Medical cures are more successful with the common people than with nobility and the eminent.

I have to confess, noble listeners, I never cease to be amazed by how deeply the belief in the dominion of fate on human vicissitudes is rooted in our minds, so much so, that although we do not have temples and altars as the ancients did, where they would place invocations for good fortune, we have still managed to invent an unbeknown deity we turn to for help and redemption when we are setting about some new endeavour. We thus imagine its extraordinary power over public and private affairs, politics and economy, great lineages as well as families of the lowest social levels. All over it is fortune that is invoked, fortune that is praised and, more often than not, criticised for being blind, imprudent, envious and finally, an unjust dispenser of resources. In the *Laws* Plato wrote that there is no field in which fortune appears more strongly and broadly than "in the government, in navigation, in military command and in medicine"; as a consequence, the opinion that a physician must be fortunate has unjustly become widespread, saying that not only must one search for doctrine and wisdom in him, but also good fortune. I, however, am unable to convince myself of the fact that, as the common people believe, fortune has such dominion and power in the medical field; indeed, if one were to attribute a role to fortune in practical medicine, I would do so in the case in which a doctor, with experience in similar cases, practise and wisdom, came up against an illness that seemed to be so serious that the patient and those present were frightened, with vigils, vomiting, pain and other symptoms, but still able to respond to the cures. Likewise, I would
call unfortunate a physician who has to treat a noxious, malignant illness, one that consumes the vital forces unseen, and that is more dangerous than it actually appears – one that does not disturb one’s sleep, does not take away one’s appetite, and does not make the patient complain even a little. In this case, no matter how much the physician tries to defend himself behind prognostic science, it will be difficult for him to escape popular slander, as soon as word spreads in the city that one of his patient’s has suddenly died. On the other hand, I believe the fact that well-prepared physicians and outstanding practical physicians treating high-ranking patients do not meet with the same success as do hospitals that are not so well prepared where the common people are treated day by day, sometimes achieving amazing results, has nothing to do with the jurisdiction of fortune. Indeed, no learned person could describe something that has to occur and which could not occur in any other way owing to various causes as a fortuitous case. And it is precisely this that I would like to prove with my discourse today, that is, that it is not in the least surprising that medical cures are more successful with the common people than with the nobility and eminent.

Illustrious sirs, I am well aware that almost everybody is convinced that the cures of noble and distinguished figures are less successful than those of the common people and the populace for the simple reason that when a physician is summoned to treat an illustrious man, he pays just as much attention to his own reputation as he does to the patient’s health, so much so that he makes sure the remedies he prescribes cannot be accused of having any negative effects. As Celsus said, “for it is the part of a prudent man first not to touch a case he cannot save, and to the risk the appearance of having killed one whose lot is but to die”. On the other hand, when treating a commoner they would prescribe strong remedies to suppress the illness and its causes in all tranquillity and with the greatest faith. Galen behaved with the greatest dignity, and as is only befitting for an honest artisan, when he was summoned to treat Emperor Commodus, who was afflicted by stomach ache, caused, as he himself writes, “by friction of the food in the stomach”, leading the Roman physicians to believe he had a fever since immediately after lunch he was afflicted by a swelling and hardening of the stomach. Once he had felt the Emperor’s pulse, he explained that he did not have a fever but it was a simple case of friction of the food
inside the stomach, which was producing air. When the Emperor asked him what he could do against it, he replied with the following words: “If someone else were suffering from this ailment, I would make him drink some wine with pepper as I usually do, but for you sovereigns, whom physicians usually prescribe remedies that are absolutely harmless, it will suffice if you place a woollen muff soaked in balsam of hot nardus at what would be the height of the opening of the stomach”. Admiring Galen’s honesty, the Emperor decided he would try the remedy of the common people, drinking Sabine wine with powdered pepper, and his health was restored. I do not want to question the fact that physicians might have a purpose that is political and that their circumspection when treating the nobility might be a hindrance, so much so that the nobility and famous, who have an abundance of honour, means and fortune on their side, do not receive the same benefits from the medical field – by nature the same for everyone – as do the common people. However, there are also other reasons that do not allow patricians to have the same success as the workers in that field. Everybody knows just how different their lifestyles are, that is, the complete opposite, even though the nobility and humble labourers live in the same region and in the same city. Indigent and used to ills, the workers are satisfied with little food and are forced to live a sober life, out of impelling need. Indeed, when a commoner returns to hearth and home after manual labour, if they find a three-legged table, a bowl of salt, a jug of evaporated wine for lunch, they believe they are living like the rich, eating polenta or stale and black bread.

Indeed, that soft, white bread with the soft crumbs
is for the master.

What is more, on feast days, they have to celebrate sacrifice without incense.

Just how much the meals of those labourers differ from those in the palaces of the distinguished and in princely homes, not just in elegance and taste but also in the wealth and abundance of all kinds of dishes! Now, just how many people work to feed one master? Forest guards, birdsmen, hunters, fishermen, cooks, confectioners, tasters, cupbearers and a vast multitude of servants who diligently bear enormous silver receptacles, waiting anxiously. This
is what one can see. One has to admit that the meals of the gods were frugal and sparing when compared to those prepared for the Roman emperors or the ones we can see today in kings' palaces. And indeed, gods ate only nectar and ambrosia, and once they had had enough ambrosia, they lived off nectar, as Martial once wittily wrote about Jupiter:

Jupiter is satiated with ambrosia, now he consumes nectar.

What kind of chylification might result from so many different kinds of food, from such incredible seasoning, from such refined wines from all over? And what sort of monstrous corruption of the humours in the veins and viscera results? Thus, when men who are used to such a rich diet fall ill, what suitable remedies might there be in the medical codex, in the pharmacists' ampullae that might help them? Which wise physician would dare move a similar Camarina with a tool for luxation? Which panacea, which nepenthes would help restore such extensive disorder? The Venetian patrician, Luigi Cornaro was once extremely providential when it came to looking after his health; he had witnessed the dangers of others and thus become more cautious after seeing that his two brothers, who were both used to dining lavishly as is customary for nobility, had died at the prime of life, as no medical cure was able to save them. He himself believed he would meet the same fate, and thus decided the only solution was to embrace a sober, frugal life, and he then went on to live to the age of a hundred. And what is more, his old age was so healthy and full of life that at the age of ninety, he still had the physical and mental strength of a man in the bloom of his youth – whenever he so wished, he went riding, hunting, dancing, played ball, read, recited and devoted himself to his studies, publishing a treatise on the advantages of the sober life, a specimen of great elegance and worthy of being exemplified by a professor from a medical point of view, as well as published to the advantage of the public good. This is the perfect example of how a well-balanced life in this noble man prolonged a life that intemperance would otherwise have wretchedly interrupted.

However, it is not just the daily, domestic congestion caused by the elements in their refined foods that makes medical cures more arduous and uncertain in the wealthy than in the common-
ers, whose diet is much simpler. There are countless other factors that do not allow the nobility and distinguished to obtain the good health from medical sources that the humble labourers do. Indeed, the most powerful figures in the city, and those who have reached the highest positions in particular, rarely obey or listen to the advice physicians give. They are so used to imparting orders to others that they show considerable shame in obeying the most imperious art of all, “the one that commands the commanders”, to use Pliny’s definition. Furthermore, since they want to be cured as quickly as possible and exert pressure accordingly, if a remedy does no good, they condemn it immediately and search for new ones, often being frustrated by their own diligence since they expect to be cured rapidly without the prolonged use of appropriate remedies and without letting the change of seasons play its part, and are therefore disappointed. As a result, the judgement of physicians, otherwise correct, is overturned and very often the best predictor of the future course of those ills is he who studies the patient’s habits rather than the imbalance of the humours and the nature of the illness. What Celsus has to say about a relative of King Antigonus is both curious and worth remembering. Of noble birth and renowned for his intemperance, this man began to have certain symptoms of dropsy, albeit slight; he therefore summoned two temple physicians, one a disciple of Chrysippus, the other Filippo Epirota, so that they could diagnose the illness and explain what was to be done. Both agreed on the nature and causes of the disease, and on which part was affected. They disagreed, however, on the final resolution. Chrysippus’ disciple stated assuredly that someone suffering from such an illness would never be able to regain good health, and that he would die of dropsy. Filippo, on the other hand, claimed that the illness could be cured, swearing on his honour that his medicine would restore the patient to his former health. They discussed the subject bitterly before the king until Chrysippus’s disciple finally put an end to the dispute; explaining the reasoning behind his opinion, he said his colleague was correct, but only as regards the illness of the body, while he was considering the illness of the soul, being well aware of the young man’s intemperance. And the events proved him right – although he was protected by the king’s safekeeping and the diligence of the physician looking after him, he did not tolerate the
cures that were meant to restore his good health, and he dragged himself to his death “devouring the salves and drinking his own urine”. In this regard, one can add the valuable judgement by the illustrious Writer on dropsy: “It is easier to eliminate in slaves than in free men, because the cure requires hunger, thirst, a thousand other discomforts and a long period of patience, and it is therefore easier to help slaves rather than those who misuse their freedom”. And why should we not say that physicians have more success in helping the commoners and labourers, who trust a physician’s words completely, who greet the physician as if he were a god on earth when he arrives, who diligently take the medicine prescribed, who do not need to be persuaded before putting the glass to their lips, content to believe in medicine, as if it were something sacred, rather than knowing about it? And why, I say, should we not admit that they can be helped much more quickly than high-ranking people when they are afflicted by a serious disease, as their very own authority often proves harmful?

Furthermore, what makes the therapies more uncertain and subject to various occurrences of fate than the presence of numerous physicians to cure just one patient? The ancient inscription is well-known: “A multitude of physicians killed the king”. No matter how world-famous they are owing to experience, preparation and fame, how honest and free of any sense of rivalry (very rare) – it will still be a miracle if they all agree and focus on just one objective. And indeed, if the saying by the comic poet has any meaning at all, “each head has his opinion, to each his own habits”, this is even more so in such a field. Indeed, as is only logical each physician expresses himself on what should be done, that is, the heart of the therapy, on the basis of his temperament and intellect, thus one will claim action must be taken without delay, another will want to play for time, and yet another will say they must proceed slowly. As a result, while delaying in consultations, the possibility of acting in time disappears, which is the most fundamental thing of all. The nobility and distinguished risk foundering on these rocks when they find themselves in the midst of a storm of some serious illness – and with a sense of compassion, one can see them surrounded, or rather besieged by the physicians. And even when a member of that social class, acquainted with the example of the danger of others, solemnly swears that once he is forced to take to his bed, there
is only one person who will be responsible for his health, and that that person must be more experienced than eloquent, it will still not be easy for him to put his wishes into practice. Indeed, in the case of a serious illness, when he falls ill his wife, children and all his family and citizens will protest that such a great task cannot be entrusted to one physician alone, and that it is unbefitting for such an imminent family if they do not summon countless men of worldwide renown, as if it were improper to be ill without pomp and honour. What is more, and this is even more amazing, the physician himself, whose honesty and skill has gained the patient's total trust, will use pretexts to try and convince him, either by deception or begging, to allow him to summon a colleague so he can share with him the slander should the case end mortally rather than wanting to share the glory should he be successful. Thanks to their poverty and humble conditions, the commoners are obviously exempt from such anguish. If they have to take to their beds, one physician suffices and at times not even that, when nature works in his place, the truly reliable healer of ills.

However, it is not only the abundance of physicians but rather the abundance or mixed masses of medicines that are normally recommended to nobility that make their illnesses worsen or last longer. These are surely problems the common people and labourers do not have when they fall ill, since it is their very nature to be content with little, so they therefore need just small quantities and simple medicines to get better. Please, what about the example of the substantial pharmacopoeia by Wecher and Shroeder, and the chemical manual and all the other things that are used to content the nobles and powerful. Let us compare them with the medicine of the poor of our Prevozio, a small book but one of gold, as Tullius once wrote in a treatise by Crantore. And may nobody believe that common medicines that are easy to prepare are prescribed to commoners simply so their limited financial means are not exhausted by medicines that are more expensive and complex to prepare. Indeed, if one considers this properly, this is not why a good physician usually prescribes such simple, local medicines to these people but rather, it is because the condition of the humours flowing through their bodies requires such medicines, and would refuse anything stronger. There is a considerable difference in the humoural mass in the bodies of the nobles and that of the com-
since the lifestyle of illustrious figures is such that food intake exceeds physical exertion, their health will be neither constant and sound, nor will it be easy to restore, once it has worsened; the opposite can be said of the common people who, thanks to a proportion that tends to be balanced regarding food intake and exertion, have passageways that are less obstructed, allowing the forerunner impurities of illnesses to be expelled from the body, both upwards and downwards, since their humours are more fluid and able to move and thus oppose less resistance to emetic, cathartic and liberating medicines. Thus, if people of this kind are afflicted by fever, should it seem opportune to provoke sweating (usually the main defence in the case of fever), the effect will be achieved with the simple use of diaphoretics from the plant kingdom and there is no need to resort to bezoarthic, jovial minerals, as is the case for men of higher standing, to defeat the resistance of the obstacles and the resistance of the humours with such stratagems. Indeed, in labourers and craftsmen, who tend to perspire more easily owing to their habitual physical exercise, so that even during the deepest winter any kind of movement makes all their limbs wet, the physician will have no difficulty in provoking sweating by using trivial remedies. The same can be said of diuretics when a mass of serous impurities has to be expelled via the urinary tracts. I would risk being long-winded if I were to list every kind of disease and explain how, regardless of its nature, it can be cured more rapidly and with greater ease in the poor and lower classes than in the wealthy. There is, however, one disease I would like to draw your attention to. The French disease, one that was once unknown and foreign but is now also present in our city, is of such a nature that it attacks anyone, regardless of gender, age, temperament. This disease is so philanthropic that it has never refused to visit anyone, never refused hospitality and never refused cohabitation; “it enters the hovels of the poor and the towers of kings alike”, regardless of ambition and pomp, unlike gout, which is to be found in the palaces of the Great, but considers it beneath it to enter the humble homes and huts of peasants. Cardano once said there is something regal about gout, “it sits while others are standing, it sleeps on soft blankets, and if it appears in public it does so in a sedan-chair”. Thus, while Emperor Charles V was once entering Milan, impressive on his steed, by his side was Antonio de Leva, lying on a litter because he was afflicted
Inaugural Orations

with gout. But this is not how the venereal disease acts – being the fruit of love, it is friendly and sociable. Thus, since this disease afflicts everyone indiscriminately and moves in a thousand ways, also via kisses, breath and food – for example even newly born infants when they are breastfed by a wet-nurse who is infected – there is absolutely nobody who does not wish to keep such a fatal guest away from their own home. Nevertheless, if we consult good, honest practical physicians, there will not be one who does not spontaneously say that this disease is easier to cure in the common people and country folk than in the rich and noble. Very often, after a simple purgative, syphilis is eliminated by administering an infusion of guaiac, and should a trace of virulence remain, it is easy to eliminate as long as they devote themselves to their usual exercise since, according to Falloppio, in the early stages it is only physical exercise, albeit intense and constant, that was the only remedy against this disease. There is therefore no need for them to roast their bodies in hypocausts, and neither is there need for an iatralipta who often made them spit their souls with their mercurial ointments; indeed, owing to their tireless exertion and frugal sustenance, their humours are not so dense and rich that the seeds of the venereal disease can plant deep roots, as is the case in those of noble birth who spend their lives between one lavish banquet and another. Thus, the illustrious admiral Doria once said, every time his oarsmen were suffering from the French disease, he restored their health by taking them out to sea, giving them a tea of beachwood made by breaking up an oar and making them row as they usually did.

Furthermore, as everyone knows and as is the case for any kind of illness, but for malignant ones that might be fatal in particular, the success of the treatment also depends on the soul being free of any other bothersome worries as far as possible; Indeed, when a pernicious illness suddenly breaks out, should the patient’s soul be thrown to and fro by the various waves of worry, as if in the Euripus Strait, what good is a diligent physician with his experience or valuable medicines, one might ask? Or the most famous bezoarthsics, panaceas or the like? Diseases of the eyes cannot be cured “unless first one cures the head, and the head cannot be cured unless first the body is cured, and in turn, the body cannot be cured unless one cures the soul”, a physician in Plato’s works
once said; “and indeed, all the good and ill of the soul go to the head in accordance with the law of sympathy”. Thus, since the sick are seriously endangered by a multitude of worries, and since one would hope that the cure begins with the soul itself, who, I ask you, can deny that it is for this very reason, that the course of disease is more favourable in the poor and humble labourers than in the upper-classes and nobles? Compare, I ask you, the humble craftsman, lying on his pallet, afflicted by a serious illness when he realises he might die, I ask you, is there any comparison with a great man? Both suffer at the thought and fear they have to leave this life, the dearest thing to them all. But which of them should we consider the most agitated in their souls by such distressing worries? The common man or the patrician? For sure, the poor craftsman is distraught, seeing himself in such uncertain circumstances, with the risk of having to take his leave of his wife and children; but nevertheless, he is not afraid when he sees the priest arrive, because he himself will have summoned him for the final rites; he is not tormented by worries regarding his property, or because he has to write a will, nobody will ask him who he intends to name as his children’s tutor, whom he has entrusted to the Lord’s hands; thus, confident of divine mercy, as far as human weakness allows, he serenely prepares himself for death, “and since he has no knowledge of the letters, he awaits to see the city of God himself, as he has heard tell”, when he has to leave this life. The other lies in a gilded bed, regally covered in purple and byssus and while he fears death is about to strike him off the list of the living, he knows no peace and is almost crushed by the burden of his worries, tossing from one side to the other; and he worries about his riches, his honour, his responsibilities and the splendour of this family, his assets, his wife, his children, everything he will lose, so that very often the patient is unable to make any decision whatsoever, and since he is not up to making any decision, he entrusts those around him with too much. If the patient who is seriously sick is a wealthy nobleman without children, as soon as word gets round that he his life is in danger, inheritance hunters and potential heirs arrive like vultures flocking to a corpse, feigning the proper devotion while really hoping for his rapid death. Should the disease then disappear, his friends and relatives will then come to him, urging him to be cheerful – they will tell him he has been offered an occasion
for celebration and religious devotion and will then advise him to atone his sins and sanctify himself by entering a convent. However, if the anguish and tempest of worries are big when nature and the illness fight as equals and one does not know if the outcome will be recovery or death, what can one say when the disease is at its peak and one has to tell the patient death is at the door, and he is asked about his will, the details of his burial, whether he wants to putrefy underground or in a coffin above? In truth, who knows the anguish of magnates and the powerful better than those who have spent their lives practising medicine? In short, if the very things physicians warn of most, what they can never say enough, is the possible negative influence that such anxiety might have on a therapy that began successfully in accordance with the rules, is it then not admissible to admit that this is also one of the reasons why patients' cures are much more successful in common people than in nobles and the eminent?

Likewise, therapeutic intervention in high-born women is also more difficult and lengthy, requiring considerably more medical endeavour than in women from the populace. Indeed, brought up in a life of idleness and refined delicacies, noble women and ladies suffer just as much from noble intemperance as the men; they taste the most varied foods, drink heavily, stay up the whole night for entertainment, dances, opera, and then sleep until late into the day, and end up having their afternoon rest and after dinner revelry at the same time, making merry like the Greeks, as Plautus said, and thus leading a life that almost equals that of their husbands. But when they fall ill, how cantankerous they are! How irksome and impervious they are to the precepts of medicine! The torments they inflict on physicians! So all too often, the latter find themselves forced to deceive them, using ploys to cure them. As Seneca once said, “some cannot be cured without deception”, telling the story of a king's daughter who had an advanced tumour in the breast but refused to allow herself to be operated on; a wise surgeon, who had finally managed to rub the tumour delicately with a sponge soaked in oil, opened the abscess with a scalpel he had hidden in the sponge while he was gently rubbing the tumour, and the princess was then healed by means of a deception for which the physician was then thanked. The aforementioned moral philosopher once lamented the fact that in his days, with their intemperance
the women had transformed the greatest physician into a liar. “A woman does not suffer from gout and does not lose her hair unless her menses be stopped”, Hippocrates wrote in his oracles, “but these women”, said Seneca, “lose their hair and have aching feet because they have transformed life, not the female nature. Indeed, having equalled men in freedom and independence, they have also equalled them in vices, and with vices they have lost the benefit of their own sex”. However, with this harsh, vicious attack against the female sex Seneca only wants to rebuke ladies from illustrious families, and certainly not those from the lower classes, as is clear from the rest of the passage which I have omitted here. Indeed, even today it is seldom and almost prodigious for women from the populace, and peasant women in particular, forced to physical exertion and a frugal diet by force, to be afflicted by arthritic fluxion, unless they have been forced to eat legumes during times of famine; Hippocrates describes such a case in the city of Eno in Thracia when, during a certain constitution, men and women had to eat legumes in continuation, and rubiglia in particular, and thus suffered from gout in the knee. Considering their improper lifestyle, one that goes against the laws of nature, it is therefore not at all surprising that these noble matrons fall ill more frequently and more seriously than their lower-class counterparts, and neither is it surprising that they suffer more than others from ailments and illnesses that are more typical of their sex; indeed, they easily become hysterical, they suffer frequently from a late menstrual cycle, they have more difficult labours, longer confinements and we often have to provide much more complicated cures for them. All of this is not the case in women of the populace and peasant women, owing to their reverse lifestyle – they spend little time in bed, they devote themselves to their work, on their feet the whole day, and they get up before day-break to do their chores, and should they ever fall ill, they recover with just simple cures. What grace, what elegance, the prince of poets uses to describe the true family mother:

a woman, who supports life with distaff and the humble work
Minerva imposes, first wakes the ashes, and slumbering flames,
adding night hours to her toil, and maintains her servants
at their endless task, by lamplight, to keep her husband’s bed
pure, and raise her young sons
There is therefore no reason why noblemen and the eminent should blame and curse the art of medicine and those who practice it when they are afflicted by serious illnesses and are not healed immediately and with a definite outcome; on the contrary, they should rest assured that there is something on this earth that they may envy the plebeians and proletarians for.