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LINACRE, THE PRIEST

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

WHILE Linacre must be considered as one of the very distinguished scholars of the Renaissance who "made Galen talk better Latin," as a distinguished critic said, "than he had talked Greek in his original"; and while he is one of the most honored of the physicians of his day, the founder of the Royal College of Physicians, he chose at the end of his life to become a priest. That was a very disturbing move for him to have made so far as the minds of non-Catholic devotees (and they are legion) of Linacre are concerned. Among his most ardent devotees in this country were Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and Dr. Osler. I know from personal communications that both of these men found it rather difficult to understand why so great a physician and scholar should turn to the priesthood toward the end of his life.

Dr. S. Weir Mitchell wrote a number of books that gave him literary prominence in this country and among them was one with the title, "Dr. North and His Friends," which was serialized in the *Century Magazine*, when that magazine was considered very probably the most important magazine in the country. In it he has the following interesting reference to Linacre. One of the characters, St. Clair, says:

"I saw the other day at Owen's a life of one Linacre, a doctor, who had the luck to live about 1460 to 1524 when men knew little and thought they knew all. In his old age he took for novelty to reading St. Matthew. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters were enough. He threw the book aside and cried out, 'Either this is not the Gospel or we are not Christians.' What else could he say?"

The passage is interesting as disclosing that Dr. Mitchell was inclined to think that the Scriptures were very little read at that time and that until the Reformation came men did not turn to them for personal direction in any sense. Some other writers in English seem to hint that this chance reading of the Scriptures represented the first occasion Linacre had ever taken to read the New Testament. Presumably the readers would be expected to believe that following the worn out Protestant tradition of the old Church's discouragement of the reading of the Bible and of the extreme scarcity of copies of the Book this was the first time he had ever had a good chance to read it. This, of course, is nonsense.

Linacre after having spent ten years in Italy studying medicine and everything else nearly there was to learn at that time, spent some twenty years in the very lucrative practice of his profession because he was the physician to both King Henry VIII and to Cardinal Wolsey. It is easy to understand how great a prestige these official positions gave him and he gathered around him a clientele of the distinguished nobility of the kingdom as well as all those who had the

money to pay the fees that would be demanded in the regular practice of a man of this kind.

At the age of sixty, then, Linacre, in possession of an independent fortune, founded the Royal College of Physicians and turned to spend the last years of his life as a priest. The tradition that reading of the Scriptures brought him to realize how little of real Christianity he had, if his one idea was to make money, is probably true. He took literally the injunction to give up all and follow Him. The Irish have a maxim that some time about sixty a man ought to make his soul. That's what Linacre did and four years later the end came.

Linacre's turn to the priesthood this way in England just three years after Luther had nailed his theses to the door of the university church in Wittenberg is the finest compliment that he could possibly have paid to the Church. Almost needless to say a man of Linacre's mental caliber was not likely to be deceived nor to deceive himself with regard to the ecclesiastics of his time. Since this was the time of the Reformation so called, priests and the hierarchy and even religious orders are said to have been grasping and selfish and hypocritical and more intent in getting on in the world than in exemplifying religion in their own characters or bringing religion to the poor with all its consolations and benefits. Linacre is the answer to all this, who at the height of his great career, when he was the most honored man in England in his profession—and deservedly, turned aside from all that to take up the dignity of the priesthood.

GUILD NOTES

CLEVELAND GUILD, Cleveland, Ohio—Cleveland came into the union with the formation of a Guild which already numbers 250. The officers are: C. A. O'Connell, M.D., President; Dr. A. E. Szcztkowski, Vice-President; Dr. F. L. McGannon, Treasurer; Rev. James J. Duffy, Spiritual Director; Dr. R. J. Schraff, Secretary; Trustees: Drs. J. E. Hallisy, A. C. J. Brickel, and J. W. Victoryn.

Welcome Cleveland!

BELLEVILLE ILLINOIS GUILD—The Belleville Guild has decided to issue a mimeographed Bulletin for its members. This is so interesting a development that we print in full the first issue:

INTRODUCING OURSELVES

Casting about for a means of keeping our widely scattered membership in contact with the Catholic Physicians' Guild of this Diocese, we hit upon the plan of issuing this Bulletin. Our object will be to give you short paragraphs on the activities of the Guild and its members.

With this issue, therefore, the *Bulletin* makes its bow to the Catholic physicians and the Reverend pastors of the Belleville Diocese.

Your suggestions for the improvement of the *Bulletin* will be welcome.

OUR NEW OFFICERS

Conforming to the very wise suggestion of Sir Knight Dr. B. H. Portuondo, first President of our Guild, an entirely new set of officers was elected at the