

LEONICENO AND THE SCHOOL OF FERRARA *

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While it is clear that schools of a crude order in all the superior faculties existed in Ferrara as early as 1241, the scholar's tenure there, as elsewhere at that date in North Italy, was altogether insecure. The Ferrarese Studio owed its origin to a migration of scholars from Bologna, and its continuation to the rather too fitful and notional support of the fighting of Lords of Este. Under imperial and papal sanction, however, the "studium generale" grew with a growth that was at once lusty and discontinuous. The pattern of her privileges was avowedly that of Bologna and Paris. By 1391 the university was well organized. The Collegium Medicorum was a notable one from the start. Its earliest privileges known to us now date from 1264. As the court physicians held teaching positions in the school, and as the Estense showed particular solicitude in selecting their body physicians, an array of illustrious names are found on the old rosters. Peter of Abano served in the household of Azzo VIII; a Montagnana served Leonello; Hugo Senensis came at the call of Marquis Nicolaus IV; he and his sons and his grandsons taught at Ferrara.

The young Marquis Leonello, an ardent Humanist, held the welfare of the studio very close to his heart. In the last years of his father's reign studies had languished, administrative abuses had crept in. Despite the presence of the elder Guarino promising scholars were migrating elsewhere. Leonello in 1442-1443 thoroughly reformed the schools in all branches; he banished all incompetant teachers from the city, and he searched Italy with a lighted candle for strong men to fill the vacancies. He offered exceptional stipends; he welcomed his pedagogic strike-breakers "with a joyful countenance and with sweetest words."

"With the utmost zeal," says Fra Giovanni, "he set himself to bring most renowned and learned men in both branches of the law, illustrious physicians and grave philosophers (of whom I was one), eminent theologians likewise, poets, dialecticians, orators skilled in Latin and Greek eloquence." Among these recruits of the Muses was a real Greek, Theodore Gaza, suggested by Aurispa and seconded by Marsupini.

Oct. 1, 1450, Leonello died in his villa Belriguardo. His brother, the Duke Borso, who raised Ferrara as a state to the height of its glory,

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while devoid of all scholarship, continued the generous patronage extended to scholars. He was generous to old Guarino who was still high in honor. He treated Lascaris and other Greek exiles with great hospitality. He welcomed Pier Candido Decembrio to his court again (Decembrio had taught Leonello his rhetoric) and pensioned him so amply that the old man forgot his envy and jealousy of the dead Guarino.

Borso, the first Duke, died in 1471. But the Age of Gold at the schools continued under Ercole I. Chairs were even more generously endowed. Henceforth the advance of the university was rapid. In 1474 there were twenty-three salaried chairs in law and twenty-nine in philosophy and medicine. The reformatores, appointed now in part by the duke, partly by the city council, had general supervision; that is, appointment of professors, salaries, etc. The college rectors had civil jurisdiction. As at Bologna, minor criminal affairs among students were in their hands; the more grave were referred to the duke in person. But, here, too the rector was to aid the defendant by all means in his power, it being expressly stipulated that "a scholar may not be tortured or in persona puniri without the assent of the said rector." The dukes could interfere in many internal matters at the studio. Here, for example, is a letter to Ercole about a salary overdue: "I have read medicine before my college, this entire year, with much sweating and effort, and as yet have not received uno denario del mio salario."

Renaissance medicine at Ferrara shows flashes of unwonted brilliance. At court the Benzi and Castelli were men of a very unusual type. One of the most fascinating figures of his time was Michael Savonarola, court physician. Then there was resident there also Savonarola's great co-evil, John Arculanus. Berengar of Carpi spent some time in Ferrara, as did Jerome della Torre, Fallopius, Laurentius Majolus and J. B. Canano. The presiding genius of the medical group at Ferrara, however, is the noble Vincentine, Nicolaus Leonicensus.

"He who serves Dante, serves Italy." Whoso would serve the state of Ferrara let him choose Leonicensus; let him chronicle this man's sixty years of loving labor in her schools, his long leadership in learning in science, in mediation between antique medical culture and the modern intellect. His story is without parallel in the annals of that part of classical scholarship which pertains to medicine.

Leonicensus was first of all a humanist, a textual critic, a philologist and translator. In view of this his life would appear to contain little of interest—as barren as a drillmaster's. Even though he held the whole mass of classical erudition in his brain, we doubtless will be inclined today to take the measure of his accomplishment with the

calmness that comes of disillusionment in the matter of pure scholarship. We are unimpressed by any amount of overfreight of mind. There is a quality, however, of high achieving power, which, while it does not invest its possessor in bright particular splendor, insures the devotion of all men with a relish for truth; the quality of complete intellectual candor. Leoniceus had this winning quality of mind, this "losing honesty" (as Lamb calls it), and he had it in an age when it required heroism to display it. You will say offhand that a simple forthright and honorable intelligence is easy to acquire and use—moderately—in any period of time. Not so in an age of authority, stupidity, ignorance, prejudice. Then, even the sifting and testing of old texts, becomes a dangerous thing; it is playing with Greek fire indeed. The saving remnant, "emancipated from the thralldom of unproved traditions," constituted a pitifully weak party in Italy when Leoniceus first scanned the readings of the Hippocratic Canon. It took a degree of the moral will to publish the "Errors of Pliny" in 1492.

Leoniceus never lacked candor, nor courage, nor kindness. He never carped at his contemporaries save in the mildest Christian way as, "Our Hermolaus Barbarus relies overmuch on conjecture," or, "still the good Theodorus Gaza sometimes nods, you know."

Read his general preface to his translations of Galen; see what a fine zestful thing literal truth is to this man! How keen is his perception of its fragrance, "far sweeter than that of any flower that ever bloomed since the morning of time." How undisguised his hatred of the man who, when the fact stands against him, wriggles and spins dialectic yarns. His is a heart of deep integrity. His rare critical insight is already betokened by fine moral feeling.

His external history is known only in barest outline. He was born in 1428 at Vincenza in the *Sindicaria* of San Michele under the protection of the healing saint himself. He had a noble line of ancestors, tracing their *Albero genalogico* from 1224; one, in fact, had hung shield and saddle in the Temple at Jerusalem. His grandfather Giovanni, an eminent Vicentine, was a notary and physician. His mother was the noble Maddelena Losco, daughter of a famous poet and papal secretary. He had four brothers, all good scholars, two of whom became regular canons; his next younger, he influenced to follow medicine for a while, until the canons persuaded him over to their calling.

Nicolo himself was launched at the tender age of 8 upon the *mare mortuum* of the scholarly life, by Bartolomea dei Burfoni di Cremona. At 15 we find him sitting at the feet of his kinsman, Ognibene Leoniceus. Ognibene had been taught Greek by Vittorino da Feltre at Mantau, who in turn had been taught by Guarina at Venice. Guarino was a pupil of Chrysoloras. Thus ran the circle of labors in

the Greek tongue. Nicolo was put through a course of translating; John Chrisotom, Gregory Nazianze, Basil, Athanaseus, a little work by Xenophon on hunting, Æsops Fables and the life of Camillus by Plutarch. At 18 he had stored in his memory much of Demosthenes, Euripides and other Greek authors which he could repeat at 80 years of age "nullo intermisso verbo." In 1445 he enroled under the faculty of medicine and philosophy at Padua. He had already made immense strides at home, so he came well prepared. Shunning the life of heedless folly led by his con-disciples, he made amazingly rich use of his seven years' residence. He singles out Pelope in Medicine and Rocabonela in Philosophy, as the preceptors to whom he owes, in a special sense, a debt of gratitude.

It was in the year of the expulsion of the Greek scholars from Constantinople that Leonicens attained the doctoral distinction, aged 25. He mounted the rostrum in the presence of his college and gave his frank and precise responses in alternate Greek and Latin. We may presume that he carried off his bonnet in a way that pleased the judicious of Padua, for after some nine years of wandering he came back to settle in his university town. Where and how he spent the Wanderyahre, 1453-1462, we do not know. It is conjectured that in company with an Englishman he made a tour of the north countries, upper Germany, Holland, England. Curious that he nowhere makes mention of his "grand tour." He is like Dante in this, or like Giordano Bruno. A habit of laying supreme emphasis upon the life of the spirit led them all properly to ignore externals such as Paris and the Channel trip. There is a story of distinctly mundane flavor, however, told of the supposed tour, by Brasavola, Nicolo's pupil and biographer. On his return to Holland our gentle hero, it seems, fell in with a tipsy company in a tavern. Declining to drink, the Hollanders forced the brew upon him. Leonicens, who from infancy had been subject to epilepsy and was never of sound constitution, was badly shaken by the episode and started hotfoot for Italy.

In Padua again, Nicolo stayed barely the two years 1462-1464, practicing medicine and perhaps teaching, too. In the latter year he was called to Ferrara by Duke Borso, and there he staid until the end of his days. "Whoso would find heaven open, let him experience the liberality of Duke Borso" was a saying familiar to the scholar. But Nicolo set his face resolutely against court service. Michael Savonarola had just died, full of honors. He had been the "right eye" of the dazzling Borso. Just before he died he had satirized his master's lavishness in a curious little work called the "Marriage of Battibecco and Serrabocca," in which he remarked that "the giving of robes, horses, possessions and money to buffoons and unworthy men, diminishes the love of the people." This was a thrust at the barbitonsor and jester of

the duke who had made the combined boast, "Never has His Excellence left his poor Scocola or his poor Pietro in the lurch in any of their necessities." Girolomo da Castello succeeded Savonarola as chief physician at the court. Nicolo took up his duties at the studio, nominally as lecturer on Moral Philosophy on a salary of 200 lire. The school year began befittingly on the Feast of Saint Luke. Lecturing with him were Francesco Benzo, son of the great Hugo of Sienna, Jerome Castello, Jerome and Horace Zironi, both highly paid lecturers on Practice, a Roman and a Parmesan surgeon and at least ten other medical teachers. Padua and Bologna no longer referred to the city on the Po as "the haven of destitute scholars."

Ferrara revived. Scholars flocked from all parts of Europe—Poles, Germans and Danes, Savoyards and Swiss (Paracelsus took his degree there). Englishmen came again as they had done in the time of Gaza and Guarino (who, by the way, taught the bishops of Bath and Ely and the deans of Lincoln and Wells). Linacre and Caius came to consult Leoniceus. They found Ferrara a library center, their host intensely busied with the recovery of classic medical literature. The process of exhumation, comparison and appropriation of texts was creating a new spiritual atmosphere of culture and intellectual freedom. The new spirit of freedom was in part Nicolo's own creation. He taught John Manardus and many another the art of looking on Aristotle and Galen with an equal eye. In throwing off the trammels of authority the Ferrarese group of medical humanists did valiant service. Leoniceus alone restored a dozen works by Galen and Hippocrates in a purer Latin rendering. These translations have always taken precedence over all other versions. They brought the world to the old grammarian's humble door. The illimitable host of his friends includes such names as Erasmus, Pico, Politian, Bembo, Valla, the Guarini, the Strozzi, Calcagnini, Aldus and his household, Codrus, Majolus, Joxius, Cardinal Farnese and Leo X.