

THAT EVERLASTING LEECH

DRUGS may come and drugs may go, but shall the leech hang on forever?

A mere worm, without a backbone, he sticks closer than a blood brother. He becomes attached to perfect strangers who let him live on them, and refuses to let go until he is full and ready.

The use of the leech, although it is almost over in these days of antiseptics, still hangs on. Wholesale drug houses continue to import the suckers, more of which are being born every minute in Sweden, and a search of certain quarters of any large city will turn up a big jar in musty little pharmacies—the home of *Hirudo*.

Many physicians think because so little is heard about leeches these days, that the creatures retired from practice when the World War came. Although the unsettled state of Europe stopped the leech trade for years, it has again taken hold.

Compared with what it once was, leeching is such a rare method of treatment that it may to all intents and purposes be called obsolete. The astonishing thing is, however, that there are persons who still employ it. Of all the customs which date back for centuries in the medical profession, it is the most persistent. The mediaeval name for physician is leech, and there seems to be a lingering belief that there was some kind of a partnership between the doctor and the little living blood-letter. Some authorities say that the original name of the parasite was not leech at all, but lyce, and that when the public confused him with disciples of the healing art, he never tried to remove the popular impression. The so-called medical leech is *Hirudo medicinalis* and he applies himself to humans; while his big country cousin, the horse leech, lingers in streams and troughs and gets into the mouths of the equine breed, and starts all kinds of trouble and runaways. The North American leech is not adapted for systematic blood sucking, as it lacks the required clinging ability. The South American leech, which hangs on the branches of trees and never goes near the water, is also unsteady in its habits and painfully obvious in its methods.

The regular leech is the most enterprising of his tribe. He has no legs, but he gets to places all the same. When he is in the water he wriggles his ringed body in an act that passes for swimming. Whenever he is on land, he steadies himself on an air-sucker in his tail, throws his body forward, gets a new hold with his front sucker, lets go at the rear, and draws himself up; and so on until he has reached a good place on which to operate. He is out for blood, and does not deny it. As a vampire, *Hirudo* can be happy with a fly or a fish, but he is very fond of scraping acquaintance with swimmers of the human species.

He has a three-piece jaw all ready for persons in two-piece bathing suits. After he has done a little pricking in triplicate, he grapples his victim fore and aft and settles down to steady pumping.

His methods, when he is requested to draw blood, instead of being swatted for so doing, are very simple. He is taken out of an ordinary vial, or forced out of a tube by a piston, and laid upon the skin. If he is not very hungry or a little stagestruck, a drop or so of blood, or of sweetened water, induces him to lay hold. When little *Hirudo* has had all his bulging skin will hold, he usually drops off of his own accord, but if he is slow in quitting, a pinch of salt sprinkled on his head induces him to resign. Even before Dr. Louis Pasteur told the world about germs, the leech was suspected of not living a sterilized life. Although he feeds on animate creatures, not on carrion, he is likely to carry about with him some undesirable elements. He may have some diseased blood in his system, although it was fresh enough when he got it. On the East Side of New York City leeches are sometimes kept in boxes of mud and get cold baths before going into action. Whether they are entirely germ free and simon pure or not, they often leave irritating substances in a wound, for they secrete a liquid which prevents the blood from coagulating.

In order to have an appliance which could be sterilized without its shriveling to nothing, for leeches are not supposedly fireproof, as salamanders are reputed to be, a machine of glass and metal was invented, known as the mechanical leech, which has a limited use.

With progress of medicine the actual removal of blood from the human body for the purpose of relieving congestion has almost disappeared. Leeches, living and artificial, are after all relics of the past, which cling because of an age-old tradition. It has been found that venesection, leeching, and all forms of blood-letting are enervating and harmful, and unnecessary. The application of a hygroscopic, osmotic preparation, sterilized, free from all contamination, such as is Antiphlogistine, serves the purpose of relieving inflammation and congestion by a simple mechanical means, without danger of debility on one hand and of infection on the other.

It is hard to foretell when the leech will relinquish his practice permanently. There are customs which date back to the Dark Ages still managing to survive. Venesection appears not only in musty old volumes, but in some modern works. However, the lure of the leech is passing, and certain it is that its spell has long since been broken by bloodless phlebotomy.

There is always room for a man of force, and he makes room for many.

Surgical instruments have been found in Pompeii exactly similar to those now in use and Pompeii was destroyed 1,800 years ago.

In Westminster Abbey 1173 persons have been buried.

Character is higher than intellect....A great soul will be strong to live as well as to think.

Injustice is in itself, to every generous and properly constituted mind, an injury of all others the most insufferable.