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## UGO DA LUCCA

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

I think that I may say without fear of contradiction that the name of the man at the head of this article is quite unfamiliar to most people, even to physicians, though he was a very distinguished physician and surgeon and eminently deserves a place in men's memories for all that he accomplished for mankind. He might very well be said to have been the Louis Pasteur of the thirteenth century, and, undoubtedly, he is one of the most important figures in medical history, but, above all, a great pioneer in almost every department of surgery. This is the man who in the early half of the thirteenth century anticipated what we think of as a very modern discovery when he performed a number of operations under anesthesia, but besides this he devoted himself to securing union by first intention so that his surgical incisions, when healed, made linear scars so fine that they were scarcely noticeable except on the very closest inspection.

There is no doubt now that Ugo da Lucca and a number of others used anesthesia for surgical purposes in the later Middle Ages, but what is still more surprising, they evolved the custom of washing wounds carefully with strong wine and employed such dressings as prevented infections. The wine evaporated, leaving what were known as the dry dressings, and these proved very stimulant for

healing. We have no first-hand account of Ugo's work, for like many another surgeon, he was not a writer. Fortunately for us, however, we have an excellent account of Ugo's work as written by his son, Theodoric, who with two of his brothers became physicians. Later Theodoric was ordained priest and consecrated bishop. He set himself among other tasks the writing of the surgical experiences of his father. Theodoric wrote in 1266 of the surgery of his day:

It is not necessary, as Roger and Roland [the great surgeons of the University of Salerno who wrote a well-known surgical textbook] have written, as many of their disciples teach and as all *modern* [note the word *modern*, just after the middle of the thirteenth century] surgeons profess, that pus should be generated in the wounds. Indeed no error can be greater than this. Such a practice [that is, of encouraging pus formation] is indeed to hinder nature, prolong the healing of the wound and prevent the conglutination and consolidation of the incision.

When we recall what was accomplished at that time, Ugo da Lucca's magnificent advances are not nearly so surprising as they would otherwise be. For Ugo da Lucca lived in a time when they built the great cathedrals which are still masterpieces of architecture, unrivaled by anything we have achieved in that line in the modern time, but that was only one marvel of his day. This was the period when they organized the universities and gave them, to

ethical teaching. Moreover, the amount of work which the doctor has to do in his daily practice, and in keeping himself abreast of medical advances, is great. Active membership in a Catholic physicians' guild is the best means by which all Catholics may keep themselves sensitively and fundamentally in touch with sound Catholic principles in questions involving important medico-ethical problems as they arise.

Catholic physicians do find time to keep well abreast of scientific medical development by what, in the broad sense, is post-graduate study—the perusal of medical journals, the use of a library, attendance at medical meetings and at times by taking formal post-graduate courses of medical study. Active attendance at the meetings of Catholic Physicians' Guilds constitutes a continuous post-graduate course in Catholic medico-ethical education.

A sound ethical orientation of the doctor is of vital import for his patients, and especially for his Catholic patients who often come to him for aid and direction in the correct solution of their medico-ethical problems. Attempts to solve such problems by the application of immoral measures leads, in the long run, to greater difficulties in the form of damage to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the individual and of the family and, finally to the several larger groups, social, religious, and national, which depend in their origin, continuance, and

health, upon the existence and integrity of these basic individual and family units.

Certainly, Catholic physicians are second to none in general culture and scientific medical training. The coordination of such culture and training with scientific, Catholic ethical principles, gives to the Catholic physician strength, dignity, and moral integrity in his field, and makes his office a refuge for the sick of body and of mind, who in a ruthless, materialistic age, so frequently require all the healing power of modern medical science, applied in the humane spirit of broad Catholic moral principles.

Being an active member of a Catholic doctors' guild, which always has as advisor on ethical and spiritual problems, a Moderator who is an outstanding member of the Catholic Clergy, is the best means of keeping in dynamic touch with Catholic teaching on all the important medico-ethical problems of our time, and of formulating ways and means of effective cooperation in keeping these principles operative in medical practice, and in the activities of the medical councils of the county, state, and nation. Catholic physicians need to organize to combat the growth in medicine of materialistic, unnatural, and un-Christian measures, that can only leave a train of consequences ruinous in the long run to individual happiness and to the fullest development and enrichment of our national life.