Presidential Addresses

TO THE

BRANCHES OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

METROPOLITAN COUNTIES BRANCH.

SIDELIGHTS ON THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN THE PAST FROM EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE.

By MAJOR GREENWOOD, M.D.BRUX.,
D.P.H., LL.B.

THE origin of the medical profession in this country is a disputed point. No literature throws much light on the subject, and the earliest evidence of the practice of the healing art in England and Wales is the existence of remains of medical instruments and appliances of the Roman period that have been dug up in various places. For at least three centuries England and Wales was a settled Roman province, containing many large and prosperous cities, and enjoying a civilization equal to that of their sister cities on the Continent. We know from Roman sources that this civilization included all that was then known of medical and surgical science. We learn, too, from the Civil Law that there was a well recognized class or profession of *Medici*. The gleanings from old Roman remains in this country give ample evidence that these *Medici* came over here and carried on their profession. But in the fifth century came the deluge of barbarous tribes from the north of Europe, sweeping away the whole of Roman civilization, and with it no doubt most of the medical knowledge that up to that time had been enjoyed by the old population.

After the Saxon invasion, then, it would seem that medical and surgical science had to begin again, and it might be that our profession was slowly evolved *de novo*, possibly owing little or nothing to the Roman civilization that had preceded it. Whether any of the Roman *Medici* survived the invasion and were enabled to carry on their art through the troublous times that followed and develop a school at a more peaceful period is purely conjectural. But I cannot help thinking that we, like our sister profession the law, may owe much to that great people, whose influence in the civilization of the world has been so profound.

Sir Lawrence Gomme has shown that in the case of London customs there are many old survivals from Roman sources, and he suggests that the origin of our earliest lawyers must be looked for there.

In *The Village Community* he says:

Now the Order of the Coif (Serjeants-at-law) is the oldest association of lawyers in this country. There is no law for its first institution, no charter from a sovereign, nothing to shew from whence it springs, except its remarkable parallel to Roman custom. If this custom could be regarded as evidence, then our present K.C.'s can shew an unbroken descent from the *Jurisperiti* of ancient Rome.

These *Jurisperiti* flourished, together with the *Medici*, in the Roman cities of Britain, and if one class could survive the Saxon conquest it is difficult to see why the other could not. If custom can be made to evidence the descent of one from Roman sources, an analogous custom might also prove our Roman ancestry. It is a well-known rule of the Royal College of Physicians of London that Fellows of the College cannot sue for their fees—a rule recognized by law, and customary in the case of all members and licentiates before *Gibbon v. Budd*—and there is a similar custom in the case of barristers. It was a particular rule in the case of the *Jurisperiti* of ancient Rome that they should give aid to the poorest citizens without pecuniary reward. The old serjeant-at-law also was bound "truly to serve the King's people without fee or charge."

The commonly received view is that general practitioners of the present day are descendants of the old barber-surgeons and apothecaries. In a sense, no doubt, this is true, and the members of these guilds chiefly

administered to the medical and surgical needs of the people for a long period.

But this fact must not be overlooked. There is abundance of evidence to show that there were always recognized medical and surgical practitioners, altogether distinct from barber-surgeons and apothecaries. So that it may be our profession owes not a little to these other practitioners, who were neither barbers nor apothecaries. Who were these others?

I think they can be distinctly traced down from the Norman Conquest. Shortly after the Conquest William I organized a sort of national *Who's Who* known as the Domesday Book. In it we find the following entry:

Nigel—Medicus—5 Hydes of land in demeenes in the hundred of Scipe.

"Medicus" could only mean a medical practitioner, and in the great national register of the landowners of the eleventh century a class known as *Medici* is shown to have existed. He was certainly not a "barber," "apothecary," or university graduate; neither was he a religious person. The writer of the Domesday Book would not have styled either of these "medicus."

The entry at least proves this, that at the end of the eleventh century there were recognized medical practitioners in this country distinct from barbers, apothecaries, or religious persons, and at a time anterior to medical faculties in universities.

Mr. Sidney Young thinks that as early as the reign of Edward II barbers were practitioners in the art of surgery; that at all events they performed the minor operations of the craft, such as bleeding, tooth drawing, and cauterization. But he admits there were other practitioners, for he records the admission of a surgeon, not a barber-surgeon, to the freedom of the city under the date 1312. Again, he recognizes that coeval with the Company of Barbers there existed in the City of London another fraternity or guild—that of the "Surgeons," in no way connected with the barbers, but like them existing by prescription, and unincorporated.

Mr. D'Arcy Power thinks these surgeons were military surgeons and formed the aristocracy of surgery. No doubt, in those days, when wars were so common and the habits of our ancestors so little peaceful, the work of all surgical practitioners largely consisted of attending to wounds and injuries the result of breaches of the peace. But whence came these surgeons, who were not barbers, and existed by prescription?

I can see nothing that forbids the hypothesis that they may have been lineal descendants of the old Roman *Medici*, neither do I think they confined their work to surgery pure and simple. In 1423 we learn of an attempt being made in London to form a united guild of surgeons and physicians, to be governed by a rector of medicine, two surveyors of the Faculty of Physik, and two masters of the craft of surgery; in short, a combined college of physicians and surgeons in the fifteenth century.

The members of this guild do not seem to have been numerous, but they were neither barbers nor apothecaries; and if the members who practised medicine did not also practise surgery, they would appear to have been physicians by prescription. In any case, I regard them as derived from the same source as their colleagues of the guild of surgeons. Some may have been doctors of physik and university graduates; but we learn from Chaucer that the Doctor of Physik practised both medicine and surgery, so that he must have been a general practitioner. Speaking of the latter in his prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, he says:

In all the world ne was there non him lyk
To speke of Physik, or of Surgerye—

It seems probable that in early times there was little distinction between the practice of medicine and surgery. It was left to a much later representative of surgery to say, "That he thanked God he knew nothing of Medicine." Our predecessors, like the old *Medicus*, probably practised both.

If, as Mr. Sidney Young thinks, that up till the twelfth century the practice of medicine and surgery was entirely confined to the clergy, there is no evidence that among religious persons any distinction was made. The mediaeval monk was essentially a general practitioner; but when the practice of the two sister crafts became the appanage

of rival trading guilds it was not unnatural that distinctions should arise and that the barber-surgeon should be jealous of the encroachment of the apothecary on his field of practice, or vice versa.

From our early literature it would seem that the old medical practitioners were both surgeons and physicians.

In Langland's *Vision of Piers Plowman*, an allegory in which, as in the *Canterbury Tales*, all classes of the community are reviewed, there is reference to "physicians," but none to "surgeons" as a special class. This can only be because the writer included them under the generic term "physician." It is the same with Chaucer. Both law and medicine are represented among the pilgrims to Canterbury, the former by the "Serjeant-at-law" and the latter by the "Doctour of Physik."

Considering the importance of surgery at this period, it can only be explained by supposing that Chaucer regarded his "Doctour of Physik" as representative of both branches of the profession; and we shall not be far wrong if we assume that where early writers refer to physicians, they include all practisers of the healing art.

It is from our early literature alone that we get any idea of the social position of our predecessors in bygone ages. The London of Langland and Chaucer was not the same as the present metropolis, but as both of them were Londoners, the sidelights they throw on our profession in the fourteenth century are mostly drawn from observations in the metropolitan area of that time.

If Chaucer's "Doctour of Physik" may be taken as the type of the Plantagenet general practitioner, the character of his dress would suggest that his income compared favourably with that of his twentieth century successor:

In sangwin and in perse he clad was al,
Lined with taffata and with sendal.

This was a costly dress, and, at a time when dress was regulated by station, shows that the wearer held an elevated social position. Langland, also, in *Piers Plowman*, draws attention to the rich dress of the practitioners of medicine of his time, for he makes his allegorical personation of "Hunger" say, in his condemnation of gluttonous living to Piers, that if mankind would be satisfied with a simple diet,

Physic shall sell his furred robe to get his food withal,
And shall pawn for his dinner his Italian cloak.

Langland was anterior to Chaucer, and the picture he draws of society in the early years of Edward III is very mournful and depressing. He was no friend to the doctors, although he admits by inference that there might be good physicians, for in the *Vision of Lady Meed* he says:

Harlots and whores, and false physicians,
They ask their hire money ere they have deserved it.

By implication it would almost seem to be suggested here that true physicians only took their fees after they had cured their patients. If that were so, they must have been gifted with rare integrity, and showed scruples not conspicuous in their modern representatives. But there could not have been many of these bright stars, for Langland on the whole severely condemns the whole faculty. He is specially satirical on the examination of the urine of patients; for when the allegorical impersonation "Liar" is being sought for by the king's officers for immediate execution, he is offered shelter by the doctors:

Then the doctors heard of this, and wrote Liar letters
To come and stay with them, and study men's water—

There is no doubt he had rather a poor opinion of our brethren of those days, for he goes out of his way to make the following general charge:

For many doctors be murderers, (God mend them),
And men die through their drinks, ere destiny would have it—

When we consider the nostrums of those days, some of us may think that there may have been a grain of truth in the latter accusation.

It is some consolation, however, that if we come under Langland's lash, the sister professions—the Law and the Church—fare no better. What he says against us pales into insignificance compared with his charges against the lawyers and clergy.

William Langland on the whole is not a lovable

personage. He was a keen observer, and devoted sympathizer with the poor and oppressed. Moreover, he was a cleric, and when speaking of his own cloth, he may have been nearer the truth than in his criticism of the lawyers and doctors. But I cannot help feeling regret that the great Chaucer, the father of English poetry, shared in Langland's disrespect for us. It is true he mostly poked fun; but none the less his satire was unmerciful, and clever enough to give the reader the impression of truth.

His picture of the mediaeval physician is a masterly portrait, in spite of his sneers. We have an epitome of the medical practice of the day. We learn that the doctor practised both surgery and medicine. The horoscope and natural magic are depicted as part of his armamentarium, and the old doctrine of "humours" shown to be in full force. Medical practice, then as now, consisted largely in drugging, and the "Doctour of Physik" had his coterie of apothecaries to supply the drugs and electuaries. So it would seem he did not supply his own drugs, and Chaucer suggests there was a good understanding between the doctor and the apothecaries to make as much profit out of the public as they could.

He says:

For each of hem made other for to wyne:
Their friendschipe was not newe to begynne—

It has been asserted that such collaboration between doctor and chemist at the present day is not unknown. If so, it indicates that abuses in practice we are all acquainted with have a respectable antiquity. Constantly Chaucer accuses our profession of being too grasping over fees and of greed generally.

He says of the "Doctour of Physik":

For gold in physic is a cordial,
Therefore he lovede gold in special—

This is only a touch of irony, but elsewhere in his works Chaucer is almost as outspoken as Langland against us.

In the *Romaunt of the Rose* he says of physicians:

They sell their science but for gain,
And ply their craft but to obtain:
Their gains such sweetness have withal,
That if a man in sickness fall,
They are full glad their purse to fill:
For truly, if they had their will,
Then all to sickness would be brought:
And if folk die they think it nought:
And when their golden fees they take,
The patient's care they soon forsake:
For in their work they take no pains,
Except for covetousness and gains—

The poet then seems to think it is incumbent on him to give some reason for this diatribe, and he has the bad taste to put it in the form of a pun:

For physic ginneth first with "fy,"
Physician also equally:
And since from "fy" to "sy" it goes,
To trust in them great folly shews:
For unto this they ne'er agree,
To practise but for charity.

If this is the only explanation to be given for the rapacity of our predecessors, it would almost seem as though the poet were trifling, and could not be in earnest. As an admirer of Chaucer, I have always felt a little sore about his strictures on the medical profession. It is true that he lashes the clergy even more severely than the doctors. But they can forgive him after his beautiful description of the "Poor Parish Parson," who stood out as a shining example in the midst of the corruption of the mediaeval Church. But he makes no mention of the poor parish doctor. Possibly, the "parson" was the only representative of a Poor Law service in his time.

There are one or two other points of interest to be noted in Chaucer's allusions to our profession.

He calls his type of the medical practitioner of the day, a "Doctour of Physik." Was this doctor a university graduate? According to Clenn the degree of M.D. cannot be traced earlier than the year 1384. But John of Gaddesden was a medical graduate of Merton College, Oxford, before then; so it would appear, Oxford gave a medical degree before Chaucer's time. It is also worthy of note that the title "doctor of physik," not doctor of medicine, was peculiar to this country.

The readers of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* will remember Dr. Johnson's inquiries of Dr. Lawrence, President of the

Royal College of Physicians of London, as to the right of a medical graduate to style himself "physician," and the answer given:

That Dr. of Physic (not Doctor of Medicine) was the highest title a practiser of Physic could have.

It may be, then, that Chaucer implied that his "Doctour of Physik" was a university graduate; although it is difficult to imagine that the typical practitioner in those days would have been a university man. If not a graduate, Chaucer's appellation of "Doctour" may throw light on the origin of the courtesy title of "doctor" given by the public to all medical practitioners.

Another question of interest is, What part did religious persons take in the practice of medicine in the fourteenth century?

It is generally believed that most of the practice of medicine in early times was in the hands of the Church; that monks were the usual medical practitioners, and surgeons also, up to the date of the Council of Tours.

Such practice may have largely ceased in this country by the fourteenth century, for neither in Langland nor in Chaucer is any reference to medical practice by the clergy. All the doctors referred to appear to have been lay persons. Chaucer, speaking of the Doctour of Physik, says,

His studie was but litel on the Bible.

It is true that after the Doctor had told his tale, "oure host" compliments him, and says:

So mote I thee, thou art a propre man,
And y-lik a prelat by St. Runian!

This has been thought by some to imply that the Doctor was in "Orders," and gave more point to the charge of unbiblical studies. It seems to me, however, that it by no means proves that Chaucer's "Doctour" was in "Orders." Both doctors and lawyers who rose to any eminence were often sought after by the Church, and "oure host" may have meant only that the doctor was such a good fellow that the Church would possibly make a bishop of him.

Mr. D'Arcy Power, in his Harveian Lecture of last year, says the physician of this period was usually, but not necessarily, a Churchman, and gives contemporary examples. But all of them were attached to the households of great personages, and were hardly types of practitioners among the people.

It is interesting to note that Chaucer, like Langland, ridicules the examination of the urine.

In applauding the doctor, our host also says,

I pray to God to save thi gentil corps,
And eke thy nrynals.

No doubt there was much quackery mixed up with mediaeval urinary pathology, and at a later age the term "water doctors" was one of opprobrium. In spite of popular contempt the practice had much vitality. It was evidently thriving in Shakespeare's day, for in *Henry IV*, Part 2, Sc. 2, Falstaff says to his page:

Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?

To which the page replies:

He said, Sir, that the water itself was good healthy water, but for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for.

It is curious to note that in pillorying a quack a urinal was sometimes hung about his neck as a mark of contumely.

In the Records of the City of London at the Guildhall, under the date 1382, appears the case of Roger Clerk of Wandsworth, who was condemned for quackery, and punished as follows:

It was adjudged that the same Roger Clerk should be led through the middle of the City, with trumpets and pipes, he riding on a horse without a saddle, a urinal being hung before him, and another urinal upon his back.

None the less these mediaeval water doctors were not always quacks. There was a germ of science in their practice. As the old alchemists, in spite of their frauds and pretensions, laid the foundation of modern chemistry, so the water doctors may have assisted in paving the way for our later triumphs in renal pathology.

Before concluding, there is one other point of interest, especially to our sisters in the profession, which the records of the past cast some light upon. What do they tell us of the practice of medicine by women in early times?

There can be no doubt that in the past there have been women practitioners of repute, and even surgeons of eminence.

Miss Bateson tells us that there was an Ordinance in 1390 which mentions the practice of surgery by women, and it is there on record that Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III, had in her service a female surgeon, Cecilia of Oxford, a practitioner who derived her origin from no less a place than the academic centre of the kingdom. How did this lady obtain her professional training? Was it under the auspices of the Church?

Women were never greatly favoured by the hierarchy, but possibly, when by the Council of Tours the practice of surgery was forbidden to monks, the prohibition was not so stringently enforced in the case of nuns, and these women practitioners may have been the last surviving instances of the practice of medicine by religious persons in this country.

It is not difficult to understand the exclusion of women from medical and surgical practice, when these professions became vested in guilds and livery companies, such as the Barbers and the Apothecaries. We have plenty of liverymen with us still, but I do not think history records any instance of a liverywoman. After Plantagenet times we hear of no more female practitioners in high places. It is probable that medical practice by women was more or less suppressed, although there is reason to think that it continued to exist long after. There is extant the draft of an Act of Parliament, 9 Henry V., in 1422 (Petyt's MSS., v, 33), in which occurs the following:

The sheriff shall inquire whether any one practises in his county contrary to the regulations; and if any one so practise he shall forfeit £40, and be imprisoned. And any woman, who shall practise physik shall suffer the same penalty.

This Act never had the force of law, but it shows that women endeavoured to practise medicine in the fifteenth century and came under the ban of the law-makers.

Again, in the next century, in the preamble 14-15 Henry VIII, cap. 5, in 1521, we read:

Forasmuch as the science and cunning of Physic and Surgery is exercised by a great multitude of ignorant persons, of whom the greater part have no manner of insight in the same, nor any other kind of learning, so that common artificers, such as smiths, and weavers, and women, boldly take upon them great cures, and things of great difficulty.

These statutes cast a sidelight on the practice of our profession in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and make it probable that Cecilia of Oxford had other successors, but that they steadily declined in social rank, till they were more or less suppressed by man-made legislation.

STAFFORDSHIRE BRANCH.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ANOCI-ASSOCIATION APPLIED TO MEDICAL PRACTICE.

BY

F. M. ROWLAND, M.D., B.A. CANTAB.

AFTER a few introductory remarks the President proceeded:

Although the mental factor in medicine has long been recognised as a valued asset to the successful treatment of disease, it is only of late years that there has been any serious attempt scientifically to marshal its forces and to examine its possibilities as a legitimate adjunct to therapeutics, the field having been left open in the past—as it now, indeed, largely is, and will probably remain for some time yet to come—to the illegitimate blandishments of quackery and the quasi-spiritual enchantments of Christian Science and similar allied systems of unreasoning thought.

It is not my intention to-day to discuss this subject from the point of view of practical hypnotic suggestion as it may be legitimately utilized in the treatment of ailments. Rather do I want to call attention to a point of view in dealing with our patients which hinges on their mental outlook, and to which I believe I am right in saying that but little attention has been paid, at any rate in any scientifically defined way, or other than as that which is recognized as individual personality often exercised almost unconsciously by individual men.

I may, perhaps, better explain my outlook if I take a lesson from surgery, and draw an analogy from Professor