

Readers' praise for THE UNQUIET BONES

Thoughtful and curious, surgeon Hugh is an engaging character who feels totally real. – Rikki B. USA

Absolutely loved the book and cannot wait for the next one. One of the best medieval genre novels I've read in years. More of the same please – soon! – David C. UK

I enjoyed the setting, the period, the very realistic characters and the dry wit. – Donna B. USA

I enjoyed the story, and the insight into life in 14th century Britain. A lovely way to learn history – I'm looking forward to the sequel.
– John H. UK

I read all of it in one go; it's quite the best medieval mystery I've read in a while. I teach medieval history, so it's always nice to read something by someone who actually knows what they're talking about. Can't wait for the next one! – Sarah T. USA

The first chronicle of Hugh de Singleton is a great read.
– Richard A. UK

I found your novel a most enjoyable read and a rewarding venture into the history of Bampton in the company of real and entertaining characters. Should I find myself in the UK again I will definitely stop for a peek at St Beornwald's. – Anne Marie C. Ireland

A wonderful story, which could have been ghost-written by a true 14th century surgeon. I'm looking forward to reading more of his work. – Jill M. USA

A great read – appreciate the detail – and the glossary. I hope you have more to follow! – Ross D. Australia

As a retired nurse I enjoy reading the history of medicine. This book fed my hunger and left me wanting more. I am sending a donation to help save the beautiful old church in the story. – Patricia N. USA

This is an outstanding book and I found it impossible to put down. I shall look forward to the next chronicle with eager anticipation. – Roger F. UK

The first chronicle of Hugh de Singleton was first rate all the way. Amusing, educational, interesting, clever, and realistic all rolled into one fantastic piece of work. I am eagerly awaiting the second.

– Annie E. USA

Just a few lines to say how much I have enjoyed reading *The Unquiet Bones*. It is going on my 'keeper shelf' with my other favourite medieval mysteries. I hope this book is the first of many. – Sue G. UK

An excellent first novel. The plot is well thought out and moves along nicely, with enough in the way of twists, turns, and red herrings to keep the reader interested. – Gary M. USA

What an outstanding first novel! Great plot, easy to read ... I've read all the Cadfael books and *The Unquiet Bones* exceeds them all. Can't wait for the next book in the series. – Peter S. UK

Excellent debut of a fine new protagonist ... the author shows a firm grasp of history. We can cheerfully hope that this will be the first of many. – Suzanne C. USA

I have never written to an author before but I really feel I must thank you for *The Unquiet Bones*. I have so enjoyed this book. I am a great fan of medieval whodunits and this must rank as one of the best. – Roger G. France

All in all this was a great first novel and I will purchase any others forthcoming from this author. – Ruth I. USA

The book contains fascinating insights into medieval surgery. *The Unquiet Bones* is a delight to read and I'm looking forward to the next installment. – Chris P. USA

I have just finished *The Unquiet Bones* and I loved it – a breath of fresh medieval air. – Annie C. USA

You've created a real sense of place, coupled with characters a reader can like and be interested in. Hugh is a great hero and I look forward to more of his adventures. – Maria H. USA

It was a wonderful read; I can't wait to see where Master Hugh's adventures will take him. – Travis B. USA

The Unquiet Bones

The first chronicle of
Hugh de Singleton, surgeon

MELVIN R. STARR

MONARCH
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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Acknowledgments

On a June afternoon in 1990 my wife and I discovered The Old Rectory, a delightful B&B in the tiny village of Mavesyn Ridware. Tony and Lis Page, the proprietors, became good friends. Nearly a decade later Tony and Lis moved to Bampton, and Susan and I were able to visit them there in 2001. I saw immediately the town's potential for the novel I intended to write.

Tony and Lis have been a great resource for the history of Bampton, for which I am very grateful.

Dr John Blair, of Queen's College, Oxford, has written several papers illuminating the history of Bampton. These have been a great help, especially in understanding the odd situation of a medieval parish church staffed by three vicars.

When he learned that I had written an as yet unpublished novel, Dr Dan Runyon, of Spring Arbor University, invited me to speak to his classes about the trials of a rookie writer. Dan sent some sample chapters to his friend, Tony Collins, Editorial Director of Monarch Books at Lion Hudson plc. Thanks, Dan.

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Dan Jensen, whose enthusiasm for teaching history was infectious, and who also pounced on bad writing.

And many others too numerous to list here.

Mel Starr
Ascensiontide 2008

For Susan
Proverbs 12:4a

For further information visit the author's website:
www.melstarr.net

Glossary

Angelus Bell: Rung three times each day; dawn, noon, and dusk. Announced the time for the Angelus devotional.

Bailiff: A lord's chief manorial representative. He oversaw all operations, collected rents and fines, and enforced labor service. Not a popular fellow.

Bolt: A short, heavy, blunt arrow, shot from a crossbow.

Burgher: A town merchant or tradesman.

Bylaw: A community assembly. The term applied to the meeting and to the laws and regulations passed.

Candlemas: February 2. Marked the purification of Mary. Women traditionally paraded to the church carrying lighted candles. Tillage of fields resumed this day.

Capon: A castrated male chicken.

Cautery: To sear with a heated metal tool. Generally used to seal a wound.

Chamberlain: The keeper of a lord's chamber, wardrobe and personal items.

Chauces: Tight-fitting trousers, often of different colors for each leg.

Childwite: A fine for having a child out of wedlock.

Christmas Oblation: An offering due to the church at Christmas.

Church of St Beornwald: Today the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Bampton, in the fourteenth century it was dedicated to an obscure Saxon saint enshrined in the church.

- Coppicing:** The practice of cutting trees, especially ash and poplar, so that a thicket of small saplings would grow from the stump. These shoots were used for everything from arrows to rafters, depending upon how much they were permitted to grow.
- Cotehardie:** The primary medieval outer garment. Women's were floor-length, men's ranged from thigh-length to ankle-length.
- Cresset:** A bowl of oil with a floating wick used for lighting.
- Demesne:** Land directly exploited by a lord, and worked by his villeins, as opposed to land a lord might rent to tenants.
- Deodand:** An object which caused accidental death. The item was sold and the price given to the king.
- Dexter:** A war horse; larger than pack-horses and palfreys. Also, the right-hand direction.
- Ember Day:** A day of fasting, prayer, and requesting forgiveness of sins. Observed four times per year, on successive Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.
- Epiphany:** January 6. Ended the twelve-day Christmas holiday. Celebrated the coming of the Magi to worship Christ.
- Extreme Unction:** "Last rites." A sacrament for the dying. It must not be premature. A recipient who recovered was considered as good as dead. He must fast perpetually, go barefoot, and abstain from sexual relations.
- Feast of the Assumption:** August 15. Marked the day Mary was supposedly carried to heaven.
- Fewterer:** Keeper of the lord's kennel and hounds.
- Furlong:** A bundle of strips of land, of different tenants, but generally planted with the same crop.
- Garderobe:** The toilet.
- Goodrich Castle:** Rebuilt in the thirteenth century. In Herefordshire, near the southern Welsh border. Came to Gilbert Talbot through his mother, Elizabeth Comyn.
- Groom:** A lower-rank servant to a lord. Often a teen-aged youth. Occasionally assistant to a valet.

Haberdasher: Merchant who sold household items such as pins, buckles, hats, and purses.

Half-virgate: Fifteen acres.

Hallmote: The manorial court. Royal courts judged free tenants accused of murder or felony. Otherwise manor courts had jurisdiction over legal matters concerning villagers. Villeins accused of homicide might also be tried in a manor court.

Hayward: A manorial officer in charge of fences, hedges, enclosures, and fields. Usually a half-virgater or mid-level villager, he served under the reeve. Also called a beadle.

Heriot: An inheritance tax paid to the lord of the manor, usually the heir's best animal.

Hocktide: The Sunday after Easter; a time of paying rents and taxes. Therefore, getting out of hock.

Horn Dancers: Men wearing deer antlers who danced in the town marketplace at Michaelmas. Probably an ancient pagan hunting custom.

Hypocras: Spiced wine. Sugar, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and nutmeg were often in the mix. Usually served at the end of a meal.

King's eyre: A royal circuit court, presided over generally by a traveling judge.

Kirtle: The basic medieval undergarment.

Lammas Day: August 1, when thanks was given for a successful wheat harvest.

Leech custard: a date paste topped with wine syrup.

Leirwite: A fine for sexual relations out of wedlock.

Lettuce: Bitter-tasting wild lettuce was sometimes added to soups, but was best known for its sedative and narcotic effect, especially when going to seed.

Marshalsea: The stables and associated accoutrements.

Maslin: A bread made from a mixture of grains; commonly wheat and rye or barley and rye.

Metatarses: Small bones of the foot.

Michaelmas: September 29. The feast signaled the end of the harvest. The last rents and tithes were due.

Ninth hour: 3 p.m.

Oxgang: About thirty acres. The term was more commonly used in northern England. See “yardland.”

Palfrey: A riding horse with a comfortable gait.

Pax Board: An object, frequently painted with sacred scenes, which was passed through the medieval church during services for all present to kiss.

Phlebotomy: The letting of blood in the treatment of disease.

Pollard: To cut a tree back to produce dense new growth.

Quadrivium: The scientific university studies – arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.

Rector: A priest in charge of a parish. He might be an absentee, and hire a vicar or curate to serve in his place.

Reeve: The most important manor official, although he did not outrank the bailiff. Elected by tenants from among themselves, often the best husbandman. He had responsibility for fields, buildings, and enforcing labor service.

Rogation Sunday: Five weeks after Easter. A time of asking God to bless the new growing season, accompanied by a parade around the boundaries of the village.

St Andrew’s Chapel: An ancient chapel a few hundred yards east of Bampton dating to before the Norman conquest.

St Catharine’s Day: November 25. St Catherine was the most popular female saint of medieval Europe. Processions were held in her honor on her feast day.

St Crispin’s Day: October 25.

St Stephen’s Day: December 26.

Scrofula: A swelling of lymph nodes on the neck.

Sixth hour: Noon.

Solar: A small private room, more easily heated than the great hall, where lords often preferred to spend time, especially in winter. Usually on an upper floor.

Squab: a young pigeon about four or five weeks old.

Subtlety: An elaborate dessert, served between courses (removes) of a meal. Often more for show than consumption.

Sumptuary laws: Laws designed to regulate expenditure on lavish clothing and food.

Suturing: Stitching a wound closed.

Tenant: A free peasant who rented land from his lord. He could pay his rent in labor, or more likely by the fourteenth century, in cash.

Terce: The canonical service at 9 a.m.

Third hour: 9 a.m.

Toft: Land surrounding a house, in the medieval period often used for growing vegetables.

Trepanning: Removing a circular section of the skull, usually to relieve headaches. It sometimes worked!

Trivium: The literary university studies – grammar, rhetoric, and logic.

Valet: A high-ranking servant to a lord. A chamberlain, for example.

Vicar: A priest who serves a parish but is not entitled to its tithes.

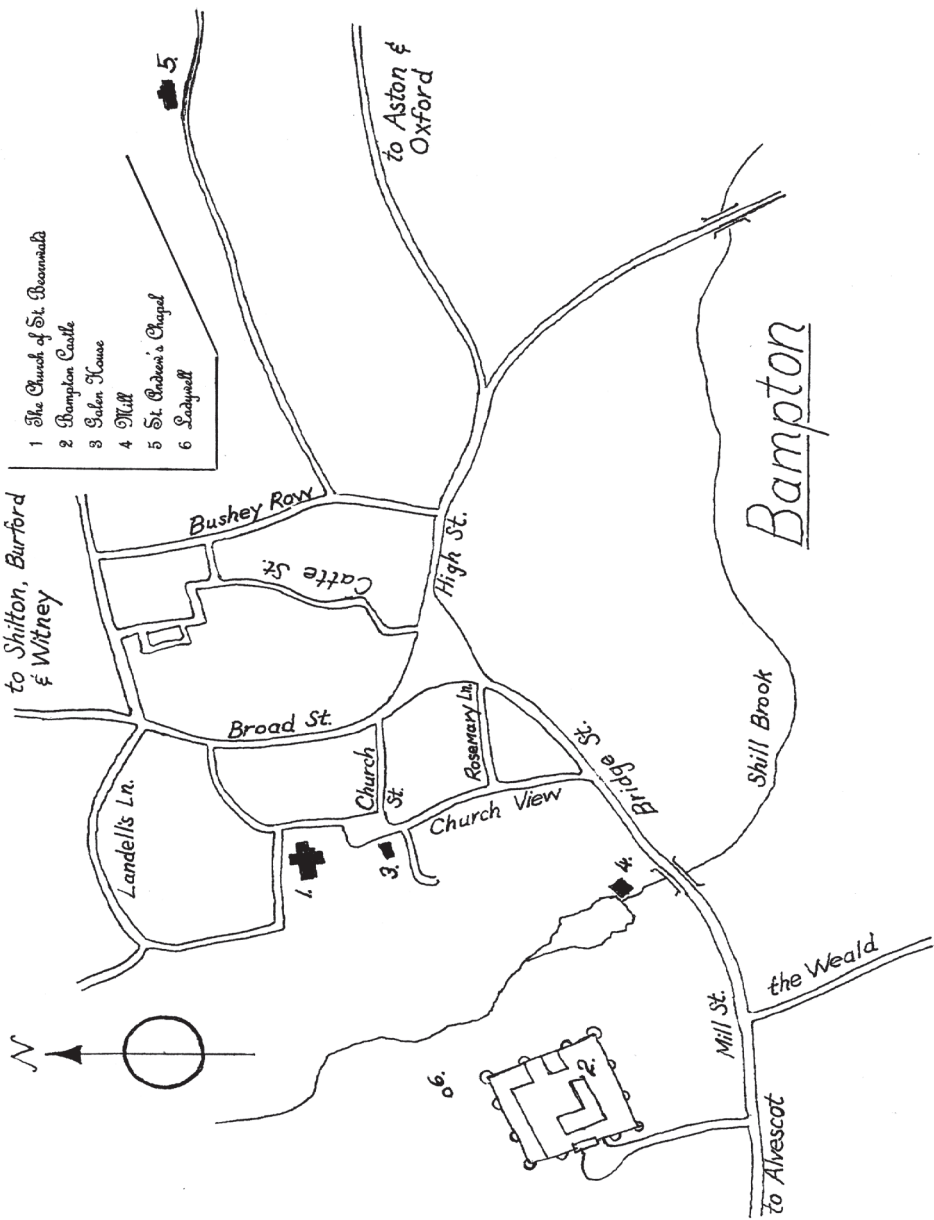
Villein: A non-free peasant. He could not leave his land or service to his lord, or sell animals without permission. But if he could escape his manor for a year and a day he would be free.

Wear the willow: “Weeping” willow was a symbol of sorrow. To wear the willow was to grieve. People did actually wear a sprig of willow to indicate their sorrow.

Week-work: The two or three days of work per week owed to the lord by a villein.

Whitsuntide: Pentecost; seven weeks after Easter Sunday.

Yardland: Thirty acres. Also called a virgate. In northern England often called an oxgang.



- 1 The Church of St. Broomfield
- 2 Bampton Castle
- 3 Baken House
- 4 Mill
- 5 St. Andrew's Chapel
- 6 Ladywell

to Shilton, Burford
& Witney

to Aston &
Oxford

Bampton

Skill Brook

the Weald

to Alvescot

Bushey Row

Cattle St.

High St.

Broad St.

Church St.

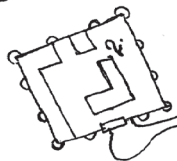
Church View

Rosemary Ln.

Bridge St.

Landell's Ln.

Mill St.



Chapter 1

Uctred thought he had discovered pig bones. He did not know or care why they were in the cesspit at the base of Bampton Castle wall.

Then he found the skull. Uctred was a villein, bound to the land of Lord Gilbert, third Baron Talbot, lord of Bampton Castle, and had slaughtered many pigs. He knew the difference between human and pig skulls.

Lord Gilbert called for me to inspect the bones. All knew whose bones they must be. Only two men had recently gone missing in Bampton. These must be the bones of one of them.

Sir Robert Mallory had been the intended suitor of Lord Gilbert's beautiful sister, Lady Joan. Shortly after Easter he and his squire called at the castle, having, it was said, business with Lord Gilbert. What business this was I know not, but suspect a dowry was part of the conversation. Two days later he and his squire rode out the castle gate to the road north toward Burford. The porter saw him go. No one saw him or his squire after. He never arrived at his father's manor at Northleech. How he arrived, dead, unseen, back within – or nearly within – the walls of Bampton Castle, no one could say. Foul play seemed likely.

I was called to the castle because of my profession: surgeon. Had I known when I chose such work that cleaning filth from bones might be part of my duties, I might have continued the original calling chosen for me: clerk.

I am Hugh of Singleton, fourth and last son of a minor knight from the county of Lancashire. The manor of Little Singleton is aptly named; it is small. My father held the manor in fief from Robert de Sandford. It was a pleasant place to grow up. Flat as a table, with a wandering, sluggish tidal stream, the Wyre, pushing through it on its

journey from the hills, just visible ten miles to the east, to the sea, an equal distance to the northwest.

Since I was the youngest son, the holding would play no part in my future. My oldest brother, Roger, would receive the manor, such as it was. I remember when I was but a tiny lad overhearing him discuss with my father a choice of brides who might bring with them a dowry which would enlarge his lands. In this they were moderately successful. Maud's dowry doubled my brother's holdings. After three children Roger doubled the size of his bed, as well. Maud was never a frail girl. Each heir she produced added to her bulk. This seemed not to trouble Roger. Heirs are important.

Our village priest, Father Aymer, taught the manor school. When I was nine years old, the year the Black Death first appeared, he spoke to my father and my future was decided.

I showed a scholar's aptitude, so it would be the university for me. At age fourteen I was sent off to Oxford to become a clerk, and, who knows, perhaps eventually a lawyer or a priest. This was poor timing, for in my second year at the university a fellow student became enraged at the watered beer he was served in a High Street tavern, and with some cohorts destroyed the place. The proprietor sought assistance, and the melee became a wild brawl known ever after as the St Scholastica Day Riot. Near a hundred scholars and townsmen died before the sheriff restored the peace. When I dared emerge from my lodgings, I fled to Lancashire and did not return until Michaelmas term.

I might instead have inherited Little Singleton had the Black Death been any worse. Roger and one of his sons perished in 1349, but two days apart, in the week before St Peter's Day. Then, at the Feast of St Mary my third brother died within a day of falling ill. Father Aymer said an imbalance of the four humors – air, earth, fire, and water – caused the sickness. Most priests, and indeed the laymen as well,

thought this imbalance due to God's wrath. Certainly men gave Him reason enough to be angry.

Most physicians ascribed the imbalance to the air. Father Aymer recommended burning wet wood to make smoky fires, ringing the church bell at regular intervals, and the wearing of a bag of spices around the neck to perfume the air. I was but a child, but it seemed to me even then that these precautions were not successful. Father Aymer, who did not shirk his duties as did some scoundrel priests, died a week after administering extreme unction to my brother Henry. I watched from the door, a respectful distance from my brother's bed. I can see in my memory Father Aymer bending over my wheezing, dying brother, his spice bag swinging out from his body as he chanted the phrases of the sacrament.

So my nephew and his mother inherited little Singleton and I made my way to Oxford. I found the course of study mildly interesting. Father Aymer had taught me Latin and some Greek, so it was no struggle to advance my skills in these languages.

I completed the trivium and quadrivium in the allotted six years, but chose not to take holy orders after the award of my bachelor's degree. I had no desire to remain a bachelor, although I had no particular lady in mind with whom I might terminate my solitary condition.

I desired to continue my studies. Perhaps, I thought, I shall study law, move to London, and advise kings. The number of kingly advisors who ended their lives in prison or at the block should have dissuaded me of this conceit. But the young are seldom deterred from following foolish ideas.

You see how little I esteemed life as a vicar in some lonely village, or even the life of a rector with livings to support me. This is not because I did not wish to serve God. My desire in that regard, I think, was greater than many who took a vocation, serving the church while they served themselves.

In 1361, while I completed a Master of Arts degree, plague struck again. Oxford, as before, was hard hit. The colleges were much reduced. I lost many friends, but once again God chose to spare me. I have prayed many times since that I might live so as to make Him pleased that He did so.

I lived in a room on St Michael's Street, with three other students. One fled the town at the first hint that the disease had returned. Two others perished. I could do nothing to help them, but tried to make them comfortable. No; when a man is covered from neck to groin in bursting pustules, he cannot be made comfortable. I brought water to them, and put cool cloths on their fevered foreheads, and waited with them for death.

William of Garstang had been a friend since he enrolled in Balliol College five years earlier. We came from villages but ten miles apart – although his was much larger; it held a weekly market – but we did not meet until we became students together. An hour before he died, William beckoned me to approach his bed. I dared not remain close, but heard his rasping whisper as he willed to me his possessions. Among his meager goods were three books.

God works in mysterious ways. Between terms, in August of 1361, He chose to do three things which would forever alter my life. First, I read one of William's books – *Surgery*, by Henry de Mondeville – and learned of the amazing intricacies of the human body. I read all day, and late into the night, until my supply of candles was gone. When I finished, I read the book again, and bought more candles.

Secondly, I fell in love. I did not know her name, or her home. But one glance told me she was a lady of rank and beyond my station. The heart, however, does not deal in social convention.

I had laid down de Mondeville's book long enough to seek a meal. I saw her as I left the inn. She rode a gray palfrey with easy grace. A man I assumed to be her husband escorted her. Another woman, also quite handsome, rode

with them, but I noticed little about her. A half-dozen grooms rode behind this trio: their tunics of blue and black might have identified the lady's family, but I paid little attention to them, either.

Had I rank enough to someday receive a bishopric, I might choose a mistress and disregard vows of chastity. Many who choose a vocation do. Secular priests in lower orders must be more circumspect, but even many of these keep women. This is not usually held against them, so long as they are loyal to the woman who lives with them and bears their children. But I found the thought of violating a vow as repugnant as a solitary life, wedded only to the church. And the church is already the bride of Christ and needs no other spouse.

The vision on the gray mare wore a deep red cotehardie. Because it was warm she needed no cloak or mantle. She wore a simple white hood, turned back, so that chestnut-colored hair visibly framed a flawless face. Beautiful women had smitten me before. It was a regular occurrence. But not like this. Of course, that's what I said the last time, also.

I followed the trio and their grooms at a discreet distance, hoping they might halt before some house. I was disappointed. The party rode on to Oxpens Road, crossed the Castle Mill Stream, and disappeared to the west as I stood watching, quite lost, from the bridge. Why should I have been lovelorn over a lady who seemed to be another man's wife? Who can know? I cannot. It seems foolish when I look back to the day. It did not seem so at the time.

I put the lady out of my mind. No; I lie. A beautiful woman is as impossible to put out of mind as a corn on one's toe. And just as disquieting. I did try, however.

I returned to de Mondeville's book and completed a third journey through its pages. I was confused, but 'twas not de Mondeville's writing which caused my perplexity. The profession I thought lay before me no longer appealed. Providing advice to princes seemed unattractive. Healing

men's broken and damaged bodies now occupied near all my waking thoughts.

I feared a leap into the unknown. Oxford was full to bursting with scholars and lawyers and clerks. No surprises awaited one who chose to join them. And the town was home also to many physicians, who thought themselves far above the barbers who usually performed the stitching of wounds and phlebotomies when such services were needed. Even a physician's work, with salves and potions, was familiar. But the pages of de Mondeville's book told me how little I knew of surgery, and how much I must learn should I choose such a vocation. I needed advice.

There is, I think, no wiser man in Oxford than Master John Wyclif. There are men who hold different opinions, of course. Often these are scholars whom Master John has bested in disputation. Tact is not one among his many virtues, but care for his students is. I sought him out for advice and found him in his chamber at Balliol College, bent over a book. I was loath to disturb him, but he received me warmly when he saw 'twas me who rapped upon his door.

"Hugh... come in. You look well. Come and sit."

He motioned to a bench, and resumed his own seat as I perched on the offered bench. The scholar peered silently at me, awaiting announcement of the reason for my visit.

"I seek advice," I began. "I had it in mind to study law, as many here do, but a new career entices me."

"Law is safe... for most," Wyclif remarked. "What is this new path which interests you?"

"Surgery. I have a book which tells of old and new knowledge in the treatment of injuries and disease."

"And from this book alone you would venture on a new vocation?"

"You think it unwise?"

"Not at all. So long as men do injury to themselves or others, surgeons will be needed."

"Then I should always be employed."

“Aye,” Wyclif grimaced. “But why seek my counsel? I know little of such matters.”

“I do not seek you for your surgical knowledge, but for aid in thinking through my decision.”

“Have you sought the advice of any other?”

“Nay.”

“Then there is your first mistake.”

“Who else must I seek? Do you know of a man who can advise about a life as a surgeon?”

“Indeed. He can advise on any career. I consulted Him when I decided to seek a degree in theology.”

I fell silent, for I knew of no man so capable as Master John asserted, able to advise in both theology and surgery. Perhaps the fellow did not live in Oxford. Wyclif saw my consternation.

“Do you seek God’s will and direction?”

“Ah... I understand. Have I prayed about this matter, you ask? Aye, I have, but God is silent.”

“So you seek me as second best.”

“But... ’twas you just said our Lord could advise on any career.”

“I jest. Of course I, like any man, am second to our Lord Christ... or perhaps third, or fourth.”

“So you will not guide my decision?”

“Did I say that? Why do you wish to become a surgeon? Do you enjoy blood and wounds and hurts?”

“No. I worry that I may not have the stomach for it.”

“Then why?”

“I find the study of man and his hurts and their cures fascinating. And I... I wish to help others.”

“You could do so as a priest.”

“Aye. But I lack the boldness to deal with another man’s eternal soul.”

“You would risk a man’s body, but not his soul?”

“The body cannot last long, regardless of what a surgeon or physician may do, but a man’s soul may rise to heaven or be doomed to hell... forever.”

“And a priest may influence the direction, for good or ill,” Wyclif completed my thought.

“Just so. The responsibility is too great for me.”

“Would that all priests thought as you,” Wyclif muttered. “But lopping off an arm destroyed in battle would not trouble you?”

“’Tis but flesh, not an everlasting soul.”

“You speak true, Hugh. And there is much merit in helping ease men’s lives. Our Lord Christ worked many miracles, did he not, to grant men relief from their afflictions. Should you do the same, you would be following in his path.”

“I had not considered that,” I admitted.

“Then consider it now. And should you become a surgeon, keep our Lord as your model, and your work will prosper.”

And so God’s third wonder: a profession. I would go to Paris to study. My income from the manor at Little Singleton was £6 and 15 shillings each year, to be awarded so long as I was a student, and to terminate after eight years.

My purse would permit one year in Paris. I know what you are thinking. But I did not spend my resources on riotous living. Paris is an expensive city. I learned much there. I watched and then participated in dissections. I learned phlebotomy, suturing, cautery, the removal of arrows, the setting of broken bones, and the treatment of scrofulous sores. I learned how to extract a tooth and remove a tumor. I learned trepanning to relieve a headache, and how to lance a fistula. I learned which herbs might staunch bleeding, or dull pain, or cleanse a wound. I spent both time and money as wisely as I knew how, learning the skills which I hoped would one day earn me a living.