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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

a great extent, the constitutions that they have at the present time, except for such departures from university training as are being deprecated by most of our modern educators. This was the time also when they made an enduring literature in every language in Europe. The *Cid* in Spain, the Arthur legends in England, the *Nibelungenlied* in Germany, the *meistersingers* and the *minnesingers*, "Everyman," and the animal epic, "Reynard the Fox," in the Netherlands, "The Romance of the Rose" and the troubadours and *trouvères* in France, with Dante as the culminating spirit of it all. Was there ever a time when a genius in medicine and surgery might be expected to arise as at this time?

In my first years as a medical student, some old surgeons were still talking about laudable pus. That was the one result they hoped to get in their wounds. They hoped to secure a mild species of pus because their experience had been that if they secured that, it would prevent the formation of the more virulent pus which was absorbed into the patient's system so that he died from generalized infection.

Theodoric's suggestion of many practical problems in surgery, as his father met them, is extremely interesting. He says, for instance, that there are two forms of cancer. One of them is "a melancholy humor," a constitutional tendency, as it were, and occurs especially in the breasts of women or

latent in the womb, and is difficult to treat, and is usually fatal. The other form of cancer consists of a deep ulcer with undermined edges, occurring particularly on the legs, difficult to cure, and prompt to relapse. For this the outlook is not so bad. Theodoric's description of the ulcer known as *noli me tangere* (because treatment of it so often sets up irritation and inflammation that made the condition worse than before), is extremely practical. The same thing may be said of lupus, which he describes as "eating herpes" which occurs mainly on the nose or around the mouth, slowly increases, and either follows a preceding erysipelas or comes from some internal cause. He thinks that deep cauterization of it is the best treatment. Since these lesions would be placed in the department of skin diseases in our time, this would seem to be the place to mention that Theodoric described salivation as occurring after the administration of mercury in the treatment of certain skin diseases. Theodoric also proclaims what his father knew of certain ulcers and sores in the genital region, with distinctions between them.

Besides surgery, Ugo was an expert in public health. In 1214, he was called to Bologna to become the city physician there, and accompanied the Bolognese volunteers in the crusade for regaining the Holy Land in 1218. He was present at the siege of Damietta. He returned to Bologna in 1221

and had achieved such prestige that he was appointed legal physician to the city. The civic statutes of Bologna are, according to Gurlt, and the German historian

of surgery, Sudhoff, the oldest monument of legal medicine in the Middle Ages, and for this Ugo, more than any other, is responsible.

MEDICAL SCIENCE AND THE LAW

By WALTER B. KENNEDY

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"THERE are those who say that the earliest physician was the priest, just as the earliest judge was the ruler who uttered the divine command and was king and priest combined. Modern scholarship warns us to swallow with a grain of salt these sweeping generalities, yet they have at least a core of truth. Our professions—yours and mine—medicine and law—have divided with the years, yet they were not far apart at the beginning."¹

Thus, Judge Cardozo begins his interesting article anent the relationship of medicine and law. It is trite to recall that the law constantly invokes the aid of medical science. Jenner or Pasteur oft-times accompanies Blackstone or Coke into the halls of justice. Welch and Mayo are not unknown in legal circles which pay daily tribute to Williston and Wigmore. Today, no less than in the past, there is a bond of professional friendship between the doctor and the lawyer, each in his own field a man of mystery, each endeavoring to allay the miseries and pains of mind and body, each subjected to criticisms and complaints for his shortcomings and his failures.

One of the interesting and timely developments of our time and place is the increasing demand for reformation of the legal or-

der. Needless to state, this movement is clearly visible in the recent proposals for the reformation of the Supreme Court. Independent of the soundness or unsoundness of such proposal, which it is not in order to consider at this time, its significance is that it indicates that law must be a growing, living science and keep abreast of the discoveries and developments in bordering sciences.

As new inventions and discoveries are perfected and proven in medical laboratories, it is inevitable that these inventions and techniques, so far as applicable, should be utilized by judges and lawyers. No one can gainsay the tremendous advantages which follow scientific discovery adequately established and uniformly accepted in the halls of science. Sometimes conservative groups in the legal profession object too strenuously to the invasion of their own discipline by profes-

¹Cardozo, "What Medicine Can do for Law," *Law and Literature* (1931).