

LIFE AND MEDICAL MORALS OF THE XVII. CENTURY.¹

By T. C. MINOR, M. D., of Cincinnati, Ohio.

A SATIRICAL tradition almost always represents medical men in the time of Moliere as strange and burlesque marionettes, clad in long robes and collars, with the well-known doctor's cap—armed, too, with the ever-present syringe, the practice of those days, in all its activity, being summed up in those three mechanical words: use bleeding, purging, and clysters. This, an easy and very paradoxical interpretation, forced by the complexity of their functions, marked these burlesque personages as physicians. Under the Grand Monarch—as in our day—all these doctors, before becoming physicians, had to be men. They were young, happy, had their little troubles, and struggled to live. It is into this intimacy with their morals that we wish to introduce the medical man of to-day. He can then make comparisons as to the student of other times and his own modern experience. It will show him, too, the professional cares that his medical ancestors had to endure, and will accept, doubtless with a lighter heart, the more modern life imposed on the medical student, the young medical man of the later 20th century.

Students who, under the Grand Monarch, were the noisy and mischief-making portion of the medical department at Paris rarely enjoyed palatial

¹ Based on translation from the French.

luxuries. The majority lived in furnished rooms: the Hotels Coq-Hardi, Hotel aux Boeufs, Hotel du Gras Chapelet, etc., the curious signs of which once ornamented the streets of the modern Latin Quarter. Some students rented rooms in private houses. No member of these embryo physicians had much money: a bed, table, two chairs, a closet, and small hanging book shelves, occasionally the luxury of a screen. In such a place they indulged in the softness of slumber and dreams of a great professional future. They were waked from their couches early every morning by some servant or early rising comrade. It was then necessary to dress hurriedly and go to their college or hospital. The streets of Paris, in those days, enjoyed an ancient renown—they were filthy. Each student walked carefully, watching each footstep, for fear of soiling buckled shoes, or long mantles. These paths were through a quarter whose inhabitants were under police suspicion: thieves, hectoring bullies, young women of easy virtue, etc. Walking was difficult, inasmuch as the inhabitants had the habit of throwing the contents of cooking utensils and chamber pots out of the window with the old traditional Parisian cry of "Look out there below!" "Take care of this under!" and the students often heard the cry too late to avoid some filthy ducking. All kinds of venders crowded the narrow streets. Brandy dealers: "Brandy! Brandy! a sou for a small glass!" "Light bread! white bread!" Venders of fish and vegetables, cheese dealers, rat killers, milkmen, hucksters of all sorts crowded each other. Monks of various religious orders implored charity, always followed by an ass that carried provisions given them for the help of the poor. Finally, the student reached the college of the medical faculty, going to his lecture room or to the chapel—for religion in those days played a large role in the lives of medical students. They often assisted at church ceremonies and celebrated a great number of masses; besides, they had six general and obligatory communions each year. The doors of the college were only open to Catholic students then; it was necessary to bring a certificate of baptism before matriculation; and when a student received the degree of Doctor of Medicine, he swore "by Our Lady, to always defend the Catholic religion, even at the price of my own blood."

For four years medical students were called "Philiatres;" they only became "Bachelors of Medicine" after a rigid examination on anatomy, physiology, hygiene, pathology, and upon the text of the works of Hippocrates. Afterwards, if they sustained their examination with a thesis, they were made "Licentiates." The title of "Doctor" was not really necessary to exercise their profession; it only opened a way of access to the higher grades and honors of the faculty. The average price for medical degrees was about \$170.00 of our money. The faculty even gave poor and worthy students long credit. But if teaching was given for a small sum, it is needful to remember that the amount of money allowed by families to their medical student sons was very moderate. Many students were habitually in debt to money-lenders, and often pawned their books and clothing to usurers. Those who enjoyed a good credit for food and lodgings were the happiest.

After leaving morning lectures, the students always went to dinner. The richest students dined at forty-cent places; for thirty cents, too, one could obtain a fine meal. Good dinners were served for twenty cents, sufficient eating for fifteen cents, a moderate but poor meal for ten cents.

LIFE AND MEDICAL MORALS—MINOR.

The poorer students nourished themselves at a cost of from three to five cents for dinner and still kept a healthy stomach. Soups, codfish, peas and beans formed the more ordinary menu for dinner. A small glass of wine was supposed to aid digestion. They used various liquors, too, such as "Populo," "Rossolis," and "Ratabia." In the afternoon some students went to special courses of lectures or to medical libraries; others were associated with practicing physicians, and went with the latter to visit patients—the best possible clinical school of instruction. About three o'clock the students, for the most part, were wont to gather at certain drinking-places or cabarets, such as the "Silver Crown," the "Three Thunders," the "Lavender," etc. There they drank, played dice, cards, backgammon, while they smoked long earthenware pipes and enjoyed themselves until supper-time. They were fond of the game of tennis, and tennis courts were numerous. Some students played billiards, and others frequented fencing-schools, for fencing in Paris was then a necessity. The students all carried swords, and not for display, either. Duels were frequent. The streets of Paris were very unsafe at night; cut-throats and drowners abounded near the Pont Neuf, and the mothers of country medical students at Paris were in constant terror for the lives of their sons. Some medical students were quite dandy, arranging fine toilettes in order to promenade on the fashionable streets where they could see the police and richer world, and perhaps run into some gallant adventure. At times the students gave small parties, little suppers, at some chosen place of reunion—some well-known Parisian restaurant, such as Bous Enfants or the Pomme de Pin. The cooking at such places was famous and the wine-cellars contained the best. This improvised banquet usually consisted of two kinds of soup, a bisque potage of lemon and yolk of the egg, fine cut up Mayence ham, chitterlings of pork, pig cutlets with Robert sauce, a fricasse of chicken with white gravy, sheep's feet broiled, round of lamb with mint sauce, mushrooms with cream, etc., etc. For wines they had Arbois, Chablis, Sillery, Orleans, and Ermitage. These dinners were very lively affairs—Catants, Nichon, Babette, Musette or Guillemette—those beauties of the Latin Quarter whose pretty faces were artistically rouged and powdered being often present. In the evening such parties usually ended up at the Theatre de L'Hotel de Bourgogne; while on their way home, afterwards, the students would run into crowds of lawless quarrelers, drunkards, serenading bands and the wilder dissolute element of Parisian night-prowlers.

On Sunday the students took some boat on the Seine—a transportation to the country at low excursion rates—to some village near Paris. Here were the young ladies again—the perfumers, dressmakers, milliners (those little French ones!) launderers, chamber-maids, cooks, washerwomen, etc., etc.—many charming mesdemoiselles, who while young belonged to the oldest profession. Vice and virtue commingled with a most particular charm for the medical student; he was much then, in this respect, as he is now. There, dancing and all manner of outdoor games were indulged by these gay Parisians of both sexes.

But this rather joyous life could not last forever. After some years of liberty and pleasure, it was necessary for the medical student to settle down to be a staid doctor. So the new-fledged physician said a fond adieu

to the Pomme de Pin and the pretty grizettes of his quarter. He had to become honest now and make a "good marriage," as the French term it. His new life commenced then and was most often one full of struggles. The physicians of those days had a much harder battle with quackery to fight than now. Charlatanism is from all times, but it especially flourished at that epoch; it was full and intense in its vigor. Italian physicians in those days enjoyed a popular credit, only equaled by the American dentist practicing in Europe to-day. The first care of empiric was to Italianize his name; there were bone-setters, mental healers, charmers spread over all the streets. They had musicians in front of stands, or on wagons, who played music while the quack cured the crowd. When they could they loudly proclaimed the virtues of "Marocain," or the miracles wrought by "The Magical Elixir." Some of these quacks had splendidly equipped offices, with all kinds of glittering devices to make a moral impression on their clients, just like some of our so-called regular specialists do now; and they made fortunes treating colics, stone in the bladder, bunions and corns, selling all manner of most extraordinary remedies. Convents and other religious institutions also sold miraculous liqueurs and particular recipes of alleged Holy Virgin.

Venereal diseases was the most profitable field for an army of special charlatans. Remedies for the sure cure of secret diseases, "medicine that will not keep you in the house during treatment, medicine that no one can detect," were to be found on every corner. The barbers and surgeons of those days enjoyed a great reputation for the cure of clap and the French pox. It is said to be a fact that a most eminent surgeon of that time knelt before the statue of Charles VII., King of France, and prayerfully thanked the image for bringing back from Naples a disease that enabled that generation of surgeons to live on. Against all these surgeons, barbers, foreign doctors, quacks, Italian charlatans, astrologers, and a crowd of pretenders from cheap provincial medical schools, the Paris medical graduate waged bitter warfare.

The loud and public disputes with this army of medical outlaws contributed to degrade the art of medicine in the eyes of the public, that only glance at the surface of things; besides, the wits and comedy writers of the epoch took up the popular ridicule of all medicine and doctors; nevertheless the better class of physicians were held in high esteem by the educated higher classes of society. Medicine conferred a stamp of nobility; and that this is uncontested is seen by the fact that the best medical men of that day were admitted to the Order of Knights of Malta. Court physicians received every kind of public honors. Almost all the best of the doctors of that day were good-humored even when aggressive. Doctors' stories were enjoyed with zest. So good were the physicians of those times that La Bruyere remarked, as for the fun made of medical men: "No matter if men must die, no matter how they wish to live, the real good doctor will be a joker, and the one best paid."

Under the Grand Monarch the custom of families was to pay their household physician at the end of every year. Sixty cents was charged up for each visit. Yet many doctors complained then, as now, that their bills were not paid; but there is good reason to believe that the better class of physicians lived lives of comparative comfort on their professional incomes.

The account-book of the celebrated Eusebius Renaudot shows that he collected about \$34,000 in the year 1666, and this noted doctor kept his private wine-cellar stocked with the best brands, rode in magnificent carriages, and was the father of twelve children, who were all well raised. Two centuries later, can you do as well, my gentle medical reader?

To those fond of this kind of literature we commend the new work of Dr. Fantelle, "*Les etudiants en medecine de Paris sous le Grand Roi*" (Paris, 1899), as this epitome is from that very charming work; almost as captivating, in fact, as Dr. Reynaud's "*Medecuis au temps de Moliere*."