



THE IMAGE OF MEDICINE IN 1500: THEOLOGICAL
REACTIONS TO *THE SHIP OF FOOLS* *

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A collection of 110 verses, written in couplets in the Swabian dialect and illustrated with numerous woodcuts, was published in Basel in 1494 under the title *Das Narrenschiff* (The Ship of Fools).¹ Sebastian Brant, its author, was born in Strassburg in 1457 and died in the same city in 1521. He wrote extensively in Latin and in German, but the work which made him famous during his life and established him as a powerful intellectual influence during the 16th century was *The Ship of Fools*. He added 2 verses to the second edition, and the work reached its final form in the third edition (1499), in which Brant added a concluding verse, the intent of which was to establish the priority of his authorship.² Despite this, Brant's verses were widely plagiarized. However, many original writings about so-called "fools" of many sorts also appeared in the 16th and 17th centuries in the form of sermons, poems, plays, and prose.

The immediate popularity of *Das Narrenschiff* is attested to by the outpouring of editions, which began within three years of the appearance of Brant's first. Six authorized German editions, as well as six unauthorized ones, and translations into Latin, French, Dutch, and English were printed prior to Brant's death. The most important translation was the Latin version of Jacob Locher (Basel, 1497).^{3, 4} It was significant in three ways. Firstly, it was the only translation on which Brant collaborated; secondly, it made the work available in the language of the intelligentsia and thus furthered its international dissemination; and finally, most other early translations were based on it, rather than on the German original. Despite the association of Brant with Locher, the Latin text contains many deletions from, and additions to, the original *Narrenschiff*.

The Ship of Fools was a criticism of many of the vices and foibles of the time. Two of its verses, nos. 38 and 55, were devoted to medical

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¹ S. Brant: *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. K. Goedeke. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1872.

² E. H. Zeydel: *The Ship of Fools by Sebastian Brant*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1944, pp. 21-22.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-28.

⁴ F. Fraustadt: "Über das Verhältnis von Barclay's *Ship of Fools* zur lateinischen, französischen und deutschen Quelle." Breslau thesis, 1894.

matters. In the present study I shall present a new translation of these verses⁵ and compare the concepts which they contain with portions of the work of two noteworthy contemporaries of Brant.

While some of what Brant wrote about physicians and patients pertained largely to the pre-scientific era of medicine, many of his lines succinctly describe relationships which are as true today as in the 15th century. Competence requires good training, and the hallmark of the competent physician is appreciation of the importance of differential diagnosis and of the necessity of adapting the treatment to the disease. He advised that medical care should be sought at the beginning of an illness and recognized that the patient requires encouragement and that the physician must persevere in his ministrations. He revealed insight into the problems which lack of cooperation introduces into the patient's relationship with his physician and also understanding of the desperation which may develop in the patient, as well as the relationship of this to the perpetuation of quackery.

These verses of Brant will be compared to their parallels in two of the many works which soon were stimulated by *Das Narrenschiff*. The author of the first of these was Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg (1445-1510).⁶ Having been ordained into the priesthood in Freiburg (Alsace, now Baden), he came to the University of Basel in 1471 and was appointed professor of theology shortly before he left Basel in 1475.

Sebastian Brant, who was twelve years younger than Geiler, arrived at the University of Basel in 1475. He first studied philosophy there, and then jurisprudence. Although the two men were together in Basel only briefly, their life-long friendship began during this time. In 1474 a Ger-

⁵ T. G. Benedek: "Doctors and Patients in *The Ship of Fools*." *J. A. M. A.*, 1962, 181: adv. pp. 236-242. This translation of Brant's verses is reprinted in the Appendix to the present paper with the permission of the editor of the *J. A. M. A.*

⁶ E. Martin: Article on Geiler in *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*. Leipzig: Duncker and Humbolt, 1878, vol. 8, pp. 509-518. Johann Geiler was born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, in 1445. He is usually referred to as Geiler von Kaisersberg after the community on the other side of the Swiss-German border, where he resided during his early youth. He matriculated at the University of Freiburg in 1460 and remained there for eleven years, serving as dean of the philosophic faculty during the last two years. In 1471 Geiler went to the University of Basel as a graduate student and teacher in the faculties of philosophy and of theology. After three years he became dean of the philosophic faculty, and in the following year he was appointed professor of theology. In 1476 he returned to the University of Freiburg as rector but soon was induced to move to Strassburg to become priest of the Lorenz church and chaplain to the bishop. He remained in Strassburg for the rest of his life, much of which he devoted to encouraging reforms in the practices of the Church within its existing framework. Although these activities made him highly controversial, Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) named him his personal chaplain in 1501.

man theologian named von Stein⁷ came to Basel. He exercised a major role in the formation of the religious attitudes of Geiler, Brant, and some others who were to become important figures in the conflicts of the Reformation. Von Stein was a conservative, opposed to many of the practices of the Church which soon were to culminate in the Reformation, but hopeful about returning to older practices.

Geiler came to Strassburg in 1478 and during 32 years of ministry became a popular although controversial figure. In 1501, owing to the influence of Geiler, among others, Brant returned to Strassburg from Basel and lived there for his remaining twenty years. In 1503 he became chancellor of the city, and after his term of office remained a political, as well as an intellectual leader. Brant and Geiler both staunchly defended the traditions of the Church; they were rigid moralists but also innovators. The literary innovation embodied in *The Ship of Fools* was immediately accepted and made Brant famous. Geiler's outstanding innovation was to base sermons on secular literature rather than on biblical texts, and his most famous secular sermons were those based on *The Ship of Fools*. Geiler had access to the German edition, published in Strassburg in 1497, and also to the Latin version of Locher. From these verses he derived 142 sermons, which he preached in German at Old St. Peter's church in 1498 and '99.⁸ He did not publish them; they were first printed in a Latin translation in 1510, shortly after his death. In 1520, Fr. Johannes Pauli published a rather abbreviated German version of the Latin translation. This is the text from which I shall cite.^{9,10}

The relationship between the sermons and the poems whence they ad-

⁷ E. H. Zeydel: "Johannes a Lapide and Sebastian Brant." *Mod. Lang. Quart.*, 1943, 4: 209-212. Johann Heynlin von Stein (d. 1496) was better known as "a Lapide." He was rector of the University of Paris 1469-1474, then moved to Basel where he remained until becoming a monk in 1487.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹ J. Geiler von Kaisersberg: *Des hoch würdigen doctor Keiserspergs narenschiff so er gepredigt hat zü strassburg*. . . . Strassburg: Johanne Grieninger, 1520. The introduction to the translation begins: "*The Ship of Fools*, which was preached in Strassburg, his home bishopric in 1498 by the devout, God-fearing Doctor Johannis Geiler von Keisersperg, translated into German from the Latin. It was set into Latin by the distinguished Magister Jacob Echer, who at the time was a disciple and assistant of this very doctor. It later was again translated from the Latin into German by Brother Johannes Pauli of the order of the Lesser Brothers of St. Francis. He, in response to the requests of many devoted persons, learned as well as unlearned, has used his idea of the sense of the Latin more than the words, because Latin translated into German verbatim is rather ununderstandable. . . ."

¹⁰ Geiler's sermons customarily lasted one hour. The version of any as given by Pauli can be read in less than ten minutes.

mittedly were derived is easily recognized. Of course, the sequence of the ideas varied, and they were elaborated upon with anecdotes, some of which are quite humorous and certainly not pious. At the same time, many religious admonitions were also incorporated. On the Tuesday before Easter, 1498, Geiler preached a sermon entitled "Sick Fools," based on Brant's verse "Of Patients who Disobey."

The folly of sick people may have seven aspects. The first of these is to disdain medicine. It is written in Ecclesiasticus, Ch. 38:¹¹

Cultivate the physician in accordance with the need of him,
For him also hath God ordained.

It is from God that the physician getteth wisdom,
And from the king he receiveth gifts.

The skill of the physician lifteth up his head,
And he may stand before nobles.

God hath created medicines out of the earth,
and let not a discerning man reject them.

Therefore, a wise man does not scorn medicine.

The second attribute of the fool is to deceive the physician. Geiler amplified this by discussing uroscopy, therein revealing his uncertainty about its ethical status. Brant did not allude to uroscopy in the poem about disobedient patients and implied approval of it in the poem on quackery (55:24-25). While Geiler began by disparaging this widespread form of charlatanry,¹² he is also quoted as having said: "Oh, sick man, if you will act wisely, then tell the doctor eagerly the entire status of your illness, show him your urine, and give him accurate information and answers. He then will diagnose you well, praise God."

The third sort of foolishness is to disobey the physician. Here Brant's thoughts were adhered to rather closely until the conclusion, in which Geiler added the practical advice that if people do not intend to follow a doctor's recommendation they "should not waste the doctor's time and should save their money."

The fourth foible is closely related to the third, namely, to follow the advice of the physician belatedly, or to distort it so that it does not help.

¹¹ R. H. Charles, ed.: *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, Vol. I (G. H. Box and W. D. Oesterley, annotators), pp. 448-450. The text states only "We read in Ecclesiasticus, chapter 38, one should not disdain medicine. . . ." Verses 1-4, cited, seem most pertinent, although 1-15 may have been intended.

¹² "There also are some who do not tell the doctor whose urine it is, whether it be from a man or from a woman, and do not tell him what ails them. They think that the doctor should see in the urine what is the matter and how it goes with them, even though

Geiler again cited Ecclesiasticus,¹³ suggesting that people should be prepared to obtain a physician, even when they have not been ill.

Before thou fight, seek thee a helper;
 Before thou art ill, seek thee a physician.
 Before judgement examine thyself,
 And in the hour of visitation thou shalt find forgiveness.

The kinship of the roles of physician and priest here seem implicit.

The fifth variety of foolhardiness is "to seek medicine and advice from old women and from others who have never learned medicine." The widely held medieval conception that elderly women potentially are witches is expressed in the closely related next section. This type of fool "searches for medicine and health from witches and exorcisoresses of the devil. . . ." Geiler distinguishes between those who offer fallacious help out of their ignorance and those who mislead the gullible maliciously. Brant does not make this legalistic distinction, but deprecates "old women" in both of the medical poems.¹⁴

The gravest error, left for last, "is to neglect one's duty to God—to make use of medicine and not desire the help of God." In this finale Geiler incorporated everything that Brant said in the last third of his verse, including all four of his Biblical references.¹⁵ These illustrate the medical consequences of obedience and disobedience to God: long, protected life, or illness and premature death. "There are many people who do not consider that they should avoid sins, which often are a cause of disease. They constantly seek for health from the physicians and seldom or never call on the Lord God. Therefore, it often happens that they become all the sicker. . . . lay down your sin which is the cause of your disease . . ." Sin as a cause of all disease was universally accepted throughout the Middle Ages. This concept was perhaps most eloquently expressed by Petrarch in "Phisicke against fortune . . ." ^{16,17} 150 years before Geiler and began its gradual decline only a century after Geiler.

the urine deceives, above everything and in all ways; verily, it has another appearance every hour. Still, they want the doctor to divine it for them, as though he were a prophet. . . ."

¹³ The fourth section ends "Ecclesiasti XVIII. ante languorem adipe medicinam." Verses 1-2 seem most appropriate. Box and Oesterley: *loc. cit.*, fn. 11 above, p. 380.

¹⁴ Verse 38, lines 33-34; verse 55, line 10.

¹⁵ References in Verse 38:—I Maccabees, 4: 36; 8: 1; 8: 20; 9: 17-18. II Kings, 20: 1-6. II Chronicles, 33: 12-13. Matthew, 9: 2.

¹⁶ F. Petrarca: *Phisicke against Fortune*, as well prosperous as Adverse. Transl. by Thomas Twyne, London: Richard Watkyns, 1579.

¹⁷ T. G. Benedek and G. P. Rodnan: "Petrarch on medicine and the gout." *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1963, 37: 397-416.

Geiler chose the feast of Corpus Christi, nine weeks after Easter, to preach "Of Foolish Physicians." He justified speaking of physicians on this day because it is "the high feast of the Spiritual Physician who descended from Heaven into this great spiritual hospital and pesthouse—the world, which is filled with patients who are ill of sins. . . ." In this sermon Brant's verse was not adhered to as closely as it was in the foregoing sermon.

The first attribute of medical knaves is ignorance: they are "wanderers and squatters who venture into what they have not learned." An example of such a knave is given in the following anecdote which illustrates in addition, intentionally or not, that quackery requires a sufficiently gullible clientele in order to succeed.

There was another fool who, whenever someone wanted some medicine, had a pill which he would give to any man who desired it. A peasant had lost a donkey and came to him, asking for the pill in order to find his donkey. He gave it to the peasant. In the morning, when this peasant went out in search for his donkey, the pill began to act. He was forced to go into a narrow path by a hedge in order to relieve himself. There he found his donkey standing at a bush eating leaves. So, he praised the medicine for having found his donkey for him.

In the second section three qualities were frowned upon by Geiler, some of which had been alluded to by Brant.

Some physicians who otherwise are learned enough are, however, dissolute. Firstly, they do not abide by the teachings and rules of the doctors of their art, and think up new things from their fantasies, and try to prove something new. If this is not sensible, then they are guilty of the life of the patient. Secondly, they are slovenly in caring for him. In the third place, when they attend the patient to give him medicine at the proper time they may not accomplish all they should, due to their avarice.

The next section is concerned with "physicians and barbers who prolong sickness and who add damage to damage in order to gain more earnings." Thus avarice is further deplored.

The fourth section expands on the dangers of experimentation. Geiler said, "It is safer for the physician to leave the patient in God's power than to give medicine of which he is unsure."

The fifth improper attitude is to be "only physicians of the body and not of the conscience."

Interference "with the salvation of the patient's soul by giving him too much encouragement that he has long to live" is next criticized. The physician should encourage the patient about his recovery only when this has some basis in probability. If the physician considers recovery

unlikely, it would be of greater value to the patient to be encouraged to confess his sins, even though he would learn from this that he is expected to die soon. Whether the physician should entirely abdicate in favor of the priest is not made clear. Brant did not specify how the physician should behave toward the dying patient. However, the lines:

A good physician does not fly
Because the patient is apt to die,

might imply some difference of opinion between Brant and Geiler.

In the concluding portion of the sermon Geiler for the third time chastised avariciousness in the physician. He acknowledged, however, that the compassionate physician should guard against being taken advantage of.

The physician should show compassion to the poor who are unable to pay. Verily, he should assist them for nothing and at his own expense. But should it happen that a wealthy man is so miserly that he refuses to take any medicine, the physician should give it to him against his will and then force him to pay.

Alexander Barclay's¹⁸ version of *The Ship of Fools* was the most enduring of his writings. It was published in London in 1509 under the title *The Shyp of Folyes of the Worlde*. He stated in his introduction that he had composed an adaptation drawn from three languages and did not claim to have translated the German original faithfully into English.¹⁹ His principal source was the Latin version of Locher. He also used a French translation of Locher's text and Brant's German text.²⁰ The explanations which Barclay, designating himself the "envoy to the fools," appended to many of the verses were a device of Locher.

While Brant chided physicians, Barclay assaulted them. The 37 lines of Brant's "Of knavish medicine" grew to 120 in Barclay's quill and were entitled "Of foolish physicians who only follow practice, knowing nought of the speculations of their faculty." Barclay's ire was directed particularly against the avarice which, he implied, is universal among physicians. He was even more vehement about this than Geiler had been. Brant's unscrupulous physician said (55: 3-4):

¹⁸ A. W. Ward: "Alexander Barclay," L. Stephen and S. Lee, eds.: *Dictionary of National Biography*. New York: Macmillan, 1908, vol. 1, pp. 1076-1081. Barclay was probably Scottish. He was born in about 1476, became a Franciscan monk, and died in Surrey in 1552.

¹⁹ A. Barclay: *Shyp of Folyes of the Worlde*. London: Richard Pynson, 1509: "I haue taken upon me, howbeit unworthy, to drawe into our Englysshe tunge the sayd boke, named the shyp of folys, as nere to the sayd three languages as the parcyte of my wyt wyll suffer me." The quoted verses have been put into modern English by the present author.

²⁰ Fraustadt, *op. cit.*, fn. 4 above.

. . . wait until you hear from me
 What I find in my syllabi,

making no reference to remuneration. Barclay, however, said (ll. 22-23) :

The physician says after he has received his fee,
 Abide a while until my books I oversee.

Brant made only a brief simile between a bad physician and an indecisive advocate, but Barclay devoted 3½ verses (ll. 75-98) to the topic "A lawyer and a physician are of the same kind," their common fault being avarice. This section is concluded with the lines (96-98) :

So lawyers and physicians thousands do mar,
 And when they can no more from their suers have,
 The plaintiff goes begging, the patient is borne to his grave.

While Brant merely said that quacks only know "what the herbals teach or what old women preach" (55: 9-10), Barclay specified what physicians ought to study. Lack of understanding of their art and ignorance of the medical literature are not presented as causally related, but as parallel signs of the "foolish physician" (ll. 33-42).

An herb or weed that grows upon a wall
 Bears within it these fools' medicine;
 They have no other books nor doctrine.
 Nor do they read to learn the true science,
 Or perfect knowledge and foundation of medicine.
 They read no volumes of the experience
 Of Podalirius,²¹ nor Mesue's²² doctrine.
 Such fools disdain their minds to incline
 Unto the doctrine in the books of Avicenna,
 Of Hippocrates and perfect Galen.

Not only did Barclay spell out the required reading of a proper physician, but he also criticized the *quacks* for not abiding by the signs of astrology, saying (ll. 57-59) :

Such witches boldly dare to affirm and say
 That they can heal every sore with one herb
 Under *every* sign of the planets, hour and day . . .

The quacks, furthermore (ll. 65-66) :

²¹ Podalirius, in Greek mythology, was the son of Aesculapius and, like his father, knew the secrets of healing.

²² Mesue (d. 857 A. D.), physician of Baghdad, a prolific writer and translator whose works were well known in Renaissance Europe. He is mentioned by Brant in another portion of *Das Narrenschiff* (verse 21, line 21).

... need not the signs or firmament,
The cause of things or the strength of nature.

Barclay's belief here appears to have been diametrically opposed to that of Brant. In the verse "O knavish medicine" Brant only accused the quacks of claiming to heal all ailments "with salve unique" and did not allude to astrology. However, he devoted an entire verse of *The Ship of Fools* to thoroughly deriding this form of impious foolishness.²³

Barclay's version of the verse "Of patients who disobey" is entitled "Of those who are diseased and sick and are impatient and disobedient to the physician." In this the original is expanded from 95 to 114 lines and, aside from slight changes in sequence, most of the subject matter is presented in a manner similar to that of Brant. The most important change is the deletion of the four Biblical references—to Maccabees, Kings, Chronicles, and Matthew—and the insertion of another in an earlier portion of the verse. Brant wrote (38: 43-46):

Many a man the devil will please
In hope that he will escape the disease;
If he from the devil awaits relief
He must expect still greater grief.

Barclay changed this to (ll. 85-91):

Paul the Apostle does boldly say and prove
That they who to such witches will assent
Are heretics, Lollards, and false in their belief,
Breaking God's laws and commandment,
And proof often also makes it evident
That such who of witchcraft have intent
By their false medicine sooner come to their end.

The reference to St. Paul probably pertains to a passage in the Acts of the Apostles²⁴ which seems to be rather of historical than religious significance. We are told that Paul was an exorciser, just as the Hebrew priests were. Both diseases and evil spirits may be banished by appropriate exorcism. Whether the act is sinful appears to depend on which sect it is, whose representative is performing the exorcism. Thus exorcism of diseases, as well as of evil spirits, could claim the support of biblical authority. The close association between religious healing in the spiritual sense and faith healing of physical ailments has only diminished since objective methods of observation and effective medicines have become

²³ Verse 65: "Of attention to the stars."

²⁴ Acts of the Apostles, 19: 11-17.

available. Barclay implied that persons who abide by the official religious dogma also consult proper physicians, while people who belong to sects of which he disapproved, such as the Lollards, show their poor judgment also by consulting quacks. This is an irrelevant aside in relation to Brant's poem, but it parallels the verses cited from the Acts of the Apostles.

Barclay's "envoys," which are the comments that he appended at the end of his verses, can be thought of as a summary of the beliefs of all three of our authors in regard to doctors and patients.²⁵ The most desirable qualities of the physician are wisdom and charity. He should be so knowledgeable that he can treat any ailment without referring to written authority, and he should recognize that there is no single cure-all. He should feel responsibility for his patient, persevere in treatment, and place the welfare of the patient before his desire for reward.

The patient should seek treatment early in the course of his disease and should be frank in giving the history of his illness to his physician. He should then follow the physician's advice faithfully but never forget also to seek divine grace.

²⁵ Barclay's "envoy" to disobedient patients reads as follows:

The envoy of Barclay to the Fools.
 You man or woman who lies sick in vice,
 To God's vicars confess your sin wholly,
 So that you from your spiritual ill arise,
 For your soul finding help and remedy.
 Without lying show him your sin plainly,
 Withhold not for shame, nor fall into it again;
 Better show your soul there to one secretly
 Than later openly and abiding eternal pain.
 Follow the counsel of a wise confessor;
 Take not cold water instead of vermeil wine;
 For much sweetness you should endure a little sour.
 Keep well the diet and threefold medicine
 Ordained for sin by spiritual doctrine.
 That is: confession, contrition and satisfaction;
 These three, with grace divine
 Are perfect salves for all transgression.

Barclay's final advice to unscrupulous physicians is:

The envoy of the translator.
 You blind physician who with your craft nought can,
 Take leave of your lewdness and bold audacity,
 To take on the cure of child and man.
 For by your folly the worse might they be,
 And you who surely perceive your faculty,
 Be true to it, and avarice from you cast.
 It is shameful to bring a man to poverty
 And then in pain to leave him at the last.

The most important problem of the role of medicine in society, which neither these nor other intellectuals of their time were able to resolve, was the relationship between medicine and religion. All diseases had one primary cause—they were punishment which was meted out by God for all conceivable transgressions. This belief imparted two qualities to every ailment: 1) It is incurable by purely mortal intervention and hence physicians alone are powerless; 2) disease is a problem of the soul, since this is the “organ” of communion with God, the only immortal part of man, and the soul is the province of the priest. So, on these abstract grounds, the importance of the priest must be far greater than that of the physician.

However, man desires self-preservation, and therefore the claim of the healer to be able to improve life before death has had a more powerful attraction than the promise of the priest for a better life after death. Even though the physician could do little to fulfill his promise, the very desire of mankind that it be fulfilled sufficed to maintain the high position of the physician. A second major characteristic of man is a combination of curiosity and fear about things of which he feels ignorant. Nothing arouses his curiosities and fears concerning his body as much as an illness. The physician claimed to possess special knowledge of the mysteries of human bodily functions, and he was called upon at the time when his patient and the patient's family were particularly fearful and curious about themselves. Thus his relationship to the patient and his family perpetuated the awe with which he was regarded. The physician, at least in the popular belief, had more knowledge of the body than the priest possessed. The eventual separation of medicine and religion can be traced in large part to the increasing real superiority of the medical knowledge of the physician and the increasing therapeutic successes attendant thereon.

APPENDIX

*Who medicine would ply with skill,
And yet can't cure a single ill,
A quack is he, without good will.*

55. OF KNAVISH MEDICINE

He fits in well with other fools
Who examines the urine of one who ails
And says: Wait until you hear from me
What I find in my syllabi.

5. While he goes home to his library
The patient proceeds toward the mortuary.
Many to medicine aspire

- Whom ineptitude does mire
 In what the herbals teach
10. Or what old women preach.
 They have an art which is so sure
 That every malady it can cure;
 One need no longer differences behold
 Among man, woman, child, young and old,
15. Or humors, pressures, heat and cold.
 An herb with strength and power far,
 Equal to the salve in an apothecary jar,
 With which the barbers a plaster prepare
 And thereby all wounds do repair,
20. Be they boil, stab, break or cut,
 Master Fool forsakes them not.
 Who seeks to heal with salve unique
 All bleary eyes, bloodshot and weak,
 And will purge without a urine glass,
25. He is a doctor as Zuhsta * was.
 An advocate surely is his twain
 Who on nothing can opine;
 Quite like a confessor-priest is he
 Who never can come to see
30. What the agents of all the plagues would be
 Or each way of living sinfully.
 Oh, the poultice is in such company!
 Some men are by knaves mislead
 And don't perceive it until they are dead.

*Who is ill and bears suffering untold,
 Yet his doctor's counsel won't uphold,
 Incurs damages, manifold.*

38. OF PATIENTS WHO DISOBEY
 He is a fool who is not impressed
 With a physician's advice when distressed
 And who his diet does dispute
 Which the doctor did for him compute,
5. And water drinks instead of wine,
 Or similar things, all out of line,
 And lies that he may pursue his fun
 Until carried off when life is done.
 Whoever wants soon to escape the ill
10. Must resist its onset with all his will,
 Since medicine must act at length
 Once illness has achieved full strength.
 He who wishes soon to be well
 Shows the physician his wound without fail,
15. And suffers him to rupture it,
 Or with a lancet puncture it,
 And suture, cleanse or bandage it;

* Zuhsta or Zuohsta was a famous quack, alleged to have practiced in Basel.

- Even if thereby he loses his skin
 And life alone remains to him,
20. His soul has been kept from leaving him.
 A good physician does not fly
 Because the patient is apt to die.
 A sick man surely should defer
 To hope that soon he shall recover.
25. A patient who to his physician lies,
 And in confession a priest deceives,
 And to his attorney falsely speaks,
 When 'tis his counsel that he seeks,
 He to himself alone has lied
30. And with his sin has himself beguiled.
 He is a fool who a physician seeks
 Whose word and teaching he not heeds;
 Instead following old wives' advice,
 And letting himself be blessed to death
35. With talismans and with fools' root,
 Does plunge into hell forsooth.
 Superstition now is so profuse,
 Which in the search for health is used,
 That were I to assemble it all
40. I could write a magic manual.
 He who is ill his health does desire,
 And whence help comes he does not care.
 Many a man the devil will please
 In hope that he will escape the disease;
45. If he from the devil awaits relief
 He must expect still greater grief.
 From foolishness he is quite berserk
 Who against God for health would search,
 And after true wisdom strive,
50. That he be erudite and wise.
 He is unsound, quite dense is he,
 Unwise and vile in his folly,
 In constant illness entrapped he be,
 In nonsense and blindness perpetually.
55. Disease arises from grievous sins,
 And many a serious illness bring,
 Hence, who illness would avoid
 Should keep God before his eyes,
 Attend to confession of his sins
60. Ere he takes the medicine,
 So that the soul its health regains
 Before the doctor he obtains.
 But many a fool says nowadays:
 Preserve the body and the soul remains:
65. Thus we'll have disease perpetually,
 Which we would escape temporarily.
 Many now are decayed and long since dead
 Who, had they earlier sought for God,
 Earned His grace, favor and aid

70. Ere they sought the physician's art,
And intended by His Mercy to abide,
Still would with impure souls have died.
Would Maccabee have relied alone
On God and not on Imperial Rome,
75. As he had done in days of yore,
He would have lived many years more.
Hezekiah would have died,
Had he not on God relied
And thus had achieved God's will,
80. So that he would live longer still.
And had Manasseh not returned,
God would forever him have spurned.
Our Lord did to the invalid speak,
Who had for many years been weak :
85. Go, sin no more, be not a fool,
That nothing worse should you befall.
Many a man while ill does vow
That he'll improve his life somehow.
One speaks of him, whose health once restored,
90. Becomes worse than he was before,
And thinks that God has been deceived—
He soon falls prey to greater grief.