

SUMMARY: Dedicatory epistle to Oxford in George Baker's 1574 publication *The Composition or Making of the Most Excellent and Precious Oil Called Oleum Magistrale First Published by the Commandment of the King of Spain . . . Also the Third Book of Galen of Curing of Pricks and Wounds of Sinews*. George Baker was Oxford's personal physician for a time, and later a surgeon to Queen Elizabeth. Baker's book consists primarily of two translations, the first a translation, apparently from an intermediate French source, of the original Spanish pamphlet on the oleum magistrale discovered by the Morisco healer Aparicio de Zubia, the second a translation, apparently from a French epitome, of the *Third Book of Galen*. Baker says in his epistle that the two translations are 'superfluous' so far as Oxford himself is concerned, since Oxford *can both read and understand the same in the first tongues wherein the authors have written*. The original language in which the book on the oleum magistrale was written was Spanish; the original language in which Galen's Third Book was written was Greek. Baker's statement thus means that Oxford was fluent in both Spanish and Greek. For additional evidence of Oxford's fluency in Spanish, see the dedicatory epistle to Oxford in Anthony Munday's translation of *Palmerin D'Oliva*.

To the right honourable Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, Viscount Bulbeck, Lord of Escalles and Badlesmere, and Lord Great Chamberlain of England, his singular good Lord and master, George Baker wisheth health, long life, with much increase of virtue & honour

It is not unknown to any, right Honourable, which have been but meanly conversant in good learning how far the Grecians did surmount all the nations of the world in renown of virtue, learning, politic government, and noble victories. For what nation doth not reverence their sages? What people doth not embrace their studies? What city doth not desire their government? What province was not subject to their empire? Yea, was not Grecia the theatre, spectacle, and light of the whole world? Were there not in it many famous cities whose people & inhabitants for civility, whose laws for policy, whose edifices for magnificence might seen angelical, divine, and celestial, as Athens and Thebes etc.?

But none more famous than the city of Sparta, which by the space of 700 years excelled all the cities of Grecia when they most flourished, both in renown of glory and equity of laws, & when they were subdued, this one city, Sparta, by defending themselves from foreign invasion achieved more honour than whole Grecia did ever win by enlarging their empire. For when Philip of Macedonia in his conquest of those islandish countries, and his son Alexander after him at the winning of Thebes, were proclaimed emperors of sea and land, the Spartans consented not thereto, nor would become tributories.

What should be the cause that this one city should less fear the force of Alexander than all other? How became it so inexpugnable? Was it so strongly fortified with walls and bulwarks and warlike munition? Not at all. The courage of the citizens was their only

wall of defence. Did the name of Hercules, whose progeny they were, defend them? Nay, rather the good counsel of Lycurgus made them invincible, who among other things exhorted them to endeavour to excel the whole world in renown of virtue and glory of valiantness as their progenitor Hercules did, which if they did not, it were but vain to vaunt of their pedigree.

Can it be said that the multitude of citizens made them strong that when by continual war the number was greatly diminished and their force much weakened? Surely by concord they were preserved.

Such is the strength that the observation of good laws doth bring to commonwealths, such fruits kindly branches (not degenerating from a virtuous stock) do yield, such commodities proceed from virtue, and contrary effects from contrary causes, as may appear in those same Lacedaemonians which afterwards by degeneration were brought to the like thralldom that their neighbours were in, being at length more ashamed than proud of their pedigree, more fearful than glad of their long resistance. Such alteration followed the change of government when no jot of Lycurgus' laws nor any other steps of their progenitors' virtues remained among them, but each man neglected his oath given to the commonwealth, each man, as he was able most to prevail, exercised tyranny over his own citizens, each man accounted that liberty to do what liked him, to live riotously and licentiously, each man studied to enrich himself, to fortify his own house, and to feather his own nest. But in the meantime the strength of the commonwealth decayed and their foreign enemies increased and at length they found by experience how pernicious a thing it is to abrogate good laws, to change the countenance of a well-governed state, to race out the memory of their noble progenitors.

Which example, right Honourable, I wish to be marked of all noble families and famous cities, that therein they may consider that by virtue they are preserved, and by degeneration they fall.

Yet do I not write these things to your Honour by the way of exhortation, but rather as a testimony of that which is already apparent to all men, namely to your Honour's study carefully to join the commendation of virtue with your nobility of blood and lineage, whose desire it is (with noble Themistocles) so to advance the glory of your country (whereby your own honor is the more excellent) that no barbarous Siriphian may upbraid your honour as though it depended only of the nobility of your country and family, whenas if opportunity would serve, your Honour, I doubt not, would be found in noble attempts and valiant acts nothing inferior to Themistocles.

In the meantime, among infinite tokens this is one especial sign of your Honour's heroic mind, that is [sic for 'as'] in courage, activity, and chivalry you yourself seek to express Achilles and other noble personages, so also your Honour doth heartily embrace all such as excel in any worthy virtue, whether it be to commend & adorn her with her seemly colours as Homer etc., or to attend like handmaids on her as Hippocrates or Galen with their needful art of chirurgery, neither doth your Honour suffer them to pass unrewarded, as may appear by the most part of them which your Honour hath entertained

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into your service, as I myself have had experience since it pleased your Honour to entertain me (though far unworthy) for my profession in the art of chirurgery, since the which time I have accounted both myself and all my labours whatsoever to be due unto your Honour, so that if by continual study I might happily invent, or by daily practice in the art of chirurgery find out any mystery which other before me had not obtained, I was fully purposed to consecrate and dedicate the same unto your name, not that I am so foolish to think that by any my inventions & labours anything should be added to that huge heap of your heroical virtues, but partly because (as I have said) I might [+not] transfer them to any other, being owing unto your Honour, and partly because the renown of your Honour's name might obtain grace for my boldness, and bring credit to my labours.

But in the meantime, till I shall be able of mine own knowledge to add something to the perfection of the art and open some good rule to the relief of my countrymen, I have adventured to interpret one small work of the fatherly both physician and chirurgeon Galen which I judged most necessary for our time, having joined the same with other treatises no less fruitful than profitable.

Which work, although it agreeth neither with the dignity of your noble name nor peradventure is answerable to your Honour's opinion and expectation of me, and (which I must needs confess) is superfluous to your Honour, who can both read and understand the same in the first tongues wherein the authors have written, yet because other may be relieved thereby, I thought I might both easily obtain pardon, and also be bold to use your Honour's patronage in this behalf, seeing the same your Honour's courtesy and clemency is usually extended to all men, which doth not use to esteem such gifts as this according to the value, but accepting willingly the good meaning of the person.

Thus beseeching your Honour to take in good part this testimony of my thankful heart, such as it is, I beseech also the immortal God to uphold the renown of your Honour's name in the noble lineage of your noble progenitors.

Your Honour's humble and obedient servant,  
George Baker