

## ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

SHAKESPEARE AS AN AID IN THE ART AND PRACTICE OF  
MEDICINE.\*

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## MEDICINE IN THE 16TH CENTURY.

To understand the medicine of Shakespeare we must briefly recall the stage of our science and the position of the profession in those days. It was just evolving out of the chaos of unlicensed and irregular practice. The College of Physicians had only been founded in 1518, and an Act of Parliament had united the surgeons and the barbers in 1540. Francis Bacon did not publish his *Novum Organum* till 1621; William Harvey did not make public his great discovery until 1628; medicine was still based on tradition, and truth was sought in the writings of Galen instead of by searching out nature by experiment. The College of Physicians in the University of Paris is credited in these days (1603, to be exact) with an exhortation to all physicians "that they will constantly continue in the doctrine of Hippocrates and Galen."

The *physician's fee* is mentioned in Shakespeare—

Thy sacred physic shall receive such pay  
As thy desires can wish.

*Pericles*, v, i.

but the amount is nowhere specified.

Mr. D'Arey Power has investigated the question of "The Fees of our ancestors," and comes to the conclusion that the "noble" and afterwards the "angel" (each worth from 6s. 8d. to 10s.) were looked upon as the customary fee during the seventeenth century. § At the Restoration in 1660 the doctors' fee was raised to 21s. on the introduction of the new coinage of a "guinea". This coin ceased to be minted in 1813, and, although non-existent, it is still used by doctors, barristers, and horse-dealers, and sometimes by the art-dealers and tailors. If the fee, in Shakespeare's time, was anything between ten shillings and the still customary guinea, it is remarkable, as the purchasing power of money in that age was at least five times what it is now. † Besides, the customary 6s. 8d. of the lawyer was, in Shakespeare's time, only 3s. 4d.—just half. ‡

\* Read at the meeting of the Ontario Medical Association, 28th May, 1919.

§ 'Janus,' 1909. Harlem: De Groen F. Bohn.

† *Shallow*. How a score of ewes now?

*Silence*. Thereafter as they be; a score of ewes may be worth ten pounds.

*Henry IV*, Part II, iii, 2.

(20 good ewes in England would now be worth 50 pounds).

‡ *Clown*. As fit as ten groats is for the hand of an attorney.

*All's Well that Ends Well*, ii, 2.