



MEDIEVAL
MEDICINE

A Reader

edited by
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READINGS IN MEDIEVAL
CIVILIZATIONS AND
CULTURES: XV

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II. MONASTIC MEDICINE IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL WEST

21. THE CARE OF THE SICK AT THE MONASTERY OF VIVARIUM

After a long career as secretary to the Ostrogothic rulers of Italy (see doc. 18), Cassiodorus began to plan his retirement. Initially, he thought that he would collaborate with the pope in setting up a Christian academy in Rome, but when the emperor Justinian's campaign of re-conquest in Italy began in earnest, he decided instead to retire to his family estate in Calabria. There he founded in 539 a monastery called Vivarium (The Fish-Pond) with himself as abbot. The aim of the monastery was not only to share a common life of prayer and asceticism, but also to make copies of important books, both Christian and classical, especially classical works that would be useful for the study of the Bible, such as works on grammar. Cassiodorus described the program of Vivarium in his Introduction to Divine and Human Readings. The book is divided into two sections, covering sacred erudition and secular erudition — that is, the ancient "liberal arts." It is interesting that medicine is included in the section on sacred erudition, as part of a group of chapters on the organization of the monastery.

Source: trans. Leslie Webber Jones, Cassiodorus, *Institutes of Divine and Human Learning* 1.31, trans. Leslie Webber Jones, *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp. 135–36. Latin.

Part 1. Divine Letters

1. I salute you, distinguished brothers, who with sedulous care look after the health of the human body and perform the functions of blessed piety for those who flee to the shrines of holy men — you who are sad at the sufferings of others, sorrowful for those who are in danger, grieved at the pain of those who are received, and always distressed with personal sorrow at the misfortunes of others, so that, as experience of your art teaches, you help the sick with genuine zeal; you will receive your reward from him by whom eternal rewards may be paid for temporal acts. Learn, therefore, the properties of herbs and perform the compounding of drugs punctiliously; but do not place your hope in herbs and do not trust health to human counsels. For although the art of medicine be found to be established by the Lord, he who without doubt grants life to men makes them sound [Ecclus. 38:1–15]. For it is written: "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him [Col. 3:17]."

2. But if the eloquence of Greek books is unknown to you, you have first of all the *Herb Book* of Dioscorides, who has treated and portrayed the herbs of the fields with remarkable accuracy. After this read the Latin translations of Hippocrates and Galen (that is, the *Therapeutics* of Galen, addressed to the philosopher Glaucon) and a certain anonymous work, which has been compiled from various authors. Finally, read Caelius Aurelianus's *On Medicine*, and Hippocrates's *On Herbs and Cures* [an unknown, probably pseudonymous work], and various other works written on the art of medicine; with God's help, I have left you these books, stored away in the recesses of our library.

22. MEDICAL INJUNCTIONS IN THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT

St Benedict (ca 480–547) was born at a time when the western Roman Empire had just about come to an end, and he died shortly after the end of the devastating wars in which the Byzantine Empire tried to re-establish control over Italy following the death of King Theodoric. He came from a prosperous provincial family and was sent to Rome for advanced education, but he left school to become a hermit. As disciples began to gather around him, Benedict came to the conclusion that life in community was, for the average monk, a better and more humane way. Eventually he migrated some 80 miles south of Rome to Monte Cassino, where he established his monastery. The Rule of St Benedict was composed for Monte Cassino. Its keynotes are obedience of the monks to their abbot; discipline, order, regularity, and simplicity in the organization of communal life; humaneness, moderation, and fraternal charity rather than heroic individual asceticism; and a daily routine balanced between prayer and work. The monastery, as a self-contained and self-supporting community (not unlike a Roman estate) takes care of its own sick (see doc. 24). But medicine also figures in the Rule as a symbol of the abbot's duty to heal the spiritual diseases of his monks, and the relationship of the patient to the caregiver is understood in mystical terms.

*Note that Benedict allows baths for sick monks. These are Roman style bath-houses, with hot and cold pools, a steam room, massages, etc. The medical purpose of a bath is to open the pores and *evacuate *corrupt *humors. They are quite distinct from the ordinary facilities for daily washing.*

Source: trans. Leonard J. Doyle, *St Benedict's Rule for Monasteries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1948), pp. 45–47, 54–55. Latin.

Chapter 27. How Solicitous the Abbot Should Be for the Excommunicated [Brethren]

Let the Abbot be most solicitous in his concern for delinquent brethren, for "it is not the healthy but the sick who need a physician [Matt. 9:12]." And therefore he ought to use every means that a wise physician would use. Let him send *senpectae*, that is, brethren of mature years and wisdom, who may as it were secretly console the wavering brother and induce him to make humble satisfaction; comforting him that he may not "be overwhelmed by excessive grief [2 Cor. 2:7]," but that, as the apostle [Paul] says, charity may be strengthened in him [cf. 2 Cor. 2:8]. And let everyone pray for him....

Chapter 28. On Those Who Will Not Amend after Repeated Corrections

If a brother who has been frequently corrected for some fault, and even excommunicated, does not amend, let a harsher correction be applied, that is, let the punishment of the rod be administered to him.

But if he still does not reform or perhaps (which God forbid) even rises up in pride and wants to defend his conduct, then let the abbot do what a wise physician would do. Having used applications, the ointments of exhortation, the medicines of the Holy Scripture, finally the *cautery of excommunication and the strokes of the rod, if he sees that his efforts are of no avail, let him apply a still greater remedy, his own prayers and those of all the brethren, that the Lord, who can do all things, may restore health to the sick brother.

But if he is not healed even in this way, then let the abbot use the knife of amputation, according to the apostle [Paul]'s words, "Expel the evil one from your midst [1 Cor. 5:13]," and again, "If the faithless one departs, let him depart [1 Cor. 7:15]," lest one diseased sheep contaminate the whole flock.

Chapter 36. On the Sick Brethren

Before all things and above all things, care must be taken of the sick, so that they will be served as if they were Christ in person; for he himself said, "I was sick, and you visited me [Matt. 25:26]," and, "What you did for one of these least ones, you did for me [Matt. 25:40]." But let the sick on their part consider that they are being served for the honor of God, and let them not annoy their brethren who are serving them by their unnecessary demands. Yet they should be patiently borne with, because from such as these is gained a more abundant reward. Therefore the abbot shall take the greatest care that they suffer no neglect.

For these sick brethren let there be assigned a special room and an attendant who is God-fearing, diligent and solicitous. Let the use of baths be afforded the sick as often as may be expedient; but to the healthy, and especially to the young, let them be granted more rarely. Moreover, let the use of meat be granted to the sick who are very weak, for the restoration of their strength; but when they are convalescent, let all abstain from meat as usual.

The abbot shall take the greatest care that the sick not be neglected by the cellarers or the attendant; for he is also responsible for what is done wrongly by his disciples.

23. A MONASTIC DEFENSE OF MEDICINE AGAINST RIGORIST CRITICS: THE LORSCH LEECHBOOK

The Lorsch Arzneibuch – “Lorsch Book of Remedies” or “Lorsch Leechbook” (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek med. 1) – is a manuscript volume compiled in the German monastery of Lorsch around 800. Most of its pages are taken up with drug recipes and dietary advice, but it opens with an interesting defense of human medical intervention against charges of impiety. The “fundamentalists” opposed by the author of the defense are strict supernaturalists who reject any human intervention in illness as presumptuous. The author’s position is closer to that found in a tract found in two Carolingian codices and entitled Medical Order (De ratione medicinae). Medical Order argues that a good doctor should know how to prevent disease through dietary regimen and how to predict outcomes, but he ought not to boast that he can cure through medications. Real cures come from God, and despair is the lot of those who rely on drugs. Indeed, ascribing therapeutic efficacy to God alone, and not to the physician or the herbs, marks the frontier between licit and illicit medicine – a frontier that separates practical techniques of diagnosis, prognosis, patient management, drug lore, dietetics, and surgery from two zones of danger: ancient medical naturalism and pagan magic. If not placed in proper religious context, healing treatments could appear to be magical or superstitious: applying a poultice, after all, is not visibly very different from binding on a ligatura or amulet (see doc. 5). In sum, suspicion might fall on medicine not only because it was rational, but because it could come perilously close to the irrational. For these reasons, the author of the defense is at pains to point out that God the Father and Jesus Christ both made use of physical means, including compounds and manual applications, in performing divine cures.

Source: trans. Faith Wallis from *Das ‘Lorsch Arzneibuch’. Ein medizinisches Kompendium des 8. Jahrhunderts (Codex Bambergensis medicinalis 1). Text, Übersetzung und Fachglossar*, ed. Ulrich Stoll, *Sudhoffs Archiv, Beiheft 28* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992), pp. 48–63. Latin.

I am obliged to respond to those who say that I have been foolish to write this book and that very little of what is written in it is true. But like a deaf man, I did not listen to their words [Ps. 38 (37):14], because I gave more heed to the necessity of those in need than to the carping of enemies against me. For this reason, I shall answer them, not with my own words, but with the words of Holy Scripture, that human medicine (*humana medicina*) is not to be utterly rejected, since it is evident that it is not unknown to the divine books. Thus, with the Lord's help, let us set forth what is found there.

For in many books it is written (and it was true before it was written) that God made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is [Ps. 146 (145):6]. And because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the whole world and all that dwells therein [Ps. 24 (23):1], the Psalmist yet again cried out to the Lord, "Yours are the heavens and yours the earth; thou hast founded the circle of the world and its fullness [Ps. 89 (88):12]." Therefore if all things on earth are created and founded by God – and far be it from anyone to believe otherwise – then without doubt all things are good. For God does not make what is evil; but if anything is evil, it was itself the author of its own evil, and not God, of whom it is written, "And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good [Gen. 1:31]." For the almighty God, to whom [belongs] supreme power, since he is the supreme good – a fact even infidels admit – could in no wise permit any evil to exist in his works.

If therefore everything that God created is very good, wise men everywhere in the world were good by nature. But through pride and faithlessness they became evil; and therefore they were good because they were men and evil because they were proud. Nonetheless their wisdom and learning (*doctrina*), because it was given by God, seems to be worthy of imitation. As the Lord said in the Gospel, "Everything which they say, do." By which we should understand that we should preserve and do everything in their sayings that pertains to the necessities of life, present and future. I do not wish ([Christ] says) that you should act according to their works [Matt. 23:3], [but rather] so that you should do for the glory of almighty God what these men did for their own sake, and not for God's sake. Therefore when something useful is found in their writings, it is just like gold [which] is often found in a dung heap. As a certain man of God observed when he was asked why he was reading a pagan book, "I am seeking for gold in a dung-heap."

The ancients called the wisdom of these men "philosophy," that is, the knowledge (*scientia*) of all things human and divine. And they said that this philosophy was divided into three parts; namely **physica*, logic, and ethics. Ethics pertains to instruction in morals, and is divided into the four cardinal virtues, namely prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Let him who wishes to know what distinguishes them read the book of the homilies of

St Gregory on Ezechiel [book 3, no. 8]. Logic consists of dialectic and rhetoric; the abovementioned [Gregory] is known to have devoted attention to this discipline, for by the mouth of Bede the priest he is called "the orator." For orators follow the methods of logic. But *physica* is divided into seven disciplines. Of these, some are compatible with religion, but some are very foreign to it in many ways. The first of these is arithmetic, the second geometry, the third music, the fourth astronomy, the fifth astrology, the sixth mechanics, the seventh medicine. Whoever wants to know what realm of knowledge these pertain to, let him read the book of the *Etymologies* of Isidore, bishop of the church of Seville. Here, it is enough for me to speak of medicine.

Medicine is the knowledge of treatments (*scientia curationum*). It was discovered for the tempering and well-being of the body and is also not unknown to the divine books, so that words are found there which are derived from [medicine]. For it is said by Isaiah [1:6]: "Every festering wound is not bound up, nor cured with medicine, nor soothed with oil." And in the book of Exodus [21:19] it is commanded that if anyone wound a stranger, he should compensate him for his injury and for the expenses of the doctors.

We know that not only is [medicine] mentioned in the divine books, but also from time to time the names of drugs. We read in Jeremiah [8:22], "Is there no balm in Gilead, and is there no physician there? Why then has the scar not been removed?" And again, the same prophet says, "Though you wash yourself with lye and heap soapwort upon yourself, yet are you stained [Jer. 2:22]."

In all these things, at least according to the literal meaning, we can see that balm is suitable against the hardened scar of wounds and that lye and soapwort are very effective for remedying filthy stains. The apostle Paul also explicitly describes medicine as the gift of the Holy Spirit, saying, "To another, the knowledge of treatments (*curationum*) is given by the Spirit [I Cor. 12:9 and 28]."

It is not for nothing that that which restores a man to the exercise of good works is called the gift of the Holy Spirit. For diseases happen to the body for three reasons; namely because of sin, because of a trial [of faith], and because of the intemperance of the passions. However, human medicine can be of help only for the last kind of illness, and for the others, only the compassion of the divine mercy. But in fact, even these will sometimes not be cured without human relief. We will demonstrate this better if we produce evidence.

It was indeed because of sin that Saul [*that is, St Paul, prior to his conversion*] was smitten with the loss of his eyes, but nevertheless he was not cured without the laying on of a man's hands [Acts 9:8-18]. [One can fall sick] as a trial, like Tobit when he lost the use of his eyes, even though he walked in the way

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of justice. Yet the angel Raphael (which means "medicine of God") cured him, not personally, but through his [Tobit's] son, by means of a medicine made from a fish [Tob. 11:10-14].

[One can fall sick] from intemperance of the passions, like the man whom the apostle commands, "Let him who is weak eat vegetables [Rom. 14:2]," and like that disciple of the Apostle whom he exhorts, saying, "Take a little wine for your stomach's sake, and because of your frequent infirmities [1 Tim. 5:23]." In all this, it is evident that human relief and human medicine are not to be rejected utterly, because if they deserved to be condemned, the Lord would never have commanded Paul to receive his sight back by the imposition of the hands of Ananias, nor would he have commanded his disciples to lay their hands upon the sick, as long as there was something better [Mark 16:18, Luke 9:2]. Neither would Tobit have been cured through his son by means of the medicine that the angel pointed out. And if wine (in which lies luxury, if it is consumed beyond what is necessary) did not, for the most part, do good to the body, that renowned preacher [St Paul], who elsewhere says, "It is good not to consume meat and wine [Rom. 14:21]," would never have commanded his disciple to relieve his infirmities with a little wine. Therefore when he said, "It is good not to eat meat and drink wine," he was speaking to people who were healthy and in good condition. But when he said, "Take a little wine for your stomach's sake," he was showing compassion for the sick, and those who were not in good condition. For he does not say, "Take wine for the sake of enjoyment," but, "Take wine for your stomach's sake, because of your frequent infirmities."

But some are in the habit of saying, "What need have we to be cured by physicians, we who cast our cares upon [God] who is able to care for us [1 Pet. 5:7]? Can he not vouchsafe us health without medicines, who by his word alone can restore all things?" To be sure, these people evidently speak the truth. Far be it that anything should be said to be impossible for God. But it is necessary that they have faith in the words of him in whose care for them they do not lack trust. For he says, "The healthy do not need a physician, but rather those who are sick [Mark 2:17]." Now they should know that no one, however righteous he is, can escape this present life without affliction. For blessed Job, who was so perfect that even though he was not immune from the lighter sins (from which an infant one day old is not free) nonetheless had no crime upon his conscience, so that he was heard to say, "My heart has not reproached me in all my life [Job 27:6]," who also was so commended by the divine voice that [God] said that there was none on earth like him [Job 1:8], [even he] was said to have been smitten by a very grievous ulceration so that he scraped the flowing pus and the teeming mass of worms with a potshard [Job 2:8]. But the apostle Paul also often declared that he had an infirmity in

his flesh, when he said, "When I am weak, then I am strong [2 Cor. 12:10]," and again, "Willingly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may abound in me [2 Cor. 12:9]." O how desirable is that tribulation of the flesh, which causes the power of the Redeemer to dwell within man.

We do not read that these men were cured with any medicine. But our Lord Jesus Christ, who left us an example that we might follow in his footsteps [1 Pet. 2:21], deigned to indicate very clearly in the Gospel that in his view, medicine and human means of relief ought not to be refused. For when he was reclining in the house of the Pharisee and the prostitute approached him, took an alabaster box full of precious ointment, and poured it over his head as he lay reclining, he took no offence, but praised her devotion highly, so that he said to the Pharisee, "Amen, I say unto you, her many sins are forgiven [Luke 8:47]." But the disciples complained about her, saying, "What was the purpose of wasting this unguent?" The Lord said to them, "She has done a good deed for me; for in anointing my body with this unguent, she prepared me for my burial [Matt. 26:6-12]." Why, then, should a pure man despise what the God-Man showed ought not to be despised?

The apostle Paul imitated [Christ's] example in saying (as we mentioned earlier), "Let him who is weak eat vegetables." But other people, and very many holy men, also emulated him, whom we know to have relieved their own illness with medicine and who entered the gate of the heavenly kingdom. But it would serve our purpose to recall them here.

When Germanus, bishop of Capua, suffered severe physical distress, the doctors told him that for the health of his body he should wash at the neighborhood baths. And he took care to carry this out as often as he could. He even mentioned these baths to Paschasius, deacon of Rome. Later the venerable man, abbot Benedict, looking through a window in the dead of night, saw the soul of the same bishop Germanus borne up to heaven by angels in a fiery sphere. The deacon Servandus also witnessed this, so that the witness of two men might validate the account. But Pope Gregory as well (who related these things which I said concerning Germanus [*Dialogues* 2.35]), sometimes suffered such great torment that he could scarcely speak. He recounts this in his homily on the Gospels [22:1], saying: "My stomach, racked with chronic distress, forbade me to speak of the explanation," and again, "The summer season, which greatly disagrees with my body, forbade me for a long time to speak about the explanation [*Homily* 54:1]." We learn beyond doubt that he made full use of medicaments, if we read his *Homilies* and the book of the *Dialogues* carefully. For he says in the *Homilies* [4.3], "By the bitter draught of medicine one arrives at the joys of health." And again in the *Dialogues* [4.55]: "A certain monk named Justus was steeped in the art of medicine, and he was wont to tend me in my monastery with great diligence and to watch

over my unremitting illnesses." Bishop Isidore as well, whom we mentioned earlier, indicated that he suffered in these words: "Have mercy, Lord, upon poor Isidore, who does unworthy deeds and suffers things which he deserves, ceaselessly sinning and daily bearing your torments." These torments can be understood to pertain to the mind as well as to the body. For God does not withdraw his mercy from the just man or the impious man, for he either judges good men in this life through affliction and rewards them in the next life with mercy, or else he rewards the wicked with temporal clemency in this life and punishes them in the next with eternal justice. Sickness which detaches the mind from intransigency is very salubrious, but health which leads a man into disobedience is pernicious. The person who is loved by God is reproved more, as Solomon says: "For the Lord reproves whom he loves; he chastens every son whom he receives [Prov. 3:12, Heb. 12:6]." And as the prophet Amos says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities [Amos 3:2]." The Psalmist cries out for this visitation, saying, "Visit us in thy salvation [Ps. 106 (105):2]." Likewise the Lord himself says in the Apocalypse, "Those whom I love I reprove and chasten [Rev. 3:19]." For it is very necessary for them to be attacked by vices and smitten by affliction in this life, so that when they are assailed by vices, they are not proud of their virtues, [and] when they are indeed ground down by suffering of mind or body, they may be withdrawn from the love of the world. For this reason, everyone who is reproved by illness should take heed lest he fall into the evil of complaining. For he who complains at scourging irritates God all the more. But let him take care to remember that one must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations [Acts 14:22]. The Apostle says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is revealed in us [Rom. 8:18]." Therefore, according to the Lord's command, you ought to possess your souls in patience [Luke 21:9] however long we must remain in this world, in order that we may bear scourges and suffering, as it is written, "Six days shall you plough; on the seventh you shall cease [Exod. 34:21]." What else should be understood by the number six save the total time of this present life, in which we are commanded to plow, that is, to bear tribulation? And what is symbolized by the seventh day, in which we are enjoined to cease plowing, save the repose of eternal life, in which all the suffering of those who patiently suffer will be rewarded with perennial respite? O how desirable is the plowing of the tribulation of the six days, which will be rewarded by a rest of days without number!

For this reason, human medicine is not to be rejected but to be used with thanksgiving for suffering; for no one should hate his own flesh because it is created, but because it readily falls into sin, he ought not to give it free rein

in pleasure. Although Paul says, "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires [Rom. 13:14]," he evidently permits in need what he prohibits in desire.

And now we should ask whether the Lord can rightly be called a physician, or if it can be said that he performed any action in a medical fashion (*medicinali more*). Why cannot the Lord be called a physician, who healed the whole world when it was oppressed in the languor of infidelity? Therefore when the people of Israel, having departed from Egypt, came to the bitter waters and could not drink them, they began to murmur against the Lord. But the Lord, taking pity on their exhaustion, commanded that Moses take wood and put it in the water. When he put it in, the water was made drinkable [Exod. 15:23-25]. Again, in order to heal the sterile and malignant waters at the request of the inhabitants of Jericho, he ordered Elisha to take a new earthenware bowl, put salt in it, and throw it into the river, and immediately the waters were made wholesome [2 Kings 2:19-22]. To whom would this deed not seem to be done, in the literal sense, in a medical manner, when even now doctors are wont to act in this way? For when they encounter something bitter and repugnant, they mix it with honey or garlic, by which (in their view) the bitterness or repulsive taste is tempered. But if you are not reluctant to inquire into the mystical meaning, you will find the symbol of the physician in these events.

Therefore, just as Moses sweetened the bitter water for the faithful people by putting wood into it, so also almighty God by introducing the confession of the wood of the Cross into the water of baptism, converted the bitter letter of the Old Testament into the sweetness of the Holy Spirit for all believers. And just as Elisha cured the sterile and diseased waters of Jericho by putting into them salt in the earthenware bowl, so also the almighty Father liberated the whole world from sterility and disease by putting his wisdom into a human body. Wisdom is symbolized by salt. For Christ is called the power and the wisdom of God [1 Cor. 1:24].

When [Christ] appeared in the flesh, he confessed that he was a physician, saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick [Luke 5:31]." That he was referring to himself in these words is attested by the following statement, "I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners [Matt. 9:13]." And he deigned to show this by his deeds. For when he saw a certain man who had been blind from birth, he spat on the ground and made mud from his spittle and daubed his eyes, and said to him, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam," and when he washed, he immediately received his sight [John 9:1-7]. It is no wonder that the Lord restored the sight of the blind man by daubing with earth, for he ordains that medicine (*medela*) come from [the earth] for all mortals. As was said by a certain wise man, "The

Lord created medicines from the earth [Ecclus. 38:4].” So it is fitting that at God’s dispensation, man, who is formed of earth, should receive relief of his infirmity from the earth. For the earth brings forth nothing without cause, but all by necessity; as the Psalmist says, “The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work, bringing forth grass for cattle and plants for man to cultivate [Ps. 104 (103):13–14].” For this reason, no one should spurn earthly medicine where he knows that it will do him good and not inflict harm, when holy men have not condemned it.

Indeed it is evident that Luke, an apostolic man who wrote down the acts of the Apostles (which he saw) and the life of Christ (which he heard), was expert in the art of medicine; for Paul said, “Luke my beloved physician salutes you [Col. 4:14],” and he is said to be well-known in all the churches for [preaching] the Gospel [2 Cor. 8:18 (*which does not in fact refer to Luke*)]. And there are martyrs of renown who were said to practice medicine and to pursue it with diligence, namely Cosmas and Damian. Therefore we should give honor to physicians that they may help us when we are sick. You should remember what the wise man says: “Honor the physician according to your need, for the Lord created him [Ecclus. 38:1].” And what they proffer you as medicine, you should take with confidence. “The Most High,” says that same wise man, “created medicines from the earth, and a sensible man will not despise them [Ecclus. 38:4].” Someone who does not seek medicine in time of need will be called foolish and lacking in sense. For this reason, I say give the physician his due as is right, while you are healthy, so that if you fall ill you will be able to obtain his benefits, lest perchance if you spurn him when you are in sound health, no one will come to your aid in time of need.

For God desires to be honored in the miracles which he performs through human beings, for whatever good is done by man is brought to perfection by God, as Isaiah testifies, saying, “The Lord hath wrought for us all our works [Isa. 26:12].” And in the Gospel [God] himself says, “Without me you can do nothing [John 15:1].” And so when one falls sick, one respectfully requests from the physician a medication appropriate to the illness and implores a healthful remedy for the disease from God with humility. One asks for a healthful remedy when one desires to become healthy in order to do good. For when one strives to become healthy for other reasons, one loses the result of one’s prayer, and hence it happens that one does not receiving healing. For when we in our ignorance ask for ourselves things that are harmful and contrary, our Lord out of his goodness refuses. It is just as if someone burning with fever were to beg for cold water from the doctor, saying, “Take pity on me and give me what I ask,” and he were to respond, “I know at what time I ought to give you what you are asking for. I will not take pity on you now, because such pity is cruelty, and because what you want is contrary to what

is good for you." Therefore no one should ask from the Lord what he thinks would not be his will, because if it is requested, he will not deign to grant it. But let him ask that it may befall him as [God's] will has decreed, for he desires that all men should be saved [I Tim. 2:4]. And if one who is being treated with medicaments does not regain his health, he should ascribe this to his guilt, or to [God's] testing, and not to the physician's lack of expertise. Nor should he for this reason cease to take care of his body, but he should strive to care for it as much as he is able, not for the sake of fleshly desires, but for the sake of the good works that are in him, "so that he may be able to give to those in need [Eph. 4:28]." And if his effort is to no avail, then let him fall back on the medicine of patience, and he shall not fail to win everlasting well-being (*salutem*) not only for his body, but also for his soul. Thus in vintage-time grapes are trodden underfoot so that later they may appear at royal banquets, and without their blood there is no power to rule. Thus wheat is ground at the mill, that pure bread might be made and placed upon the table of the great king. So the more one is ground by tribulation here, the purer one will be found in the realm to come, if one is patient despite everything.

But now I address you, beloved brethren, who treat the health of the human body with painstaking care and fulfill the duty of blessed compassion towards the sick — you who are saddened by the suffering of others, grieving for those whose lives are in danger, pierced through by the pain of those in their care and always absorbed in another's calamities, to your own grief. You should serve the sick with sincere effort as the skill of your art teaches. For this you will receive a reward by which things eternal can repay things temporal. And so, learn the natures of herbs and the differences between drugs, and carry out the mixing of medicine with careful attention. Do not, indeed, put your hope in herbs, nor your security in human eyes. For although medicine, we read, is created by God, still it is he who grants life and who makes one healthy, without a doubt. For it is written, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Lord and Father through him [Col. 3:17]," saying, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory [Ps. 115:1 (113:9)]," and what we said earlier on, "The Lord has wrought for us all our works [Isa. 26:12]." Therefore be not slothful to help those who languish, for the grace of God. For whatever you do for the sick you do for Christ the Lord, who on the Day of Judgment says, "I was sick and you visited me [Matt. 25:36]," and "whatsoever you do for the least of these, you do for me [Matt. 25:40]." Do not neglect, then, to visit Christ. Moreover, you should know — and I would that you would act in accordance with what you know — that Christ is to be visited primarily in the poor, for the very wealth of the rich compels doctors

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to visit them [*Rule of St Benedict* c. 53]. Remember the deeds of the Lord, who did not refuse to go to the centurion's slave when he was oppressed with sickness [Luke 7:2-10] and who nevertheless refused to go in person to the official's son [John 4:46-53]. Here is our pride subdued, who honor in men not their nature (in which they are made in the image of God), but their titles and wealth. Lo, he who came from heaven did not disdain to visit a slave on earth, while we, who are dust and ashes, refuse to go to the sick poor. Do not, then, look to what kind of reward you will receive in this world, but to what kind of reward you will receive in the world to come. Blessed shall you be, if you devote your treatment to those whom you know cannot repay you. You should ask nothing from them, if you wish to find a reward in eternal rest, because it is more blessed to give than to receive. Visit, then, those who seem to you to be poor and regard those whom you perceive are despised by the world because of their external circumstances as friends of God. For why should you be slothful, when what you offer to one lying upon the earth, you give to the one enthroned in heaven? Learn then to show pity for the poor so that the Lord will also have pity on you. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy [Matt. 5:7]." So if in doing this you seek not your own glory, but Christ's, you will deserve on the Day of Judgment, in the company of those at his right hand, to hear, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world [Matt. 25:34]."

But if the eloquence of Greek letters is unknown to you, you have the book of herbs of Dioscorides, who has described and portrayed the herbs of the field with marvelous accuracy. After these, read Hippocrates and Galen in Latin translation; that is, Galen's *Therapeutics* addressed to the philosopher Glaucon, and a certain anonymous compilation from various authors. The *On Medicine* by Caelius Aurelianus and Hippocrates's *On Herbs and Cures*, and various other works on the art of healing. So read these, and in accordance with what they say, confect medicine and so give help to the sick. You will receive a reward from Christ, who will not fail to reward in the eternal kingdom a cup of cold water given in his name [Matt. 10:42], where he lives and reigns together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.