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## MEDICINE AND MORALS

(An address delivered at a meeting of the St. Luke's Guild of Boston)

By FRANCIS J. DORE, S.J., M.D.

A MEDICAL career is one of the most fascinating in the world. Of its very essence, it necessarily brings one closer to real life than falls to the lot of most men. A doctor of any experience at all comes into contact with human nature in all its fulness, with its fads and its fancies, with its joys and its sadness, with its successes and its failures, with its aspirations and its lost hopes. It is his part to peer into the intimacy of the heart's deepest secrets in a way unknown and unrevealed to any other class of men save the priest in his sacramental capacity.

Yet as in every other line of human endeavor, in the medical profession there are some who are good and some who are bad, there are successful physicians and those who are not so; and, generally speaking, for the doctor as well as for any other man, his success or his failure depends largely on his personal goodness or his lack of it. It is perfectly true that some people seem to thrive who are known to be rogues; it is undoubtedly a fact that many a highly respected physician fails to achieve anything like wealth. A man may be a very good doctor, and never become a millionaire; in fact, most good doctors, whose time is occupied with the duties of their profession, are far from becoming rich. But if a man becomes a really good doctor, his life may rightly be counted a successful achievement despite comparative poverty, because success in medicine does not imply success in finance. In truth, medical men may boast that their profession is unique in its scorn of "filthy lucre." Though the reputation of men in other lines is usually measured by the size of their bank accounts, one of the sublime assets of the medical profession is the amount of charity it dispenses with constant and cheerful alacrity. In this way, the doctor re-lives the life of Him "Who went about Judea doing good."

In the daily practice of his profession, the doctor is trying always to neutralize and to prevent the necessity of his very existence. China is said to be the only country where the doctor is paid only while the patient remains well; but in all countries the true physician spends his entire life in trying to make sick people well, and thus to annihilate the reason for his position in society.

The medical profession also develops character in a remarkable manner. When we finally reach that land on the other side of the valley of death, we bring with us the character we have developed here, and it is that character which will receive an eternal recompense. Now character, like muscle, is developed by exercise; and every day of any good physician's life is dotted with acts of virtue which are the jewels of character. Along with therapeutics, he practices patience, long-suffering, fortitude, generosity, kindness, unselfishness, often to a

heroic degree. Life is made up of thoughts, words, and deeds; and the thoughts, words and deeds of a doctor are almost wholly concerned with the welfare of others rather than with his own. If as some one has lately said, "A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small package," the size of the package which contains the good deeds strewn along the life of a doctor must be very huge indeed.

But life on earth is a warfare, in which right is contending with wrong. No one escapes the assaults of temptation, and temptation in a medical career is usually subtle, masked, perfumed. Murder is wrong, of course, but in some particular case presented to the doctor, it is presented as his duty to save a reputation, or to relieve economic difficulties, or even to obtain a much-needed honorarium. A physician was seated in his office one day when two ladies were shown in. They were mother and daughter, and the older lady said that they had come from a long distance to him, as he had been recommended to them for his prudence as well as for his skill. The girl was pregnant; it was not at all her fault; her innocence had been betrayed by a fancied friend, and her entire future would be ruined unless the doctor relieved her. The physician replied that while he was very sorry for the girl, he was not that sort of man, and they had made a mistake in coming to him. The mother answered that of course they knew that he was not a regular abortionist, but he had a high reputation as a skilful surgeon, and this was simply a surgical operation; no one would know about it, even the girl's father had not been told; and she finished by taking out a check-book and signing her name, told him to put down any sum he wished. The physician had heavy bills to meet; the operation would not be difficult, the temptation was strong; but since he was a man of character, he rang the bell for the nurse to show the people out. They were both very surprised and very angry, and left assuring him that they would do their best to ruin his reputation.

It is my privilege to say something to you in regard to the position which the Catholic Church holds concerning certain aspects of medical practice. First, we should remember that the moral law, *i. e.* the law binding the conscience of every physician, is the same law which must be observed by every creature, whether Catholic or not. The reason is because the moral law is an ordinance established by the Supreme Being Who set this world in motion, and gives existence to all that inhabit it. God's existence nowadays is denied or challenged or at least ignored by a large number of people from whom has been withheld the sublime gift of faith, which is the dearest possession of all here.

Why God bestows faith on some and not on others is a mystery; and a mystery, we know, is something we recognize as a fact, though we cannot fully understand it. But just as a rude, uneducated person will accept as facts certain things told to him by one whom he respects,

though he cannot hope to understand and explain them as well as the authority that relates them, so we who are finite creatures, recognize that we cannot expect to know all the reasons why the Infinite Wisdom acts as He does; but we show our human wisdom by acknowledging His laws as the guides for our actions. This is true of all men who are dominated by their intellects. But the Catholic has in addition, for his direction and satisfaction, the authority of an Infallible Church which has the promise of her infallible Founder that she shall never teach error.

We all know that civilization depends on obedience to law, and that all law rests on authority. Without law and without its enforcement, a state of lawlessness ensues which inevitably results in chaos and anarchy. Even from the viewpoint of expediency, it is best for a Catholic physician, who lives under the authority of the Catholic Church, to yield his personal opinions to her wise decisions. He may be, and will sometimes be, mistaken; he has the assurance that his Church never will be. How is it, then, that the Church at times apparently reverses her decisions in regard to medical matters? At one time, operation for ectopic pregnancy was forbidden. Now it seems to be permitted, under certain conditions. Does not this show that the previous ruling was erroneous, and that the Church can make mistakes? Well, first, we know that papal infallibility extends only to "ex-Cathedra" pronouncements on matters of faith and morals, matters the denial of which, after such pronouncement, would render a person heretical. Secondly, the ruling in the case of ectopics amounted simply to this: that considering the state of knowledge about the subject at the time, the operation was illicit. When further investigation by competent medical authority clarifies the condition, then the objection to the operation is thereby removed under rigid conditions.

Modern science acts, and especially talks, as if God and His authority no longer had any binding force, as if spirit had no existence save in our imagination, as if we all were but the final results of evolved matter. It is stated that there is no such thing as a vital principle within us, because life itself is only a figment of the mind. A professor of medicine a few years ago wrote that the difference between life and death is rapidly being done away with. Another taught that life and death are simply a question whether anabolism or katabolism is prevailing in the body. It is remarkable how far astray from ordinary common sense a man can go when he sets himself up in place of God. Learned professors cannot recognize such a condition as life, and yet any child knows at once the difference between a living and a dead dog.

In the latest edition of his text-book of Biology, a professor in one of the leading universities of the country discusses the origin of life,

and being somewhat averse to admit the outmoded theory of spontaneous creation, and rejecting creation as unscientific, he falls back on the Cozmozoa Theory, according to which, life has never risen "de novo" on this earth, but has been carried hither from somewhere else in the universe. In this unique way, he just transfers the problem to that other planet from which life traveled here, and is not concerned as to how it reached the other planet. Since for such people there is no such thing as creation, there is necessarily no religion, and no inconvenient obligations that would follow from admitting religion. To the modern scientist, religion, as one of them has defined it, "is simply a collection of emotional experiences." They evidently are not aware of the fact that the word "religion" comes from the same Latin verb as the word "ligature" and means "to bind," and not "to feel." The function of religion is not to provide thrills of sensory disturbances, but to furnish principles which are to govern our emotions and standards which are to direct our actions.

If we are to discard the idea of a Creator, we must admit the emergence of life from lifeless matter somewhere. But such an emergence would demand a process far greater than what a Catholic means by a miracle; and according to such scientists, miracles really do not happen. However, we are not to think that Catholics lack great names in the field of science. On the walls of the Science Building at Boston College there are chiseled the names of some of the greatest leaders in science which the world has yet known, and whose great learning brought them inevitably nearer rather than further away from God. In his old age, Pasteur said that as a result of his long studies he had attained to the faith of a Breton peasant; and that if he studied yet more, he hoped to reach the faith of the Breton peasant's wife. The renowned entomologist, Fabre, wrote: "I can't say that I believe in God; I see Him. Without Him, I can understand nothing. Without Him, all is darkness. You could take my skin from me more easily than my faith in God." And the more intelligent of the non-Catholic scientists of the present day are cautiously admitting God's existence. One of the recognized leaders of science in England made the following statement in the *London Times*: "Today there is wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science, approaches to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not, of course, our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown, exist as thoughts."

As a sample of biased mentality, on the other hand, one of Huxley's

arguments is classic. He says, "One of the greatest merits of Materialistic Evolution is that it occupies a position of complete and irreconcilable antagonism to that consistent and vigorous enemy of the highest intellectual, moral, and social life of mankind—the Catholic Church." It would be difficult to find a more unscientific statement. As a contrast to such testimony, let me cite the following passage from the address of a Methodist clergyman in Seattle: "I like the Roman Catholic Church, because it stands so immovable in its allegiance to Jesus Christ as very God. None of its leaders ever questions the divinity of Jesus. I like it because it believes in the religious training of its children, and at great sacrifice of time and money, gives that training. I like it, for it stands for the purity of home life and the sanctity of the marriage vows. Thank God for that Church's strong and clear protest against the cheap divorce-mills that disgrace our American civilization. I honor it for its defense of the Bible. I especially thank God for the stand that Church takes in this land against anarchy and Socialism. I go to sleep every night with a firmer feeling of security because we have in this city the Roman Catholic Church."

The Catholic doctor has the great advantage over those who are not physicians of realizing from his own daily experience that it is impossible to explain adequately in terms of physics or chemistry the natural processes which are constantly going on in the human body. Not to cite any of the embryological phenomena which occur so regularly and so uniformly in the development of the body that any exception is immediately remarkable, it is enough to mention the selectivity of the tissues, which is so evident in the process of absorption and assimilation of food; the appearance or the non-appearance of stomata in the capillaries, according to the need of having the plasma transuded into the lymph spaces, or having it returned to the vessels when too much blood has been lost by hemorrhage; the removal of waste matters from the blood into the renal tubules, and the return lower down along the tubule of any matters which could be further used, and which should not have been allowed to escape—and this quite independently of the concentration; the sifting through the endothelial membranes into the serous cavities of lymph, deprived of its nutritive or its waste content; these and other similar processes of daily occurrence familiar to you all, simply cannot be explained by filtration, diffusion, or osmosis, as all honest physiologists admit. The most simple plant or animal manufactures substances which the most learned chemist cannot reproduce. Everyone recognizes the difference between a real and an artificial flower. A chemist not only cannot make a living thing of any sort, though he has been trying for many years, but he cannot reproduce even in a dead state, what every living thing easily and abundantly manufactures. Did you ever hear of the artificial production



of a piece of steak, which is produced without trouble by the lowing kine, grazing in the field?

We know what enzymes are, though no one has ever seen them; but we postulate their existence on account of what happens as a result of their activities in the various juices of the body. No man may see God and live; but we are forced to acknowledge His existence on account of the many evidences of His activities in this world. When you were children, you read the story of Robinson Crusoe, and you doubtless remember how the shipwrecked sailor, who had been, as he thought, alone on a desert island, one morning discovered on the sand of the beach the print of a human foot, and though he actually saw no one, he was sure that he was not alone. So you who are constantly working with the changes of the human body in health and disease are justified in demanding the presence of a soul, and of a Creator, by what you observe therein. You perhaps recall the poem of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, which begins:

"Not in the world of light alone,  
Where God has built His blazing throne,  
Nor yet alone on earth below  
With belted seas that come and go,  
And endless isles of sunlit green,  
Is all thy Maker's glory seen—  
Look in upon thy wondrous frame,  
Eternal Wisdom still the same."

A doctor supposed to be a Catholic recently replied to the question of a medical student, who enquired, "Can I be a Catholic in good standing, and yet become a successful physician?" that it was quite impossible in certain branches of medicine. He was referring to the practice of what is euphemistically called "therapeutic abortion." The Catholic Church condemns this practice, just as the State condemns criminal abortion. The only difference between these two is that one is taught in most medical schools, and the other puts the abortionist in jail. Each is murder, call it what they will. It is depriving a human being of life unjustly. Jesuits are often accused of having taught the doctrine that "the end justifies the means." Jesuits never advocated such a doctrine, but those who accuse them of it as a crime, practice that very thing as if it were a virtue. They intend, they say, to save the mother's life, which is a very good thing indeed; but the means chosen is murder, which is a very evil thing. The question of its justification in particular cases is so often a personal thing. Consulting physicians will not agree often as to its necessity. A few years ago, tuberculosis was said to be sufficient cause for this operation. Nowadays that opinion is no longer held by the majority. Cardiacs are bad risks, it is said. Yet it sometimes happens that one doctor thinks that the woman will die unless an abortion is performed; another

doctor will advise against it, and, with proper care and rest, a successful parturition is accomplished. One hears the objection: "But this woman has two or three children already; and the task of caring for another will surely be too much for her in her weak condition." And the reply might well be: The oldest child is baptized, and will probably go to heaven if dead. Kill it then, and give this unborn child a chance for existence. Who would take such counsel; and yet it should be taken, if the abortionist were only logical.

Allied to this topic is the subject of birth control, which is constantly growing in force. Many who would stop short of actual murder, consider this practice as a good substitute. But those who acknowledge a Creator realize that His dominion over life not only begins with life, but over whatever would lead to life. The instruments He created to cooperate with His plans can only be used in accordance with His divine will. In the plan of God, parents are essential to the existence of future members of human society. It is wrong, therefore, for them to perform acts which are subversive to such future members. Besides, it is bad medical practice. Experience has shown that temporary sterility, obtained by the use of contraceptives, leads in many cases to permanent sterility. It is also a fact that sexual excitation without the normal physiological outlet, leads to various nervous disorders, and is sometimes the exciting cause of tumors of the uterus.

(Continued in next issue.)



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