

John Hall's Little Book of Cures: A New Translation

John Hall, physician in Stratford upon Avon (c.1607 – 1635), made a selection of 178 of his cases towards the end of his life. This was acquired after his death by James Cook, a surgeon, who translated Hall's 'so abbreviated or false' Latin and published them in 1657. The availability of Cooke's text and Hall's Shakespeare connexion (his son-in-law) has made it a popular reference work.

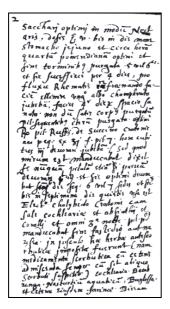


My research

Comparison of the texts reveals that Cooke was an active editor, expanding some elements and leaving out others.

My plan, a joint project in the Centre for the History of Medicine and the Centre for Renaissance Studies, is to produce a new and complete translation of Halls notes.

A page from Hall's notes on his treatment of the Countess of Northamptonshire in 1622¹



The Countess had fainted in her bedroom and injured her face on the floor. Hall treated this with local ointment applications, and vigorous purging.

He also suspected an underlying scurvy which he treated although she had no symptoms – a relatively new approach at this time. Cooke omitted his explanation for this.

Further on, Hall prescribed herbs boiled in five gallons of beer. Cook added that this should be 'until one be wasted'.

The Same in Cook's Translation²

2 Select Obfervations the following, R Senz 3j. Agarick 3 iij. Rabarb 3ii. Cinnamon 3ii8. Infuje them all for twelve boars in three pints of White-wine on warm embers, after it was frained through an Ipports bag, far of feven times, and fivetned with balf a pound of Sugar. Dole 3v. twice a day, viz. in the morning fatting, and at four a clock in the afternoon. This gave five or fix ftools a day without gripings, it was continued four days. Her face was anonited with white Ointment camphorated, which cured it in four days. The Body being not fufficiently empited, the following Pills were ufed, R Pil. Rufin. & Succin. Crato. of each equal parts of 3 is, were made feven Pills, there of which fhe took when fhe went to bed, the next day the had fix or feven flools. But this was obfervable, that inflead of fwallowing the Pills, the clowed them, and fo let them down, faying the could not fwallow them, though never fol littles withal, that the thought it the boft way. She took of thefe twice a week. Thofe days the took not the Pills, I adminitized the following: R Eleif. Chalyb, Crat. mixed with the falts of Scarrygraf, Wornwood and Corat. In her Broth was boiled thefe Scorbutick Herbs, viz. Scarry-graf, Water-Craffer, and Brook-lime. After all, the took this Scorbutick Ecer, R Scarry-graff, Watercraff, Borsek-lime, each Mi. Wornwood, Fumitory, and Germander, cach M. J. Rost of Fenel, Barage, Succorv, cast 5 i. Rost of Elempary 36. Liaveris 3 i. Flowers of Borag. Bugloff, Rofemary, each p ii. Bovi them all in five gallons of Beer, iill one be wafted. After haring the following lagresitents in a bag, viz. Sudaparilla, Calamus aromaticus, Cinnamon, Maee,

A Preliminary Translation of Part of the Same

'Her body not being adequately purged. she was purged again with very good effect with the following pills: Take: of Rufus's pills, and Crato's amber, equal quantities of each. Of one dram make 7 pills. I ordered three to be swallowed at bed time [but what was strange, she chewed them. She said she was never able to swallow a pill, even a small one]. She took them very well twice a week, each following day [giving] six or seven stools. On the other days she used Crato's chalybeate electuary with salt of scurvy-grass and wormwood and coral. She chewed all three of the above-mentioned pills at night without aversion or nausea. These antiscorbutic herbs were mixed in a broth (for antiscorbutic medicines should always be mixed with others when there is any suspicion of scurvy) scurvy-grass, brooklime, watercress, bugloss and others of the same sort.'

Future Plans

Once the translation is completed, I shall provide a commentary putting it in the context of medical practice at the time, and comparing Hall's original with Cook's translation, to see what factors might have influenced his editorial decisions.

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³ With thanks to Dr David Lines for guidance with the translation.



¹ British Library,Egerton MS 2065, The Casebook of Dr John Hall, ca.1635.

² John Hall, Select Observations on English Bodies ... Englished by James Cook (2nd Ed., London 1679).