

The Enduring Humor of J. Fred Smithcors

Two Thousand Years of Veterinary History As Told In Alliteration

Kenneth B. Haas

When Fred wrote this Foreword to *Behavior Problems in Dogs*, he was on the staff of the *North American Veterinarian*:

Longer ago than I sometimes care to admit, I was amused upon receiving a telegram confirming my appointment as an assistant in Animal Psychology--instead of the position in Animal Physiology for which I had applied. After all, why should anyone *purportedly trained* in science be concerned with so unscientific an endeavor? Fortunately, my ignorance was short-lived. On arrival at Cornell I found there was an animal psychologist on the staff--but not (then or now) in the veterinary school.

Think of it in the strictly jocular vein: This was 1975, 30 years ago, and *even then* it was longer than Fred cared to admit. I hope Cornell straightened itself out, but in academia such things take time. Do they still confuse psychology and physiology? It's interesting to learn he considered himself *purportedly trained* in the science of veterinary medicine. Even more laughable, in May 1986 it was proclaimed *Dr. Smithcors Retires*. He never did.

Fred was born at Camden, New Jersey, in 1920. Before long, he sported a B.S. in animal husbandry and zoology from Rutgers University, a M.S. in endocrinology and a D.V.M. from Cornell. In his spare time he earned a Ph.D. in animal breeding and genetics. Needless to say, he never taught any of these subjects. He taught veterinary anatomy at Michigan State University. Where he learned anatomy remains a deep mystery. He developed a program of teaching and research in veterinary history. He amassed a collection of veterinary works dating to the 16th century, which he donated to Washington State University, where he lectured on veterinary history. He was visiting

professor there for 20 years and was proclaimed an honorary alumnus. He co-founded the American Veterinary Medical History Society, serving as editor of *Veterinary Heritage*. He saw it through 25 years.

There's no law requiring a historian to be so dull it hurts, although many easily achieve it. Fred's books *Evolution of the Veterinary Art* and *The Veterinarian in America* are unimpeachable sources of historic.

Fred was a master of alliteration, as demonstrated by his classic *Evolution of the Veterinary Art*. He referred to a loudmouth as a bombastic braggart, another spouted dim-witted drivel, a farrier farrago produced faulty farriery of dubious distinction. He exposed such alliterative humor in his center headings. Here are two thousand years of veterinary history as told in alliteration.

"The universal use of dung and urine throughout the centuries of...veterinary medicine, including the past century [19th], is a bit difficult to rationalize, but as history goes, rough and ready was the rule." Fred calls them *Nauseating Nostrums*.

Cato imposed his medical philosophy upon the naïve nonentities of Rome. His favorite panacea was cabbage internally, externally, cooked, raw, alone, or in combination. Since Cato's considerable concoctions were for those of bovine persuasion: *Cato's Cattle Cures*.

Cato was inhumane. He sold blemished cattle and sick sheep, laughing all the way to the bank. Instead of dubbing him Cato The Crook, Fred covers him with contumely: *Cato's Callousness*. A natural for alliteration, Cato was known as *Cato The Censor*.

Blood, dung, frogs, roots, and urine composed: *Pliny's Emplastrums* and *Pliny's Preservatives*.

Varro, a true son of the soil, held enlightened agricultural beliefs. He said cattle were in such esteem that signs of the zodiac were named after them: *The Virtuous Varro*.

Vergil's *Veterinary Verses*, triple alliteration no less, was a veterinary *vade veterinarius* in verse.

The *Geoponica* was an agricultural treatise. It touted the *Viagra* of the day: Burnt stag antler mixed with urine: *Geoponic Gyration*s.

Men of the cloth, friars and bishops of the 13th century, were prodigious writers on diseases of the horse: *Clerical Contributions*.

In the 14th century, the true practitioner of the veterinary art was proud of his accomplishments: *Professional Pride*.

In the 14th century, Leonardo de Vinci, Andreas Vesalius, Paracelsus, Marcello Donato, William Harvey, and Carlo Ruini, accomplished savants, had momentous effect on veterinary musings: *Medical Masters*.

In the 16th, John Fitzherbert wrote his *Boke Of Husbandry: Agricultural Artisans*.

In the 15th, Frederick Grisone, a notorious horse master, was a butcher of fiendish versatility. His contemporary, Cesare Fiaschi, was a sadistic quack who did much harm to the art of shoeing. Said Fred: "Shakespeare had another Caesar in mind when he lamented, "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones": *Heinous Horsemasters*.

In the 16th century, Thomas Blundeville, was the first important veterinary writer in the English language: *The Scholarly Squire*.

Gervase Markham was an evil genius, his demented atrocities corrupting veterinary literature for a century: *Markham's Maisterpeece*.

Michael Baret was humane. He bemoaned killing animals with dollops of medicine

and rendering them lame through "tirranous chirurgery": *Humane Horsemaster*.

In the 17th century, Jacques de Sollysel had the scientific spirit, yet his work is permeated with astrology: *Superstition vs. Science*. Fred says, "It would be disastrous to characterize these denizens of the dim past as dim witted." After all, Sollysel was a *Genius On Glanders*.

Rinderpest was the first major cattle plague of the 18th century: *Rinderpest In Rome*.

Anent major cattle plagues, Giovanni Lancisi made a presentation before Pope Clement XI and the College of Cardinals on how to combat rinderpest: *Lancisis' Legacy*.

A popular cure for plague was administration of 50 to 70 bottles of wine per cow: *Plague Panaceas*. A few swigs didn't hurt the cattleman and his chums either.

William Taplin advocated malice toward all and charity toward none. He derided druggists, farriers, gentleman, grooms, sportsmen, stable boys, and all his contemporaries: *Taplin's Intemperate Tongue*.

George Stubbs, James Douglas, Alexander Monro, John Lawrence, and others were more circumspect. They produced well-illustrated anatomy texts on the horse, dog, and bird: *Perfection Personified*.

E. G. Fosse, Sr., farrier to the King of France, demonstrated medical discrimination. He used puffballs to stop hemorrhage, was the best authority on the hoof, producing colored plates of it, and composed a four volume veterinary dictionary. He took a unique approach toward preservation of the hoof: *The Finesse of la Fosse*.

Bracy Clark of Edinburgh was elevated to Farrier To His Majesty For Scotland because of his advocacy of a Scottish veterinary school. This led to his appointment as professor. The down side was the school never materialized: *Promotion To Professor*.

Claude Bourgelat, professor in the veterinary school at Alfort, France, was far ahead of his time.

He viewed disease as intermediate between life and death: *Fundamentalist Philosophy*.

John Wood and a coterie of farriers solicited subscriptions for a hospital for horses. Edward Snape, anatomist to King George III, proposed a "hippiatric infirmary." They failed: *Education Efforts In England*.

Charles Vial de Sainbel became *persona non grata* in his own country, France. During the revolution he escaped to England, where he urged a liberal veterinary education and the study of diseases of *all* animals. No one else considered veterinary education important: *Sainbel The Savant*.

The damage Edward Coleman of the London school caused the English veterinary profession is difficult to overestimate: *Coleman The Incompetent*.

When *Coleman The Incompetent* croaked, he was replaced by William Sewell, unpopular with students and clinicians alike. He ignored cattle and the fruits of his folly were realized to the full when cattle plagues broke out. He foisted fraud upon the public: *Sewell The Successor*.

John Lawrence, was a confirmed critic of veterinary education. He was pestered by perpetual regurgitation of purportedly new medical and surgical discoveries. Outspoken, he thought certain veterinarians were full of baloney, and said so: *The Lucid Lawrence*.

Fortunately, Sewell was succeeded by William Youatt, who was trained for the ministry, but changed his profession for the better late in life. Because he contended rabies was transmitted by the bite of a rabid dog, he was attacked by physician and veterinarian alike: *The Yeomanly Youatt*.

William Percivall wrote veterinary books. He demonstrated accuracy in his anatomical correctness and in physiologic philosophies, reporting what was known rather than imagined. Humane, he was against docking horses and against extensive cautery. He published his monumental *Hippopathology: Percivalls' Productions*.

As an Edinburgh graduate, John Stewart wrote a book on veterinary jurisprudence, urging readers "never to purchase a horse from a friend, a petty lawyer, a litigious person, or one who cannot pay the expenses of a lawsuit." *The Eminent From Edinburgh*.

William Haycock, another Edinburghian, veterinarian was a disciple of Samuel Christian Hahnemann, he who thought *like cures like* and coined the term *homeopathy*. Haycock published *Veterinary Homeopathy*, concerning the horse, cow, sheep, and dog. What else?: *Haycock's Homeopathy*.

James Simonds recommended restrictions on importation of cattle into Britain. He was ignored, with predictable results: Plague. Government indifferent to plague and listening only to commercial interests, was asking for trouble. They got it: *The Fruits Of Folly*.

Fred's humor extended beyond alliteration. There was outright japery.

From Cato through the 18th century: *Fowl Medicine* describes the contribution of a hen's eggs, viscera, and dung to the veterinary *materia medica* of the day.

The symbolism of the cave-man attitude toward the female of the species would suggest that "the man who loves his dog more than his wife" has an ancient if not honorable history.

"If Aristotle's tale of the shrew seems a little wild, generations of shrewed minds failed to tame it."

Medical Follies is about a 1665 play by Moliere, scripted to say, "...our cat is lately recovered of a fall she had from the top of our house into the street... 'tis very lucky for her there are no cat doctors for 'twould have been over with her, and they would not have failed purging her and bleeding her." Oh, those blasted veterinarians.

"Veterinarians of the day must have been a hardy, if not foolhardy, lot to attempt such an operation before the advent of anesthesia." What operation? Removal of the frenum beneath the tongue for treatment of rabies.

To fatten a thin horse, de Sautier (1734) prescribed a dozen starlings for 15 or 20 successive mornings. Fred said: "Were all the lean horses of the country to receive this delicacy, there would at least be considerable in road on the starling population."

Between 1819 and 1856, we Pennsylvania Germans treated poll evil by breaking off twigs, doing our "business" on them, and twisting them around in the animal's wound. As Fred said, "This is what is presumably known as the businessman's cure." This is jollity, except to us Pennsylvania Germans.

Concerning the four traditional "humours" was enough to arouse the ill-humor of certain veterinary savants.

He even took jabs at himself when he extolled veterinarians who in any age carefully recorded the results of experience instead of depending on what someone else had written from the armchair--"writers of history being, of course, an exception."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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News and Comment

The AVMHS Program in Hawaii

As you saw inside the front cover of this issue of *Veterinary Heritage*, President-elect Gary Vroegendewey has put together a program that brings speakers from Hawaii, the mainland, and the Pacific Rim. Col. Vroegendewey has done this while deploying veterinarians all over the world for the U.S. Army, and sometimes traveling overseas himself. He expresses his appreciation for program assistance from Secretary/Treasurer Susanne Whitaker, and past AVMHS presidents, Sebastian Heath and Phyllis Larsen.

If you are in Hawaii on Monday, July 17, 2006, please plan to come at 7:30 am, eat a bite, visit a bit, and take part in the annual business meeting which President David Williams will start at 8 o'clock.

The AVMHS Booth in Hawaii

The AVMHS Booth at the AVMA Convention will honor Dr. J. F. Smithcors and will feature the

students who have won prizes in the essay contest that bears his name. Past contest winners are replying with pictures and words about what has happened in their lives since writing prize-winning veterinary history essays.

In addition to the main display and handouts, there will be notebooks on the life and work of Dr. Smithcors and on the essay contest history. If you have a letter, picture, or an article that you would like to offer for the exhibit or for the notebooks, please send them to this year's booth chairperson, Susanne Whitaker, whose addresses are inside the back cover of this journal. Please send things as soon as possible because she is an AVMHS volunteer who has her own fulltime work to do for a veterinary library.

The 2006 Essay Contest

Dr. Diana Davis, who now chairs the essay contest, has received 13 essays, and their judging is in progress. Due to the passing of Dr. Smithcors, Dr. Wolfgang Jöchle generously agreed to serve as a