

Texts and Documents

A CASE OF SNAKE-BITE FROM THE CONSILIA OF GENTILE DA FOLIGNO

by

LYNN THORNDIKE

IN an earlier paper¹ on Gentile da Foligno reference was made to a *consilium* on a case of snake-bite which was briefly reported in the printed editions of Gentile issued at Pavia and Venice and more fully recorded in various manuscripts. This case of snake-bite has so many features of special interest that it is here printed in full from a fourteenth-century MS. at Munich (Cod. lat. 77).

The 'Consilium ad morsum aspidis surdi' as printed in the two incunabula of Pavia (c. 1488) and Venice (c. 1497) is a very abbreviated summary of the much fuller manuscript text of 16 November 1385. A variant version of this was printed as the last item in the editio princeps (1482) of the *Consilia* of Hugh of Siena (1376–1439),² but he is too late to have been its author. Its opening page only is found in another manuscript at Erfurt, Amplon. Q.222, late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, fol. 227r, where it is ascribed to Mundinus. It will be seen that the printed abbreviation limits itself to the traditional remedial measures which Gentile took from past authorities, and entirely omits his account of the accident, description of the snake and of the patient, and the latter's condition at various stages. Also Gentile's references to the use of messengers, the participation of his associates and pupils, and the interest of other spectators in uroscopy.

THE SHORT VERSION³

(fol. 77ra). Remedia que fuerunt facta in isto servo dei quem momorderat serpes aspis surdus per Gentilem que ipse composuit in tractatu de hoc;

Primum remedium fuit de ligatura super locum morsus ut venenum non ascenderet ad partes cordis.

Secundum fuit de exhibitione tyriace communis ad confortandum cor et de exhibitione butiri non recentis et de appositione ventose super locum. Et de predicta tyriaca communi fuit ab extra circa partem cordis.

Tertium remedium fuit reiteratio ventose cum profunda scarificatione partis.

Quartum remedium fuit ordinatio tyriace ad proprietatem secundum hunc modum: Recipe gentiane carpobal. ruthe ana; fiat pulvis et detur cum vino puro quantum uno digito capi potest.

Quintum remedium fuit de pulvere smeraldi seminis citri pulverizatorum, et modo dabatur sibi de uno modo de alio cum bono vino ☉ i frequenter etiam in cibo semina citri.

Sextum fuit de exhibitione tyriace alterius quam ponit Hali-abbas: Recipe castorei cassie lignee aristo. rotunde ana ʒss, seminis anisi piperis ana ʒ ii; terantur et detur de ea quantum duobus digitis capitur. Fecimus fieri clistere ex lacte et decoctione malvarum; postea redicto fecimus ipsum lavari cum aqua decoctionis aristol. rotunde, et sudavit. Cum hoc fuerint sibi

Texts and Documents

ultimo concessa acetosa propter caliditatem veneni et usum tyriace calidum, que fecerunt aliquam distemperantiam.

Ex istis remediis vita dei gloriosi evasit servus dei qui morsus fuerat.

FULLER TEXT FROM COD. LAT. MONACENSIS 77

Gentile da Foligno, Consilium ad morsum serpentis.

(fol. 79va) rubric, Sequitur Consilium utile Gentilis de Fulgineo ad morsum serpentis in pede a latere.

(fol. 79vb, top margin), rubric, Consilium Gentilis Perusini.

Pervenit ad me iuvenis quidam de servis dei qui habitabat in monte sterili privato aquis prope Perusium in fine Iulii hora nona. Et morsus fuit a serpente non magno in pede a latere silvestri prope thalum in loco expansionis vene sciaticae. Et quia valde cito sensit defectum (?) in corde suo et cerebro suo set ipse fecit sibi fieri (?) ligaturam supra locum morsus ne ascenderet venenum. Sed errans cito dissolvit ligaturam.

Venerunt igitur nuntii ad me statim scilicet post septem vel octo horas et narraverunt eventum et quod infirmus iacebat quasi sine sensu et motu cum permutatione pulchritudinis faciei et casu palpebrarum, et quod predixerat patiens defectum cordis sui et cerebri et totius corporis.

Cum igitur audivi hoc, dubitavi valde non sperans fere de sua salute, et iudicavi serpentem fuisse de surdis puris pravis et iam pervenisse venenum ad cor et principalia membra. Et addebant ad pravitatem eius hora anni et diei et locus. Subito tamen feci subveniri cum tyriaca communi et scarificatione partis et potu butiri non recentis. Et feci serpentem quem occiderunt portari ad me et portaverunt illum mortuum, et cum vidi illum, terruit me. Erat enim lati capitis procedens ingrossando in corpore cum cauda brevi et acuta. Quantitas eius erat parum ultra cubitum, niger in omni sua parte, sed nigredo adhuc aspergebatur in grissis maculis. Fuit igitur, sicut iudicavi, de genere aspidum surdorum.

Rediens igitur ad cogitandum secundum canones scientie, intendi in infirmo ad confortationem cordis eius et ad resistendum et corrumpendum venenum cum communi corrumpente scilicet ad corrumpendum illud cum tyriacis appropriatis vipperis de quarum summa sunt nostri serpentes surdi curtone (?) set intendi ad trahendum venenum ad exteriora secundum quod potui.

Subito igitur feci dari sibi de tyriaco communi ut diximus que cor venenati hominis confortat, et feci de ea poni ad partes cordis. Nec iuvenes inexperti dubitent extra applicare tyriacam dicendo quod ipsa repellit intus venenum. Iam enim declaramus in questione de hoc quod tyriaca magna, si ponetur etiam extra, iuvat cor ut defendet se a venenis, et occidit tyriaca venenum. Et diximus etiam quod si ponatur extra expellit, et etiam si ponatur intra. Et lectu-dabilis Zoar in pustulis venenosis etiam extra posuit tyriacam. Et multe res sunt que intus et extra posite valent in venenis, sicut dixit Avicenna de bedaguard. Et iam diximus in hoc modum possibilem secundum humanam curationem. Et cum dabatur tyriaca, secius apponi ventosam cum igne que colligeret locum morsus, et secius scarificari profunde et multam partem et frequentius apponi ventosam cum igne. Non enim repertus fuit qui vellet suggere cum ore, tanta apparuit terribilitas ctlis (?) et pravitas veneni ex terribilibus accidentibus que erant in morso.

Et cum hoc fieret, feci sibi fieri tyriacam hanc. Recipe gentiane carpobalsami ruti anisi partes equales; fiat pulvis et detur cum vino potenti quantum duobus digitis capi.

Transivit igitur nox et mane secunda die pervenimus ad videndum eum et invenimus eum iacentem prostratum sub clausis palpebris. Malignabatur anhelitus eius et ex hoc pulsus habebat aliquid plus. De apparitione aspectus faciei eius erat turpis in colore et forma. Subito igitur sicut omnino certus de pravitate veneni feci parari pulverem smaraldi et dare ei frequenter quantum duobus digitis capiebatur. Et dedi cum vino subtili aromatico et puro, et

cum hoc etiam semina citri feci teri et dari etiam cum vino. Et feci de hiis seminibus dare multotiens et multum etiam et nunc de uno et nunc de alio. Et in hec remedia induxerunt nos honorati viri Avicenna et Rabi Moyses et Zoar. Laudant enim Zoar et Raby Moyses laudibus arduis smaraldum. Et semina citri omnes fere collaudant et (?) etiam vinum et modicum quidem comprehendebatur transire per meri quia quasi transglutire non poterat.

Cum igitur appropinquaret hora nona eiusdem diei, accidentia eius erant in eadem pravitate vel modica remissione, et vidimus urinam eius, in cuius collectione studuerunt astantes, et erat livida. Sumimus (?) ad illum aliquos ex sociis nostris viros provecctos et usitatos in visitatione infirmorum nobiscum et qui iam erant docti in scientia de venenis per doctrinam nostram, quando explicavimus partem Avicenne de venenis. Cum igitur reversi sunt ad me, narraverunt eum non bene dispositum, in pulsu ymo peioratum et in aliis accidentibus eodem modo habentem, et iudicavimus per hoc vehementiam pugne veneni contra virtutem. Et subito fecimus parari tyriacam hanc, recipe quam traximus ex sermonibus Haly Abbate et fecimus de ea poni sibi in ore et statim locutus est. Et continuavimus reliqua dicta supra de smaraldo et seminibus citri. Hec est tyriaca. Recipe castorei cassie lignee aristologie rotunde ana ʒʒ, seminis anisi piperis ana ʒ ii; terantur et detur quantum duobus digitis capitur cum vino (*fol. 80ra*).

Sero eodem die secundo visitavimus eum et vidit nos et cognovit et locutus est et pia locutione et cum laude dei recommendavit se nobis. Et vidimus urinam eius tunc lividam et pulsus eius erat parvus et frequens. Precepi sibi dari in nocte frequenter de lapide et seminibus citri et bis dari de tyriaca Haly Abbatis, et quod fricarent eum et vigilarent cum eo. Et in mane venit nuntius eius narrans quod reversus erat in dispositionem pravam et non videret et quod erat permutatus in facie et pulsu ad malam et quod in nocte non potuit dare tyriacam illam nec aliquid fere et quod dorminuerat(?). Nesciamus(?) igitur quod sompnus et negligentia in usu tyriacalium et medicinarum illarum produxerat eum ad peioramentum, et urina eius erat tenuis livida cum resolutionibus furfureis, et dubitavi ne venenum dissolveret eum.

Feci procurere nuntium et quod omni violentia de tyriaca Haly Abbatis sibi daret et post illam per breve spatium de smaraldo et seminibus citri. Et fecit. Et in tertiis perveni ad eum et inveni eum multum melioratum in omnibus accidentibus et in pulsu precipue, de quo confidebam.

Precepi sibi dari de sueto pulle et aqua distillationis pullorum ubi super ponebantur smaraldus et semen citri, et fuit iste cibus eius semper cum loco cibi voluimus dari aliquid.

Sero tercię diei ante tertiam iterum dedimus de illa tyriaca et in nocte semel, et fecimus quod in nocte non profundaretur ad sompnum et semper (super?) iteravi ventosam in parte.

Quarta die in mane narravit quod nocte communiter habuerat sed quod extrema erant rigida. Et urinam vidimus melioratam, venientem ad maiorem tincturam et meliorem substantiam, nec apparuit aliquod malum sedimentum, sed narrabat ventris tortiones et dolorem renum. Precepimus clysterium ex lacte vel decoctione malvarum et eo facto fecimus lavari cum aqua decoctionis aristologie rotunde, et sudavit cum hoc. Et iteravimus predictas res dando semel de tyriaca predicta. Licet enim ipsa a proprietate resistat veneno vipparum, tamen est calida.

Quinta die completis quatuor diebus naturalibus vidimus eum liberatum ab omnibus pravis accidentibus et ordinavimus ei regimen confortativum cum cibus laudabilibus et vino, et quod dimitteret usus tyriacarum, et quod post duos dies uteretur aliquibus acetosis si vellet, quia venenum calidum et usus calidorum aliquam distemperantiam fecerant. Sed non fuimus audaces statim comedere illas ne percutterent debilia membra et maxime nervos. Videtur enim quod venenum illud multum ledat cerebrum et nervos cum nocumento generali cordis.

Et iam scivimus a quodam fideli merito amico nostro quod unus qui evasit a morsu surdi stetit multis mensibus cum casu palpebrarum simili Yesse(?) quod ut non poterit videre nisi digitis elevantem palpebras. Considerent (?) igitur medici mirabiles effectus venenorum et mirabiles proprietates rerum contra ea, et in omnibus viderant pulchritudinem dei gloriosi qui sit benedictus. Amen.

Gentilis et (?) Paulus Rietri⁴ scripsit (?) Padue M. CCC. 85, 16⁴ Novembris. Finis. Laus deo.

TRANSLATION

At the end of July and the ninth hour there came to me the case of a young man of the servants of God who lived on a barren mountain without water near Perugia. He had been bitten by a snake—not large—on the foot on the left side near the ankle where the sciatic vein spreads out. And because he at once was conscious of weakness in his heart and brain, he himself made a ligature above the bite to prevent the venom from ascending. But as he moved, the ligature ceased to bind.

So messengers came to me straightway, say after seven or eight hours, and told what had happened and that the patient lay as if senseless and motionless, with ugly change of countenance and fallen eyelids, and that he had predicted failure of heart, brain and his whole body.

When I heard this, I was very dubious with slight hope for his safety, and I judged that the snake was a very vicious surd and that the venom had already reached the heart and principal members. And the time of day and year and place increased its poisonousness. However, I had him treated at once with ordinary tyriac, and the place scarified, and draughts of stale butter. And I had the snake which they had killed brought to me, and they brought it dead, and when I saw it, it scared me. For it had a broad head, a body increasing in size, with a short sharp tail. It was a little more than a cubit in length, black all over, but spattered with grey spots. So it was, as I judged, of the genus of deaf asps.

Reflecting once more according to the canons of medical science, my intention was to comfort the patient's heart and to resist and destroy the venom with the common corruptive, namely to corrupt it with the appropriate tyriacs of vipers, of which the strongest are our short surd snakes. But I also meant to draw the poison outward as best I could.

So I at once had him given ordinary tyriac, as we have said, which comforts the heart of a poisoned man, and I had it put over the heart. Nor should inexperienced youths hesitate to apply tyriac externally, saying that it repels the venom inward. For we have already stated in a *Question* on this point that great tyriac, if applied externally, helps the heart defend itself from poisons, and tyriac kills poison. We said too that it expels, if applied externally, and also if applied internally. And readable Zoar also applied tyriac externally for venomous pustules. And there are many things which applied internally and externally are good against poisons, as Avicenna said of the bezoar. And so we've said in this way what is possible by human cure. When tyriac was given, later to apply the cupping-glass with fire to draw together the bitten place, and then scarify deep and wide, and repeatedly apply the cupping-glass with fire. For no one was found willing to suck the wound with his mouth, so great appeared the frightfulness and depravity of the venom from the terrible symptoms seen in the man bitten.

And when this was done, I had this tyriac made for him. Take equal parts of gentian, balsam seed, rue, anise; make a powder and give with strong wine as much as can be taken with two fingers.

The night passed and next morning we went to see him and found him lying prostrate with closed eyelids. His breathing was affected and from this his pulse was somewhat heightened. His facial appearance was foul in colour and form. So, quite assured of the badness of the poison, I promptly had emerald powder prepared and given to him frequently, as much as could be taken with two fingers. I administered

it in light wine with an aroma and pure. And with this I also had citrus seeds brayed and given with wine. And I had these seeds administered frequently and in large doses, and now of the one and now of the other. We were led to employ these remedies by those honoured men, Avicenna and Rabbi Moses and Zoar. For Zoar and Rabbi Moses laud emerald with loud praises. And citrus seeds almost all approve and also wine. And he could only take a modicum *per meri* because he could hardly swallow.

When then the ninth hour of the same day approached, his symptoms were still in the same bad state or only slightly improved, and we inspected his urine, to whose collection the by-standers were attentive, and it was livid. We sent to him some of our associates, men advanced and experienced in visiting the sick with us, and who were trained in the science of poisons by our doctrine, when we explained the part of Avicenna about poisons. When they returned to me, they said he was not well disposed, his pulse even worse, and other symptoms as before, and we inferred from this the strength of the poison's fight against the virtue of medicines. And we promptly had this tyriac prepared, a recipe which we took from Haly Abbas, and we had it put in his mouth and immediately he spoke. And we continued the others aforesaid of emerald and citrus seeds. This is the tyriac. Take castor oil, cassia wood, round aristologia, a half dram each; of anise seed and pepper two drams each. Let them be brayed and as much given with wine as can be taken with two fingers.

In the evening of that same second day we visited him and he saw and recognized us and spoke piously and praising God commended himself to us. And we inspected his urine, then livid, and his pulse was slight and rapid. I ordered that often during the night he should be given of the stone and citrus seeds, and the tyriac of Haly Abbas twice, and that they should massage him and stay up with him. In the morning came a messenger, stating that he had had a relapse and did not see and was altered in face and pulse for the worse, and that during the night he could not take that tyriac or hardly anything, and that he had slept. So we suspected that sleep and failure to take those tyriacs and medicines had made him worse. And his urine was thin, livid, with scaly solutions, and I feared that the poison would destroy him.

I got a messenger and told him to administer the tyriac of Haly Abbas to him forcibly, and shortly thereafter the emerald and citrus seeds. And he did it. And at tierce I went to him and found him much improved in all his symptoms, and in the pulse especially, by which I was much assured.

I ordered that he be given chicken fat and chicken soup with emerald and citrus seed on top of it, and that that should be his food when we wished something to be given in place of food.

On the evening of the third day before tierce we again administered that tyriac and once during the night, and we arranged that he should not sleep too profoundly at night, and I repeated the cupping-glass on the affected part.

On the fourth day in the morning he said that he had passed a fair night but that his extremities were rigid. We found his urine improved with more colour and better substance, nor was any bad sediment apparent. But he complained of gripes of the belly and pain of the kidneys. We prescribed a clyster of milk or decoction of mallows, and, that done, we had him washed with water of decoction of round aristologia, and it made him sweat. We repeated the aforesaid, administering the said tyriac once. For while it has the property of resisting the venom of vipers, yet it is hot.

On the fifth day, four natural days having passed, we found him freed from all bad symptoms and we prescribed a comforting regimen for him with laudable food and wine, and that he stop taking the tyriac and after two days take something sour, if he

Society Reports

wished to, because hot poison and the use of hot things had produced some derangement. But we were not anxious for him to eat these immediately lest they affect his weak limbs and especially the nerves. For it appears that that poison is very injurious to the brain and nerves with injury in a general way to the heart.

And I already knew from a trustworthy friend of mine that one who recovers from the bite of a surd remained for many months with closed eyelids . . . so that he could not see unless he raised them with his fingers. So let physicians consider the marvellous effects of poisons and the marvellous properties of things against them, and in all these see the beauty of glorious God, who blessed be. Amen.

Columbia University,
New York.

REFERENCES

1. THORNDIKE, L. 'Consilia and more works in manuscript by Gentile da Foligno', *Med. Hist.*, 1959, III, 8-19.
2. Discussed by Dean P. Lockwood, *Ugo Benzi*, 1951, pp. 347-8.
3. From the Venice edition. That of Pavia opens and closes similarly: 'Remedia que fuerant facta . . . evasit servus dei qui morsus fuerat'.
4. This is the same Paul (Riether or Rietis) who copied so many works, mostly of Gentile, in another Munich MS. cod. lat. 7609, between December 1382, and 2 January 1387. See my 'A medical manuscript of the fourteenth century', *J. Hist. Med.*, 1955, X, 392-8.

Society Reports

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY HISTORY OF MEDICINE SOCIETY

THE first meeting of the 1960-61 session was held in the Lecture Theatre of the Department of Anatomy on 11 October at 5.30 p.m., with the President, Dr. P. A. Tyser, in the Chair.

Dr. Donald Hunter lectured on 'Stepney and the London Hospital'. He gave a vivid account of episodes in the life of the Hospital and of the Borough, whose population it serves, and contrived a skilful blend of medical and social history.

At a meeting of the Society held in the Lecture Theatre of the Department of Radiotherapeutics on Tuesday, 25 October, with Dr. R. Williamson, Honorary Vice-President, in the Chair, Dr. W. Stanley Sykes spoke on 'A Hundred Years of Anaesthesia'. Although the main outlines of the story are well known, Dr. Sykes, by the meticulous examination of the original sources, has been able to correct many errors of facts perpetuated in the standard text-books. Several anaesthetists who were present as guests took part in the discussion which followed this particularly useful lecture.