

**FAITH-HEALING
AND 'CHRISTIAN
SCIENCE'**

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Faith-Healing and 'Christian Science' by Alice Feilding

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ALICE FEILDING

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CHAPTER I

FAITH-HEALING

‘Medical miracles have at all times been common.’—CARLYLE.

THE healing of the body by mental agency is a phenomenon which, generally under the direct auspices of religion, whether Pagan or Christian, has manifested itself from time to time from the earliest days of history. The influence of the mind on the body, although never frankly admitted as such, and only vaguely realised by religious devotees, has been made use of and treated as a manifestation of the mysterious and transcendent powers of the great Author of the Universe or of His unseen delegates. Some leaders of sects, recognising from their insight into human nature that it is through the cure of bodily ills that the masses can be most readily attracted and won to their

views, have made use of this uncomprehended influence of mind over matter. Like Simon Magus, the more carnal-minded of these leaders proclaimed themselves 'great ones,' and so reaped material advantage, while the devout gave glory to a Higher Power whose humble instruments they professed themselves to be. Experience everywhere teaches that those among the multitude in whom little yearning for spirituality normally exists, are, however, willing enough to endure exhortation if accompanied by miracle.

It is not here proposed to attempt anything like a survey of the history of these psychotherapeutic phenomena, for, although such would be full of interest, it is beside the purpose of this book. Let it then suffice to say that the record of all peoples, savage and civilised, teems with instances of supernatural or miraculous cures. At the altars or shrines of the Egyptian Serapis, the Greek Æsculapius, or the Christian saints and martyrs, a mysterious healing art has been practised in widely varied forms and attributed to equally varied sources. Nor has this faith-healing always

been of a strictly devotional character. A secular form, so to speak, familiar to readers of modern history, is that commonly known as 'Touching for the King's Evil,' which was so popular a remedy for scrofula, goître, and epilepsy in this and in Continental countries.¹ We first read of its being practised in England by Edward the Confessor in the eleventh century,² and it only became obsolete after the death of Queen Anne in the eighteenth.³ The hard-headed Elizabeth is said to have been much averse to what she doubtless regarded as an ignorant and godless superstition, but she had nevertheless to conform to the practice, and, according to a contemporary account, her 'touching' was most efficacious.⁴

¹ It has been a disputed point as to whether this royal curative faculty originated in England or in France. The House of Hapsburg were also credited with the balsamic virtue. Laurentius, first physician to Henry IV. of France, derives the practice of 'touching' from Clovis, A.D. 481.

² This is recorded by William of Malmesbury, who wrote in the following century.

³ Samuel Johnson was touched by this Queen in 1712, aged thirty months.

⁴ William Tookes published a book (*Charisma; sive Donum Sanationis*) in Elizabeth's reign on the subject of cures effected by the royal touch. He vouched for these from personal observation.

This royal curative gift appears to have been at its height of popularity in the reign of Charles II., and the gay monarch 'touched,' according to the historians, near upon a hundred thousand persons during his twenty-five years of kingship.¹ It is recorded that the days in which the 'touching' was to take place were fixed at the sittings of the Privy Council, and were solemnly notified by the clergy in their parish churches. The sufferers who wished to present themselves to their Sovereign had to obtain a recommendation from the minister or churchwarden of their parish, these individuals being enjoined to examine carefully into the cases before granting a certificate. They then had often weeks

¹ Touching for the Evil appears to have increased greatly after the Restoration. In the first four years of Charles's reign nearly 24,000 persons were 'touched.' Regulations had consequently to be drawn up in Council (1683) concerning these 'Publick Healings,' which were appointed to take place in the winter for the avoidance of contagion. The King's surgeon wrote: 'I myself have been a frequent eye-witness of many hundreds of cures performed by His Majesty's touch alone, without any aid from chirurgery.'

James II. touched during one of his 'progresses' eight hundred persons in Chester Cathedral.