April 1937

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Available at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol5/iss2/4
year, if not every day, we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge."

I thank you sincerely for the honor of appearing before you, and I hope there may continue the cooperation that has so long existed between doctors and lawyers for the discovery of truth.

HOW OLD THE NEW
By JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D.

I VENTURED to suggest in the preceding article on "How Old the New" that surgical anesthesia had been described, and manifestly practiced in one form or another every century during that period which used to be called the "dark ages," but which is proving now to have anticipated us in so many ways that it rather deserves, as John Fiske suggested, to be called the bright ages. The comparative antiquity of surgical anesthesia has been coming home to a great many minds in recent years. Anyone who devoted more than a modicum of attention to the history of medicine as it has developed during this first generation of the twentieth century will quite surely be convinced of this old-time practice of anesthesia and how much more of suffering that it saved than we have had any idea of until the consultation of original documents in history came to be the rule.

When it comes to the acceptance of the idea of asepsis in the medieval period, the great majority of physicians are likely to balk. They are quite persuaded that antiseptic surgery was introduced by Lister and that it was founded on a series of original thoughts of his that had never come to the mind of surgeons before. It would be particularly easy to think this if one looked only at the opposition that Lister encountered during the early years of his practice of what may be called asepsis. When Lister left Edinburgh for London to teach surgery at one of the colleges there, it was proposed that as a courtesy he should be invited to become a member of the London Surgical Society. The president of that organization, himself one of the most distinguished surgeons in England, is said to have intervened with the bitter expression: "That charlatan Lister? Never! I'll blackball him myself if necessary." As a matter of fact, Lister's ideas were taken up much sooner and ever so much more enthusiastically by the German and French surgeons than by the English and Americans, though it would be easy to expect that similarity of language would make English-speaking surgeons more sympathetic. Antisepsis was no more a novelty than anesthesia, but it had to make its way against opposition just as anesthesia did.
It is quite as easy to accumulate a series of quotations from old authorities in the history of surgery, original sources with regard to asepsis, as it was to secure them with regard to anesthesia. All that is needed for this is to know the authorities we want and look them up. For instance, there was Theodoric, who was a bishop as well as a surgeon, and who made it one of the principal businesses of his life to write out his father’s surgical teaching. In his volume on surgery Theodoric said: “For it is not necessary, as Roger and Roland have written (these were the two great surgeons of the twelfth century at Salerno whose names were romantic enough), as many of their disciples teach, and as all modern surgeons profess (note the use of the word modern in a textbook written at the great medical school in the south of Italy about 1180) that pus should be generated in the wounds. No error can be greater than that. Such a practice is indeed to hinder nature, prolong the disease, and prevent the conglutination and consolidation of the wounds.”

Theodoric was very proud of the beautiful cicatrices which his father had obtained without the use of any ointment (his own words, in Latin, are pulcherrimas cicatrices sine unguento inducebat). He impugned the use of poultices and of oil in wounds, and declared that powders were too drying, and besides had a tendency to prevent draining (the literal meaning of the Latin words he employs, saniem incarcerare, is to incarcerate sanious material) so that it becomes easy for us to understand that the claim that antiseptic surgery was anticipated six centuries ago is no exaggeration and no far-fetched explanation with modern ideas in mind of certain clever modes of dressing, hit upon accidentally by medieval surgeons.

Professor Clifford Allbutt, who occupied the corresponding position at Cambridge that Professor Osler did at Oxford, Regius Professor of Medicine, when invited to address the scientific assembly at the World’s Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 took for his subject “Historical Relations of Medicine and Surgery Down to the Sixteenth Century.” He described how old-time surgeons treated wounds, and especially the north Italian surgeons of the thirteenth century:

“They washed the wound with wine, scrupulously removing every foreign particle; then they brought the edges together, not allowing wine nor anything else to remain within—dry adhesive surfaces were their desire. Nature, they said, produces the means of union in a viscuous exudation—or natural balm, as it was afterwards called by Paracelsus, Paré, and Wurtz. In older wounds they did their best to obtain union by cleansing, desiccation, and refreshing of the edges. Upon the outer surfaces they laid only lint steeped in wine. Powder they regarded as too desiccating, for powder shuts in decomposing matters; wine, after washing, purifying, and drying the raw surfaces, evaporates.”

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It was one of these fourteenth century surgeons, Guy de Chauliac, often called the father of French surgery, who described how they used anesthetics. He said:

"Some surgeons prescribe medicaments, such as opium, the juice of the morel, hyoscyamus, mandrake, ivy, hemlock, lettuce, which send the patient to sleep, so that the incision may not be felt. A new sponge is soaked by them in the juice of these and left to dry in the sun; when they have need of it they put this sponge into warm water, and then hold it under the nostrils of the patient until he goes to sleep. Then they perform the operation."

One would be prone to wonder what the physicians were doing at a time when the surgeons were anticipating so many of our modern notions. One could be quite sure that they would not be foolishly prone to devote themselves to absurdities of various kinds such as might possibly be considered almost inevitable during these medieval or dark ages.

There was an English surgeon, John of Ardern, who deserves a place among the physicians. He has this to say with regard to nephritics, that is, sufferers from what we would call Bright's disease. He said:

"Nephritics (he uses the old-fashioned English form of the word, nefretykes) must put away all tendency to anger and over-attention to business and all manner of things that arouse the emotions, save only joy. They must forbear to take all manner of meats, that are substantial, such as old beef that is mightily powdered and hardened with salt (this would be corned beef), and they must refrain from salt pork unless it has been lying in salt for four days before. They may use wood wine and the flesh of calves that has been soaking in brine and all fowls except those that live along the lakes and ditches. Fish fresh from the river and especially the running brooks and not from standing waters may be eaten. They must eschew all manner of meat (by this word the old English meant what we call food in general) made of paste (that is, pastry) and avoid all bread that is dough baked (that is, insufficiently baked) and all fatness (that is, all greasy food). They may use kidneys of animals either roasted or cooked otherwise. The little bird or fowl that is called the wagtail is particularly good for them, but if dry it is not worth much." Such little birds were used somewhat in the way that we use squab.

The most interesting chapter of all with regard to the medicine of the Middle Ages remains to be told. It is with regard to insanity. Ordinarily it is presumed, at least everyone who has anything to say about the Middle Ages always says, that the insane were frightfully abused in the Middle Ages and were considered to be possessed by the devil or some evil spirit, and therefore most of them were chained up
or shackled, and some of them had been in this sort of prison in so-called asylums for years.

As a matter of fact, all this aspersion of the treatment of the insane in the Middle Ages is entirely wrong. The psychiatrists of the time well deserve that name, studied their cases of insanity and its causes and conditions very carefully, and anticipated our best discoveries in the modern time. The idea of possession by evil spirits was not at all common in those days but it was almost universally accepted in Protestant countries particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when literally many, many thousands of supposed possessed individuals were put to death during the witchcraft delusion time, and many other thousands imprisoned for a long time because of the Protestant literal interpretation of Scriptures in this matter.

The best possible demonstration of this newer knowledge of the attitude of mind of physicians toward insanity in the Middle Ages has come from Bartholomew the Englishman. Bartholomew was a Franciscan who just before the middle of the thirteenth century wrote a small encyclopedia which in its English dress is about the size of an unabridged dictionary. It was one of the most widely read books of that period. Bartholomew wrote it so as to apply materials for answers to questions that might be asked of parish priests or confessors. He was not a physician himself but he summed up the medical knowledge of that time as regards a number of subjects very well. He has a wonderful paragraph with regard to the causes and the treatment of insanity which fairly takes one's breath away when we consider what are the usual notions with regard to the knowledge of insanity possessed by physicians and the laity at that time. Bartholomew has a whole book on medicine, that is, not a volume but a book in the sense of a division of his work. It is in this that we find the paragraph with regard to insanity.

He begins by stating the causes of insanity, first the internal and then the external causes. He says: "Madness comes sometimes from deep emotion, from being over worked, afflicted with sorrow, or because of over study and dread." Those are the internal causes. Now for the external. He says: "Madness comes sometimes from the biting of a mad dog, or some other venomous beast, and sometimes it comes from melancholy meats (that is, from beef that has been rendered hard to digest by salting it away), and finally from the drinking of strong wine." You see, they knew all about alcoholic insanity.

Next Bartholomew gives the forms of insanity: "Some cry and leap and hurt and wound themselves and other men (that is, suffer from what we call mania) and others darken and hide themselves in privy and secret places." This is melancholia or depressive insanity.

Now then comes the treatment: "They must be bound (not manacled
but with cloths wrapped around them) so that they hurt not themselves and other men.” And then comes that marvelous anticipation of our most modern development in the treatment of the insane: “They must be refreshed and comforted and withdrawn from dread and busy thoughts (you must get them out of the environment that helped to bring on the affliction), they must be gladded with instruments of music and some deal be occupied.” Here, explicitly stated, is the entertainment and occupation treatment of the insane as we are so proud to plume ourselves on having ordered it for the present time.

In these two articles I have merely touched superficially on what might be said of medieval medicine and surgery, anticipating modern medical and surgical practice. Ever so much more might be said. My book on “Medieval Medicine,” published by Black in London, contains a hundred pages of similar quotations from original authorities with regard to medicine and surgery. If you are surprised that these men of the Middle Ages could think so straightforwardly in the solution of many medical problems, then it is well to recall that when our forefathers needed principles to guide them when they were writing the Declaration of Independence and when they were engaged in the ever so much more important and intricate work of drafting the Constitution of the United States, the Scholastic philosophy that had been developed by the great teachers in the medieval universities was their greatest guide and its principles have continued to be the foundation of what we have to say with regard to government down until the present day. My book, “Education of the Founding Fathers of the Republic,” tells that story very clearly. It has ever so many passages that are as startling anticipations of what is supposed to be modern thought as those which I have quoted with regard to anesthesia, asepsis, and insanity.