thing even clearer, with an example taken from the mathematical sciences: who, I ask you, would know how to explain more truthfully where sight is born and how it is damaged, than one who has studied optics? Who could more clearly explain the admirable artifice of nature that gives rise to hearing? Who could demonstrate and make understood the mechanical laws according to which the humours of our body are put into motion with such docile compliance and orderly distribution of the parts of the body, and in what way their flow is from time to time altered, if not someone who has drawn abundantly from the sources of hydrostatics? So he who has been thus educated, "sails with a sure wind" and resists the storms of diseases and their symptoms, to the extent of what is conceded to human powers in the field of a speculative art.

Nor would I believe that a deep and fatal disease can be more readily described than as a sea storm. Imagine, if you wish, illustrious listeners, a ship in the open sea beaten by the winds and in danger, and a worried seafarer concerned with tearing it from the embrace of the waves and keeping it in perfect condition. The expert captain of a ship is thus shown not only when he is surprised by a sudden storm, but also, when forecasting its threat, he

orders the sails to be reduced and the crew to bend with strength to the oars,

as the famous seaman Palinuro once did in Virgil. He lowered the sails as quickly as he could, or bent them across the wind so as not to sustain its full force, threw out the anchor, gripped the helm tightly, kept his eyes fixed on the sheet to tack, curbed the anxiety of the fearful and prepared with his whole being to fight the winds and the fury of the sea. And if he saw that the rage of the waves and winds grew and he feared an imminent shipwreck, he would have ordered the ship emptied. And not only would the luggage of least value and greatest weight be thrown into the sea, but also the most precious goods, collected from the extreme confines of the earth with great effort and energy, as if by sacrificing these treasures to Neptune, the sea god, he thought he could placate his anger.

Let us imagine, on the other hand, a totally committed physician who finds himself near a sick person afflicted by a mortal disease: does he not perhaps behave exactly like the sailor? First he entreats
those who assist him to see to their tasks, he hastens to the medical arsenal, grasps the wrist with his hand as if it were the helm, keeps his eyes fixed on the face of the patient so as not to miss any sign, feigns hope in his face and represses the clamour and moaning of the women. And if he sees that the storm of the disease increases its fury, he lightens the patient’s body of the ballast of humours, now below, now above, with purges and emetics; and, resorting to the sacred anchor of phlebotomy, he slits the veins (and also the arteries if necessary) and lets the blood flow in abundance. For what else is more precious than blood, vivifying nectar and genius of nature, beside which nothing is equally necessary to compensate for the expenditure of daily life and sustain the vital flame?

The sailor now hopes, now despairs, uncertain and dubious as to how it will end; so he formulates vows together with those in the same ship and implores assistance from all the gods in heaven.

Respect for the gods is so great in moments of anxiety; the altars rarely smoke in times of prosperity.

As Silio Italico once wrote, describing the Roman matrons, beseeching the gods at the altars and making various offerings while Hannibal loomed over the city and threatened the final slaughter. We see the same thing today when some great calamity is imminent, like earthquakes, epidemics or other terrible events; “other men, rather than other customs”, said the master of politicians.

Similarly, the clinical physician, though feigning hope in his face, also presses the heavens with prayers, albeit silently, especially if he is treating some illustrious person or if vicious, contagious diseases are spreading among the people. At such times one must honour the divine dictate of Hippocrates: “Medicine nourishes respect for the gods and it is a good and proper thing to supplicate them”: these are precisely the words of Hippocrates and, as the Holy Scriptures say, it is the task of the physician to pray to God for the sick, so that he will see to their cure.

There is then no sphere in which medicine is shown to be more similar to navigation than the divination of future things and the search for signs from which the nature and quality of the disease can be verified. The thing that most concerns the captain of a ship is that the calm of the sea does not deceive him, that the silent
winds do not determine the unexpected and are not a sign of a sea spout; so he carefully observes all the signs, no matter how small, that may foretell something hostile, like the small cloud that rises in the distance, the light breeze that softly ruffles the waves, the unusual darting and playing of the fish and similar things, like those predicted by the Mantuan prophet, who evidently learnt from experience that modest signs are usually warnings of big storms at sea. This, by Hercules, O noble listeners, is the condition of this world we inhabit. The signs and traces of great calamities are miniscule and vague. A pestilent summer is foretold, according to Plutarch, by an abundance of spiders and fig flowers taking on the shape of crows feet; a famine is announced, according to farmers' observations, by small red marks spreading over the crops while ripening; an earthquake is portended by the water in wells suddenly becoming murky and taking on a nasty smell. This also not rarely occurs in the medical art and takes in the imprudent physician if he does not take care to observe the small and minute signs and manifestations of diseases and their symptoms.

Often you will be given the sad warning by the little mouse, that no love has held beneath the depths of the earth, but has come out of the drain into the open air, abandoning its normal habits of life.

So said Fracastoro, a famous poet and physician, in his book On contagions. The small and minute pricks that appear on the skin of the feverish, that at times mislead because they resemble flea bites, are thus the sign of a malignant fever, called petechia, which eats up the intestines from inside; a cold shiver that rises gradually from the feet is a sign of epilepsy, the earthquake of the microcosm; an unusual fogging of the mind, combined with a slight dullness of the limbs, indicates the imminent approach of an apoplectic stroke. "Fear nothing, ignore nothing", said Hippocrates, or in other words, as Valesio optimistically wrote in his comment, nothing happens by chance; everything has a cause, even if it is unknown to us, and so nothing should be lightly ignored. In that branch of medicine known as semiotics (which is perhaps the most neglected), the remaining testimonies show that Hippocrates was a very accurate observer, to the point of finding certain signs that may not seem very dignified.
for such a great physician and could make some laugh. For example, he considered the sweetness or bitterness of earwax, almost as if he were scatophagous, and whether the breath emerged with or without noise. He said that if the earwax is sweet this is not bad but mortal, and that it is best if the breath leaves the chest without noise.

So the skill of the expert and prudent sailor is more praiseworthy than in any other field. In observing the signs he predicts the threatening storm, and either takes the ship to some safe roadstead or prepares to furiously fight the wind and sea; in the same way it is right that the wise and expert physician pays attention to any sign, obvious or secondary, no matter how small, so that subsequently, when the illness leaps out as if from an ambush along with a great number of symptoms, he does not find himself unsure of which direction to take and what to do before and what after. What a shameful spectacle and unworthy thing it is to observe a physician who is surprised by the wily disease, when he does not suspect anything sinister for the patient and remains unconcerned! He leaves nothing untried, nothing neglected in terms of remedies, but he does so in a great hurry: he turns heaven and earth upside down, mixes botanical and metallic remedies and other things from the earth and sea, often in conflict with one another, as Erasistratos said, pulling nature in different directions at the same time, with reins and spurs, and taking it to pieces, to the point of making the poor wives aware that he has miserably lost the patient due to his own indolence.

The medical art and the nautical art require their practitioners to be prudent and circumspect: in both cases it is a question of the lives of men and the loss of reputation and honour. Prudence is partly a gift of nature and partly acquired with practice and experience. This is why it is normally found in the older rather than the younger person. So it is good that the authentic, appropriate seafarer is a serious man approaching an advanced age, "who has seen the customs of many men, and cities", as Homer says of Ulysses; such is also the case with he who wants to devote himself in the proper way to medicine.

I am often quite amazed at the way in which those who are about to undertake a long voyage carefully observe both the face of the captain and his appearance before going on board, and do not easily place their trust in him if they see he is young, refined and elegant; similarly, not many when they are ill trust in the treatment
of a young physician who is just out of university. Despite there being many educated young men (which I do not deny) who have probed the inner mysteries of medicine, it is nevertheless inevitable that they are lacking in experience, which is the daughter of time. So the ancients portrayed Asclepius, protector of medicine, with a big beard, despite Apollo his father being clean shaven and of elegant appearance.

I certainly do not deny that fortune, which at times favours the audacity of the young more than the wisdom of the elderly, has much influence on the medical art no less than the nautical. However, in ambiguous and uncertain situations, grasping onto reason and experience, as if to trusted companions, has always been more praiseworthy among wise men than blind impulsiveness.

I do not deny that sometimes the attending physician has difficulty acting with prudence and following that which is precisely his art in the correct and proper way, when he is used to being rushed almost every day and often obliged to work without delay and make the patient safe as quickly as possible. The physician must be on guard against this every day and, on the example of Ulysses, should block his ears and become deaf. Seneca was once making a voyage by ship, as he recounted in a letter to his Lucilio, and on realising he was about to be struck by acute sea sickness, asked the captain if he could be let off at some point along the coast. The latter replied, no less wisely than nobly, that “with bad weather he feared nothing more than the proximity of land”. When pressed to raise anchor and direct himself immediately and with every means to port, the physician must respond fervently with similar words as suits the expert and must fear nothing like the desire to moor in the port of health when the disease still rages and foams.

Caution is thus required in practising medicine, and one must not confront diseases with too much faith and certainty of victory. Indeed, this is an obvious, indisputable sign of ignorance; recklessness is the mother of imprudence, as the saying goes.

O excessively trusting in the sea and in calm horizons

so wrote Virgil once of Palinuro, who drowned in the sea. Why should one not sometimes say the same thing of those who, trusting too much in a disease that advances fairly slowly and stealthily,
and does not excite any crowd, suffer an unhappy shipwreck to their fame and fortune?

I would be verbose if I were to describe one by one the characteristics that correspond to one another in these two activities. However, it is worth noting (to also come to something that concerns their success and their renown) that in a century or two they have proceeded at the same pace and with the same fortunes, such as to almost reach the peak of perfection. If modern navigation is compared with that of the past and the medicine of our day with early medicine, both will be seen to have a different appearance from that of the past. Let us go and visit the shipyard of the glorious Venetian republic and admire the old vessels that are kept in memory of an ancient and venerable time. Tell me, who would want to compare them to the great ships equipped with rams, as strong as they are elegant in construction, and the golden craft the constantly cross the city of Venice and fly so swiftly on the wings of their oars? Since the compass was discovered, the manner of plying the seas has changed significantly, even in the heart of a foggy night. The eyes are no longer fixed on Ursa minor, but on the sheet for tacking and the chart; and the captain of the ship stands not under the open sky, but enclosed inside his cabin, knowing with good approximation where he is, where he is directed and how far away he is from his destination. Not many centuries have passed since Columbus, Vespucci and Magellan sailed all over the planet following the track of the sun. It once seemed an important subject worthy of poets that the Argonauts had sailed as far as Colchis, to the point that the ship carrying those heroes was thought worthy of ascending into heaven and shining among the constellations.

But what is that expedition, whose prize was the golden fleece of the sheep of Phryxus, compared with those made every year from England, Holland, Gaul, Lusitania and Spain to the Indies - expeditions that offer mountains of gold and rule over the new world? Indeed, now that the whole planet has been covered it seems that almost nowhere in the new lands has been neglected (at least in the northern hemisphere) – you too can see it – if not some small areas near the pole that are inaccessible to human zeal, where in winter the sea thickens into ice. The Dutch once tried to break that ice in order to reach the Chinese kingdom by a shorter route; but it was in vain, because the whole fleet was held in the grip of the
ice and they were forced to spend the winter in that place without ever seeing the sun, in total darkness for several months.

On the other hand, in the century just ended, what has the medical art not tried and not obtained in the microcosmos? Our art has also had its Columbuses. I refer here to Realdo Colombo of Cremona, who was perhaps the first to raise the idea of the constant circulation of the blood and make a sketch of this, not to mention Andrea Cesalpino and the great Harvey, who subsequently made this mystery of nature, known since the start of the world, visible and comprehensible and led the enterprise to its conclusion. It is no mere chance that I recall here many other famous discoveries like the milk ducts of the abdomen and the thorax, from which the real use of the natural intestines has now become known; the lymph and the lymphatic ducts and the movement of all the fluids; such that, as all the seas, gulfs, lakes, rivers and springs in the whole wide world are mutually related, either secretly or openly, so all the fluids in this small one communicate with one another and perform a harmonious dance. And if we were to go and visit the armouries of the medical art of our time and compare them with those held by the ancients? How much they exceed them in splendour, excellence and usefulness! This is shown quite sufficiently by the large anatomical theatres and the varied array of instruments for dissection of the body, not to mention the laboratories of the hermetists for creating highly refined and effective remedies. So our forebears left us a great legacy, but they almost removed every opportunity to increase it. This is why in our time, with almost every hope of making major new discoveries on the human body lost, the energy of the anatomists has been directed toward the pursuit of every kind of insect, like a desire for game. So why should it be strange if the external aspect of medicine now differs from that of the past, and if after so many glorious discoveries, precisely as if the fruits of Ceres had been rediscovered, honest professors nourish minds in the schools with a healthier doctrine and the most skilled clinicians undertake the cure of diseases with a different method? But it is now time

that I lower the sails and hasten to steer the bows to shore.

In the end there is no difference in the fates of navigation and
the medical art, which are often given little or no recognition by those who have made use of their services, regardless of the diligence employed. Those who in a frightening sea storm are torn from the jaws of Hades by the skill of a sailor have difficulty in recognising his face once they have greeted mother earth from afar and reached the shore. Likewise, when those who find themselves in danger of a mortal disease realise that the problem is over, they see off the physician with a minimal payment, if not with nothing at all, and it is already something if they do not ask him for a gift or make him the object of mockery and contempt. If instead a terrible storm full of malign symptoms has upset the patient, how many and how great the insults unleashed on the physician? Such that if the outcome is good (to use the words of Plautus) "the gratitude is lighter than a feather", if it is bad, "the anger is of lead". The elderly Seneca, a very strict critic of customs, once blamed this kind of bad habit when he thought that the debt to the physician was not paid simply with a modest figure: "there are things that are worth more than what is paid", he said. That which is bought from the physician is something that has no price: life and good health. But what must be done? Must that insignificant amount offered be refused? Not at all; that would mean striking the figure of a greedy man and a grasping physician; and furthermore it would be the greatest lunacy "to lose the cost of the rent along with all the rest". So as there is a great affinity and similarity between the nautical art and the medical one, the wise physician must borrow the useful models of the similar art, to navigate with sails unfurled toward the health of the ill.
VI Oration

Given on 12th November 1704

It is of great importance that a practicing physician knows what the common people think of him.

As was once the case in the art of oratory, when the study of eloquence was the height of fashion, and the question was raised as to who had been a true, perfect orator, and what such a person should be made of, not even Cicero, who was presiding the matter, was able to decide. He was unable to say who could be considered a perfect model, and which attributes such a man should have. I believe that the very same thing has happened in the field of medicine. There is no doubt that saving a patient afflicted by a fatal illness is no less difficult than defending someone who risks capital punishment, regarding both the method and the art. Amongst the many praiseworthy things written about the orator Mark Anthony, he was also praised in particular for the fact that when he was before a judge, not once did he say a word that might have harmed the person he was defending, while it is all too often the case that while acting imprudently or inopportune an orator or advocate makes the very cause he had embraced worse rather than better. Should, by chance a doctor have done something similar, so that he has no difficulty convincing anyone he has never prescribed a remedy that made an illness worse, it would be an extremely rare example of wisdom and good fortune. However, I have no difficulty in believing that until now, no doctor who has practised medicine with such rigour and wisdom, has deserved such praise, or that anyone can claim he has never killed anybody, as did the man who was wont to say: “nobody has ever had to wear mourning because of me”. Likewise, just as there are reports in medical annals and documents
of people being spectacularly healed after being given a certain remedy and surviving serious misfortune "with the aid of fate or the physician", the self-same also contain reports of examples of inappropriate cures that resulted in collapse or even death because of inopportune blood-letting; perhaps we would have a more successful and safer medical practice than we do. However, with the exception of Hippocrates who, as is befitting to such great men, had the sincerity to admit and pass down to his descendants that he had been disappointed by future events, there is not one person who realises he has made a mistake but leaves it unspoken, and goes on hiding his ignorance. I have no intention of either describing or discussing in which studies and skills the true, perfect physician should be educated. The greatest of all physicians, Hippocrates did so once, describing the image of the good doctor. Galen and other illustrious men of our times did the same, so that the person to be worthy of such a description must excel not only in philosophy and the field they call "experimental", but also in mathematics and above all, in *polimathia*, that is, the most varied of studies. Thus, those who stand out are those who have devoted themselves to teaching or have achieved fame posthumously by publishing books. For my part, since it is my duty to teach practical medicine at this illustrious university, I would wish a practical physician to have a specific characteristic, one that has been neglected or perceived too little, but one that could do considerable good to the sick and the prestige of the medical field. In short, a physician who wishes to carry out this profession both correctly and scrupulously, needs to try and discover what the common folk think of those working in this field.

It is both strange and worthy of note that depending on their own physical constitution and hence also on which diseases of the soul they are subject to, nearly every physician treats an illness accordingly and is quick to pronounce judgement on its outcome. Thus, there are those of considerable talent whose livers swell with male bile and as soon as they are summoned to the sickbed of a patient who is seriously ill, they are sure they will be successful, sound the trumpet and immediately resort to the tools of medicine, even though they have not fully understood either the patient's character or the nature of the illness. If someone should dare to oppose them and dampen their enthusiasm, they would scream at the top of their voices that the enemy has to be crushed as soon as
possible, before it gains even greater strength; that once there is no strength left, medicine should get ready; that any kind of dilation is harmful but in the medical field it is even worse when dilation means a life is in danger. Such people tolerate no delay, they know no rest or holidays, no Saturdays and no medical examination goes by without prescribing some new remedy. If plant or animal compounds prove ineffective, they offer mineral compounds or other inexplicable combinations if they believe that the simple ones are not strong enough; they even contaminate the food with various things and everything they offer tastes of medicine. Thus, even though nature disagrees, it finds itself being forced to fight an enemy within with almost continuous stimuli. As a result, all too often this vivacious strength of spirit and excessive promptness to act results in neglecting one’s duties and harms the patient’s condition considerably. The effects are even more harmful if the physician in question has just completed his studies and is jubilant with youthful audaciousness and the desire to gain experience, even though there is no lack in physicians who are more advanced in age and nearer the grave; the latter, either out of habit or because they still possess some of that natural temperament, refuse to negotiate a truce with the disease and continue this ceaseless war until either the disease or the patient is eliminated.

However, I have no intention of speaking of this kind of physician, those who accumulate remedy upon remedy using deception and bad advice so that they curry favour with pharmacists, which means resorting to usury and making it appear they have left no stone unturned in such ruinous circumstances. Indeed, I would call these people bloodsuckers or, to use Pliny’s expression, ‘dealers of souls’ and all they deserve is to be struck off the register of physicians. However, I cannot avoid such people and, firm in their belief that they are behaving correctly and in accordance with their field, they obey their natural inclination all too readily and allow themselves be led astray from their natural intuition.

There is another kind of physician, one that differs greatly from those who are too diligent. Melancholic in appearance and in their speech, when they intervene, they are suspicious of everything and being fearful by nature, they are more inclined to make a highly serious prognosis no matter what the disease; they believe that an illness that appears to be tranquil is making fun of them, so they
treat all illnesses with the greatest caution and remain on their tip toes in the belief that it is better to play for time and wait and see 'what nightfall or morning brings', waiting to see if more symptoms emerge, whether nature is strong enough to fight the disease alone, whether the crisis is early, or whether treatment should begin with catharsis or blood-letting; in this manner, by dithering and taking their time, they shamefully miss the fleeting occasion when it would have been most appropriate to intervene.

This kind of physician is quick to have the right reasons and justifications at hand to defend his method when required to do so by the patient who feels his strength fading away day after day, surrounded by servants who urge that no more time be wasted. First of all, they quote the famous saying by Fabius Maximus that Livy recorded, “at times, physicians and commanders cure movement better when acting calmly”; then they say that time resolves an illness just as it causes it, and that it is not as easy as it would seem, to suppress speculation regarding what nature is conniving in the interior, and in which direction it is heading; nature alone can cure disease, and any attempt to resist is nothing other than “to rebel against nature – is that not to fight like the giants with the gods?” as Cicero once said.

These are some of the arguments they bring forward to rid themselves of any guilt. However, neither those who are too diligent and eager nor those who are too slow and weak are held in good esteem by either scholars or the common people, the former travelling backwards and forwards as if they needed the curb while the others needed the spur, as the renowned orator Isocrates said of his disciples Ephorus and Theopompus.

It would take too long to list the individual differences of the mind and where each of them lead or are carried away by nature. Indeed, the variety is incredible, so much so that there are just as many kinds of the mind as there are bodies. This is very similar to the example of orators, each of whom has their own manner of speaking and this can also be observed in physicians, each of whom has their own way of treating patients according to their own character. There are those who cling to their beliefs and have difficulty letting go of something they once believed correct, even if experience has proved otherwise and the disease is exacerbated; there are those who are of a more volatile and inconsistent nature,
who change opinion and remedy according to whether the disease is alleviated or aggravated and go in the opposite direction; there are those who are sullen and severe, who refuse to give in to their patients on any matter whatsoever, no matter how trivial, acting like torturers in a kind of tyranny; and there are those who are too soft-hearted and altruistic who 'submit to their patients' requests'.

Those who are excessively optimistic place great store on the effectiveness of remedies; there are those who, citing επέκυω (epéchō: suspending judgement) like Pyrrho, who prepare an infusion with one or two herbs for their patient to give them the impression something is being done. There are also those who are reticent, taciturn, who high-handedly order what is to be done, but offer no explanation as regards the nature of the illness or the remedy they are prescribing; there are some who are the complete opposite, loquacious and long-winded, more suited to help the waning moon than a suffering patient, and therefore so hostile towards their patient that they gave rise to the Greek proverb ἵατρος ἀδύλεος νοσόντα πάλιν νόσος, "a loquacious physician is just another disease for the patient". Indeed, the medical fraternity also has its charlatans and chatterers who made a silent art loquacious.

Since this is such a widespread occurrence and happens no matter what the place or region, although, as Celsus said, it is one thing to practice medicine in Rome, another in Egypt and another in Gaul, but nevertheless, it can be observed in the same places, the same cities, in physicians trained in the same schools as if they had suckled the same breasts, I ask you, what other reason could there be for such varied, diverse treatments, such diversity of temperament and, as a consequence, such a difference in customs, so that everyone complies and obeys to please their own minds? Cicero once admired something similar in the most famous orators of his times, and as a result he was unable to say which orator should be held as a model, "since there are such considerable differences between skilful orators, what could be more difficult than deciding what the best kind and ideal type of orator is?" he said. Just how astounded would Cicero himself be, if he came back to life and to this famous university, the seat of Latian eloquence and for just one day listened to the numerous professors discuss the most sublime sciences with such skill and knowledge, but in such different ways? Therefore, not low-ranking physicians but those who are experi-
enced and worthy of praise, both in foreseeing the outcome of illnesses and their cures, just how much they differ everywhere; who does not realise that whoever practices medicine has to heed the significance and soul of that famous stern warning from the oracle γνῶθι σεαυτόν (gnōthi seautón, know thyself)?

Everyone must therefore take great care to know themselves well, and realise how far they stray from that golden mean, essential in all fields but in medicine particularly since we are dealing with human lives; so, if he is unable to change the natural equilibrium of the body, at least he uses medical wisdom to moderate the ailments of the soul, to go back towards that golden mean, – this is where virtue lies. Indeed, how many physicians are there, whose viscera were so perfectly formed by a Titan, that they have attained an equilibrium those who weigh substances would call perfect, neither too quick to act, nor too weak or bolder than necessary, or too fearful than is required? "We all suffer our own punishments" as Dante Alighieri rightly said, and there is almost nobody in the medical profession who has not needed treatment in this situation; but the remedies must not come from the illustrious sources of medicine, but are to be sought for in the pantry of moral philosophy.

More than anyone else, Galen recognised the need for such a cure, after having written his elegant treatise called The Qualities of the Mind depend on the Temperament of the Body before going on to write another one, On the Affections of the Mind.

That such a cure is certainly neither easy nor something that takes just a few days is clear; however, our daily experience shows us it should not be archived amongst the impossible. For example, the physician who falls ill one day and rather than trust himself, calls someone else to find out what ailment he is suffering from; likewise, on the subject in question, the practical physician who is told by others what ails him will not stray from the right path if he practices medicine nobly, with wisdom and acclaim or in what way he is straying from common opinion and gaining ill repute. Thus, according to the circumstances, he deftly senses the common opinion of the people from this or from that, like a game, and although he frequently has to hear things he finds unpleasant, he takes them in his stride, a little like a medical potion, and after honest reflection is able to say if they are true or false, whether spoken by friend or foe, thus taking them as a cue to curb his own passions.
Our Saviour himself told us just how important it is to know what men think of us. The entire time he spent on earth in the image of man, although they knew perfectly well who he was and his very nature, he still seems to have wanted to know what men thought of him when he turned to his disciples and asked: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Although they claim he asked this question as an act of declaration of his disciples' faith, it would not be wrong to base our behaviour on this example.

A practical physician should never be ashamed to sound out what people think of him, and not just his friends' opinions but also the rivals' he has been in disagreement with. Indeed, it is easier to have one's friends speak praise that is so pleasant to hear, rather than truth from one's enemies that is more salutary. If one pays careful attention, there are considerable advantages to be had from one's enemies, if one wants to turn an ill into a gain – "those who have an enemy as teacher will learn something that escapes their friends for free". Indeed, as Plato rightly said, a friend is blind to those he loves. Whereas those whose envy is aroused will glibly belittle what is praiseworthy, exalting and divulging anything negative instead. Thus, owing to the weakness or maliciousness of human nature, it is customary to keenly watch the vices of others while ours we watch with swollen eyes and "are unable to see the saddlebag behind us", as the old proverb goes.

Salutary advice is also not just to study the opinion of experts in the faculty of medicine, but also of those who enjoy certain renown in other fields of science. What is more, sounding the opinion of the common people is certainly no waste of time. Indeed, prudence and knowledge of what is right is not just the due of scholars but also of the common people, who show remarkable wisdom in carrying out their own actions, and are often admired for this by the scholars themselves. It is said that the tragic poet Pomponious Secundus laid such store by the opinion of the common people that every time one of his friends wanted him to change something in his texts, he believed he should, as he used to say: "I will rely on the opinion of the people"; and continued, "or my opinion or that of a friend, depending on the approval or silence of the people".

In the past, painters would also hide behind their canvases on display so they could carefully listen to the opinion of those walking past, not so much out of curiosity but more because they want-
ed to know what the people were praising or criticizing so they could then modify the painting accordingly once the people had left. Phidias is said to have done the very same thing once he finished his statue of Jupiter: "Indeed, he believed that the judgement of such a large crowd was not to be ignored or paid little heed"; In fact, the saying, "nobody can deceive the people and the people can deceive no one", is more than true and is almost like a oracle especially because it concerns the correction of habits.

All those who have devoted themselves to practising medicine must do their utmost to correct this mistake, one that escapes nobody, if they are to use their own virtues to achieve what was unattainable for the physical constitution in nature. Thus, the practical physician who has his patients' good health and his own reputation at heart rather than ignoble money, should adapt his behaviour according to the opinion of the common people, as if it were a mirror, and when he realises that his excessive zeal and hastiness to act are frowned upon, he should slow down a little and learn to act more slowly; when he realises that his excessive slowness or the severity of his demeanour is being frowned upon, he should shake off his sluggishness and make himself as affable as possible and, as the saying goes, "put himself in the hands of the three Graces".

Indeed, those physicians who were either conceived or born under the influence of the planet Saturn are endowed with a nature that is not as pleasing as those who were born under a more auspicious star and were bestowed with a more agreeable nature. Perhaps this is what the renowned orator Quintilian was referring to when he so elegantly said that: "In some people virtue has no grace, in others vice is pleasing".

Thus, a physician who behaves accordingly will be as Pindar so desired, ἐπιχειρότατος (epicheirotatos), that is, ready to act swiftly. He will be able to recognise when is the best moment to act, when it is best to hurry, when to delay, when to risk or when to mock the illness, thus proving worthy of the praise from Quintus Fabius Maximus and Marcello, one of whom was the so-called shield of the res publica of Rome, the other the sword.

However, most importantly of all, he will assiduously avoid any quarrels or arguments when he has to seek consultation with other physicians, an all too common ill, that "will always be condemned and restrained" in medicine. There is no doubt that nothing brings
more dishonour on the medical profession and makes it seem like deception than the frequent discussions and fights in the hospitals, often in front of the patients themselves; and when a decision has to be taken regarding the remedy “without anyone thinking the same thing because to do so would make them appear to be of the same opinion”, this is not so much a result of weakness or uncertainty in the field, but because of the hate physicians have for one another, but that should be kept hidden or at least put aside in such circumstances. Aristides and Themistocles, two illustrious figures held in the greatest esteem by the Athenians, who usually held the highest positions in the state, were always at each other’s throats with manifest hatred because of their rivalry. “Every time they set out on a diplomatic mission or expedition, they left their disagreements behind them until they returned”. This is an outstanding example for physicians to bear in mind whenever they find themselves conferring with each other about a patient’s treatment.