Old Irish "Herbal" Skin Remedies.

ART. V.—Old Irish "Herbal" Skin Remedies. By H. S. Purdon, M.D.; Consulting Physician Belfast Hospital for Diseases of the Skin (18 Beds).

Through the courtesy of R. M. Young, Esq., B.A., M.R.I.A., I have had the opportunity of looking over a rather rare book—viz., "A General Irish Herbal, Calculated for this Kingdom, giving an Account of the Herbs, Shrubs, and Trees, naturally produced therein, in English, Irish, and Latin, &c. By John Keogh, A.B., Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Lord Kingston. A.D. 1735." As the book contains a good deal of the prevalent ideas current close on two hundred years ago, it may be more or less interesting, at the end of the 19th century, to note some of the vegetable remedies and "simples" used by our Irish forefathers towards alleviating various diseases, especially those recommended and employed in cutaneous medicine.

Following the order of the book, which is arranged alphabetically, I shall merely extract the remarks of the author as regards the best-known herbs, omitting all botanical details, and first on the list is Agrimony (in Irish, Murgrine or Murgrabin), recommended for "obstruction of the liver," whilst the leaves, pounded with hog's lard, are said to heal and cicatrise old wounds. The leaves, when bruised, and "a cataplasma made of them, with yolk of egg, flour, and honey, is good to be applied to a cut or a gall after riding."

The plant known as All-heal (in Irish, Furrbum), which grows in ditches and watery places, flowering in June and July, is considered "an excellent vulnerary applied to green wounds, whilst its tops stop all sorts of haemorrhages."

Barley is in Irish Oer-nabevg.—The author recommends a decoction to be drunk "as exceeding good in all kinds of fevers, in the stone, gravel, and heat of urine," whilst an infusion of the Bramble or Blackberry bush (in Irish, Driseog) made from the "tops and young buds, cures the sores and ulcers of the mouth, throat, and uvula, if held in the mouth" for some time. It also "stops fluxes of blood," whilst "the leaves, stamped and bruised, cure the piles."

For removing freckles and preventing a "sore" spreading,
Our author recommends an oil made from the root of White Briony (Irish name, Urinagh).

The well-known Butcher's Broom, called by the Irish Brusglagh, and still esteemed and used for its diuretic properties, is advised to be given, as the "decoction of it breaketh the stone and expelleth the gravel."

Buckbean (the Irish Ponair Capuil) is considered "very serviceable in gout, rheumatism, and dropsy."

The Carline Thistle (in Irish, Fobenanemine) is to be taken in a powder against the "pestilence," or, held in the mouth, it cures toothache, "but, applied externally with vinegar, cures scurf and itch."

Even in the present day, in various parts of the country, Chickenweed (called in Irish, Fliagh or Bliagh) is considered a powerful remedy "against scorbutic heat, itch of the hands. It is cooling and moistening, good against inflammations, St. Anthony's Fire, all phlegmons or hot swellings, and pains in any part of the body, the juice, or a poultice with hog's lard, being applied."

Goose Grass Clivers (in Irish, Garub-Luss) is to be used, our author states, "against the king's evil, all kernels and wens." It is called goose grass clivers "because it is exceeding good to fatten geese."

The Great Water Dock, still used in cutaneous medicine, as in Rumex ointment, introduced by the late Sir James Simpson for the treatment of acne rosacea, is known to the Irish in former years as Cuppoge More Isky, and, according to our author, is exceedingly good in scurvy, ulcers, and fluxes.

In many rural parts of Ireland at the present time the inner bark of the elm tree is used as an application to skin affections and "boils." A short time since a very respectable woman brought her young daughter to me suffering from a patch of lupus on her forearm, and which she was poulticing with the inner bark of the elm. The Irish called the elm ailm—in fact, it is the name of the first letter, A, of the Irish alphabet, for, as is well known, every Irish letter is the name of a tree. Thus—b, Beit, a birch tree; c, Coll, a hazel tree, and so on.

However, to return. As a cosmetic, "a liquor made from