

'McCulloch, Dr HO'

Publication/Creation

1912

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/bxxwaee5>

License and attribution

Works in this archive created by or for Henry Wellcome or the Wellcome organisation are available under a CC-BY license. Please be aware that works in this archive created by other organisations and individuals are not covered under this license, and you should obtain any necessary permissions before copyright or adapting any such works.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

McCulloch. DR. H.D.

1912

12th June 1912.

Dear Sir,

With reference to your enquiry left with Messrs. Burroughs Wellcome & Co., at their Exhibition Room in Wigmore Street, your note has been handed to me, and I regret that absence from town has prevented my replying to it sooner.

With respect to the drug catapuce or spurge, which you state is mentioned among the secret poisons of the Borgias, as you are doubtless aware, all the spuries possess poisonous properties, which act as escharotics, but which have not yet been chemically determined. I should judge, however, that it would be very unlikely that *Croton Tiglium*, although belonging to the same natural order, was used as a secret poison in Italy in the fifteenth century, and I can find no reference to it in the Italian herbals of that period.

From recent investigation it would appear that the secret poisons, wrapped up in so much mystery, used by the Italian poisoners in the fifteenth century were either solutions of arsenic or antimony, which, administered in small doses, gave rise to the idea that the poisoner could himself determine when a fatal effect would be caused from their cumulative effects.

In my own opinion, very few poisons of vegetable origin were used in the Middle Ages in Italy, and arsenic was, in all probability, chiefly used for nefarious purposes.

Faithfully yours,

C.J.S.T.

Dr. H. D. McCulloch,

152 Harley Street, W.

He (Pullock)
(Da)

REPLY SENT.

12 JUN 1912 *Poissons*

D^r H. D. McCulloch of 152 Harley St. W. enquires
in reference to the use of Drugs in the 15th Century
the secret poisons of the Borgias among which
occurs the name Cataputia or Catapuce given
in the Webster's Dictionary as a plant belonging to the
Euphorbiaceae. ~~the~~ Catapuce being the obsolete
term for Spurge. Croton Tiglium belonging as
it does to the Euphorbiaceae was this the plant
referred to as Catapuce?

D^r McCulloch would feel obliged for any information
or references as to the secret poisons alleged to have
been used by the Borgias Drugs which are said to have
acted at a distance as to time when administered
the expression 'veneno a termine' occurs which
possibly refers to its cumulative effect.

5
23 12

H. D. W. C.