Neurological stamp

Hermann Boerhaave 1668-1738

Hermann Boerhaave was the outstanding physician and teacher of his time. At Leyden he introduced bedside teaching in his 12 bed hospital. He also introduced the thermometer and the value of urine examination in clinical practice. He was the first to isolate urea, describe the sweat glands and to establish that smallpox was spread only by contact.

Students from many countries came to seek his advice. His writing had an enormous reputation in their day. His Institutiones Medicæ (1708) and Aphorismi de Cognoscendis et Curandis Morbis (1709) were enormously successful, and were published in many editions and translated into many languages. The method of instruction he introduced at Leyden became a model for Europe and later his pupils were to influence the teaching in Vienna, Germany and Britain.

Boerhaave described a neurological case of great interest in functional localisation. A beggar in Paris begged for money with his calvarium. How the skull cap had been removed is not specified but the beggar was a one man physiological laboratory. For a few coins he would allow the occipital area over his bone deficit to be pressed. The sparks and flashes of light experienced were described. For a larger amount of money, the benefactor could press on the brain more forcibly so that the beggar would drop unconscious to the ground.

Boerhaave was the first doctor to be honoured on a stamp for his medical works. Among the great physicians who studied under him were: the scientist van Haller, founder of the University of Gottingen; van Swieten, founder of the old Vienna School and Carl Linneus (Linnaeus) of Uppsala, founder of the Linnaean system of classification. Haller called Boerhaave "communis europae praeceptor"—the common teacher of Europe. This stamp was issued by The Netherlands in 1928 (Stanley Gibbons 375a, Scott B107).

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J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry 1993 56: 148
doi: 10.1136/jnnp.56.2.148

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