddle to hold the water into which the Penny had been immersed. It appears in this case that, as a condition on which the efficacy of the water depended, the casks containing the charmed fluid should not be permitted to touch the ground until home was reached. In consequence every care was taken to prop up the saddles with tressels when the barrels were removed from the horses for the purpose of resting or baiting.

In 1824 a gentleman arrived at Lee from Yorkshire and carried off a quantity of the "dipt" water as a cure for his cattle which had been bitten by a mad dog.

It is to be noted that during the closing years of the eighteenth

century and the first half of the nineteenth, the popular belief in the sanative virtues of the Lee Penny seems to have been at the strongest. Writing in 1828, William Davidson, author of a *History of Lanark*, records:—"Indeed not a summer passes without pilgrims visiting the Lee Penny from all quarters to prove its healing powers; and so convinced are many people of its potent virtues that a failure is attributed to come from improper observance of the ceremonies of the 'three dips and a sweel.'"

In 1847, as recorded by William Cowan, who also writes a *History of Lanark*, a gentleman from Yorkshire got a tin vessel made in Lanark for the purpose of taking away to his home a quantity of the charmed element. The same writer, whose book was published in 1857, adds, "The Penny is carefully kept at Lee Castle, and large numbers hearing of its remarkable history visit it every year. An album is kept beside it for inserting the names of the visitors."

Writing in 1853, Mr Hector Maclean, factor on the estate of Lee and Carnwath, says, "It will be thought, doubtless, by some that now it can only be looked upon as a mere subject of curiosity; such, however, is not the case. The water is still frequently applied for by the inhabitants of the different villages at a considerable distance from Lee. But the most recent case of which we have heard happened a few months ago, and fully exemplified the great faith placed on it by our southern neighbours and their recollection of its talismanic influence upon the sick and afflicted. The neighbourhood of Kirkwhelpington and Birtley, Northumberland, had been subjected to much alarm by the visits of dogs in a rabid state; no fewer than seven of these animals had been killed. The dread of the inhabitants was naturally great, and the injury done excessive, principally among the farm stock: the number of sheep and cattle bitten and which died of hydrophobia was incredible. A horse having bitten a man's hand severely at Gunnerton, the dreadful nature of the complaint and the hitherto impossibility of its cure excited great alarm in the minds of the people and a desire to resort to any means whereby to avert its fatal effects. In this state of doubt and anxiety they bethought themselves of the Lee Penny, in which they still had a belief, and hoped that the waters would effect what no mortal means could do. They accordingly sent express to Lee for a large quantity of the water. The person sent, having arrived on Sunday morning, procured a "barrel full," and started back immediately with that which was looked upon as the only hope of the man labouring under the complaint; and, strange as it may seem, no bad effects resulted from the wound.' Mr Maclean adds:—"The sceptic may doubt; but we merely state a fact, and for the accuracy of which we can vouch."

One of the English newspapers at the time taking notice of the circumstance adds:—"The spirit of the age has not yet banished the popular belief in the 'Lockerlee Water,' a large supply having been procured by voluntary subscription."

Since the middle of last century no instance has been recorded of the Lee Penny being employed as a talisman. Its last public appearance was made not with a view to testing its curative virtues, but as a spell to procure financial aid for a highly deserving object. The occasion was a garden fête and sale of work held on Saturday, 3rd August 1918, at Lee, when as yet the issues of the Great War were still trembling in the balance; the object was to raise funds in behoof of the Red Cross Society. During the course of the afternoon it was announced that the Lee Penny would be exhibited to visitors. The then Laird of Lee, Sir Simon MacDonald Lockhart, himself held the amulet in his hand when exhibiting it to a large crowd of interested and generous spectators. The ancestral name of the exhibitor and the reputed character of the Spanish stone elicited a twofold reflection. It was fitting that this ancient charm to which healing powers had during so many long by-past years been implicitly attributed should lend its historical influence for the beneficent object of a Red Cross appeal for aid. And further, there were those who called to recollection the coincidence that a Symon Loccard was the first to bring this talisman to Lee, and that another Simon Lockhart was after well-nigh six hundred years on the present occasion displaying his ancestor's trophy of war—a relic so interesting by reason of its reputed curative virtues and so amply endowed with legendary lore.^o