



A Strange Superstition.

By Mrs. Arden Lovett.

AMONG the many quaint superstitions which were still prevalent at the beginning of last century, there were few which seem more incredible at the present day than the one so firmly believed in by our ancestors of the power possessed by the Sovereign to heal, by a touch, any persons suffering from that terrible malady, King's evil.

The superstition dates back as far as the reign of Edward the Confessor, 1058, and in the reign of King Charles II., no fewer than 92,107 persons were touched; and according to Wiseman, the King's physician, they were nearly all healed. Queen Anne, in the *London Gazette*, of 12 March, 1712, announced her intention to touch publicly.

Four months before her Majesty's death, she consented to use her credited power on Elizabeth Lovett, daughter of Col. John Lovett, M.P. by his second wife, the Honble. Mary Verney, daughter of Viscount Fermanagh, and sister of Ralph, Earl Verney; and among the Verney papers at Claydon House, Bucks, there are interesting letters, written at the time, from Mrs. John Lovett to her father, Lord Fermanagh, in which she expresses her great wish to have her afflicted daughter touched by the Queen. She also relates the difficulties she experienced ere she attained her desire.

It is probable that the difficulty arose from the then state of the Queen's health, and her Majesty died soon after.

In the first letter in which mention is made of this subject, dated London, May ye 15th, 1714, Mrs. Lovett wrote:—

"I had writ to you before now but that I stayed to give you some account of what I can get done for my poor girl. I shewed her to a famous surgeon, one Blundall, who assures me it is the evil, and told me all that had been done for her and all that I can doe for her, signifies nothing—he said shes young and will out grow it but he woud by noe means have me tamper with her nor give her any more phisick for of that he says she has had to much already which he fears has made her consumptive. She must entirely leave of malt drink and wine and he bid me

get her touched which I fear I have not at this time interest enough to doe—for the Queen disorders her self by preparing herself to touch that noe one about her cares she should doe it for she fasts the day before and abstains severall days which they think does her hurt. I have also shewed her to Mr. Williams the surgeon and he says the very same thing as Mr. Blundall says and they both bid me leave of her plaister and all medicines but they cut her an issue in her arm."

In another letter, dated London, May ye 20th, 1714,

"As to the child I am advised by all the surgeons to doe nothing to her for they say more phisick will bring her into a consumption besides if she is touched nothing must be done to her after it and I have great hopes the Queen will touch her. Lady Denbigh has been so kind to speak for me to the Queen, and there is interest making for another young Lady to be touched so we hope they will both be done together. The Queen's answer was she will not doe it this week but Lady Denbigh will goe to her again the beginning of next ; indeed she runs about to all the bed Chamber Ladys, and does all thats possible for me, and will goe with the child herself to the Queen so every body ; says as long as I have thoughts of getting her touched I must doe nothing else to her otherwise I would have had Viccars under take her though at present I hear his fame much cryed down but in this case I should be willing to try all means. There is some that I know in town who the Queen touched last year that had severall sores on them but are now as I am ; pray God grant the like to my poor Bess "

That Lady Denbigh was successful in her mission is evident from the following extract from a letter dated May ye 29th, 1714,

"I this morning set forward dear little Bess for Claydon where I pray God she safe arrived before this and I pray God the means that has been used for her may prove effectual she must take care of her gold and ware it about her neck both night and day and rub the place that swelled with it every morning "

At this point the interesting subject drops out of the correspondence, and it is to be regretted that Mrs. John Lovett gave no account in her letters of the actual ceremony. Elizabeth Lovett—according to the brass which is to her memory in the chancel of All Saints' Church, Soulbury, Bucks—lived till the year 1775, sixty-one years after she had been "touched."

The custom was discontinued by King George I on his accession to the throne in 1714.