

Last Dying Speech and Confession of  
BACILLUS TUBERCULOSIS, Esq.,  
Late of Belfast,  
With a Full History of his many Crimes and Murders, and his most Edifying End.

'Twas a weariful bacillus, old and faded, worn and gray,  
Who, drying on the coverslip, spake thin and far away:  
"Proud mortal, ere my form you steep in carbol fuchsin stain,  
Ere I bathe in acid alcohol again and yet again,  
I would fain recount my story to your sympathetic ear;  
But wet my lips with saline, for the Bunsen flame's too near.  
I was once a gay young microbe, and I floated round the town,  
Wrapped up in well-dried mucus, light as the thistle down.  
My race was old and mighty; Koch made us known to fame,  
For the Tubercle Bacillus is my far-renowned name.  
In the heyday of my vigour, when the world and I were young,  
My aims were high—I sought and found the apex of the lung.  
With a chemotactic longing leucocytes came flocking round,  
We dallied fondly till we changed th' expiratory sound,  
So Professor Lindsay spotted me, and ordered me to quit—  
I find fresh air unhealthy, I thought it best to flit.  
More cautious now, I sought to rest embraced by giant cells,  
Within a deep cervical gland that-near the phrenic dwells.  
Unhappy choice! for Surgeon Kirk removed me all complete,  
With half a foot of jugular and half a pound of meat.  
My bonds with man, so rudely torn, gave all my faiths a shock,  
I doubted—'Am I human? p'raps I ought to try the flock;  
I may be bovine after all; since man evicts me still  
I'll look for compensation under Mr. Birrell's Bill'.  
So I found a country dairy, just back of Grosvenor Street;  
A friendly stripper took me in and lodged me in her teat.  
Here, amid rustic sights and smells, I ruralised a space,  
Then borne upon a stream of milk rejoined the human race.  
Snug in a mesenteric nook I soon addressed my mind,  
By fission's simple easy arts, to propagate my kind.  
Over the serous surfaces quick spread my hardy brood;  
Ascitic fluid came in floods—we found it very good.  
But Thomas, prince of opsonists, by fell mischance came nigh:  
He took the index of our host, and found it very high.  
Treatment on scientific lines we heard him then discuss  
Tuberculin, one milligramme, soon decimated us!  
Fleeing the slaughter of my tribe, my powers now rather weak,  
With hearty zest I made a nest upon a damask cheek.  
There, in an apple-jelly speck, I'd hoped to end my life,  
But X- Rays pierced me to the quick—I left th' unequal strife.  
Since then I've wandered round Belfast, but find the world grown hard,  
Man's bowels yearn no more for me, and bovine breasts are barred.  
A band, with demonstrating ways and eloquence profound,

'Gainst me the people's passions raise, and loud the tocsin sound.  
Chief instigator of the fray, Sir John—'No quarter'—cries,  
When knights were bold they fought with things—well, nearer their own size!  
A surgeon, too, a vet. as well, physicians add their breath,  
And gents from sanatoria, where we are fed to death,  
And several more who show my crimes, while all the people stare;  
Though many a fee they've got for me—they'll get no more, I swear!  
For now those oft-respired airs, in which a microbe blooms,  
Are blown to Hades by the breeze denouncing 'Stuffy Rooms'.  
They've cleared away the dust, in which I used to lurk and hope;  
They hear 'What other nations do'—the Dutch are fond of soap.  
I lived with darling children once, in tissues soft as silk;  
I simply can't get near them now—they sterilise the milk!  
Aye, worse than that—excuse the tear of pity in my eye—  
The poor milch cows that harbour us, for that offence must die.  
The very things I most detest I strive in vain to flee,  
All round it's sunlight, food, fresh air, to kill 'the Scourge'—that's me.  
Why, many good, hard-drinking souls are sorely put about—  
They're going to dock the beer, because I like men fond of stout.  
At peril oft before I scoffed, I've managed to outpace  
The dreaded phagocyte's pursuit, his fatal slow embrace;  
I've laughed to scorn iodoform, and once—'twas rather warm  
Passed through a disinfectant, hid in blankets, without harm!  
But at the fate we've met of late imagination swoons—  
Frizzling to death by millions in combustible spittoons!  
Well, when assailed by these alarms I had begun to quake,  
Professor Symmers welcomed me for old acquaintance sake.  
Said he—'Can I believe my eyes, and have we met at last,  
Sole Tubercle Bacillus left alive in all Belfast?  
Nay, come; I'll gladly take thee in, and gladly give thee place  
Upon this spacious agar slope, last scion of thy race.  
With glucose will I nourish thee, and human serum too,  
And thou shalt grow apace, and I will put thee oft on view—  
The parasite that lived and throve—believe it now who can—  
In pre-Exhibition ages on pre-Exhibition man!'  
The murmur ceased, the microbe passed; the relics are on view—  
A crimson speck, in balsam, on a ground of methyl blue.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

Professor Lindsay	See text, page 11
Surgeon Kirk	T S Kirk, surgeon to the Royal Victoria Hospital
Mr Birrell	Augustine Birrell (1850-1933). Chief Secretary for Ireland (1907-1916)
Stripper	A cow coming to the end of a lactation
Thomas	Sir Thomas Houston, bacteriologist to the Royal Victoria Hospital
Apple-jelly speck	The lesion of a lupus vulgaris
Sir John	Sir John Byers. See text, page 24
A band	The Women's National Health Association
Professor Symmers	W StC Symmers. Professor of Pathology in the Queen's University of Belfast
Exhibition	See text, Chapter 6

For many years the author of these lines was unknown, but the text was found with the papers of Professor Sir Robert Johnstone after his death, and there is good evidence that he was the writer.

Found in Appendix III of *The White Plague in Ulster, A short history of tuberculosis in Northern Ireland*, by H. G. Calwell and D. H. Craig