

IV. *An Attempt to prove the Antiquity of the Venereal Disease, long before the Discovery of the West-Indies; in a Letter from Mr. William Beckett, Surgeon, to Dr. James Douglass, M.D. and R. Soc. Soc. and by him communicated to the Royal Society.*

S I R,

THE Undertaking I am at present engaged in, has unavoidably obliged me to consult, among others, a great Number of ancient Physical and Chyrurgical Books, written by my own Countrymen: From these I took the Hint, that the *Venereal Disease* was known among us, much earlier than the *Æra*, which has been generally assign'd for its Rise by modern Authors; for it's believed it was not known, at least in *Europe*, till about the Year 1494. Notwithstanding which, I determin, in the following Papers, to make it evident, it was frequent among us some Hundreds of Years before that Date. I could mention several Physicians and Surgeons of Eminence, who have been of the same Sentiments with me, particularly, the Learned Dr. *Charles Patin*, who has written a curious Dissertation to prove the Antiquity of this Disease, which is sufficient to excuse me from the Imputation of having started a Novelty, or being at the trouble of quoting ancient Authorities before taken notice of, from the most ancient Writers of Medicine; as the Great *Hippocrates, Galen, Avicen, Celsus, &c.* and even the *Holy Scriptures*. I shall in these and some following Papers, lay aside all those foreign Aids and As-

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sistances, and trace out the Symptoms of the Disease, as they naturally arise, from the first Infection to the last destructive Period, and shew that, by searching into our own Antiquities, we may be furnished with Instances of the Frequency of the Distemper among us, in all its respective Stages, before ever our Modern Authors dream it had its Appearance in *Europe*.

I shall begin with the first Degree of this Disease, and prove from authentick Evidences, it was anciently call'd the *Brenning* or *Burning*; and that this Word has been successively continu'd for many Hundreds of Years, to signify the same Disease we now call a *Clap*; and that it was not discontinu'd till that Appellation first began to have its Rise. The most likely Method to accomplish my Design, will be first to examine those Records that relate to the *Stems*, which were by Authority allowed to be kept on the *Bank-Side* in *Southmark*, under the Jurisdiction of the Bp. of *Winchester*, and which were suppressed the 37th of *Hen. VIII.* For it's impossible but, if there were any such Distemper in being at that Time, it must be pretty common among those lewd Women who had a Licence for entertaining their Paramours, notwithstanding any Rules or Orders which might be establish'd to prevent its Increase: But if we shall find that there were Orders establish'd to prevent the Spreading of such a Disease, that Persons might be secure from any contagious Malady after their Entertainment at those Houses (which were anciently Eighteen in Number, but in the Reign of *Hen. VII.* reduced to Twelve) we may then securely depend upon it, that it was the Frequency of the Disease that put those that had the Authority, under a necessity of making such Rules and Orders. For the same Powers that granted a Liberty for keeping open such lewd Houses, must find it their Interest to secure,

as much as possible, all Persons from receiving any Injury there; lest the Frequency of such Misfortunes should deter others from frequenting them, and so the original Design of their Institution cease; from the entire sinking of the Revenues. Now I find that, as early as the Year 1162, divers Constitutions relating to the Lordship of *Winchester*, (being also confirmed by the King.) were to be kept for ever, according to the old Customs that had been time out of mind. Among which these were some, *viz.* No *Stew-holder* to take more for a Woman's Chamber in the Week than 14 *d.* Not to keep open his Doors upon Holy Days. No single Woman to be kept against her Will, that would leave her Sin. No single Woman to take Money to lie with any Man, except she lie with him all Night till the Morning. No *Stew holder* to keep any Woman that hath the perilous Infirmity of **Burning**. These and many more Orders were to be strictly observed, or the Offenders to be severely punished. Now we are assured there is no other Disease that can be communicated by carnal Conversation with Women, but that which is Venereal, by reason that only is contagious; and it's evident the **Burning** was certainly so: For, had it been nothing else but some simple Ulceration, Heat, or Inflammation, there would have been no Contagion; and that affecting only the Woman, could not be communicated by any Venereal Congress, and so not infer a Necessity of her being comprehended under the restraining Article. These Orders likewise prove the Disease was much more ancient than the Date above-mentioned; because they were only a Renewal of such as had been before established time out of mind.

But to confirm this farther, I find that in the Custody of the Bishop of *Winchester*, whose Palace was

situated on the *Bank side*, near the *Stews*, was a Book written upon Vellum, the Title of which runs thus; *Here begynne the Ordinances, Rules, and Customes, as well for the Salvation of Mannes Lif, as for to aschewe many Myschiefs and Inconveniencents that dayley be lik there for to fall owte, to be rightfully kept, and due Execution of them to be don unto any Personne wythin the same.* One of the Articles begins thus; *De his qui custodiunt Mulieres habentes Nephandam infirmitatem.* It goes on, *Item, That no Stew-holder keep noo Woman wythin his Hous that hath any Sycknelle of BRENNING, but that she be putte out upon the peyne of makeit a fyne unto the Lord of a hundred Shyllyngs.* This is taken from the Original Manuscript which was preserv'd in the Bishop's Court, suppos'd to be written about the Year 1430. From these Orders we may observe the Frequency of the Distemper at that Time; which, with other Inconveniencies, was dayley lik there for to fall owte: and the Greatness of the Penalty, as the Value of Money then was, that is laid on it, proves it was no trifling or insignificant thing.

But the bare Proof of there having been anciently such a Disease as was called the *Burning*, may be thought to be insufficient, unless we were perfectly assured what it was, and how it was in those Times described: I shall therefore do it from an unquestionable Authority, which is that of *John Arden, Esq;* who was one of the Surgeons to our King *Richard II.* and likewise to King *Henry IV.* In a curious Manuscript of his upon Vellum, he defines it to be, a certain inward Heat and Excoriation of the *Urethra*; which Description gives us a perfect Idea of what we now call a *Clap*; for frequent Dissections of those that laboured under

under that Disease, have made it evident, that their *Urethra* is excoriated by the Virulency of the Matter they receive from the infected Woman; and this Excoriation or Ulceration is not confined to the *Ostiola* or Mouths of the *Glandulæ Muscosæ*, as has been lately thought, but may equally alike attack any part of the *Urethra* not beyond the reach of the impelled malignant Matter. The Heat before described, which these Persons are sensible of, as well now as formerly, is a Consequent of the excoriated *Urethra*; for the Salts contained in the Urine must necessarily prick and irritate the nervous *Fibrille*, and excite a Heat in those Parts of the *Urethra* which are divested of its natural Membrane; which Heat will always be observed to be more or less, as the Salts are diluted with a greater or less Quantity of Urine; a thing I have often observed in Persons that have laboured under this Infirmary in hot Weather, when the perspirable Matter being thrown off in greater Quantities, the Salts bear a greater Proportion to the Quantity of Urine, and thereby make its Discharge at that Time so much the more painful and troublesome.

Thus we see this very early and plain Description of this Disease among us, to be entirely conformable to the latest and most exact Anatomical Discoveries. Here is no Tone of the *Testicles* depraved, according to *Trajanus Petronius*; no Exulceration of the *Parastatæ*, according to *Rondeletius*; no Ulceration of the *Seminal Vessels*, according to *Platerus*; no Seat of the Disease in the *Vesicula Seminales* or *Prostatæ*, according to *Bartholin*; nor in those Parts and the *Testicles* at the same Time, according to our Countryman *Wharton* and others, who have falsely fixed the Seat of this Disease, and whose Notions, in this respect, are now justly exploded; but a single and true Description of it, and

its Situation, about an Hundred and Fifty Years before any of those Gentlemen obliged the World with their learned Labours.

Having, I hope, sufficiently made it appear, the **Burning** was a Disease very early among us, and, given the Description of it, I shall proceed to say something of the ancient Method that was made use of to cure it. We are not to expect the Measures our Predecessors, in those early Times, made use of, should be calculated for the removing any Malignity in the Mass of Blood, or other Juices, according to the Practice in Venereal Cases at this Time; because they looked upon the Disease to be entirely local, and the Whole of the Cure to depend upon the Removal of the Symptoms: Hence 'twas they recommended such Remedies as were accommodated to the taking off the inward Heat of the Part, and cure the Excoriations or Ulcerations of the *Urethra*. The Process for the accomplishing of this, I shall set down from the before-mentioned *John Arden*, who wrote about the Year 1380. his Words are as follow, *Contra Incendium. Item contra incendium Virga Virilis interius ex calore & excoriatione, fiat talis Syringa (i. e. injectio) lenitiva. Accipe Lac mulieris masculum nutrientis, & parum zucarium, Oleum viola & prifana, quibus commixtis per Syringam infundatur, & si prædictis admiscueris lac Amigdalorum melior erit medicina.* There is no doubt but this Remedy, being used to our Patients at this Time, would infallibly take off the inward Heat of the Part, and cure the Excoriations or Ulcerations of the *Urethra*, by which means what issued from thence would be entirely stop't; and this was all they expected from their Medicines, forasmuch as they were entirely unacquainted with the Nature of the Distemper; and did not in the least imagine, but if the Symptoms that first attack'd the Part were removed, the Patient was entirely cured. I

I shall now, as a farther Confirmation of what I have advanced, proceed to prove, that by this **Brenning** or **Burning** is meant the Venereal Disease, by demonstrating that succeeding Historians, Physical and Chirurgical Writers, and others, have all along with us in *England* used the very same Word to signify the Venereal Malady. In an old Manuscript I have by me, written about the Year 1390. is a Receipt for **Brenning of the Wyntyl, yat men clepe ye Apegalle; Galle** being an old English Word for a running Sore. They who know the *Etymologie* of the Word *Apron*, cannot be ignorant of this. And in another Manuscript, written about 50 Years after, is a Receipt for **Burning** in that Part by a Woman. *Simon Fish*, a zealous Promoter of the Reformation in the Reign of *Hen. VIII.* in his Supplication of Beggars, presented to the King in 1530. says as follows, *These be they* (speaking of the *Romish Priests*) *that corrupt the whole Generation of Mankind in your Realm, that catch the Pockes of one Woman and bear them to another; that be Burnt with one Weman and bare it to another; that catch the Lepry of one Weman and bare it unto another.* But to make this Matter still more evident, I am to observe, that *Andrew Boord*, a Doctor in Physick, and Romish Priest, in the Reign of *Henry VIII.* in a Book he wrote, entitul'd *The Breviary of Health*, printed in 1546. speaks very particularly of this sort of Burning; one of his Chapters beginneth thus, **The 19th Chapter doth shew of BURNING of an Harlotte;** where his Notion of communicating the *Burning* is very particular. The same Author adds, that if a Man be **Burnt** with an *Harlot*, and do meddle with another Woman within a Day, he shall **Burn** the Woman that he shall meddle withal; and as an immediate Remedy against the **Burning**, he recommends the washing the *Pudenda* two or three

three times with White Wine, or else with Sack and Water; but if the matter have continued long, to go to an expert Chirurgion to have Help. In his 82d Chapter, he speaks of two sorts of Burning, the One by Fire, and the Other by a Woman through carnal Copulation, and refers the Person that is **Burnt** of a *Harlot* to another Chapter of his for Advice, what to do, **if he get a Doxer or two**, so called from its Protuberancy or bunching out: For I find about that Time the Word *Eulo* was mostly made use of, to signify that sort of Swelling which usually happens in pestilential Diseases.

From hence it appears, the *Burning*, by its Consequents, was *venerial*, since every Day's Experience makes it evident, that the ill Treatment of the first Symptoms of the Disease, either by astringent Medicines, or the removing them by cooling and healing the excoriated Parts, will generally be attended with such Swellings in the Groin, which we rarely observe to happen from any other Cause whatsoever.

I shall give a few more Instances of this Disease being call'd the *Burning*, and conclude. In a Manuscript I have of the Vocation of *John Bale* to the Bishoprick of *Ossory* in *Ireland*, written by himself, he speaks of *Dr. Hugh Weston* (who was Dean of *Windsor* in 1556. but deprived by *Cardinal Pole* for Adultery) as follows, "At this Day is lecherous *Weston*, who is more practised in the Art of **Brech Burning** than all the *Whores* of the *Stems*. And again, speaking of the same Person, he says, "He not long ago **brent** a *Beggar* in *St. Botolph's* Parish. The same Author says of him elsewhere, "He had been sore-Bitten with a *Winchester-Goose*, and was not yet healed thereof; which was a common Phrase for the Pox at that Time, because the *Stems* were under the Jurisdiction of the Bishop of

of *Winchester*. *Mich. Wood*, in his *Epistle* before *Steph. Gardiner's Oration de vera Obedientia*, printed at *Rhoan*, 1553. gives another Evidence of the **Burning**. And *William Bullein*, a Physician in the Reign of *Queen Eliz.* in a Book he publish'd, call'd *The Bulwark of Defence, &c.* printed in 1562. bringing in *Sickness* demanding of *Health* what he should do with a Disease call'd the *French Pockes*, *Health* answers, " He would not that any should fishe for this Disease, or to be bold when he is bitten to thynke thereby to be helped, but rather to eschewe the Cause of thys Infyrmyty, and filthy rotten **Burning** of *Harlots*."

I believe, by this time, I have sufficiently prov'd what I propos'd, that the first Degree of the Venereal Disease was very anciently known among us, under the Title of **Burning**; and that you may lose no more Time at present upon this Subject, I shall reserve my Collections, which shew that the Disease, when it came to be confirmed, was no Novelty here in those early Times, for a further Opportunity, and detain you no longer than to express my Pleasure in professing my self, *Yours, &c.*

London, Feb. 4.
1717-18.

Will. Beckett.

V. *Accuratarum Observationum Astronomicarum, anno superiore & currente, cum Reg. Societate communicatarum Sylloge.*

INterest sanè Scientiæ ne pereant Observata Astronomica, debita curâ fidisque Instrumentis ab Artificibus idoneis cælitus deprompta: Hoc enim solo fundamento nititur Urania practica. Itaque in his *Trans-*
actionibus,

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