

A TOOTHACHE REMEDY: ITALY 1514

Introduction

Giovanni Da Vigo was an Italian physician who published a text in 1514 that was translated into English in several editions – I used the edition from 1550. I have analyzed one of his toothache remedies and recreated it.

“Sometyme there chaunceth a certeyn dormitation in the teeth, by holding cold thinges in the mouth, a stupefaction... medicines in the mouth, for the remotion werof, they shal use the medicine under wrytten, comaundi yng it to be holden in the mouth warme....”

the teeth therwytth, in the morning
 fastynge thysse a weeke.
 Sometyme there chaunceth a cer-
 teyn doxmitatio in þ teeth, by holding
 cold thinges in þ mouth, & stupefacti.
 If it. medt=

Cha. v.

The fyfth booke.

medicines in the mouth, for the remo-
 tion wherof, ye shal vse the medicine
 vnder wyrtten, comaundyng it to be
 holdē in the mouth warme. R. of odo-
 riferous wine. li. ʒ. of aqua vite. ʒ. i. of
 rosemarye, sage, & camomill. ana. iii.
 ʒ. of cloues, of nutmegges. an. i. of
 sandrake. ʒ. i. ʒ. let them sethe all toge-
 ther, tyl the thyrde part be consumed,
 then straine them, & vse them as is a-
 foresayd, Item aqua vite applyed to
 the teethe, wyth cotton, taketh away
 the doxmitation and congelation of
 the same. Laxation or loosenes of the
 teth, chaunceth through the loosenes
 of the gummes, or through debilita-
 tion or weakenynge, of the rootes or
 dyes, the sa-
 ued, for as
 the tethe,
 that kille
 spre cause
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English translation of the text

Theory of Toothaches

Prior to learning about bacteria, tooth pain not related to an obvious injury was believed to be due to unbalanced humors or tooth worms living inside the tooth. Most herbal remedies sought to balance the humors – tooth worms were chased out by more extreme methods.

Ingredients

Odiferous wine

This refers to wine vinegar. Vinegar was a common ingredient in toothache remedies as it was thought to be strong enough to carry the other ingredients into the structure of the tooth.

Aqua vite

Otherwise known as distilled liquor. This may be another carrier like the vinegar since simmering would cause most of the alcohol to evaporate.

Rosemary

Required warm according to Dioscorides, warm and dry according to Banckes.

“The distilled water of the floure of Rosemary being drunke at morning and evening first and last, taketh away the stench of the mouth and breath, and maketh it very sweet....”

John Gerard

Sage



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Sage, Fuchs 1543

Should be hot in the first degree and dry in the second.

“Of sage there are two manners, sage of the garden and wild sage. If thou will have sage for medicines, take the leaves of garden sage....”

Banckes

Chamomile

Should be warm. *"The roots, flowers, and herb have a warming, relieving strength."*

Dioscorides

Clove

Hot. A topical numbing agent especially useful in the mouth and used to relieve sinus pressure. "If one suffers in his head, so that his head is stuffy, and it is as if he were deaf, he should eat cloves often, and the stuffiness in his head will diminish." – Hildegard von Bingen

Nutmeg

Hot and dry in the second degree according to Banckes

Mandrake





Mandrake, Fuchs 1543 and Trento 1591

A plant that depresses the central nervous system and is also associated with the human body due to the shape of the root.

Mandrake is a powerful pain reliever and was used extensively in European medicine for a wide variety of ailments.

"The wine within the root hath been boyled or infused provoketh sleepe and asswageth paine." – John Gerard

"Twenty grains of the juice.... expel phlegm..."

Dioscorides

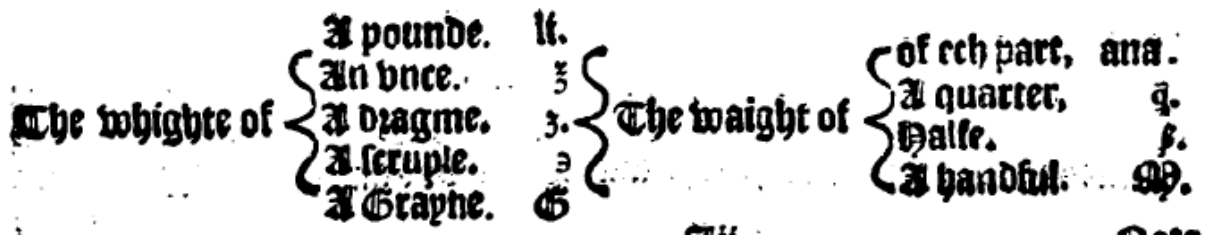
Analysis

At the beginning of this chapter Da Vigo states that teeth “are wont to be vexed” due to matter descending from the brain. My theory is that this remedy is for toothache caused by sinus congestion which would include phlegm (which is the cold and wet humor) dripping down from the sinuses (matter “descending from the brain”). This would also explain the ingredients which are a mixture of hot/dry and pain relievers. Sinus congestion puts pressure on the nerves going to the roots of the upper molars which can cause general pain in those teeth.

Recipe

Da Vigo uses common apothecary symbols of the time.

A handfull is written thus _____ **M.j.**
Halfe a handfull thus _____ **M.β.**
A little handfull thus _____ **P.j.**
A Scruple thus _____ **℥.j.**
A Dramme thus _____ **ʒ.j.**
An ounce thus _____ **℥.j.**
Halfe an ounce, or halfe a dramme thus _____ **℥.β. – ʒ.β.**
An ounce and halfe, thus _____ **℥.j.β.**
A Grayne thus _____ **G.j.**
The number of any thing, thus _____ **no.j.&c.**
A Pound, is thus _____ **l.j.**
So much as shall suffice, thus _____ **q.ʒ.**
(Ana) is of either of them.
xx. Graynes make a Scruple.
iiij. Scruples, make a Dramme.
viiij. Drammes, make an ounce.
xij. Ounces, make a pound.



My Redaction

of odiferous wine, half a pound

of aqua vitae, an ounce

of rosemary, sage, and chamomile each a half ounce

of clove and of nutmegge each, a scruple

):(– this symbol means to pound in a mortar

of mandrake, a dram and half a pound

“Let them all sethe together until the third part be consumed, then straine them”
 Simmer until reduced by 1/3, strain the solids. Hold in the mouth while it is still warm.

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