

Texts and Documents

(the second volume appearing posthumously) he had by that time made his fortune.

Willis's writings also boosted his practice. His best known book is, of course, *Cerebri Anatome* (1664) but it is more likely that his earlier book on fevers, fermentation and the analysis of urine served to enhance his reputation in fever-ridden Restoration Oxford.

These letters also give us a fresh insight into Willis's relation with other eminent Fellows of the Royal Society. Hitherto, it has been assumed that the demands of medical practice prevented Willis from attending meetings of the Royal Society. This is true to some extent. But whereas, in his youth, Willis had been regarded as a versatile scientist, in later life his medical opinion was sought by several eminent Fellows of the Royal Society, including Power, Williamson and Ward. Thus, there was a change of emphasis, and Willis' advice tended to be sought on purely clinical matters rather than on the iatrochemical or anatomical researches of his youth.

A MEDIEVAL GLORIFICATION OF DISEASE AND DEATH

FEW RELIGIOUS poets and mystics of the Middle Ages can rival Jacopone da Todi in glorifying the pursuit of spiritual perfection through domination of earthly passions, freedom from worldly possessions and denial of personal pleasures. No other writer of that period has ever used the imagery of ascetism with such macabre power. Among some hundreds of his 'Laudi Spirituali' there is one of particular interest to medical historians as it yearns for not less than twenty-two different diseases, preceding a painful agony and the final disposal of the human body reduced to ordure:

OF THE INFIRMITIES AND PAINS THAT BROTHER JACOPONE DESIRED FROM EXCESS OF CHARITY

O Lord! of Thy courtesy,
Send me ill-health!
Let me have quartan fever,
The continuous and the tertian,
The double quotidian
With a great hydropsy
May I have toothache,
Headache and belly-ache,
In my stomach sharp pains,
And in my throat angina.
Pain in my eyes and in my flank,
With an abscess in my right side,
Phtisis be added furthermore
And at all times frenzy.
May I have a burning liver,
An enlarged spleen and a swollen belly,
My lungs be plagued
By a great cough and paralysis.
Grant to me fistulas,
With thousands of pustules,
And so many cankers
That I am covered with them.

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Send me podagra, [podagra—gout]
The painful eyelids
Aggravating my condition,
Let dysentery plague me,
Likewise haemorrhoids.
May I also suffer asthma,
To which be added spasms,
Like a dog let me have rabid pruritus;
And in my mouth gangrene.
Come to me the falling sickness,
So as to make me fall into the water and the fire,
And let there never be one spot
In which I am not afflicted.
The devils of hell shall be my nurses,
To make yet more sharp,
The pains which my folly has earned me.
Until the end of the world,
Make hard for me this life,
And at the final separation,
Grant me a hard death.
Choose for my burial,
The belly of a wolf who shall devour me,
That my remains be reduced to dung
Among the thorns and the rocks.

Fra. Jacopone da Todi, 'De l'Infermità e Mali che Frate Jacopone demandava per Eccesso de Carità'.

(Translated from Italian by Joan M. Bruce-Chwatt)

Jacopone da Todi (Jacopo de Benedetti) was born in 1230 in Todi (Umbria) and practised as a lawyer. Married to Vanna, a lady of noble birth, they led a gay life until her tragic death in 1268, when the pavement collapsed under a dancing crowd. Lady Vanna was found dressed in her elegant gown but with a penitent's hair-shirt on her dead body. This event led to Jacopone's conversion; he spent the next ten years wandering, preaching extreme ascetism and glorifying in his devotional poems complete obedience to the Holy Spirit. He entered the Franciscan order of minor friars at the time when the internal conflict between the 'conventuals' and the 'spirituals' was raging. Having sided with the latter group, which adopted the ideal of communal and personal poverty, he vehemently denounced the 'degeneracy' of the order and this brought him into conflict with the Pope Boniface VIII. Excommunicated and imprisoned by the Pope he was released after five years by Benedict IX.

Jacopone's 'Laudi', sung by him along the highways of Umbria are highly dramatic and speak with mystic fervour of the ascent of the soul to God, through human suffering. His last mystery play *La Donna del Paradiso* about the Virgin Mary at the Crucifixion is still performed in Italy. He died at Collazone (Umbria) in 1306 and his name is included as 'blessed' in the Franciscan martyrology.

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