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978-1-108-06998-4 - A Treatise of the Scurvy, in Three Parts: Containing an Inquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Cure, of that Disease

James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)

A
T R E A T I S E
O F T H E
S C U R V Y.

P A R T I.

C H A P. I.

A critical history of the different accounts of this disease.

IN the first accounts given us of this disease, by *Ronffeus*, *Echthius*, and *Wierus* (*a*), it is surprising to find, not only an accurate description of it, but an enumeration of almost all the truly antiscorbutic medicines that are known to the world even at this day.

(*a*) The first authors on the scurvy. *Ronffeus* and *Echthius*, though cotemporary, wrote separately, without having the benefit of seeing each others works.

A

Ronffeus,

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

Critical History.

Part I.

Rouffeus, who believed it to be the same disease that is described by *Pliny* (*b*), and is said to have afflicted the *Roman* army under the command of *Cæsar Germanicus*, observed, that in his time it was to be met with only in *Holland*, *Friesland*, and *Denmark*; though he had heard of its appearing in *Flanders*, *Brabant*, and some parts of *Germany*. From seeing some of those countries entirely free from this distemper, he was induced to ascribe its frequency in other places to their soil, climate, and diet. In order to prove which, he wrote his first epistle (*c*).

Echthius seems to be the first who gave rise to the opinion of its being a contagious or infectious *lues*. He was led into that mistake, by observing whole monasteries who lived on the same diet, and in the same air, at once affected with it, especially after fevers; which no doubt might become infectious in close and confined apartments. He imagined, therefore, that a scurvy might in a manner be the *crisis* of a fever, which as such he deemed contagious.

(*b*) Vid. part 3. chap. 1.

(*c*) Intituled, *Quare apud Amsterodamum, Alecmariam, atque alia vicina loca, frequentissime infestet scorbutus?*

But

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)Chap. I. *Critical History.* 3

But where *Wierus* transcribes the symptoms from this last author, (which he does almost *verbatim*), upon this occasion he very justly differs from him. He observes, that the scurvy is not properly the *crisis* of a fever; but, like many other diseases, may be occasioned after it by unsound viscera, and a vitiated state of blood. He imagines people were induced to believe it a contagious malady, by seeing many whole families alike affected; but this he ascribed to the *samenefs* of their diet. He was however deceived (probably by the authority of *Echthius*) in thinking, that where the gums were putrid, the disease might be infectious: and accordingly makes it a doubt, whether in some parts of the *Lower Germany*, where it had lately appeared, it was owing to their diet, or to infection. But it shall be fully proved hereafter, that the scurvy is not contagious or infectious (*d*).

It may be proper to observe further, that *Wierus* had described the various and extraordinary symptoms of this malady, in so accurate a manner, that the succeeding authors for a long time did nothing more than copy him. It was a considerable time afterwards, when

(*d*) Chap. 4.

A 2

Solomon

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

Critical History.

Part I.

Solomon Albertus wrote a large treatise on this subject, wherein he assumes great merit to himself in discovering a symptom not taken notice of by any author, and which he had once or twice observed in this disease, *viz.* a *rigor* or stiffness of the lower jaw. However, *Wierus* still continued in the greatest esteem and reputation; and his book was deemed the standard on this subject, even till the time of *Eugalenus*, who gives it that just character, and refers to it almost entirely for the cure. He must be allowed therefore to have been a good judge of this distemper: and as he was a person of eminent learning, as well as probity, (which his writings on this and many other subjects sufficiently shew), his word may be relied upon, when he tells us, that in his time this disease was peculiar to the inhabitants of the countries upon the north seas: he had never met with it in *Spain*, *France*, nor in *Italy*; nor was it to be seen in the large tract of *Upper Germany*: and as to *Asia* and *Africa*, if ever it appeared there, it would no doubt be in such places as lay adjacent to the sea; where such a situation, and a gross diet, with the use of putrid water, might give rise to it, in the same manner as they do in the countries where
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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)Chap. I. *Critical History.* 5

it was endemic. These were not conjectures in our author; for he was a great traveller, and had visited all the places he talks of (*e*). A book wrote in those times by him, *De præstigiis demonum*, adds much to his reputation; as it shews he was neither so weak, nor credulous, as some later writers on the scurvy.

Brunnerus, who may be deemed the next judicious author after him on this subject, observed, that in his time, when the use of wine was become more common, the scurvy was not so frequent as formerly, even in those countries where it had been endemic.

Notwithstanding which, in a very short time after, we are surpris'd with accounts of this supposed contagious *lues* having spread far and wide. In less than thirty years after *Wierus*, *Solomon Albertus*, in his dedication to the Duke of *Brunswick*, after some very pathetic declamations on the vices of the times, observes, that he had met with the scurvy every where; and that it prevailed in *Misnia*, *Lusatia*, on the borders of *Bohemia* and *Silesia*, &c.

However, the disease as yet still retained the same face; the symptoms and appearances in it the same. For though this author (who

(*e*) *Vid. Melchior Adam in vita Wieri.*

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *Critical History.* Part I.

practised in a place where *Wierus* says the scurvy was uncommon) had discovered one extraordinary symptom, before mentioned, sometimes accompanying it; and which certainly was but rarely to be seen, as it escaped the observation of every one but himself: yet in other respects, he, as well as his contemporary writers, gives us the same account of it as *Wierus* had done before; and particularly, that the putrid gums and swelled legs were the most certain and only characteristic signs of it (*f*).

But in eleven years after him, we are likewise acquainted by *Eugalenus*, with the surprising rapidity with which this contagious *lues* had made its progress over almost the whole world. And what is still more remarkable, the face of the disease was in a few years so much changed, that the putrid gums and swelled legs were no longer characteristic signs of it, as it often killed the patient before these symptoms appeared (*g*). And it is highly probable from

(*f*) *Signa mali hujus characteristic non alia sunt, præter duo illa (quorum supra meminimus) gemina, symptomata pathognomica appellata, indubia morbi indicia, viz. stomacace et sceletyrbe. Cætera symptomata ancipitia sunt et vaga.* Alberti historia scorbuti, p. 546.

(*g*) P. 10. and 211. The *Amsterdam* edition of *Eugalenus*, published in the year 1720, is here quoted.

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)Chap. I. *Critical History.* 7

the histories of above 200 cases of patients delivered in his book, wherein mention is made of the gums being affected in one person only, that such symptoms did now but rarely, if at all, occur.

This malady was also greatly increased in virulence, as he gives us to understand in different parts of his performance: all which he would persuade us to have proceeded from a very singular cause (*b*).

Its effects and symptoms were now various and innumerable (*i*): and it was also become a much more frequent calamity than it appears to have ever been formerly; at least, if we may take this author's word for it, who upon

(*b*) P. 250. where talking of the pox and scurvy as both modern diseases, *Utrique etiam peculiare hoc nostro seculo fuit, ut quàm longissimè latissimèque sua pœria dilatent et diffundant, atque procul à generationis suæ locis et terminis, ad incognita et remota loca excurrant evagenturque, atque sub diametrali linea, quâ sibi invicem, sub polorum oppositione, opposita sunt, se mutuò quasi completantur, et inter se virus ac venenum suum communicent. Ita fit ut hodie etiam Germaniæ, Angliæ, Galliæ, hic morbus innotescat; apud quos antea ne quidem auditum ejus nomen fuit.* He says the same thing in the dedication of his book to the Count of Nassau. Some of his editors have taken care to have this dedication suppressed in the later editions. It is indeed a most curious piece.

(*i*) *Tam varii sunt effectus quos hic morbus edit, ut minimas omnium differentias numero comprehendere non magis ferè possibile sit, quàm arenam maris numerare, p. 217.*

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

Critical History.

Part I.

this occasion expresses himself in very hyperbolic terms. And we must indeed allow him to have had a very extensive practice, since he informs us that he had seen almost innumerable patients afflicted with only one particular symptom of the malady (*k*).

But besides the natural reasons which he assigns, he is likewise pleased to introduce some moral considerations, to account for the great frequency and virulence of this distemper, and the extraordinary symptoms which he ascribes to it. In one place (*l*) he attributes its irregular appearances to the operation of the devil. But in another, he thinks this new and surprising calamity sent, by divine permission, as a chastisement for the sins of the world. And as he really thought himself (as appears through the whole treatise) the most sagacious detector of this *Proteus*-like mischief, lurking under various and surprising appearances, he

(*k*) Thus in a scorbutic quotidian, *Plures mendaci quotidianæ febris typo ab hoc morbo ægrotarunt, quàm ut numero hic comprehendere queant*, p. 231. Talking of scorbutic pains in various parts of the body, *Describendis nominibus eorum qui ab his doloribus variè exercitati elapsis hisce annis fuere, vix sufficeret præfens charta*, p. 51. Those patients, he again repeats, were almost innumerable, p. 258.

(*l*) P. 81.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)Chap. I. *Critical History.* 9

very religiously thanks Heaven for the important discovery (*m*).

Now, as this book has been often reprinted in different parts of *Europe*, has been recommended by the greatest authority, by *Boerhaave* to his pupils, by *Hoffman*, &c. and is looked upon at this day as the standard author on our subject (*n*); it may be worth while to inquire into the contents of it, as well as the merit of its author. And we shall begin with observing wherein he differs in his account and description of this disease, from all preceeding authors. For as to those who succeeded, they did little more than copy him. So that I shall have few remarks to make upon these, till we come to Dr *Willis*, who gives us a somewhat different account of its symptoms.

(*m*) *Quod idè permittere Deus videtur, ut hoc modo iram suam adversus peccata ostendat, dum novis et inusitatis morbis et ægritudinibus, nunquam priùs cognitis ac visis, mortale genus in ira sua visitat et castigat; ut etiam vulgus nostras, morborum novitate admonitum, intelligat differentes hujus temporis febres ac morbos esse, ab iis qui ante aliquot annos homines affligerunt. Agamus igitur Deo gratias, quòd pro sua infinita misericordia ac clementia tam benignè eis nobis revelare dignatus sit, p. 222.*

(*n*) It is said very lately by *Haller*, to be universally esteemed the best book written on the scurvy. *Vid. Boerhaave methodus studii medici.*

B *Eugalenus*

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James Lind

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

Critical History.

Part I.

Eugalenus differs from all preceeding authors.

1st, In supposing the malady may be far advanced, before (what they judged) the most equivocal and uncertain signs appeared in it. “ Thus, (says he), after a long continuance of the distemper, the patient has a constant languor, a numbness, a sense of heavy pain in his legs, or an acute pain in any part (o).” But such symptoms are by *Echthius* classed in a separate chapter, under the denomination of *the remote signs common to this disease with others*. And *Forrestus*, who had the greatest opportunity of being conversant with scorbutic cases, by living in a sea-port town, mentions them as the symptoms only of the approaching evil. He says, that upon their appearance he hesitated for some time, till the proper and peculiar symptoms of this disease appeared, *viz.* the putrid gums, &c. which put the matter out of all doubt. But *Eugalenus* supposes the scurvy often to destroy the patient before the appearance of these latter (p).

2^{dly}, On the contrary, he supposes, that those symptoms which, according to all others, ap-

(o) P. 14.

(p) P. 10. et 211.

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