

June 1933

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James J. Walsh

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### Recommended Citation

Walsh, James J. (1933) "Medieval Science and Surgery," *The Linacre Quarterly*. Vol. 1: No. 3, Article 2.  
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol1/iss3/2>

## MEDIEVAL SCIENCE AND SURGERY

By JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D.

SOME of my friends have expressed great surprise that there should have been such a magnificent development of surgery in the Middle Ages as I pictured in the last number of *THE LINACRE QUARTERLY*. This surprise is due to the fact that there is still in the back of a great many peoples' minds the idea that the Middle Ages are the dark ages, or at least definitely obscure in what relates to science and above all medicine. As a matter of fact nearly all the things that we are most proud of in our modern civilization have their origin in the Middle Ages. No wonder that John Fiske should have said that in a certain sense at least the ages which men in their ignorance used to call "dark" are really "the bright ages" and can be compared even with the greatest of the ages of classical antiquity.

After all we have from the Middle Ages that wonderful Gothic architecture with which all over this country during the past fifty years our churches have been built, not alone the Catholic but also the Protestant churches. St. Thomas' Anglican Church on Fifth Avenue is as beautiful an example of Gothic as St. Patrick's Cathedral just down the avenue from it. This is the time also when the universities had their origin and when that scholastic philosophy which continued to influence Europe down until well on in the nineteenth century was born. From that time we have the great literature in the various countries of Europe, the *Cid* in Spain, the Arthur Legends in England, the *Nibelungenleid* in Germany, the Troubadours and Trouvères, Reynard the fox and at the end of the century Dante. There is no greater period in literature in all the world's history than this, though it lacks the finish of the Greek and the polish of the Romans. Instead of being surprised that anything good should have come out of the Middle Ages, the fact of the matter is that what is best in our day comes from there.

Of course if we did not have the books of the surgeons of that day no one would accept for a moment the thought that the medieval surgeons anticipated so much of that surgical work that we are accustomed to think of as having its origin in our day. The same thing is true for many other things in the Middle Ages. For instance, no one would believe for a moment that the most beautiful books in the world had been made in Ireland in the eighth century only that we have the books. Neither would any one believe that the Irish had made the most beautiful jewelry in the world in the ninth century, that is in the earlier Middle Ages which is still presumed by some to deserve the name of dark ages, only that we have a large number of specimens from that medieval Irish period.

There are other striking examples of that misunderstanding of the Middle Ages besides the refusal to think that surgery could have had such a magnificent origin. President White of Cornell in his "Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom" declared that because of the decrees of the Church councils forbidding the practice of surgery, surgeons were in dishonor until the Emperor Wenceslaus at the beginning of the fifteenth century ordered that they should be restored to public esteem. As a matter of fact, during the two preceding centuries surgery developed marvelously and we had at that time probably the most successful period in all the history of surgery except our own. The Church decrees adduced by President White forbade monks to practice surgery because it led to certain abuses. Priests would not be allowed to practice surgery at the present time because that requires special training which they have not, and then if they had it the Church objects to that combination of priest and surgeon, as who would not?

These traditions of various kinds with regard to Church opposition to science need to be sifted very carefully before being accepted. My attention was recently called to a contribution to the scientific aspects of relativity in the midst of which there was an acknowledgment of the genius of Roger Bacon, the very well known Franciscan scientist of the thirteenth century, with the comment that "apparently possessed of a keen mind far in advance of his contemporaries, Bacon won only imprisonment in recognition." As a comment on this passage one only need turn to the volumes "History of Magic and Experimental Science" by Professor Lynn Thorndike, sometime professor of history in Western Reserve University, and now professor of medieval history in Columbia. He dwells on the fact that what is known with regard to the imprisonment of Bacon is founded "solely on the very contestable authority of the Chronicle of the XXIV Generals of the Franciscan Order, a work written about 1370 though containing some earlier materials." This would mean that it was not until nearly one hundred years after his death that the story of his imprisonment found a place in history. Something of the same kind is true in the story of Galileo. The Italian astronomer is said to have said, after having recanted before the Holy Office, *é pur se muove*, "And yet it does move." This formula which is often quoted was found first in a French encyclopedic dictionary in the sixth edition though it had not been referred to in the preceding editions. In any of these stories about the relation of the Church to science in the Middle Ages it is extremely important to get the original documents. When we get them they usually tell a very different story from the one that has been coming down the

centuries. The relationship of the Church and surgery is a striking example of that. As a matter of fact some of the authors of the textbooks of surgery that have proved so startling for the modern time were in very intimate relationships with the popes or with other ecclesiastics. Theodoric was actually a bishop and he did not practice surgery but compiled information with regard to it. Guy de Chauliac, the great father of French surgery, was the canon of a cathedral and therefore may have been a priest, but that is not certain, and was papal physician to several of the Avignon popes. The surgery of the Middle Ages was worthy of the great literature, architecture, art, arts and crafts and philosophy of this wonderful time. That is not surprising, for whenever a generation does any one thing well as a rule it does everything that it turns its attention to, well. We shall see in the next article how well the medieval people developed that most important part of medicine, diagnosis in clinical medicine.

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## THOMAS LINACRE

By ANTHONY BASSLER, M.D., New York City

**H**ANGING in Kensington Palace is a portrait of Thomas Linaere painted by Holbein, a line cut from which is found on the front cover of this journal. Linaere was successfully physician to Henry the Seventh, Henry the Eighth, Edward the Sixth and to Princess Mary. Not only England, but the intellectual world owes a debt to his activities because he undoubtedly was the most learned physician of his time. He studied eloquence at Bologne under Politian, one of the most elegant Latinists in Europe, and while he was in Rome he devoted himself to medicine and the study of the natural philosophy under Hermolaus Barbarus. Linaere was the first Englishman who read Aristotle and Galen in the original Greek. On his return to England after taking the degree of Doctor of Medicine at the University of Padua he graduated an M.D. at Oxford and he lectured in physic and taught the Greek language at that university. His reputation became so high that King Henry the Seventh called him to Court and intrusted him with the care of the health and education of his son, Prince Arthur. He also instructed Princess Catherine in the Italian language at this time, and published a work on mathematics. Subsequently he produced a treatise on grammar which has universally been acknowledged to be a work of great erudition. Linaere lectured in physic at both Oxford and Cambridge, was the instigator and founder of the Royal College of Physicians, holding the office of President