XVI Oration

Given in November 1714

The medical journey, although not indispensable, is at least very useful for gaining skill in the art and renown.

If what we read and hear regarding our mortality is true, O noble listeners, that this life we lead on earth is none other than a kind of journey until we find the Heavenly Home from which our better part came, then it is no wonder that in almost every single mortal there is a desire to travel and to completely observe the appearance of the terrestrial globe; such that there are many who say goodbye to the comforts of their homeland and undertake long and difficult journeys by sea and by land. On the other hand, I have seen that those who burn with such a desire may be divided into two kinds: for some the only aim is to travel through different lands to observe their magnificence, such as temples, theatres, armouries, princely relics, effigies, paintings and other similar things; the others undertake journeys to observe men rather than statues and works of art. Men of both kinds are praiseworthy, because in this way they are able to attain wisdom and comprehensive knowledge on everything. But I think that those who undertake a journey to meet and admire wise and learned men are to be more highly praised. There is an example of this second kind that it is a pleasure to recall, in perpetual honour of this our immortal city. Practically every educated person has read or at least heard of that man who, inspired by the fame of the Paduan Livy, came to Rome from far-off Cadiz, crossing Gaul, to visit that such very important Latin writer, and after having seen him and paid him homage as was fit, quickly headed for home without any further curiosity. The love and reverence for virtue were exceptional in that man. He, who was not

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attracted by the glory of Caesar Augustus nor of Rome – which in those days was the wonder of the entire world – was taken by the fame of a single learned and wise man. The extraordinary results that could be obtained by such journeys were already known in ancient times by philosophers, poets, orators and all scholars of the liberal arts. Having left the hearth and home, they were unafraid of making long peregrinations and not only restricting themselves to contemplating the external appearance of the wise, like that man from Cadiz, but also examining their accomplishments and establishing mutual relations with them.

The first seven shoots of Greece, or rather the so-called Seven Sages, still remembered today and consecrated by eternal fame, had no fixed abodes and did nothing but roam around, as shown by historic testimonies. In addition to the Sages, others who were born and raised in Greece, mother and wet-nurse of the sciences, burned with such a desire to travel to find out the doctrine of the wise beyond the borders of Attica. So the Egyptian priests and astronomers of Memphis and Heliopolis, the Druids in Gaul and the Brahmins and Gynmosophists in India were often visited. The Romans themselves, who opened their cities to the liberal disciplines after they had left their coarseness behind, were all stimulated by the desire to visit Greece itself, despite having Greek teachers in their public schools – such that many of these had cause for laughter at how Hellenised the city was. Documents show that Marcus Tullius went to Athens and stayed their for a certain time, putting his eloquence in Greek to the test: it had in fact been predicted that eloquence would have quickly turned its back on Athens to emigrate to Lazio. There is no one who does not know that Virgil, Horace and the other illustrious poets sailed to Greece to drink the sweeter waters at the very fountains of the Muses. And the ancient physicians, or rather the fathers of medicine, burned with the same desire to travel, as is evident from their writings. In the same way it is common in our own times for young Germans, Hungarians and others, after receiving their diploma in their own academies, to travel, also on foot if not too arduous, to the most famous cities of Italy, to visit their schools and to spend time with physicians they regard as distinguished either because of their fame or because they have read their works. And I call on all of you present, distinguished Professors, as witnesses of this. I have thus drawn the subject of
my speech today from this ancient and never too highly praised custom, in order to show the young students with explanations and examples that the medical journey, if not indispensable, is at least useful for acquiring experience in the art and a good name.

I have thus claimed that the kind of journey that would be good for a physician to undertake and is worthy of being exalted above the vulgarity of every other similar kind must be a medical journey. Indeed, all the others made only out of curiosity are completely fruitless, and rather, instead of teaching the traveller, remove him from the study of medicine; they thus become of the kind made by merchants, who plan itineraries and routes based solely on profit and trade. Consequently, in order for someone who decides to take a medical journey to be able to wisely and praiseworthily succeed in the enterprise, he should find out about the nature of the places, the cities and the regions he wishes to visit prior to making the journey. He should also have with him a list of the most eminent professors of the art with whom he ought to request meetings in the cities. He should also procure letters of introduction from some noble and influential people addressed to others of this same order in other cities who can host him. Such letters are by nature fruitful, and at times produce others that can be of great usefulness in the chance situations that very often befall travellers. On this subject it is worth citing the very elegant pamphlet on the medical journey that Thomas Bartholinus wrote for his son Caspar travelling to Italy, in which he notes how he should behave, which cities, universities, libraries and rarities he ought to visit and to which scholars he should meet and present the greetings of his father. On the other hand, who cannot see that a journey undertaken in this way corresponds to an uninterrupted and accurate exercise of medical art? Indeed, he who is well organised, noting in his diaries all that he can elicit from this or that physician, may even say of himself that he has not wasted so much as a day.

But please, noble listeners, let us compare the progress and scientific enrichment that a physician already active in his home city may hope to acquire in an entire year, visiting the sick every day and at times consulting with his more learned colleagues, with the progress that another scholar may make in the same period thanks to a medical journey. I think that there will be no one who does not agree with me that greater knowledge is obtained from a medical
journey than from careful study enclosed within the domestic walls of his home city, and that much more knowledge, wisdom and fame will be acquired the more he moves away from his homeland. This can be likened to rivers that, the further they flow from their source, bathing different lands, expand thanks to the admission of new tributaries, like the Danube in Europe and the Nile in Africa, which "flows through the thousand Moorish kingdoms of the Ethiopians" until, flowing into the Mediterranean divided into seven branches, it seems more to declare war on the sea than to offer it a tribute.

But perhaps some may object that the travelling, itinerant physician cannot make great progress due to his lack of books, given that he can take only a few with him in his luggage, and that he cannot read them, even wishing to, because of the lack of time, which must rather be used to recover the strengths of an exhausted body with food and sleep, and that he should rather use such strengths to regenerate his mind, deprived of the reading of books. Whereas staying in a city makes a great abundance of books available to the physician who lives a varied life, so he can easily learn all the news of what happens in the world of medicine and culture every day.

I will not discuss whether it is more useful for a physician to have a large and noble library containing books on the therapeutic art and others, decorated with portraits of various physicians, and a book rest holding the original Hippocrates always open and on display, or better to have a few, well selected books to be consulted day and night. I will restrict myself to quoting what Seneca wrote on the abundance of books and the vanity of some: "A large number of books distracts rather than instructs; and as you are unable to read those you own, it would be sufficient to own as many of them as you are able to read".

We may certainly grant that the physician who can spend his leisure time in his own city will never be lacking in books from which he can learn various lessons every day. However, books are silent teachers as an old saying goes, and, as Socrates used to say (according to Plato), they do not respond easily to one who has doubts, while the travelling physician may have as many teachers (but speaking and able to resolve doubts) at his disposal as there are expert, learned men he is able to meet in each city. Every one of us has had the experience of how effective the live voice of the speaker is, and of how the spoken word is imprinted more firmly
on the memory of the listener. Indeed, the spoken voice has the virtue of percussive intensity, on whose extraordinary power Borelli has written so admirably. The ancient coins of Caesar show us how easily the blow of a hammer can imprint an image in bronze that lasts forever. If then it is not so easy for the travelling physician to set about reading, it is very easy for him to consult learned, intelligent men in this or that city, among whom there will often be clinicians, anatomists, chemists, botanists, surgeons, lithotomists and, in the royal courts, archiaters, who it is right to think members of Asclepius' family, being responsible for the health of kings and emperors.

On this subject it is worth noting that the travelling physician is never bored by such practice; indeed, with each new place he always finds new nourishment for his curiosity, like one who always tries new foods. In this way, thanks to the constant freshness of the doctrines he will fill his mind with knowledge and experience and, so to speak, sate himself. So, with the least effort, thanks only to politeness, speaking to learned men and consulting them on the questions discussed by physicians, he will create a personal store of knowledge and a medical encyclopaedia.

I would risk going on too long if I were to number all the benefits and advantages set off by travel as from a very rich source. In truth I fear that it would be your ears that would want to set off on a journey. But may I be allowed to emphasise only this: the physician traveller will go home extremely well informed not only in medicine but also in natural history if he carefully studies all that is shown him along the way. It invites him, even unwillingly, to observe and to immediately note all that he thinks worthy of study in special files, following the example of Pliny the Elder, the founder of natural history, who, as mentioned by Pliny the Younger in a letter, when travelling always had a scribe with book and tablets at his side. He wrote everything down in a diary so as not to forget anything once he returned home. Every single city presents extraordinary elements worthy of close rather than superficial observation. Some have minerals, fossils, sulphurs, salts, stones, marbles and bitumen, others different kinds of waters, in which we may admire the most varied tricks of nature, to the point that waters of all types may be found in a single area: hot, cold, salt, fresh, nitrous, lapidific and mortal, as was the water of the Styx near Nonacris in Arcadia,
and dense and heavy like Lake Asphaltites in Judea, in which no animal could immerse itself. In some towns museums can be found in the homes of learned men, where it is possible to see large, small and tiny skeletons of insects of every kind; and if one wished, even the skeleton of a tic. A physician who travels here and there will never lack the opportunity to see them, such that with little effort and in a short period he may be defined as a *polymath*, and quite rightly. But if all that I have said so far is true, then who would not agree with me that travelling is a rather effective way of attaining expertise and a good name in the medical art? He who has followed every good rule will stand out above all the rest when he goes home, worthy of the famous Homeric eulogy: “A single man is worth many if he is a physician”.

If I were to add the weight of some examples to the arguments made in support of our theory, we would have so many, so relevant, ancient and recent, at our disposal, that examining them would excessively prolong my speech. It is a pleasure, however, to cite just a few of them, to make absolutely clear how useful the medical journey is. As an ancient example, it is enough to cite Galen, leader of physicians. He left Pergamum, the Asian city in which he was born, to visit all of Greece. He sailed to Cyprus where he went into the vitriol mines to observe its production; he then went to Palestine and from there to Rome on foot, as he himself says. He crossed Thrace and Macedonia on foot, and then reached the island of Lemnos to study the composition of Lemnian earth. He also came to our Venetian lands with the intention of visiting Germany. But he stopped in Aquilea for a whole winter, awaiting the return of the emperor Commodus from his expedition to Germany, and in that city composed the book entitled *Ars parva*. Among the more recent ones, Prospero Alpini of Marostica was once a professor much in demand in this university; this city of ours once saw and listened to this very learned person explaining the riches of the plant kingdom while seated in the Botanical Gardens and surrounded by a big crowd of young people and professors; the Padua Botanical Gardens had never before hosted so many people. But how do we think he acquired so much fame and veneration? Perhaps practising the medical profession in some city, or holding a chair in some university? Not at all. His extraordinary reputation was due to his journey to Egypt with the Venetian nobleman Gior-
gio Emo. He stayed in Cairo, a highly populated city, for several years and was able to comfortably observe the customs, diseases, treatment methods and various remedies of those people, noting them in his diaries. He then returned home, to our city, and, laden with all that he had acquired abroad, published the excellent book *De Medicina Aegyptiorum et Plantis Aegypti*; the final port of his voyage was thus the prefecture of the Botanical Gardens and the prytaneum, to the great acclaim of all.

The two most brilliant luminaries of Batavia, Guglielmo Pisone and Carlo Bonzio, cannot be ignored. They became famous because of the exceptional travel accounts they have left us, the *De Indiae utriusque re naturali* by the former and the *Historia naturalis et medica Orientalis Indiae* by the latter, from which numerous medicines may be taken to import and treat the illnesses of Europeans.

And whatever should I say about the highly illustrious Turnefortius, recently removed from the ranks of the living, whom botanists and literary men lament? His research led him, a tireless traveller, to Europe, Asia and the confines of the known lands to penetrate remote places, in forests, in valleys and on steep mountain ridges, enriching the botanical catalogue with new, unknown plants. This is shown by his very refined work, which is written and illustrated with so much beauty and elegance that it cheers the eye as much as the mind. Before the name of Turnefortius became famous, anyone would have thought that, after the work of so many illustrious men, botanical science had by now reached absolute completion, there not being space left for inquiry, and that nothing remained for botanists to do than to order a muddled collection of plants by classes. Before him, if someone by chance discovered some herb that was not easy to insert into the series of the others, how much was he exalted! Now, after that highly praised man has also embellished this Sparta and enriched botany with thousands of plants, it is obvious that the extension of the vegetable kingdom is great and not inferior to that of the mineral and animal kingdoms. In short, if on one hand everything that natural history scholars (and there are many) win step by step is never acquired truth, and, furthermore, they cannot but exercise their efforts on things of little or no usefulness, on the contrary in the medical field enormous spaces are opened up, in practice and theory, to acquire merit in the most varied ways, and especially if one travels often. So, may I be permitted
to say of this great and renowned traveller, who earned much fame with his journeys, that which Ovid wrote of Ulysses: “If Ulysses had wandered less, he would be less famous”.

So come on, you young scholars – it is for you that I have written this exhortation – come on, listen to me, and when, having gained your doctorate and probed some medical procedures thanks to some learned and erudite professor, do not think of undertaking a journey as a burden. You need not go from Cadiz to the East and the Ganges, but at least the length and breadth of our Italy, to meet those who you will know to excel in doctrine and experience in the different cities and question them on medical matters. In this way it will not be difficult for you to collect a large harvest of prescriptions and remedies, which will then be of great use to you when you have returned home. And if because of financial restrictions or difficult circumstances you cannot afford the travel comforts in keeping with the dignity of your name, do not be ashamed: follow the example of Galen and undertake a journey on foot. Likewise, you should not think drawing on part of your wealth painful and worthy of rebuke. It is not a waste of your own resources, but an investment of them. Everything that you will have spent will be paid back over time, and with interest, from the medical journey.
List of the illustrations

1. Frontispiece of the first edition of *De Principum*, Padua 1710
2. Frontispiece of a new edition of *De Principum*, Padua 1717
3. Frontispiece of the first edition of *Annotationes*, Padua 1714
4. Frontispiece of the first edition of *Vita sobria*, Padua 1558
5. Frontispiece of the Padua edition, 1714, including all the *Epidemic constitutions* and the *Dissertation of the Abuse of Quinine*
6. First page of *Costitutiones* in the Ramazzini's *Opera Omnia*, London 1742
7. Frontispiece of the first edition of *De Contagiosa epidemia*, Padua 1712
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