

IX. *A Letter from the Rev^d. Mr. Tho. Steward, V. D. M. to Dr. Mortimer, Secr. R. S. concerning the Virtues of the Star of the Earth, CORONOPUS, or Bucks-horn Plantain, in the Cure of the Bite of the Mad-Dog. See Transf. N^o 443. p. 319. and 360.*

*Bury St. Edmund's,
Nov. 1. 1738.*

Honoured SIR,

HAVING met with a Paragraph in the History of the Works of the Learned for *July* last, in which the Author takes Notice of a Passage in the last published *Philosophical Transaction*, relating to some Vegetables said to have great Virtue for the Prevention of that terrible Malady called the *Hydrophobia*, viz. The *Lichen cinereus terrestris*, and an Herb called, *Stellaria*, or *Star of the Earth*; as to the latter of which, at least, I apprehend there must have been a Mistake, (though an involuntary and unavoidable one, through the Defect or Confusion of the Memoirs made use of) and a putting of *quid pro quo* (as 'tis commonly express'd): On this Occasion I drew up a Letter to the said Author, in which I attempted the Rectification of it, happening to have some Materials by me, proper (as I thought) for such a Purpose: But considering that what he writes is but an Extract from what was published by you as Secretary to the ROYAL SOCIETY, I conceived that it would better become me to address you more immediately,

diately, as more expreffive of Refpect both to your-
 felf, and to that very Honourable and Learned
 SOCIETY, to which you are fo nearly related. And
 fince the Draught of what I judged fit to fend the
 afore-mentioned Author, (and which I have chofen
 to fupprefs) I have endeavoured to get fome further
 Light into the Affair, by a Converfation with my
 worthy Friend Dr. *S. Dale* of *Braintree*, (well known
 to feveral of the Virtuofis, and one of whose inge-
 nious Letters I find published in *Phil. Trans.* No 444.)
 who fully concurs with me in his Sentiments, as to the
 Subject of this Letter. In his well-furnifhed Bota-
 nic Library, I met with feveral things which are
Defiderata in my own much meaner one, that greatly
 contributed towards the Elucidation of what has been
 frangely obfcured by an odd and unaccountable Com-
 plication or Accumulation of Miftakes, grounded upon
 Narratives in which there feem to me to be diverfe
 Inconfiftencies, and Mifrepresentations of Matters of
 Fact, through Inadvertency or Lapse of Memory, or
 Anachronifms, by which my once very dear Friend
 and kind Correspondent, Mr. *Ray*, (whose Name
 and Memory muft ever be precious to all Lovers of
 folid Learning) was himfelf led into a Miftake (and
 became the innocent Occafion of leading others into
 the fame) about the laft-mentioned Vegetable, which
 he took to be *the Star of the Earth*, mentioned by
Grey, as a fovereign Remedy againft the Bite of a
 Mad-Dog; but was afterwards convinced, that it was
 not fo, as will evidently appear from what follows,
 in which I have done what in me lies to get to the
 Bottom of the Matter, and to extricate it out of that
 Maze

Maze in which it has pretty long lain hid, by the Help of the best Clue that I could possibly find.

Having made the Study of Botany the agreeable Amusement of my younger Years, I was very much puzzled with what I met with in the Appendix to the 2d Volume of the General History of Plants, compiled by the Reverend and Learned Gentleman but now mentioned (who was pleased to honour and favour me both with his Friendship, and Epistolary Correspondence) concerning the *Spanish Catch-fly*, which he there affirms (*p.* 1895.) to be *the Star of the Earth*, so famous for the Prevention of the *Hydrophobia*; whereas I always (before I read this Assertion in Mr. Ray) took the *Coronopus*, or *Buckshorn Plantain*, to be the true *Star of the Earth*, and do still believe it so to be, for the Reasons that will occur to you in the Sequel.

Being desirous to know what Grounds Mr. Ray had for ascribing such Virtue to the *Catch-fly*, I wrote a Letter to him, dated so long ago as *Dec.* 1. 1698. in which (among several other Particulars that would be impertinent to mention) I requested of him to tell me what his Sentiments were at that time upon this Subject. My Words were these, *viz.*

[Opinionem tuam de Herba illa a Grayo in sua Hippatrice Memorata, quam Stellam Terræ vocat, & ad morsum canis rabidi efficacissimam esse asserit, scire exopto. Stirpes duæ (ut videtur) hoc nomine insigniuntur, viz. Plantago illa foliis laciniatis Coronopus dicta, & Lychnis viscosa flore muscoso, sive Sefamoides Salamanticum magnum. Prior in Comitatu Norfolcienci magno in pretio habetur, & in casu prædicto (nec sine certo successu) semper fere in usum venit.

venit. Posterior autem paucis innotescit, nec ab ullis mihi notis unquam usurpata fuit. Tu vero auctoritate Domini Edwardi Hulsii (viri sane clarissimi) nixus, in Appendice ad Hist. Generalem, hanc esse Plantam a Grayo tantopere laudatam asseris; sed in Synopsi Stirpium Britannicarum nihil de Herbæ hujuscæ viribus scribis; laudes autem, quibus hanc ornabas, in Coronopum retulisti. Quæro igitur abs te, num sententiam tuam mutasti? Et D. Hulsium de hac planta deceptum fuisse nunc arbitraris? Ego sane dubius & incertus hæreo. Grayus ipse nullum aliud nomen præter Stellam Terræ herbæ, quam adeo magnificat, imposuit, neque (in illa saltem Editione, quam mihi videre contigit) descriptionem ullam, notamve characteristicam addidit, qua Planta hæc laudatissima aliis innotesceret. Nescio autem quomodo D. Hulsius tam certo sciret Grayum ad Lychnidem prædictam respexisse, eamque nomine illo designasse. An Lychnis hæc tantis pollet viribus, ego quidem multum dubito; quod autem tu mihi hunc eximas scrupulum, (ut phrasi Pliniana utar) hoc impensus cupio.]

To this Inquiry that good communicative Gentleman condescended to return the following free and ingenuous Answer, in *English* (though part of his Letter was in the same Language with mine).

[As to your pertinent Question concerning the Plant called *Star of the Earth*, the Case stands thus: King *James* sent to the ROYAL SOCIETY a Sample of a Plant dried, which was sent him for that which cured his Dogs when bitten with a Mad-Dog, and by the Name of *the Star of the Earth*. This Plant not being well dried and preserved, none of the ROYAL SOCIETY knew certainly what to make of;

so they sent it to me, who, upon careful Examination of it, found it to be the *Sesamoides Salamanticum Magnum*; whereupon Dr. *Hulse* sending me that Observation out of *Gray*, concerning the Use of the Plant called *the Star of the Earth*, I thought I had Ground enough to attribute the Virtue of curing the *Hydrophobia* to the *Sesamoides Salamanticum*, not imagining that any would dare to abuse a Sovereign Prince, by sending him a false Plant. But afterwards, considering that the *Coronopus* was, for its Resemblance to a Star, called *the Star of the Earth*, and that it was noted for such a Virtue, but the *Sesamoides* was neither like a Star, nor by any so called, nor described to have such a Quality; I concluded, that the Plant which *Gray* meant, was the *Coronopus* and not the *Sesamoides*, and that we had been abused by a false Plant sent to King *James*, for *the Star of the Earth*.] †

This Account from Mr. *Ray* himself fully satisfied me, that the *Bucks-horn*, and not the *Catch-fly*, was the true *Star of the Earth*. But as to the curing of King *James's* Hounds, I suspect that Mr. *Ray* was misinformed as to that Matter, and am now almost persuaded, that there was never such a thing; for I cannot but observe, that there is a most perplexing Inconsistency between the two Extracts which have been given from the Journal-Books of the ROYAL SOCIETY, relating to this Matter of Fact. The Words are these, in the last Page of the last-published *Transaction*, N^o 443. p. 360. viz.

[Nov. 16. 1671. Sir *R. Moray* exhibited a certain Plant, (which by Mr. *Ray* is called *Lichen cinereus terrestris*) said by Sir *R. M.* to be very good to cure Dogs bitten by a Mad-Dog; his Royal Highness

having caused it to be given to a whole Kennel of Dogs bitten by a Mad one, which were all cured, except one of them, to whom none of it was given. The Specimen was kept in the Repository.]

Quære, Whether it be there still?

[Afterwards, *viz.* *March* 1671-2. Sir *R. M.* mentioned, That a whole Kennel of Dogs belonging to his Royal Highness, were bitten by a Mad-Dog, and had been lately cured by an Herb called *Stellaria*, or *Star of the Earth*. This Plant is the *Lych. visc. flore muscoso*, *C. B.* in *English*, *Spanish Catch-fly*: See these *Transactions*, N^o 187. where is a Receipt to cure Mad-Dogs, wherein this Plant is a principal Ingredient, which Receipt, communicated by Sir *R. Gourdon*, was there published by his Majesty's special Command, *An.* 1687.]

Now, Sir, here are two very different Accounts from the same Person, relating to the same Thing. In the first, Sir *R. M.* speaks of the Cure as performed by the *Lichen*; in the second, in less than half a Year after the other, he mentions it as done by the *Stellaria*. Now it seems utterly improbable, that the Kennel of Hounds should be twice bitten, and cured by a different Plant in so short a Space: And indeed (as I hinted before) my present Opinion is, that the Hounds were never bit by a Mad-Dog at all, but that the whole Story has been founded upon an older one, of which there is Mention made in that Book written by *T. de Grey*, Esq; called *The expert Farrier*, in the 2d Edition of which, in 4^{to}, published in 1652. among other Cures for the Bite of a Mad-Dog, he prescribes this which follows, *p.* 160.

[Take

[Take the Herb which groweth in dry and barren Hills, called *the Star of the Earth*; you must give it three Days together. The first time you must gather three of these Herbs, with all the whole Roots; and wash them clean, and pound them well; which done, give them to your Horse in Milk, Beer, Ale, or White-wine, but be careful the Horse takes all the Herbs and Roots: If you will, you may make up these Herbs and Roots in fresh or sweet Butter, which will do as well. The second Day give your Horse five of these Herbs and Roots, as before; and the third Day give him seven. Do this punctually, and you may be well assured your Horse will be perfectly cured; for albeit I myself have never tried this Medicine, yet I do know, the Party of whom I had this Cure, hath cured much Cattle of all Sorts therewith. I myself can say thus much of this Receipt, That I knew it cure an whole Kennel of Hounds of a Gentleman's, one Beagle excepted, which they did not suspect to be bitten, which indeed was bitten; so he fell mad and died, but all the rest escaped. Another time, a Gentleman's Son of my Acquaintance was unfortunately bitten, who was cured by the Party who taught me this Receipt; and this young Gentleman (who was then a Boy of 10 Years old) was so far spent with the Rancor of the Disease, before this Man took him in hand, as that his Head began to be addle, and he to talk very idly; yet he cured him, so as he lived and did well, and is at this Hour living, and a very proper and handsome Man, &c.]

Thus far *de Grey*. Now, Sir, I am apt to think, that any one who considers what he says about the Kennel of Hounds, will be ready to conclude, that

these were what Sir *R. M.* mistook for the Duke of *York's* Dogs, as seems plain from the remarkable Circumstance of the one Beagle that had none of the Plant given him, mentioned in both the Stories. So strangely may Errors arise, and be multiplied, by jumbling the Ideas of different things together in the Minds and Memories of Men, how wise and learned soever. So far as I can find, all the Concern King *James* had in this Affair, was his sending a Plant to the ROYAL SOCIETY, which his Huntsman recommended as an excellent Remedy for the Bite of a Mad-Dog; and it seems to me very likely, that the Huntsman might have met with this Story in *Grey*, and told it to his Master, and this he might tell to Sir *R. M.* and it may be, the Man, to set out the Virtues of the Medicine the more, might tell the Duke, that several of his own Hounds were cured by it, whether it were really so or not. None of these Suppositions are impossible, nor, in my poor Judgment, very improbable.

To make this dark Affair appear in a still clearer Light, let me desire you to compare and consider the following Extracts. In a Letter to Mr. *Ray* from Mr. *Aubry*, published by Mr. *Derham*, and dated *Aug. 5. 1691.* there is this Paragraph, *p. 250.* [King *James* sent by Sir — *Garden* (I suppose it should have been *Gourdon*) to the ROYAL SOCIETY, a Plant called *Star of the Earth*, with the Receipt made of it, to cure the Bite of a Mad-Dog, which is in *Transactions* N^o 187.] This refers to a Receipt communicated by Sir *R. Gourdon*, by his Majesty's Command, and in which there is mention of *the Star of the Earth*, and to which this *N. B.* is added, [The Plant
in

in this Receipt, and which is the chief Ingredient, is known among Botanists by the Name of *Sesamoides Salamanticum* of *Parkinson*, or *Lychnis viscosa*, &c. of *Baubine*, *Anglicè Spanish Catch-fly*. It grows plentifully about *Thetford*, &c. *Vide Raii Cat. Pl. Angl. & Hist. Pl. Tom. 2^{do}. inter Lychnides.*] This seems grounded upon what *Mr. Ray* was afterwards persuaded to be a Mistake.

The next thing I shall beg your Attention to, is a Letter from *Sir Hans Sloane*, the now very Honourable President of the ROYAL SOCIETY, to *Mr. Ray*; prior indeed in Time to the former, being dated *June 1. 1687.* in these Words: [*Sir*, I send you inclosed the Specimen of a Plant growing on *Newmarket-Heath*, and in *Surrey*, known by the Name of *the Star of the Earth* in those Parts. It is particularly taken Notice of on the Account of its extraordinary and admirable Virtue, in curing the biting of Mad-Dogs, either in Beasts or Men. One of his Majesty's Huntsmen having proved it a great many times, gave the King his way of using it, which was an Infusion in Wine with Treacle, and one or two more Simples. His Majesty was pleased to communicate it to *Gresham-College*, to the ROYAL SOCIETY; and nobody knowing the Plant by that Name, some there present confirming its Use in some Parts of *England* in that Disease, the Herb being as little known here as if it came from the *Indies*, I told the SOCIETY, I would let you have the best Specimen of it, which I question not is known to you. If you please to give your Sentiments, you will extremely oblige, &c.] To this *Mr. Ray* returned the following Answer: [*Sir*, I received your
Letter

Letter with the Specimen enclosed, which seems to me to be the *Sesamoides Salamanticum Magnum* of *Clusius*, or *Lychnis visc.* &c. of *Baubine*, which I have observed to grow plentifully upon *Newmarket Heath*, &c. I wonder it should have such a Virtue as you mention, but it seems it is well attested. Dr. *Hulse* writes to me, he finds it in *Grey's* Farrier.] This seems pretty evidently to refer to the same Plant mentioned by *Aubry*, and this surely was the Plant that not being well dried and preserved, the SOCIETY could not tell what to make of, and which Mr. *Ray* found to be the *Sesamoides*, which he then thought was the Plant that *Grey* called *the Star of the Earth*; but upon further Consideration, he was firmly persuaded, that the *Coronopus*, and not the *Sesamoides*, was the Plant intended by *de Grey* (for so his Name ought to be written): And indeed, to me there seems to be the greatest Probability, if not absolute Certainty, of this latter Opinion; for the *Sesamoides* was a Plant so little known in *Grey's* Time, that the Botanists who were cotemporary with him, took it for a Plant that was wholly a Stranger in *England*, as may be seen in *Johnson* upon *Gerard* and in *Parkinson* and the Manner of giving it, as directed by *Grey*, viz. first three, then five, and then seven Plants, Roots and all, speaks it to be a small Herb, such as is the *Coronopus*, and not such a large one, with a big, sticky or woody Root, as the *Sesamoides*. This I am very sure of, that in *Norfolk*, my native County, (and which, if I mistake not, was *Grey's* also) the *Coronopus* is called *the Star of the Earth* (and among other Names given it by *Dodonæus*, this of *Stellaria*, and *Stella Terræ*, is one, p. 95. of the *English* Translation; and he describes it as lying spread upon the Ground like a Star; and

Gerard

Gerard gives the same Description of it, and *Parkinson*, in his *Theatrum*, yet more fully, p. 501. viz. That the Leaves lie round about the Root in Order one by another, thereby resembling the Form of a Star, and therefore called *Herba Stella*; by which Name, among others, it is called by *Casalpinus*, *Lobel*, &c. But who ever met with the Name *Stellaria*, or *Stella Terra*, among the *Synonyma* of the *Sesamoides* in any Botanic Writer before Mr. *Ray*, who afterwards retracted it, as has been fully proved †). In that Part of *Norfolk* where I was born, not far from *Norwich*, towards the Sea-coast, where the *Bucks-horn* Plant grows abundantly, there was great Use made of it when I was but a Lad, and always with good Success, so far as ever I could hear. One Story I can tell of my own Knowledge, which may seem too trifling to mention, were it not to shew the Efficacy of the Simple. About 40 Years ago, when I lived at a Place called *Debenham* in *Suffolk*, a Person unknown to me, having heard that I knew an Herb that was good against the Bite of a Mad-Dog, sent to desire a Sample of it, with Directions how to use it; and some time after I had half a Dozen fine Chickens brought me. I asked whence they came? It was answered from such a one (the Name I have now forgot). I said I did not know him: To which the Reply was, That it was the Man to whom I had sent the *Plantain*, which had saved the Lives of half a dozen Hogs of his, that had been bitten by a Mad Dog; and he thought the least he could do was to send me half a Dozen Chickens as a Token of his Gratitude. After all, I will not be positive, that the *Lychnis*, or *Catch-fly*, is not good *contra morsum Canis rabidi*; but I
am

am confident that it is not the true *Star of the Earth*.

You see, Sir, I have taken a good deal of Pains to trace this Matter through all its intricate Meanders. I have been forced, indeed, to deal pretty much in Gueſſes and Conjectures, which I am not very fond of; but as the Caſe ſtands, it could not well be avoided: And I ſhall be glad, if by this Means we may be got (as I hope we are) near the Truth, which is the thing I aim at in this long Purſuit; and I have rode more than 50 Miles in this wet winter Seaſon, (though *ferè Septuagenarius*) in order to diſentangle it from the Confuſion and Contradiſtion in which it has been involved. Whether you will judge my Labour *tanti*, I know not; but if you ſhall be ſo favourable to me, as to think any thing that comes from ſo mean and obſcure a Perſon, worthy of the Notice of that very learned Body, at whoſe Board you have the Honour to ſit as Secretary, you may be pleaſed to communicate the ſame at ſome Meeting of the SOCIETY, as a well-meant Attempt (how weakly ſoever managed) to clear up, in ſome meaſure, what has been long clouded by dark and diſagreeing Accounts. If any doubt ſhould be made with reſpect to my Integrity, or Exaſtneſs in the Extract I have given you from Mr. Ray's Letter, the Original is ſtill in Being, and ſhall be produced, if deſired.

As for the *Liverwort*, I can ſay nothing from my own Knowledge; but by the Account of its Virtues given by *Dampier*, (which he took for a kind of *Jew's-ear*, but which that very venerable Gentleman, and illuſtrious Ornament of the ROYAL SOCIETY, Sir *Hans Sloane*, with great Reaſon affirmed to be the
Lichen

Lichen cinereus terrestris) and published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, N^o 237. I cannot doubt but it is a potent Remedy, of which I presume there may have been several successful Experiments made, since those made by *Dampier's* Uncle, which are very considerable. And it may be King *James* might have some of his Hounds cured by this *Lichen*, after he came to the Crown, and might then send a Specimen thereof also to the SOCIETY.

I must here restrain my Pen from being further tedious, and beg Pardon for giving you the Trouble of so long a Scrawl, and for saying so much that may look like a *περιαυτολογία*, though the Occasion is such as will, I hope, plead my Excuse. In so perplexed an Affair, I could not tell how to represent my Sense in a smaller Compass; and I wish I may have done it to your Satisfaction, and that of the learned Gentlemen, who, I doubt not, frequently receive Accounts from better Hands, far more worthy of their Attention in Matters Physical, Philosophical, &c. than any thing that I am capable of producing; but as 'tis commonly said, *In magnis voluisse sat est*; and I am free to impart what little I do understand, that may have the least Tendency to promote Natural Knowledge, and be any way serviceable to the Public, especially in Cases where Life and Health are concerned, those precious inestimable Jewels, and most valuable Gifts of Divine Bounty. The Practice of Physic is not indeed my Profession, though I have looked a little by way of Diversion into the Theory, but in *Communi periculo omnis homo Miles*; and shall think myself very happy, if any thing I have here communicated may prove in the lowest Degree advantageous

and useful. I have not been very solicitous about Words, all that I aimed being only to make my Meaning known: The Nature of the Subject would not, indeed, well admit of the Decorations of Art and Style, had I been capable of giving them to it. *Ornari res ipsa negat, contenta doceri.*

I am,

S I R,

With great Respect,

Your very humble Servant,

Tho. Steward.

P. S.

A Friend of mine lately informed me, that there was a wonderful Cure performed upon a Woman in this County, several Years ago, who had been bitten by a Mad-Dog, and in whom the evident Symptoms of the *Hydrophobia* appeared, who yet was saved, by GOD's Blessing, upon the Use of a Powder given by the Direction of the Lady *Brook* (a Person of Eminence formerly in *Suffolk*). It seems the Powder went by the Name of *The Lady Brook's Powder*, and was generally supposed to be chiefly, if not only, the *Coronopus* dried and pulverized: And I must own, that I have at present such an Opinion of the great Virtue of this Simple, that till I have some convincing Evidence of its having failed, I can scarce avoid looking upon it as a Specific *contra morsum canis rabidi*; and I heartily wish, for the sake of such as shall at any time happen to fall under so terrible a Misfortune, that it may be proved by Experience so to be.

X. De