

HEALTH IN THE HIGHLANDS IN DAYS OF OLD

by Dr Ian MacKichan

It may be more than 500 years ago that advice on living a healthy life was given to those living in the Highlands of Scotland In "Regimen Sanitatis", The Rule of Health, a Gaelic manuscript of the early 16th century, or perhaps older, from the Vade Mecum of the famous MacBeaths, Physicians to the Lords of the Isles, and to the Kings of Scotland, for several centuries. The translation was made in 1911 by H. Cameron Gillies M.D., and set out in numbered columns.

Those readers who are parents surely will have said to a child "Off you go to bed now, wash your hands and face, comb your hair, and clean your teeth." In the third chapter, column IX, are found these words:

"Comb his hair and wash his hands and his face ...let him rub his teeth with the leaf of the melon in summer and with the skin of the yellow apple in the winter."

I remember, when a boy, forgetting to take my toothbrush and toothpaste on holiday, and being told to rub my teeth with the inner side of the peel of an apple

instead.

Do you sleep well after a heavy meal eaten late at night? Read Chapter I, Column XIV:

“And let the supper be short or light unless the habit is against that; for regarding the digestion that is made during sleep it were that not more were eaten at night.”

And in Column XV:

“do not desire to hold thy urine nor force thy middle beyond the time in which it is right; and it is therefore that it is not well to be on the stool too long and (not well) to make the forced squeezing. And it is therefore that the urine should be given (passed) six times in the day with the night, for that is the (whole) natural day.....and the evacuation (of the bowel) twice or thrice in the same time as these verses say.”

And as for that advice on “forced squeezing”, it is worth following, for there is always a risk of producing a thrombotic pile!