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THOMAS LINACRE, M.D.

BY SIR JAMES RISDON BENNETT, M.D., EX-PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.

AMONG English Worthies of former times Thomas Linacre holds a high place. In his own profession of medicine he was esteemed "the ornament of his age," and his name is remembered with honour as the founder of the Royal College of Physicians of London, of which he was the first President. He was not less distinguished as a man of learning and of lofty character. Of him it was said that "no Englishman of his age had such famous masters, Demetrius and Politian at Florence, such noble patrons as Lorenzo de Medici, Henry VII and Henry VIII; such high-born scholars as Prince Arthur and Princess Mary of England; or such learned friends, for among the latter were Erasmus, Melancthon, Latimer, Tunstall, Dean Colet, and Sir Thomas More. In the reign of Henry VIII, when Linacre flourished (he having been born about the year 1460), the practice of medicine was scarcely elevated above that of the mechanical arts, and those among the laity by whom it was practised were for the most part little better instructed than artisans. No society devoted to learning existed in England, except such as were connected with the hierarchy, and which were fettered by the seclusion and obligations of monastic and religious life. The Italian Republics had, however, established institutions solely for the advancement of science and literature, which had already acquired great celebrity, and to which students from all other countries were attracted.

Linacre, a descendant of the Linacres of Linacre Hall, in Derbyshire, was born in Canterbury, and, having received his first grammatical instruction in the monastery school of Christ Church, Canterbury, proceeded to Oxford, and became a Fellow of All Souls' College, and about A.D. 1485 travelled into Italy with his former master, William Tilly, or De Selling, who had been appointed ambassador from Henry VII to the Court of Rome.

It does not appear that at this time he had definitely determined to devote himself either to the Church or to the study of physic, but rather to perfect himself in the study of Greek, and to profit by intercourse with Politian and the other distinguished scholars who at that time adorned the Italian Universities, and who were favoured with the patronage of Lorenzo de Medici, "the Magnificent." The young English scholar attracted the notice of Lorenzo, who associated him with his two sons, Piero and Giovanni, as their companion, and enabled him to participate in the instruction of their preceptors, as well as in that of the celebrated Demetrius Chalcondylas, a Greek who had fled from Constantinople when taken by the Turks. On quitting Florence he visited Rome and Venice, and formed acquaintance and lasting friendship with the most dis-

tinguished scholars of those cities. From Venice he went to Padua, which was then the most celebrated school of physic in the world, and here he devoted himself to medicine, and took the degree of Doctor of Medicine with the highest applause. This degree was confirmed to him by his own University, that of Oxford, where he resumed his studies and the privileges of his Fellowship. About the year 1501 he was summoned to the Court of Henry VII to undertake the double office of preceptor and physician to Prince Arthur, and subsequently that of the King's domestic physician. This, though one of the earliest appointments of the kind of which we have any record, was not the first. The earliest warrant for the attendance of a physician at Court appears to be that which is dated 33 Henry VII. By this warrant the King, with the consent of his privy council, deputed to three physicians and two surgeons the regulation of his diet and the administration of such medicines and remedies as might be sufficient for his cure. These remedies are specifically set forth in the warrant, and present a formidable regimen to which the King, by consent of his privy council, might be subjected. The King, however, does not appear to have been satisfied with the treatment that was adopted, for in the following year, on a return of his complaint, he reverted to the aid of the ecclesiastics, and by an order under the privy seal summoned to his aid Gilbert Kemer, Dean of Salisbury, "as an expert, notable, and proved man in the craft of medicines," and who enjoyed the confidence of his royal patient—not less as a physician than as a spiritual adviser.

Linacre, on his appointment, was associated with one Giovanni Battista, an Italian, who had more pretension to the title of astrologer than physician. On the death of the young Prince, Linacre devoted himself altogether to the practice of physic, and acquired great celebrity. Erasmus, being in England at this time, appears to have availed himself of the medical skill of his friend, for there is a letter from him to Linacre, dated from Paris in 1506, describing his complaints, and lamenting the want of Linacre's advice and the loss of one of his prescriptions, which the pharmacopœist had neglected to return.

On the accession of the new King, Linacre left London, and again betook himself to classical and philosophical studies at Oxford, continuing, however, to practise as a physician. He was soon honoured by the appointment of physician to Henry VIII, and resided occasionally at Court. His professional fame at this time was great, and the foremost men in Church and State committed to him the care of their health, among whom were the Lord High Treasurer, the Primate Warham, and Cardinal Wolsey.

On the deep sea's brim,
 In beauty quite excelling,
 White, and light, and trim,
 Stands my lady's dwelling.
 Stainless is the door,
 With patent polish glowing ;
 A little plot before,
 With pinks and sweet peas growing.

And when in you go
 To my fairy's dwelling,
 You will find a show
 Of beauty, past all telling ;
 Wealth of pretty wares,
 Curtains, pictures, laces,
 Sofas, tables, chairs,
 All in their proper places.

But above all fair
 Of which my song is telling,
 Sits my lady there,
 The mistress of the dwelling.
 Dressed in serge dark blue,
 With trimming white and snowy ;
 All so nice and new,
 With nothing false and showy.

Dainty is her head,
 Quite the classic oval—
 Just the thing you read
 In the last new novel,
 But you never saw,—
 For Nature still is chary
 To reach the perfect law
 She modelled in my fairy.

An eye whose glance doth roam
 O'er the azure spaces,
 But still is most at home
 'Mid happy human faces.
 Cheeks of healthy red,
 With native freshness glowing,
 By the strong breeze spread
 From purple moorland blowing.

And a look of warm
 Welcome to the stranger,
 Whom the sudden storm
 Hath cast on her from danger ;
 And a board well spread,
 Bountiful and bonnie,
 With milk and barley bread,
 Bramble jam and honey.

And for wit and brains,
 Though not taught at college,
 Her dainty head contains
 All sorts of curious knowledge ;
 Every nook she knows,
 Every burn she crosses,
 Where the rarest grows
 Of fungus, ferns, and mosses.

And when flowers are few,
 And suns of heat are chary,
 She has work to do
 Beseems a bright-eyed fairy ;
 A telescope she keeps
 For lofty observation,
 Through which she finely peeps
 At all the starry nation.

But she's more than wise,
 Better far than clever,
 From her heart arise
 Thoughts of kindness ever ;
 As the sun's bright ray
 Every flower is kissing,
 All that comes her way
 Takes from her a blessing.

Where a widow weeps,
 She with her is weeping ;
 Where a sorrow sleeps,
 She doth watch it sleeping ;
 Where the sky is night,
 With one sole tint of sadness,
 Let her come in sight,
 And all is turned to gladness.

And now, if you should fear
 I'm painting out a story,
 Ask, and you will hear
 The truth at Tobermory.
 In beauty Mull excels
 All ocean-girdled islands,
 And there this lady dwells,
 Sweet angel of the Highlands.

JOHN STUART BLACKIE.

[This lay is no ideal picture, but a portrait from life of Henrietta A. Bird, daughter of the late Rev. E. Bird, Rector of Wigton, Huntingdonshire, and only sister of Isabella L. Bird (Mrs. Bishop), the well-known traveller and author. The "Little Lady" of Tobermory died there of typhoid fever on June 5, 1880, loved and honoured by all around her, who still cherish her memory as that of a ministering angel. Her sister, now a widow, makes the cottage described in the lay her home.—ED. L. H.]

What were the precise motives that induced him to abandon the position that he had obtained, together with the practice of medicine, it is difficult to say. But when past middle life he resolved to devote himself to theology and the duties of the priesthood. He appears to have been ordained either by Warham or Wolsey, about the year 1509, after which date we have a curious record of preferments conferred on him in rapid succession, and as rapidly resigned. The only reason for this that has been assigned is either creditable to the patrons nor those who were thus rewarded. But it seems to have been the practice of the Court and nobility thus to reward the physicians who had rendered them service, and who, instead of holding the preferments given them for the sake of the emoluments to be derived from them resigned them, with the connivance of the bishops, for the sake of the pensions which they secured from the succeeding incumbents. So early as Henry VII's time the distinction prevailed between the methods of paying the physician and the apothecary who supplied the medicine. The services of the former were usually treated to be paid "in reward," a term expressive of a gift or honorarium, not like those of the latter, in the form of a legal demand. It was not, indeed, till the recent Medical Act of 1858 that a physician had the power of enforcing by legal means any payment for his services, and even in the present day Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians, by a voluntary act of their own, have approved themselves of the power of enforcing legal payment of their fees, preferring, as in the case of barristers, to consider their payment as an honorarium.

Whilst most occupied with professional avocations, Linacre found time to continue his philological pursuits and the study of the writings of antiquity, but in common with the laity, and, indeed, many of the clergy, he wholly neglected the sacred writings, of which he was totally ignorant. With the study of divinity he, however, took up the Greek Testament, but we have no record of his making any attempt to render to the Greek Scriptures similar services to those which he had rendered to the Greek medical classics. The time for making the Scriptures available by the laity in general had not yet come. But we proceed to notice those labours by which Linacre erected a perpetual monument of his enlightened views and generous aims.

Associating himself with John Chambre and some others of his medical friends, and with the aid and recommendation of Cardinal Wolsey, he obtained from Henry VIII letters patent for founding a College of Physicians, with a view to the improvement and more orderly exercise of the art of physic and the repression of singular unlearned and incompetent practitioners of that faculty. By the terms of this charter, and by a subsequent Act of Parliament, the constitution of the College was defined and the powers and privileges conferred were set forth. The government of all who practised physic was entrusted to them, and no one was allowed to practise that art in London, or within the distance of seven

miles, except such as were licensed by the College, nor subsequently was any one permitted to practise throughout England, except such as had been examined and licensed either by the College or by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The supervision of the shops and drugs of the apothecaries within the City of London was also given to the College.

Of the new College thus founded Linacre was the first president, an honour that he might justly claim, not only as having been the prime mover in its establishment, but as providing almost entirely from his own resources the means for carrying out its objects. Nothing was granted in the way of funds by the Crown; the support of the institution was from the first, and has been until the present day, thrown upon the Fellows. At that time Linacre had a house in Knight-riding Street, where the meetings of the College were at first held, which he eventually made over to them, and by whom it was possessed till the year 1860, when it was taken by Act of Parliament to provide a site for the Court of Probate and other courts and offices. The meetings of the College continued to be held in Linacre's house for nearly a century, till the first College building was erected in Amen Corner, and which was destroyed in the Great Fire of London. The noble objects which Linacre had in view, both in reference to the welfare of the profession and the community at large, were most fully attained, and "perhaps no founder," says Dr. Friend, "ever had the good fortune to have his design succeed more to his wish."

Whether this could with truth be said of his equally generous efforts on behalf of learning and physic, in connection with the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, must be doubted. Shortly before his death he obtained the sign manual to letters patent for founding "three separate lectures to the glory of God and the true art of medicine, for the relief of the fallen and the increase of the whole realm." Two of these were to be appropriated to Oxford and one to Cambridge, and they were to be distinguished by the name of "Linacre's Lectures." To carry out these objects he assigns certain manors, of which he had long been possessed, to four trustees—Sir Thomas More, Bishop Tunstall, Mr. Stokesley, Prebend of Westminster, and Mr. Shelly, Counsellor-at-Law.

"Although," says his biographer, "these individuals were well known to Linacre and to each other, the choice was singularly unfortunate. More, in addition to other offices, had afterwards to sustain the weight of the Court of Chancery, and to uphold the ceremonies of the Royal Court. Tunstall was involved in the business of the sees over which he successively presided; Stokesley, his successor in the see of London, boasted of devoting his time to the detection of heresy and its reformation by fire and the rack; whilst Shelly—probably the most competent of the four to discharge the duties of his appointment—had neither the influence nor the power to execute the provisions of the licence without the concurrence of his colleagues."

It is not, therefore, surprising that Linacre's intentions were not fully carried out. In the religious distractions in which the country became involved the proceeds of the estates were lost or greatly diminished, and no steps were taken to carry out the original design till the third year of Edward VI's reign. Tunstall, the only surviving trustee, then assigned two lectures—not to the University, but to Merton College, Oxford, and the other, not to the University, but to St. John's College, Cambridge. "A more glaring instance," says his biographer, Dr. Johnson,¹ "of abuse on the part of trustees has seldom occurred." The office of the lecturers thus appointed was to explain or comment on the writings of Galen and Hippocrates. But little good has accrued either to learning or medicine from this noble bequest of Linacre, and funds which might have largely contributed to the advancement of medical science and the reputation of the Universities have been, to a great extent, diverted to other purposes, although there is now a Linacre Professor of Physiology at Oxford and a Lecturer on Medicine at Cambridge. The complete success of his magnificent design in the establishment of the Royal College of Physicians Linacre lived to see, except in one particular. The privileges which had been accorded by Henry VIII to the Bishop of London and Dean of St. Paul's (at that time the illustrious Colet) of granting licences to practise medicine to those who had been examined and approved by them, like all other ecclesiastical privileges, were held both by them and their successors in tenacious grasp, and it was not till after the lapse of a hundred and fifty years that they relinquished the exercise of their *imperium in imperio* in defiance of the royal letters by which the College had been established, although during all this time they had proclaimed their incompetency for the task assigned them by calling to their aid four physicians to ascertain the competence of the candidates for their licences. But long before Linacre's death his College acquired that rank among the learned institutions of the country which it has ever retained. The influence which it speedily exercised on the profession and on the public weal was abundantly manifested even in its founder's lifetime. It is not too much to say that the superior social influence and re-

putation which the profession enjoys in this country, as compared with any other, are mainly due to the wisdom, sagacity, and generosity of its founder in the establishment of the Royal College of Physicians.

During many years of his life Linacre had been a great sufferer from calculous disease, and had frequently been compelled to forego the emoluments of his profession and abandon important offices through illness. He at length was worn out by suffering and died on the 20th October 1524, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. He was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral near the north door, a spot chosen by himself and specified in his will. Through the neglect of his executor more than thirty years elapsed before his grave was denoted by any memorial. In 1557 Dr. Johannes Caius, who was then President of the College and who rivalled Linacre in learning and devotion to his profession, erected at his private cost a monument to his predecessor in office, and in learned and eloquent Latin epitaph recorded his claims to the gratitude of mankind.

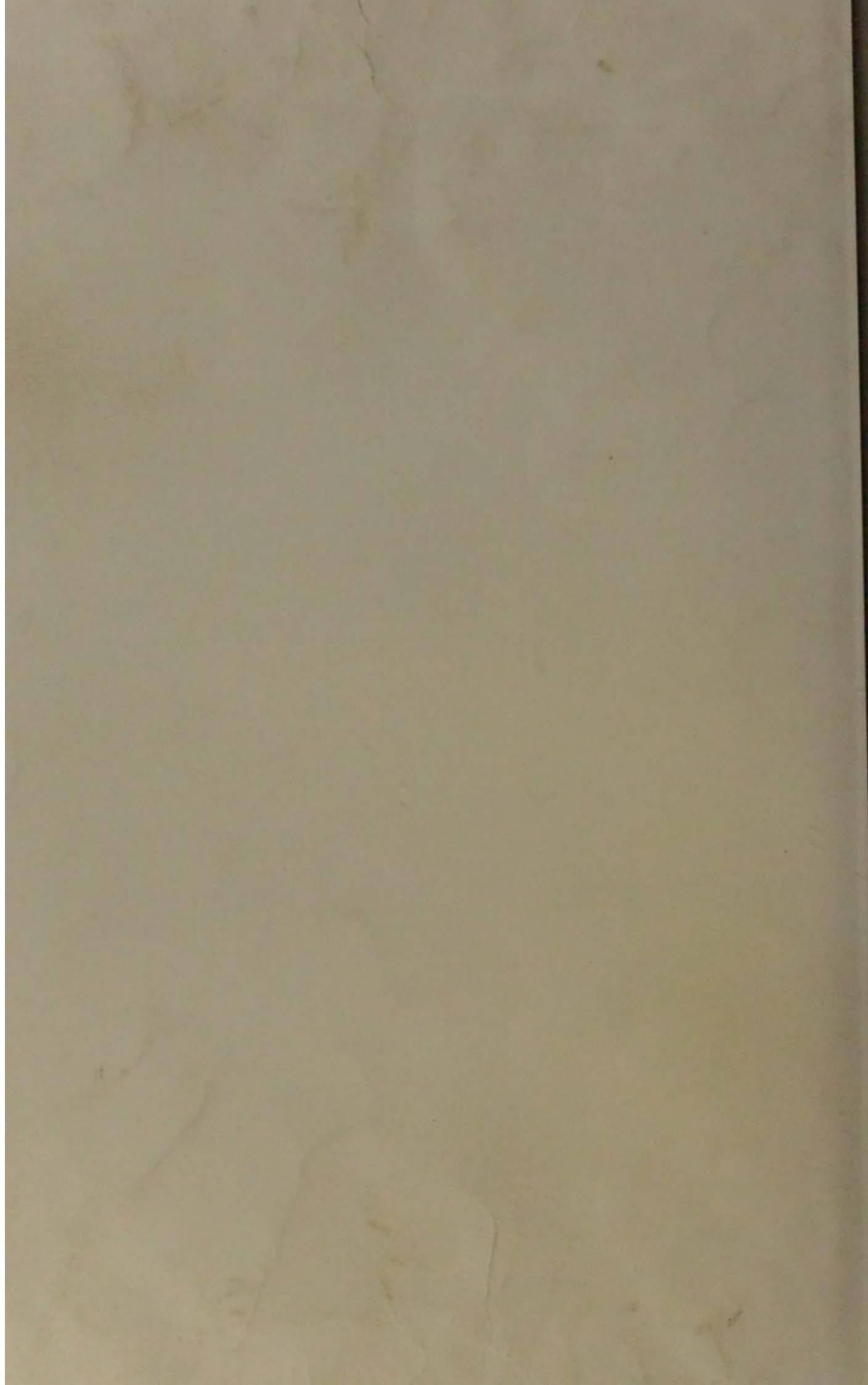
This monument was destroyed by the Great Fire in 1666, which involved the church and many other historical edifices. We give in a note the lost inscription.¹ There is an original picture of Linacre in Kensington Palace, a copy of which is in the possession of the College, and there is a bronze bust of him by Sir H. Cheete in the library of All Souls' College, Oxford.

Linacre's published works consist of translations from the Greek into Latin of Proclus's *Sphæra*, of various of Galen's treatises, and of two philological essays, which had a high reputation in their day, and contributed greatly to a more perfect understanding of Latin. He left no original medical writing by which we might judge of him as a physician.

¹ Thomas Lynacrus, Regis Henrici VIII, Medicus. Vir et Græcè Latinè, atque in re Medicâ longe eruditissimus; Multos ætate languentes, et qui jam animam desponderant, vitæ restituit; Multos Galeni opera in Latinam linguam, mirâ et singulari facundiâ vertit. Egregium opus de emendatâ structurâ Latini sermonis, amicorum rogatu, paulo ante mortem edidit. Medicinæ studiosis Oxoniæ publicè lectiones duas, Cantabrigiæ unam, in perpetuum stabilivit. In hac urbe Collegium Medicorum fieri suâ industriâ curavit, cujus et Præsidentis proximus electus est. Fraudes dolosque mirè perosus; fidem amicis; omnibus ordinibus juxta clarus; aliquot annos antequam obierat Presbyter factus. Plenus annis, ex hac vitâ migravit, multum desideratus. Anno Domini 1524, die 20 Octobris.

Vivit post funera Virtus.
Thomæ Lynacro clarissimo Medico
Johannes Caius posuit anno 1657.

¹ "Life of Linacre." By Dr. J. Noble Johnson. 8vo. London: 1835.



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