

Foreward



Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) was a mid-level naval administrator during the reigns of Charles II and James II but he is far better known for keeping an invaluable diary that chronicled personal, public, and political details of life in mid-17th century England. Pepys provides an eyewitness accounting of major events like the Great Plague of London (and the Great Fire of 1666 that ended it), but also the minutiae like his urolithiasis. "My pain (had) begun to abate and grow less and less" he wrote in early 1664. "Anon I went to make water, not dreaming of any thing but my testicle that by some accident I might have bruised as I used to do, but in pissing there come from me two stones."(1) By the following July he had consulted a Dr. Burnett who prescribed a concoction of marshmallow of Cumfry, St John's Wort, leaves of plantain, cinnamon, nutmeg, and red roses. By 1666, Pepys' lower urinary tract symptoms had normalized. "Strange with what freedom and quantity I pissed this night, which I know not what to impute to but my oysters."(2) Oysters, nutmeg, or roses notwithstanding, we learn what was most probably contemporary medical thinking and a folklorish approach to diseases that had no scientific basis.

Three hundred years later, the unpublished diary of the British surgeon and polymath Sir Henry Thompson (1820-1904), provides a humbling first-hand account of 19th century urologic surgery. In 1873, Thompson was called upon to remove a bladder stone from a stricken Napoleon III (1808-1873) via lithotrity, a procedure of which Thompson had already become an international authority. Sir Henry provides us with his observations and inner thoughts of the experience in seeing the famous patient, learning of their anxieties and hopes, and the Emperor's resignation to being a surgical patient. Ever the complete physician, Thompson even made a detailed sketch of the Emperor's room, persons in attendance, and the location of the makeshift on-call quarters.(3) We wince at the graphic nature of the operation performed, not so much because we might view the blind surgical approach as archaic and morbid, but because our initial hopes and optimism become

suddenly and irrevocably consumed by despair and dread as Napoleon succumbs to sepsis. The diary makes us wear Thompson's heavy cloak of failure.

Some historians have a problem not with what diaries contain but what they don't. Diaries, as Irina Paperno once wrote, are a privilege to read but are "condemned from exclusion from analysis".(4) In this issue of the IJUH, authors take on the challenge of using diaries. Herr and Chubak, both from New York, use diaries to place us on the front lines of urologic surgeons during the American Civil War and in early World War I, respectively.(5,6) Osinski et al. from Rochester accessed the journals of Rainer Engel (1933-2018), the tireless curator of the AUA's William P Didusch museum, the to reveal the creative processes that led to the 2005 creation of the Retrospectroscope Award for best paper of the annual AUA History Forum. Lastly, Donnenfeld et al. from Atlanta used the surgical 'diary' of MASH 8055th, stationed in Korea from 1952-53, to experience the first successful results of the thoraco-abdominal incision in the management of chest and abdominal trauma. Diaries are an excellent example of primary source material, often unpublished, that provide ample grounds for urologic and medical exploration, especially in the context of secondary data that describes the contemporary world around the writer.

REFERENCES

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