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The President's Page

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To pursue the account of developments in medical learning and research, we discovered—or rather, rediscovered—the fact that the Church, far from being ill-disposed, or even opposed, to medical men and their healing art, on the contrary had been their consistent friend, their supporter and their ally in the development of better methods of diagnosis and treatment of disease. We found history's testimony that the Church's divine Founder, Our Lord Jesus Christ, not only was Himself a healer of the sick and afflicted, but that He honored the profession of medicine by including a physician among His early Disciples. That physician was St. Luke, whom we honor especially on his feast day, October 18.

What did we learn there? We saw that the Church, as far back as 828 A.D. had set up the first great center of medical learning and research at the University of Salerno in Italy. We learned, too, that in the middle of the thirteenth century a Christian ruler, Frederick II, formulated and promulgated what is now known as the Medieval Law for the regulation of the practice of medicine. That Medieval Law was not merely a forerunner of modern medical practice acts. It is the framework of medical practice acts as we know them today in the various states.

The Church not only tolerated medical practitioners. She fostered centers where they could acquire medical lore and learning. Moreover, She went further than that. She also provided hospitals and clinics where they could practice their healing arts. At Salerno, for example, we know that the hospital was established as early as 828 A.D. by Archdeacon Adelmus.

Adelmus placed the institution under the control of the Benedictine Fathers because he felt that they were best fitted by their organization for carrying on such charitable work continuously. Other infirmaries and charitable institutions, mainly under the control of religious orders, sprang up at Salerno. It was the presence of these hospitals that seemed first to attract the attention of patients and then physicians, from all over Europe and even from adjacent Africa and Asia. History does not record with certainty whether clinical instructions were a part of these institutions. But it is reasonable to presume that those who came to study medicine at Salerno were brought directly in contact with patients. Anyone familiar with medical

education methods of today will recognize that as clinical clerkship—an integral part of modern medical education.

Here we are in the middle ages of Christendom—with seven centuries behind us. But even at this point, the record of the Christian—that is, the Catholic—support and fostering of medical progress was nine centuries old. I stress “Catholic” because at that time there was only one Christian Catholic Faith, for it was three centuries before the so-called Reformation.

Let us call as our witness another non-Catholic authority—the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I refer specifically to the article on Hospitals, Eleventh Edition, Vol. XIII, Page 791, which states the following:

“In Christian days no establishments were founded until the time of Constantine (about the fourth century). . . . A law of Justinian referring to various institutions connected with the Church mentions among them the nosocomia which correspond to our idea of hospitals. In A.D. 370, Basil had one built for the lepers of Caesarea. St. Chrysostom founded a hospital at Constantinople. At Alexandria a religious order of parabolani was chosen by the prelate of that city to attend the sick there. In A.D. 416, Fabiola, a rich Roman lady, founded the first hospital at Rome, possessed of a convalescent home in the country.”

Let me digress here for a moment to recall a personal experience. In 1943 I attended a meeting at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia. It was a regional meeting of the American College of Physicians, and at it a report was given on the work that was being done at a convalescent home which had recently been established on the Hudson for the care of children with rheumatic fever. Those in attendance were advised to establish similar institutions in their respective communities. This, mind you, took place in the year 1943 or exactly 1500 and 27 years after Fabiola had founded her hospital in Rome with its convalescent home in the country. But let us get back to the *Britannica*'s record. I again quote from the *Encyclopedia*:

“One of the four great Fathers of the Latin Church—St. Augustine of Hippo, in Africa—founded a hospital in this See city in the fifth century. These nosocomia (or early hospitals) fell almost entirely into the hands of the Church, which supported them by its revenue when necessary, and controlled their administration.”

To quote further from the *Britannica*:

“Though hospitals cannot be claimed as a direct result of Christianity, no doubt it softened the relations between men and gradually tended to instill humanitarian views and to make them popular with the civilized people of the world.”

More will follow in the next issue.

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