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NICCOLÒ MORANGHELLI, A LIBELLOUS PHYSICIAN

by

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The struggle among medical professors between supporters of a revived classicism and those who sought to introduce innovations both practical and theoretical and to criticize and correct Galen dominated much of sixteenth-century medicine. Although the teachers of the University of Paris, notably Guinther of Andernach and Jacobus Sylvius, were prepared to make small modifications to the doctrines of the ancient authors, their loyalty and the limits of their own studies often led them to retain many errors, and they wholeheartedly opposed the revolutionary anatomical teachings of Vesalius.¹ At the University of Bologna it was only in 1586 that works other than those of Galen were permitted for comment by the medical faculty, and the Galenism of the Spanish medical fraternity may well have influenced Vesalius in his decision to leave Spain in 1564.² But our information on the decline of Galenism comes almost entirely from the highest levels of the medical profession, the academic doctors who published learned works, and we cannot as yet decide how far the effects of this debate were felt by the average small-town physician. In the series of documents that follows, describing a doctors' quarrel at Viadana in the Duchy of Mantua in 1569, medical as well as personal disagreements can be invoked in explanation, and a distinction can be made between the old-fashioned erudition of the local man and the modern ideas of the newly arrived physician. As well as showing the turbulent and dangerous life of a doctor in an Italian town, the case of Niccolò Moranghelli indicates, in an unusually personal way, some of the obstacles to the spread of new theories and the determined conservatism that opposed it.

The chance preservation in the Cambridge University Library of two books containing many marginalia by Niccolò Moranghelli, Hippocrates, *Liber de somniis cum Iulii C. Scaligeri commentariis*, Lyons 1539 (=I), and L. Jacchinus, *Galenii liber de praecognitione*, Lyons 1540 (=II), offers an opportunity to assess the scholarly capabilities of this prickly physician, for he diligently added parallel references to other texts and occasionally castigated erroneous opinions. Although his place of education is unknown to me (Ferrara? or Padova?), his annotations suggest a man of learning, especially of the ancients, with a useful library. He cites several tracts of Galen: *Methodus medendi*, I 7, II 5 and 55; *De usu partium*, I 13; *De creticis*, I 30; *Thrasylbulus* I 41; *De antidotis*, II 41; *De libris propriis*, II 41; *De ptisana*, II 81; *De causis symptomatum*, II 84; *De differentiis febrium*, II 88; *De generatione et corruptione*, II 96; *De diebus iudicialibus*, II 43; *In Hippocratis librum De regimine in morbis acutis commentarium*, II 52; five works of Hippocrates: *De flatu*, I 11; *Aphorismi*, I 62; *De diaeta*, II 6;

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Medical History, 1974, vol. 18.

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Liber acutorum, II 4; *De natura hominis*, II 54; and five of Aristotle: *Sophistici elenci*, II 4; *Magna moralia*, II 5; *Ethica*, II 6; *Rhetorica*, II 7; *De anima*, II 28. There are other rarer authors: Paul of Aegina on lycanthropia, I 47; Pliny the Elder, I 71f.; Averroes, I 74; Strabo on music, II 61; Albertus Magnus on how the kidneys, like the Danube, are affected by winds, II 74; and Avicenna's Canon on the use of gruel in tertian fevers.³ Significantly, the only Renaissance physician mentioned is Giovanni Manardi of Ferrara, one of the early champions of the revived Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, whose *Epistolae medicinales* are quoted, once, II 62, to confirm the regular bad weather of winter [Lib. I Ep. 2] and once, II 81, because of his false opinions on the suitability of gruel in treating fevers. All these quotations are both accurate and relevant and Moranghelli takes great pleasure in adding a reference to Galen's *Thrasylbulus* which J. C. Scaliger had missed in his discussion of the one, single art of medicine, I 41. The impression of a somewhat antiquated learning that may be derived from Moranghelli's literary annotations is confirmed by other marginalia. He was a great believer in dreams—'I have often discussed many problematical cases while asleep', I 3—and in defending Galen. When, discussing Galen's prescription to cut a vein on the side of the body afflicted by pain, Scaliger records, I 39, that he found in his twenty-two years' experience only one survivor of such treatment and that eighty had died from it in five years, whereas he had cured over five hundred patients by venesection on the opposite side, Moranghelli vigorously takes the other part. 'Though we are less than you, Scaliger, we confute your experience, for we have found in our practice exactly the opposite.' He thus allies himself with those who, in Scaliger's words, preferred to err with Galen rather than adopt a true opinion without him.

His opponent, Giovanni Battisti Olivo (or Oliva) of Cremona, is equally an intellectual but of the new learning. A friend of Aldus Manutius and of the Cremonese litterateur Francesco Zava, he travelled abroad, possibly attending the University of Bologna, and had a minor reputation as a poet and a stylist.⁴ Of his poems on Lepanto, published at Venice in 1572, it is said that they preserve the majesty of poetry, its ornament and its gravity, but 'prosodiacarum legum aliquali incuria convincuntur'—they fail to scan.⁵ He was an associate of the Mantuan physician and writer G. B. Susio, translating into Latin his oration in praise of Henri III, King of France and Poland, in 1574, and himself wrote a tract on theriac and another on the herbs in the collection of Calceolari at Verona (*De reconditis et praecipuis collectaneis a F. Calceolario in Museo adservatis Johannis Baptistae Olivae testificatio*). He was appointed a civic physician at Viadana c. 1568 and later became the personal doctor of Vespasiano Gonzaga at the nearby principality of Sabbioneta. In Olivo medical knowledge and ability were united with literary style and, to judge from the letters of Zava, family wealth; in short, he was just the sort of well-connected outsider to annoy the stolid Moranghelli.

Between this pair, desperately trying at first to be impartial, stands the podestà, or governor, of Viadana, Giovanni Francesco Arrivabene. An elderly man, now acting as the political representative of the Gonzagas, he could look upon his post as a rest from his diplomatic labours by the side of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga.⁶ First in Rome in 1550 and 1555, and later in 1562, at the council of Trent in 1561–3 and finally at Milan in 1565 trying to arrange an expedition against Casale Monferrato, he was at the centre of Mantovan diplomacy, and like others of the Mantuan aristocracy he

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consoled himself amid his duties with the delights of poetry. The author of sonnets, madrigals and maritime eclogues, he was, under the name of Orontes, a member of the literary *Accademia degli Argonauti* at Casale del Franco. Not surprisingly, he found more in common with the poetic Olivo than with the bluff, indeed boorish, Moranghelli, and his successive letters show his transition from impartiality to outright hostility.

1. 20 April 1569, to the Duke of Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, Busta Gonzaga 2582.

Most illustrious and excellent master, my most attentive lord and master.

This community of Viadana has now two doctors in its employ, one a foreigner, the other a local man. To the foreigner, who comes from Cremona and is called Master Gio. Battisti Olivo, it pays six hundred pounds of provisions a year, and half this to the local, called Master Nicolò Moranghelli.⁷ Now as far as my information goes, Moranghelli has held his public post for two years, during which he has always hated and persecuted the doctors who have been hired by this community, intending to make them pass on either from fear or from despair and planning to compel them to deal with him to their annoyance. Nor did he wish to practise alongside the doctors of this town, with all the privileges my predecessors would have given him to make him happy to practise there; as can be seen from Moranghelli's own writings, in which he has provided evidence of this and much else. Since during my absence at Mantua for the Carnival some libellous notices, as I told your Excellency, were affixed to the house-door of doctor Olivo, insulting him and his wife, a lady greatly and universally respected, and the responsibility for this was attributed to Moranghelli and his son-in-law from Guastalla, Moranghelli was thus placed in solitary confinement and his son-in-law arrested by my deputy. On my return to Viadana, I examined both of them, and as a result of my investigations and those of my deputy I was forced to imprison Moranghelli, since when I have discovered so much against him on this count that I am advised that he cannot avoid being tortured, and harshly at that. At any rate, in order to pursue this business with greater assurance and peace of mind, I sent all the papers to the honourable Captain of Justice,⁸ who as a servant of your Excellency told me freely and sincerely all that reason allowed, but then remitted everything to me, apologising for being unable to attend to it. I was thus constrained to seek other remedies. I inspected other evidence of the public repute and estimation of Moranghelli, which indicated that, at least in the past, he had been publicly regarded as a man who had written other writings and some notorious libels even against his own community of Viadana, intending to harm some men of Viadana, who were accused by him in an anonymous letter to the late Signore Carlo di Gazuolo [a former governor] which he mentions elsewhere in writings certainly belonging to him; further, just as his wife has appealed to your Excellency with slight truthfulness even concerning the public esteem and repute of her husband, so she cannot very well pretend not to know very well the reason for his imprisonment, and god grant that she hasn't a hand in this offence. . . . I have discovered that he [Moranghelli] had found that it was possible to send letters through a hole in the door at certain agreed times, for which he had then been provided with wooden pens, black ink and wine. The aforesaid woman also knows that, in order to prevent the sufferings of a few invalids whom he used to treat when he was at liberty, I allowed him the opportunity of seeing the symptoms of the invalids and making the necessary prescriptions in the presence of lawyers and the Prison Governor; and even in this they have appealed to your Excellency in their own way. The punishment for libel is expulsion and, for what Moranghelli is imprisoned, I cannot push things through in two days, as they would like, since I must spend half the time consulting with impartial lawyers, and since I do not think it right, in matters concerning the Treasury of your Excellency,⁹ to consult lawyers here, for all that I regard them as sound and competent. It is also true that the law code of Viadana is such that he should be tortured before giving evidence, which appears reasonable in some cases, but the lawyers say that it should not be done in the gravest and most secret cases, like that of affixing cruel and vicious libels of which Moranghelli stands accused. Having only to obey Your Excellency in what he deigns to command, I most humbly kiss your hands and entrust my self reverently to your favour. Viadana, April 20, 1569, Your Excellency's most humble and devoted servant, Gio. Franc. Arrivabene.

A second letter, dated 12 September 1569, Busta 2582, informed the Duke that Moranghelli's servant had escaped from the leg-irons that had been placed on him

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while he was ill, but it was not until 23 September, Busta 2582, that Arrivabene made any new significant report. Replying to some privileges granted to the defendants, he insisted that the delay in bringing the case to trial was not his. 'The agents of the prisoners have kept the case in the lawyers' chambers at Viadana and Mantua for four months without reaching a decision: and two further months have been spent in appeals, as Your Excellency can discover from his Captain of Justice, who read the whole case'. Then follow various protestations that the case has been tried according to the rules laid down by the best Mantuan jurists. Two months later, 23 November, Busta 2582, Arrivabene again insisted that he was not responsible for the delay, despite the insults and libels on him by one of the opposing advocates which offended his sense of honour, and assured the Duke that he would do all in his power and see that a man falsely accused should not be punished. Later the same day he wrote a second and fuller letter to the Duke (Busta 2582).

I remember that some months ago I requested Master Antonio to tell Your Excellency, my friend and my lord, what happened at Carnival time while I was in Mantua. . . .As well as this conversation when he [Anniballe Zanone, agent of Francesco Boiano] went on doing many disservices to me, he wrote completely hostile letters about me to a brother of Moranghelli now in Rome, and published defamatory libels against me in Guastalla of which I have been informed by Secretary Careno and the doctor of Mr. Cesare Illustrimo. And finally, after five or six months when I can say I have never seen him save once at the Montata this August when he came with the aforesaid Moranghelli's wife with a letter from Rome, I believe to make the request that he has now made to Your Excellency, but possibly he did not have the heart to tell lies when I could defend myself; and finally, I repeat, after five or six months when I did not see him and when I had the proceedings in hand and gave them to the excellent lawyer, Traiano Delfino, then with the help of a few letters from Moranghelli in my opinion, he complains to Your Excellency of my actions, accusing me of maladministration of justice, and that I did not let him hear the confession of the prisoner in the place where I had let him request a confession; accusations of which I have been informed by Zanone's acquaintances.

Then follow further protestations of innocence by Arrivabene, who calls witnesses to his good character and his previous services and who complains bitterly that the game is being played on his table with his position at stake. Five days later (Busta 2582) he was ordered to bring Moranghelli and his son-in-law to stand trial at Mantua and to come himself, a task that he tries vainly to avoid on the grounds of pressing business and an uncertain court. The two prisoners were transferred quietly by night. The case was still not heard by 21 December (Busta 2582), but on 10 January Arrivabene was told that Moranghelli had been given bail of five hundred scudi and was confined to the city of Mantua (Busta 2583). This did not please Arrivabene at all.

Although he has confessed to the libels against me and Dr. Taccone and has been convicted, he now has this luck and gets away with it, for if one considers the libel and Your Excellency's rules in libel cases, it is clear that, from the other libels published at Guastalla, Sabioneta and Rivaruolo, he should be condemned to the greatest punishment of all, which, I assure you, I neither desire nor would want; thus I would be pleased if on the complete discovery and revelation of his crime he should be still allowed to live and repent of his past life that has been so long dressed in clothes of hostility and madness, for which his family have long known him. Also, if the author of the aforesaid writings is not found someday, the people here will be annoyed, since many of them have been hurt and harmed by that man's pen, as can be seen: possibly if the truth becomes clear, one will find accomplices in the publication (of these libels), which will not be unwelcome to the Treasury of Your Excellency.

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Later that same day (Busta 2583), he wrote the final letter in the series, in an entirely different tone.

I have entrusted to the Captain of Justice a certificate from the governor of Guastalla, a Mantuan gentleman, and from Dr. Cignasco and from a lawyer, both from Guastalla, to the effect that Anniballe Zanone of Guastalla, agent of the doctor Moranghelli, has read and published libels at Guastalla that were written by that physician against my honour. I have likewise sent to the aforesaid Captain of Justice a letter from the doctor at Rivaurolo in which it is clear that Moranghelli had other libels published in Sabioneta against Dr. Olivo, and there is much evidence to prove that the publisher was Ludovico Bolzone and that in these libels Moranghelli also dealt with me in his own way, just as he did for many, many years against those he disliked. The Captain also knows that we have found in our cells in the doctor's drug box a libel in his own hand, admitted by him in his preliminary statements, also against my honour; and I believe he intended to have it posted up, as Your Excellency is aware that he did with another on almost the same topic; in which he accuses me of corruption and barratry. Lastly, the Captain knows that another libel has been found amongst the doctor's papers, written in his own hand against Felice Fiera, former Governor of Viadana, and also he knows other libels against Dr. Taccone written and admitted by that doctor. For these acknowledged crimes, it is clear that both reason and Your Excellency's laws demand that he deserves the severest punishments, and similarly his accomplices and supporters, as can be better seen from a letter which I am sending to the Constable. It thought it advantageous to inform Your Excellency of this, since I shall owe to my honour by a law of nature all that a good man owes to his honour and I greatly desire to see myself justified in what concerns a servant of Your Excellency insulted in this manner, and also to be recognised as a good man where that doctor has endeavoured to harm me and to endanger, or at least to dispute, my honour.

Arrivabene's wishes were granted. When Moranghelli came to annotate his Galen and reached the allusion to the expulsion of Quintus from Rome on a trumped-up charge of murdering his patients (II 7=XIV, p. 602,12 in Kühn's edition of Galen), he added the following in the margin. 'A similar thing happened to me in the year 1569 through the envy of Antonio Bergomate and Gio. Battisti Olivo and through the criminal acts of Giovanni Francesco Arrivabene, at that time podestà of Viadana.' Where he went in his exile and when he died must continue a mystery until further marginalia are discovered, but it is clear from the letters of Arrivabene and from his own notes that he was indeed guilty of the alleged offences, that Arrivabene had little sympathy with him, and that he remained unrepentant and unreconciled to Olivo and to the fashionable medicine that he represented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article has been prepared with the assistance of grants from the Wellcome Trust and the H. A. Thomas Fund of Cambridge University. I am grateful for the help given me by the staff of the Archivio di Stato at Mantua, Professor F. Venturi and Miss J. M. Petrie.

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1. O'MALLEY, C. D., *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964, pp. 46-57.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 305; DURLING, R. J., 'A chronological census of Renaissance editions and translations of Galen', *J. Warburg Courtauld Inst.*, 1961, 24, 245. The old essay of H. Heinrichs, *Die Überwindung der Autorität Galens durch die Denker der Renaissancezeit*, Bonn, 1914, is badly in need of revision.
3. II 80; he must have used an edition before that published at Basle in 1556, since his reference, lib. 4, fen 1, tr. 2, cap. 10, is there cap. 9.

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4. ZAVA, F., *Epistulae familiares*, Cremona, 1568, pp. 135r.; 136v.; 141r.; 146r.
5. ARISI, F., *Cremona literata*, vol. 2, Parma, 1705, p. 327f.; JÖCKER, C. G., *Allgemeines Gelehrten Lexicon*, vol. 3, Leipzig, 1751, p. 1061.
6. CARANDO, S. *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 4, Rome, 1962, p. 327f.
7. A community would hire a physician so that they could be sure of some assistance in infirmity. The duties imposed on a city doctor varied greatly, often including the free treatment of the poor and granting in return immunity from public service. See C. D'Arco, *Studi intorno al municipio di Mantova*, Mantua, 1872, vol. 4, p. 123f.; R. Ciasca, *L'arte dei medici e speciali nella storia e nel commercio fiorentino dal secolo XII–XV*, Florence, 1927, 291–95; A. Garosi, *Siena nella storia della medicina*, Florence, 1958, 281–87, cf. 551–53. I know of no directly comparable figures for stipends, but in 1599 that of Gaspare Tagliacozzi as a doctor lecturing at Bologna was 1140 pounds a year.
8. The Captain of Justice was the official responsible for the control of public order, cf. L. Mazzoldi, *Mantova, La Storia*, vol. 3, part 1, Mantua, 1963, p. 74.
9. Presumably the Fisco was interested in the fines and the sequestered property rather than in the offence itself, but I can find no guidance on this point.