

## Historical and Bibliographical Notes:

A SERIES OF SKETCHES OF THE LIVES, TIMES AND WORKS OF THE OLD  
MASTERS OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY.

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### I. ANDREAS VESALIUS.

1514-1564.



OVER three and a third centuries ago a young man, twenty-two years of age, already professor of anatomy in the renowned University of Padua, lectured and demonstrated anatomy before large classes, and labored industriously with scalpel and quill in the preparation of a work upon this subject which should surprise the world and immortalize his name. He had attentively listened to the prelections of Jacobus Sylvius, and of Johannes Guentherius, at Paris; he had read most critically all that Galen had written on the structure and use of the several parts of the human body, which, by the way, was the chief authority from which his masters had derived the materials for their discourses. He had perused the only text-books then ex-

isting, the little tractates or opuscula of Mundinus, Berrenger, Dryander, and Massa, yet none of them were satisfactory to this ambitious youth. So he toiled on and spared no expense. He induced Titian's favorite pupil and most perfect imitator, Johann Stephan von Calcar, to leave his studio and sit by his side in his dissecting room, and carefully delineate the parts as he demonstrated them; the engravers were set at work; the famous press of Joannem Oporinum of Basle slowly but perfectly worked off the sumptuous folio sheets of the Opus Magnum, entitled "*De humani corporis fabrica, Libri septem.*" Thus in the year of grace 1543, Andreas Vesalius, the young professor (æ. 28), published far the most splendid work on anatomy the world had ever seen. Space will not permit a description of its engraved title-page, representing the lecturer, the cadaver, the class of students, etc., and scarcely an allusion to the curious initial letters with their quaint and cunning little anatomical conceits, some of which are reproduced in this number. The initial which introduces this sketch is the one with which Vesalius begins his first chapter, the words running thus: *Os cæterarum hominis partium est durissimum, & aridissimum, maximeque terrestre & frigidum, & sensus denique præter solos dentes expers.* No analysis of the contents of the almost seven hundred large folio pages of this book can be here attempted. It must suffice to say that it was and is a glorious book, a rare and precious monument of genius, industry, and liberality.

The subject of this sketch was born at Brussels, Dec. 31, 1514. "Three weasels formed the family arms of Andreas, whose name was properly Wesalius" (Morley). He was one of a long line of medical men; Peter Wesalius was famous; Everard, his grandson, wrote commentaries on the books of Rhases, and upon the Aphorisms of Hippocrates, and thus it seemed that "the veins of the family,

in fact, ran medicine." He was highly educated for the period in which he lived; his great work affords proof of the singular purity of his Latin style, and his Greek annotations to the works of Galen exhibit his familiarity with that tongue. He read Avicenna in the original Arabic, and wrote a paraphrase of the ten books of Rhases to the Emir Almansor. In 1535, at the age of twenty, he served as a surgeon in the army of the Emperor Charles V., during the French war. In 1537 he was chosen professor of anatomy at Padua, being the first purely anatomical chair ever instituted. This he held seven years, being at the same time professor at Bologna and Pisa.

After the abdication of Charles V., he became the physician of Philip II. In 1555 he published an augmented edition of his great work, from the same old printing house in Basle; the first contained 659 pages and 23 leaves; this, 824 pages and 28 leaves. The title-page, initials, and at least some of the figures are re-engraved; the type is different, and the pages larger. In a fit of passion, he burned all his manuscripts, and little has been printed except his anatomical works, and his little work on a species of sarsaparilla. The great work on surgery, commonly included among his writings, is said to have been written "by a Venetian, Prosper Bogarucci, a literary crow, who fed himself upon the dead man's reputation" (Morley).

In 1564 he was obliged to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to atone for an alleged sacrilege in opening the body of a young Spanish nobleman, who was not yet dead. The rumor is believed to have been false; however he went, and on his return was shipwrecked on the island of Zante, where he perished miserably of hunger and grief, on the 15th of October, 1564, before he had quite reached the age of fifty. His remains were placed in the Church of St. Mary, on that island.

His great work on anatomy has been printed as follows: Basle, fol., 1543, 1555, 1563; Zurich, fol., 1551, 1573; Lyons, 2 vols., 8vo, without figures, 1552; Paris, fol., 1559, 1564; Venice, fol., 1568, 1604; Antwerp, fol., 1572; Frankfurt, 4to, 1604, 1632; Amsterdam, fol., 1617, 1640; Leyden, fol., 2 vols., 1725.

The plates have been published in various styles and sizes, and frequently used to illustrate different works on anatomy, both with and without acknowledgment. They were engraved originally on wood (xylographic). In 1545 Thomas Gemini, an engraver, cut them in copper, being the first rolling press work ever done in England, and published them in London under his own name, and also in 1553, and in 1559; the first with Latin text, the last two with English letterpress.



*"Ligamenti in tendinibus continendis usus."*

VESALII DE HUMANI CORPORIS FABRICA. 1543. P. 215.