

News, Notes and Queries

JOHANNES JESSENIUS A JESSEN

IN his *Toxicology* (Nuremberg, 1827), a comprehensive bibliography of medical writings on poisons from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, A. Buchner mentions two papers of Johannes Jessenius a Jessen: *Dissertatio de morbis, quos venena intra corpus sumta, cognita et occulta qualitate efficiunt*, and *De morbis, quos venena extrinsecus morsu illata committunt*. Both works were published in Wittenberg in 1596.

After a long search, one of the papers has been found in the Municipal Library in Breslau, Poland, and the second, together with fragments of the first, in the Széchenyi Library of the National Museum in Budapest.

The first of the Jessenius works consists of seven chapters: 'de venenis, sive assumantur aut furinsecus accedant', 'de differentis venenorum', 'de venenorum effectis', 'de signis assumtum venenum demonstrantibus', 'de indiciis morborum venenatorum exitus designantibus', 'de preservatione', 'de curatione'.

The number of poisons discussed is very limited. They are: euphorbium, hellebore, arsenic, opium, lead dioxide and calcium hydroxide. It is suggested that euphorbium is dangerous on account of its 'coolness', while theriac reacts against this with an 'excess of warmth'. The poisons often attack only certain parts of the body. Thus the 'sea hare', *Lepus marinus*, attacks the lungs, cantharides the bladder, mandragora the brain, while solanum causes maniacal moods. The remainder are said to be described by Dioscorides and others.

Poisonings should be reported to the physician, who may conclude from the signs and symptoms which poison has been taken. By the use of antidotes he may then fight the effect of the poison. Thus, bloody phlegm indicates a disease of the lungs, and bloody urine a disease of the bladder or kidneys. The illness may be recognized more easily if there is fever or shivering. The victim of a 'hot poison', such as sandarac or orpiment, will suffer from severe burning; there are gnawing pains, pains of the stomach, unbearable pains of the bowels, and vomiting. 'Cold poisons' as, for instance, cicuta and mandragora, are cured by small doses of good wine, since small doses are better than large ones.

All poisoning is fatal if the heart is not healthy; otherwise recovery may be expected according to the kind and amount of poison in a healthy physical constitution.

Care should be taken to avoid poisoning, but should such a mishap occur the symptoms may be treated in various ways. Of the antidotes, that of King Mithridates is the best. The poison must be expelled from the body by vomiting, due account being taken of the condition of the stomach. Warm oil, alone or mixed with water, employed as an enema, repeated massage, lathronia baths and sweating are helpful, as they draw out the poison from the inner parts to the surface of the body. This treatment was employed by Pope Alexander VI, and by the son of Cesare Borgia. The latter, however, died shortly afterwards, as, due to the carelessness of servants, he had drunk the poison prepared for somebody else.

From these available fragments of writings dealing with poisons it may be concluded that both papers actually constitute one whole. In addition to poisons taken by mouth, Jessenius also considers the bite of a mad dog; snake-bite, however, is not included.

The second book presents a more detailed medical prescription than the first. This reads as follows:

News, Notes and Queries

Oxysaccharum, juice of lemons and oranges to which a simple juice of roses or honey has been added. In the case of severe vomiting, Aeginetus prescribes the following: cataplasma from vine root boiled in wine and *panis Montagnae* bark if gall is vomited. In cases of frequent diarrhoea clusters of oil are administered. I also give starch to improve the condition of a weakened body, but an overdose must be avoided. Headache, insomnia and excitement have the same origin, and require the same treatment. Even if meningitis is avoided, the vapours of the hot blood, if excessive, cause severe headache and loss of senses. Finally, if the humidity of the brain causes insomnia, poultices which absorb the vapours are placed on the head. If the headache is very bad, roots of raphania with salt may be applied to the back of the skull. In the case of dark delirium the head is wrapped round with alabaster ointment. If the legs are becoming dead, we may treat them by washing, or the application of a narcotic. This is what I wished to say from my own experience, and knowledge; but I would welcome any further information.

Johannes Jessenius a Jessen (Jessenský, Jessinský) was born in 1566 in Breslau in Poland. He studied at Leipzig and several universities in Italy, and took his degree of Doctor of Medicine at Wittenberg in 1596. He became the personal physician of the Kurfürst of Sachsen, and was appointed Professor of the University of Wittenberg, where he lived until 1601. He was then invited to Prague as a Professor of the University of Prague. Here he became a close friend of Tycho Brahe, was appointed personal physician to the Emperor Rudolph II and to Matthias, and finally became the Rector and Chancellor of the University of Prague. On his return from an expedition of Czech noblemen to Hungary, he was arrested in Vienna and imprisoned. After his release, he took part in a rebellion against Ferdinand II, and was sentenced to death by a Viennese Court. Before his execution, on 23 June 1621, his tongue was torn out, and he was executed by the same executioner, Mydlář, from whom he used to buy corpses for his post-mortem examinations. His body was cut to pieces and impaled at the town gates. His head, together with the heads of twenty-seven other Czech noblemen executed on the same day, hung for ten years on the Old Town Tower, and only then was he buried in Tyn Church, where Tycho Brahe was also buried.

Among the possessions of Jessenius were found 190 scientific papers, some his own, some dedicated to him. His own were later burned by the Jesuits. Some of them, without deep scientific significance, but showing a good deal of the author's wit, are as follows:

Vita et mors Tychonis Brahei, Wittenberg, 1601.

Zoroaster, Wittenberg, 1593.

De generationis et vitae humanae periodis, Wittenberg, 1602.

Anatomiae Pragae anno 1600 ab se solemniter administratae historia, Wittenberg, 1601.

Institutiones chirurgicae quibus universa manu medendi ratio ostenditur, Giessen, 1614.

Adversus pestem consilium, Giessen, 1614.

Historica relatio de rustico Bohemo, Hamburg, 1628.

De sanguine, vena secta dimisso iudicium, Prague, 1618; Frankfurt, 1618.

Andreae Vesalii anatomi carmen, Hamburg, 1628.

EMIL SVAGR

'TEETH AND TAILS' IN THE CRIMEA*

IN October of last year I had the honour of addressing this Club on the experience of a young officer, William Cattell who, as R.M.O. to the 5th Dragoon Guards, gave a 'worm's eye view' of the disastrous Crimean campaign.

* Given at the Osler Club, 7 June 1962