

THE LURE OF PADUA

by

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WHEN the College of Physicians of London, this present Royal College of Physicians, was founded in 1518 through the efforts of Thomas Linacre and a small group of presumably like-minded physicians, not the least reason for their efforts was the belief that the quality of English medicine then practised was below that of the Continent. This was to become apparent in the College's prosecution of charlatans, its efforts to limit the activities of apothecaries and surgeons, and its examination and licensing or refusing to license London physicians who had studied and obtained their medical degrees abroad—more particularly aliens who had immigrated into England.

Occasionally, moreover, the College displayed reservations about the practice of physicians who had obtained their medical degrees at the English universities and thereby considered themselves to have the right to practise without the need of the College's licence. In this last respect there seems to be some indication that the founders of the College were not wholly satisfied with the quality of medical education in England, and that they hoped that in some way the College might have an influence towards the improvement of the medical curriculum of the universities. Although it was not politic to speak out strongly on this matter, nonetheless there were to be a few later occasions when such feeling was clearly expressed and thereby promoted no little friction between College and universities, although to little purpose. However, it seems to have been clearly apparent to many young English aspirants to medicine that the length of time required for a medical degree at their native universities was excessive, that the curriculum was medieval, and that there were occasional failures to observe even the medieval standards. In consequence many of the more serious sought their medical training abroad.

If one consults the first volume of Munk's *Roll of the Royal College of Physicians*, covering the period approximately from the founding of the College to the end of the seventeenth century, it appears that about twenty-five per cent of the physicians associated with that institution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did study abroad, most of them receiving their medical degrees at continental schools. It must be added at once that Munk's account is by no means complete or, indeed, always accurate, but it is nonetheless sufficiently inclusive to provide a general estimate.

If these English medical students abroad are followed and observed through at least the first hundred years of this period of two centuries, one may say that they showed a commendable seriousness of purpose by seeking out the best continental schools so that their presence or absence from any particular medical faculty gives

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some indication of its repute. For example, it appears that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries only two students of the group under consideration attended the once great medical school of the University of Bologna, and only one each attended the similar schools of the Universities of Pavia and Ferrara.

On the other hand, in the later sixteenth century a number of English students were to be found at the University of Basle, attracted no doubt by the fame of Felix Platter and his successor Caspar Bauhin. By long odds, however, the major continental attraction was the medical school of the University of Padua in northeastern Italy, which remained the chief centre for the training of English medical students abroad until about 1670, when for various reasons outside the scope of this account, Leyden became more popular. Indeed, the tradition of Padua's greatness was so enduring that even in the middle of the seventeenth century, as favour was shifting to Leyden, a number of students who went to that latter school for much of their study ultimately completed it at Padua, presumably in order to have a Paduan degree.

In the course of the seventeenth century as the number of English students increased, and inevitably the number of the less serious, so, too, more continental medical schools became attractive, notably those of the French provinces. Paris seems not to have been favoured, perhaps because of the length and conservatism of its curriculum, as well as the higher cost of living in the French capital. William Petty was one of the few who studied there for a time, although his happiest hours in Paris seem to have been those spent in reading Vesalius' *Fabrica* in company with Thomas Hobbes. On the other hand, a number of English students attended such medical schools as those of Bourges, Caen and Rheims, but these schools were far from demanding in terms of scholarship and for the most part attracted the less serious students. At Orange, for instance, provided one paid the fees, a ludicrously short period of residence might suffice for the degree of Doctor of Medicine, called the 'orange-blossom diploma'. It was there that Hans Sloane received his medical degree, although it must be added in fairness to him that this was after earlier studies elsewhere. But with his exception and that of Walter Harris, four times Harveian orator and authority on paediatrics, the English graduates of the French provincial schools seem to have made little mark after their return to England. In the Netherlands the medical school of the University of Utrecht, although it did graduate Havers Clopton, seems to have been in that same category of diploma mills since a number of English students, after study at Leyden, went to Utrecht for their examinations and degrees, and this may also have been true of the University of Franeker in Friesland which enjoyed considerable but suspect popularity.

Despite this later divergence of students to other medical faculties, throughout most of the period under consideration, that is, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the desire of the largest number of English medical students was a Paduan degree. And when towards the close of the sixteenth century Shakespeare referred to 'Fair Padua, nursery of arts,' he was not making an independent judgment but merely reflecting the general English opinion of Padua's pre-eminence, indeed, in other disciplines as well as that of medicine.

The University of Padua was founded in 1222 by a group of disgruntled students and teachers of civil law who had seceded from the University of Bologna. Such

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secession was nothing unusual at the time, since a university had no impedimenta and was comprised merely of mobile students and teachers. Given a reason, such as extortionate charges for food and lodging or some sort of interference by the local authorities, the dissatisfied element could easily move to another city—usually on the invitation of a municipality which foresaw an economic advantage in such an influx. A few halls for lectures would be rented, and the new university was ready to begin operation. Such was the origin of the University of Padua, which in 1250 added a medical faculty that began almost at once to achieve a fame which would ultimately make it the most distinguished in Europe.

From the outset the faculty included men of reputation such as the surgeon Bruno Longoburgo, to whose work the later great French surgeon Guy de Chauliac admitted his considerable indebtedness. Some decades thereafter the faculty was enhanced by the presence of the learned Pietro d'Abano whose tolerance of conflicting systems of learning led to the accusation of heresy but nevertheless established what was to be the Paduan tradition of intellectual tolerance in contrast to the theological and philosophical conservatism of Rome and elsewhere. After Padua came under Venetian control in 1440 this tolerant attitude and the consequent conflict with Rome continued as a struggle between St. Mark and St. Peter, and was perhaps most clearly and dramatically exemplified at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the heroic stand of the redoubtable Fra Paolo Sarpi against Roman repression.

In strictly medical terms Padua was the home of pioneering ventures. The first printed book on paediatrics was the work of a Paduan professor, Paolo Bagellardi. Another and later Paduan professor of medicine was Girolamo Fracastoro, sometimes called the father of epidemiology, who, in his book *De contagione*, was the first to propose a scientific explanation for the transmission of disease. Practical clinical training also originated at Padua when Giambattista da Monte instructed the students at the bedside of the patients in the hospital of San Francesco, long before the method was borrowed and taken northward to Leyden which sometimes receives undeserved credit for it. The development of human and comparative anatomical studies at Padua under the impetus of Andreas Vesalius has long been recognized, and the influence of Fabrizi d'Acquapendente and Giulio Casserio on William Harvey and his epochal work has more than once been told. Padua was as well the first centre for quantitative studies in physiology through the work of Santorio, and another Paduan professor of medicine, Girolamo Mercuriale, produced the first books of any significance on medical gymnastics and on dermatology. At the end of the period under consideration yet another, Bernardino Ramazzini, composed the classic work on occupational medicine, and despite the university's later decline, towards the close of the eighteenth century Padua was still able to count in its medical faculty such a figure as Giovanni Battista Morgagni, the celebrated clinical pathologist.

The fact that such developments occurred at Padua, promoting the fame of the medical faculty and increasing its attractiveness for foreign students, including the English, was by no means fortuitous.

Like all Italian universities Padua had begun as an institution controlled by the students, but unlike more recent efforts toward that same goal, student control of

Padua had as justification the fact that the students paid all the expenses of the university, that is, the lecturers' fees, for which in return they expected and demanded a proper educational dividend. Control passed out of the hands of the students when those expenses were assumed by the government which, after 1440, was that of the Republic of Venice. Nevertheless, the Venetian government was shrewd enough to allow the continuance of a student rector of the university, chosen by the students but draped in pomp of little real significance in so far as concerned essential educational activities. The rector did, however, have the right to be present when any of the students might be put to the torture, a fact which reveals something of the more rigorous university life of the past, and also the real source of authority. Nor did the government attempt to interfere with student carnivals and what was generally acknowledged as the rowdiest student nightlife in Europe.

Having gained firm control, the Venetian government, to its credit, was genuinely interested in the university's development and in time became immensely proud of the result. There was one brief setback when in 1509 Venice was attacked by the major powers combined in the League of Cambrai, and the Republic had need to give all its energies and resources to the problem of survival. But a new formation of the states, somewhat cynically called the Holy League, because of the inclusion of the Papacy, removed the danger as well as the heavy drain on Venetian resources, and in 1517 Venice took upon itself the entire financial burden as well as the immediate direction of the university, hitherto partly borne by the town of Padua. It was at this time that the Paduan magistrates who had formerly controlled the university were replaced by three Venetian overseers known as *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*. It appears that from the Venetian viewpoint the university had become more important than the town in which it was located, or as Bernardo Navagero, one of the later *Riformatori* expressed it, 'without the university Padua would not be Padua.'

Such then was the new order of administration, characterized by the efficient but enlightened control of Venice which applied certain business and commercial practices to the university with no little success. Both students and professors were subject to the *Riformatori*, under whose direction a number of new regulations were put into effect. For example, members of the faculty were elected for regular terms of up to four years, and only after a longer period of successive reappointments might an exceptional professor, such as Fabrizio d'Acquapendente, be considered a good long-term risk, that is, be elected for life. To prevent pressures from being applied unduly by influential families, and so possibly endangering the high academic quality of instruction, with the exception of individual cases determined individually and solely upon merit, no patrician of Venice or Padua was permitted to hold a chair in the university.

When a scholar was added to the faculty he was allowed full freedom to teach as he desired, the single restriction being that he must not repeat his course of lectures in successive years. It was in accordance with this philosophy of change and variety of intellectual fare that Andreas Vesalius was permitted to reorganize the presentation of the anatomical demonstrations in a manner that was actually contrary to what was prescribed in the university's statutes. Furthermore, the professors were required to teach a certain number of hours or be fined in proportion to the lectures they had

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not given, and they were also subject to fine if they did not succeed in drawing a certain minimum number of students to their classes. In addition to what were called private lectures, that is, those exclusively for the students enrolled in the courses, the members of the faculty were required to present a number of public lectures before their colleagues, and so be judged by their peers.

As the state had long been involved in international commerce and was impatient of restraints, religious or nationalistic, that might interfere with the profits of internationalism, so, too, that same sophisticated attitude was reflected in the university. The faculty contained a variety of nationalities including, for example the Belgians Vesalius and Spigelius, the German Vesling, and in 1541 the Englishman John Caius.

Nor did Venetian business sense subscribe to the curious belief that ability was only to be correlated with venerable years. When in 1535 the Polish student Joseph Struthius passed his examinations with great distinction, he was immediately appointed to a chair of medicine, and two years later the twenty-three year old Andreas Vesalius was given the chair of surgery and anatomy on the day following his likewise distinguished examination. In the case of Vesalius, furthermore, an original salary of forty florins was increased five-fold in as many years, since, in accordance with the commercial mores of the government, a successful teacher who could draw students to the university was a good investment. Moreover, the government was wise enough to sample student opinion, and it was recorded as a reason for the renewal of Vesalius' contract that he had 'aroused the very great admiration of all the students.'

The academic year began on St. Luke's day, 18 October, with a convocation of faculty, students, the local bishop, and various civic officials. But with this single day of ceremony ended, the regular business of the university, that is, the lectures, began and continued until the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, 15 August. It was a long year relieved by a weekly holiday on Thursday and certain specified special holidays.

As for the examination required for the degree, the procedures were carefully laid down in the statutes. First was the trial examination which determined whether or not the candidate was sufficiently prepared for the ordeal so that no one's time might be wasted. Then, if he were judged to have done sufficiently well in this trial examination, his sponsors presented him to the rector of the university and to the bishop and a time was set for the official examination which was divided into two parts. In the first part the candidate was required to solve a number of questions previously prepared by the examiners. If he were successful, he was then required to discuss or argue a thesis. The examinations took place in the presence of the medical faculty, the bishop and the student rector who had the unusual right of silencing any examiner who appeared to be influenced by personal dislike of the candidate. In short, the university operated in a very business-like fashion which once more reflected the attitude of the commercially-minded government of Venice.

It has already been noted that before the University of Padua had come under Venetian control it displayed a tolerance of conflicting philosophies even though such tolerance sometimes involved the dangerous charge of religious heresy, but with the coming of the Reformation and the religious division of Europe in the sixteenth century the problem of heresy and heretics became ever greater. Universities in

Catholic areas such as Italy found it very difficult if not impossible to accept Protestant students, and students of those opposed religions were loath to risk the dangers of attending universities where local orthodoxy constituted a potential threat.

It will be readily understood that sound Venetian business sense was unwilling to permit the loss of income derived annually from the attendance of several thousand Protestants at the University of Padua. Nor, as a matter of pride, did the Republic look forward with pleasure to any consequent decline in the university's prestige. This problem became even more acute when by a papal bull of 1564 Pope Pius IV required that those taking degrees at Catholic universities swear to their profession of the Catholic faith, and at Padua such maladroit papal action created further problems since the degrees were granted in the presence of and nominally by the bishop.

Now it happened that there existed within the German Empire—but theoretically universal in character—the curious title of Count Palatine, an utterly meaningless but non-religious rank which successive emperors had bestowed liberally because it cost them nothing; and among the Count Palatine's perquisites was the declared but hitherto ignored and normally unenforceable right of conferring academic degrees. This became the first solution of the university's dilemma, and in consequence the English, Dutch, German and Swiss Protestant students were able to continue their studies as usual. Count Palatine Sigismund de Capitibus Listae has no other claim to remembrance except that he conferred the degree of Doctor of Medicine upon William Harvey.

In time, however, this arrangement led to various difficulties and to charges of evasion, and on the suggestion of Fra Paolo Sarpi, that stalwart defender of Venetian liberties, a separate Venetian College of Arts was established as a civil institution in which, at least in theory, non-Catholics were enrolled and from which they received their degrees. This College continued its existence through the eighteenth century, and although it represented merely another way of evading religious restrictions, it was successful in maintaining the university's international position.

Such were some of the reasons underlying Padua's greatness and its attractiveness for foreign students. Let us, then, give some consideration to a selected few of the English medical students who were captives of that attraction. Pride of place must go to Thomas Linacre, the first of those associated with the College of Physicians to have studied abroad. There is no documentary evidence to indicate when Linacre began his studies at Padua, although most likely in 1492, but there is record in the Paduan archives that 'Thomas the Englishman', as he was called, passed his examinations with distinction and received his degree in 1496. That he was well trained relative to his day is suggested both by his later, successful medical career in London and the expressed satisfaction of his valetudinarian patient Desiderius Erasmus who was under Linacre's care for treatment of the stone.

Linacre's slightly younger contemporary John Chamber, received his degree at Padua in 1505, and as one of that little group associated with Linacre in the founding of the College of Physicians, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Linacre's and Chamber's observations at Padua and nearby Venice were effective upon the establishment and organization of the College. In the founding Letters Patent there

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is cryptic reference to the examples of Italian institutions that had served as models for the new College, and this might well have been reference to the Collegio dei Fisici of Venice and the formal organization of Rector, sub-Rector, Syndics and Counsellors within the University of Padua.

Nor ought one to ignore Edward Wotton who received his medical degree in 1522. He resembled Linacre in his interest in Greek so that for a time upon his return to Oxford he held the Greek readership at Corpus Christi College; and also like Linacre and Chamber, Wotton was a physician to Henry VIII who seems to have been wise enough to choose the best-trained men for his medical staff. Wotton was devoted to the College, serving through all the offices and holding the Presidency for three terms.

John Fryer, who obtained a degree in 1533 must be mentioned not because he held the Presidency of the College of Physicians in 1549 and 1550, but because he began a family tradition of studying at Padua. John Fryer's son Thomas received his degree at Padua in 1571, and his son John did likewise in 1610. This latter John Fryer was something of a curiosity. He became a Candidate of the College in 1612 but as a suspected papist he was denied the Fellowship. Since he lived to the ripe age of ninety-six, however, he outlasted his intolerant opponents, and in 1664, a half-century after his initial application, he was created an Honorary Fellow. His brother Thomas, a Paduan M.D., of 1614, was denied admittance to the College for the same religious reason, but unfortunately, he lacked the necessary longevity for a Fellowship by the same honorary route.

The next Paduan graduate who deserves mention was John Caius who was granted his medical degree in 1541 and, as an example of the international composition of the Paduan faculty, lectured in it for about a year on the philosophy of Aristotle. For his time Caius was probably the best-trained and most capable physician in London, and later in life he had no hesitancy in acknowledging his debt to his Paduan teachers. After his return to England he was admitted to the College of Physicians in 1547, soon became a Fellow and began that long period of service which led to his being elected President nine times. Caius ranks second only to Linacre in his contributions to the College of Physicians; as a matter of fact, he considered himself to be Linacre's spiritual descendant. No one was more vigorous in the maintenance of the founder's ideals, even doing battle with the universities over their laxity in standards of medical education; and it was Caius who gathered such scanty information as was available regarding the founding and the early years of the College and presented it in his *Annals of the College* from its inception.

As the sixteenth century came to a close two other noteworthy Englishmen received their degrees at Padua, Simeon Fox, son of the martyrologist John Fox, and a devoted supporter of the College who held the Presidency on seven occasions; and Edward Jorden, author of a *Discourse of the Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother*, a study of hysteria. Jorden's significance lies in the fact that he sought through his book to expose the fallacy of the belief in witches and to demonstrate that hysteria was the basis for much that was accepted as witchcraft. One is tempted to believe that Jorden's attitude at a time when both king and subjects were gripped by the witch mania was the result of his exposure to Paduan rationalism. In any

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event it was said of Jorden by a contemporary that 'his conversation was so sweet, his carriage so obliging, and his life so answerable to the port and dignity of the faculty he professed, that he had the applause of the Learned, the respect of the Rich, the Prayers of the Poor, and the love of all.' Such a testimonial to a Fellow of the College would be difficult to approach, let alone surpass, and presumably represented inherent qualities rather than the result of training either at home or abroad. In any event, it must have been immensely pleasing to Linacre's shade.

The most renowned seventeenth-century graduate of Padua was, of course, William Harvey who, as has been mentioned earlier, because he was a Protestant received his diploma from a Count Palatine rather than from the bishop of Padua. There is no need to dwell on Harvey about whom so much has been written, except to reiterate his debt to Padua which he was the first to express strongly and generously, especially to Fabrizi d'Acquapendente and to Giulio Casserio, his teachers and sponsors.

Mention may also be made of Paul de Laune, brother of the celebrated apothecary Gideon de Laune, who received the Paduan degree in 1614; of Laurence Wright, a graduate of 1617 and later physician to Cromwell; of Sir Thomas Cademan, who graduated in 1620 and was later physician to Queen Henrietta Maria; and of that luckless and ultimately earless puritan John Bastwick who received his degree in 1622. Sir George Ent, friend of William Harvey, constantly active in College affairs and eight times President, was a Paduan graduate of 1636.

In the middle seventeenth century, actually in 1657, the later Sir John Finch received a Paduan degree, and it seems most likely that it was he who brought back with him in 1660 those tables of Paduan anatomical preparations which were presented to the College in 1823 by the Earl of Winchelsea, and which may still be seen in the College's library.

By this time, for various reasons Leyden was in the course of becoming the major attraction for English medical students abroad, although a few who were later to be of some significance continued to accept the lure of Padua. Perhaps the most notable of these was Richard Blackmore, awarded his medical degree in 1684. Although he was chief physician to William III, from whom he received a knighthood, Blackmore was certainly not the equal of some of his predecessors, possibly because he preferred to give much of his time to literature and literary quarrels, and possibly, too, because of Padua's decline.

If, however, one considers the previous period of about 150 years, roughly the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries, Padua's contribution to English medicine was by no means inconsiderable. During that time its graduates were not only better trained than those studying elsewhere, including, of course, England, but were as well the heirs of a medical tradition superior to that of any other school. Indeed, one may speculate on the nature of Harvey's achievement had he not studied there. With few exceptions the English graduates of Padua were later to be found among the élite of England's medical profession. Their role in the organization and development of the College of Physicians was of the utmost importance, and one may wonder if there would have been a College in Linacre's day if he had not gone to Padua; or what course it might have followed had not John Caius been its directing force several decades later, or had it not been guided thereafter by so many Presidents

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who were products of Padua.

Distinctly, Padua had things of value to impart to the medical world, but, in the final analysis, Padua's dominant position, held for so long, is best reflected in the fact that such numbers of the later great figures of English medicine were attracted to and chose to go to Padua for their training.

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