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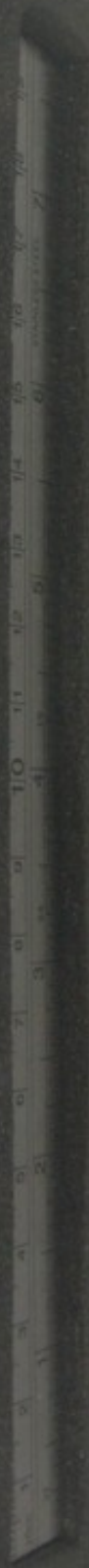
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OF THE
EARLY HISTOR

SYPHILIS IN

BY
GEORGE THIN, M
SHANGHAI

EDINBURGH: OLIVER AND BOTT, TWO
—
RODGERSVILLE

from the Author.

ON THE

EARLY HISTORY

OF

SYPHILIS IN CHINA.

BY

GEORGE THIN, M.D.,

SHANGHAI.

EDINBURGH: OLIVER AND BOYD, TWEEDDALE COURT.

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EARLY HISTORY OF SYPHILIS IN CHINA.

THE writer of this paper, having been assured by many Chinese scholars that syphilis has been known to exist in China for very many hundred years, availed himself of the kind offer of a learned native antiquary, to select passages from the writings of recognised genuineness and antiquity which allude to its existence. It is hoped that a very brief record of these may prove interesting to the profession at home.

Leprosy has been common in China from a very early date, and there are frequent allusions to it in early writers. These are often vague enough, and distinguished by poetic names. The earliest allusions to syphilis are also couched in vague language, and have been very often interpreted as belonging to leprosy. A careful examination of the scope of the passages shows that syphilis and not leprosy is the disease in question.

By the writers of the Tang dynasty, A.D. 618-906, we find the chancre denominated by a specific name, whose meaning is sufficiently distinctive.

What is believed to be the earliest notice of the disease is in the Shi King, "Book of Odes," consisting of a collection of ballads, used by the people of the various petty states of China in ancient times, selected and arranged by Confucius, to the number of 311. One of these ballads is named "Fei ee," the name of a plant whose qualities form the subject of the song. The exact meaning of this ode is differently rendered by ancient commentators, but they all agree that the leading idea is a connexion of this plant with a disease that renders sexual intercourse injurious. Han Ying of Yen, who lived in the earlier part of the Han dynasty, B.C. 200, and who collected a version of the odes, writes a commentary on this one. He says "the above poem, the 'Ee is gathered,' is a lady's lament because her husband has the 'hateful malady.'" Another commentator, Süeh Chün, also of the Han dynasty, writes as follows:—"The poetess complains that her husband has the 'hateful disease,' and that the conjugal duties are not fulfilled. The neglect is not to be endured, and she gives vent to her anger in the poem."

This is the most ancient notice of the disease. There is no specific literary name for it in the time of the Han. It is written of as the "hateful disease." We know that this means venereal disease, because of the phrase that Süeh Chtin uses in expressing the debarring results of it. This phrase is composed of four words that literally translated mean, "There is no entrance to the path of man," and their use in this sense has been stereotyped from ancient times. The uses of the plant, *fei ee*, also confirm this. In the great standard compilation of Chinese Materia Medica, compiled three hundred years ago, *fei ee* is stated to be the ancient name of *chê tsien*, the uses of which are said to be antisymphilitic and diuretic. This plant has been very long in use in China in venereal cases.

The exact meaning of the Chinese written character as transmitted in ancient records is sometimes difficult to ascertain. There are certain characters applied to severe types of disease which were applied not so much to indicate the specific nature of the malady as the structure involved. The character "lee," translated by Dr Morrison, in his Chinese Dictionary, as "a virulent sore, a pestilence, noxious effluvia," is used by the old writers as one of the names of leprosy, and is also undoubtedly applied to syphilitic affections. Chang Kwoh Tseh, a writer of the earlier Han dynasty (2000 years ago), says "the 'lee' disease, when severe, attacks (or penetrates to) the bladder," indicating evidently the genital organs as the parts affected. Other characteristics of the 'lee' disease that writers of the same date mention are destruction of the nose, and falling off of the hair.

"Fung" is another term applied by writers of the same early date to a disease with the characteristic symptoms of constitutional syphilis, although it is also commonly used for leprosy. Dr Morrison gives as its meanings "a disease of the head; a kind of leprosy; applied to thirty-six forms of disease; it includes insanity, and certain forms of the venereal disease." The *hill and sea classic*, whose antiquity is as far back as Chinese authentic history, says, "On the *Ku tung* hill there grows the *yung tsao* plant. Its leaves resemble willow-leaves. Its root is like an egg. Eating it cures the *fung* disease." The *yung tsao* is the modern *tu fu lin*,¹ which has had long a repute for constitutional syphilis. It is stated in the compilation on materia medica above referred to, that it cures chancres otherwise incurable. There is no record of its ever having been used in the treatment of leprosy.

Soo Tung-po, in a book entitled, "Collection of Desultory Notes, A.D. 1000," relates that in the tenth month of the sixth year of the Emperor Yuan-Fung, he had a friend who was seized with the *fung* disease. He says, "Life and death fought together. The pain was worse than knives, saws, or the cangue. What guilt brought this on him? It was from too great a liking for wine and

¹ *Smilax pseudo-china* (Linn, Thb.)

lust." There already existed a specific name for the disease in the time of the Sung dynasty, but from a sentiment of modesty, the authors call it by the general term of the *fung sickness*.

In the first Tang dynasty, a medical writer, named Sun Sz Miao,¹ wrote a book entitled, "A Thousand Prescriptions, Golden and Precious." In the same period, an author, named Wang Tao, wrote "An Authoritative Collection of Prescriptions." Both these authors speak of the chancre as "the jealous semen ulcer." The Chinese name thus rendered is composed of three characters, whose sound is rendered *tu, ching, chwang*; *tu* jealous, *ching* semen, and *chwang* ulcer. This name was given to it in accordance with the theory of its production at that time believed, namely, that when a woman had connexion with two men, the semen from the one was jealous of that from the other succeeding in producing impregnation, and thus rendering void its own chance of producing this result.

In the dynasty of Sung, Tow Han K'ing, the court physician, during the eleventh century of our era, published a work in thirteen books, entitled, "A Complete Encyclopædia of Cutaneous Diseases." (A new edition of this work was published in 1717.) He speaks of the chancre as the "mould ulcer." We find in the name he gives it the origin of the modern term for a bubo. The character he uses sounds *mei*, and means *mould*. The modern name for chancre is the *yang mei* ulcer. The *mei* here used is the same in sound as that translated *mould*, but is written differently, and is represented by a character which means a *prune*. The word *mei*, being in common use in the spoken language, became confounded in its meaning with another word of the same sound, and in course of time was superseded in written language by another character which, though it has the same sound, presents to the eye another idea. This transposition of character, which is common in the Chinese language, and the want of sufficient erudition caused the medical writers of the Ming dynasty, A.D. 1368-1643, to confound secondary symptoms with common ulcers, and explains their being ignorant of the disease as described by the old authors above quoted. But we find that tradition had transmitted to them the use of the same remedies. Sun Sz Miao, in his "Thousand Prescriptions, Golden and Precious," quoted above, gives, as a curative application to the "jealous semen ulcer," broiled honey, mixed with *kan tsao* (*glycyrrhiza glabra*) powder. We find the writers of the Ming dynasty recommending the same treatment for chancre.

The vagueness of the ancient terms may have helped to mislead them. The earliest writers we have seen above include syphilis under the term *fung*. After the "jealous semen ulcer" had found its way into type, it was still more respectful to general taste to use the vaguer term. The name for leprosy is *ma fung*, and hence a confusion of the meanings of the three terms, "jealous semen ulcer," *fung*, and *ma fung*.

¹ Sun Sz Miao died A.D. 682, upwards of 100 years old, so that he was born in the Suy dynasty, which preceded the Tang.

There is a tradition mentioned by a writer 400 years ago (utterly untrustworthy), that syphilis came from beyond the Ling Piao hill, in Canton province.

To give a brief summary of the above statements, it is to be noted that,—

1. In the book of Odes is a song, the theme of which is understood by the most ancient Chinese commentators to hinge on a disease of the sexual organs, which was common enough to be connected with the idea of a specific remedy. The odes were collected by Confucius, who was born B.C. 551.

2. The commentators of the earlier Han dynasty, in commenting on this ode, give this disease a recognised name, "the hateful disease," state that it debars from sexual intercourse, and that the remedy for it is a plant which, from the earliest records to the present day, has been used for the treatment of syphilis. These commentators lived B.C. 200.

3. From the reluctance of Chinese authors to use in their writings the vulgar names of their time for venereal disease, and from the same feeling prompting to the use of general and collective terms for disease for its designation, the imagination of the student being supposed to supply the want of more defined information, a general ignorance as to the very early existence of syphilis has been generated among Chinamen, even of moderate erudition. Facts related by writers who lived about the beginning of the Christian era, about cases to which these general terms for disease were applied, point out these cases as venereal.

4. In the seventh century, the venereal chancre is described under a specific name, which places its nature beyond doubt. From that time onwards, various allusions to it are found in literature. In modern times, these ancient notices had been overlooked, partly from the change of nomenclature, and partly from the works in which the notices occurred not being likely to come before practitioners as objects of study.

