

THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE
HISTORICAL RECORD SOCIETY
VOLUME XXXI

A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
DOCTOR AND HIS PATIENTS :
JOHN SYMCOTTS, 1592?-1662

BY

F. N. L. POYNTER AND W. J. BISHOP
(Wellcome Historical Medical Library)

"E vus ne poez ren fere outre
le record ke est vostre garant."
Louthur: Hereford Eyre, 1292.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY AT
STREATLEY, NEAR LUTON, BEDS. MCMLI

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SYMBOLS USED IN TRANSCRIPTION.

Insertions	(')
Cancellations	(°)
Marginal notes	(<i>Marg.</i>)
Additions by the transcriber	[]
Illegible or torn parts of the manuscript	---

EDITORIAL NOTE.

Spelling and punctuation have been modernised, and the abbreviations extended, except in the Latin. In the original English text "the" and "that" are always written "ye" and "yt"; "u" and "v" are written as "v" initially and as "u" medially. In the prescriptions the pharmaceutical symbols which appear in the original are replaced by the words "ounce," "dram," "grain," etc. Cancellations and insertions made by the original writers are shown unless they are trivial slips of the pen. Personal names are printed as written, but the prefix "Mrs." has been extended throughout to "Mistress" as it was used of both married and unmarried females in the seventeenth century. The original foliation of the case-book is indicated by an asterisk in the text, the number appearing as a footnote.

It is with great regret that the editors record the death of Mr. Stephen Price, while the volume in which he had taken so much interest was in the press.

INTRODUCTION.

THE SYMCOTTS MANUSCRIPTS

The Sycmotts manuscripts comprise a case-book, a receipt book, medical notes, letters, wills and other documents relating to John Sycmotts and his family, and now housed in three repositories. Dr. Sycmotts was born about 1592 and died in 1662. He enjoyed an extensive practice in Huntingdon and Bedfordshire, and was for years the medical attendant of Oliver Cromwell and of members of his family. The Sycmotts papers provide material for reconstructing the life of a seventeenth century physician, and throw light on the state of medical practice in the provinces. Few similar records have survived, and so far as is known no comparable collection has been published.¹

The Bedford Collection (DDX 125)

Almost all these documents, belonging to Mr. Stephen Price of Twynning, and deposited at the County Record Office, Bedford, have been handed down through the families of Sycmotts, Crawley and Lord. John Sycmotts died childless. He left most of his property to his nephew William, only son of his twin brother Robert. William Sycmotts of Clifton, who was also a Doctor of Medicine, left three daughters,

1. The medical case-books of Sycmotts' contemporary, Sir Theodore Mayerne, M.D. (1573-1655) fill twenty-three volumes of the Sloane MSS. in the British Museum, but only a few extracts from these have been published. The diary of Dr. Claver Morris of Wells, covering the period 1674-1726, was edited by Dr. Edmund Hobbouse as *The diary of a Westcountry physician* (1934). Fragmentary diaries and autobiographical memoranda relating to Sir John Hinton, M.D. (1603?-1682), Dr. Edward Browne (1644-1708), Sir Robert Sibbald, M.D. (1641-1723) and Dr. William Stukeley (1687-1765) have also been printed, but these contain few particulars of patients.

Penelope, Anne (who in 1702 married John Crawley,² M.D., son of Robert Crawley, M.D., of Dunstable, and grandson of Sir Francis Crawley), and Elizabeth. It was through Anne's sons, John and Thomas, that the Symcotts papers passed to their cousin John Lord (grandson of John Lord, rector of Dunstable and vicar of Kensworth, who died in 1728; and son of John Lord, rector of Toddington, who died in 1751, and of Martha Crawley). This John Lord (1712-78) was rector of Drayton Parslow, Bucks., 1740-78 and also "practised physick";³ and through his great granddaughter the majority of the Symcotts papers passed to her son, Mr. Stephen Price. Mr. Price reassembled (with the exception given below) those which had passed to other members of the family; and added a few letters and prescriptions recently sold at Sotheby's. Those thus added are: the letter to his nephew William; those to Mistress Halford, "Madam", and "Good John"; the case history of Mistress Halford; and prescriptions (Nos. 2, 10, 17, 30, 32, 35, 40).

The collection comprises in all some 100 documents, which came to Bedford in four instalments between 1945 and 1950; and everything relating to John Symcotts is printed here in full: that is to say, his medical case-book, a folio volume of 412 pages, bound in vellum; his letters and prescriptions, now repaired and bound into a portfolio; and his will. In addition, however, the collection includes some papers relating to the next generation of the family (letters exchanged by the doctor's nephews, Robert and William Symcotts, 1678-88; rents received for the three daughters of William Symcotts, 1709-17; and the latter's will, proved 1704); and others relating to the Lord family (including names and

2. The Crawley family were extensive landowners in south Bedfordshire (cf. W. Austin, *The history of a Bedfordshire family* and *V.C.H.*, ii, 358 and elsewhere) and later also in north Bedfordshire. Robert Crawley took his M.D. from Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1660, Extra-L.R.C.P., 1656 (Venn, *Alumni Cantab.*). John Crawley, M.D. does not appear in Venn except as the father of Thomas; but Thomas, born at Dunstable, was admitted pensioner at St. John's, 1730; and then migrated to Oxford, where he took his M.B. in 1742/3 (Venn, *op. cit.*; Foster, *Alumni Oxon.*). The Rev. William Cole says that "Dr. Crawley of Dunstable . . . died young, of too much Drinking, & left his Estate in Bedfordshire to Mr. Lord" (F. G. Stokes, ed., *The Blecheley Diary of the Rev. William Cole*, 43-4).

3. Cole (*loc. cit.*) in 1766 wrote that John Lord had many or all of his late cousin's (Dr. Crawley's) patients, and adds that he had "12 Children grown up, & hanging upon him, with a small living, where he overbuilt himself a too good House, on Dr. Crawley's first leaving him his Estate." This combination of the cure of bodies with that of souls was a not uncommon practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; cf. the Rev. Francis Willis, M.D., and his sons, John and Robert, who attended George III during his attacks of madness.

detailed accounts for maintenance of mental patients⁴ received at Drayton Parslow rectory from 1759 to 1835 during the incumbencies of John, William and James Lord).

Manuscript in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, London (MS. 92543)†

This manuscript has largely the same history as the preceding group, but was separated from them in recent years, and purchased by the Wellcome Historical Medical Library at Sotheby's in 1943. It is a folio volume of 512 pages, ruled in double numbered columns and bound in vellum, and contains prescriptions and recipes in the hand of John Symcotts, dated 1635-58, evidently collected from books, professional colleagues, friends and patients; with about a dozen entries in a later hand, dated 1686-8 and 1694. Only two brief case-reports from the Wellcome manuscript have been reproduced here, but some of its information has been incorporated in the introduction and notes; and the personal names mentioned are given in the general index with an asterisk.

Symcotts Letters in the British Museum (Add MS. 33464)

These letters were written to a patient, Richard Powers, of Ramsey, near Huntingdon, some by John Symcotts himself, and some by his assistants, Gervase Fullwood and Edward Johnson. They were acquired by the British Museum in 1888 from Lord de Ramsey, with a collection relating to Ramsey Abbey. Selections from them have been published by Mr. F. G. Marcham⁵ of Cornell University. They have been re-edited from the originals and are here printed in full.

THE SYMCOTT'S FAMILY

The name Symcotts is derived from Simon or Sim and the suffix "cock", appended to boy's names as implying the pertness of youth.⁶

4. The boarding out of mental patients was fairly common, and was adopted by all who could afford it in view of the barbarous conditions ruling in the "madhouses" of the period.

† The editors have to thank Dr. E. A. Underwood, Director of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library, for permission to consult this volume.

5. *Isis* (Brussels), 1932, xvi, 55.

6. C. A. Bardsley, *A dictionary of English and Welsh surnames*, 691. The following variants are found: Simcock, Simcocks, Symcock, Simcox, Simpcox, Simcott, Simcotts, Simcote, Simpcott, Symcote, Symcots, Symcott, Symcotts. The form used in this volume is that by which our doctor signed himself.