In medical practice, simple remedies are preferable to complex preparations.

Highly esteemed listeners, each time I reflect on this profession, one I have been allowed to practice publicly, and study how seriously this vast array of illnesses has afflicted mankind and just how much they have oppressed mankind but, just how little we have been forearmed to banish these countless enemies, I am overcome with a two-fold sense of commiseration; on the one hand for our mortality, which certainly knows no peace or safety in the face of such a harmful and insidious progeny; on the other, for the medical profession, which is not always able to prove itself superior because at times the expectations one has of it are too rigid, and it is thus attacked from all sides with reproaches and affront, almost as if it were a profession that wants to deceive or is so weak itself that it is in need of a remedy. An illustrious historian once said with great knowledge and elegance that, “Owing to the fragility of human nature, the effect of treatment is slower than the spreading of the illness”. For heaven’s sake, this saying, although spoken in such a way that it can be adapted to any circumstances, both public or private, is so befitting to the medical profession, because all the remedies that have been devised and discovered until now to deal with these diseases are making very slow progress. Just how quickly fever, the greatest fury of them all, consumes human bodies and devours them, armed with funeral torches! But the remedies we offer to counter the fire of fever, if not to extinguish it then at least to moderate it, are even slower than the wave is compared to fire. A simple apoplectic attack, like a flash of lightning, can kill a
man in an instant, no matter how robust he is – what remedy might we have, even from the volatile family that is able to equal the dangerousness of such a serious affliction? The same can be said of diseases that progress slowly, stealthily as it were, before exploding and revealing their true strength, as is the case of rabies, after being bitten by a rabid dog. Once again the medical profession is thunderstruck and flabbergasted, and all too often does not know how to deal with the outbreak of the illness. This is truly the case, my illustrious listeners. If we go through the diseases one by one, we will be even more convinced that the remedies are slower than the ills. And we have no choice but to acknowledge this truth, since we enter the world in the same manner we enter the arena with this law, and we constantly have to fight these cruel beasts equipped with only the lightest of armour. Very often it is our fault that the remedies are slower than the ills – and this is even more regrettable and should not be ignored – more than the fact that the diseases really originated as such, while we, for our part, merely corrupt the remedies, debilitating them and making them such that when they actually enter the seat of life, they fight one another rather than attack the disease and its cause. Nature certainly exercised great foresight and benevolence towards us by devising innocuous remedies, with a skill certainly unknown to us but of the greatest precision, endowing them with characteristic traits so that an expert observer would have no difficulty in recognizing which plant would benefit which part of the body with just a mere glance, if she had not wanted what had been conceived for our health to be the source of harm. Illustrious Sirs, as far as I can see, you have already understood what I mean, what I think, in other words, the very fact that, since it is my task to transmit practical medicine, I must show that the simplicity of remedies is preferable to excessively complex preparations when treating illnesses.

It is well-known from religious texts that medicine is the gift of divine benevolence alone to alleviate the ills that afflict us. The pagans were of the same opinion, and they had a proverb that called medicine ἥθελν γείροντες, that is, the hands of the gods. Thus, if it is divine magistery, medicine is not the work of human supposition. All physicians have to do is diligently scour the vast kingdom of nature and study carefully which remedies have been created to heal certain afflictions of the body, by means of repeated experimenta-
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a n d p a i n t s t a k i n g o b s e r v a t i o n , a s w a s o n c e t h e p r a i s e w o r t h y
custom of the ancient fathers of medicine. “I t i s t h e g l o r y o f G o d t o
hide things but the glory of kings to investigate them” — thus spoke
Salomon, the guardian of human wisdom. The divine Architect of
all things hid arcane powers in the heart of the plant, animal and
mineral kingdoms, as if he were playing, to make sure there would
be enough for man to exercise his wit and diligence and bring the
hidden virtues of these objects to light. However, unless we leave
our patients lengthy sheets, at times even writing on the back, and
unless we mix simple remedies with simple ones and complex
preparations with complex ones, even for a simple illness, we be-
lieve we are less competent. In this regard we are actually very like
painters, who hold the palette in their left hand and the brush in
their right, intent on mixing the colours, but there is a difference
— they create a new colour, visible to all, whereas for us, neither the
ministry of the senses — nor the help of the faculty of reason allows
us to understand what compound was formed by this confused
multitude of remedies.

Those who want to adduce from the characteristics in the sub-
stances mixed together that the same characteristics are propor-
tionally present in a mixed body draw up a long list, putting them
together erroneously, while in actual fact, the new product not
only has the original characteristics, now considerably weakened,
but very often also has completely different characteristics that,
at times, can even be poisonous. The experiment of mixing two
transparent liquids, resulting in an opaque substance like writing
ink, is relatively common; Helmont’s offa showed that when two
equally fluid substances are mixed together they condense into a
solid body; gold by nature does not have the strength to discharge
lightening but when it is mixed with spirit of nitre it becomes a
powerful diuretic; silver does not have the strength of a purgative,
but once again, with spirit of nitre, it becomes a powerful diuretic;
it is also well-known that the so-called “strong Stygian waters”, a
vicious poison, are prepared from various kinds of salts that are
particularly innocuous. Furthermore, and probably even more sur-
prising, is the fact that when two poisons are mixed together, an
antidote is sometimes created; an example of this is to be found in
Ausonius when he describes the woman who, after having giving
her jealous husband a poison to drink to make him die more rap-
idly, she added quick silver, which resulted in an unexpected turn in the poor man’s health for the better. Moreover, what better demonstration is there of the strength of a combination of compounds than the composition of gunpowder? It is common knowledge that this is made up of sulphur, nitre and carbons; sulphur burns slowly, nitre flees from the fire and the burning carbons give off sparks. But when these elements are separated, just how much they are to be admired! However, when they are mixed together in certain proportions, the result is a product that is so powerful that, with all the dangers facing us, and even more so at this very moment when a terrible war is spreading throughout Europe, if we were not to experiment with its strength, we would believe this wonder is just one of the Atellan fairytales. There is no doubt that if Virgil had seen such a product he would never have called Salmineus mad nor said that lightning cannot be imitated. Thus, just how much caution and circumspection must the good physician show when he administers his remedies, refraining from the tumultuous combination of medicines that might result in compounds of unknown powers, at times even resulting in monsters, just like in Africa when different species of beasts mate? Once these medicines end up in the stomach, which is the battlefield of Mars where highly demanding battles take place, what sort of upheaval, what disorders will ensue? Furthermore, since fermentation has the power to change and transform the mixtures and the constitution of the elements, and since this is also present when there is a mixture of elements of a different nature, one could rightly ask whether remedies of this kind are harmful or beneficial, especially when they are prescribed when fermentation has not yet finished. Thus, in the rooms where the patients are lying one can often see tables prepared with the greatest care, with mixtures of various cordials, that are usually prescribed in the case of a fever to prevent the ill or to remove it; they surge upwards and distend, overflowing from their very jars, while the patients themselves become nauseous at the sight of such a spectacle. Likewise, when simple compounds are dissolved in menses, to obtain extracts and salts, – as chemists themselves have confessed, it is not that easy for the menses to be separated from a dissolved compound, so nothing remains. And what would happen if the torture of fire were to approach them? Van Helmont called fire “death in the hand of the Artifice, given for great uses”
but Pliny was even closer, despite being a sceptical chemist, when he wrote that he did not know if fire “consumes or generates more beings, and if an object is something that has been generated from the first fires, another generated from the second, and yet another from the third”. Thus, if there is an element of truth in all of this, in medical practice why should the use of simple remedies not be preferable to complex ones, since they are not subject to such vicissitudes and transformations?

There is no denying, it has to be admitted that the remedies that are on sale have been scrupulously prepared with the greatest accuracy, in accordance with the laws laid down by the workshops, and in accordance with all proportions, both geometrical and harmonic (as the composers of medicine have also called music to their aid), for example, *theriaca diatessaron*; perhaps we are meant to believe that laws of this kind were dictated to the theoretical physicians who proposed them by some kind of divine inspiration and anyone who attempts to revoke them will be considered guilty, as if he had violated religion? We certainly have to believe that those aids, created by Mother Nature or the Creator of Nature, were done in a weight, number, measure and structure that are such that they have certain effects following a mechanical logic that we can only admire rather than understand or imitate. If it is legitimate to gain considerable advantage by using simple compounds, at times also generated with their own limits, no matter what those high-sounding medicines promise, composed of various substances with too much ardour, and are basically not all that different as the discordant forces in them, why should we consume the strength and patrimony of the sick?

And let nobody object that the simple remedies are not completely harmless, and this is why they have to corrected and sorted out by adding other substances; simple remedies also have to be modified, but in the very same manner that wheat is prepared, when it is used to make bread, grinding it under a rotating millstone to make flour, separating the flour from the bran, adding yeast, kneading the dough and baking it. And this entire process is done by adding what? With the addition of nothing other than water. And, what is more, bread rejects nearly any other addition; indeed, if it is made with honey, sugar, butter, eggs or anything else of the kind, it is much less healthy! By all means, this sweet
bread is more pleasing to the palate for one or two days; but the
denser it is, the heavier it lies on the stomach! The same can be said
of wine; it is unable to cheer any meals if the must has not been
pressed from the grapes by peasants' feet, if it has not fermented
in tuns, or if the foam in the casks or the sediment have not been
removed. And if it should ferment because of an excess of spirits,
and threatens the head, its strength is reduced by adding either
water or using a filter. The same would happen to simple remedies
if their dirtiness were not cleaned, adding infusions or fruit juices,
steeping or heating them, or the like. And should someone wish to
combine simple remedies, this should be done with great caution
since elements of a different or exotic nature are much more diffi­
cult to combine than those from the same family. Before modifying
or correcting medicine, one must first have studied and examined
the nature of not only what is to be corrected, but also of what is
being used as a corrective; indeed, all too often it is the very nature
of these correctives that the natural strength of the medicine is
either alleviated excessively or exalted more than is necessary. For
centuries it was believed that the narcotic strength of opium was
corrected and alleviated by the addition of warmer aromatic spices,
as in the preparation of Filonius romanus and other opium deriva­
tives; this was certainly the result of the blind conviction, which
was passed down over the centuries until very recently, that the
soporific strength of opium lay in its great degree of cold.
However, I would not like anybody to believe that I am the
first to consider this habit of mixing and remixing medicine as
the greatest evil of the century, as a form of deception. In actual
fact, this custom is centuries old – antiquity alone itself defends it
– and after Hippocrates it appeared for the first time in Greece and
then developed in the Arabian schools in particular. From there
it then went on to invade the entire republic of medicine, as if it
were contagious. The prince of poets expressed this custom with
great elegance when he described a doctor named Iapige with
great concision as was Paionian tradition, intent on removing an
arrow that had struck Aeneas during battle; he was doggedly try­
ing to extract the arrow with forceps and to treat the wound with
a bland preparation of various herbs so Venus mixed dittany with
water, removing the arrow by simply following the hand, without
any effort at all:
Inaugural Orations

This Venus brings, in clouds involv'd, and brews
Th' extracted liquor with ambrosian dews,
And odorous panacee. Unseen she stands,
Temp'ring the mixture with her heav'ny hands,
And pours it in a bowl, already crown'd
With juice of medic'nal herbs prepar'd to bathe the wound.

Homer was of a different opinion, and in those times the manner of medication was perhaps both simpler and healthier. Indeed, when describing Helen, who was preparing that famous remedy for sadness and grief, that is, nepenthes wine to alleviate Ulysses' sons, Menelaus and Telemachus from the grave ailments of such a long pilgrimage, he described her mixing the root of the oenopia plant she had been given by the wife of King Tone, Polydamna, in Egypt in the wine: "[She] thought to slip a drug into the wine they drank, one that calmed all pain and trouble, and brought forgetfulness of every evil".

However, if only a sick person who is suffering is to be prescribed a medicinal wine, unless it is prepared with infusions and steeped until the roots of different kinds of plants, leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds, spices, in short, the whole array of remedies, it will be considered inadequate, and thus, its preparation requires careful attention that is futile since all that matters is the number, instead of virtue and weight. However, common practice is now that any kind of illness now requires a varied array of remedies, which could rightly be called sand without limestone, and it is almost an embarrassment if one writes a list for the perfume maker if it does not include that famous 'misce' like a public medical seal.

Nevertheless, as regards their diet, I cannot but admire how nearly all doctors insist on the greatest simplicity in their diet, so that if there is any sin of indulgence committed by those in their sickbed, they scream at the top of their voices and protest that they are absolutely not to blame if something goes wrong, however, when it comes to administering remedies, the strength of which were not studied with enough attention, and to which the stomach was unaccustomed, they have the blindest faith in any kind of mixture. It is certainly common knowledge that a simple diet leads to long life and good health, as the ancient hermits showed all too clearly, living off just herbs and palm fruits, and living for a whole
century; those living in the country are another example and, as Virgil said, "The earth is the virtuous producer of all nourishment". The same cannot be said of the city folk, the nobility and princes in particular who, by trying any kind of gluttony in all things, fall victim to serious illnesses and descend down into the Kingdom of Hades long before their time. The saying by the poet from Venosa is particularly appropriate in this respect: "If you mix boiled and roasted meats, sea food and thrushes, these delights turn to bile and indigestion upsets the stomach".

Not only is the variety of food the wet-nurse of disease, but also that of beverages; particularly famous wines, sought after in various places, for example Spain, France, and Italy, that the nobility wash down at mealtimes, and a source of disagreement and uproar amongst themselves once they have entered the stomach that is comparable to that between the nations and peoples they were imported from. Water itself, the simplest of all beverages, is to be even more recommended when it is without any external quality. For example, the water Marcus Agrippa brought to Rome was so famous because of its purity that it was called 'virgin', since, according to Pliny, it refused to mix with the waters of Herculaneum along the Via Prenestina. Thus, the illustrious Hippocrates wrote that the waters of great rivers are undrinkable because, from the very moment that the great rivers such as the Po, the Rhein and the Istro are so vast because various other rivers all merge as one, their waters are obviously different and dissimilar, depending on the different ingredients they have absorbed from different places. Furthermore, the divine teacher had a highly elegant word to describe waters of this kind, "dissentient". However, if simplicity of food and drink leads to the total protection of one's health, why not use simple remedies rather than composite ones to regain it once it has been lost? If, however, it should be the soul that is making the humours go up and down, in the class of the simple remedies is there a lack of cathartics, emetics and attenuating substances (if I be permitted to use such a term), that is, those medicines that delicately dissolve the stomach, the kind of remedy the ancients also had, calling the lenitives 'syrnesmi'? If, however, the intention is to fortify a specific organ, for example the head, stomach, liver, spleen, kidneys or other parts of the body and to restore its tone, does the kingdom of the simple remedies not suffice with its cephalics, gastric medicines, hepar, those for the spleen...
and those for the kidneys? If, however, we are treating a poison that has been served or swallowed, or one that is the result of animal bites, is the administration of theriac safe enough, as a single means of keeping ailments away, prepared by Herculean strength to tame any kind of poison, and should the poison spread, would one not resort to the help of singular and specific remedies? Far be it from me to want to denigrate the esteem of such a universally famous remedy. However, although it contains so many ingredients, and is renowned as an effective remedy against strong, corrosive poison, I believe it is justified to claim that this is not a universal antidote and that there are much greater benefits to be obtained by using simple remedies such as milk and oleous substances. I sincerely hope that the name of the simple remedies not be misunderstood as those that come from the plant kingdom, but also includes those that the animal and mineral kingdom supply in such abundance and that are too numerous to name here one by one. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to get one's feet wet when walking through the thermal waters that nature has provided everywhere in large watercourses. The waters with the best reputation are those in the thermal baths of Abano, both because they are the oldest and because of their outstanding divine virtues, which Claudiano described as a "common aid to physicians and present divinity" since nearly all the illnesses that have eluded the teachers of medicine lose their ferocity and are allayed by these medicating waters, as if they had drunk from a Lethean goblet. However, at times, the ancient vice of mixing and re-mixing remedies means it is impossible to prescribe these sacred thermal waters to the sick as nature intended since sometimes, the thermal waters, coming from various sources and of different qualities, are mixed together and, because certain spirits are also added, for example, vitriol, sulphur or some stigmatic acid, are corrupted so much they become diuretics, under such conditions thus possibly making them fatal and corrosive. There is an infinity of other subjects I could mention but I fear I might risk your displeasure with my excessive verbosity. Nevertheless, thanks to your kindness, I feel I am allowed to say a few more things to complete what I proposed at the very beginning. Just how long have experienced teachers in this field toiled to devise some kind of febrile remedy with ingredients from the three kingdoms? However, all their fatigue, all their thwarted efforts have come to nothing and if they do include an
antifebrile in their recommendations, it is only described with great
vagueness so that one needs the help of the swimmer Delio if one
wants to believe the author is sound of mind. Cinchona bark alone,
an act of divine benevolence, no matter where, no matter what the
season, age, sex, temperament, makes recurring and intermittent fe-
vers flee and die. Once again, however, there have been those who
have tried to pollute this sacred, pungent remedy, taken from the
tree of life, by adding opium and other substances so they can im-
pose it on people with their usual embellishments. There is another
plant that is now being brought to us from the same Peruvian land,
a certain root called  *ipeca caunha*, a special remedy and certainly di-
ine, to heal dysentery, an epidemic illness that devastates cities and
countryside and has not only decimated vast armies in the past but
has also destroyed them. What remedy is more effective than guaiac
to tame the horrendous monster of the venereal plague? Drinking
a brew of this wood in pure, boiled water, is a marvellous way to
clean ourselves of the French disease, better than any other remedy,
and we thus restore our suffering bodies to their former splendour.
I am more than aware that many other ingredients are usually added
to guaiac tea but I believe that this is because of that terrible, ancient
custom of mixing medicines, since anything boiled together with
this wood will certainly make the drink more pleasing to the palate,
but certainly not healthier. The advice given by Antonio Gallo can
therefore never be repeated too often, when he observed that even
during his lifetime this remedy was corrupted with the addition of
countless ingredients, and since he found such a practice intoler-
able he wrote a book called “About not mixing the holy wood”. If
the virtues of the vast number of medicines that are called ‘simple’
is put to multiple tests and found reliable, it will be the wise, hon-
est physician who will prefer such remedies when he treats his pa-
tients, rather than those that are prepared with force and subjected
to various metamorphosis. Nevertheless, today we must thank those
who care about analysis rather than synthesis, because despite the
belief that many of the opinions of the ancients are to be unques-
tionably considered valid, they have taken a healthier decision and
have started to use the uncontaminated gifts from the Divine Father,
Creator of Nature, who so generously provided our food to nourish
the flame of life and provided us with a wealth of medicine to fight
the illnesses, preparing them for us with his own hands.
Theoretical medicine has no right to aspire to dominion over practical medicine

Just as various forms of government were instituted for the proper administration of civil society – thanks to which the way the human race lives is distinguished from the way animals do – with power at times being exercised by a single person, at times by several people together, it is right to believe, distinguished listeners, that the same thing be followed in administering the health of the human body; the latter being the only thing that counts in the world, because life does not consist in merely living, but in being well.

Since the origin of the world itself, when, after the fall, first our father and then his descendants had to sweat to procure food by working the land, hunting or rearing livestock, and had to put up with the various excesses of climate, of hot and cold, and when, because of this, the original sturdiness of the body began to fail and weaken under the threat of the hostile transmission of disease, practical medicine alone had the entire right and power to safeguard and restore health, and exercised this not without success for many centuries. So, having set up an array of varied but simple medicines, being taken from the complex of vegetables (the bowels of the earth having not yet been penetrated and that which nature kept hidden deep down not yet brought to light), the medical art spent its youth fairly quietly and successfully; a still mute art at that time, because theory was silent on everything. But as soon as the eagerness to find the causes of natural phenomena made its way into the minds of men, ignited by the intense energy of the always praiseworthy craving for knowledge, then for the first
time the reason was sought as to why some medicines were more effective, and the nature and quality of the diseases that appeared day by day began to be carefully observed. So gradually theoretical medicine joined practical medicine and brought its forces into alliance with it, but behaving with reverence as if toward a mother, conforming doctrine to concrete fact, not fact to doctrine. But, with the passing of time, and mainly due to the extraordinary and admirable prosperity of the century just past, extending larger wings from the nest thanks to so many wonderful discoveries, theoretical medicine raised itself so high that it seemed to have left its companion many parasangs behind. So now only theory is admired; it alone is praised and especially cultivated, and now there is almost no one, philosopher or scholar, who is not able to discourse (or write) eloquently and energetically on the structure of the human body and the use of its parts, or on the nature and character of any illness, even exotic, or the effectiveness of remedies and their way of acting on the human body, even though they have no more experience of medical cures than one who has learnt navigation solely from books knows the rules of that art. It thus seems that this ability, which is so refined, so bright as to eclipse the other arts with its brilliance, wants to exercise dictatorship and leadership over practical medicine and, despite having come into the world later, now tries to seize the tiller from the hands of the other (which is older and thanks to which it first sailed), setting it laws and ways of working even from afar. But to me, a practitioner of practical medicine in the very large emporium of all the sciences and arts, it seemed right to deal with this dispute before you in my daily speech as if before very upright judges, and to openly show with reasoning and examples that theoretical medicine has no right to claim a despotic dominion over practice, but that it is rather preferable that both these custodians of human happiness, allied together, should exercise joint power under equal conditions.

If I wished I could demonstrate how easily and frequently our reasoning, although intelligent and almost peremptory, makes fun of us and deceives us, with no few examples drawn both from the domain of natural sciences and that of popular wisdom. What has been greeted with greater approval and held firm with greater consistency in the philosophers' schools than that imaginary set of four simple elements, from whose reciprocal embrace all things would
firstly be formed and in which all in the end would be destroyed, deduced from the fact that there are two elements, earth and water, whose weight makes them tend to descend, and two others, air and fire, whose natural lightness makes them tend to ascend? But what is more vacuous, more false, at least among scholars, than such a doctrine on the number of elements and on the presumed lightness of certain bodies? It is evident beyond every reasonable doubt that all bodies, whatever they be, are drawn and pushed down by their own weight and that nothing, on the other hand, is raised up if not by an external force.

Nor let the bodies of flames deceive thee here:
when the fires will leap from under round the roofs of houses, 'tis not to be supposed they act of their own accord, no force beneath to urge them up.

So Lucretius also once said in the *De rerum natura*. How many theories on the world have so far been coined by human minds and have earned faith and followers? If the authority of the holy books did not constrict the minds of the devout behind the bars of obedience, there would perhaps be few who would not accept the opinion of one who claimed that the Earth on which we stand is impelled by a continuous whirling motion, while the sun remains stationary with regal majesty at the centre of the world; so well does the theory of the planets correspond to all the phenomena of this system. On the other hand, the records of the ancients and daily life abundantly tell how often our opinions deceive us in both public and private affairs, even if weighed on the scales of wisdom. It is sufficient to quote Brutus, who, after killing Caesar, in order to return freedom to the land, when he realised that every good decision had come to a bad end, gripping the sword in his hand, with which he had brought death, is said to have exclaimed: "O miserable virtue! So you were a story, you were only words, and I loved you as if you were real, and I practised you, but you were a slave to chance".

No differently do we see that this happens all the time in the medical art, an art that is entirely conjectural, more so now than ever, in which it is normal to take chances, no different to the military or navigation arts; indeed, it is often the case that those cures that were properly in line with medical laws to counter some
illness – not even Hippocrates could have done better! – result in such an unfortunate outcome in that conflict that it is necessary to go back, if not openly at least silently, on the decisions made and take the diametrically opposite road to the cure already begun, following the example of Antonio Musa, who restored Augustus when seriously ill with an opposite remedy. It is true that the part of medicine called theoretical contains magnificent theorems and propositions of a general nature, in virtue of which it seems possible to ascribe it to the catalogue of the sciences; but when it is pressed to evaluate and treat specific diseases, it will come across no few obstacles, to such a point that very often it will not be able to maintain the promises it had made with so much faith and solemnity. The diversity of regions and places, the various and multiform foods to which men resort not so much for need but to make life enjoyable, the personal allergies of some, several sinister epidemics that constantly return, and other more hidden causes, all these things very often oblige the most expert physicians to listen and to comply with, so to speak blindly, but with more refined reasoning, the twists of fate or the signs of nature, repudiating the symptoms. If an epidemic like fever, pleurisy, diarrhoea or other disease of this kind begins to spread, how cautious must the physician be, how circumspect! Because if he understands one thing, he will proceed on tiptoes. And in the treatment of those illnesses, whose fate is not to be extinguished by themselves, he will not decide to administer heavy remedies, as in sporadic diseases, if he has not first carefully considered the direction in which nature is proceeding. Indeed, he knows that remedies like blood-letting, purging, febrifuges and others of the kind, which would be advantageous for one epidemic, but to another though similar would kill the diseased person. So may it be permitted to define those whose fate it is to fall ill at the start of such an epidemic as being “born under an unlucky star”. On the basis of their distress the clinicians will learn which cure to subsequently use for all the others. Nevertheless, I would not want by this to be considered one who thinks that the facts are appraised only on the basis of their outcome, ignoring the causes, because anyone thinking like this would not go far; the result would be the master of fools, as Quintus Fabius Maximus says in Livy, if reason were constant and invariable; but when it is a question of man himself and whenever reason provides only some appearance
of truth, I would think that results and experience, which created the art, are preferable. Certainly in long illnesses, which time not only creates but also cures, if everything does not go according to reason for those who act according to reason, that which has not immediately been beneficial should not be immediately discarded. But in acute illnesses one must quickly change that which was not beneficial and always try new remedies.

When some new illness raises its head, as we read has at times happened, how excited is the crowd, how much do the most famous pioneers of the art fight with one another in serious battles of words! All in order to study the nature of a disease never before seen, nor described even summarily by any ancient author, and to establish a rational way of treating it; which nevertheless is usually not found, if not after practical medicine by chance or analogy has found the only suitable remedy and has circulated it. Two centuries have already passed since the yellow plague spread with tremendous contagion through Italy, starting with the kingdom of Naples, then throughout Europe. And it still persists, though it has finally become milder and most of its ferocity and arrogance been set aside. If we leaf through the testimonies of the writers who have handed down the history of this disease and the way in which it was treated at the time, how much extravagance, how much inappropriate argument do we find! In truth I confess that in examining some of these testimonies I have difficulty in restraining laughter, if not sleep. On this matter it is enough to say that the opinion of those who thought that the Gallic plague was none other than a case of hot and dry upsets in the liver, easily extinguished on the basis of the rule of opposites, was greeted with great favour. On the other hand a simple decoction of guaiac in water was able to completely cancel all the theories invented on this disease by the ancients, no less than it was able to eradicate Celtic plague.

In a not dissimilar way, Peruvian bark, the famous febrifuge, whose use in our time is so frequent (if not perhaps excessive and shameless), has clearly shown that we have not yet understood the secret nature of the fever, it having been fairly effective in undermining the theories of all the ancients on this and having also raised no few doubts about all the ideas of the moderns that have so far appeared on this disease. The result is that the knowledge of what the fever really is may quite rightfully be numbered among those
things we are still lacking. So the practical medicine of the Indians, whose particular remedies often bring assistance to our needs, exercises and stimulates the theoretical medicine of the Europeans.

Nevertheless, I would not want anyone to think that in this way I want to defame theory in a hostile manner as an inconsistent thing of no use. On the contrary, I have always taken it and will always take it into the utmost account (if the medical art were without it, it would undoubtedly be imperfect and incomplete), but I intend only to show that it has no reason to think itself owed dominion over practice and to want to precede she whose footsteps it once followed, running like a back wheel, on the second axle.

Reasoning and working are very different. It is one thing to see a sick person laid on a bed and another to see him described in a book. The pulse must be taken and one has to watch over the furious assaults of diseases and the alternate motion of the attacks, by which the sick are tossed about in their beds as in a sea strait. According to the example of distinguished masters, it is necessary to frequently examine the interior of still warm, just dead bodies and to observe the fibrils and filaments of the nervous parts, divining in this way not what will happen, like the haruspices of the past, but what has been the real, authentic cause of an illness not well known and of a sudden, unforeseen death. So the real practical physician is entirely active, and he consults and leafs through the book of nature in his mind and his hand, to thus manage to be more expert and more ready to act than to speak. Theory may delight as much as it likes in its realm, applauding itself and making a display of its strength. But when it moves into the territory of practice, it must put on the brakes and, setting aside the pride of formulating ever new grandiose propositions, recognise both that it is a guest in that province and the amount of time needed to acquire complete, concrete experience. Who, on the other hand, provided he has been instructed in the study of letters and has absorbed a purer philosophy - in this time of ours when everything has been levelled and easy access is open to all the sciences; who could not raise himself quickly to the theoretical good only by reading the most selected writers, despite having never crossed the threshold of the academy and without ever having heard anyone declaim from the benches? The man who is completely submerged in theory alone and who, turning pallid night and day over books and spending his life in
lamp light, eager to know all that the ancient writers wrote, all that
the moderns have said (because knowledge of our own is very of­
ten none other than knowing what this or the other person said),
should set aside his solitary studies, set aside his books and devote
himself to practical medicine, proceeding to the hospitals, going to
visit the sick district by district, as the clinicians do, beginning to
do the rounds. But how inexpert will he appear to the sick and to
those who assist them, even though he is instructed and nourished
by the precepts and teachings of the writers! Astonished, certainly,
dumbfounded like an incompetent artist, he will give himself away
like a field mouse. I think that the same thing as used to happen to
speakers when pleading cases would happen to the inexpert phy­
sician in undertaking treatments for illnesses. Indeed, as soon as
those that were used to declaiming in a learned and eloquent way
in private places, imagining their choice of controversies, went into
the court to defend a case, were at times frightened by the sight of
the place and the judges, to the point that their eloquence suddenly
abandoned them and they seemed more like clients than defenders.
"The court alone ensures progress", a grand master of the oratory
skill used to say; "The atmosphere, the appearance of the real trial
is very different; and if one wants to separate them, practice with­
out theory is worth more than theory without practice; this is why
some who have grown old at the school benches are astounded by
the new when they appear in court". So precisely that which used
to be seen in the legal court, we also see in the medical court when
someone wants to proffer their own hands (which are not yet the
hands of a physician) to take pulses and prescribe medicines.

It is thus indispensable that the theoretician, no matter how
learned and erudite, gives up his honours at the beds of the sick,
especially if he is just out of university and, recently graduated, has
vowed an easy victory to himself over the most serious illnesses. It
is not sufficient to have the most famous teachings of Hippocrates,
Celsus and the other luminaries of medicine at the tips of one's
fingers, so that one can declare with certainty what the nature and
character of the illness he is charged with treating are, where it is
lodged, what part of the body it threatens, what outcome it is des­
tined to have and what defences must be tried to besiege it. It would
certainly be nice to also know those things that concern medical
culture. But just as it is not dishonourable for an expert sailor to
not know the cause of the ebb and flow of the tides, provided he knows where the shallows and rocks are hidden and how it is appropriate to take shelter in a port, so the good practitioner does not need to blame as a crime the fact of not knowing certain things that have more to do with elegance than the health of the sick.

"Analogies also lead good physicians into error" the great master of the art once said, which is extremely true, given that not rarely diseases of completely different kinds are accompanied by the same signs and the same symptoms, such as colic and nephritis. Galenus testifies to this, frankly confessing to being deceived when he thought he was afflicted by a kidney disease, to then discover he had suffered colic. But the dictum of such a master is much more common in theory than in practice, because the capable and expert practical physician knows how easy it is to be deceived and how difficult it is to judge, or rather, how risky it is for the honour of the art and artifice to pronounce a categorical opinion on the nature of a disease, and to do so publicly. But if these considerations provide some picture of the truth, by what ever right should theory claim leadership in the medical art? Is it perhaps because with its wisdom and teachings it offers practice much light and in some ways carries forward a lantern so it will not stumble, so it will not leave the straight and narrow? But it is not the lord or master's task to carry forward the lantern, it is the servant's. Who would dare to contest that practice owes much to theory? Indeed, it would be wrong to malevolently belittle the benefits; though if one should begin the calculation of giving and receiving, doubt will remain about which of the two is most indebted. Nevertheless, it is certain that the sick person is indebted to good practice much more than to good theory. He who has spent more of his life with ill people than healthy ones will not easily forget the monstrous face of the diseases hidden behind the mask, and will thus not be as exposed to errors in the evaluation and the treatment as one who has grown old reading, writing and declaiming. But I do not think that my words should merit belief if I were not to make some arguments with the addition of some examples. May I thus be permitted by your courtesy, distinguished gentlemen, to tell a rather strange story that is worth remembering on this subject.

In 1576 the not negligible signs of a plague suddenly appeared in Venice; and as the notables and the whole city were frightened
by the news of this event, special attention began to be given to protecting public health. And as the funerals increased day by day, rumours of all sorts multiplied and, as often happens, great arguments arose among the physicians regarding the nature of the disease. Some denied that it was a pestilential disease, others cried out that within a short time a terrible plague would cause enormous slaughter. In the midst of these divisions and discussions between physicians at such a serious moment, Girolamo Mercuriale and Girolamo Capivaccio, at that time the most eminent luminaries of Padua university, were thus called to Venice by public decree in order to establish what the nature of the devastating disease really was. These highly distinguished gentlemen thus left for Venice with a magnificent entourage and were greeted by the entire populace with no lesser expectations than those once reserved by the people of Abdera for the great Hippocrates when he was called on to treat Democritus. After having undertaken their work of subjecting the repulsive disease to a close examination according to the dictates of medical laws, having weighed up in the proper manner all the signs of the plague, those evident and those secondary, and having listened to the arguments of both sides, conducted before the highest body, they gave their findings in the presence of the Doge. They said that the spreading epidemic was not contagious, and openly declared that they would treat a disease of this kind with their methods and their remedies. Such a favourable response, heard by willing ears and made public, immediately freed the city of its great anxiety and fear, and it let it itself go in immense joy, praising its saviours to the heavens. But in just a few days that ill-conceived joy went terribly bad and, in addition, the usual care to move the sick to more remote places having been ignored, that deadly disease, which judges of great authority had absolved as not guilty, began to torment the people even more vehemently, to the point that it sent about 100,000 people to the kingdom of the dead in the course of a single year. Nevertheless, that pestilential disease behaved much more humanely towards its judges, because it saved them and allowed them to go back to Padua safe and sound, though deprived of most of their entourage:

The remedies sought work harm; masters in the art fail,
Chiron, son of Phillyra, and Melampus, Amythaon's son
As Virgil once wrote of two physicians in a pestilential disease. This was the outcome of the departure for Venice of such very important, such magnificent, such solemn men.

Far be it from me to want to take anything from the fame and reputation of such distinguished masters, because their glory and names will continue as long as the medical art is honoured among mortals and this university remains consecrated to eternity. My sole intention was to more solidly support my assumption with the example of very famous men, who shone more among the theoreticians than the practitioners, and whose methods were kept secret.

So, having shown more than sufficiently, if pride does not deceive me, that theoretical medicine does not have any legitimate right to obtain any predominance over practice, nothing would be more desirable, nothing more useful for the common good, than that these two governors of health, their rivalry set aside, should make a loyal pact between each other and exercise their control as equal allies. Certainly, it would be much more desirable that one be both a good theoretician and a good practitioner, but this is given to few and only those

Loved by just Jupiter

Who raised ardent virtue to the heavens.

In any case, each epoch has had masters of this rank, as does this one and this university of ours. The highest hope is thus that both these skills, on which the art is based and by which it is constituted, may harmonise with one another, with advice and with works, with precepts and experiments, to the point that they no longer seem to be two authorities, but one only.