

This wonderfully correct picture of tibial nodes, laryngeal syphilis, tertiary syphilides, specific disease of the nose, alopecia, and impotence—could only have been portrayed by a layman who had particularly studied this disease.

The disease, though so common, was dreaded, as is evident from these two passages—

O hound of Crete, think'st thou my spouse to get?
No; to the spital go,
And from the powdering tub of infamy
Fetch forth the lazar kite of Cressid's kind,
Doll Tear-sheet she by name, and her espouse.

Henry V, ii, 1.

Also:

King. But like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging let it feed
Even on the pith of life.

Hamlet, iv, 1.

Vicious living brings its own retribution:—

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us.

King Lear, v, 3.

The contagiousness of the disease is referred to—

This fell whore of thine
Hath in her more destruction than they sword,
For all her cherubin look.

Phry. Thy lips rot off!

Tim. I will not kiss thee: then the rot returns
To thine own lips again.

Timon of Athens, iv, 3.

And Falstaff discusses the subject—

Fal. You make fat rascals, Mistress Doll.

Doll. I make them! Gluttony and diseases make them; I make them not.

Fal. If the cook help to make the gluttony, you help to make the diseases, Doll: we catch of you, Doll, we catch of you; grant that, my poor virtue, grant that.

Henry IV, Part II, ii, 4.

The power of gold to gild over the loathsomeness of syphilis is described by Timon—

This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions; bless the accurs'd;
Make the hoar leprosy ador'd; place thieves,
And give them title, knee, and approbation,
With senators on the bench: this is it,
That makes the wappen'd widow wed again;
She, whom the spital-house, and ulcerous sores
Would cast the gorge at, this embalms and spices
To the April day again.*

Timon of Athens, iv, 3.

As regards treatment it is curious that mercury, although introduced as a remedy before Shakespeare's day, is not actually mentioned in any one of the plays. The treatment referred to is that by diet, sweating, and the "tub", or the "powdering tub"—

Lucio. How doth my dear morsel, thy mistress? Procures she still, ha?

Pom. Troth, Sir, she has eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub.

Measure for Measure, iii, 2.

* "Wappen'd" here means decayed or diseased.