

**Antiquarian notices of syphilis in Scotland in the 15th & 16th centuries / by J.Y. Simpson.**

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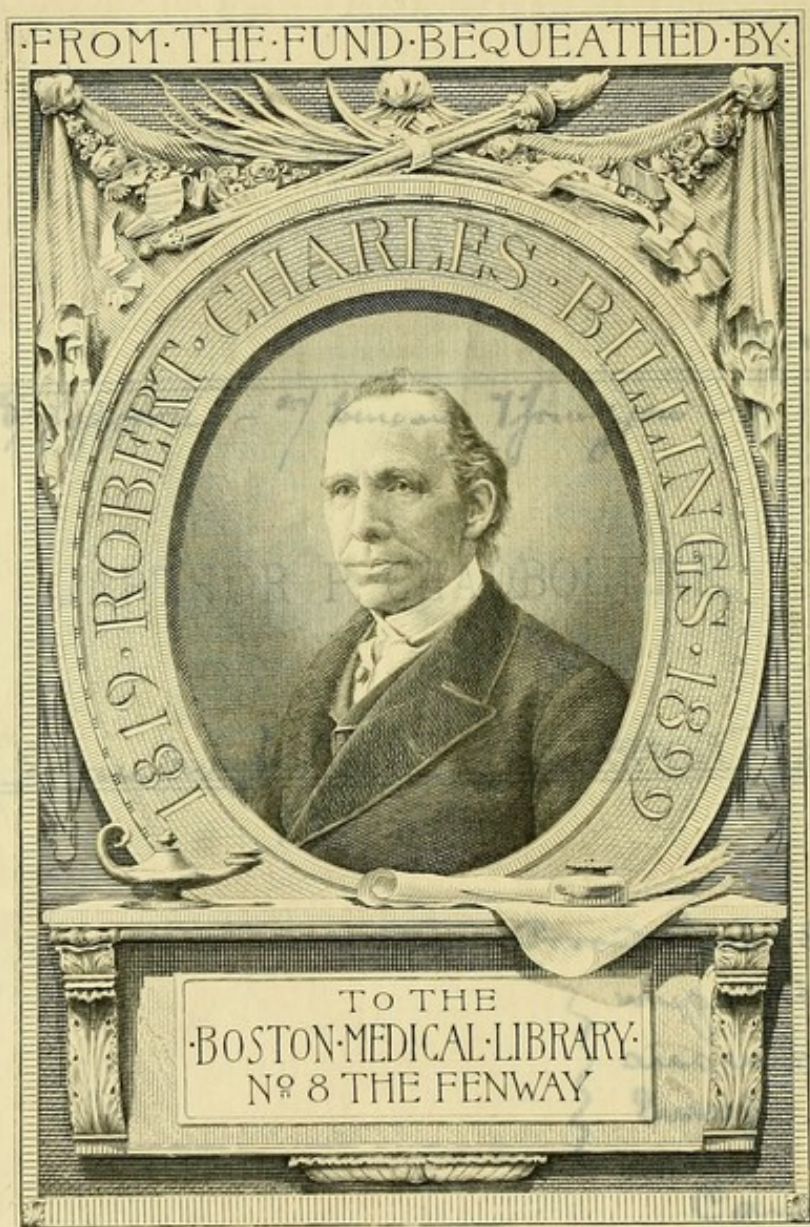


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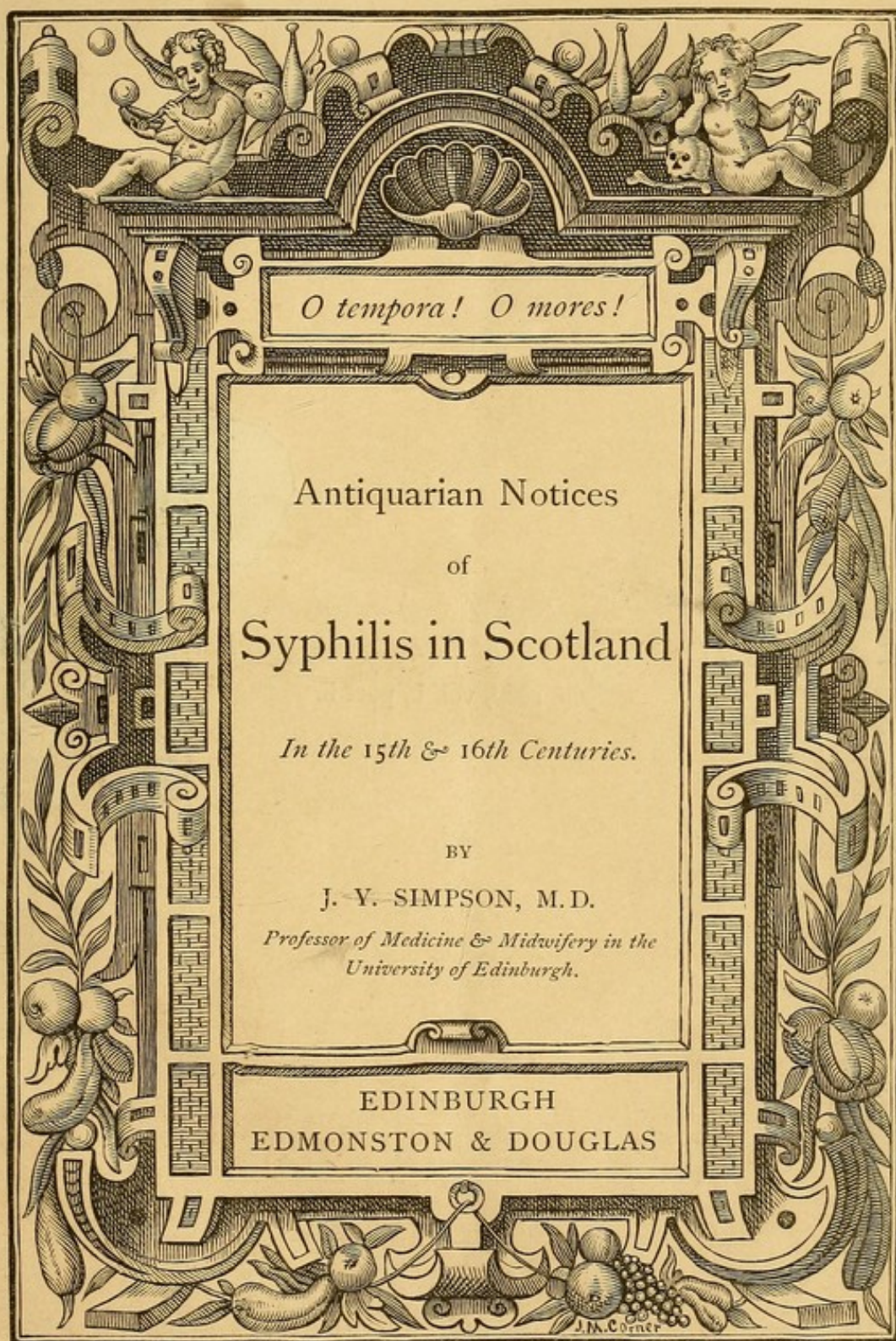


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London (1834) p 117



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*O tempora! O mores!*

Antiquarian Notices  
of  
Syphilis in Scotland

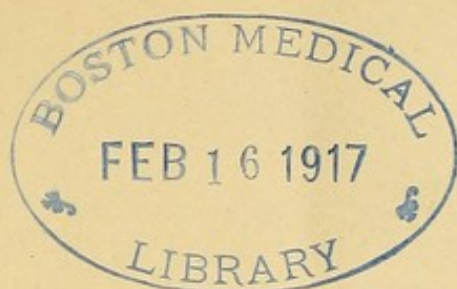
*In the 15th & 16th Centuries.*

BY

J. Y. SIMPSON, M.D.

*Professor of Medicine & Midwifery in the  
University of Edinburgh.*

EDINBURGH  
EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS



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*Extracted from the Transactions of the Epidemiological Society of London  
for 1862, vol. i., part ii.*

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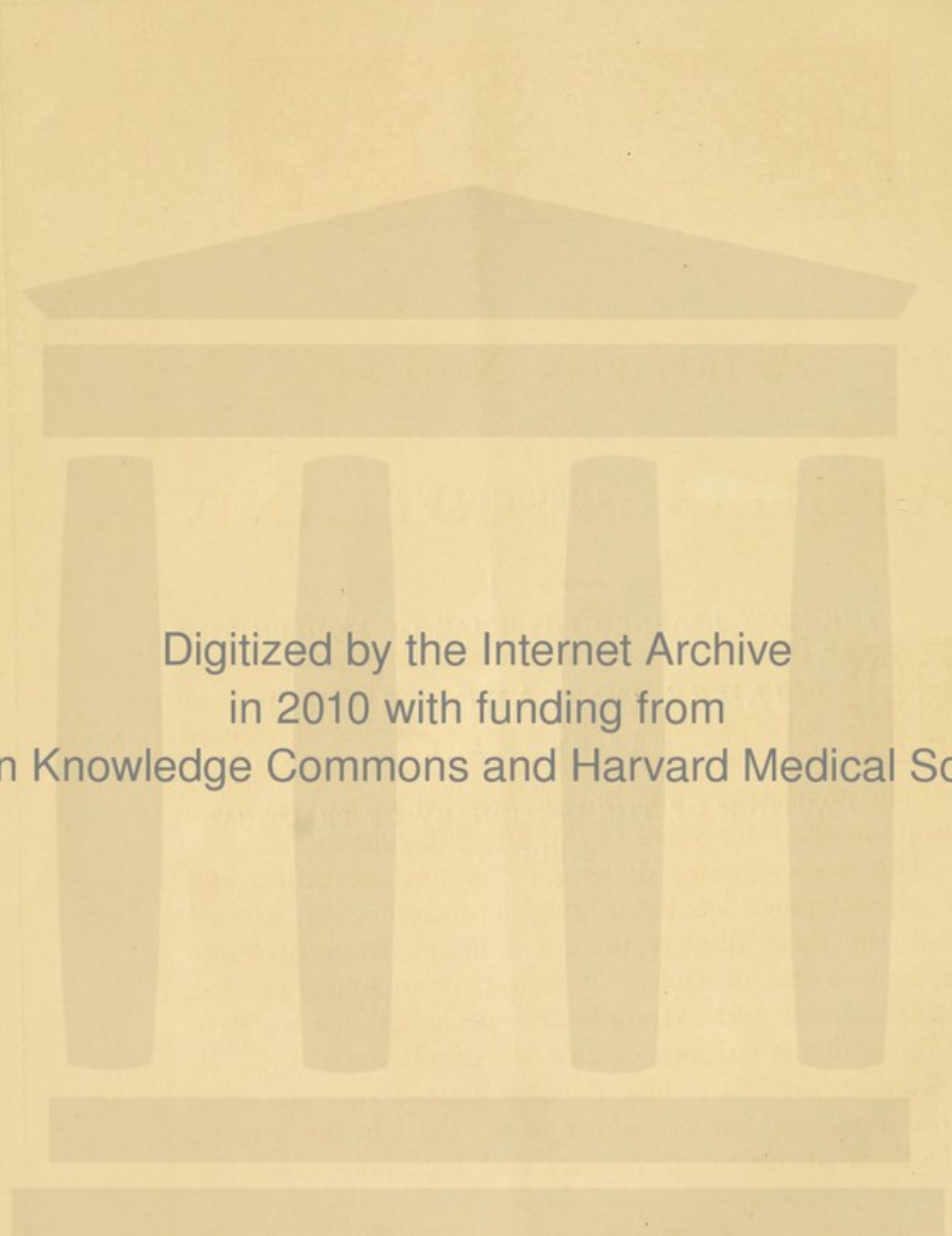
TO

THE MOST LEARNED PHYSICIAN OF MODERN TIMES,

JAMES COPLAND, ESQ., M.D.

F.R.S., F.R.C.P., &c., &c., &c.

AUTHOR OF THE DICTIONARY OF PRACTICAL  
MEDICINE.



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# ANTIQUARIAN NOTICES OF SYPHILIS IN SCOTLAND.



**M**EDICAL men are, for the most part, agreed upon two points in relation to the history of syphilis; viz., that it is a species of disease which was unknown to the Greek, Roman, and Arabian physicians; and that it first began to prevail in Europe in the later years of the fifteenth century.

The non-existence of syphilis in ancient times, and the circumstance of its original appearance in Europe about the date alluded to, are opinions strongly borne out by two sets of facts. For, first, no definite account of this marked and extraordinary species of disease is to be found in the writings of any one of the ancient Greek or Roman physicians, historians, or poets; and, secondly, of the numerous authors whose works exist in the learned collections of Luisinus,<sup>1</sup> Astruc,<sup>2</sup> and Girtanner,<sup>3</sup> and who

PART I.  
DATA.

A new  
disease.

<sup>1</sup> Aphrodisiacus, sive, Collectio Auctorum de Lue Venerea. Venet., 1566, 67; and Lugd. Batav., 1728.

<sup>2</sup> De Morbis Venereis. Paris, 1740.

<sup>3</sup> Abhandlung über die Venerischen Krankheiten. Göttingen, 1788.

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## DATA.

Whence it  
came.

saw and described the malady in the later years of the fifteenth or commencement of the sixteenth century, almost all comment upon it as (to use their own general expressions) *morbus novus*, *morbus ignotus*, *ægritudo inaudita*, *ægritudo nova*, *malum novum*, *novus et nostro orbe incognitus morbus*, etc. etc.<sup>1</sup>

It would not, however, affect our present object were we to consider the disease, as it appeared about the period in question, not to have been a new malady previously totally unknown, but merely, as some have thought, an aggravated form of a disease formerly existing in so mild a form as not to have attracted general observation.

Nor need I stop here to inquire into the much more difficult questions of the probable source of syphilis, and the exact date at which syphilis first burst forth in Europe. In relation to the object which I have at present in view, it matters not whether the malady sprung up spontaneously and endemically in Spain, Italy, or France, at the era in question; or was imported from Africa, as Grüner,<sup>2</sup> Infessura,<sup>3</sup> and others allege; or from Hispaniola, as Astruc,<sup>4</sup> Girtanner,<sup>5</sup> Weatherhead,<sup>6</sup> and various other authorities, have stoutly and not unsuccessfully maintained. Nor is it necessary for me to discuss whether it first shewed itself in 1493, as Sanchez<sup>7</sup> and Hensler<sup>8</sup> consider that they have proved; or in 1492, as Fulgosi<sup>9</sup> asserts;

<sup>1</sup> See also a collection by Grüner of the opinions of many authors, who wrote in the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, as to the disease being new and unknown,—in his “*Morborum Antiquitates*,” p. 69, *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Aphrodisiacus, sive de Lue Venerea*. Jena, 1789.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Grüner's *Aphrodisiacus*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *De Morbis Venereis*, 1740.

<sup>5</sup> *Ueber die Venerischen Krankheiten*, 1788.

<sup>6</sup> *The History, etc., of the Venereal Disease*. London, 1841.

<sup>7</sup> *Sur l'Origine de la Maladie Venerienne*. Paris, 1752.

<sup>8</sup> *Geschichte der Lustseuche*. Altona, 1783.

<sup>9</sup> Grüner's *Aphrodisiacus*, p. 115.

or as early even as the month of October 1483, as Peter Pincto<sup>r</sup>,<sup>1</sup> in 1500, demonstrated astrologically, to his own complete satisfaction at least, that it ought to have done, inasmuch as that was—as he sagaciously convinced himself—the precise and exact date of the conjunction of Venus with Jupiter, Mars, and Mercury; and the conjunction of these or other stars in the heavens above, was—so he and many of the astrological physicians of his day believed—the undoubted origin of this new scourge on the earth below.

In such a notice as the present, we may most safely, I believe, and that too without entertaining the question of the exact source or geographical origin of syphilis, start from the general proposition that the disease was in 1494 and 1495 first distinctly recognised in Italy, during the invasion of that country by the victorious army of Charles VIII. of France. The malady is usually allowed to have first broken out in a very marked degree at Naples, about the time that Charles took possession of that city, in the spring of 1495; or nearly two years after Columbus' return from his first voyage to Hispaniola. Charles set out again for France in May 1495; and the malady seems to have been both diffused by his infected troops along the line of their northward march, and afterwards carried to their respective homes by his own French soldiers, as well as by his various Swiss, German, and Flemish auxiliaries.

But it is as little my intention at present to trace the progress as to ascertain the first origin of syphilis in Europe. The chief object of the present communication is to adduce some data which shew that the new malady was not long in reaching the shores of Scotland, and in

PART I.  
DATA.

When re-  
cognised.

Reaches  
Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> Grüner's *Aphrodisiacus*, p. 86.

## PART I.

## DATA.

spreading to different towns in that kingdom. In proof of this, I have principally to appeal to one or two old edicts and ordinances relative to the disease, and to other collateral but slighter evidence bearing upon the subject. The edicts or statutes in question were issued by the Town Council of Aberdeen, in relation to the existence of the malady in Aberdeen; and by the Privy Council of Scotland, in relation to the prevalence of the disease in Edinburgh. The two first edicts in both places were issued in 1497. That of Aberdeen is the earliest. It is dated the 21st of April 1497. Its words, as they stand in the old and carefully preserved Council Records of that city,<sup>1</sup> are the following:—

Aberdeen  
edicts.

“The said day, it was statut and ordanit be the Alderman and Consale for the eschevin *of the infirmitey cumm out of Franche and strang partis*, that all licht weman be chargit and ordanit to decist fra thar vices and syne of venerie, and all thair buthis and houssis skalit, and thai to pas and wirk for thar sustentacioun vndir the payne of ane key of het yrne one thair chekis, and bany-sene of the toune.” (Vol. i. p. 425.)

A few years later—or on the 8th October 1507—a long list of statutes was passed by the “Prouest, bailyes and counsale” of Aberdeen, for the “common proffitt, weil, and gud reull of the burgh.” Two of these statutes refer again to the introduction and spread of syphilis. By the first of these statutes it was enacted “That diligent inquisitioun be takin of ale infect personis with this strange *seiknes of Nappillis*, for the sauetie of the town; and the

<sup>1</sup> See “Extracts from the Council Register of the Burgh of Aberdeen,” edited by my friend Mr. John Stuart, and published by the Spalding Club.

personis beand infectit therwith be chargit to keip thaim in their howssis and vther places fra the haill folkis." (Vol. i. p. 437.)

Two or three enactments follow in the "statut buk" on minor subjects, one ordering the hygienic measure "that thar salbe certane personis to cleng the toun and dicht the causaies;" and then succeeds another sanitary ordinance relative to the avoidance of syphilis; viz., "That nayne infeccht folkis with the *seiknes of Napillis* be haldin at the common fleschouss, or with the fleschouris, baxteris, brousteris, ladimaris, for sauete of the toun, and the personis infectit sale keip thame quyat in thar houssis, zhardis, or vther comat placis, quhill thai be haill for the infectioun of their nichtbouris." (P. 437.)

The Edinburgh edict regarding syphilis was six months later in date than the first of those issued by the magistrates of Aberdeen, and is more lengthy in its details and provisions. It was drawn up, as I have already said, by the King's Privy Council, and apparently sent to the magistrates for due execution. It is preserved in the first volume of the Town Records of Edinburgh, fol. 33, 34, and is entitled in the rubric "Ane Grangore Act;"—Grandgore being an early term often applied to syphilis in Scotland. This edict has been repeatedly printed, but usually in a very incorrect form. The exact date and words of it are as follows:—

"xxii Septembris anno i<sup>ai</sup> iii<sup>c</sup> lxxxxvii zeiris. It is our Souerane Lordis will and the command of the Lordis of his Counsale send to the Provest and baillies within this burch, that this proclamatioun followand be put till executioun for the eschewing of the greit apperand danger of the infectioun of his liegis fra this contagiis seiknes callit the Grandgor, and the greit vther skayth

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DATA.

Edinburgh  
edict.

## PART I.

## DATA.

that may occure to his legeis and inhabitouris within this burch—that is to say—We charge straitlie and commandis be the authoritie abone written, that all maner of personis being within the fredome of this burch quhilkis ar infectit or hes bene infectit vncurit with this said contagious plage callit the Grandgor, devoyd red and pas furth of this toun and compeir vpoun the sandis of Leith at x houris befor none, and thair sall thai haue and fynd botis reddie in the havin ordanit to thame be the officiaris of this burch reddely furneist with victuallis to haue thame to the Inche, and thair to remane quhill God prouyde for thair health, and that all vther personis the quhilkis takis vpoune thame to hale the said contagious infirmitie and takis<sup>1</sup> the cure thairof, that they devoyd and pas with thame, sua that nane of thir personis quhilkis takis sic cure vpoune thame vse the samyn cure within this burch in presens nor peirt ony maner of way—and quha sa beis fundin infectit and nocht passand to the Inche as said is be Monounday at the sone ganging to, and in lykwayis the saidis personis that takis the said cure of sanitie vpoun thame gif thai will vse the samyn thai and ilk of thame sal be brynt on the cheik with the marking irne that thai may be kennit in tyme to cum—and thairefter gif ony thame remanis that thai sall be banisht but fauouris.”

Spreads in  
Scotland.

It is almost unnecessary to add that the measures adopted by the public authorities in Aberdeen and Edinburgh were utterly inadequate to arrest the further dissemination of syphilis after it was inoculated upon the country. It seems indeed to have been spread to the more populous towns of Scotland within a year or two after its

<sup>1</sup> By an evident clerical error this word is mis-spelled “vakis” in the copy of the edict contained in the Town Council records.

first introduction into the kingdom. There are some references in official documents of the period which incidentally but amply prove this rapidity in its diffusion.

The notices to which I here specially refer exist in the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland. The Register House, Edinburgh, contains a curious and valuable series of these Accounts, detailing the daily expenses of the kings of Scotland from the reign of James III. down to the ascension of the English throne by James VI. At the time of the first appearance of syphilis in our northern realm, the throne of Scotland was occupied by James IV., a prince who was a great patron of the arts and sciences of his time. He was a practitioner in them also, as well as a patron of them. At different times we find him busily experimenting in chemistry, in physiology, and in medicine. His daily expense-books contain many entries of purchases for instruments and materials to make the unmakeable "quinta essentia," or philosopher's stone; and he had laboratories for these investigations both at Edinburgh and Stirling. His alchemical assistant—John the Leech—whom he had imported from the Continent and made Abbot of Tunland, experimented for the king in physiology as well as in chemistry. John, Daedalus-like, undertook to prove the improvability of human progression by flying to France with wings. "To that effect he causet (states Bishop Lesley<sup>1</sup>) mak ane pair of wingis of fedderis, quhilkis beand fessinit apoun him, he flew off the castell wall of Striveling, but shortly he fell to the ground and brak his thee bane." But the doctrine of sympathies was in vogue in these days, and by that doctrine the afflicted Abbot easily, of course, and clearly explained all. For the cause of his fall, or "the wyt thairof he asseryvit to that

PART I.  
DATA.

King  
James IV.

<sup>1</sup> History of Scotland, by John Lesley, Bishop of Ross, p. 76.

## PART I.

## DATA.

James IV.'s  
surgery.

thair was sum hen fedderis in the wingis, quhilk yarnit and covet the mydding and not the skyis." Like the Egyptian king mentioned by Herodotus, King James made also a physiological or rather philological experiment to ascertain the primeval language of mankind; and for this purpose His Majesty sent a deaf and dumb woman to live with and bring up two young children upon the island of Inchkeith, in the Firth of Forth—the same island to which we have found the first victims of syphilis previously banished, and itself the old "Urbs Guidi" of the venerable Bede. When the two children, the companions of the "dumb voman cam to the aige of perfyte speach, some sayes" (to quote the account of Lindsay of Pitscottie) "they spak guid Hebrew;"<sup>1</sup> but the cautious old Scottish chronicler sagely doubts the truth of this tradition. King James personally practised the art of leechcraft, as well as experimented in alchemy and physiology. He was, says Pitscottie, "weill learned in the airt of medicine, and was ane singular guid chirurgiane; and thair was none of that professsioun if they had any dangerous cure in hand, bot would have craved his adwyse" (p. 249). So states the ancient Scottish historian. The High Treasurer's Account shews that the king had in one important respect a right royal way of gaining patients,—a way by the adoption of which he probably might have secured a considerable consultation and private practice even in these modern days of high-pressure rivalry, and keen competition. For he paid his patients, instead of being paid by them. Thus, for example, in his daily expense-book, under the date of April 14th and 15th, 1491, are the two following entries:

"Item to Domenico to gif the king leve to lat him blud,

<sup>1</sup> The Chronicles of Scotland, by Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, vol. i. p. 249.

xviii shillings." "Item til a man yat come to Lythgow to lat the king blud and did it nocht, xviii shillings."

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Some time afterwards he buys from a travelling pedlar "thre compases, ane hammer, and a turcase to tak out teeth;" and, forthwith, we find the Scottish king becoming—like the more modern Peter the Great of Russia—not a dentist to royalty, but himself a royal dentist, as the two following entries may suffice to shew (the first of them—provided there be any truth whatever in dental orthography—surely indicating a tooth of rather a tough and tusk-like character) :—

"Item, to ane fallow, because the king pullit furth his twt, xviii shillings."

His dentistry.

"Item, to Kynnard, ye barbour, for tua teith drawin furth of his hed be the king, xviii shillings."

He seems to have tried his royal hand also at ocular surgery. But the terms of the following entry would seem rather ominously to hint that he was not a very successful operator for cataract :

"Item, giffin to ye blind wif yat hed her eyne schorne, xiii shillings."

A Prince imbued with such medical and surgical propensities would naturally feel deeply interested in the first appearance within his realm of such a malady as syphilis ; and in his Treasurer's accounts there are several entries indicating that the king had bestowed monies upon various persons affected with this disease. Perhaps these monies were given less in the way of alms, than in the way of a reward for the king's medication of the patients ; less for the behoof of royal charity than of royal chirurgery. The entries I advert to all occur during the currency of

He notices syphilis.

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## DATA.

the years 1497 and 1498.<sup>1</sup> They are as follows:—the first sum given away being to a person at Dalry, when the king was on one of his many pilgrimages to the ancient and holy shrine of St. Ninian at Whitehorn, in Wigtonshire.

September 1497.

“Item to ane woman with the grantgore thair [Dalrye, in Ayrshire], be the kingis’ command . . . ijs. vjd.”

2 October 1497.

“Item to thaim that hed the grantgor at Linlithquho . . . vijd.”

21 February 1497-8.

Item that samyn day at the tounne end of Strivelin to the seke folk in the grantgore . . . ijs.”

22 February 1497-8.

“Item the xxij day of Februar giffin to the seke folk in the grantgore at the tounn end of Glasgo . . . ijs.”

April 1498.

“..... seke folk in grangor in Lithgw as the King com in the tounne . . . ijs. viijd.”

Rapidly  
extends.

In the course of the preceding remarks I have had occasion to adduce seven or eight different notices with regard to the appearance of syphilis in various cities and districts of Scotland during the years 1497-8, as at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Linlithgow, etc. A diversity of allusions to the same disease, of a less direct and official character, and somewhat later in date,

<sup>1</sup> Two of these entries were published by Mr. Pitcairn, in the *Criminal Trials of Scotland*, vol. i., p. 117. My friend Mr. Joseph Robertson, Superintendent of Searches in the Literary and Antiquarian Department of the General Register House, most kindly collated for me the other entries, while looking over the Treasurer's accounts for another purpose.

may be traced in various olden Scottish works and writings. The malady is occasionally alluded to, for example, in the reports left us of some of the old criminal and other trials of Scotland. Thus a minute in the Records of the Privy Seal of Scotland records the punishment of a medical man in whose hands a dignitary of the church had died while under treatment for syphilis. The entry is as follows :

January 18th, 1509.—“Respitt made to Thomas Lyn, burges of Edinburgh, for ye slauchtir of umquihile Schir Lancelote Patonsoun, chapellain, quhilk happinit be negligent cure and medicine yat ye said Thomas tuk one him to cure and hele ye said umquihile Schir Lancelote of ye infirmitie of ye Grantgor yat he was infekkit with. To endure for xix yeeris. (Subscripsit per dominum Regem apud Edinburghe.)”<sup>1</sup>

Some, perhaps, of my professional brethren may think that this nineteen years’ banishment from the town was a proper punishment for an unprofessional charlatan undertaking the cure of syphilis in the sixteenth century; and some, possibly, may even hold, that it would not be an improper proceeding in this—the nineteenth century.

The disease is alluded to in some of the old Scotch witch trials of the sixteenth century.

One of the most remarkable of these trials was that of a lady of station and wealth—Euphame Macalzane, daughter of Lord Cliftonhall, a judge of the Court of Session. Among other matters, she was “indyted and accusit” of using, during the birth of her two sons, anæsthetics in the form of charms, and a fairy stone “layit

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DATA.

Privy  
Council  
Records.

Witch trials.

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn’s Criminal Trials, vol. i., p. 110.\*

## PART I.

## DATA.

under the bowster," whereby, in the words of the dittay, "your seiknes was cassin of you unnaturallie, in the birth of your fyrst sone upon ane dog, quhilk ranne away and wes newir sene agane. And in the birth of your last sone, the same prakteis foirsaid wes usit, and your naturall and kindlie payne, unnaturallie cassin of you uponn the wantonne cat in the house, quhilk lyke wyis wes newer sene thair efter." In the fourteenth item of her indictment she is accused of trying to break off a marriage by "certane witchcraft," and by alleging that the intended bridegroom had the "glengore." For these and other analogous crimes this unfortunate lady was "takin to the Castel-Hill of Edinburghe, and thair bund to ane staik, and brunt in assis, quick to the death."<sup>1</sup>

Poetical  
allusions.

There are also various sarcastic allusions to syphilis by the Scottish poets of these early days, amply testifying to the fact of its rapid diffusion both among the followers of the court—who were then the most common objects of poetical satire—and among the community at large.

Dunbar.

William Dunbar, the flower of the old Scottish poets, was, at the period of the first introduction of syphilis in 1497, in the prime of manhood; and in two or three years afterwards, viz., in 1500, he was attached to James IV. and his court by an annual state pension. In a number of verses addressed to his patroness Margaret, the Queen of James IV. and the sister of Henry VIII.—verses which appear to us at the present day, and with our existing standards of taste, as utterly degraded and indecent—Dunbar commemorates the communication of the new disease under the name of the "pockis" and the "Spanyie pockis," to the Queen's men (as he terms them) during the jollities of Fastern's e'en, and the reign of the

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. i. p. 232.

Abbot of Unreason ; and he closes his stanzas with an earnest advice to all youths, to

PART I.  
DATA.

“Be ware with that perrelous play  
That men callis libbing of the Pockis.”<sup>1</sup>

The after effects and consequences of the disease he describes as follows :—

“Sum that war ryatouss as rammis,  
Ar now maid tame lyk ony lammis,  
And settin down lyk scarey crockis,  
And hes forsai kin all sic gammis  
That men call libbing of the Pockis.”

“Sum thocht thame selfis stark lyk gyandis,  
Ar now maid weak lyk willow wandis,  
With schinnis scharp, and small lyk rockis,  
And gottin thair bak in bayth thair handis,  
For ower oft libbing of the Pockis.”

Another and later poet of that age, Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount, alludes to the occurrence of syphilis at the Christmas feasts in an inferior officer of the court, viz., in John Mackrery, the king’s “fule,” or royal jester, who, according to the poet—like many a poor fool since John’s time—did

Lyndsay.

“In his maist triumphand gloir,  
For his reward get the Grandgoir.”<sup>2</sup>

The same author includes this disease elsewhere (p. 147) among the maladies

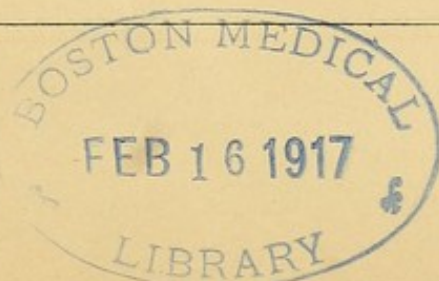
“Quhilk humane nature dois abhor,  
As in the Gut, Gravel, and Gor.”

A metrical translation of Hector Boece’s *History of Scotland* was made in the earlier half of the sixteenth

Stewart.

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Laing’s admirable edition of Dunbar’s Poems, vol. i. p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Lyndsay’s Warkis (1592), p. 262.



## PART I.

## DATA.

century, apparently by command of James V. It has been published for the first time, within the last two years, under the authority and direction of the Master of the Rolls. The author of this rhyming "Buik of the Chronicles of Scotland," William Stewart, when translating Boece's account of the fatal disease produced in the old mythical Scotch king, Ferquhard, by the bite of a wolf, tells us (vol. ii. p. 313) that the resulting gangrenous wound defied the skill of the leiches, and the fætor of it, and its discharges were

"Moir horribill als that time for till abhor,  
No canker, fester, gut, or yit Grandgor."

In the celebrated old poem of the *General Satire of Scotland*, attributed by most authorities to Dunbar, and which, from some circumstances adverted to in the course of it, is supposed by Sibbald and Chalmers to have been written in 1504 (seven years after the first introduction of syphilis), the author deploras the extent to which the disease had by that time already spread in Scotland, observing—

"Sic losing sarkis, so mony Glengoir markis,  
Within this land was nevir hard nor sene."<sup>1</sup>

## Names.

In several of the notices which I have just quoted, the new disease, syphilis, is alluded to under the names of "Gor," "Gore," "Grandgore," etc. Few maladies have been loaded with a more varied and more extensive nomenclature. The terms in question, "Gore" and "Grandgore," are of French origin, and are old names corresponding to pox and great pox—"verole" and "grand verole." In the earlier periods of the history of syphilis they were terms commonly employed by the French themselves to

<sup>1</sup> See Dunbar's Poems, vol. ii. p. 24.

designate the affection. To quote one confirmatory sentence from Astruc (p. 1166), the disease "Gore et Grandgore a Gallis initio vocata erat." John le Maire, in his celebrated poem on syphilis, published in 1520, gives this as one of the designations of the disease used at that time by the commonalty :—

"La nommoit Gorre ou la verole grosse,  
Qui n'espargnoit ne couronne ne crosse."<sup>1</sup>

Old Rabelais, whose *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* are perfect repositories of the low and licentious French words of the era at which syphilis first appeared, uses the term Grandgore as a synonyme for syphilis; and in his wild allegorical style he makes the poor and widowed poet, Rammagrobis, take this grandgore to bed for his second wife. The term Grandgore seems to have been applied to the disease in Scotland for a long time after its introduction. For example, the author of the "Historie of the Kennedys" quotes a letter, written in the latter part of the sixteenth century by the Laird of Colzean to the Laird of Bargany, whose "neise was laich," maliciously suggesting to him that yet he might lose "sum uther joynt of the Glengoir, as ye did the brig of your neise."<sup>2</sup> Still later, or in 1600, the Kirk Session of Glasgow requested the magistrates "to consult the chirurgeons how the infectious distemper of Glengore could be removed from the city."<sup>3</sup>

In Scotland, as elsewhere, the disease also passed under other designations. When syphilis first broke out it was frequently, as is well known, designated from the

PART I.  
DATA.

Rabelais.

Other  
names.

<sup>1</sup> Astruc, p. 634.

<sup>2</sup> Historical, &c., Account of the Principal Families of the name of Kennedy, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cleland, in 1st Part of the Transactions of the Glasgow and Clydesdale Statistical Society, p. 13.

## PART I.

## DATA.

country or people from whom it was supposed to have been transmitted. Thus, the Italians and Germans at first generally spoke of it as the French disease; while the French talked of it as the disease of Naples; and the Dutch, Flemings, Portuguese, and Moors, applied to it the name of the Spanish pocks or Castilian malady. Dunbar, in the Scottish poem already alluded to as addressed to Queen Margaret, speaks of it, in most of the stanzas, under the simple title of "pockis," but in one he gives it, as I have already hinted, the distinctive and significant appellation of the Spanish pocks:—

"I saw cow-clinkis me besyd;  
The young men to thair howssis gyd,  
Had better liggit in the stockis;  
Sum fra the bordell wald nocht byd,  
Quhill that thai gatt the Spanyie Pockis."

Sickness of  
Naples.

In two of the Aberdeen Town Council entries we have already seen the malady spoken of as "the sickness of Naples." This name was at first often applied to the malady. The disease was, however, much more generally known in Scotland and in the other kingdoms of Europe under the name of the French pox. The first Aberdeen edict speaks of it in 1497 as the "infirmity come out of France." In the manuscript Session Records of the parish of Ormiston for 1662, there is an entry regarding the malady under the appellation of the French pox, one of the minutes being—

French pox.

"The minister, Mr. Sinclair, hath given out to James Ogilvy, apothecary-chirurgion, for curing William Whitly, his wife and daughter, of the French pockis, 35lbs Scots."

Grunbeck and Brandt, who wrote on syphilis in 1496, when speaking of the diffusion of the disease at that early date over Europe, both allude in very vague and general terms to its having invaded France, Germany, etc., and

reached as far as Britain.<sup>1</sup> But the earliest specific notice of syphilis in England which I remember to have met with is in 1502; and in this notice the malady is spoken of under the same name that I have been adverting to, of "French pox." The notice in question is contained in the interesting Privy Purse Expense Book of Elizabeth of York, the queen of Henry VII., edited by Sir Harris Nicolas. This charitable lady seems from these records to have had several protégés under her immediate care and keeping. Among these protégés is entered John Pertriche, one "of the sonnes of mad Beale." There are various articles of expenditure noted in the Queen's private expense book as lavished upon this John Pertriche during the currency of 1503; as monies for his "dyetts," for buying "shirtes," "shoyn," and "hosyn," "cloth for a gown," and "fustyan for a cote" to him. There are twenty pence expended "for his lernyng;" and the last two items in the account record attempts of two different and rather opposite kinds to amend the mental and moral deficiencies of this hopeful youth. These two ultimate items are—

"For a prymer and saulter (book to John), 20 pence."

"And payed to a Surgeon whiche heled him of the Frenche pox, 20 shillings."

To finish this very rough and meagre sketch, let me here add that by the end of the sixteenth century—and perhaps long before that date—the malady was abundant enough in England. Writing in 1596, or in the time of Queen Elizabeth, William Clowes, "one of her Majesties

PART I.

DATA.

Earliest  
English  
notice.

In 1596.

<sup>1</sup> See Grunbeck, in *Tractatus de Pestilentia Scorra*, c. 8; and Brant, in his poetical *Eulogium De Scorra Pestilentiali*—

"Nec satis extremo tutantur in orbe Britanni."

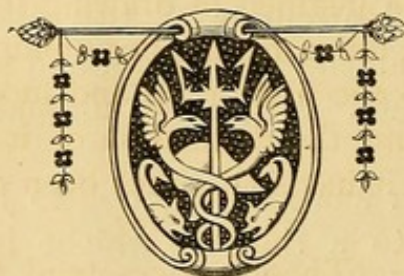
## PART I.

## DATA.

chirurgians," observes to his "friendly reader," "If I be not deceived in mine opinion, I suppose the disease itself was never more rife in Naples, Italie, France, or Spain, than it is in this day in the Realme of England."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Brieffe and Necessary Treatise touching the Cure of the Disease now usually called Lues Venerea.





## PART II.

THE preceding notices, however brief and imperfect, relative to the first introduction and dissemination of syphilis in Scotland, are not simply matters calculated to gratify mere antiquarian curiosity. They appear to me to be capable of a much higher application, for they offer so many elements tending to illustrate the general history of the first appearance of syphilis in Europe. Besides, we may, I believe, be justified in drawing from the data they afford, several not uninteresting nor unimportant corollaries, both in regard to the first origin and mode of propagation of the disease, and the distinction of it from other affections with which it has sometimes been confounded.

*1st Corollary.* These notices tend to corroborate the pathological opinion, that syphilis was a species of disease new to Europe when it first excited the attention of physicians and historians in the last years of the fifteenth century.

Like the numerous list of contemporary authors and physicians quoted by Astruc, Grüner, and Weatherhead, the Aberdeen edict speaks of syphilis in the last years of the fifteenth century as a disease hitherto unknown, "the infirmity come out of France and foreign parts." The Edinburgh edict mentions it as "*a contagious disease callit the grandgore.*" If it had been previously known,

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Syphilis  
new to  
Scotland.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.

the definite, and not the indefinite, article would have, in all probability, been employed. And if such a disease had previously existed on the continent of Europe, there is every reason to believe that it would have also existed and been known in Britain. Besides, this reasoning certainly admits of being inverted and changed, in so far that we may probably lay it down with equal justice, that if the disease was new, as it would appear to have been, in Scotland at that time, it was in all probability new also to the other kingdoms of Europe.

Distinct  
from

I. Gonorrhea.

*2d Corollary.*—But if syphilis was thus new in Britain in the end of the fifteenth century, this shews that it is a species of disease distinct and different alike,—1st from gonorrhea, and 2d from Greek leprosy, with both of which maladies it has, as is now well known, been occasionally confounded; for both these maladies existed, and were abundantly recognised, in this, as in other countries, long before the era of the introduction of syphilis. Gonorrhea was early distinguished by English authors under the name of “burning” or “brenning” (*ardor urinæ, arsura, etc.*) Thus, Andrew Borde, in his *Breviary of Health*, 1546, speaks of it as the “burning of an harlotte.” “Burning of harlottes” is also mentioned in Bulleyn’s *Bulwark of Defence*, 1562. But it is under this same name that reference is made to the same disease in one of the ordinances enacted about 1430, for the better regulation of the eighteen brothels that stood for centuries on the Bankside in Southwark, under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester. At the above date it was decreed that “no stewholder keep noo woman wythin his hous that hath any sickness of brenning.”<sup>1</sup> This statute was

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Beckett’s papers in the Philosophical Transactions for 1718.

enacted half a century before the introduction of syphilis in England; and nearly a century previously, gonorrhea had been accurately described, among others, by John Arden, surgeon to Richard II., who, writing about 1380, gave a correct summary of the symptoms, pathology, and treatment of this malady. In an old English medical poem, evidently written not later than the last part of the fourteenth century, and published lately by Mr. Stephens of Copenhagen, there is a receipt for "all maner brenninge" (line 294); and then follows a series of cures (line 510, &c.)

"if ye verge be brente  
As man of woman may so be schente,  
Thorow cas yt womā may be his bote  
Off qwom his sekenesse be gan ye rote."<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt, further, that gonorrhea was well known to the Greek, Roman, and Arabic authors, and is described unmistakeably in their writings.

I might also, if it were here necessary, adduce abundant evidence to shew that the two diseases, Greek leprosy and syphilis, though sometimes confounded together, were always in general regarded as two entirely different affections; and that, as such, the hospitals severally appointed for the reception of those unfortunates labouring under the diseases in question were kept distinct and separate. Thus, in 1527, the Carmelite monk, Paul Elia, proposed to the burgomaster of Copenhagen a plan for an hospital outside the town for "syphilis, cancer, and other great sores," similar to the Leper Hospital already existing;<sup>2</sup> for syphilis had, at an early period of its existence, spread itself into Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia*, vol. xxx., p. 358 and 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Holdtfeldt's Chronik*, p. 6. Astruc (p. 116) points to the same fact in regard to Paris, where two leper hospitals existed when syphilis began; but the syphilitic patients were not sent to them, but to other houses specially hired for the purpose.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.Leper  
Hospitals.

When syphilis broke out in Edinburgh, in 1497, those affected by it were not sent to the leper hospital then existing near the town, but they were ordered off to Inchkeith. In the course of the next century, we find in the Kirk Session books of Glasgow the two maladies recognised as distinct, and two separate hospitals devoted to those affected by these two separate diseases. For on the 20th October 1586, the Kirk Session "ordains some to visit the leper folks' house or spittal beyond the brig, to see how the same, and the dykes of the yards may be reformed, and that nane be received but town's folks." But again, in 1592, the same Session directed "that the house beyond the stable-green-port for women afflicted with the Glengore be looked after."<sup>1</sup>

In a late census of Norway, above two thousand lepers were found in that small kingdom; but the Scandinavian physicians do not confound together syphilis and Greek elephantiasis, and have no difficulty in distinguishing them. Nor have our own colonial professional men in the East, and in the West Indies, where both diseases exist, any dubiety, at the present day, in recognising them as two totally different and specific maladies.

## How spread.

*3d Corollary.*—As regards the mode or modes in which syphilis was supposed to be so speedily propagated at its first appearance in Europe, the Aberdeen and Edinburgh records are both interesting, though in some respects they offer very opposite testimony on this point.

For some time after syphilis broke out, it was believed, both by medical men and by the non-medical public, that the disease was communicable, and constantly communicated from the infected to the healthy by the employment of

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Cleland's Extracts, in Transactions of Glasgow Statistical Society, Part i. p. 13, etc.

the clothes, vessels, baths, etc. used by those already suffering from it, and by the slightest corporeal contact, or even by inhaling the same air with them. I might appeal on this head, if it were necessary, to the individual and general testimony of Schilling, Torella, Brandt, Massa, and almost every other early continental author, historical or medical, who mentions the first outbreak of syphilis. Some even thought that neither the presence of infected persons, nor of fomites, was always absolutely requisite. In his work, *De Morbo Gallico*, published in 1551 (above half a century after the disease commenced), Benedict Victorius, of Fienga, like most of his contemporaries, still maintained that "the state of the air" (to use his own words), "together with that of the putrid humours, are sufficient to beget the affection;" and in strong confirmation, he adds, "I myself happened once to know some honest and religious nuns, who were confined in the strictest manner, and yet contracted the venereal disease from the peculiar state of the air, together with that of the putrid humours, and the weakness of their habit of body."

The same belief in the easy contagion of syphilis without contact or intercourse extended to our own country. It was, in particular, strongly believed that the malady could be propagated from the sick to the healthy by the medium of the breath. One of the gravest articles of guilt brought against the celebrated Cardinal Wolsey, when he was arraigned before the English House of Lords, in 1529, was the allegation that (to quote the *ipsissima verba* of the indictment, as laid before Henry VIII.), "whereas your Grace is our Sovereign Lord and Head, in whom standeth all the surety and wealth of this realm, the same Lord Cardinal knowing himself to have the foul and contagious disease of the great pox, broken out upon him in divers places of his body, came daily to your Grace, rown-

PART II.

INFERENCES.

By fomites.

By the  
breath.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.Edinburgh  
regulations.

ing in your ear, and blowing upon your most noble Grace with his perilous and infective breath, to the marvellous danger of your Highness, if God of his infinite goodness had not better provided for your Highness. And when he was once healed of them, he made your Grace believe that his disease was an impostume in his head, and of none other thing.”<sup>1</sup>

The notion that the breath of persons having the venereal disease was infectious seems to have prevailed as late as the reign of William and Mary. Dr. Oates, in his “Picture of the late King James” (1696), says,—“Tom Jones, your quondam chaplain, was afraid to go to old Sheldon, for fear he should give him the pox by breathing on him.” (Part II. p. 106.)

The Edinburgh regulations of September 1497 are evidently framed upon the idea that “the contagious plage callit the grandgore,” as they term it, was propagated by simple contact, and personal intercourse, or probably even by the air. Hence their strict injunctions for the removal and detention of the “infectit, or that hes bene infectit and incurit,” to their secluded position upon the island of Inchkeith, for “the eschewing” (to cite again the words of the edict) “of the greit apperand danger of the infectioun of the lieges.” Indeed, it seems to have been believed that the disease might be communicated through medical attendants, or intermediate individuals who were themselves unaffected. This is at least the natural, or, indeed, the only interpretation of that part of the edict which enjoined that all persons who take upon them “to hale the said contagious infirmitie,” go with their infected

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary History, vol. iii. p. 44 ; Henry's History of Great Britain, vol. xii. p. 219 ; the Life and Reign of King Henry VIII., by the Right Hon. Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury, 1572, p. 295.

patients to Inchkeith; and if they attended and treated such cases within the city, they did so at the peril of being themselves cauterized on the cheek with the "marking iron," and banished without favour (*banisht but favouris*) out of the town.

The anxiety of the authors of the Edinburgh regulations to prevent this supposed medium of communication through a third person is further displayed in the severity of the punishment—the application, namely, of the actual cautery to the face—denounced against the medical attendants who should infringe the above edict by not passing to, and remaining on, Inchkeith. "*Lykwayis the saidis personis that takis the said cure of sanitie vpoun thame, sal be byrnt on the cheike with the marking irne that thai may be kennit in tyme to cum.*"

For some time after the first outburst of the disease, sexual intercourse with the infected does not seem to have been suspected as the source and means by which the syphilitic contagion was propagated. Nor was the local primary affection of the sexual organs generally noticed by the authors of these times as either a constant or marked symptom. They were acquainted with, and described, only the secondary symptoms of the malady—the hideous eruptions on the skin—the ulcers of the throat—the nocturnal pains in, and lesions of, the bones—while they mostly all pass over the genital organs, as if they remained unaffected. So much so was this the case, that we find Montagnana, in 1498, advising not as a means of infection, but rather as a means of cure, moderate coition; for, in laying down various rules of treatment to a sick bishop under his care for syphilis, he inculcates, among other items "*coitus vero sit temperatus.*"<sup>1</sup>

PART II.  
—  
INFERENCES.

Spread by  
third  
persons.

Erroneous  
ideas.

<sup>1</sup> See his *Consilium pro reverendissimo Episcopo et Hungariæ Vicerege*; in Luisinus' Collection, vol. ii. p. 6.

## PART II.

## INFERENCES.

Swediaur.

When treating of this subject, and when speaking of both the usual mode of the infection of syphilis, and its primary local symptoms generally escaping notice at the era of the first appearance of the disease, Swediaur observes,—"It is worthy of remark, that although many authors, since the year 1500, make mention of the genital organs, and say that syphilis may more generally (*ut plurimum*) be communicated by coition; not one before that time (1500) points out the (primary) affection as essential or characteristic of the disease. All (Swediaur adds) look upon it as a disease pestilential and contagious without coition, and even without any direct contact" (vol. i. p. 36). The observations of Astruc and Girtanner, and other authors on this point, are nearly to the same effect.

Aberdeen  
views.

In relation to this question, that of the actual mode and means of propagation of syphilis, the edict of Aberdeen, in 1497, is particularly remarkable and interesting, and most fully maintains the character of the capital of the north for that native shrewdness and sagacity which the poet Dunbar long ago solemnly assigned to it. We have just now referred to Swediaur, etc. stating, that up to 1500, all European writers looked upon syphilis as spreading, pestilentially and contagiously, without coition. Three years earlier, the aldermen and town council of Aberdeen seem to have arrived at more just ideas of its laws of propagation, and to have distinctly suspected impure sexual intercourse as the mode of communication of the malady. This seems to be fully borne out by their ordering, "for the eschewing of the infirmitey," that (to use the words of the edict) "all licht weman be chargit and ordanit to desist fra thar syne of venerie;" and we have the usual glowing and earnest threat of the application of the actual cautery, or "ane key of het yrne (hot iron) to thair chekis," in case of disobedience. The

later Aberdeen edicts of 1507, which we have already quoted at length, shew, however, that the rulers of the burgh had been subsequently led to adopt the erroneous idea of the leading authorities of the day, that the disease might be transmitted also in the way of common contagions, and even, perhaps, by the medium of a third person.

*4th Corollary.* The early notices that I have adduced of the appearance of syphilis in Scotland are curious as proofs of the rapidity with which the disease travelled, at its first outbreak, over the kingdoms of Europe. The new malady was, as I have already stated, first distinctly recognised during the period that Charles VIII. of France occupied the city of Naples, or rather immediately after he left that place. The cases of the disease that had appeared previously were not, at least, anywhere in such numbers, or in such severity, as to excite any marked and decided degree of attention from physicians or from the public. That Naples was the locality in which the contagion first burst forth so extensively and overtly as to be considered almost the source and cradle of the new epidemic; and further, that this happened at the precise date of the visit of the French army, seems, as has been suggested by various authors, to be shewn by the very designations respectively conferred at the time upon the new affection by the Neapolitans and French. For whilst, as already alluded to, the French, as is well known, designated it at its first commencement among them the Neapolitan disease, alleging it to have been communicated to them by the inhabitants of Naples, the Neapolitans, on the other hand, termed it the French disease, believing that it had been brought to them by the victorious army of France. Now the date of Charles's sojourn in Naples is well known. His army, in their march through Italy,

PART II.

INFERENCES.

Its rapid diffusion.

Naples dates.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.Columbus'  
arrival.23d April  
1497.

arrived at Rome on the 4th December 1494, and entered Naples on the 21st or 22nd February 1495; and after remaining three months, they vacated the city on the 20th May. On the 24th of the same month the renowned Spanish general Cordova landed in Sicily; on the 6th July the battle of Fuornovo was fought, and next day King Ferdinand returned to Naples; but the last remains of the French army did not reach France till the end of the following year. The Aberdeen edict, however, was issued within less than two years after Charles commenced his march homeward. Or, we may state the matter otherwise. Columbus arrived at Palos, in Andalusia, after his first voyage to the New World, on the 15th March 1493, having previously landed at Lisbon on the 6th, and visited the Portuguese king at Valparaiso: while Pinzen, the commander of the other remaining caravel of Columbus' tiny fleet, was about the same date, driven northward into the French port of Bayonne. Possibly one focus or centre for the future spread and dissemination of syphilis was left in this French port by Pinzen's crew, if they brought the infection with them; but I have nowhere found any allusion to this question. Columbus reached Spain, from his second voyage, in April 1496. The edict of the Aberdeen aldermen and council was passed on the 23d April 1497, or exactly four years and thirty-eight days from the date of Columbus' first return to Spain; while the famous ordinance of the Parisian authorities regarding syphilis was issued on the 6th March, 1497, only forty-eight days before that of Aberdeen.<sup>1</sup>

In reference to the rapidity with which syphilis spread from the south and middle of Europe to this small and isolated kingdom of Scotland, it is necessary to remember

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<sup>1</sup> Astruc, p. 113 (English Edition).

PART II.  
INFERENCES.

Perkin  
Warbeck.

Mode of  
propaga-  
tion.

that in the last years of the fifteenth century, and during the reign of James IV., the intercourse of this country with "France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, and Flanders was (to quote the words of the Scottish historian, Mr. Tytler) as regular and uninterrupted, not only in the more solemn way of embassies, but by heralds, envoys, and merchants, as that carried on with England."<sup>1</sup> There was in actual operation, also, at that very date, another medium by which such a disease was very likely to be carried from the Continent to our shores, and diffused among the population of the larger towns. In November 1495, Perkin Warbeck, under the title of Prince Richard, Duke of York, arrived in Scotland, and was received with regal honours by King James, who bestowed upon him in marriage his cousin, the Lady Catherine Gordon. This pretended claimant to the English throne remained in Scotland till July 1497. He was preceded, accompanied, and followed to this country by gay and reckless "soldiers of fortune" from the Continent, Ireland, England, etc.—the men of all others most likely to transmit and diffuse such a disease as syphilis. These adventurers appear to have been quartered by the Scottish King upon various towns. Thus, the town-records of Aberdeen shew that, as early as the 5th July 1495,—some months before Warbeck himself arrived in Scotland,—a burgh tax was imposed "to the sustentacioun of aught Inglismen of the Duk of Yorkis, direkit to the toune by our souerane lordis hienes, and his letteris therapone."—(*Spalding Club Extracts*, vol. i., p. 57.)

The speed, however, with which the disease thus travelled from the south of Europe to its western confines has been often employed as an argument to shew that the

<sup>1</sup> Tytler's History of Scotland, vol. iv., p. 319.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.State of  
morals.

Victims.

contagion of syphilis was propagated at its first introduction by laws different from those which now regulate its communication. In other words, it has been often alleged that the disease was then spread from kingdom to kingdom, and from city to city, by epidemic influences and by general contagion, and not merely by the slower medium of impure sexual connection. We have just seen such a doctrine so far belied by the sagacious regulations of the magistrates of Aberdeen; and when we look to the then existing state of Society, both on the Continent and in our own country, to the loose manners and licentious lives of these times, we shall probably find a sufficient solution of the, at first sight, difficult problem of the rapid dissemination of the new malady. The morals of the general mass of the people are ever found to be principally regulated by the example set before them by the aristocracy and clergy. At the date of the introduction of syphilis into Europe, the notorious habits of the two latter ruling bodies were assuredly such as to expedite greatly the diffusion of the new scourge that had sprung up among them; and hence, at its first outbreak, we find the disease fixing itself upon several of the highest members of the continental courts, and of the church. The Emperor Charles V., and Pope Alexander VI., kings and cardinals, princes and bishops, peers and priests, are openly and publicly recorded among its victims by those who personally watched and described the first ravages of syphilis. In fact the disease was then scarcely, or indeed not at all, looked upon as conferring any degree of infamy.

In his tract on the malady,<sup>1</sup> published at Rome in the year 1500, Peter Pinctor mentions by name, and without

<sup>1</sup> De Morbo fædo et occulto, his temporibus affligente.

any reticence, three of the more illustrious patients whom he had treated for this new disease, namely, the Prebendary Centez, the Cardinal of Segovia, and his Holiness the reigning Pope. Writers thought it no imputation on their own characters to publish an account of the disease as it occurred in their own persons. The physician Joseph Grunbeck of Burkhausen, in his essay "*De Pestilentiali Scorra sive Mala de Frantzios* (1496)," tells his readers how he himself caught the disease from the atmosphere, when walking in some fields near Augsburg. One of the earliest adherents and fiercest champions of the Reformation in Germany was Ulric Hütten, "the poet and valiant knight of the sixteenth century," as Merle D'Aubigné designates him. In 1519, Hütten, though bred to arms, and not to physic, published a treatise—"De Guiaci Medicina, etc., Morbo Gallico." In this treatise he details his own case and sufferings from the disease, how he had been "utterly vexed with the sycknes,"—had been eleven times salivated for it, and was at last cured by guiacum. This treatise, written, as the preface bears, by "that great clerke of Almayne, Ulrich Hutten, Knycht," was translated by Thomas Paynell Chanon of Marten Abbey, and published in England in 1539. The disease was, in Hütten's opinion, produced "throughe some unholosome blastes of the ayre." His polemical antagonist, Erasmus, in his "*Colloquy of Gamos and Agamos*," denounced fiercely the character of this reforming and literary knight:—"Qualis eques (he exclaims) cui per Scabiem vix in sella sedere liceat!"

In order to shew how swiftly a disease, propagated in the way syphilis is, might overrun the society of continental Europe towards the conclusion of the fifteenth century, it is only necessary to allude to the dire and deplorable state of morals among those that ought to have set an example to the community, namely, the clergy of these

PART II.  
INFERENCES.

Ulric von  
Hütten.

Clerical  
morals.

PART II.  
INFERENCES.City of  
Rome.

days, as painted by the tongue and pens of their own writers. In an official sermon published by Martene (tom. ii., p. 1758), and preached in St. Peter's at Rome by the Apostolic Auditor prior to the election of the pope in the year 1484, the corrupt morals and dishonesty of the whole church are denounced; and it is added that many do not merely commit, but triumph even in such sins as the subversion of chastity and other virtues (*de pudicitia, cæterisque virtutibus subversis, triumphantes*). The frightful licentiousness and obscene orgies of the reigning pontiff, and of his family and court, which speedily followed, formed a hideous practical commentary upon this text. A high Romanist who had the honour of refusing a cardinal's hat, Claud D'Espence, Rector of the University of Paris, after exposing the infamy of the taxes of the apostolic chancery, with its list of "filthy and horrid iniquities" (*foedorum tamque horrendorum scelerum*)—a license for any and all of which could be purchased—adds, "You shall say we ingenuously confess that God permits this (Lutheran) prosecution to come upon his Church on account of the sins of men, chiefly of priests and prelates, from whose sins the Scriptures cry out that the sins of the people are derived.....Is it wonderful if the malady descend from the head to the members, from the supreme Pontiff to others?"<sup>1</sup> Where, under heaven, is there a greater license of all evils (*infamia, impudencia, etc.*)?.....Truly (adds D'Espence, and he had personally visited Rome), evils such and so great that no one can

<sup>1</sup> The simple and newly elected Pontiff, Adrian VI., when writing to his Legate at the Diet of Nuremberg, A.D. 1522, in the same spirit observes, "We are well aware that for many years past the holy city has been a scene of many corruptions and abominations. The infection has spread from the head through the members, and has descended from the popes to the rest of the clergy."—Pallav. Op., vol. i., p. 160. Sarpi, p. 25.

believe but he who has seen, and no one can deny but he who has not seen...

Vivere qui cupitis sancte, discedite Roma;  
Omnia cum liceant, non licet esse bonum." <sup>1</sup>

Previously another orthodox Roman ecclesiastic, Nicolas de Clemangis, Archdeacon of Bayeux, had in indignant, and, let us hope, in too sweeping terms, denounced the continental nunneries of these dark days as little better than brothels, and the taking of the veil as almost synonymous with a profession of public prostitution.—  
"Nam quod aliud sunt puellarum monasteria nisi quædam non dicam Dei sanctuaria, sed Veneris execranda postibula. Sed lascivorum et impudicorum juvenum ad libidines explendas receptacula ut idem hodie sit puellam velare, quod et publice ad scortandum exponere." <sup>2</sup> Truly

<sup>1</sup> See Claud. Espenœi Opera Omnia, p. 479. The morals of those assembled at the "sacred" Councils of the Church shewed, perhaps, in these days, little or no amendment upon the morals of Rome itself. At the great Council of Constance, for example, held in the fifteenth century, there were, according to the long list of those present, as given by Lenfant, "seven hundred common women" whose habitations were known to Ducher; whilst the Vienna list of the same Council sets down the list of "meretrices vagabundæ" as fifteen hundred in number (Lenfant's History of the Council of Constance, Vol. iv., pp. 414, 416). This council was summoned together by that misnamed "Vicegerent of God on earth," Pope John XXIII., a man who, according to his own secretary, Thierry de Niem, was guilty of "all the mortal sins, and of a multitude of abominable acts not fit to be named" (Niem de Vita Joh. XXIII., ap Von der Hardt, Tom ii., p. 391.) Among other matters, the Procurators of the Council publicly accused him before it of "cum uxore patris sui, et cum sanctis monialibus incestum, cum virginibus stuprum, et cum conjugatis adulterium, et alia incontinentiæ crimina" (Concil. Constan. Sess. XI., Binius, Tom. iii., p. 874). Yet this same "infallible" Council of Constance, as it termed itself, called together, as it was, professedly for the cure of the evils and doctrines of the Church and Papacy, principally distinguished itself in history by burning John Huss and Jerome of Prague for preaching from the Scriptures the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Nicol. de Clemangis Opera (Edit. Lydii.), p. 22.

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INFERENCES.British  
Clergy.

in these pre-Reformation days there was, as Cardinal Bellarmine confesses and laments, "almost no religion left."<sup>1</sup>

As far as regarded the predisposing habits and influence of the clergy, matters were not better in Britain than on the continent, when the disease first reached this country. We have already seen Cardinal Wolsey, the primate of England, publicly accused in parliament of labouring under the disease. We can, however, wonder the less at the disease attacking such a high dignitary, when we recollect that, according to some writers,<sup>2</sup> there was openly inscribed over the doors of a palace belonging to this prelate—"*Domus Meretricium Domini Cardinalis.*" Polydore Vergil, the sub-collector of the Pope's revenues in England, speaks, perhaps in exaggerated terms, of the orgies in the residence of Wolsey, by which he allured at first the young King Henry VIII. "*Domus suae voluptatum omnium sacrarium fecit quo regem frequenter ducebat. Sermones leporis plenos habebat, etc.*"<sup>3</sup> The manners of the inferior dignitaries of the church offered only too close an intimation of those of its Primate. The commissioners appointed by Henry the Eighth to visit the monasteries of England have recorded a sad, and (even setting aside the influence of prejudice) probably only too true a picture of the moral degeneracy of the great mass

Monasteries.

<sup>1</sup> Opera, Tom. vi. col. 296 (Ed. of 1617). The history of these and other dark times shews us, however, occasional bright and isolated glimpses of the existence of true Christianity in general society and in the cloisters. In the personal history of Luther, for example, few circumstances are more interesting than the fact of Staupitz, the Vicar General of the Order of Augustine Monks of Germany, earnestly and tenderly assisting the young and distressed monk of Erfurth to arrive at a knowledge of salvation by faith alone (as laid down in the Scriptures—a copy of which he presented to him), and not by works.

<sup>2</sup> See Sir John Dalrymple's *Fragments of Scottish History*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Polydor. Vergilii, *Angl. Histor.* (Bull 1570) p. 633.

of the regular clergy of the time. With some few cheering and honourable exceptions, they found the occupants of most of the monasteries following lives of degraded vice and licentiousness, instead of religious purity and exemplary rectitude. When the visitors received their commissions and instructions, they were dispatched into different parts of the kingdom at the same time, that the monks might have as little warning of their approach as possible. They executed, says the historian Henry,<sup>1</sup> their commissions with zeal and diligence, and made some curious discoveries almost in every house, not much to the honour of its inhabitants. Accounts, he adds, of their proceedings were transmitted by the visitor to the vicar-general, and they contained sufficient materials to render the monasteries completely infamous,—for their gross, absurd superstition, their shameful impositions, their abandoned unnatural incontinency, etc., etc. Some of the old abbots and friars did not attempt to conceal their amours, because they knew it was impossible. The holy father, the prior of Maiden Bradley, assured the visitors that he had only married six of his sons and one of his daughters out of the goods of the priory as yet; but that several more of his children were now growing or grown up, and would soon be marriageable. He produced a dispensation from the Pope, permitting him to keep a mistress; and he asseverated that he took none but young maidens to be his mistresses, the handsomest that he could procure; and when he was disposed to change, he got them individually provided with very good lay husbands.<sup>2</sup> “These be the men” (exclaimed Simon Fish,

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INFERENCES.

Maiden  
Bradley.

<sup>1</sup> See his History of Great Britain, vol. vi. p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> See the whole details given more fully and broadly in the “Letters relating to the Suppression of Monasteries,” published by the Camden Society, p. 58, etc.

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INFERENCES.

Scottish  
Clergy.

in one of his celebrated public sermons which he delivered at the period we speak of), "These be the men that corrupt the whole generation in your realm, that catch the pox of one woman, and bear it to another; that be burnt with one woman and bear it to another."<sup>1</sup>

Clerical morals and manners were not in a much healthier state on the Scottish side of the Border. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, we have not on record any such obscene scandal as was detailed in a previous century in the *Chronicle of Lanercost* regarding Priest John, who is alleged to have publicly celebrated phallic orgies among the young inhabitants of his parish of Inverkeithing,<sup>2</sup> a town which was certainly a place of no small note and importance in these early days. But clerical morals were still confessedly in a sad state about the time that syphilis first appeared in this part of the island. The *General Satyre* of Scotland, written, as I have already stated, at the commencement of the sixteenth century, stigmatises amongst other things—

"Sic pryd with prellatis, so few till preiche and pray,  
Sic haunt of harlettis with thame, baythe nicht and day."<sup>3</sup>

Queen Mary would seem to have regarded the health of the high Roman church dignitary who baptized her son James VI. with considerable suspicion, perhaps, however, only in as much as he was one of a class with a very bad

<sup>1</sup> See his "Supplication of Beggars," presented to Henry VIII. in 1530.

<sup>2</sup> "Insuper hoc tempore (A.D. 1282) apud Invirchethin in hebdomada paschæ, sacerdos parochialis Johannes, Priapi prophana parans, congregatis ex villa puellulis, cogeabat eas, choreis factis, Libero patri circuire; ut ille feminas in exercitu habuit, sic iste, procacitatis causa membra humana virtuti feminariæ servantia super asserem artificata ante talem choream præferebat, et ipse tripudians cum cantantibus motu mimico omnes inspecantes et verbo impudico ad luxuriam incitabat, etc." See the *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> George Bannatyne's *Ancient Scottish Poems* (1770), p. 42.

character in that respect. King James, in "A Premonition to all most mightie Monarchs, Kings, Free Princes, and States of Christendome,"<sup>1</sup> thus refers to it:—"For first, I am no apostate, as the Cardinal (Bellarmine) would make me, not onely having ever been brought up in that religion which I presently professe, but even my father and grandfather on that side professing the same: and so cannot be properly an Heratike, by there own doctrine, since I never was of their church; and as for the Queene my mother of worthy memorie, although she continued in that religion wherein she was nourished, yet she was so farre from being superstitious or Jesuited therein, that at my Baptisme (although I was baptized by a Popish Archbishop) she sent him word to forbear to use the spettle in my baptisme; which was obeyed, being indeed a filthy, and an apish trick, rather in scorne than in imitation of Christ; and her owne very words were, that 'She would not have a pokie priest to spet in her child's mouth.'"

Of the dissolute lives of the Scotch, like the other clergy of these times, we may find ample proof in some of the contemporaneous medical works. We know, for example, from an old medical author, something of the inner life of the identical "pockie priest" who baptized James VI. In 1552, Dr. Jerome Cardan, the famous Italian physician, came from Milan to Edinburgh to visit professionally the high ecclesiastic in question—namely, John Hamilton, Archbishop of St. Andrews—who was suffering under severe and recurrent attacks of asthma. He travelled with all possible expedition, and in these "good olden times" the part of his journey from London to Edinburgh only took twenty-three days. Cardan has left

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INFERENCES.

"Pokie  
Priest."

Archbishop  
Hamilton.

<sup>1</sup> King James's Works, p. 301.

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Cardan.

us in his works a copy of the lengthy and very minute medical and hygienic directions, which he drew up for the behoof of the archbishop. Besides giving him innumerable medical prescriptions, he lays down for him excellent rules regarding his food, drink, exercise, sleep, etc., down to the materials of which his bed and his pillows should be composed. He adds for the Archbishop's guidance the following rule—"De Venere. Certe non est bona, neque utilis: ubi tamen contingat necessitas debet uti ea inter duos somnos, scilicet post mediam noctem, et melius est exercere eam ter in sex diebus pro exemplo ita ut singulis duobus diebus semel, quam bis in una die, etiam quod staret per decem dies."<sup>1</sup>

The quiet and matter-of-course style in which these rules are laid down and published proves only too strongly the dissolute life of some of the highest clergy in our land; and in order to appreciate the full force of this observation, it is necessary to remember that Cardan's patient was the living head of the Scottish Roman Catholic church of that day—the Primate and Metropolitan of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps still more unequivocal evidence of the scandalous profligacy of the Scottish clergy of these times is to be found in their own statutes, and in the legal documents of the country.

<sup>1</sup> Cardani, *Philosophi ac Medici, Opera*, tome ix., p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Yet we find the Archbishop, who left some bastard offspring, when writing as an author, violently and virtuously declaiming against "all kind of licherie." See fol. li, etc., of "The Catechisme set furthe by the Most Reverend Father in God, John Hamilton, Archbishop of St. Andrews," printed at St. Andrews, 1552. Perhaps the Archbishop held some of the other commandments in little more respect than the seventh, if we may judge by one of his sayings regarding Queen Mary, when a girl of nine or ten years of age, as reported by Sir James Melville in his *Memoirs*, p. 73. There is no wonder that Sir James found it difficult or impossible to translate the coarse saying of the Scotch Primate for the polite ears of Montmorency the Constable of France. See *Memoirs of his own Life*, p. 21.

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INFERENCES.

Last  
Catholic  
Council.

In a provincial council of the Scottish clergy, held at Edinburgh in 1549, the circumstance that there had come very grave scandals to the church from the incontinence of ecclesiastics (*ex clericorum incontinentia, gravissima ecclesiæ scandala esse exorta*) was taken into consideration, and the edict of the Council of Basle "*De Concubinariis*" put in force. Another edict was passed by this Edinburgh synod "exhorting" both the prelates and inferior clergy not to keep their own illegitimate children in their company, prohibiting their promotion of them in their churches, and forbidding the endowment of them with baronies out of the church's goods.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps the dissolute and depraved state of the Romish church in Scotland is more clearly photographed in a subsequent edict, which they passed in a large synod held at Edinburgh in 1558-9. This edict does not "exhort" against incontinence on the part of the priests, but it simply and shamelessly restricts, and lays down a legal limit to, the amount of property which they might unsacrilegiously abstract and purloin from the pious endowments belonging to the Church (*de patrimonio Christi*) for the marriage portions of the bastard daughters of their concubines; the synod enacting that neither prelates nor any other ecclesiastics should directly or indirectly give with their illegitimate daughters, in marriage to barons or other landowners, any greater sum than one hundred pounds yearly of the Church's patrimony.<sup>2</sup>

The legitimation of bastard children was necessary before they could inherit or dispose of property, and exercise other legal rights. The Privy Seal Records of

<sup>1</sup> See the edicts in Wilkins's *Concilia Magnæ Britanniae*, tom. iv., pp. 47-8.

<sup>2</sup> See the forthcoming *Statuta Ecclesiæ Scoticanæ*, p. 155, edited for the Bannatyne Club by Mr. Joseph Robertson; also Wilkins's *Concilia*, iv., 20.

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 INFERENCES.  
 Clerical  
 bastards.

Scotland for the earlier years of the sixteenth century have been preserved, and are full of entries of legitimation of the bastard children of Scottish prelates and priests. Lord Hailes gives us some sad information regarding the numbers of the illegitimate children of the Scottish bishops, abbots, and monks of these times.<sup>1</sup> Among others, he states that David Bethune, the immediate predecessor of Hamilton in the archbishopric of St. Andrews and primacy of Scotland, had three bastards legitimized in one day; and afterwards, Patrick Hepburn, Bishop of Moray, had seven—five sons and two daughters—all acknowledged in one day. John Lesslie, Bishop of Ross, himself the illegitimate son of an official in the diocese of Moray, viz., of Gavin Lesslie, parson of Kingusie, was the father of several illegitimate children; and it is, says the learned author of the “Book of Bon Accord,” sufficiently amusing to find his name among those of the other members of the chapter of Aberdeen who solemnly counselled their ordinary to “caus the lay kirkmen within their diocie to reforme thameselves in all thair slanderous maner of lyving, and to remove thair *oppin* concubins.”<sup>2</sup>

Concubinage among the lower clergy, provided it was not slanderously open and avowed, would almost seem to have been overlooked and connived at by the church dignitaries of those degenerate times.<sup>3</sup>

The remains of the old chapel of St. Ninian, at Leith, still exist in the vicinity of Edinburgh. The spire of the church is, even at the present day, a conspicuous object

<sup>1</sup> See his note to Ballantyne's Scottish Poems, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Bon Accord, p. 377; Keith's Historical Preface, p. xv.; Aberdeen Magazine, 1796, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> See Prescott's Ferdinand and Isabella, vol. ii., p. 354. In Spain, indeed, it was recognised and sanctioned by law, till the scandal was uprooted by the strong hand of Ximenes.

above the second harbour bridge, though the chapel itself and its prebendary are degraded to common dwellings. This chapel was founded by Robert Bellenden, Abbot of Holyrood, and endowed for two chaplains. In the charter of foundation, which is dated 1493 (four years before syphilis broke out in Edinburgh), it is—in accordance with a common formula in these deeds—ordained that if “either of the aforesaid chaplains keep a lass or concubine, in an open and notorious manner, he shall be degraded; which seems,” as the historian Maitland pertly observes, “to imply this, that they or either of them might keep a miss or misses provided it were not publickly known.”<sup>1</sup>

Nor was poverty on the part of a portion of the priesthood apparently any great obstacle to such, as well as to less sinful indulgences. For, according to the testimony of honest George Majoribanks (see his *Annals of Scotland*, p. 5), “In the yeir of God 1533 Sir Walter Cowpur, Chaiplaine in Edinburgh, gate a pynte of vyne, a laiffe of 36 unce vaight, a pock of aite-meill, a pynte of aill, a schiepe-hede, ane penny candell, and a faire woman for ane xviii<sup>d</sup> grote.”

Very shortly before the commencement of syphilis, the dissolute manners of the English clergy, especially of the regulars, created such noise and commotion among the laity, that Pope Innocent VIII. sent in 1490 (a few years before the actual appearance of the disease) to Archbishop Merton, authorizing him to admonish his abbots and priors that “by their lewd and dissolute lives they brought ruin upon their own souls, and set a bad example to others.” In obedience to this bull, the Primate sent monitory letters to the superiors of all con-

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INFERENCES.

Charter  
formula.

Papal  
message.

<sup>1</sup> History of Edinburgh, p. 497.

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INFERENCES.Monitory  
letter.

vents and religious houses in his province, admonishing and commanding them, by the authority he had received from the Pope, to reform themselves and their subjects from certain vices, of which they were said to be guilty. The monitory letter that was sent on this occasion to the Abbot of St. Alban's is published in Wilkins's *Concilia*, vol iii. p. 632. If that Abbot and his monks were stained with all the odious vices of which the Primate openly accuses them in this letter, they stood much in need of reformation. Some of these vices, says Dr. Henry, were so detestable, that they cannot so much as be named in history. "You are infamous," writes the Archbishop to the Abbot, "for simony, usury, and squandering away the possessions of your monastery, besides other enormous crimes." One of these crimes was, that the Abbot had turned all the modest women out of the two nunneries of Pray and Sapwell (over which he pretended to have a jurisdiction), and filled them with prostitutes; that these nunneries were esteemed no better than brothels, and that he and his monks publicly frequented them as such. His Grace seems to have been well and accurately informed, for he even names some of these infamous women and their gallants. The monks, too, were at least as profligate as their Abbot, for they also kept their concubines both within and without the monastery.

## Conclusion.

When such was the scandalous life led by some of the clergy, we cannot wonder that, before the introduction of syphilis, Rabelais (himself at one time a monk) should apply to the gonorrhœal disease the very significant term of "rhume ecclesiastique;" or that, after the appearance of syphilis, this latter and greater malady should have spread speedily among all ranks, down from the clergy to the laity, and from the king to the churl, and should have become diffused by such stealthy but rapid steps over the

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INFERENCES.

Laws of  
diffusion.

countries of Europe, as to have at first been mistaken for a malady spreading itself, not by impure intercourse, but by general epidemic influences. And when we advert to the existing state of society in that age, and couple it with such notices as we have found in the Aberdeen records, we may surely (in despite of all that has been written to the contrary, both in ancient and modern times) reasonably doubt whether the laws regulating the propagation of syphilis in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were in any degree different from what we know them to be in the nineteenth century. The Aberdeen edict shews that three hundred and sixty odd years ago, or in 1497, the common mode of infection of the disease was precisely the same as all acknowledge it to be at the present day.





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*From the Author*

ANTIQUARIAN NOTICES  
OF  
SYPHILIS IN SCOTLAND  
BY  
J. Y. SIMPSON.













