MEDICINE IN CHAUCER'S DAY

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AMONG the motley crew of pilgrims, the "companye of sondry folk", that forgathered at the Tabard Inn on their way to the shrine of the Blessed Martyr at Canterbury, was a physician. The lines in the *Canterbury Tales* depicting him are well known. They are of value in that they reveal to us something of the state of medical theory and practice in the fourteenth century as seen by the greatest English poet of the time:

With us ther was a Doctour of Phisyk,
In al this world ne was ther noon him lyk
To speke of phisik and of surgerye;
For he was grounded in astronomye.
He kept his pacient a ful greet del
In houers, by his magik naturel.
Wel coude he fortunen the ascendent
Of his images for his pacient.
He knew the cause of everich maladye,
Were it of hoot or cold, or moiste or drye,
And where engendred, and of what humour;
He was a verrey parfit practisour.
The cause y-knowe, and of his harm the rote,
Anon he yaf the seke man his bote.
Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries,
To sende him drogges and his letuaries,
For ech of hem made other for to winne;
Hir frendschipe was nat newe to biginne.
Wel knew he th'olde Esculapius,
And Deiscorides, and eek Rufus,
Old Ypocras, Haly, and Galien;
Serapion, Razis, and Avicen;
Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn;
Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn.
Of his diet mesurable was he,
For it was of no superfluitee,
But of greet norissing and digestible.
His study was but litel on the bible.
In sangwin and in pers he clad was al,
Lyned with taffata and with sendal;
And yet he was but esy of dispence;
He kept that he wan in pestilence.
For gold in phisik is a cordial,
Therfore he lovede gold in special.

We may gloss this as follows. The "Doctour of Physik," or, as we should call him, the Doctor of Medicine, was unsurpassed, so far as *talking* was concerned, in medicine and surgery, because of his knowledge of astronomy. He watched his patient diligently hour by hour, and was able, through natural magic, to forecast when his star would be in the ascendant and prepare the appropriate "image" or charm. "Natural magic," it may be remarked, was the expertness gained from a knowledge of the processes of nature, as opposed to supernatural magic or the "black art," in which the "adept" was supposed to be in collusion with the Devil or his satellites. Then, we have a reference to the doctrine of the four humours and the four qualities. Having discovered the cause of the ailment through his knowledge of the heavenly bodies, that is to say, what humour is at fault, and whether the system is unduly affected by hotness, coldness, moistness, or dryness, the Doctor stands out as a very skilful practitioner. He employs his knowledge for the benefit of his patient, and now has recourse to the apothecary, or compounder of drugs. The relationship between the two is of long standing, and much to the advantage of both.

Not the least important is the list of authorities in medicine with which the physician is conversant. They are well selected, and represent the best of the ancient and modern teaching. They are all such as the well trained physician of the day might be expected to know. The Doctor is a moderate man, for we are told he does not overeat; his food is very nourishing and digestible; and, no doubt, his own practice was commended to his clients. His study was but little on the Bible. He was well dressed in sangwin (bright red) and in pers (Persian, or light blue) lined with taffeta and thin silk, all in conformity with his dignity and position. Nevertheless, he was not lavish, for he was moderate in his expenditure. He kept what he earned in treating the plague, and, since gold is a bracing remedy in a prescription, he had a special liking for it in his purse.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to decide whether this portrait of the Doctor represents Chaucer's considered opinion of the medical profession of his day. The Doctor's moral outlook is not of the best. He is given to boasting about his success and his attainments; he is a frugal man, perhaps rather "close"; he is fond of money, and is not above entering into collusion with his apothecary to enhance the cost of his prescriptions by putting in expensive ingredients such as gold. Yet, withal, the Doctor is a scholar, a "verrey parfit practisour"; there is no suggestion that he is a quack. He, also, does his best for his patients. There is an antithesis of

ideals here—on the one hand, knowledge, skill and devotion; on the other, avarice and a desire to impress the laity. If we cannot condone the Doctor's love of gold altogether, we can, perhaps, be a little charitable. The times were hard in Chaucer's day. The country was going through a period of depression. In Chaucer's youth there had been a terrible pestilence. The Hundred Years War was in progress. The political situation was bad, and had led to an uprising of the peasants. Money was scarce, and taxes were high. So, let us be gentle with the Doctor.

It has been suggested by certain scholars that, in his delineation of the Doctor, Chaucer had in mind some well known figure in the profession, possibly John of Hampstead or John of Gaddesden. The latter seems to correspond fairly well, as he is mentioned by name in the poem, was alive in Chaucer's youth, was a renowned practitioner, and, we gather, had some defects of character not unlike those mentioned. John of Gaddesden (1280?-1361) was a prebendary of St. Paul's, physician to King Edward II, and a Fellow and Lecturer at Merton College, Oxford. His great book, the *Rosa Anglica*, was compiled in 1314 and printed at Pavia in 1492. It is a hotch-potch of Arabian crudities and popular superstitions, and contains an interesting reference to the treatment of small-pox with red light. Guy de Chauliac called the work "a vapid rose devoid of fragrance." Haller called its author "an empiric, full of superstition, obviously untrained, a lover and eulogist of quack medicines, greedy of gain, an expert in kitchen-lore." If all this be true, Gaddesden hardly attains even to the standard of Chaucer's physician. The truth probably is that, in drawing the picture of the Doctour of Physik, Chaucer did not go out of his way to vilify a learned profession, of which there were not a few noble exponents in his own day, but took a type not unfamiliar to his readers, and, as a literary artist, which he was preeminently, played off against one another the opposing elements of his character, thus adding to the human interest of the story.

The "Doctour's" study was "but litel on the bible." This recalls the old reproach—*Tres medici, duo athei.* In this particular the physician was probably no worse than his companions, for manuscripts were scarce and beyond the reach of most, and the Church was, in practice, relied upon for religious instruction. Perhaps Chaucer meant that the Doctor was irreligious, with a furtive suggestion that he was in league with the powers of darkness. Yet the Doctor was on a pilgrimage. Scoffers would say that in this he was merely following the fashion, or that he found the route a promising place for pecuniary pickings. Perhaps, again, Chaucer

meant only that he was a rationalist, relying on his scientific knowledge rather than on the mystical and supernatural; in other words, that he was self-sufficient.

The statement that "gold in phisik is a cordial" is a reference to gold, the noblest metal, which the astrologers sought to obtain in potable form, to serve as a panacea for all ills. "Potable gold," as discovered by Arnold of Villa Nova, is said to have been nothing more nor less than brandy. No wonder gold was "cordial."

One trait in the Doctor's character is worthy of note, and it is to his credit. He was a brave man. We are told "He kept that he wan in pestilence." "Pestilence" was the bubonic plague, a most deadly scourge, and one rampant in mediaeval times. Chaucer may have had in mind here the epidemic of this disease which occurred in his childhood, and carried off, where it was prevalent, one half of the population. It is hard for us now, though bubonic plague still exists, to realize the suffering and terror which such an outbreak entailed. In the Great Plague of London in 1665, most of the population, including the doctors, ran away if they could. Chaucer's Doctor did not act thus.

In the first portion of Chaucer's description we have a brief reference to the theories currently in vogue as to the causes and development of disease. The belief that the heavenly bodies exerted an influence on man's life can be traced to the Babylonians and Assyrians, and was an outcome of their studies in mathematics and astronomy. Movements of the sun, moon and planets were studied, and these heavenly bodies were identified with divine beings. The twelve constellations traced in the sky corresponded practically with the signs of the zodiac, each of them being visualized by the symbol of some god, the Scorpion, the Ram, the Bull, the Fishes, the Twins, and so on. As Jastrow expresses it, in his *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practices in Babylonia and Assyria*, "Changes in the heavens.....portended changes on earth. The Biblical expression 'hosts of heaven' for the starry universe admirably reflects the conception held by the Babylonian astrologers. Moon, planets, and stars constituted an army in constant activity, executing military manoeuvres which were the result of deliberation and which had in view a fixed purpose." Thus the Macrocosm, that is, the heavens or universe, reflects as in a mirror the Microcosm, or smaller world, of man. This conception was introduced into Greece, but with this important difference. What was in Mesopotamia the caprice of the gods is now blamed upon the working of an unalterable fate controlling the whole universe—the movements of the heavenly bodies and the movements of man alike. Hence,

perhaps, the Doctor's rationalism. Gradually the notion spread throughout Europe, until it became the accepted belief of all people thinking and unthinking. Astrology, the study of the heavens, came to be regarded under two aspects—"natural" astrology, otherwise astronomy, a legitimate science, and "judicial" astrology, an illegitimate pseudo-science concerned with the casting of horoscopes and reading in the heavens the fate of the individual.

According to the latter, everyone was born under a particular "sign" or "image" of the zodiac. When the patient's star was ascending in the heavens, he was in better health, and better able to withstand operations than when it was descending. There were certain "Egyptian days", for example, on which a person should not be bled. These ideas have survived until now, and, strange as it may seem, books on fortune telling and astrology are still being printed. There are certain common, every-day, expressions which hark back to these far off times. We still speak of "disaster", "disastrous", and of our star being "in the ascendant", curious relics of speech which have lost their original connotation.

The doctrine of the four primitive elements of which all things are composed, fire, air, earth, and water, was first advanced by Empedocles of Agrigentum (504-443 B. C.), physician, physiologist, poet, politician, religious teacher and wonder-worker, who is the hero of Matthew Arnold's poem "Empedocles on Aetna." Perhaps his greatest title to distinction lies in his notable discovery that light travels. Corresponding with the four elements are the four qualities, heat, dryness, cold, and moisture. On this theory was based the pathology of Hippocrates and his school which, with additional refinements, held sway in medicine for two thousand years. As in the external world there are four elements, fire, air, earth and water, so in the world of man's body there are four humours—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, related to the four qualities of matter, hotness, coldness, dryness, and moistness, and governing the four temperaments or complexions—the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the choleric, and the melancholic. The application of the theory is expressed with great clearness in the Hippocratic work called *The Nature of Man.* "The body of man contains in itself blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, which things are in the natural constitution of his body and the cause of sickness and health. Man is healthy when they are in proper proportion between one another as regards mixture and force and quantity, and when they are well mingled together; he becomes sick when one of them is diminished or increased in amount, or is separated in the body from its proper mixture, and not properly

mingled with all the others." The humours are maintained by the innate heat of the body, by a sort of internal coction. Whatever brings disturbances of the humours manifests itself as disease; the innate heat, that is, the nature of the body itself, as Hippocrates expresses it, tends to bring matters back to an equilibrium or norm. This change, occurring suddenly, is called a "crisis", which is manifested on some special day of the disease (critical day), and is often associated with a "critical" discharge or a fall of the bodily temperature. The noxious or superabundant humours are eliminated. The idea that morbid products work their way out of the body is not unheard of even to-day. To Galen we owe the sublimation of the theory, and he made the whole thing so logical and convincing that it was accepted without question. To doubt it was heresy. And the Arabians passed it on to Europe, to dominate the whole of medicine, almost to our own time. The thoughts of Hippocrates live still and we use, commonly, almost his very words. "Melancholy" means "black bile." We speak of being "out of humour". We not unfrequently hear the expressions "too much bile" or "a touch of the liver." When we say we are "as cool as a cucumber", we are talking Galenism! With the death of Galen, who was an experimenter and research worker in the true sense of these words, the necessity for this kind of study was soon forgotten, and medicine became purely a matter of theory and tradition. It was not until 1628, when William Harvey published his immortal work, *De Motu Cordis*, a study based on observation and experiment, that the shackles were broken and modern medicine had its birth nearly fifteen hundred years later.

The medical authors mentioned by Chaucer in his description are well chosen. They were all authoritative, and in high repute at the time. The "Doctour" was not only in possession of the traditional knowledge of his craft, but he was up-to-date. Of the fifteen, five are Greek or Roman, seven are Arabian, one is French (or possibly Scotch—Bernard de Gordon) and two are English. A word or two about some of them may be in order. Dioscorides, a Greek surgeon in the army of Nero (54-68 A. D.), was the first to write on materia medica. Rufus of Ephesus, who lived in the reign of Trajan (98-117 A.D.), was a good surgeon. He described all the known methods of stopping haemorrhage. Ypocras is, of course, Hippocrates, the "Father of Medicine". Rhazes, (860-932 A.D.) gave the first accurate description of small-pox and measles, which is a classic even to-day. Avicenna (980-1036) was called the "Prince of Physicians". His *Canon* was the "bibel" of the mediaeval physician and the last court of appeal. John of Damascus (777-

837), otherwise called Johannes Messue the Elder, was a great translator of the old Greek medical works. Constantinus Africanus (*circa* 1020-1087), by his voluminous translations, fastened Arabian modes of thought on the medicine of western Europe, from the twelfth century on. John of Gaddesden we have already considered. Bernard de Gordon was a teacher at Montpellier from 1285 to 1307. His *Lilium Medicinae* is a characteristic Arabist production. It is notable, however, as containing the first description of the truss, and the first mention of spectacles.

Gilbert the Englishman (died 1250) was the leading exponent of Anglo-Norman medicine. He wrote the *Compendium Medicinae*, somewhat similar to Bernard's *Lilium*. In it he avows his preference for the simple expectant treatment of Hippocrates, but hesitates to employ it for fear of appearing to be an odd-fish. He was the first to refer to small-pox as contagious, a view that was afterwards contradicted by such an authority as Sydenham. His description of leprosy was the *locus classicus* on the subject for many years. It is evident that the training of the "Doctour" was the best of its kind, and quite up to the requirements of his day. He was probably a university man, for in Chaucer's day the title "doctor" meant something. The doctor possessed the highest qualifications of learning as imparted in the Schools, and was competent to teach. In fact, the terms "doctor" and "professor" were synonymous.

During the twelfth century many universities had sprung up in various parts of Europe, and by Chaucer's time Oxford, Salerno, Bologna, Paris, and Montpellier were giving the doctorate in medicine. Those who aspired to higher accomplishments in the art attended at least one university, and often several. The course of instruction was entirely theoretical, and based on the knowledge of the Greek period that had filtered through Arabian sources. We need not, however, assume too great an air of superiority, for the older writers had a very respectable grasp of medicine and surgery, and, as a matter of fact, in the Middle Ages, practical experience was regarded as an essential. We can learn something of the requirements from a reference to an edict of the Emperor Frederick II, issued in 1224, which provided that a candidate for a license to practise medicine must be examined in public by the faculty of Salerno. The examination was based on the genuine works of Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna, and before taking it the candidate must have studied logic for three years (the equivalent of an Arts course), medicine and surgery for five years, and have practised for one year under an experienced physician. The candidate in surgery had to give proof that he had studied the art for

at least a year, in particular human anatomy, "without which no incision can be safely made nor any fracture treated". In the time of Harvey a double doctorate was given in Italy, that of philosophy and medicine. In spite of the high standard of professional education at this time, quackery was rampant, as, indeed, it still is, and much of the practice was rough and ready, and marked by the grossest kind of empiricism. In spite of his possibly venial defects, Chaucer's physician may fairly be taken as a representative of the higher type of medical practitioner. He stands out well by comparison.

The mediaeval period in Europe was in many ways a period of contradictions, for not only do we find exemplified, on the one hand, the highest expressions of Christian charity but, on the other, the most ruthless cruelty. The Crusades, which lasted, off and on, for two hundred years, brought to western Europe the halt, the sick and the blind; and the ghastly punishments, inflicted for what we would now call trivial offences, led to the maiming of a considerable number of people. Accordingly, pilgrims, beggars, the lame, the lepers, went up and down the country. These had to be cared for, and so an elaborate system of almshouses, hospitals, and lazarettos grew up throughout the land. It surprises us to learn that in England alone there were about this time no fewer than seven hundred and fifty of such institutions. Material ripe for the exercise of the physician's and the surgeon's art was everywhere at hand. Jacobus de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, in an account of the social life of Western Europe written about 1220, gives us an account of the hospitals of his time in France, a picture which, no doubt, applies with equal truth to similar institutions in England. He says:— "There are, moreover, very many associations of men and women renouncing the world and living by rule in houses of lepers or hospitals of the poor, humbly and devotedly ministering to the poor and sick.....These servants of Christ, sober and sparing towards themselves, and rigid towards their own bodies, abound in compassion towards the poor and sick, and at once minister to them all necessaries to the best of their ability". He ends with the praise of several good hospitals, which are "a refuge to the poor, an asylum for the wretched, consolations for the mourning, nourishment for the starving, a kindness and diminution of suffering for the sick." Such, too, were the hospitals of St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas in London, active in Chaucer's time, and still, in the twentieth century, carrying on their beneficent work. The place of such institutions in the life of the time is well indicated in the following quaint lines, taken from *The hye way to the Spytell hous*, written

about 1536, in which a certain Robert Copland speaks with the porter of a London Hospital, probably St. Bartholomew's:

The Spytell hous
Copland.
Syr, I pray you, who hath of you relefe?
Porter.
Forsoth they that be at such myschefe
That for theyr lyvyng can do no labour
And have no frendes to do them socour
As old people seke and impotent
Poore women in chyldbed have here easement
Weyke men sore wounded by great vyolence
And sore men eaten with pockes and pestylence
And honest folke fallen in great poverty
By mischaunce or other infyrmyte
Way farying men and maymed souldyours
Have theyr relyef in this poore hous of ours
And all other which we seme godd and playne
Haue here lodgyng for a nyght or twayne
Bedred folke, and such as cannot craue
In these places moost relyef they haue
And yf they hap within our place to dye
Than are they buryed well and honestly
But not euery unseke stoborne knaue
For than we should ouer many haue.

The references to the theory and practice of medicine found in the stanzas descriptive of the Doctor of Medicine move us to enquire how much Chaucer knew about medicine and the "sciences" on which it was based. He was a man of position, a courtier, a diplomatist, a traveller and a scholar. He was conversant with English, French, Latin and Italian, was a lover of books, and had access to many sources of information. Moreover, he was a close friend of John Gower, priest (?) and poet, a highly educated man for the time. While probably not a university man, Chaucer had unusual opportunities, and must undoubtedly be regarded as highly cultured. Astrology and alchemy are rather frequently referred to in his works. His knowledge of astrology is much more than superficial, as a study of the prologue to the Wyf of Bathe's Tale and the tales of the Knight and the Man of Lawe will show. Alchemy is more lightly dealt with, and in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is held up to ridicule; yet Chaucer is inclined to think that there is something in it. The Treatise on the Astrobale, written for "litel Lowis" his "sone", indicates a considerable knowledge of mathematics, and of astrology as well. The list of medical authors which our Doctor is said to have studied is well chosen, for they were all in high repute at the time. Chaucer might very well have had

more than a bowing acquaintance with them, for important collections of medical works were to be found at Dover and Canterbury, towns which he would have to pass through on his several visits to the Continent, and must have known well. Dover Priory had in its library some hundred and eighteen medical treatises, including *Trismegistus ad Asclepium*, the book which Chaucer possibly had in his mind when he mentioned the "olde Esculapius," as well as the works of Hippocrates, Galen, Rhazes, Bernard and Gilbert, according to a catalogue of the books written in 1389, almost exactly contemporaneously with the *Canterbury Tales*. St. Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury possessed ten of the fifteen authors mentioned by Chaucer in its collection of about two hundred and thirty medical works. Aesculapius, Rufus, Averroes, Damascenus, and Gaddesden, however, were not to be found there. The library of Christ Church, Canterbury, contained more that two hundred and eight medical treatises, including nine of Chaucer's list. Bernard, Gaddesden, Aesculapius, Serapion, Rufus, and Gilbert were not represented.

In the time of Roger Bacon, some hundred years before Chaucer, mathematics, astrology and alchemy had some pretensions to be sciences; at least, they represented the best knowledge of the day, and were respectable. Before long, however, in the hands of the unscrupulous, they were degraded into the veriest quackery, and were employed in the basest way for gain. In the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, Chaucer seems to have set himself to expose the trickeries of the alchemists, and it is the only one of his poems that contains more than stray allusions to alchemistic lore. What alchemistic learning there is in it is superficial, but it raises the interesting, if somewhat futile, speculation as to whether Chaucer himself was an alchemist. Elias Ashmole, the famous antiquary, in his *Theatrum Chemicum Brittannicum*, published in 1652, reprints the whole of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, and remarks that Chaucer "is ranked among the Hermetic Philosophers, and his master in this Science was Sir John Gower, whose familiar and neere acquaintance began in the Inner Temple upon Chaucer's return into England.... He that reads the latter part of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale will easily perceive him to be a Iudicious Philosopher, and one that fully knew the mistery." Ashmole, however, was bathed in the glamour of the past, and lived in a most uncritical age, so we need not take this too seriously. Certainly, we should not conclude that Chaucer was a practical alchemist.

Towards the end of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale are some lines concerning alchemy. They run:

Let no man bisy him this art for to seche,
But—if that he th'entencioun and speche
Of philosophres understonde can;
And if he do, he is a lewed man.
"For this science and this conning," quod he,
"Is of the secree of secrees, parde."

Chaucer attributes the quotation to Arnold of the Newe Toun (Arnoldus de Villa Nova), but is in error in stating that it is to be found in the Rosarie (*Rosarium Philosophorum*). It occurs in his *De Lapide Philosophorum.* The expression "secree of secrees" in the last line will bear two interpretations. Either it means the Philosopher's Stone, that elusive prize after which the alchemists sought, or it refers to a famous book, perhaps the most popular work of the Middle Ages, called *Secreta Secretorum.* T. R. Lounsbury, the well known critic, takes the latter view. The work professes to be based on a Greek original, *De Regimine Principum,* attributed to Aristotle, which was said to have been written for the benefit of Alexander the Great. It came down to us through the Arabians, and assumed many forms and variations, one of them the famous *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum,* or *Flos Medicinae,* which passed through some two hundred and forty editions. It became a sort of *Family Doctor* in print, and in it are to be found in rhyme (so as to be easily memorized) many simple and homely directions as to diet, conduct, mode of living, and the correction of minor ailments. The book was intended for the use of the laity, but physicians did not, at times, disdain to follow it. Some of its maxims have passed into popular use, such as, "Joy, temperance and repose, slam the door on the doctor's nose." Gower, Chaucer's intimate, knew of this work, as C. M. Hathaway has noted in his edition of Ben Johnson's *Alchemist,* and Chaucer himself could hardly have been ignorant of it.

In view of such evidence as we have, we may sum up the matter in this way. Just as in the palmy days of Rome a theoretical knowledge of medicine was regarded as an essential part of every gentleman's education, or as to-day every well-informed person is expected to know something of the constitution of the atom and the relations of time and space, so Chaucer, it seems safe to conclude, had a general acquaintance with the science of his time, which term meant "physic" or natural philosophy (under which medicine was included), mathematics, astrology and alchemy. In regard to mathematics and astrology, however, his atainment was more considerable.

Despite his defects of character, Chaucer's "Doctour" may be taken as the representative of the better type of medical practitioner

of the day, so far at least as training goes. How much higher the mediaeval physician could climb, we may learn from a study of the life of John Mirfeld, a contemporary of Chaucer's, and a physician connected with St. Bartholomew's Priory in London. His career is thoroughly set forth by Sir Norman Moore, the erudite historian of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, in his Fitzpatrick Lectures on "The History of the Study of Medicine in the British Isles," to whom the writer gladly acknowledges indebtedness for the facts narrated here.

John Mirfeld reaches the high standard set for a physician by Isadore Hispalensis (600 A. D.), for he knew something of the seven liberal arts—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. He probably had studied at Oxford, though this is only an inference from a passage in his *Breviarum.* He had been trained in medicine by a master who was a physician. He lived hard by the St. Bartholomew's Hospital and saw something of the patients in that noble institution, great even then. In his later life he seems to have become a monk, thus combining, as was often the case at that time, the functions of a cleric and a physician—an example of what Cotton Mather, some three hundred years later, termed "the angelical conjunction." Mirfeld had read materia medica, medical botany and pharmacology in Nicholas and, perhaps, in Marcellus; surgery in Roger and Lanfranc; medicine in Galen, Rhazes, Avicenna, Platearius of Salerno, and in the more modern authors, Bernardus de Gordon, John of Gaddesden, and Gilbertus Anglicus. He had read Ysaac on diet, and knew by heart the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum.* He was familiar with the names of Hippocrates and Aristotle, and with parts of books ascribed to them. He knew something of Horace, Vergil, and Ovid, and had read the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, which King Alfred and Chaucer had translated, by the way. He wrote easily the Latin of his time and knew the Greek alphabet. Unlike Chaucer's Doctor, he was thoroughly versed in the Old and New Testaments. Truly, a man of distinction!

Coming to the practice of medicine, Mirfeld could recognize fever, and distinguish a few ailments in which fever occurs, such as plague and malaria. He could distinguish to some extent what we call pleurisy and bronchitis. He knew that dysenteric symptoms are not all due to the same cause. He recognized several distinct diseases of the skin. He was as well acquainted with epilepsy as most physicians up to the time of Trousseau. He knew what hemiplegia is, and could recognize gout. He knew something of dislocations and fractures. He understood the value of exercise and

of rational diet in the preservation of health, and was convinced of the ill effects of intemperance. He was acquainted with some of the effects of opium, turpentine, sulphur, and some other drugs. He understood the necessity of attention to detail in nursing, and realized the influence of mind over matter. All this will appear no mean accomplishment when we realize that in Mirfeld's time there was a very imperfect knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Besides, he wrote two books, one the *Floriarium Bartholomei*, composed anywhere from 1362 to 1369, which is a theological treatise containing one long chapter on physicians and their medicines; the other the *Breviarum Bartholomei*, the first book on medicine in any way connected with the oldest hospital in London.

"Such was John Mirfeld, a physician of wide reading, with a mind full of all that was known in his time, a laborious and high-minded man, anxious to do all in his power for his patients, and to instruct others how to relieve suffering." (Norman Moore).