



Fig. 1

The Bed Slipper of the Liverpool Northern Hospital

News, Notes and Queries

THE BED SLIPPER OF THE LIVERPOOL NORTHERN HOSPITAL

by John A. Ross

SOME months ago the chairman of the House Committee of the David Lewis Northern Hospital, Liverpool, was offered a bed slipper by Mr. A. E. Boothroyd, a dealer in antiques. The bed slipper probably came from a large house in Kilburn, having been collected by a 'rag and bone' merchant, who sold it to someone else before it came into Mr. Boothroyd's hands.

The bed slipper has the following inscription printed in copper plate on the back: 'The Bed Slipper of the Liverpool Northern Hospital 1836'. Under this, in small lettering which cannot be completely deciphered are some instructions for its use, which read as follows:

The slipper must not be inserted under the side of the body as the common bedpan but be passed under in front. A flannel cap for the toe part held on by strings round the heel will afford access with comfort to the patient.

Under the instructions there are some initials which are indecipherable.

On inquiry amongst trade circles, I found that this particular pattern of bed slipper is always referred to in the trade by the name 'Liverpool'. Messrs. John Lockett and Co. were making them in 1853 and still print on them instructions in copper plate, although the wording which they use is not the same as in our example. Messrs. Mintons, Ltd., made a special bed slipper in the early part of the nineteenth century which was called the 'Liverpool shape' and they possess an old undated sketch book showing one of these. The shape is identical with the one in the possession of the Northern Hospital. The date of the introduction of these articles is unknown, but Messrs. Mintons have been making a different pattern since 1820; they may have been manufactured prior to this by the Wedgwoods. Normally the old types of bed slipper were made in a cream colour.

I have made a search in the early records of the Northern Hospital, but can find no reference to orders for such bed slippers. It would appear, however, that the bed slipper of this particular pattern, which is now in universal use, was the invention of some person on the staff of the Northern Hospital. The name 'Liverpool shape' has clung to this type of slipper for over one hundred and twenty-five years in trade circles.

The hospital was founded to cater for the needs of the port and town of Liverpool in 1833, when the town was expanding rapidly in a northerly direction and when the existing Infirmary was so overworked that it had become quite unable to meet the needs of the poor. The number of beds at the Infirmary had not increased sufficiently to meet the increase of 50,000 in the town's population.

The bed slipper which is now in the possession of the David Lewis Northern Hospital is in perfect condition. It is of a cream colour, showing only faint, superficial cracks, which one normally finds in old earthenware (Fig. 1). It is interesting that such articles were in use in hospitals long before the days when adequate nursing

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services had been developed. The inscription giving instructions for its use ends with the words 'comfort to the patient'.

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FOLK MEDICINE IN DUNDEE

IN his *Dundee Worthies* (1934), G. M. Martin, F.S.A., records two local therapeutic practices. On p. 47 he writes:

WARTS

Sixty or seventy years ago an epidemic of these skin troubles broke out and this 'quack' made a good living in the following peculiar manner.

His stock-in-trade was a large sheaf of straw and the afflicted paid him 1d. per wart for his 'cure' which was a joint from the stem for each wart.

The patient had to carry these joints of straw in his hand and find out where a funeral was taking place, and at the first movement of the horses, had to throw the joints under the hearse—'and all the warts faded again'.

And again on p. 49:

KINK HOAST

A knowing wag who played on the credulity of the working class by posing as the curer of the Kink Hoast (whooping cough) and gathered round him a large clientele. He possessed a well groomed donkey and as to whether or not he knew of the religious belief appertaining thereto it was never known. He moved from district to district taking up his stance in little frequented alleys or back yards and awaited the coming of a distracted mother with her coughing child. The mother handed the child under the donkey's belly from one side, to a waiting relative or friend at the other, and this was thought to be a certain specific for the troublesome complaint. The charge for a child in arms was 6d., but if a 'toddler' 4d.

The date of Martin's publication is 1934, but the greater part of the material recorded belongs to a considerably earlier period, and the writer fairly claims (p. 3) 'that many of these reminiscences would be lost by the passing of this generation'.

A. M. HONEYMAN

TRAUMATIC(?) PARAPLEGIA AS REPORTED IN THE TALMUD

IN his interesting note K. Bryn Thomas¹ refers also to a case of paraplegia as mentioned in ancient literature. The name paraplegia is to be found several times in the Greek text of Hippocrates.² However, the reference is so brief and devoid of any specific details that W. H. S. Jones translates it: paralysis. Littré's index contains but one reference to '*paraplégique*',³ and the expression there does not carry its modern connotation. The Kuhn edition of Galen⁴ indexes paraplegia thirteen times, the meaning again not always corresponding to the clinical picture as understood today