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EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY

SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., F.S.A.

"A SYSTEM OF SURGERY" BY MASTER JOHN ARDERNE

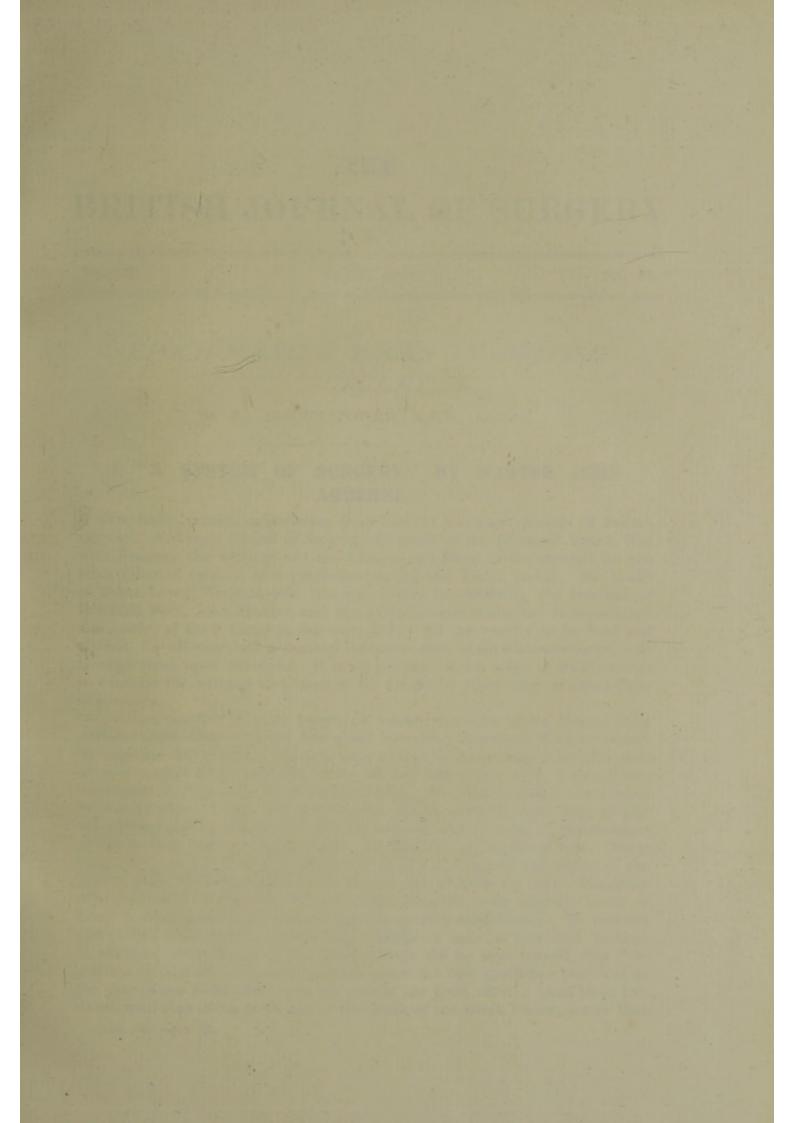
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EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY.

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I. "A SYSTEM OF SURGERY" BY MASTER JOHN ARDERNE.

A FEW books remain outstanding from each of the great periods of British surgery. Arderne's System of Surgery, the result of the Hundred Year's War with France; the writings of Gale, Clowes, and Read in the struggle for the recognition of surgery as a profession during the Tudor period; the books of Peter Lowe, Woodall, and Wiseman under the Stuarts; the treatises of Percivall Pott, John Hunter, and Sir Astley Cooper under the Hanoverians; and lastly, of Lord Lister in our own days. All are worthy to be read and re-read, for all exercised a marked influence upon their contemporaries, and through them upon ourselves. It is the purpose of this series of short articles to examine the writings and to show the means by which they attained their importance.

I have written at some length on former occasions about Master John Arderne (1307-1380?) as the first great operating surgeon in England whose writings are still extant. There is little to be said about him personally that is new, except that, browsing in the Record Office last year, I found two documents dealing with his domestic affairs. The first is dated 1348, when he was 41 years of age. By it he agrees, jointly with Ellen his wife, to pay six shillings and eightpence for 18 acres of land, and 11 acres of meadowland at Mitcham in Surrey, together with two shillings and sixpence rent. Three years later, in 1351, he was granted a licence to transfer the whole of the land to John de Ware, but there is no mention of Ellen his wife. The story is a sad one, as I read it. He came home from the wars after the battle of Crecy in 1346, a successful surgeon with many influential friends. He married and settled with his wife at Mitcham. Within a year his wife died, perhaps in childbed, more likely of the Black Death, for he says himself that "he dwelled in Newark in Nottinghamshire from the first pestilence that was in the year of our Lord 1349, unto the year of our Lord 1370". And these two dates, with that of his birth and of the death of the Black Prince, are all that

he cares to remember. It is evident that he sold his newly-bought estate and moved to Newark, where he would be welcomed by the Earl of Lancaster, under whom he had served, and later by John of Gaunt. He built up a large surgical practice amongst the great landowners, and in his old age he set himself to write a System of Surgery.

The System consists of a series of treatises which could be bought separ-Manuscripts were expensive at the time they were written, and surgeons would buy only the section dealing with the subject in which they were interested. Some of the sections, therefore, had a large circulation. others had a smaller sale, if we may judge by the number of manuscripts of the Treatise on Fistulæ, as compared with those on the Diseases of Women, which are still to be found in our public libraries. Originally written in Latin propria manu", with my own hand, as he says in the treatise on Diseases of the Eve, they were soon translated into English, some by North countrymen, others by scribes of the South Country. They were largely read, but they were not reproduced during the troubled times of the Wars of the Roses, and, having escaped the printing press at the end of the fifteenth century, there was some danger of their being entirely forgotten. Fortunately the treatises were collected into a portly volume entitled Practica Magistri Johannes de Arderne. One is in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and another is in the Library of the British Museum. The latter, from which the Keeper of the Manuscripts has allowed me to reproduce Plates I and II, is beautifully illustrated and may have been a presentation copy. The work of collecting the treatises has not been done skilfully in either case. No method has been adopted, and parts of one section have been allowed to intervene, so that it is only by reading the whole that the work of Arderne can be properly understood. When this is done it is obvious that Arderne's collected works form a fairly complete system of surgery as it was then understood, when surgery had not yet been divorced from medicine and when neither medicine nor surgery had freed itself from the herb lore of Saxon times, even for so advanced a surgeon as John Arderne.

The first section of the System deals with Hæmorrhage. It states when a patient should be bled, and gives formulæ for stopping bleeding in cancer, in bleeding piles, and in menorrhagia. Another section treats of Diseases of the Eyes, another of Diseases of the Male Generative Organs, and another of Diseases of Women. There is an excellent section on Diseases of the Kidney, with advice to those who suffer from renal calculus. The symptoms and treatment of Intestinal Obstruction are described with admirable vividness, and Gout is treated of at length, for it was a common complaint amongst the wealthy nobles who lived luxuriously at a time when there were no satisfactory purgatives. Fistulæ, whether from festering wounds or of the ordinary rectal type, are also dealt with exhaustively. They were common as a result of arrow wounds and when knights in heavy armour spent long days in the saddle in all weathers. Incidentally there is a supplementary section into which Arderne threw a whole series of interesting cases which had come under his observation at different times.

Cancer of the Male Breast.—The great merit of the System is that the author writes from a clinical standpoint. The general scheme of each section

is to illustrate the diseases from personal experience and to give details of the patients whom the author himself had treated. It is still readable, therefore, for it gives a picture not only of the practice and trials of a surgeon but also of the conditions under which a patient lived in the fourteenth century. Here is a good example of his method of writing. The case was clearly a cancer of the male breast: "To a priest of Colstone near Bynghame [Colston Bassett in Nottinghamshire there fell a sore in the right pap within the skin, upon the top of the pap as it were a little knot about the size of a pea with itching. And the aforesaid knot grew continuously till it was as large as the egg of a hen and looked like a top. The colour of the sore was livid, mingled with red, and it discharged a wateriness. It felt hard, and when two years were passed he was taught by a lady to lay a plaster upon it and to drink the drink of Antioch for a long time. And when he perceived that the aforesaid medicines availed him nothing he went into the town of Nottingham to be let blood, and when the barber perceived the aforesaid knot he asked of him whether he would be helped about it and told him that he knew of a cure for it and could heal him. The priest said he would fain be helped, but nevertheless he said to him he would ask counsel if it might be done to him as he said. And in the same town there was a wise surgeon [i.e., John Arderne himself] of the which the said priest had knowledge, and he went to him and asked counsel if that he were curable, or if that he might suffer any cutting or corrosive or any such other medicines. And the said leech warned him that he should on no manner put no corrosive nor any other violent medicines nor allow any cutting to be done, for if he did he promised that it would bring him to his death without any recovery".

A Case of Traumatic Tetanus.—There was "a gardener who, while he worked amongst the vines, cut his hand with a hook upon a Friday after the feast of [the translation of] Saint Thomas of Canterbury in summer [July 7], so that the thumb was wholly separated from the hand except at the joint where it was joined to the hand, and it could be bent backward to his arm and there streamed out much blood.

"And as touching the cure. The thumb was first reduced to its proper position and sewn on and the bleeding was stopped with Lanfrank's red powder and with the hairs of a hare and the dressing was not removed until the third day. When it was removed there was no bleeding. Then there was put upon it those medicines which engender blood, redressing the wound once every day. The wound began to purge itself and to pour out matter. And on the fourth night after, the blood began to break out about midnight and he lost almost two pounds of it by weight. And when the bleeding was stopped the wound was re-dressed daily as before. Also on the eleventh night about the same time the bleeding broke out again in greater quantity than it did the first time. Nevertheless the blood was staunched, and by the morning the patient was so taken with the cramp in the cheeks and in the arm that he was not able to take any meat into his mouth, nor could he open his mouth, and on the fifteenth day the bleeding broke out again, and on the eighteenth day the blood broke out again beyond all measure, and always the cramp continued and he died on the twentieth day ".

He says, describing a case of facial paralysis, that "it is a kind of cramp which turneth the mouth of a man or woman down to the ear in the manner of a fish called a flounder. Note well, if the crookedness of the mouth endure for six months it shall never be cured". Incidentally he seems to have seen several cases of diphtheria, for he begs his readers to "note this diligently that in quinsy and in all swellings of the throat and neck and in all difficulty of swallowing, as when the patient may not be able to swallow meat or drink, I have seen many die thereof within five days through strangling".

There is a clear description of intestinal obstruction under the name of passio iliaca. "It cometh with constipation of the belly and busy casting [vomiting] and with huge acheing as though the guts were being bored with a wymball [gimlet]. And it hath this difference from Colic, for in Iliac there is more ache and more wallowing now on the right side and now on the left side, and it sooner slayeth through its torment than doth the Colic. And in the Iliac the ache is most from the navel upwards, and the matter that should pass out beneath-forth cometh out of the mouth and in other cases there happeneth many cursed sicknesses as hiccoughing, the cramp, and coldness and stinking of all the body. And all these be mortal signs if they be with continual vomiting". As regards colic it is possible to distinguish renal colic from colic of the bowels because in renal colic "the sorrow of the reynes is felt whilst going to and fro", i.e., when walking or riding.

Arderne distinguishes between inflammation of the kidney and a botch or abscess of the kidney, and between a botch of the kidney and a botch of the bladder. Botch of the bladder leads him to speak of strangury, and strangury of the chaudepisse or "burning of the urine", i.e., gonorrhæa, with which he was familiar and treated with mucilaginous injections. He also gives details of a case of soft sores which had been unsatisfactorily

treated by "a lady" before the patient applied to Arderne.

Dysuria is classified into the cases "when the urine is utterly denied", i.e., suppression, which "is a sign of death within seven days", and "difficulty

of pissing" or retention.

A stone impacted in the urethra "causeth the patient to suffer right great pain and intolerable sorrow. It may be pushed back into the bladder by an instrument of silver or latten such as may be made in every good town by Craftsmen that maketh pins for women's heads or at the goldsmiths. Many a one have I so holpen. I have seen young men and old in the which the stones have been so great that they could neither come out by the eye of the yard nor be pushed back but always abideth in the middle of the yard. And I cured them easily and quickly in this manner: First, I took the patient and laid him grovelling and then I bound the yard on both sides of the stone with linen bands, so that the stone might nowhere flee away, and with a little incision upon the stone with a lancet or with a razor I had out the stone, and after that I sewed the outer skin over the hole with a needle and thread, and then I laid on a dressing of white of an egg mixed with finely ground wheaten flour and left it for three days, and within fifteen days I had him perfectly cured".

There is an interesting sidelight upon the chivalrous period in which the System was written. A modern writer identifies his patients by giving their initials; Arderne does so by tricking their armorial bearings. He gives the following account of a patient: "I saw a man who could not move nor lift either foot or leg, nor could he draw up his foot, and even though it were put to a hot fire it would have been burnt, for he felt nothing, and yet he suffered no great pain and he was well enough in every other part of his body and could eat, drink and sleep well, but he could not go to stool on account of the constipation of his belly". The shield (Plate II) put against this passage was used by William, Lord of Douglas, who is said to have died of fever after a short illness in 1384. In the light of this record it seems that he had been under treatment for a slight paralytic attack, so that his fatal illness may have been due to a cerebral hæmorrhage. This William, as the first Earl Douglas, was surety for the ransome of David II, and was frequently in England. In November, 1363, King Edward III gave him a gilt cup of the value of £10:18:0. In like manner we learn that Lord de Grev, who served in Gascony in 1366, had a necrosis of his tibia; that Framlingham of Suffolk had tenesmus; that Crioll of Leicester had "a flux of the belly"; that Darbleton of Buck in Lincolnshire had an inflammation of the knee, possibly a staphylococcic infection starting in his tonsils, for it began with headache and a pain in his throat. There are also other shields belonging to the knightly families of the period, and all are still traceable by those skilled in heraldry.

Sometimes, as in *Plate I*, the illustrations are simply added for the sake of embellishing the manuscript. The king here depicted was probably intended for Demetrius III, King of Georgia, who died in 1289. Arderne may have heard the story from Sir Geoffrey Scrope, who was killed in Lithuania in 1362, the eldest son of Sir Henry le Scrope of Masham in Yorkshire. It runs, according to the text: "With this medicine [Gum Arabic dissolved in ink and used as an enema] was cured Demetrius, King of Perses, by a Christian man that was prisoner with the same king; which Christian man was made full rich and was sent home to Christian men's lands by commandment of the same king, and many prisoners of Christian men were let go free with him." The plant is "alleluya, i.e., wood sour, a trefoil growing under shrubs and bearing white flowers. Bruised and put upon hæmorrhoids, or condylomata or dead flesh it freteth softly and removeth all the above said things better than any thing in the world". Perhaps the helmet surmounted by a rat was the cognizance of Geoffrey Scrope.

* * * * * *

The Plates shown on pages 7 and 9 are copied by the kind permission of the Keeper of the Manuscripts at the British Museum.

The following transcription of the two pages of illustration is supplied for those who are unskilled in reading fourteenth century manuscripts:

Plate I.

ita ut per nastare possit in ano infundi. Cum hac medicina curatus fuit Demetrius rex persarum a quodam Christiano in captivitate apud dietum regem retento. Qui quidam Christianus ditissimus factus est et ad terram Christianorum iussu dicti regis transmissus et cum eo multi captivi de Christianis cum ipso liberi dimissi sunt.

Nota lucide alliaria.

Panis cuculi, anglice Wodesoure, et crescit ob dumis, id est busches, et est quoddam trifolium sicut hic depingitur et fert flores albos et est herba ualde acida et eadem dicitur alliaria panis igitur cuculi. Manipulum minimum in drapella lineo in aqua madefacto et expresso sine contricione uoluatur uel in folijs lappacij acuti, id est reddok, et sub cineribus calidis coquatur ut non desiccetur postea extrahatur et conteratur. Ponatur super emoroidas uel ficus uel condilomata uel carnem mortuam ubicunque fuerit et ficus corrodit suauiter et remouet omnia predicta super omni re de mundo. Quando ergo commode potest haberi temptare non nocet.

Nota de experimento regali. Experimentum regale quod errorem tam prime digestiue quam jucunde feliciter ac mirifice emendat colorem que scelestum et innaturalem deponit et naturalem restaurat et bonum colorem facit. Recipe cynamoni zinziberis, galange, reubarbi antea subtilissime pulverizatur. Quibus addatur zucari equali-ter et inuicem. Tere. Hoc puluere utatur paciens in principio prandij ad pondus quinque denariorum in vino.

Ista etiam medicina utilis est emoroidarum pacientibus quia frequenter sunt discolorati.

Nota de sputo sanguinis. Contra epinia, id est sputum saniosum, et ulceracionem pulmonis et spiritualium. Recipe radices simphici, id est comferye, radices liquiriei et succum eiusdem et semen Nasturcij, id est cresses, et semen plantaginis antea tere et cum melle confice et fiat electuarium ad predicta.

Nota quod succus liquirici est quedam confeccio facta de sueco liquirici in transmarinis partibus et fit in latis laminibus ad modum glutis et est similis gluti et apotecarij hoe habent ad vendendum et vocatur Iude licorys id est Iuys licorys.

Nota de emoroidarum dolentibus. Emoroidarum dolencium et inflatarum sine fluxu sanguinis fiat talis cura. Et est sciendum quod si bono modo possent fieri non deberent localia remedia mitigatiua apponi nisi prius corpus mundificaretur cum farmacia, id est medicina laxitiua, ut est de mirobolanis predictis et flebotomia quia aliter mitigatiua minus ualerent.

Mitigatiua pro emoroidis. Mitigatur dolendum ad emoroidas inflatas cum punctura et arsura ex calida causa ut ex ignita uel adusta. Est emplastrum de folijs malue communis in aqua decoctis et postea cum axungia porci bene contritis addito oleo rose, uel uiole, uel lilij, uel camomille, uel communi si predicta non habeantur. Quo facto folia malue aqua expressa cum aliquo predictorum oleorum in patella bene frigentur: Postea super lanam carpinatam, uel stupas lini subtiles, de predictis maluis appone et calide applica miro modo mitigat dolorem. Si uero radix lilij poterit haberi et cum maluis coqueretur, ut dictum est, efficacius erit; et hoc emplastrum est satis commune quia in hyeme possunt haberi radices lilij potes facere ut de maluis dictum est, et si ambo haberi potuerit, efficacius erit emplastrum.

Item pro eodem. Item mitigetur dolor et inflacio emoroidarum cum uitello oui dure assato et addito oleo rose et croco quibus inuicem contritos et cum lana apposita miro modo mitigat in omni causa et melius si predictis adderetur opium. Quorum si opium imponatur hec est proportio. [The quantity is not given in the MS.]

Item pro eodem.

Miro modo mitigare dicitur emplastrum de albumine oui crudo et oleo uiole simul uerberatis et appositis, uel coquuntur oua dura et eorum albuminia cum oleo rose et uiole, uel ambo, cum bombace apponatur calide dolorem emoroidarum placat et una nocte delet.

Nota contra inflacionem emoroidarum. Hec est medicina quam ego Johannes Ardern Tapsiualencia composui quam nunquam carere volui quia omnem inflacionem emoroidarum dolorem ac puncturam cum ardore mirifice mitigat et aufert, que sie fieri debet. Primo, Recipe succum tapsibarbasti et cum axungia porci a pelliculis mundatum et minutim incisum bene in mortares, uel in pelui, contundantur inuicem donec axungia bene de succo fuerit imbuta et postquam sic feceris permittatur illa axungia cum succo simul stare per ix dies aut plus donec axungia viride appareat. Quo uiso iterum cum succo eadem bene contundatur. Et quando axungia de succo perfecte imbuta fuerit et colorata quod superfluum est.

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on ha me countrie fint, Dathernie my place a quodin y pramo in capatate and data roje artento. Am quidin y pramo in capatate and data roje artento. Am quidin y pramo in infin data roje antende a pramo ai molibi duncifi fint, to inque altra Danie cumh anglise thodoponue precipitob dunne i bufelico a chiadom enfente di depuntro a ferrificio albo a chi depuntro a ferrificio albo a chi de made acada acada di altra panne di cuchi arampin mini i disella inno in adjunade acada acada acada di disella incomo a quando con fine in forme in contente appropri finte acada a fine antifica acada a

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152

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Plate II.

de dolore lumborum Dolor Renum

42 expurgetur. Hoc est bis in hieme, et in vere quasi post quadragesimam semel, in estate semel vel pluries si necesse fuerit, nam eius beneficium nemo potest dinumerare. Quia sicut in necessitate pulcre adiuuat Ita eo vtentes a necessitate et dampno preseruat. Habeatur ergo in reuerencia.

Et quia dolor lumborum et renum habet vicinitatem cum colica et vliaca ideo hic aliqua experta de doloribus renum breuiter sunt notanda. Signa autem doloris renum sunt ha'c :- Dolor videlicet mansitat et in hoc differt a colica et yliaca quarum dolor est deambulatiuus per totum ventrem. Secundum signum est quod pes illius ex qua parte dolor oritur quandam patitur dormitacionem et vidi quendam qui non poterat mouere nec leuare a terra pedes nec tibias nec pedes ad se trahere quamuis contra ignem calidum positi concremarentur pro certo et tamen non paciebatur magnum dolorem et satis fuit sanus in reliquis partibus corporis et bene potuit commedere et bibere ac dormire, sed non ascellare pre ventris constipacione. Hec egritudo est valde difficilis curacionis si paciens transierit annos xlª secundum ypocratem Qui dicit Neferetici vltra xlª annos non curantur. Nichillominus tamen experiri possumus. Curacio ergo fit talis porro si predictus

nota

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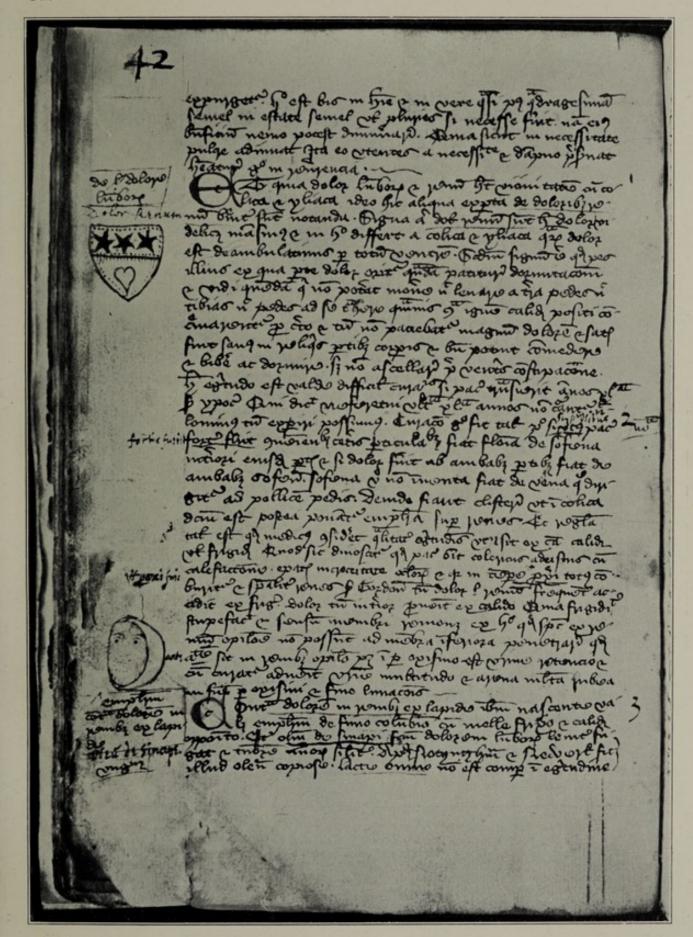
sixtus paciens fertis fuerit conuenientibus ceteris particularibus fiat flemina de sofena interiori eiusdem partis et si dolor fuerit ab ambabus partibus fiat de ambabus sofenis. Sofena vero non inuenta fiat de vena que dirigitur ad pollicem pedis. Deinde fiant clisteros vt in colica dictum est postea ponantur emplastra super renes. Et regula talis est quod medicus consideret qualitatem egritudinis vtrum sit ex causa calida vel frigida. Quod sie dinoscitur quod paciens sit colericus adustus cum calefaccione epatis in crocitate oculorum et quia in tempore ‡proximi totus comburitur et specialiter renes secundum Gordon tamen dolor renum frequenter accidit ex frigore. Dolor tamen interior prouenit ex calido. Quia frigiditas stupefacit et sensum membri remouet ex hoc quod spiritus ex renum opilatione non possunt ad membra inferiora penetrare quod autem sit in renibus opilatio patet in paroxismo est vrine retencio et cum curatur aduenit vrine multitudo et arena multa rubea insuper paroxismi et fine lunacionis.

tparoxismi

Emplastrum contra dolorem

in renibus ex lapide oleum de sinape vnguentum

Contra dolorem in renibus ex lapide ibidem nascente valet emplastrum 3 de fimo columbino cum melle frixo et calido apposito. Item oleum de sinapi factum dolorem lumborum leuiter fugat et tumorem ani similiter. Apud Notyngham et Newerk fit illud oleum copiose. Lacte ouino non est compar in egritudine.



British Museum, Harley MS. 5401, f. 21b, XVth Century.

