

## DOCTOR DIET, DOCTOR QUIET AND DOCTOR MERRYMAN

Popular books recommending a healthier lifestyle are nothing new. One example from the sixteenth century is William Bullein's *The government of health ... for the better understanding of the unlearned*. At the time of its publication in 1558, Bullein was physician to Sir Thomas Hilton, Baron of Hilton and Captain of Tynemouth Castle. Bullein's little book presents in a simple and accessible way what the writer considers the best medical advice for maintaining good health. It is written in the form of a dialogue between a hedonistic young man and an older and wiser counsellor who answers his questions and advises him on how he can live a healthy and happy life. The language may be archaic, but at times some of Bullein's advice sounds surprisingly modern.

The dialogue begins with the young man asking why we should not just 'passe away the time with good fellowes and make mery, seinge we have but a time to live?' His mentor, however, warns him against overindulgence in eating and drinking as it could have long-lasting effects on his health: 'Those bellies that follow the lust of the eyes in youth, shall lack the health of all their bodies in age, if they live so long.' The properties and values of a wide variety of foods are then discussed with an emphasis put on the necessity of moderation in eating and drinking.

But good diet on its own, the counsellor says, is not enough to maintain good health. The young man is asked to consider who in society are among the healthiest, and is warned 'idelines is the mother of al mischief ... he which doeth abstayne from exercise shall lack the joyes of health'. Walking is recommended to be good exercise, and it is argued that this is why hunters, ploughmen and gardeners 'have so good digestion and strength of bodie'. To such people walking can be a



Portrait of William Bullein from *Bulleins Bulwarke of defence*. London, 1562.

pleasure even in old age, but 'to idle people seemeth verye painfull'. For those who are not employed in physical labour the wise man suggests that exercise can be enjoyed as a leisure activity, and recommends 'tennis, dancing, running, wrestling, riding upon greate horses, ordeyned, as well for the state of mennes health, as for pleasure'.

Practical advice is given on domestic matters. 'Lodgings must be kept cleane. The chamber must be considered that it be cleane, sweete, comly, clothes fit for the time of the yere, and the age of the people.' There are also directions for personal care and hygiene from washing and bathing to the combing of hair and cleaning of teeth.

Stress and its effect on wellbeing are emphasised. The young man says that a friend told him to 'not stay my selfe upon the opinion of anye one phisician, but rather upon three ... Doctor Diet, the second Doctor Quiet, the third Doctor Meryman'. The wise man answers, 'Small it helpeth to any man, to have honour, riches, fame, cunning, etc., and in the meane time, to want quietnes, and

mirth, whiche bee the chief frendes... Hetherunto I have said something that shall well suffice for thee to knowe doctor diet, as for quiet, and merry man they lie in no phisicians handes to give, but only in Gods.'

How true this was to prove for William Bullein. He had started off his guide to good health with a dedication to his patron, Sir Thomas Hilton, and ended it by telling us he had begun writing 'another booke of healthfull medicines'. Within the following few years, however, Sir Thomas died of a fever. Bullein then married his widow and moved to London. The ship conveying his goods was shipwrecked and his manuscripts were lost at sea.

William Hilton of Durham, the brother of the late Sir Thomas, then accused the physician of having poisoned Sir Thomas. Bullein was eventually acquitted of the charge, but Hilton continued to persecute him 'with much malignity' and subsequently had him and his wife imprisoned for debt. While in prison Bullein took the opportunity to rewrite his lost work, the *Bulwarke of defence*, which was published in 1562. Included in its pages the physician not only gives an account of his troubles with William Hilton but also writes of a family of former patients who 'sought divers waies to have murdered me: taking parte against me with my mortall enemies'.

His wife appears to have died soon after these events as Bullein remarried in 1566. In 1570 he again appeared in court accused of carelessness in setting fire to his house by lighting 'too copiously' his Christmas yule log. William Bullein died on 7 January 1575. He was only around 50 years of age. His life might suggest that he did not see as much of Doctor Quiet and Doctor Merryman as he would have liked.

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