THE FOLKLORE OF CATTLE DISEASES: A VETERINARY PERSPECTIVE*

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Introduction

Patrick Logan in his *Irish Country Cures*, stated, 'Veterinary folklore is almost forgotten . . . today, if a farmer has a sick cow, he is certain to consult a veterinary surgeon.'[1] A review of the veterinary literature in Europe reveals that there has been little research in veterinary folklore. Only a few brief papers have been published in the area, including a communication on the folklore of animal diseases in Turkey and the Balkan countries.[2] There have been no previous studies of veterinary folklore in Ireland. The purpose of the present investigation was to establish the experience of the veterinary profession of folk custom and belief as it applies to diseases of cattle in Ireland. Its objective was to record living folklore as well as drawing on experiences of the past. There were two components to the study: information was gathered on the local terminology for diseases as well as on traditional cures for specific conditions. The terminology for an animal disease can tell us something about its place in folk memory and this terminology is inextricably linked with the history of the disease itself.

Methodology

A questionnaire was distributed to all registered members of the veterinary profession in the Republic of Ireland. Questionnaires were also sent to selected veterinarians in the six counties of Northern Ireland. The survey was primarily directed at farm animal practitioners and the questionnaire consisted of two sections. The

* The author wishes to acknowledge the help and support of Professor Séamas Ó Catháin and Bairbre Ní Fhloinn MA, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

[1] P. Logan, *Irish Country Cures*, Belfast 1981, 151.

[2] F. Dinçer, 'Some notes on the treatment of human and animal diseases in the folklore of Turkey and the Balkan countries', *Deutsche Tierärzliche Wochenschrift* 95 (1988): 419-20.

first section dealt with the terminology for a list of common diseases of cattle. Veterinary practitioners were asked to provide the terms used within their practice area for various bovine diseases. The second section was concerned with traditional cures for a number of specific bovine diseases: veterinary practitioners were asked whether the cures were still practiced by their clients and when and where the cures had been observed by them.

Results

Replies were received from 73 veterinarians working in large animal practice. At least one reply came from each of the 32 counties and the collected material may, therefore, be said to be broadly representative of the experience of the veterinary profession throughout Ireland. Material will be presented by county response although, clearly, many practice areas embrace a number of neighbouring counties. In the accompanying figures terms for a disease, or for the practice of a traditional cure, are identified on the map of Ireland at the approximate geographical position of the responding veterinary practice. The spelling of any variants provided by the respondents is included without modification in the results. However, where appropriate, the spelling of Irish language versions has been amended in line with contemporary usage. The maps represent the four provinces of Ireland as follows: *Ulster* (Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Tyrone), *Munster* (Cork, Clare, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford), *Leinster* (Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Louth, Longford, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath, Wicklow, Wexford), and *Connacht* (Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo).

TERMINOLOGY FOR DISEASES OF CATTLE

Babesiosis

Babesiosis is a tick-borne disease of grazing cattle, characterised by fever, haemoglobinuria (redwater), anaemia and death; the cause is a protozoan parasite that attacks and destroys the red blood cells.

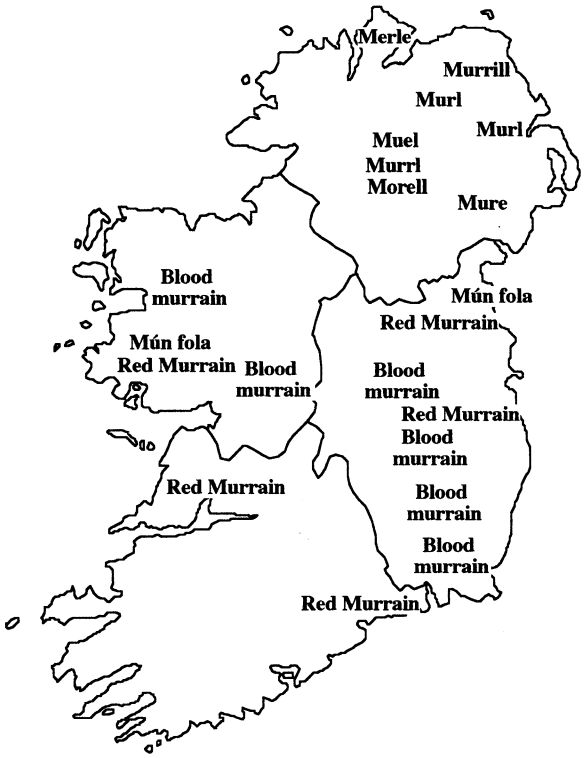

Fig. 1. Distribution of the terminology for babesiosis in cattle

Redwater and *murrain* are the most widely used terms for babesiosis in Ireland and were reported from every county in Ireland. *Red murrain* and *blood murrain* are also in common use throughout Connacht, Leinster and Munster. Some interesting local dialect variations of murrain e. g. *Murll, merle, murl* and *mure* are in use in Ulster (Fig. 1). *Mún fola* (bloody urine) was reported from the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas of counties Galway and Meath.

Interdigital Necrobacillosis

Interdigital necrobacillosis is a bacterial cause of acute, severe lameness in cattle. It is characterized by painful swelling of the

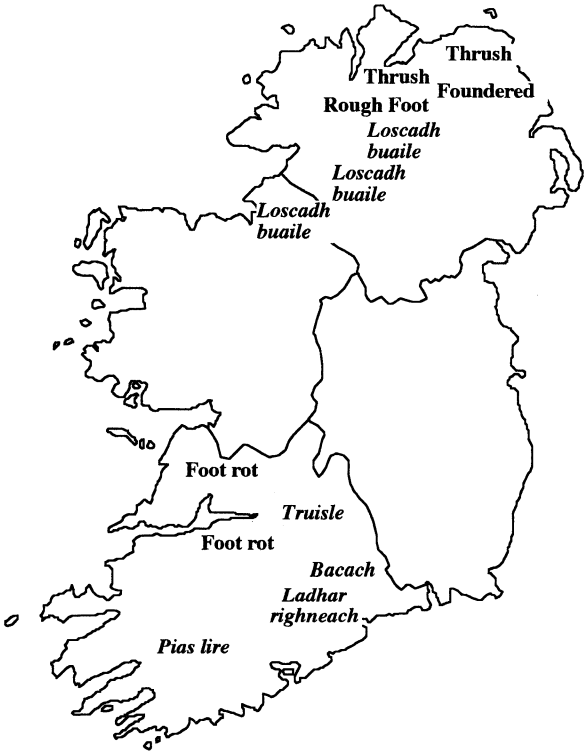

Fig. 2. Distribution of the terminology for interdigital necrobacillosis

tissue in the cleft between the cleats. The use of *foul* and *scald* is common to all counties; the terms thrush, *rough foot* and *foundered* are used in the Ulster counties of Antrim, Derry and Tyrone. *Foot rot* was recorded in counties Clare and Limerick. *Loscadh buaile* was reported from southwest Ulster and North Connacht. *Truisle* is a term used in county Tipperary, *bacach* and *ladhar righneach* in County Waterford and *Pias Lire* in west county Cork (Fig. 2).

Mastitis

Mastitis is an acute bacterial inflammation of the mammary gland. It is characterized by swelling of the udder, the presence of clots in

the milk and varying degrees of illness in the affected cows. *Felon* is in widespread use throughout the counties of east Ulster, whereas *start* is commonly used in Leinster and Munster. *Weed* was reported from counties Donegal and Tyrone while *blast* is common in counties Meath, Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. *Blown* and *blow-up* were recorded in counties Galway and Meath respectively, while *cruds* was reported from county Tipperary and *gargot* from county Cork.

Pneumonia

Pneumonia in cattle is a common acute respiratory illness caused by both viruses and bacteria. It is characterized by fever, difficulty in breathing, nasal disharges and coughing. *Chill* is used to describe pneumonia throughout Ireland. *Founder* was reported from counties Derry, Donegal and Tyrone. Certain farmers in the Munster counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary, and in parts of county Sligo use *an impression* to describe pneumonia. *A draw* is used in counties Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare while *blowing* was recorded in counties Antrim and Tyrone. *Lifting* was reported from county Donegal, *blow/'bit of a blow'* from counties Meath, Westmeath and Kildare and catarrh from county Galway. *Seordán* and *'soillteach in herself'* were reported from county Tipperary. Verminous pneumonia (lungworm) is referred to as the *giúrsán* in parts of west Kerry.

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea commonly results in dehydration and death in calves; it has many causes including bacteria, viruses and worms. *Scour* was recorded throughout Ireland. However, diarrhoea containing blood is referred to as *blood murrain* in counties Cavan, Clare, Galway, Kerry, Laois, Louth, Offaly, Sligo, Tyrone, Waterford, Westmeath and Wexford; *blood scour*, like scour, is in widespread usage throughout Ireland. *Flux* and *bloody flux* were reported from counties Kildare and Dublin. *Sciotar bán* was recorded in county Galway, *skitter* from county Tyrone, *scutters* from county Waterford, *runs* from county Kildare and *wet murrain* from county

Wicklow. *Inflammation, E.coli* and *salmonella* were recorded in county Galway. *Jelly murrain* was reported from counties Laois and Offaly, *bloody mure* and *gut murrl* from county Tyrone.

Constipation

Constipation, particularly that associated with advanced cases of babesiosis is referred to as *dry murrain* throughout Ireland; *dry mure* was reported from county Tyrone.

Infectious Keratoconjunctivitis

Infectious keratoconjunctivitis is a painful, bacterial inflammation of the eyes; spread by flies, it is particularly prevalent in the summer months and is characterized by redness of the tissues around the eye, watery discharge from the eye and the presence of a white opacity on the surface of the eyeball. The use of *pink eye* is common throughout Ireland. *Forest Disease* is used in parts of Mid-Ulster, *pearl eye* in county Galway, *New Forest eye* in counties Westmeath and Clare, *one eye cold* in county Dublin and *New Forest disease* was reported from counties Carlow and Wicklow.

Trace Element Deficiency

Trace element deficiencies are common diseases characterized by a failure to thrive in cattle. They are caused by the absence of key nutritional elements in the diet, notably cobalt and copper. *Pine* is in widespread use throughout Ireland. *Duaghras* was reported from county Mayo, *piosánaí* from county Tipperary, *wasting* from county Kildare and *an galar truagha* from county Galway.

Phosphorus Deficiency

Phosphorus deficiency is a nutritional disease of cattle grazing poor, highland pastures characterized by ill-thrift, depraved appetite, lameness and infertility. *Bog lameness* was reported from counties Mayo, Offaly, Westmeath, Tyrone and Waterford. *An cnupán* was reported from county Donegal, *an galar crupag, crupack, cal na crippeagh, an galar truagha* and *pica* from county Galway, the *péist* from county Donegal, *worm-in-the-tail* from county Waterford and

tail-worm from county Limerick. *An galar truagha* and *an galar cam* were both recorded in west Kerry.

Angioneurotic oedema

Angioneurotic oedema is a severe, localized swelling of the subcutaneous tissues of the head that occurs suddenly in grazing cattle. It is an allergic reaction and may be associated with the ingestion of plant allergens. *Blain* was the most commonly used term found throughout Ireland. '*Swallowed a snail*' was reported from county Tyrone, '*swallowed a clock*' from county Galway, *brown nose* from county Fermanagh and *Armagh nose* from county Tyrone!

Hypomagnesaemia

Hypomagnesaemia is a disease of lactating cows at grass in spring-time; it is characterized by low levels of magnesium in blood, sudden deaths, muscle twitching, staggering and convulsions. *Grass tetany* was the most commonly used term throughout Ireland while *staggers* was less frequently used; *the starts* was reported from Westmeath.

Hypocalcaemia

Hypocalcaemia is a disease of high-yielding cows immediately after calving characterized by low blood calcium, muscle weakness and recumbency. *Milk fever* is the term in use throughout the country. *Fiabhras a' bhainne* was reported from the Gaeltacht area of county Galway, *the paralysis* from county Tyrone.

Ketosis

Ketosis is a metabolic disorder of high-yielding dairy cows associated with inadequate levels of energy in the diet. It is characterized by dullness, inappetence and a sweet smell of ketones on the breath. *Sugar deficiency* was reported from counties Carlow, Cavan, Fermanagh, Tipperary and Waterford; *Sweet breath* from counties Clare, Derry, Kildare, Limerick and Tyrone, *smelly breath* from County Waterford, *diabetes* from counties Carlow and Laois,

sour stomach from County Limerick, *chronic milk fever* from county Westmeath and *slow fever* from county Wicklow.

Downer Cow

A Downer cow is a recently calved cow that is unable to rise due to a combination of muscle weakness and nerve damage. *Slip tail* was reported from county Donegal and *tail slip* from county Antrim. *Worm-in-the-tail* was reported widely throughout Ulster and Leinster. It was less commonly reported from Connacht and Munster. *Ruher (rua) péist* was reported from county Galway and *ocras* from county Westmeath. The *péist* was reported from county Limerick.

Clostridial myositis

Clostridial myositis is a severe bacterial lameness due to muscle swelling. There is usually marked swelling of the upper part of the affected leg. The disease is often fatal and incision of the affected muscle mass reveals black, swollen tissue. *Blackleg* is the most commonly used term and is distributed evenly throughout the island. *Quarter-ill* was reported from county Limerick and *black quarter* from counties Tyrone, Clare and Limerick. *An c[h]eathrú g[h]orm* was reported from county Galway, *an c[h]eathrú d[h]ubh* and *an c[h]eathrú g[h]orm* from west Kerry, *quarter evil* from county Wicklow and *speed/speedy disease* from county Dublin.

Papillomatosis

Papillomatosis is a viral disease characterized by the presence of large cauliflower-like warts on the skin. *Angleberries* is the most widely used term throughout Ireland. *Warts* is in use in counties Cavan, Mayo, Waterford and Westmeath. *Strawberry foot* was reported from county Galway.

Dermatophycosis

Dermatophycosis is a skin disease characterized by the presence around the head of circular areas of hairless skin covered with a thick grey crust. *Ringworm* is by far the most commonly-used term

throughout Ireland. *Tethers* was reported from counties Laois and Offaly, but particularly from counties Limerick and Tipperary, *tetters* from county Dublin, *scruff* from county Galway and *scurvy* from county Sligo.

Ragwort Poisoning

Cattle that ingest ragwort (*senecio jacobea*) plants over a period of time suffer severe liver cirrhosis that causes weight loss and nervous symptoms. *Benweed poisoning* was reported from county Donegal, '*ate some buachalláns*' from county Sligo, and *an galar buí* from county Galway.

FOLK CURES

Q. 1 Have you ever encountered the practice of 'turning the sod' for the treatment of interdigital necrobacillosis in cattle?

Fig. 3 illustrates the regional distribution of reports by veterinarians of the folk practice of 'turning the sod' (referred to as 'turning the scraw' [Ir. *scraith*] in parts of county Offaly). Reports were received that the custom is currently practised in counties Tyrone, Cavan, Offaly, Westmeath and Meath. A Kildare veterinarian noted that the practice was widespread in that county in the 1950s but that it waned with the advent of sulphonamides in practice. Reports of 'turning the sod' being performed between 15 and 20 years ago were provided by veterinarians in counties Derry and Laois. The details of how the procedure is performed vary from region to region, as illustrated from the following selected descriptions by veterinarians of current practices that they have observed.

County Down: 'A sod is dug out or sometimes torn out with the aid of the owner's boot and turned upside down in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. This is done often in the south Armagh area and beyond and extends across the religious beliefs'.

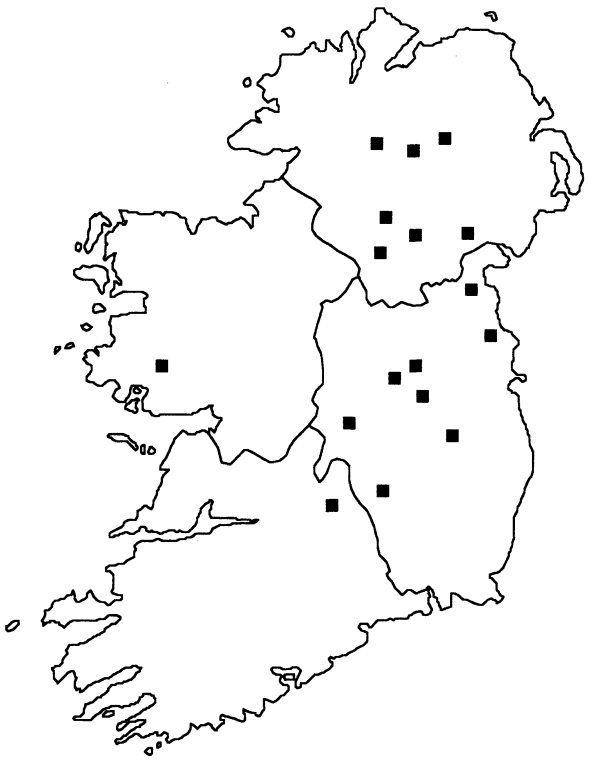

Fig. 3. Distribution of the custom of treating interdigital necrobacillosis by 'turning the sod'.

County Offaly: 'A animal that has foul is watched were it walks. Then, using a spade the impression made on the soil by the affected foot is dug out and turned over'

County Meath: 'the animal with foul is watched, the imprint made by the lame foot is identified, a circle is cut round this with a pen-knife and then the inner core of this circle cut out with the knife. The sod is then taken to the perimeter of the field and thrown out; a prayer is said, sometimes the 'Hail Mary'. The sod may be thrown onto a whitethorn bush'. Plates 4 (a), (b) show Mr. John McDonnell 'turning the sod' on his farm at Rosnaree, Slane, county Meath in August 1997. An outer circle is initially cut in the sod (a) and then the inner core is removed (b).

Plate 4a. 'Turning the sod'.

Plate 4b. 'Turning the sod'.

Q. 2 Have you ever encountered the practice of using people with the 'the cure for bleeding' in cases of haemorrhage/ babesiosis in cattle? Do you know of any prayers or charms which were/are used to cure 'bleeding'?

Fig. 5 illustrates the widespread regional distribution of reports by veterinarians of the folk cures for bleeding. Reports revealed the practice to be still in use in counties Antrim, Tyrone, Cavan, Fermanagh, Armagh, Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo, Offaly, Westmeath, Meath, Carlow and Wicklow. Reports were also received that this practice was used in counties Tipperary and Kildare up to 20 years ago. Details of how the procedure was and is

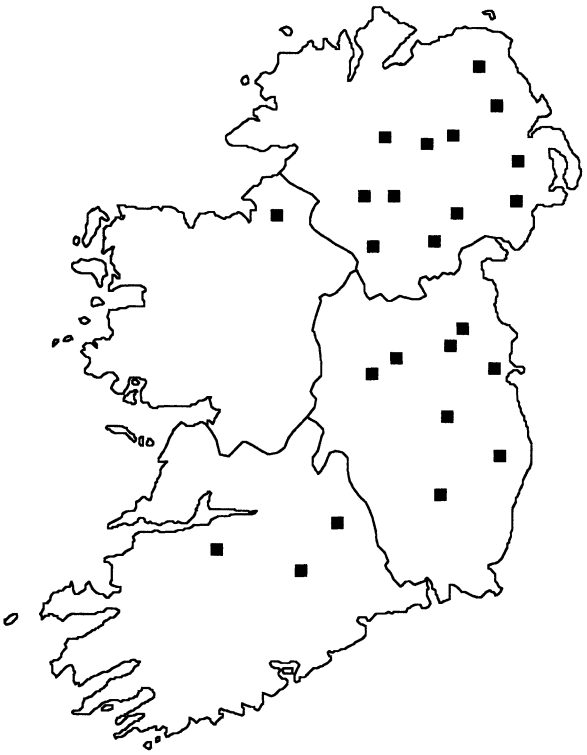

Fig. 5. Distribution of the custom of curing bleeding in cattle by distance-healing.

performed vary from region to region, as illustrated by the following descriptions:

Counties Armagh, Fermanagh: 'I don't think prayers were involved, just notification of the person with the cure in the following cases:

(i) after dehorning cattle—mention the incident to the person with the cure (county Armagh)
(ii) Redwater cases: send for the vet but also tell the neighbour with the cure (county Armagh)
(iii) Very large haematoma in dairy cows: neighbour with cure was informed—cattle improved (county Fermanagh)'.

County Tyrone: 'I was working in the Cookstown area of county Tyrone in 1989-1990. On getting a call to a haemorrhage case usually after calving, the farmer would ring a local woman immediately who was said to have the cure for bleeding. She required some description of the cow, colour, breed, location etc. By the time the vet arrived at the farm the bleeding was invariably under control'.

'Like most things in Northern Ireland, there are both Protestant and Catholic charms. However, in an urgent case, the religion of the charmer is deemed irrelevant!'

County Antrim: 'The person with the charm requires to know the sex of the animal and its colour only. If the animal is bi-coloured, the predominant colour must be given first'. . .

'A progressive pedigree beef breeder always calls the 'charmer' to resolve any bleeding problems'.

County Down: 'The person with the gift was contacted either by telegram or phone or word of mouth . . . I knew of a man, now dead, in whose house a trunk was found filled with telegrams giving descriptions of animals with redwater and bleeding due to numerous causes'.

County Westmeath: 'The prayer for the cure for bleeding was "Christ was born of the Virgin Mary in a poor stable in Bethlehem and was brought to river Jordan to be baptized. The water was sweet and the water was good. He commanded the water and the water

stopped. By his word and in his name, I command this blood to do the same." Three Hail Marys must be said in honour of the Precious Blood'.

County Monaghan: A cure for redwater from Carrickmacross, was based on the following prayer: 'By the blood of Adam's sin was bought, By the blood of Christ's sin was bought, By this prayer you will understand, That this (animal/pet name if any). Will stop passing blood and Nine Hail Marys'.

County Louth: the identity of the animal and the townland in which it was located were regarded as essential information to the healer with the cure for bleeding. These cures although applicable to redwater are also used for any bleeding problem such as bleeding after dehorning, castration, abomasal ulceration, and post-parturient haemorrhage.

Q. 3 Have you ever encountered the use of garlic in the treatment of recumbency in post-parturient cows?

The majority of reports were of witnessing this practice some 30 to 40 years ago in counties Donegal, Tyrone, Dublin, Mayo and Galway. Reports that this folk cure is still practised were received from counties Derry, Antrim and Armagh. Details of how the procedure is performed vary from region to region as illustrated by the following descriptions:

County Armagh: 'a clove of garlic is inserted under the skin in the tail region, done in bad winters when animals went down. A man from Carrickmacross still does it in the South Armagh area charging £10-£20 for his services and travelling about in an old red tractor'.

County Antrim: 'The soft part of the tail at the 3rd and 4th coccygeal vertebrae was slit and a mixture of garlic, soot and goose dung applied and bandaged in position. A once common procedure in North Antrim'.

'. . . a cow down for several weeks after calving last spring 1999, the farmer asked a man from the Glens to look at her, he incised the tail, and inserted garlic and she was up the next day!'

County Tyrone: 'Not garlic, but an onion slice was placed under the 'worm' ligament on the udder side of the tail root . . . it acted as an irritant and was probably a descendent of the garlic practice. . .'.
'I have observed a mixture of soot and garlic being placed onto a cut made in the tip of a recumbent cow's tail and then bandaged . . . I have not seen it used for about a year. The cow in question had obturator paralysis and among other things that were tried were mustard blister to the sacral spine and a charm of some kind. . .'.
County Dublin: 'For poor thriving cows, in the dark, approach cow's hind end, grip tail, incise apply chopped garlic and wrap incision site with red flannel which was left on for seven days, improvement was expected in three weeks. . .'.
County Galway: Known as the *péist*/worm in the tail or *Ruher (rua) péist* . . . a few centimetres was slit above the hair line of the tail and garlic and soot inserted, the skin was sewn over or covered with a cloth . . . the objective was to get rid of the 'worm in the tail . . . .

Q. 4 Have you ever encountered the concept of the evil/bad eye or 'blinking' as a supernatural influence in diseases of animals?

Reports that this belief is still held were received from counties Donegal, Tyrone and Limerick. The majority of the reports related to incidents that occurred between 40 and 50 years ago, as illustrated by the following accounts:

County Donegal: 'A stranger can come into the yard and by looking over the byre door can cause a cow to get sick. This cow becomes "blinked". The cure for a blinked cow is to drench her with a dose of garlic and soot'.
County Kildare:'I was called to a cow with post-parturient haemoglobinuria and the owner's wife said to me, "I don't care how good a vet you are, no matter what you do that cow is going to die . . . the evil eye has been put on her, I found a smear of grease on the shed door this morning, put there by a neighbour." In this case, the cow was successfully treated using a blood transfusion'.

County Limerick: 'In East Limerick, I had the experience of treating a sick sow. One of the onlookers asked me to go outside the house in which the animal was. I did so and was told that I was wasting my time that a *piseog* had been placed on the sow by someone unfriendly to the owner, I took no notice and proceeded to treat the case . . . quite often a *piseog* was placed in the form of a curse and the outward sign of such activity was notified by placing a number of eggs in the hay in the haybarn, well buried in the hay, to be discovered only as the hay was being forked . . .'.
County Tipperary: 'Frequently encountered . . . *piseogs* . . . eggs found in the hay, aborted fetuses left on neighbours land . . . one old man told me that he had seen a neighbour woman trailing a hair spancil on his land on May eve—this was designed to cause his animals harm . . .'.
County Down: 'I was asked to certify that I had failed to cure a horse because of the fact that it was bewitched and a solicitor was consulted to establish a case.'.

Discussion

The variety of terms used for mastitis in Ireland is remarkable. *Felon,* and *summer felon* are common terms throughout East Ulster to describe mastitis and summer mastitis. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (*SOED*), *felon* is Middle English in origin and one of its meanings is given as *whitlow* meaning a suppurative swelling near the nail.[3] The English Dialect Dictionary (*EDD*) gives *fellon,* 'a disease in cows caused by cold' and states that, in north Yorkshire, 'the udders of cows are frequently thickened and enlarged in the process of the disorder, in which case the term *yuer fellon* is employed . . . *cripple fellon* is used for the lameness associated with the disease'.[4] It is the author's experience that felon is also used to describe mastitis in Lanarkshire in central Scotland and its geographical distribution in Ireland probably reflects an origin consistent with the Ulster plantations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The use of *weed* for mastitis is

[3] C. T. Onions (ed.), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford 1944. sv *felon.*
[4] J. Wright (ed.), *The English Dialect Dictionary*, London 1900, sv *felon.*

prevalent in east Donegal and parts of Tyrone and cows with mastitis are often referred to as '*weeded*'. The Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language (*EDSL*) gives *weid* 'men, women and animals are likely to be affected by this disease' and cites the Agricultural Survey of West Lothian, 'milch cows are not unfrequently subject to what is called a weid, which is a kind of feverish affection'.[5]

A *blast* is described as any pernicious or destructive influence on animals or plants, or a flatulent disease of sheep; it derives from the Gothic, *blesan* meaning to blow.[6] Blast is used in Leinster and is possibly descriptive, reflecting the swollen nature of an affected mammary gland; *blown* and *blow-up* would appear to be similarly descriptive terms. However, *EDD* gives '*blast*; to blight, shrivel' and 'blasted', specifically, from Leicestershire, 'of a cow's udder, dried or shriveled inflammation' and also 'of cattle, to inflate, to swell in the stomach'.[7]

Cruds, the term used in county Tipperary, describes the altered mammary gland secretion in mastitis. *Crud* is a variation of curd and the Glossary of the Lancashire Dialect (*GLD*) gives its origin from the Welsh *crwd* ('a round lump') and the Middle English, cruddle.[8] The origins of *start*, used in Leinster and Munster are uncertain.

One of the terms for mastitis reported from county Cork was *gargot*. The French veterinarian, Hutrel d'Arboval was one of the earliest writers on the subject of mastitis in sheep and described a gangrenous inflammation of the udder known as *garget*.[9] The word *garget* is Old French in origin and its first recorded use for mastitis in sheep and cattle was in 1725.[10] *EDD* gives *garget*, in East Anglia, as 'a distemper affecting the throats and udder of cattle and pigs',

[5] J. Jamieson (ed.), *The Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, Vol. IV, Paisley 1882, sv *weid*.

[6] *Op. cit.*, sv *blast*.

[7] *EDD*, sv *blast*.

[8] J. N. Nodal & G. Milner, *Glossary of the Lancashire Dialect*, London 1875, sv *cruds*.

[9] W. Yonatt, *Sheep, Their Breeds, Management and Disease*, London 1823.

[10] *SOED*, sv *garget*.

and indicates that in East Norfolk *gargut* and *murrain* are interchangeable terms and, from Suffolk, quotes the remark 'the garget have seized her dug'.[11] No Irish-language terms for mastitis were recorded in this survey.

Terms in use for pneumonia: *chill*, *draw*, *blow*, *blowing* are obviously descriptive of the pyrexia and increased respiratory effort associated with the disease. A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue states that *draw* is Middle English in origin, meaning an inhalation of air.[12] *Blow*, *blowing* stem from the Middle English and describe the increased respiratory effort.[13] The origins of the term *an impression* that was reported from Munster are unknown.

Seordán and *'soillteach in herself'* were reported from county Tipperary. *Seordán* is the Irish for a bronchial wheeze.[14] The *giúrsán* was reported from West Kerry for verminous pneumonia (*lungworm, hoose*) and is probably a version of the Irish *cársán* meaning a wheeze.[15]

It is probably not surprising that *scour* is the term predominantly used for diarrhoea in Ireland. *Scour* is Middle English in origin and its first recorded use for diarrhoea in cattle was in 1592.[16] However, when blood is present in the faeces—a condition indicative of the diseases coccidiosis or salmonellosis—the term *blood murrain* is used. Similarly, the constipation seen in some cases of babesiosis is widely referred to as *dry murrain*. *Wet murrain* was reported from county Wicklow; *jelly murrain,* from counties Laois and Offaly, is particularly descriptive of the mucoid diarrhoea often seen in acute salmonellosis. *Murrain* is Middle French in origin and may derive from the latin *mori* (to die). It was first recorded meaning a cattle plague or pestilence in 1613[17] and will be discussed at greater length below.

[11] *EDD,* sv *garget*.

[12] W. A. Craigie, *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue from the 12th century to the end of the 17th century*, Vol. I, London, [1937], sv *draw*.

[13] *SOED,* sv *blow*.

[14] N. Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, Baile Átha Cliath 1977, sv *seordán*.

[15] *Op. cit.*, sv *cársán*.

[16] *SOED,* sv *scour*.

[17] *SOED,* sv *murrain*.

Flux and *bloody flux* for diarrhoea were reported from county Kildare. *DOST* gives '*flux* from the Middle English *fluxe*, late fourteenth-century; Latin, *fluxus*, meaning an excessive discharge from the bowels, a discharge of mucus/catarrh'.[18] There were no reports of the use of the Irish-language term *boinneach* for diarrhoea. However, *sciotár bán* was reported from county Galway, while *skitter* and *scutters* were recorded in counties Tyrone and Waterford respectively. The use of the terms *E. coli* and *salmonella* from county Galway reflect the influence of veterinary diagnosis on disease terminology.

Pearl eye, *pink eye* and *one eye cold* are descriptive terms for inflammatory conjunctivitis that is often unilateral in nature. *New Forest eye*, *Forest disease* and *New Forest disease* were reported from Westmeath, mid-Ulster and county Carlow and represent a link with a common term for this disease in the south of England, particularly in the region of the New Forest. *Pearl eye* is particularly descriptive of the small, white, circular corneal opacity that characterizes this disease.

Brown nose, reported from county Fermanagh for angioneurotic oedema, describes the crusted muzzle that frequently follows the severe head swelling that characterizes this disease; *Armagh nose* tells us something of the mischevious sense of humour of some county Tyrone farmers! '*Swallowed a 'clock'* from county Galway (probably meaning ingestion of a 'beetle') and '*swallowed a snail*' from county Tyrone reflect an ancient belief in Ireland that disease was precipitated by ingestion of insects, their larvae or worms.[19]

Blain, the most commonly-used term for angioneurotic oedema stems from the Old English verb *blegen,* meaning to swell, and is descriptive of the subcutaneous oedema of the head present in the disease. This term may be more recognizable as a component of the common term chilblain. *SOED* also gives *blegen* as a bladder on the

[18] *DOST,* sv *flux*.

[19] W. F. De Vismes Kane, 'The cattle disease called the "Connogh" and its traditional cure by amulets and charms', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 4 (1914), 143-8.

root of the tongue of cattle pressing against the windpipe.[20] *GLD* cites a Middle English source, *bleine*, meaning a little boil.[21]

Hypocalcaemia, hypomagnesaemia and ketosis are diseases that have emerged due to changes in the nutritional and genetic management of cows for increased milk production.[22] The relatively recent appearances of these diseases, compared to diseases such as babesiosis, is reflected in the terminology. Thus, *milk fever*, the standard term used by practising veterinarians to describe the disease, is the predominant form for hypocalcaemia; *fiabhras a' bhainne* from the county Galway Gaeltacht may be a direct translation of milk fever. Ironically, fever is not a symptom of this metabolic disease and its use probably reflects a belief that the disease was an infectious one before its precise aetiology was discovered. *The paralysis* from county Tyrone, however, accurately describes the muscle weakness associated with this common disease. Similarly, *grass tetany* is the most widely-used term for hypomagnesamia and accurately describes the spasms exhibited by affected cattle grazing spring pasture. Hypomagnesaemia is a common cause of sudden death of cattle grazing spring pastures and the '*puck oan spare*' [*poc ón spéir* (lit. 'a stroke from the sky')], recorded in Kilgarvan, county Kerry, in 1939 for a sudden stroke affecting grazing cattle at the beginning of May, could be a reference to acute onset grass tetany.[23]

Ketosis by virtue of the smell of ketone bodies commonly detected on the cow's breath is described as *sour stomach*, *sweet* (or *smelly*) *breath*. *Sugar deficiency* and *diabetes* reflect veterinary views concerning the aetiology of this metabolic disease although *chronic milk fever* and *slow fever* from counties Westmeath and Wicklow respectively suggest an alternative view of its pathogenesis.

[20] *SOED*, sv *blain*.

[21] *GLD*, sv *blain*.

[22] J. M. Payne, *Metabolic Diseases in Farm Animals*, William Heineman Medical Books Ltd., London 1977, 1-11.

[23] *IFC* 616:13. The abbreviation *IFC* refers to the main manuscript collection in the archives of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

The word *pine* is used throughout Ireland for trace element deficiency leading to ill-thrift, while *wasting* was reported from county Kildare. *Piosánaí* and *padhsaan*, reported from counties Tipperary and Limerick respectively derive from the Irish *padhsán* or *piasún* meaning a delicate or sickly person; *píosán*, meaning 'a sickly person' in east Limerick appears in the Dictionary of Anglo-Irish (*DAI*).[24] A descriptive phrase recorded from county Clare in 1930 for ill-thriven cattle, '*bhíodh na ba ar tógaint*' ('the cattle used to be lifting'), was found in the folklore archives[25] and *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* records 'a dawnsey' as an ill-thriven cow.[26] *Duaghras* was reported for ill-thrift from county Mayo and, in this context, it is interesting to note that Ó Moghráin, in a paper on booleying in Achill Island (county Mayo), referred in the case of cattle grazing the sandy soils of the island to a condition characterized by ill-thrift, pica (depraved appetite) and ocular discharge.[27] The tradition of booleying (from the Irish *buaile*), is an ancient agricultural practice, also known as transhumance, that involved moving cattle to upland or mountain grazing areas called 'booleys' during the summer months to allow conservation of grass for winter feeding.[28]

Ó Moghráin identified several names for this disease on Achill, including *dubhras*, *galra dumhaighe* and *galra dubhaidh*. However, he was unable to ascertain the nature of the condition and concluded 'only by one who knows both veterinary science and Irish can the origin of the names be solved'.[29] The cure for *dubhras* was to send the cattle to the booleying pastures of Sliabh Mór, Achill's highest peak, and even water collected from Sliabh Mór was considered curative for this condition. *Dumhach* is the Irish for a sand-dune and

[24] D. Ó Muirithe, *A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish: Words and Phrases from Gaelic in the English of Ireland*, Dublin 1996, sv *píosán.*

[25] *IFC* 38:166.

[26] *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 3 (1887), 117.

[27] P. Ó Moghráin, 'Some Mayo traditions of the buaile', *Béaloideas* 13 (1943), 161-71.

[28] A. T. Lucas, *Cattle in Ancient Ireland*, Kilkenny 1989, 58-67.

[29] Ó Moghráin, *op. cit.*, 166.

an *galar dumhaigh* fits best with a diagnosis of cobalt deficiency, a condition particularly seen in cattle grazing sandy soils.[30]

Bog lameness (bog is from the Irish *bog* meaning soft)[31] was the most commonly reported term for phosphorus deficiency in cattle. Phosphorus deficiency is characterized clinically by ill-thrift, infertility and lameness associated with osteomalacia (softening of bones).[32] Although once common in Ireland, phosphorus deficiency is now rarely diagnosed because of the widespread use of phosphate fertilizers since the late 1950s. The rich variety of terms in the Irish language for phosphorus deficiency is remarkable and contrasts with the dearth of Irish-language terms for the relatively recent nutritional diseases such as hypomagnesaemia and ketosis. Thus, for phosphorus deficiency, this study revealed the use of *an cnúpan* from county Donegal, *an galar crupag*, *cal na crippeagh* and *crupak* from county Galway, the *péist* from county Donegal, as well as an *galar truagha* (county Galway) and *an galar cam* from county Kerry. *Péist* means a worm in Irish, so the English terms *tail-worm* and *worm-in-the-tail* from counties Limerick and Waterford suggest a connection. Ó Súilleabháin in his seminal work, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, gives *an galar truagha* (lit. 'the wasting disease') for phosphorus deficiency.[33] A veterinary survey of Conamara commissioned by the Department of Agriculture in 1951 revealed the use of the Irish *briosc brún* to describe phosphorus deficiency of cattle,[34] and folklore manuscript sources revealed the use of this term to describe a lameness of cattle in the Aran Islands and Carna, county Galway.[35]

It has previously been recognised that *an cnupán* in county Donegal refers to phosphorus deficiency;[36] thus, it is interesting to

[30] O. M. Radostits, C. C. Gay, D. C. Blood, & K. W. Hinchcliff, *Veterinary Medicine, a Textbook of the Diseases of Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Goats and Horses*, Ninth Edition, London 2000, 1483-7.

[31] *SOED,* sv *bog*.

[32] Radostits *et al., op. cit.*, 1537.

[33] S. Ó Súilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, Dublin 1942, 34.

[34] Anon, Connemara Veterinary Survey, Department of Agriculture, Dublin 1951.

[35] *IFC* 5:6.

[36] L. McGill, *In Conall's Footsteps*, Dingle 1992, 284-5.

note the related terms *an galar crupag* and *crupak* from county Galway. Furthermore, Payne in his text on metabolic diseases of cattle gives *cruban* as the Gaelic term for phosphorus deficiency in the Scottish Highlands and Islands.[37]

Just as in Achill, there was a recognition in the Donegal Gaeltacht that moving cattle to mountain pastures was necessary to allow them to recover from the long-term effects of grazing by the shore. There was also an observation that if cattle were left too long on the mountain pastures grazing sedges (*cíb dhubh*) they developed *an cnupán* characterized by both lameness and ill-thrift.[38] The Donegal folksong *Bríd Bhán*, dating to the early part of the seventeenth century, also provides a reference to this disease. Bríd, from the coastal area of Teileann in south Donegal, is being wooed by her lover to come and live with him in the mountains. One of the many reasons given by Bríd for her reluctance to join him is that cattle grazing the mountain pastures are likely to develop *an cnupán*.

'Tá na caoirigh anseo gan dóigh, tá cnupán ar na buaibh,
Agus galar ar na gabhair 's na hárdaibh.
Is a' méadú mo bhróin níl anseo ach móin,
Agus cíb dhub; ní áirighim-sa féar í.'[39]

[The sheep here are in a poor way and the cows have cramps,
And the goats in the hills are diseased.
And to increase my sorrow there's nothing here but turf,
And black sedge; I don't call it grass.']

Blench highlighted the usefulness of linguistic evidence in the study of prehistory of African ruminant lifestock and in archaeological research where conventional methodologies were limited.[40] In a similar way, linguistic evidence and evidence gleaned

[37] Payne, *op. cit.*, 1-11.

[38] M. Mac Gabhann, *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*, Indreabhán 1996 (reprint), 30.

[39] P. Mac Seáin, *Ceolta Theilinn, Studies in Irish Language and Literature* Volume 1, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast 1973, 65.

[40] R. Blench, 'Ethnographic and linguistic evidence for the prehistory of African ruminant livestock, horses and ponies' in *The Bioarcheology of Africa*, (eds. T. Shaw, P. Sinclair, B. Andah & A. Okpoko), London 1993, 71-104.

from folklore can be used to shed light on the history of animal disease. Thus, from a veterinary perspective, it would appear that in parts of west Donegal and Mayo the practice of booleying may have been associated with maintaining a delicate equilibrium between two nutritional diseases, namely phosphorus deficiency and cobalt deficiency.

Not surprisingly, *blackleg* is the most widely used term for clostridial myositis in cattle. The first recorded use of *blackleg* as a disease of cattle and sheep was in 1722.[41] *Quarter-ill*, *quarter-evil* and *black-quarter* may have evolved from the Irish-language variants *an cheathrú dhubh* (black quarter) and *an cheathrú ghorm* (blue quarter) which were both reported in this study from Gaeltacht areas of counties Kerry and Galway. These terms capture the distinctive discoloration of swollen muscle tissue associated with this often fatal disease of cattle and imply that ante and/or post-mortem examination of the damaged muscle tissue was performed by early farmers. The practice of cutting a piece of affected muscle from cattle that had died of blackleg and leaving it to hang and dry in the chimney as a kind of prophylactic talisman was once common in Ireland and was reported from counties Tipperary,[42] Carlow[43] and Longford.[44] Interestingly, Faulkner Mason, a veterinarian in Dublin in 1928, noted that scrapings from the dried muscle were spread on tape and inserted, as a seton, through the skin of healthy calves.[45] This, of course, would have stimulated a crude protective immune response in the animal.

Angleberries is the most widely used term for viral papillomatosis—*warts* is also commonly used. The earliest known use of angleberry was in 1600 (Var. ang-berry) for a fleshy excresence resembling a strawberry found growing on the feet of cattle.[46] It

[41] *SOED,* sv *blackleg*.

[42] *IFC* 7, 220.

[43] *IFC* 407, 27.

[44] *IFC* 96, 343.

[45] F. C. Mason, 'Traditions concerning domestic animals', *Béaloideas* 1, Part 3 (1928), 222-5.

[46] *SOED,* sv *angleberry*.

comes as no surprise that *ringworm* (the origin of which is late Middle English), is the common form for dermatophycosis throughout Ireland. However, interesting alternative versions, *tethers* and *tetters* were reported from counties Laois and Offaly and Dublin respectively.

Tetter, a cutaneous disease of horses, first recorded 1552, is Old English and Old Teutonic in origin.[47] A Glossary of Words used in Lincolnshire gives 'tetters; the ringworm; stampe chelendine and apply it . . . and it will quickly cure you, Anne Neville of Ashby, 1680'.[48] The use of tethers for ringworm in cattle has been reported in north county Kerry, where an apparently successful cure using car grease was recorded in 1953.[49] *Scurvy* was reported from county Sligo; *SOED* gives scurvy from the Old English *scurf,* first recorded in 1515, a scabby skin disease.[50]

Ragwort poisoning is known as *benweed poisoning* in parts of county Donegal. *SDD* gives *benweed* as the common ragwort.[51] The phrase, '*ate some buachalláns*', reported from county Sligo, obviously refers to the Irish for the ragwort plant, *an buachallán buí.* The *galar buí*, reported from county Galway, may relate to the yellow flowers of the plant or possibly to the jaundice that may accompany the disease in cattle and horses.

The thread that links the terminology in use for the post-parturient downer cow throughout Ireland would appear to be the '*worm (péist) and the tail*'. *Ruher (rua) péist* (red worm) was reported from Conamara and the term collected in 1942 from Corr na Móna, county Galway, was *péist riobaill* (tail-worm).[52]

[47] *SOED,* sv *tetter.*

[48] E. Peacock, *A Glossary of Words Used In The Wapentakes of Manley and Corringham, Lincolnshire*, London 1878, sv *tetter*. This cure for ringworm from 1680 is interesting in that a farmer acquaintance of the author, from near Trim, county Meath makes an ointment for treating ringworm using lesser celandine.

[49] *IFC* 520:516-40.

[50] *SOED,* sv *scurvy.*

[51] A. Warrach & W. Grant (eds.), *A Scots Dialect Dictionary. Comprising the words from the latter part of the 17th century to the present day*, Edinburgh 1911, sv *benweed.*

[52] *IFC* 835:174-83.

This worm-in-the-tail/*péist*-theme already appeared in terminology for phosphorus deficiency, which is not surprising as phosphorus deficiency may be a contributory factor to recumbency in cows after calving.[53] In counties Donegal and Antrim, *slip-tail* and *tail-slip* were reported. Perhaps a Scottish origin for these terms is a possibility in the light of comments concerning certain Perthshire folk beliefs made in 1869 by William Dick, the founder of the Edinburgh Veterinary School.[54]

It appears that the beliefs held about this disease included a view that it was in some way associated with the presence of a worm (Irish *péist*) in the tail. Whether the worm was symbolic of a serpent motif representing some malevolent influence over the animal is uncertain. It was common practice to treat this condition in the nineteenth and early parts of the twentieth centuries by making an incision over the coccygeal vertebrae. This having been done, this typically garlic and or soot and salt was applied over the wound in a poultice or inserted under the skin either to 'kill the worm in the tail' *in situ,* as was reported from county Kerry,[55] or by removing a piece of the dorsal ligament, 'if it was a milking beast you could taste the garlic in her milk that night'.[56]

An alternative approach to curing the recumbent cow which also involved the worm or serpent motif was the practice of tying a knot in the shape of a worm (*snaidhm na péiste*; 'knot of the worm') over the back of a cow that had become recumbent, as recorded in literature from county Donegal,[57] and saying a prayer or charm. The folklore archives contain an account of this being performed in Erris, county Mayo, in 1940.[58]

[53] Radostits et al., *op. cit.*, 1537.

[54] W. Dick, 'On a supposed disease in cattle called the tail-slip', in R. O. Pringle (ed.), *Occasional Papers on Veterinary Subjects by William Dick*, Edinburgh & London 1869, 130-40.

[55] *IFC* 1177:563.

[56] C. McGlinchey, *The Last of the Name*, (ed. B. Friel), Belfast 1986, Chapter 14, 'Cures and Spells', 88.

[57] S. Mac Grianna, *An Druma Mór*, Baile Átha Cliath 1969, 7.

[58] *IFC* 1242:432.

Evidence was gathered from the present study that the insertion of garlic in an incision over the dorsal coccyx is still practised by a small number of people in counties Antrim and Armagh. Thus, in spring of 1999, it was reported in the present study from county Antrim that 'a cow that had been recumbent for two months on her home farm was treated in this was by a 'man from the Glens' and '*she got up the next day*!' William Dick, in his 1869 essay on Perthshire folk practices, mentions that in addition to the use of an incision to remove dorsal ligament (the worm) inserting garlic, a piece of rowan tree was attached to the extremity of the tail and a black cat made to pass three times round the cow's body. Dick concluded that the practice was absurd and was based on witchcraft and ignorance; he advocated a more 'scientific' way of treating these recumbent animals by bleeding them from the neck or by administering purgatives.[59]

It is interesting that these folk practices were taken to the New World. The American veterinarian Keene reported that some east-coast farmers believed that downer cows were affected by '*hollow tail*' and that 'believers always point out the soft ventral surface of the tail and treat the condition by splitting the tail with a knife and packing it with salt.[60] The garlic that was traditionally used in the treatment of downer cows was the wild garlic plant (*allium ursinum*). However, current practitioners tend to favour the imported variety. Garlic was commonly cultivated in Ireland until about the time of the first world war and its use is common in a variety of traditional herbal remedies.[61]

Although the majority of reports concerning a belief in the evil eye or '*droch-shúil*' were made between 40 and 50 years ago, some people in Ireland today believe that individuals—particularly strangers coming onto a farm for the first time—have the ability to 'blink' an animal, resulting in the appearance of disease or a drop in

[59] Pringle (ed.), *op. cit.*, 140. (Author's note: current veterinary therapy based on specific treatment of hypocalcaemia and nursing care would not have endorsed William Dick's 'scientific' treatment).

[60] R. B. Keene, 'Folklore of 50 years in veterinary medicine', *Veterinary Medicine/Small Animal Clinician* 66 (1971), 684-6.

[61] R. Vickery, *A Dictionary of Plant-Lore*, Oxford 1995, 150.

milk production— *'tnúth daoine chuirfeadh sé mart 'na coire agus fear 'na cille'* ('the ill will of people could put a bullock in the pot or a man in the grave').[62]

Recorded in the present study was a Donegal farmer's remedy for the 'blinked' cow, by drenching her 'with a mixture of garlic and soot'. Attaching a red ribbon or flannel to the animal was thought to prevent 'blinking' and it is fascinating to read Charles McGlinchey's colourful account from the beginning of the twentieth century of cattle at a fair in Ballyliffen, county Donegal, with red flannel ribbons attached to their tails.[63]

The use of the colour red to protect against the malevolent influence of disease is an idea that is common to practice of both traditional medicine and veterinary medicine in many parts of the world.[64] Red cloths were attached to the tails of cows after they calved in Ros a' Mhíl, county Galway,[65] red string was tied on cows' tail in county Longford to prevent them being 'over-looked'[66] and tied under the necks of cattle in county Donegal to prevent them being 'elf-shot'.[67] The red colour may signify the blood of Christ, although an alternative view is that disease was linked in folk memory with the fairies whose 'blood' was thought to be white. The colour red was chosen to contrast as vividly as possible with the blood of the malevolent fairies with whom the onset of disease was associated.[68] Another view is expressed by Don Yoder: a Pennsylvanian German charm for human erysipelas included the line 'the red string chases you away, away, away' and, as the colour of the disease was red, it was believed that it was symbolically 'collected' into the string.[69]

[62] McGlinchey, *op. cit.*, 91.

[63] *Loc. cit.*, 113-7.

[64] P. Skrabanek, 'Irish traditional medicine: the foxglove ordeal and other folk "cures"', *Journal of the Irish College of Physicians and Surgeons* 23 (1994), 121-6.

[65] *IFC* 1841:149.

[66] *IFC* 96:343.

[67] *IFC* 289:367-8.

[68] Personal communication from Professor Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

[69] D. Yoder, 'Folk Medicine', in R. Dorson (ed.), *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Chicago & London 1972, 191-205.

Patrick Logan stated 'the most usual method of protecting cattle against the evil eye was to tie a piece of red cloth around the animal's tail . . . red is the colour used to resist and expel demons and ward off other evil influences'.[70] The author has received reports, as recently as January 2001, of red flannel still being employed—if only rarely—by individuals in county Tyrone to prevent disease in both humans and cattle.[71]

Remarkably, a rich variety of terms exists both in English and Irish for the common bacterial cause of lameness, interdigital necrobacillosis. *Foul* and *scald* are used throughout Ireland. *SOED* cites *scald*, Middle English, 'an injury to skin caused by heat, applied to diseases that produce a similar effect, first recorded, 1882'.[72] *Foul* is Old English in origin and was first recorded in 1523 to mean a disease of the feet of cattle, sheep and dogs.[73] *Loisceadh/Loscadh buaile* is reported from South Ulster and North Connacht, and particularly from counties Fermanagh, Cavan and Monaghan.[74] The origins of the word are uncertain. *Losc* is an Old Irish word for lameness in cattle and an Irish law text copied in the fifteenth- and sixteenth centuries specifies that a cow being put up for sale should not be lame or *losc*.[75] The modern Irish word *loisc* (vn. *loscadh*) means *scald* and those familiar with the scalded appearance of the skin between the claws in an acute case of foul-in-the-foot will understand why our ancestors described the lesion as a burn or scald in both the Irish and English languages.

Ó Dónaill gives *loscadh buaile* as 'foot rot of cattle', a term that links the disease with the practice of booleying.[76] Interdigital necrobacillosis is a disease that is particularly associated with cattle grazing wet fields during the summer

[70] *Op. cit.*, 166.
[71] *IFC* Unbound material.
[72] *SOED,* sv *scald.*
[73] *SOED,* sv *foul.*
[74] *IFC* unbound material.
[75] F. Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, Dundalk 1997, 204.
[76] Ó Dónaill, *op. cit.,* sv *loscadh.*

months.[77] Therefore, given what we know of its epidemiology, the summer booley would have been an ideal environment for outbreaks of this disease. The other Irish-language terms recorded for interdigital necrobacillosis were *ladhar righneach, truisle, bacach* and *pias lire*.[78] Both *ladhar righneach*, *bacach* and *truisle* originate from the south Munster area, particularly south county Tipperary and county Waterford.

Ladhar righneach translates descriptively as 'stiff, swollen claw' while *truisle* probably stems from the Irish word meaning 'trip', reflecting the lameness associated with the disease; *DAI* gives *truslóg* as a Munster term meaning a long, loping stride or a hop.[79] *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* gives '*treasluach*, a disease of cow's foot, Kilkenny'.[80] *Bacach* is the Irish for 'lame'; the origin of *pias lire* is uncertain but it may originate from *péist* the Irish word for a worm and *ladhar* giving *péist laidhre* (foot worm). The Irish-language names for a disease tell us something of its history and *loisceadh buaile* is a good example of this, as booleying is a practice that dates back to the early days of Gaelic civilisation in Ireland.

Just as remarkable as the variety of terms in both Irish and English for interdigital necrobacillosis is the fact that 'turning the sod' is still practised by a significant number of people as a way of curing this disease. The study has revealed that 'turning the sod' is still being performed in counties Armagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Offaly, Westmeath and Meath. The belief in its influence is deeply held by those who practise it. For some, as suggested by the prayers said, this is tied up with their Roman Catholic faith. However, it is interesting to note that the custom extends across the religious divide, particularly in Ulster. The geographical distribution of the tradition revealed in the present study shows that it is confined in the main to the east of Ireland. However, examination of the manuscripts of the folklore collection in UCD reveals evidence that

[77] M. L. Doherty, 'Clinical examination of the musculoskeletal system in cattle' in O. M. Radostits, I. G. Mayhew, & D. M. Housten (eds.), *Veterinary Clinical Examination and Diagnosis*', London 2000, 631.

[78] *IFC* unbound material.

[79] *DAI,* sv *truslóg*.

[80] *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 11 (1900-1901), 141.

a similar tradition existed in the west of Ireland and, in particular, in north County Mayo. Two reports of charms (*Araid an luascadh bhualadh*) for the treatment of this disease were found: both were collected by Anraoí Ó Cordhuibh in Cill Chomáin, Iorras, in 1935.[81]

The charms involve a prayer said beginning at the right foot and then said at every other foot of the lame animal; interestingly, the report continues '*bhí cuid acu agus do ghearraidís na scraitheacha ar a mbíodh an bhó ina seasamh agus chaithfidís sa tine iad . . .*' ('there were some who used to cut out the sods where they (the cattle) were standing and they would throw them into the fire...'. This would appear to be another variation of 'turning the sod'. However, it is remarkable that the source of one of the charms, Sailí ní Mhuiríle stated '*ní maith le duine ar bith iad sin a dheánamh mar i gcónaí caillteár duine . . .*'. ('nobody likes to perform those as often someone dies . . .'). This fear of the charm may have contributed to the demise of this tradition in Mayo and it is clear that in many areas, great tension existed between practitioners of traditional healing and the Catholic clergy.[82]

The origins of the practice are unknown, but it is likely that it has been performed for many hundreds of years. The tradition may represent a symbolic transference of the disease 'in the sod', taking it out of the animal and away from the field. This is a theme that is common to traditional or primitive medicine throughout the world.[83] The disease is transferred by an intermediary person or thing, into a plant or an object. Wayland D. Hand, in a study of American human folk medicine, reported that one of the commonest methods was to transfer disease to trees or shrubs by means of plugging, wedging or nailing.[84] This has obvious echoes for the magical transference of the conough worm in 1693 by the native Irish (discussed later), for 'turning the sod' (particularly when it was thrown onto the thorns of

[81] *IFC* 195:498-9; *IFC* 83:115.

[82] P. Ó hÉalaí, 'Priest versus healer, the legend of the priest's stricken horse', *Béaloideas* 62-3 (1994-5), 171-89.

[83] Yoder, *op. cit.*, 203 and E. H. Ackerknecht, 'Problems of Primitive Medicine', *Bulletin of History of Medicine* 11 (1942), 503-21.

[84] W. D. Hand, 'The magical transference of disease' in *Folklore Studies in Honor of Arthur Palmer Hudson* (= *North Carolina Folklore* 13 [1965], 83-109).

a whitethorn bush) and for the use of a pin or *bior singil* in the dissipation/transference of redwater.[85] In his study of primitive medicine in Africa and North America, Ackerknecht emphasized the importance of belief by the Medicine Men in the symbolic rite and he underlined the folly of only seeking in primitive medicine that which it has in common with modern medicine.[86] Those practitioners of 'turning the sod' believe deeply that the practice will influence the outcome of the disease for the better; they believe in the symbolic effect of cutting and removing the sod.

Ackerknecht argued that it should not be so difficult for many Christians to understand this mechanism as the central rite of the Roman Catholic religion, the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ is based on a similar symbolism.[87] In general, folk diagnosis is kept to a minimum and it is conditions rather than precisely defined ailments that are recognized.[88] 'Turning the sod' is unusual in this regard as it appears to be specifically indicated for the treatment of interdigital necrobacillosis.

The word *murrain* is one of the widest recorded terms for babesiosis in Irish cattle. *Murrain* appears to be a generic term applied to a number of severe clinical diseases of cattle. The Irish-language term for murrain—*connach*—deserves some discussion. De Vismes Kane in a paper published in 1914 stated that the connough (conach) was a murrain of cattle that people attributed to a poisonous worm that the animals swallowed.[89] In his paper, De Vismes Kane quotes from a letter written in 1684 by Samuel Molyneux of Castle Dillon, county Armagh, to his cousin. Molyneux referred to diseases of cattle: one caused by the black *conough worm* and another caused by the bright red *tine* ('fire') *worm*. The belief was that ingestion of the *tine worm* caused severe swelling of the head and eyes and drooling saliva; the cure of incising over the base of the swollen tongue led to rapid improvement. The

[85] *IFC* 7, 220.
[86] Ackerknecht, *op. cit.*, 503-11.
[87] Ackerknecht, *op. cit.*, 511.
[88] Yoder, *op. cit.*, 203.
[89] De Vismes Kane, *op.cit.*, 145-7.

description is consistent with that of *blain* and, in this context, it is interesting to note that the *SOED* gives *blegen* as a bladder on the tongue.[90]

On the other hand, the *connough worm*, if ingested, 'caused the beast to swell and resulted in death within 24 hours unless a remedy was found'. The *connough*, was cited as a disease of high mortality in cattle grazing autumn pastures when people noticed the appearance of these worms (larvae of the hawk moth) on the grass. While appearing to accept the aetiology of both conditions, the English colonists differed from the native Irish in their approach to treatment. The English cure was to dose affected cattle with a drench of 'the herbe called Beare's Foot, and rue and a little garlike, beare and butter'. The Irish cure—described as 'irrational and improbable'—was to take the caterpillar, pin it in a hole cut in a willow tree and then to use leaves and branches from the tree to make drenches that could be given to affected cattle. The idea seems to imply a transference of the disease as mentioned previously.

An elaborate range of charms was used to treat cattle disease, including *murrain,* in Ireland. These charms or murrain stones were frequently placed in running water and the sick animal was taken to drink from the water downstream; some of these amulets and jewels were carved to resemble the detailed anatomy of the Hawk Moth. [91] The most bizarre cure for redwater found in the folklore archives was the use of live frogs orally; it was reported in 1953 that it was common practice in the Glens of Antrim that cattle affected with redwater were made to swallow live frogs. A similar practice '*frog beo a scaoiltí siar ina bolg*' ('a live frog that would be released into its belly') was reported from Spiddle, county Galway.[92]

Several reports were also found of the use of a pin or a pike (*an bior singil*) in a cure for redwater. These were reported in the present survey from Spiddle, county Galway, as well from counties

[90] *SOED,* sv *blain.*

[91] R. Day, 'Charms employed in cattle diseases', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 10 (1904), 157-62.

[92] *IFC* 5:236.

Limerick (in 1939)[93] and Tipperary.[94] These involved watching the animal urinate and inserting the pin into the ground at the exact point were the first flow of redwater landed. The county Limerick cure required that the person keep the procedure a secret. This tradition again seems to relate to disease transference-dissipation as mentioned previously.

Like the practice of 'turning the sod', the use of distance-healing for bleeding is still common throughout Ireland today. Typically, if an animal is haemorrhaging or losing blood in its urine in babesiosis an individual is contacted who takes details of the animal and who then may say a prayer. Details of some of these prayers are provided above. Buckley divided medical folk healers in Ulster into three groups: those to whom a cure is passed on as a hereditary rite; those who acquire a cure by being the seventh son or daughter; and faith healers who discover the ability to heal within themselves.[95] Yoder states that practitioners of magico-religious healing in the USA normally learned their trade directly from older practitioners or indirectly from books.[96] Unlike the practice of 'turning the sod'—that can be learned from another practitioner—the cure for bleeding cannot be learned and is generally passed down in a family, sometimes at the point of death. Both men and women can have this cure. Interestingly, like 'turning the sod', a belief in this folk cure crosses the traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant religious divide. The belief in the cure for bleeding was common among the Pennyslvanian German population[97] and the commonest person with the cure was the respectable grandmother who, as pow-wower, could 'stop blood'.

Yoder categorises folk medicine, including veterinary practice, into two types: natural folk medicine based on herbal remedies; and magico-religious folk medicine. This paper has highlighted that magico-religious veterinary folk medicine is still commonly

[93] *IFC* 628:547.

[94] *IFC* 7:220.

[95] A. D. Buckley, 'Unofficial healing in Ulster', *Ulster Folklife* 26 (1980), 15-34.

[96] Yoder, *op.cit.*, 206.

[97] Yoder, *op.cit.*, 207.

practised in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even the use of garlic, while a herbal remedy, was and is deployed in a magico-religious sense in the treatment of the downer cow. The principles of magico-religious healing in Western civilization, rooted in antiquity, were channelled into Christianity, as healings in the name of the deity were permitted and a special category of saint—the healing saint—arose. In this context, the use of the 'Hail Mary' in current practice of 'turning the sod' would appear to represent this interface between Christianity and pre-Christian practice. Following the Reformation, folk healing was driven underground throughout Protestant Europe and it is significant, therefore, that the cure for bleeding is equally prevalent among the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities in Ulster.

It is clear that magico-religious healing must be seen in an international context. Yoder noted that the American pow-wowing charms prevalent among Pennsylvanian Germans were primitive in text but set in a Christian frame ending with Christian symbols 'the blood of Jesus, the cross of Jesus and the five wounds of Jesus'. A similar symbolism is clearly apparent in the prayers for bleeding collected from counties Westmeath and Monaghan. The frequent use of the number three in European charms has both Christian and primitive undertones and appears commonly in older charms.

In his paper, entitled 'Traditions concerning domestic animals' (published *Béaloideas* in 1928), the veterinarian Falkner C. Mason wrote:

> In view of the advance of science in every sphere of life and the fact that cold reason rules where once sentiment and romance held sway, it is interesting to note that here and there throughout Ireland old customs and legends still find a place.

Some 73 years later, it is quite remarkable that many of these beliefs and customs still exist.