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constitution. It tends to stabilize infantilism and result in sterility even in the absence of a pelvic infection. Artificial abortion is an important etiologic factor in extra-uterine pregnancy.

"The advocates of the bill likewise stress the salutary effect they believe the new law will have on the relations of the sexes, on the irresponsible and frivolous attitude toward the sex problem and on the building of character in the growing generation."

The bill was passed, June 27.

HOW OLD THE NEW

By JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D.

JOHNS FISKE, who was very well known in this country for his books on history and on certain phases of popular science, once disturbed the minds of his many special adherents by suggesting that the so-called "dark ages" were really the bright ages. He added: "It is hard to find words fit to express the debt of gratitude which modern civilization owes to the Roman Catholic Church." He even went so far as to say that: "When we consider how the seeds of what is noblest in modern life were then painfully sown upon the soil which imperial Rome had prepared . . . there is a sense in which the most brilliant achievements of pagan antiquity are dwarfed in comparison with these."

During the better part of the twentieth century, a change has been coming over appreciation of what was accomplished during the Middle Ages until now there are a great many people—I mean of course scholarly, educated people—who are very ready to acknowledge our debt to this period which was supposed to be almost nil and has now come to be appreciated as representing the beginnings of those influences which have meant most for the development of our time.

Now the surprising thing is that this is true for medical science as it is for other phases of knowledge, though in the minds of a great many people, even educated folk, there remains the deepest prejudice against it. It needs only a little consultation of original and not secondary authorities to bring this out. Of course these original authorities have only been available, as a rule, during comparatively recent years. It is a disgrace now for anyone not to know them. Let me illustrate.

I suppose that the things we consider to be triumphs of modern medicine and proofs of the advancement of medical science are, (1) the use of anesthetics to relieve pain during surgical operations; (2) the use of what may be called aseptics to prevent the spread of infection and save life after surgical operations; (3) the proper understanding of insanity and the taking of such care of the insane as provides opportunity for them to get better and, above all, not to be abused in their unfortunate condition; and last, but not least, (4) the erection

and equipment of hospitals that make the performance of operations and the subsequent care of patients possible in such ways as shall assure them the best hopes for their recovery and convalescence.

Surgical anesthesia is usually supposed to be an invention of Americans made about the middle of the nineteenth century. It has been looked upon as one of the greatest preventives of suffering which enabled surgeons to do ever so much better work than they could do under the awful circumstances which prevailed before the days of anesthesia, when a drunken patient, narcotized by opium, would be held by brawny ward assistants while the surgeon cut him.

As a matter of fact, surgical anesthesia has been in the literature of medicine for some fifteen hundred years and there is scarcely a century in which there is not some very definite reference to it. To begin in the early modern time, Shakespeare in "Romeo and Juliet," written about 1590, made use of the traditions with regard to anesthesia in the plot of that play. Juliet is put to sleep by means of a narcotic preparation, "a potion," and is to sleep for some forty hours until after her burial and then she would be awakened by her husband who would carry her into exile with him until happier times might allow them to return home.

How strong that tradition was may be judged from a quotation from Tom Middleton's tragedy of "Women Beware Women" (act iv, scene i):

I'll imitate the pities of old surgeons
To this lost limb, who ere they show their art
Cast one asleep, then cut the diseased part.

Some three centuries before that there is a passage not unlike it from the life of St. Mungo, which is in manuscript in the British Museum, from the twelfth century. This was written by the celebrated Jocelyn, of Furness, the biographer of St. Patrick. That passage runs:

"It is perfectly clear to us that many having taken the drink of oblivion which physicians call the lethargion have as a result gone to sleep; incisions in their members and at times cauterizations even in their most vital parts, or abrasions have occurred without their feeling them in the least. After they were awaked from their sleep they were entirely ignorant of the fact that anything had been done to them."

Manifestly this writer had been very close to the actual practice of anesthesia for surgical purposes, otherwise he could not possibly have described the process so vividly in detail as he has actually done.

If we go back nearly a thousand years before that, there is another very striking passage in the history of anesthesia. This passage was written by St. Hilary of Poitiers and is to be found in his book on

the Trinity, of which there are a number of modern editions. For those who think of anesthesia as a modern discovery, it is astounding to read the straightforward account, as Hilary presents it, of how men could be brought under the influence of an anesthetic and have various quite serious operations, even to the amputation of limbs performed on them, without suffering any pain. Here are Hilary's own words. They occur in the midst of a discussion of the psychology of sensation. These old theological books contain an immense amount of material that would seem to have no direct reference to the general subject of the volume and yet represent the erudition of the time. Hilary said:

"When through some grave necessity part of the body must be cut away, the soul can be lulled to sleep by drugs which overcome the pain and produce in the mind a deathlike forgetfulness of its power of sense. Then the limb can be cut off without pain. The flesh is dead to all feeling and does not heed the deep thrust of the knife because the soul within is asleep."

That passage was written about 356. The practice of anesthesia for surgical purposes, or at least the very definite tradition of it, has been traced back to Alexandria when the great medical school of the university there made its magnificent contribution to medicine and surgery.

What has been said about anesthesia could be said also with regard to asepsis, for there was a great period during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when they were avoiding infection and getting some really wonderful results. They called it "union by first intention," *unio per primam intentionem*. That is a Latin expression which signifies that the original users of it did not think that the surgeon had to have pus in a wound. For some five hundred years after that time surgeons were very well satisfied to get what was called "laudable pus," and then came Lister with antiseptics and the gradual development of asepsis, but all of this had been anticipated in the older time in the magnificent hospitals they had in the thirteenth century.

In recent years we have come to realize that these people of the "bright ages," which used to be called the dark ages, anticipated us in many other things than those we have mentioned. During the past three years we have heard much about the Constitution of the United States and what a wonderful document it is. I believe that Gladstone, the distinguished English statesman, once declared that it was the greatest document that had ever come from the mind and hand of man. Our Supreme Court has been engaged in recent years in supporting and maintaining that Constitution, and everybody has been insisting that we must surely safeguard it from disturbance.

The great problem has been, where did we get it, that is, how did a

little group of representatives of the colonies, with very limited educational opportunities, succeed in drafting an instrument of these magnificent proportions that has served as the fundamental law of the republic for nearly a hundred and fifty years, and which will be preserved for as long more and even beyond that if the will of the people of the United States can prove effective? It has been subjected to many political trials and once to the arbitrage of a great war, the greatest up to that time in modern history. The question will recur insistently, where did we get it?

Some years ago while delving into old-time printing in Massachusetts I came across some sets of theses which Harvard men had to defend on Commencement morning before they received their degree of Bachelor of Arts. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw that these represented old-fashioned Scholastic philosophy as it had been studied in the thirteenth century universities—Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Bologna, Padua—in the flourishing days of Scholasticism. These theses had a number of propositions with regard to politics as well as jurisprudence and, above all, ethics. For instance, one of the original group of theses at Harvard runs—they were in Latin and had to be defended in Latin, so I translate: “Death should rather be undergone than a mortal sin committed.” Many of the old propositions condemned slavery and other abuses. Other theses set forth the rights of men, but also the rights of rulers. Many of them emphasized duties rather than rights. The rules for right living for the individual were side by side with those of government.

Harvard continued to have these theses down to the beginning of the nineteenth century, indeed the last of them printed was as late as 1820. All the other colonial colleges presented similar theses, Yale and Princeton, as well as William and Mary in Virginia, the University of Pennsylvania, King’s College in New York, now Columbia, and Brown. There were about a hundred in number for each occasion, and the theses sheets were passed out to those who, as interested visitors on the occasion, might care to take part in the public disputation which was held on Commencement morning.

Here, then, is where our Constitution comes from, and also the Declaration of Independence. More than half of the signers of the Declaration were college men who had studied their Scholastic philosophy. Just about one-half of the men who drafted the Constitution had been educated in the same way. I wrote a book about that subject called “Education of the Founding Fathers of the Republic.” When I was asked to talk at Convocation of the University of the State of New York this fall, I took for subject “The Fruits of the Past,” and talked about Scholasticism and the place that it had in the colonial colleges and the fact that as regards anesthesia and antiseptics and asepsis

these old scholarly university men had anticipated us in the best thoughts that we have in the modern time. While it is hard for many to realize how old is the new, nothing is clearer than that a great many of the things of the modern time are not at all the novelties they are supposed to be but come to us from the very long ago. Man has not changed a bit, except possibly for the worse, in all the centuries that we know anything definite about him, though in our complacency we have been prone to think of him as constantly making progress. That fond delusion the Great War largely destroyed. It was fondly hoped to be a war to end all war. Now we have made a great peace that threatens to end all peace.

CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE HEALING ARTS

(An Address to Guild of St. Luke, St. Cosmas and St. Damien,
Nov. 19, 1936.)

By REV. GEO. E. O'DONNELL, Litt.D.

Perhaps you saw in the *Philadelphia Record* of Saturday last (Nov. 14, 1936) a half-page discussion of euthanasia. Pictures of Lord Ponsonby and two prominent Philadelphia physicians accompanied an article by G. R. Alexander in which certain pertinent questions on the proposed English bill were given answers by the Philadelphia doctors. Dr. Charles W. Burr is in favor of euthanasia, "in theory," he says. Dr. Ludwig Loeb is against it.

I am not going into the subject of euthanasia. Your President, Dr. Daly, treated that topic decisively in a lecture which you probably heard. I should rather mention some thoughts which came to me while reading the article. My first impression was that the article was on the wrong page of the paper. It should have been with the comics. There is no flippancy in this suggestion. Most comics achieve their humor through situations of misunderstanding; unconscious on the part of the characterization, but, of course, deliberate on the part of the creator. When Moon Mullins asks for the foot of the Welsh rabbit, Moon is ignorant, but Willard, the comic strip artist, is not. Now, it is difficult to believe that some one was not deliberately striving for humor in the article under consideration. At least this is the more charitable interpretation. That both eminent doctors miss the main point about euthanasia—dominion over life—is not surprising. But when one of them is guilty of a fallacy so elemental that a high school student could detect it at a glance, we'd rather believe the good doctor hoped he wouldn't be taken too seriously.

Here are two of the questions with the answers Dr. Burr is quoted as giving:

Q. "Do you believe, in principle, that a patient suffering protracted excruciating pain with an incurable disease is entitled to euthanasia . . . ?"