the physician with a healthy face and good complexion, who is vigorous and robust and proud to show off his strength, as once in Virgil, Darete showed off his broad shoulders and swung his arms at Entello, rather than trust himself to an exhausted, thin, pale, physician of frail health, as if he needed the strength of his body rather than that of his spirit to fight the strength of the disease. If however they wanted not only to feel, but also to listen to reason, I have no doubt that they would come around to my way of thinking. It is worth them knowing that the health they see and admire in the physician is not produced by the art he practises and a correct way of living, but by the temperament and good physical disposition he received by chance from his forefathers and from healthy parents; similarly, because of the constant exercise that practical medicine demands. But the poor physical disposition that they see and feel sorry for in a physician of frail health, however, tells them that he is the son of a poor constitution, received from parents who were also ill, and also of the irregularity of studies and nights spent awake reading, in which the scholars of ancient medicine wore themselves out. Indeed, it cannot but occur, as Plato rightly said, that “the strength of the will flourishes, if the strength of the body does not fade”, for which an emaciated appearance, pallor, weakness of stomach and plenty of other afflictions easily accompany those who are completely devoted to their studies, just as it is possible to see people in religious communities who are not weakened and exhausted by fasting and by frequent flagellations, but only by studying. But some will set Hippocrates, the father of medicine, against Plato’s doctrine. He states that it is good that the physician takes care of himself, so that he is ruddy and has a good fleshy constitution relative to his own nature. Hippocrates certainly wrote this, but no honest appraiser of things can allege from it that physicians of frail health must be kept away from the treatment of diseases, as unsuited to practising medicine. The divine old man explains why he wrote this, adding that “people think that those whose body is not sufficiently well disposed are unable to provide for others”. So this is the opinion of the people, not of those who have a wise heart. So to drive out this popular saying and to avoid the popular slander according to which physicians who are often ill are not suited to practising medicine, the tutor persuaded each one to make an effort to appear healthy and of good constitution. So
Hippocrates' document follows a certain policy and does nothing to weaken Plato's opinion: indeed, it will always be right to assert that, under similar conditions, the physician of frail health has the prerogative to be more suited to treating diseases than a physician of stable, robust health. Such a prerogative is certainly not enviable and undoubtedly loathsome also to he who possesses it, but it is good for the ill. On the other hand, if I were permitted to guess what Hippocrates' intention was in this circumstance, I would dare say that he was in favour, rather than against, my idea. Indeed, who was Hippocrates' tutor, if not Herodicos? He put his faith in him for instruction, and undoubtedly would have done the same for treatment if he were prey to some disease. And yet Herodicos, as all scholars know, is traditionally cited as being a man of frail health.

I have difficulty restraining a laugh when I hear that ancient biting saying, cited by Plutarch and taken from a poet as a kind of a proverb, that mocks he who is wise about others, but not about himself, or "physician of others, himself covered in wounds". In this way those who speak like this do not want to be cured by physicians that are often afflicted by various diseases and show their ignorance. That saying of the divine Tutor is sufficient: "The fistulae of others suggest the cure". Do expert physicians perhaps not have open sores on their bodies and want to keep them open both to cure them and to save them from complications? And what do they dread more than the usual blockage of the discharge, like old wounds healed naturally or by a non-expert physician? So physicians of frail health who know the nature of their afflictions neglect a complete cure so as not to be oppressed by aggravations; nevertheless they treat themselves in acute diseases, unless the disease has not besieged the citadel of Pallas. Indeed, they are not so stupid as to place their trust in the throng of physicians when they fall ill. They know what the usual fate of almost all physicians is. Once news that a physician has fallen victim to a serious disease has spread, no few colleagues hasten to him either out of duty or curiosity with the proposal of some remedy, until the poor man in bed is forced to succumb to the quarrels of the physicians. They treat themselves and very often live to an old age, like the above mentioned Herodicos, who, with the aid of the art of gymnastics, which he first instituted, drew out his existence to an entire century. If these physicians do not know how to get to the roots of the
disease, such as a disposition to gout, nephritis, asthma and other similar ailments, not rarely also hereditary, that not even Apollo himself with eleven divinities could heal, this must not be attributed to a defect in the art. It is rather already a lot if the art, which cannot act beyond the sphere of its own activity, can remove the buds that sprout from roots of this kind.

I would be immoderate if I wanted to consider all that would help make my proposition stronger, but allow me to add this sole argument to conclusively seal my talk. The physician of frail health is more suited not only to practising the medical art than one who enjoys excellent health and is strong by nature, but also writing about it. Is not the one who best explains on paper the internecine battle between nature and disease he who, if not having seen such a battle go on inside himself with his own eyes, will have at least perceived it to the prejudice of his sensitive soul? Prospero Alpini, whose stay in Cairo, Egypt, for several years with the Venetian consul enriched the republic of medicine with his distinguished work on the medicine of the Egyptians. He then contracted a serious and almost complete deafness, such that he could not hear even the loudest sounds and, when he was prefect of the Padua Botanical Gardens, he used to say that no physician up until then had understood the nature of such an ailment, nor could he understand it, if he had not been affected by deafness. He thus said that he thought he would write a work on the nature of the disease, but death prevented him doing so and robbed us of a very intelligent publication. Falloppio, professor in this famous university, was prey to a certain ailment, whose name I do not remember, in winter, as he himself mentions in his works. Following the customs of others, he drank Aquarian water. But as he did not expel it either through the urinary tract or by evacuation, he said that it was taken by a spasm in the legs, something that he had had the opportunity to also observe in others. So, instructed by his own experience, he entirely rejected the use of thermal waters in winter, adding that genuinely golden rule for those who have varicose veins: it is safer for them to use mineral waters.

Furthermore, what writer of medicine more famous than Marcello Malpighi has this age of ours had? Those who know him are well aware that he did not enjoy very good health; indeed, he was not ashamed to openly declare among his friends that he was normally
tormented by various ailments. So the physician of frail health who
is accustomed to various kinds of disease and otherwise educated
and wise, always excels above other professionals who have been
conceded the particularly good luck of being always well, though
both having a parity of solid knowledge of doctrine, in perform­
ing all the duties of the medical art, apart from also being a good
theoretician, best practitioner and excellent writer.
XV Oration

Given on 20th November 1713

Much decorated listeners, ever since I was first permitted to teach in this famous university I admit that I have never been as worried as at the start of this academic year. I think myself fairly unprepared for this solemn beginning of studies as I set about ascending this lectern, from which I do not remember descending other times without even an applause. Given that until now it has been my habit every year to give an opening speech on a medical subject, I was attracted by the idea that I would do the same this year. I do not know why, but for the entire summer, especially when Canis Minor raged, I had to fight my own ills and not without the fear of not emerging from them alive. For this reason I had other concerns, my attention was focused on other things than preparing this speech.

Having finally with the help of God obtained respite from the illness — though for me this is never very certain — I started thinking seriously about the choice of a subject that would not disappoint your expectations, but would neither make the effort of writing unpleasant. So, running through the most beautiful places of medicine in my mind, I carefully tried to find something that would respond to my wishes. I do not know why, but everything seemed barren and desolate to me. If I roamed around the ancient fields of the medical art, nothing came to mind that I had not already dealt with or had at least touched on in previous speeches. If I then scoured the well cultivated fields of the moderns, nothing offered itself but a meagre harvest. So, almost despairing of being able to find something that would satisfy my mind, I was more than a little anxious in spirit, as I saw that the days were sliding by in vain and the question had now gone on to the last month of the holidays. And so, disappointed in my efforts, in order not to destroy my strength
of spirit as well as that of my body, I headed toward the pasture of curiosities, or to read the comments on recent exploits in Europe, which are usually referred to us every week. And as I read them, though in peaceful spirits and not passionate about any of the parts in play, I wondered whether, after the so many great vicissitudes we have seen in the space of a few years and that will be admired by our descendants, things could ever be resolved with some equilibrium such as to be able to hope for a solid and lasting peace. But in this state of things, with spirits on both sides braced to take the chance of arms, I realised a hope of this kind was entirely vain. But above all I admired the prosperity of France, which, first afflicted by so much slaughter as to seem ready to sue for peace, now has such fortune that it seems to want to impose rather than accept the laws of war and peace, if there are any. England was certainly no less an object of admiration. Despite being scattered all over the world, it had reached the point of dividing the world at its pleasure, becoming a bestower of kingdoms. But then, when I came to Germany, no sooner had I heard that a plague still continued to rage in Vienna than, as if woken from a heavy sleep, the subject of my speech, which I had been so anxiously searching for, suddenly appeared between my hands while I was doing something else. What more could I want that would be more worthy of my listeners' attention than precisely that which demands so much attention, thought and vigilance from the Most Serene Prince and the Most Noble Senate, in order that such a terrible plague does not infest Italian territory? I was ashamed, I admit, much decorated listeners, of the fact that my mind had been so obtuse as to make me turn to these subjects so late, having read many times about the onset and advance of this disease, and heard it discussed by others. If, indeed, I had been more attentive, I would perhaps have approached the subject slightly more prepared. But even at a sturdier age I was never so fortunate as to be able to quickly give form to the things I conceived with my mind, while now that I am old this happens even less. Nevertheless, in proportion to my strengths, I will try to communicate some notions regarding the nature and character of this fever, so that, if ever it should dare to approach our land (something I hope does not happen), it will not come as a new or unknown enemy. This purple fever, the malignant *Mysoptocha*, will thus be the fitting and proper subject of my speech today.
Some will perhaps be surprised at my calling this purple fever by the new and unusual name of *Mysoptocha* and not rather Acherontic, born from the race of the furies. But you should know that I have used this word specifically to describe its nature and wonts. Indeed, this fever has raged with particular loathing among the poor and needy people, spending its brutal rage against them. This is certainly nothing new, nor must it be considered a wonder; it was noted by the great Hippocrates, that very accurate observer of everything. Indeed, in his books on epidemics he mentions a disease that only struck the servants, leaving the nobles and all the free people untouched. In the same books he also recalls dreadful diseases that used to seriously infect some men known as *Fullers*, those who used to clean clothes. I have also observed a rural epidemic of tertian fevers in the Modena area, in which almost all the rural people succumbed at the same time, while the city remained safe and sound. But the following year I observed another epidemic of fevers that afflicted only the citizens, while the country folk remained in good health. It is also worth remembering what Cardano mentions regarding the Basel plague. It almost emptied the city of its citizens, but did not affect the Italians, Spaniards or people from other nations in the city. There is no doubt that epidemic diseases have this nature of easily destroying those who have the same poor disposition of humours, whatever the cause that gave rise to it, be it the air, the water or rotten food. I know for sure that in the common efforts of the people, the masses, greater in number than the citizens, are the ones who bear the heaviest loads. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the common folk usually eat very bad food due to poverty, so in places where the plague has shown its face, they are more exposed than others to contracting the disease because of the internal decay of their humours. Plague and hunger, or better the need to make do with very bad food due to poverty, are described by the Greeks with the very same word, differing only by a diphthong: *λοιμός* (*loimos*), means "plague", *λίμος* (*limos*) means "hunger", so that at times hunger has been the result of the plague alone.

So calling this fever that resides among the masses in the suburbs of Vienna and certainly consumes its hunger among lowly people *Mysoptocha* is not out of place. However, it is best not to trust that, after having become sated with this kind of food, she will
not seek better nourishment. Indeed, although she seemed to have some trace of humanity, not having ever dared to approach the inner city, perhaps fearing his Sacred Imperial Majesty Charles VI, it is nevertheless necessary to look on her as a fairly wily enemy, whose main characteristic is precisely that of besieging the human being with ambushes until she kills him. I am not unaware of the fact that the genesis and nature of this fever has been discussed right from the start in the assembly of physicians, but she quickly quietened such discussions. Indeed, laying down the purple and putting on black dress, she very clearly showed what she really is. Indeed, what else could the petechias changed from purple to black, the carbuncles, or blackleg, the sores and bruises, the bubos and other typical signs of a dangerous and deadly disease be but a pestilential kind of fever, hurled to earth by the Devil?

It is also remarkable, much decorated listeners, that, if one wants to leaf through the historians’ testimonies, any plague has so many supporters and patrons at its outset. And the thing that is even more astonishing is that this number also includes the physicians themselves, until it has not stopped its progress. Such a disgrace was once visited on the city of Venice. Riccoboni notes in his L'Ateneo di Padova that in 1576, after heated arguments between physicians as to whether the fever, which had spread in epidemic proportions causing widespread slaughter, was pestilential or not, the city ordered that Capivaccio and Mercuriale, distinguished professors of Padua University, be called. After they had attempted to exonerate that fever from the charge of being pestilential, they were forced to return to Padua to deliver themselves from the obvious danger. In the plague that devastated the regions of Cispadania and Transpadania in 1429, too, controversies among the physicians were heard on the slaughter of Milan, according to what the much learned Settala notes, who barely missed being stoned by the crowd – he notes this himself – because he had openly declared that the disease was pestilential, while others screamed at him at the top of their voices and, for this reason, the noble professor did not enjoy great fame. So, given that there is no longer room for discussion on this plague, which now infests Vienna, the simulated piety of this fever Mysoptocha and its respect for the Viennese must be scornfully rejected and it must be looked on with horror, worse than a dog or a snake, as the saying goes. It is a disease that causes rapid death, that does not respond to
any kind of remedy, that threatens the city with a constant and terrible siege much worse than that of the Turks, against whom at least it was possible to fight with arms and expect some help from allied princes, as in fact happened. But this cruel and pestilential demon can only be fought with vows and prayers against that Devil that the Apostles could not drive away, who the Saviour said was of the kind that are only driven away by prayer and fasting.

But what must be said about the sudden abatement of this pestilential fever under the icy gusts of the North wind and the abundant fall of snow, such that the Viennese people may feel considerable hope that the disease may soon halt its siege? What should I say if not that all the world will applaud and cheer this city, the only bulwark of the Christian world, on hearing that this fever has been dulled among the snows, such that it is forced to go back to the Phlegethon from whence it came. Indeed, this is usually the case with the plague: that in the moments of change in the year, that is, in both solstices, as the weather conditions change considerably, it too undergoes a change, both for the better and the worse, most of the time. Nevertheless it is more easily mitigated when the air changes from maximum heat to cold, such that in Cairo, according to Prospero Alpini, the plague reaps the lives of many men at the time of greatest heat, but sets aside its ferocity on the first flood of the Nile. Given that in the now past summer solstice this fever reached the peak of its ferocity against the poor masses, it is not unreasonable to conceive the hope that in the next winter solstice, to which the year has already turned, either it will fade away or die out completely covered by the snow, in the same way that in 1679 the other plague that afflicted Vienna, especially in summer, ended on 1 November, a day that is still honoured with great solemnity to give thanks for the liberation of the city. Would that this conceived hope of such a happy outcome be greeted by a positive sign from the heavenly gods and that they allow this evil year for Vienna to be followed by a better one.

But for some time now this pestilent disease has spread from the suburbs of Vienna far and wide in various cities, such as to seem to want to wander through all of Germany, flying here and there causing such damage that it really can be called "an evil of which nothing is faster", that has more energy for its mobility and "becomes stronger as it proceeds" as Virgil says of hunger. And this
disease is not content to roam around the land and to fill all with havoc to its pleasure, but has now also begun to sail the Baltic Sea, burning also with the desire to practise piracy, to win the appropriate title of sea plunderer.

Whether or not this pestilent disease should torment the poor and needy masses in those places and in those cities it has occupied as it has in the suburbs of Vienna, with the same appearance as purple fever and the already mentioned symptoms of blackleg and bubos, or lead both common folk and citizens to Libitina’s roll-call with a different type of suffering, I admit to not knowing, given that nothing certain is known about it. I know only this: that the plague is a multiform beast that changes its skin, “that has a thousand names, a thousand tricks for doing evil” as Virgil, the prince of poets, sang about Alecto, the worst of the Furies. Indeed, the plague is not a particular disease but a crazy, lawless, universal one that escapes every category, given that even after the passing of many centuries there is no real definition of it, and much less is there any real remedy. If anything the plague can according to its nature associate itself to any disease, large or small and of any type, to more easily deceive: indeed it joins not only chronic fevers as an ally, but also intermittent ones; it has even made transient fevers, which everywhere are known to be fairly innocuous, infamous with its company. Particular diseases are often seen in pestilential constitutions, such as angina, pleurisy, pneumonia, diarrhoea and dysentery, but with obvious signs of virulence. In his books on *Epidemics* Hippocrates refers to a certain constitution in which, he says, “the emptying of the stomach takes everything away”. His warning that it was necessary to observe “whether there be something divine in diseases” was also directed toward this. But there is not sufficient agreement between physicians on what is meant by this ἰθιον (theion) of the divine teacher. However, the wisest say that that “divine” means nothing but something hidden, something that exceeds human understanding, as says Fernel regarding hidden causes. But perhaps the very learned Sennert has hit the mark closer than others, thinking that that “divine” refers to pestilential fevers. The plague is thus the Proteus of diseases, which deceives under various appearances, now black, now purple, now multicoloured, as in the Hungarian fevers, well recorded by the historians. So in any constitution, in any place and in any city in which the
plague has for the first time set foot, it always enjoys distin-

guishing itself and making itself noted for some peculiarity. No sooner
had the plague entered Prague, as I heard from the latest letters,
than it chose the ghetto of the Jews as its home, where it is said to
have caused enormous slaughter, again not perhaps forgetting its
my sophtocha nature. Indeed, the Jewish people are truly destitute
and very poor and have "the basket and hay as furnishings", being
accustomed to eating dreadful food. Such a race is suited to host-
ing the disease, and to taking it elsewhere due to their trade in
clothing, and perhaps for this reason, as we have learnt from public
documents, in various places in Germany, and especially with the
Swiss, there is no health certification for the Jewish people, but
they are completely forbidden from wandering here and there.

But what will be the purpose of saying such things if some rem-
edy and some precautions to prevent such a terrible disease are
not proposed? This is certainly an appropriate request, but a fairly
difficult one. If there were something in the pharmacist's jars or the
chemist's laboratories able to fight all poisons, this really would be
the remedy sought. Indeed, the nature and character of a plague
is such that for every poison there is something that reduces its ef-
fects and that, so to speak, keeps it at bay. But I think that a medi-
cine with the power to curb all poisons can be more easily made
with the mind than the hand. Each may freely decide whether the
remedy sought may perhaps be a panacea, which is thought able to
fight any kind of poison, being made up of simple medicines like
poison cures, such that it was defined by Pliny as a "much sought
after luxury compound". Personally, I very much like the single
remedy that is commonly defined as consisting of three elements:
a rapid escape from the infected area, departure for distant regions
and a late return; this was the kind of remedy usually also used by
the wisest physicians.

Up to what point has the Venetian Senate with its far-seeing deci-
sions taken the precautions that human diligence is usually able to
employ in such cases? No sooner had the rumour that the epidemic
of malignant fevers infesting Vienna had spread to Venice than it
immediately issued numerous decrees. It ordered that people who
would supervise a thing of such importance with the usual precau-
tions be sent by land and sea to areas and places under suspicion.
In the same way it ruled that citizens and noblemen in each city, cit-
adel or port under its rule were to prevent entrance to anyone without a guarantee of health. But regarding this as not sufficiently safe, it then stopped trade with foreign cities and bordering cities, with not so much consideration for the advantages and disadvantages that come to all cities from the free trade of goods as for the public health of the people. At the same time it was also decided to offer public prayers to placate the anger of the supreme God, though full and faithful implementation of the edicts was not stopped: as the old proverb says: “the gods help those who help themselves”.

Certainly, so much diligence employed right from the start, almost unequal to suitable fears, was not much favoured by some given that the question of whether that purple fever was of the breed of plagues was still under discussion. But then, as the disease became more serious day by day and openly revealed its cruelty, fairly obvious signs appeared of the excellent Venetian Senate’s wisdom, and of how timely had been those decrees made by such insightful minds. Indeed, if that Plautine saying that “He who takes care not to be deceived, has difficulty taking care, precisely while taking care” is not in any case considered true, at most it is only in suspicion of the plague.

So the benefit to those who have been lucky enough to be born and live under this Serenissimo sky is great and singular; indeed, here one spends one’s life happily, here one can sleep peacefully, while many excellent Senators, almost like local tutelary deities, watch over public happiness. By now we are reasonably experienced in how easily and with how little effort the Serenissimo Senate has maintained peace and calm for its subjects, and total authority for itself, albeit remaining armed, in such a big, drawn out trembling of arms throughout Italy. In the meantime almost all of Italy groans, overwhelmed, forced to provide foreign forces with supplies, wages and everything else necessary to maintain big armies. And if in some places of Venetian rule some disadvantage and some damage is caused by the passing of so many troops, that too is in some way compensated by the great sums distributed by the soldiers for their support and supplies. Look at how much attention, how much mindfulness of spirit and new thinking the Senate applies day after day to ensure that no pestilential air may come from infected areas to contaminate these regions by way of some secret route through those mountains that nature has placed as a barrier.
According to Diogenes Laërtios, the Agrigento area was once weakened by the blight of rust, to the point that all the harvests were ruined in mid-summer by the gusts of some pestilent winds from the north. The manner in which this evil could be resisted was not known; indeed, who knew how to fight the winds? But Empedocles, pitying his unfortunate fellow citizens, whose grain for nourishment was being covertly stolen by the wind, easily found a solution with his acute intelligence. He ordered that animal skins be taken up as defensive barricades to the hills and the mountain peaks where the winds blew. With this solution, even though base and abject, he stopped and diverted the ferocity of the winds, due to which that philosopher was subsequently known by his fellow citizens as *kolusanémás*, or he who slows and tames the winds. Just a short while ago, in an example certainly worth remembering, the Venetian nobility opposed its stout breasts to the Rhaetian Alps that mark the confine between Germany and Italy, to keep at a distance and repel this evil looming over us from the North Wind. May he who is the sole Saviour of all men favour these distinguished and pious attempts made in favour of public health.