

Consilium XLVIII

Translated by Patricia Coyne

Argument

The most illustrious and worshipful D. N. N., after he had just past beyond the onset of youth and puberty, was endowed with a rather weak stomach and was so greatly subject to sickness that, although he was leading a healthy life without interruptions, he was always and without exception forced to eat meat every day and sometimes as much as four times as anyone else and indeed only those quite tender meats and those easy to cook and for this reason, when he became older, after he had sought the advice of several doctors, he obtained an exemption from F. R. Urban the eighth so that he could always eat meat. In the meantime, after he was compelled to make a long journey because of some very urgent business affairs, he remained outside his native land for almost three years and advanced to such great health of body that he seemed to have become another man. Having at last returned to his native land, when he observed that he held himself like an athlete and was in excellent health in regard to his stomach, moved by religious zeal and thinking himself bound to the observation of the Forty Days and of other fasts, he sought the advice of doctors and asked whether he could, without the loss of his recovered health, return to the observation of fasts, for when he undertook an experiment of fasting for three or four days, he had noticed he had not been completely well. And so, having summoned five doctors of the first rank, he asked that, after thoroughly discussing his situation, they determine what he ought to do in good conscience; and although the others were agreed he could not without serious danger to his health observe the laws of fasting lest he return to his former state of poor health, I handed down a contrary opinion, the reasons for which see below.

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Summary

1. Faults which are natural cannot be removed.
2. From a change of air bodies clearly and perceptibly receive changes.
3. To what extent a change of age is beneficial in overcoming long-lasting and contumacious diseases.
4. For strength increases with exertion and exercise.
5. Sloth weakens the body, exertion strengthens it.
6. Faults arising from happenstance are more easily removed than those stemming from nature.
7. Incurable diseases are sometimes cured by only a change of air.
8. The flesh of the turtle is difficult to digest and is melancholic.
9. Worry drains a man and makes him weak
10. The air of our native land is naturally more friendly to us than the air of a foreign land.
11. A change of air may be advantageous to some and injurious to others.

1. Not without strong reasons for so determining did my colleagues express the opinion that the most illustrious gentleman should not be obliged to observe fast days, even if at present he is known to be in excellent health; first because, although from a journey and from a change of air he may seem to be endowed with an excellent constitution and to be in good health in respect to his digestion, yet on the grounds that a weakness of this same digestion is natural to him and he has in addition a certain intolerance and natural contrariety to fish and other foods which we usually consume on

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fast days, it is thus certain the symptoms cannot be removed since they may recur at the slightest opportunity as experience had already demonstrated, for faults which occur naturally cannot be removed and so a reasonable fear arises that from the observation of fast days he may once again return to his former and natural weakness and again be compelled always to lead the life of an invalid.

Moreover, since this most illustrious gentleman is living in a healthy state right up to this moment because of the regimen of food which he observes and it may be agreed that his strength is satisfactory, with his problems it will be entirely against medical precept to force him to another regimen of nourishment, since that is the way which brings him soundness of health without any alteration; for it must not be said in his case that he acquired greater strength and has done better in regards to his digestion than he had done previously because of a change of air and his journey, but much more that this has happened to him from observing a regimen of nourishment and from avoiding consuming any of the foods which disagreed with his digestion and from which, for this obvious reason, he was not able to nourish his body, and thus, however often he used these foods, although he always selected the less harmful, he relapsed into perceptible weakness, with the result that although he employed the utmost diligence in order to accustom himself to them, yet never did this happen as he wished and never was he able to overcome that natural intolerance which he had been given to such foods; and he is also able to demonstrate more than sufficiently that he still retains this intolerance since he has gained new proof concerning this matter, about which in the report. My colleagues said, as mentioned above, that it is to be feared that when in the future this most illustrious gentleman is compelled to remain in his native land, in which he has

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shown he does not do well even if he uses a very healthy diet which is both in accord with his nature and demanded by his health, he may fall all the more easily into his former weakness if he returns to the observation of fast days; because just as his native air, at other times very inimical to him, was always able to harm his strength and his digestion when combined with less excellent food, so foreign air, much more beneficial to him, was able to help his strength and his digestion when combined with a proper regimen of nourishment, and just as from the change of his native air into foreign air he changed the constitution of his body into a much better and stronger one, so from the exchange of foreign air for his native air it is to be feared that he may return to his previous state of bodily health, and thus according to their excellent judgment he must take care not to be lacking in his regimen of nourishment, which might very easily happen if on fast days he is to be compelled to use foods incompatible by nature because of which he subsequently may be rendered completely unfit for the good works from which he is always accustomed to abstain.

2. They added that it is certain that from a change of air, especially from air in which one has remained for a long time to air from which one has been long absent, bodies perceptibly and clearly receive changes both for bad and for good, as is noted by *Hippocr. in lib. de octem. Par. num. 3. alibi, and by Cornel. Cels. lib. 1. sua Med. cap. 3. & by Lucret. lib. 3. de Rer. nat. as here.*

*Nonne vides etiam caeli novitate, & aquarum Tentari procul a patria quicunque domoque Adveniunt? [Surely you see also how a new climate and waters affect those who travel far from home and native land?] *Translator's note: this quotation is found in De Rerum Natura, Book 6, line 1103.*

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This is not only true in the case of a change from better air into worse, but also in a change of worse air into better, as is clear from the words of Celsus himself. Therefore, just as a change into good air brought about the greatest benefit to the health of the illustrious man, so we ought to be more certain that a change to bad air is going to bring evident harm, for if even a change into the good is harmful, how much more will a change for the bad be harmful? But, if to this same change from good air into worse is added a change from more excellent food to less excellent, we will quite certainly propel him into inevitable danger to his health, I may even say to his life. Therefore, this seems enough to excuse the most illustrious gentleman from the observation of fasts since the danger arising from this observation, according to what has been said above, is certain and very clear.

3. But in truth, not being satisfied with all the previously mentioned arguments brought forward for the opposite opinion, I thought the most illustrious gentleman, in order that he might pursue his devotion to his religious observances, could safely and with no noteworthy danger satisfy the obligation of fasting and abstaining from meats and other foods forbidden on fast days by the church by eating other available foods; provided that moderation is employed, on the grounds that, in the first place, the most illustrious gentleman not only benefited, as is supposed, from his journey, from a change of air and from maintaining a regimen of food by abstaining from fish and other foods proper to fast days, which at other times seemed especially harmful to him, but also from a change of age which may be of considerable benefit in overcoming and conquering long- lasting and contumacious illnesses, as even those who revered medicine from its first beginning recognize and which is evident from the example of

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epilepsy and other such very puzzling diseases which in particular are banished by a change of age according to *Hipp. sententiam Aphor. sect. 3. num. 28. & sect 5. Aphor. 7. ubi Gal. in comm.* and so although hitherto he was troubled in the more fiery ages, in youth, of course, and in the age of maturity and virility, yet now as he hastens to old age, from a change of constitution it has happened that he has sufficiently regained the health which earlier dispositions disturbed with their excessive heat: for at an earlier age he burned with so much heat of the liver that he was given too cold a stomach, with the liver absorbing and attracting all heat so that he could not even consume food which is very easily digested; more than this, the heat of the liver, which was very excessive and degenerating into the abnormal, was dispersing the better emissions of the stomach and of the other parts so that the processes of digestion operated very poorly and in his illness every day he fell into a worse state and so he seemed to become even weaker and to become wasted in his more solid members because his body was denied its due nourishment.

4. and 5. To these considerations must be added the exertion experienced on a journey, especially a very long journey as his was, for from exertion and exercise strength increases. In this there is vigor of the body, *Hippocr. de Aer. aq. 7 loc. num. 54.* and this is excellent in this situation, because as likewise *Hipp. lib. 2. de diet. num. 24.* exertion makes dry and makes the body robust, to which opinion is joined in agreement *Cels. lib. 1. sita Medic. cap. 1.* who says inactivity weakens the body, exertion strengthens it, the former brings an early old age, the latter a long period of youth. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if the most illustrious gentleman, from the many and unaccustomed exertions undertaken on his journey and in carrying out the

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tasks which had to be accomplished, acquired a greater firmness of body and recovered his strength, where previously from ease and inactivity he was so feeble and weak in his bodily functions that he could not even walk abroad with sufficient safety and so he took no exercise of any kind. And it should not be said that this lack of exercise could have come about because he was of thin appearance and so desiccated that he seemed to come close to an extreme emaciation, since this emaciation and thinness of his body came about not so much from excessive heat as from the fact that his body was in no way being nourished as was necessary. Moreover, from exercise he reported two very great benefits, first the fact that as his humors had been removed with his excrement, his natural heat escaped more easily since it was less hindered in performing its proper functions and as a result it was even able to overcome the abnormal heat and could carry out any digestive processes more efficiently and more easily, even as his limbs too, which had previously been denied their due nourishment, were made stronger by their own natural heat and afterwards were able to draw to themselves the required nourishment and his body was able to put on weight and bring itself into a much better condition by causing a more vivid complexion and more liveliness of spirit. All these things seem so evident that we are compelled to affirm as true that the weakness of his stomach and the thinness of his whole body and the other conditions which he suffered in earlier periods of his life he suffered not from a weakness of his nature, but rather from weakness which befell him, since at other times by nature he has been given his own strong and vigorous elements.

6. Nor do they affect any argument which is brought forward to the contrary, and what is first assumed, namely that the most illustrious gentleman has been endowed by

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nature with a less than laudable constitution, not just in respect to the weakness his whole body, but especially in the weakness of his stomach, is not wholly true because although this weakness did appear after puberty, as has been stated, yet in his childhood right up to his fourteenth year he had an excellent constitution and such a strong stomach that he even tolerated very well the digestion of great quantities of food and he never suffered stomach pains or any other problems originating from his stomach, as he himself has given witness, notwithstanding those arguments to the contrary which my colleague, his family doctor, brought forward when he persuaded the gentleman and his other medical colleagues to his own opinion. From mischance, moreover, when his heat increased as he aged and with his original moisture decreasing gradually, from errors made in his regimen of nourishment and especially on account of the studies to which he devoted himself incessantly and diligently and beyond a suitable period of time, he began to suffer badly in his stomach, to have a poor digestion and to emit very many belches from his mouth which were sometimes acid tasting and at other times also foul smelling, and he considered it necessary to act more cautiously in his regimen of nourishment and because he knew from experience that he clearly suffered great harm from fish, oil, salted foods and other foods used on fast days and that he suffered likewise from eggs no matter how they were cooked, even poached or able to be sucked up, he was compelled always to turn to the use of meats, as has been stated, although he was forced to select the more tender and easily digestible meats and to consume them in small quantities. From which it appears very clearly that he had not suffered from the moment of his birth and because of his nature all those symptoms which had forced him always to eat meat, but that they befell him by

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mischance, and finally that these problems ended because of a correctly altered regimen of nourishment, because of the previously mentioned change of air, because of the change from inactivity to exercise, because of his devoting himself more sparingly to his studies and only at the required and appropriate times and indeed by sometimes completely omitting them, and that after this was done he recovered the earlier and natural vigor which had been granted to him by nature from his birth; for which reason we have no cause to fear that these same conditions may recur from the observation of fast days and indeed, since conditions which happen by accident are more easily removed than those which are innate by nature, it must be stated that the most illustrious gentleman, who for the most part has already overcome those symptoms with which he was afflicted, will, if caution is employed, very easily overcome those which remain, if indeed we perceive any have still remained, and it is very unlikely that we need fear that he may return to his former state of ill health.

7. To the argument, which is added, that the most illustrious gentleman has made such great progress in his health from observing a regimen of nourishment consisting of abstaining from fish and from other foods injurious to him, the response is that this argument easily proves to be false for the reason that he had made use of this regimen of nourishment in his native land for many years and yet he was always troubled by the same conditions, therefore, since he made no progress in this matter during a long period of very many years, it must be said that he recovered his health not for that reason but from another new and obvious cause; and since in this case the new causes included such evident ones as a long journey, exertions, a change of air, and other reasons of this kind, any one of which in itself may be considered very efficacious

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in overcoming long-standing and contumacious maladies, it must be admitted that he has advanced so much in health because of these advantages and not on account of the observation of a regimen of nourishment which elsewhere had brought absolutely no benefit over such an extended period of time; therefore, a change of air by which alone incurable diseases are sometimes cured brought very great changes and also the fact that he was engaged in considerable exertion, for as *Hippocr. lib. de Nat. hum. 17. & lib. de flat. num. 2. said longstanding illnesses are overcome if a person given over to idleness is compelled to exercise or on the contrary if a person exhausted by too much exertion is allowed to rest.* If a change of constitution, which arises from a change of age because of which the departure of heat has been abated, is added to all these causes, we will very clearly see that the abstinence from the foods of the Forty Day fast which he observed for such a long period of time played a very small, indeed, probably no part in the recovery of the health of the most illustrious gentleman.

8 and 9. And there is no greater truth in the argument that the most illustrious gentleman had a natural intolerance to and incompatibility with fish and other foods used on fast days, indeed he freely admits this statement and affirms that before puberty he enjoyed these foods freely and without harmful effects and that he would not be averse to them at the present time if he were not afraid for his own health, indeed he also promises he will admit them more willingly than meats, and so it seems that he must be allowed without fear to use them whenever it is necessary. It is of very little concern that we have been informed through an experiment made by eating fish two or three times alternately that he still retains the same intolerance which he is supposed to have had by nature, since if all the evidence is considered correctly, we shall see most

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clearly that fish have not been the reason he had problems with his stomach, but rather the cause is an excessive abundance of food and especially of those foods which by their very nature cause distress to the stomach of any person whatsoever, such foods as fungi, oysters and turtles, which he has consumed in copious quantities as if they were excellent foods, although by their nature they bring melancholy and provide debased nourishment and when cooked they are very troublesome; in addition to which, on those very same days he had been entangled in many cares and involved in the most serious business affairs which drain the body and make it weak as *Hippocrates testifies lib. 2 de Diaet. num. 26*. On these occasions he had been compelled by the food to leave the house immediately and to take a rest from the perusal and undertaking of arduous affairs, which bring great harm to the stomach and produce a situation not conducive to the digestion of food, a fact which we explain at length, although it has been noted more than sufficiently and is proved by daily experiences. **10.** Moreover, the fear expressed by my colleagues is an empty one, namely their fear that because of his return to the air of his native land which he has always found dangerous to him, especially since for three years he had become accustomed to such excellent air, when there is in addition a less excellent regimen of food, he has fallen once more into his former condition and previously experienced ill health and even into a much worse state, since it cannot be denied that the air in which he spent the aforementioned period of three years is more excellent and more healthy than his native air; yet on two counts it must be said and certainly must be hoped that he is going to prove to be more healthy in his native air. First because, now that he has recovered his strength and his vigor, he is able easily to overcome the harmful effects of his native air, if indeed this is the

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source of his difficulties, so that he suffers not even the slightest harm; moreover, there is absolutely no truth in the assumption that there are harmful effects, since he lived in this same air in a state of health until puberty and he did not become ill from the bad quality of the air but from other causes, as has been pointed out previously; in addition to this, the sympathy of one's native air has a certain latent energy on account of which it is accustomed to be always more friendly to our nature than to any other, even if it is not naturally very excellent; this does not occur by reason of the mildness of the air, as *Fortun. fidel. lib. 1. de Relat. Med. cap. 2 shows*. but, as I have said, because of a certain harmony and sympathy which it has with our nature. Secondly, because when he practises a different way of life and makes a change from a leisurely and inactive life in which he is accustomed to no exertion and exercise to a more industrious life, one fatiguing him with exercise, he will be freed from his increasing debility and will conquer all illness, according to the opinion of Hippocrates cited above. Thus if we should fear any harm because of the observation of fast days, from the better health already confirmed and from his more robust strength there should be no doubt that it will be overcome. 11. And indeed it must be said that the argument that a change from better air to worse is dangerous and on that account that this danger ought not to be increased by a change of better food for worse has no place in our case, since changes of air of this kind usually produce illnesses at the time when bodies are weak and cannot sustain the adverse affects of the new air because of their debility, but when bodies have innate strength, the same change can in no way be prejudicial; change plays a much greater role in a change from foreign air into the air of the native land, which although it is

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naturally poor, sometimes is a remedy for long-lasting diseases said *Corn. Cels. sua*
Med. lib. 2. cap. 1.