

News, Notes and Queries

SOME PHYSIC FOR THE CHILD:

Robert Pemell's *De Morbis Puerorum*, 1653

PHAER'S *Boke of Children*, published in 1545, was the first book on paediatrics in the English language written by an Englishman. More than a century passed before the phenomenon recurred. In 1653 Robert Pemell published a little book of sixty pages entitled *De Morbis Puerorum or a Treatise of the Diseases of Children with their Causes Signs Prognosticks and Cures for the benefit of such as do not understand the Latine Tongue and very useful for all such as are Housekeepers and have Children*.

The book is dated 'May the 29th 1653', and it is to be hoped that the author lived to see and handle a copy for he died five days later. He realized the need for hurry for in the preface he wrote: 'And because I see my glasse runs apace and I know not how short my time is, therefore I have made the more haste.'

We know little about Pemell apart from what he tells us himself. He was one of three general practitioners in the village of Cranebrooke situated in the heart of Kent.

He found time 'at rapt hours' to write several practical books for doctors and the general public. All were published between 1650 and 1653. Two were on 'simples', meaning materia medica. One was entitled *Help for the Poor*, in the preface of which we get a glimpse of the man. He writes: 'It is every man's duty to be doing good to others, or to receive good from others for surely no man was born for himself onely.' And of the book he says: 'The chief and inducing cause hereof was these hard times wherein the poor have scarce bread to eat, much lesse money to go to the Physition or Chirurgion.'

The book was 'in English very useful for such as understand not the Latine tongue'. This was a sensible but courageous act for men of learning looked with disfavour on books written in English. Pemell realized this only too well for in one of his books he wrote: 'Some it may be will be offended at what I have written because it is in the Mother-tongue.'

The use of English was slowly but surely making headway. Still (*History of Paediatrics*, 1931, pp. 235 *et seq.*) has pointed out that the year which saw the publication of Pemell's book on children added also to English literature one of its choicest gems, Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*.

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Pemell's little book makes interesting and amusing reading. It is essentially practical as can well be seen from a list of its chapter headings:

Of Ulcers and Sores in children's heads
Of Lice
Of the Scab and Itch
Of the Falling Sicknesse and Convulsion
Of pain in the ears with inflammation
Of breeding and coming of Teeth
Of inflammation of the mouth and throat with ulcers and sores thereof
Of Feavers
Of the Small Pox and Measels
Of watching out of measure and want of rest
Of fear, starting and terrible Dreams
Of Rheume, the Cough and Shortnesse of breath
Of Vomiting and weakness of the Stomach
Of the Consumption or leannesse and of the Rickets
Of the Hicket
Of Gripings and fretings in the belly
Of looseness and flux of the belly
Of costiveness and stopping of the belly
Of Worms
Of Ruptures and Burstings
Of swelling or coming forth of the Navel
Of inflammation of the Navel
Of the swelling of the Cods
Of falling of the Fundament
Of the Stone and difficulty of making water
Of Pissing in bed
Of the disease called Saint Antonies fire, or wilde fire, as also of burning
and scalding
Of fretting, chafing or galling of the skin in the groines

The descriptions of many of the signs and symptoms are correct and remarkably complete. This can well be seen in the chapter dealing with worms.

Signs of long and round worms

The signs of long and round worms are these: The mouth aboundeth with moisture, the breath stinketh: terrible and fearful dreams follow, and they gnash and grind their teeth in their sleep, and start suddenly in their sleep, their tongues are hot and dry, and they often rub their noses; they have a dry cough, and sometimes vomiting and the Hicket followeth; they feed much sometimes, and sometimes little; great drought doth most times accompany wormes, the belly is hard and swollen, and sometimes bound, but most times loose. The urine is most times white and thick and great

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gripings of the belly doth follow, especially when the belly is empty. The body waxeth lean for want of that nourishment which the worms consume. Oftimes they have cold sweats, the face is sometimes red, and sometimes pale, and many times they are taken with Convulsions, and fevers happen. The pulse is very uncertain. But the most certain sign of all is, when they void worms in their excrements.

Signs of long and flat worms

If the worms be long, and flat, they have a great appetite to feed, and except they do eat, they have a great pain and graving in their belly, and many times they faint; the body waxes lean and groweth weak, but the most certain sign is, if with their excrements they void flat substances like Gourd Seedes.

Signs of the least sort of worms

Signs of the least sort of worms (which are engendered in the great Gut) are these. A great itching in the fundament, and an often desire to go to Stool; the excrements are like beasts excrements, and very stinking, and these worms come oftentimes forth in the excrement, which is the most certain sign.

But when it comes to aetiology and treatment his ideas are very different from those of modern times and in consequence they make good reading.

Of Lice Breeding in Children

If persons of years do live nastily and not change often they soon become lousey. But tis very familiar for children to breed Lice. They arise from a hot and moist matter which putrieth on the skin or pores of the body. Sometimes they are bred by eating of Figs in grown persons because they ingender bad juyce.

Of the Consumption or Leanness

Children do many times wax lean without any manifest cause and although they suck much or feed well yet they are not therewith nourished.

The Cure: If the fault be in the milk that must be rectified by a good dyet of the Nurse or if that do not help then the Nurse is to be changed. If leanness come from a Feaver or without any manifest cause make this following Bath. Take the head and feet of a Wether; boyl them till the bones fall asunder; then bath the childe with this liquor twice a day and after bathing anoint with this oyntment. Take of fresh Butter, oyl of Roses and of Violets of each one ounce, Hogs-grease or the fat of raw Pork half an ounce, wax a quarter of an ounce, make an oyntment and anoint the body with it warm twice a day.

Of Ruptures or Burstings

The Cause: Children are often troubled with this disease and that chiefly male children, and the cause may be from too much crying, coughing and too frequent going to stool. In elder children it may come by too much motion of the body, as

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running or leaping, by a fall or riding astride; for the Rim or film of the belly in children is but weak and doth soon break or grow loose and so the guts fall into the cods.

The Cure: For the cure hereof lay the childe upon his back that his head may be lower than his feet and gently reduce the bowels with your hand into their due place.

Of the Swelling or coming forth of the Navel

The Cure: Take Cow dung and boyl it in milk and lay it on the navel.

Of the Swelling of the Cods

The Cure: Let the cods be anointed with oyl of Lillies, oyl of Camomil or oyl of Dil. Or apply the following: Take Cow dung, boyl it in milk and apply it warm.

Of the Stone and difficulty of making water

Among all those diseases that happen to children these two are not the least dangerous. The stone in the bladder is most frequent in children, for with the stone in the Kidneys they are seldom troubled: as on the contrary old men are most frequently troubled with the stone in the kidneys.

The Prognosticks: The stone in the bladders of Children is not to be slighted for although it doth not suddenly kill them, yet if it be not in sometime cured it proves dangerous and cannot be cured but by cutting. And truly there is much danger in cutting them, for if the stones be great, not only children, but also persons of years die therewith. Suppression of urine in children is dangerous especially if it proceed from the stone in the bladder.

The Cure: Give the child a scruple or two of the powder of magister of crabs' eyes or of Amber or Goats blood prepared with Parsly water: or 2 or 3 drops of the spirit of Vitriol or 4 or 5 drops of oyl of Crabs eyes in the same water.

Of pissing in bed

The Prognosticks: This disease although it be not mortal yet it is very troublesome and if not cured in time, it continues (in many) till death. If it proceed from the stone, it cannot be cured till the stone be taken away. This disease is cured in many when they come to grown years without any means.

The Cure: Let the Nurses dyet be hot and dry. The child must drink but little, and let the belly of it be kept loose for hereby they pisse lesse. The Wesand of a Cock in powder is commended also the stone of a Hedgehog in powder. The bladder of a Bull or a Goat dried and in powder is good to be used as before, or give the powder of Goats clawes in Pap or milk. This following powder is commended. Take a Hogs bladder or Bores or Sheeps bladder dried, the stones of a Hare, the Wesand of a Cock dried of each half a drachme. Acorn cups two scruples. Nep and Mace, of each a scruple; make all into a powder and give hereof a scruple or half a drachme in distilled water of Oaken leaves. If the childe be of some reasonable growth make a plate of lead with holes therin, and lay it on his back; let it lye on for a moneth or two.

The book is singularly free of charms and astrology, but even these creep in. In detailing the treatment of worms Dr. Pemell writes: 'Note also if one medicine do not bring away Worms, that you must use variety of medicines or continue one medicine for some time, at about the full of the Moon give your medicine at the least two or three dayes together.' And for the cure of the 'Falling Sickness and Convulsions' he advises: 'Hang about the neck of the childe a thin slice of Piony or white Briony roots as green as you can.'

Pemell is a friendly writer and addresses his book to the 'kind reader', submitting it 'to thy Charitable censure desiring my good will and affection may be accepted'.

WILLIAM BROCKBANK

THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF PHARMACY IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE interest in drug jars, mortars and pill tiles for their merit as works of art has been heightened in late years by the increasing sale-room prices. This has tended to cause the study of pharmacy to be neglected in favour of the acquisition of collections of material deriving from the early apothecary's shop or pharmacy. So much has this overshadowed the main subject in this country that few important books relating to it have been published, and pharmacy has for the most part been overlooked in the many publications dealing with the broad stream of medical history.

The development of pharmacy as an art and science, distinct yet complementary to medicine, took many centuries. Some degree of specialization was worked out in the days of the monastic hospitals, but it was not until the introduction of chemical medicines, requiring for their preparation more expertise than the galenic apothecary possessed that manufacture became the domain of the chemist and druggist. The ancestry of the present-day pharmacist is, according to Cripps (*Pharm. J.*, 1955, cxxi, 444), the druggist and not the apothecary. The owners of the family wholesale drug businesses and the chemical manufacturers of the eighteenth century were largely responsible for the improvement in methods of manufacture on a large scale, leading to the establishment at the end of the nineteenth century of specialized research laboratories in which the active principles of crude drugs could be identified, new synthetic remedies discovered and their pharmacology determined. In this way the secret remedy gave place to the accurate medicament for specific treatment. All this opens up a wide field of inquiry for the historian of pharmacy.

Since the founding of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in 1841 numerous similar societies have been formed in the Commonwealth, alike