

HERMAN BOERHAAVE
1668-1738

Boerhaave was born in 1668, the son of the Protestant minister of Voorhout in the province of Holland. His father took a great interest in his son's education and sent him to a grammar school in Leiden. Following his father's wish, expressed just before his death in 1683, Boerhaave entered the University of Leiden in 1684 to study theology. In 1690 he earned a degree in philosophy, after defending five disputations and delivering a gold-medal winning oration. He continued his theological studies, but his interest soon shifted to medicine. He attended public dissections and studied the major anatomical works of the time. In 1693 he received his doctorate in medicine from the small university of Harderwijk in the province of Gelderland.

After his studies, Boerhaave settled in Leiden where he started a medical practice. In 1701 he was appointed lecturer in medicine at the university of Leiden. He lectured on the *Institutiones medicae*, gave private lessons in the practice of medicine, and began giving lessons in chemistry as well. In 1703 the university allowed him to give an oration *De usu ratiocinii mechanici in medicina*, in which he outlined his iatromechanical programme. In 1708 and 1709 he published his *Institutiones medicae* and the *Aphorismi de cognoscendis et curandis morbis*. These textbooks made Boerhaave and his ideas widely known, and as a result, when a vacancy occurred in the chair of botany and medicine in 1709, he was appointed to that chair.

In 1710 Boerhaave married the wealthy Maria Drolenvaux. They had one daughter who reached adulthood. Because Boerhaave was responsible for the university's botanical garden he published two catalogues, in 1710 (*Index plantarum*) and 1720 (*Index alter*). Because of Boerhaave's care, the number of plants in the botanical garden increased greatly. In medicine Boerhaave revived the clinical teaching at the patient's bedside at the Caecilia Hospital, beginning in 1714. The quality of his methodical and systematic teaching was his greatest contribution to medicine and attracted many students from all over Europe, especially from English-speaking countries. His activities greatly contributed to the fame of the Leiden faculty of Medicine in the eighteenth century. In 1715 he delivered his oration *De comparando certo in physicis* at the occasion of the resignation of the office of *rector magnificus*.

After the death of J. le Mort, professor of chemistry, in 1718, Boerhaave was entrusted with that chair as well. He accepted it with an oration *De chemia suos errores expurgante*. Dissatisfied with an earlier work on chemistry, he assembled his chemical experience and theories in the two volume *Elementa chemiae* of 1732. This book would become one of the major textbooks on chemistry in Europe over the next decades. Boerhaave opposed the organic ideas of G.E. Stahl and introduced quantitative methods into chemistry. After a serious illness in 1722, Boerhaave resigned from his chairs in botany and chemistry in 1729 in order to concentrate on his medical teaching duties.

Boerhaave systematized and edited many works of predecessors like Aretaeus, Vesalius, Eustachius, Bellini, and Piso. In 1737-1738 he published the *Bybel der Natuure* (Bible of Nature) of the late Jan Swammerdam. At the end of his career Boerhaave was the most famous Dutch scientist and had a world-wide reputation. He was a member of the Royal Society and the Académie Royale des Sciences, and his advice was sought by royalty, nobility, and magistrates. Boerhaave, whom Albrecht von Haller later called 'communis Europae preceptor', died in 1738 in his house in Leiden.

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