

Book Reviews

BARTISCH'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO OPHTHALMOLOGY AN ESSAY REVIEW BY ARNOLD SORSBY

The title page of Georg Bartisch's *Ophthalmodouleia* indicated that the book was protected against reprinting for ten years. In the event it was not reprinted till 103 years later. The present facsimile reproduction has come after nearly 400 years—an event that the pious and superstitious Bartisch would probably have ascribed to a happy juxtaposition of the stars on the 'Wednesday after Palm Sunday in the year 1583 after the birth of our Saviour', when the book was launched. However, the juxtaposition of three rather more mundane influences, can also be mooted. In the first place the book 'the like of which has never before seen the light of day' was indeed exceptional in being the first systematic book on diseases of the eye to appear in the vernacular, all previous treatises having been brought out in the ancient tongues, including Hebrew and Arabic. Bartisch's German text antedated Jacques Guillemeau's *Des Maladies de l'Oeil qui sont au nombre de cent treize* by two years and Richard Banister's *Breviary on the Eyes* by thirty-nine years. Secondly, Bartisch's book contains much useful information—mostly of an incidental character—on the practice of the specialty in his century. But it is more for its form than for its teaching that the book has remained memorable. Matthes Stöckel of Dresden made an outstanding job of the production of Bartisch's text and illustrations. The folio runs to 629 beautifully printed pages, of which fifty-six were devoted to preliminary matter and sixteen to a concluding Table of Contents. The text itself carries nearly 100 illustrations, mostly full page, and these depicted clinical appearances, surgical instruments and procedures, appliances for the preparation of medications and also amulets. The illustrations for these woodcuts were presumably drawn by Bartisch.

The book has suffered from excessive praise. It has been acclaimed as the first general survey of diseases of the eye. This it clearly is not, for Jesus Hali and Benevenutus Grassus, to mention only two early precursors of Bartisch, were responsible for fuller treatises. There is likewise no justification for regarding the book as a pioneer effort in ophthalmic surgery; classical antiquity produced more specialized writings. The claim by Haeser in 1868 that Bartisch had led ophthalmology out of the sad state of its being practised by ignorant barbers and itinerant cataract couchers, is hardly borne out by the state of the specialty during the century after Bartisch. In a florid judgment, Ammon held that Bartisch explored unknown fields in the science and art of his specialty by his penetrating insight into Nature and by carrying aloft the torch of investigation—a peculiar assessment seeing that Bartisch's theoretical knowledge of the specialty was, as Hirschberg pointed out, often poorer than that displayed in Arabic writings. In contrast to this and such adulation, there has also been considerable derogation. At the end of the eighteenth century Joseph Beer could see in Bartisch's book mostly stupidity and superstition, whilst in our century Pansier also stressed these aspects and denied Bartisch the generally acceded credit for originating the operation for exenteration of the orbit.

Ophthalmodouleia: das ist Augendienst, by GEORG BARTISCH, facsimile of the 1st ed., Dresden, 1583; London, Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1966, £32 10s. 0d.

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It has been suggested that the very title of Bartisch's book may have influenced the present name of the specialty, but as the term 'ophthalmia' and various derivatives of it are of considerable antiquity, the suggestion is barely tenable. The designation taken from St. Paul (Collossians 3: 22, and Ephesians 6; 6) where it is used in a derogatory sense, is in any case of doubtful suitability for an emerging specialty.

The title-page sets out the scope of the book and ends with an indication of its potential use 'to all needful physicians, true-hearted fathers of families and especially to those who are laden and afflicted with infirmities, diseases of the eyes and of the sight, or who have to guard against such things'.

The book opens with a twenty-page exceedingly verbose preface addressed to the Elector of Saxony. Its main interest lies in the scanty autobiographical information it contains. It would seem that Bartisch was born in 1535 at Königsbruck near Dresden. Poverty compelled him to cut short his schooling and devote himself to surgery. He became apprenticed to a barber-surgeon at the age of thirteen and had had thirty-six years of experience when writing the preface. This experience he gained as an itinerant practitioner, visiting different places and markets. The succeeding thirty pages are taken up with testimonials on the cures he carried out, certified by various civic and other authorities: thus, Simon Henet, who was 104 years old and had been stock-blind in both eyes for five years, was helped by Bartisch and could see well after treatment. Occasionally he healed other affections too: Anna, the wife of Jacob Urban, aged fifty-two, had been deaf for six years, but regained her hearing after using the ointment she bought from Bartisch. Most of the cures were, however, on people who had been stock-blind. A page of prayers concludes this section.

There follows the text of 348 pages. It is divided into sixteen parts, each with a number of chapters, some of which are but a few paragraphs. The opening part deals with the constellation of the stars and their bearing on the management of eye disease, and the rest of the text covers fairly fully the prevailing knowledge and practice of ophthalmology. Noteworthy features are very few. There is condemnation of spectacles for poor sight (for which various medications are prescribed), stress is laid on the unfavourable prognosis in gutta serena, rather full accounts are given of operations for couching cataract, for removal of sterygia-like excrescences, and for correcting distortion of the lids. The two outstanding features are the description of an operation for exenteration of the orbit, using a spoon-shaped knife which Bartisch designed for the purpose; and the account he gives in the XIIIth part of the book of sorcery, magic, and similar practices in the causation of eye disease, and of amulets and charms in their treatment. Amulets he found efficacious in many affections, including cataract. The concluding parts of the book contain advice on the maintenance of good sight, on the medicinal treatment of foul breath, and accounts of general procedures (such as blood-letting) then in vogue in relation to eye disease. If repetitions, pious disquisitions, endless recipes, and descriptions of amulets are allowed for, the text becomes greatly reduced, and even then, to quote Hirschberg again, Bartisch was better at illustrations than at descriptions.

BARTISCH AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Measured against the two contemporaries who stand nearest to him, Bartisch

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poses few questions. In his upbringing and practice he was less fortunately placed than Jacques Guillemeau, who was Chyrurgeon to the French king and had been trained by Paré. Guillemeau's treatise is concise, lucid, and well-organized. It is as obviously the work of a Renaissance scholar as Bartisch's book is a continuation of the traditions of the Middle Ages. It is, however, likely that the scholarly, well-trained and orthodox Guillemeau lacked the pugnacity and limited originality displayed by Bartisch.

Compared with Richard Banister, he was also at a disadvantage, for Banister, though also an itinerant practitioner, had a regular training and qualification. But Banister's *Breviary* contains much the same laudatory testimonials, the same rage against untrained practitioners, and the same unscholarly digressions that mar Bartisch's book. Furthermore, Banister was not averse to stellar influences and pious exhortations, but these were incidental in his *Breviary* and not part of the very texture as they are in Bartisch's *Ophthalmodouleia*. Alike in many respects, Banister towers over Bartisch, not so much in being rather more modern but in being an outstandingly good observer. His clear recognition of hardness of the eye and its significance as a cardinal sign in ocular disease, came almost two hundred years before its general acceptance.

Bartisch, for all his acumen, was a distinctly limited personality, and it is unlikely that the very title of his book and the extensive play with classical authors in his preface were his own contributions. His lack of a formal education would not by itself be conclusive evidence, but the marked differences in the style of the text of his book from that in the preface is definite enough. It must be assumed that the illustrations came from his own hand, and, as these may well be regarded as the kernel of his book, Bartisch's place amongst ophthalmographers is unchallenged, for the free use of illustrations in ophthalmic textbooks owes much to his example. Of his contributions to ophthalmic surgery, far too much has been said of his exenteration operation; it does not seem to have had many adherents and it speaks more for his technical boldness than for any originality. The pedestrian text of *Ophthalmodouleia* is saved from oblivion by the woodcuts and the magnificent printing they inspired. One would like to know more of Bartisch as an expert draughtsman and more too, of Matthes Stöckel of Dresden as a printer.

This reproduction is a joy to behold and to handle. On the evidence of this facsimile, the publishers, Dawsons of Pall Mall, and the printer, Jos. Adam of Brussels, might well have qualified for membership of the Printers' Guild of Dresden of 1583.

REFERENCES

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