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Historical Evidence of “Printer’s Devil” in Pediatric Cancer Literature

By Wilson I. B. Onuigbo

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the field of informatics, the printing error is of considerable interest⁽¹⁾. Dubbed “Printer’s Devil,” the author made use of such errors to determine that the magazine, Current Contents, was the innate source in his experience⁽²⁾.

Research, according to Alan Gregg⁽³⁾, “profits from the slightest deviation from the conduct expected from Nature.” It is in this sense that such deviation is equally true of human conduct. Therefore, what of the publications of the medical masters of yester years? Their publications in the Transactions of the Pathological Society of London enamored Willis⁽⁴⁾, the great author of “The Spread of Tumours in the Human Body.” Indeed, he revealed it by frequently citing from them when bolstering historical data. Moreover, Burnet⁽⁵⁾ did advice that in research it is necessary to be aware of the historical antecedents. Consequently, it was while pursuing this apt advice that I came across a documentable printer’s devil!

II. HISTORICAL TEXT

F. C. Turner⁽⁶⁾ furnished a Card Specimen before the London Society. The title was “Medullary sarcoma of both ovaries and of the peritoneum in a child aged 6.” Actually, he began thus:

The specimen consists of the pelvic organs of a female child aged 6. Both ovaries are converted into rounded masses of medullary sarcomatous growth. The right ovary is as large as a full-sized orange. The left ovary is smaller; it was adherent to a large mass of growth surrounding the cæcum and commencement of the ascending colon. The right ovary was free.

Free it was not. Thus, as I will italicize, his discussion also centered on two ovaries. Moreover, he

did add that “Sections of the growth in the ovaries showed the structure of small round-celled sarcoma.”

III. DISCUSSION

The author is persuaded that throwing light on both right⁽⁷⁾ and wrong⁽⁸⁾ historical accounts are good for the growth of scientific knowledge. Thus, as an Editorial has it⁽⁹⁾, the historical perspective of “medical truths” require continuing validation. In sum, errors are worthy of being pointed out. Incidentally, the modern trend is to ensure quality in science editing and publishing⁽¹⁰⁾!

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