

**ANDREAS VESALIUS,  
THE REFORMER OF  
ANATOMY**

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Andreas Vesalius, the Reformer of Anatomy by James Moores Ball

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BY  
JAMES MOORES BALL, M. D.



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TO THE MEMORY  
OF THOSE ILLUSTRIOUS MEN  
WHO  
OFTEN UNDER ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES  
AND  
SOMETIMES IN DANGER OF DEATH  
SUCCEEDED IN UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES  
OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BODY  
TO THE FATHERS OF ANATOMY  
AND  
TO THE ARTIST-ANATOMISTS  
THIS BOOK  
IS DEDICATED







## PREFACE



IN THE ANNALS OF THE medical profession the name of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels holds a place second to none. Every physician has heard of him, yet few know the details of his life, the circumstances under which his labors were carried out, the extent of those labors, or their far-reaching influence upon the progress of anatomy, physiology and surgery. Comparatively few physicians have seen his works; and fewer still have read them. The reformation which he inaugurated in anatomy, and incidentally in other branches of medical science, has left only a dim impress upon the minds of the busy, science-loving physicians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That so little should be known about him is not surprising, since his writings were in Latin and were published prior to the middle of the sixteenth century. His books,

which at one time were in the hands of all the scientific physicians of Europe, are now rarely encountered beyond the walls of the great medical libraries of the world. They are among the *incunabula* of the medical literature. That English-speaking physicians know little of Vesalian literature is due to the fact that no extensive biography of the great anatomist has appeared in our language. Most of the Vesalian literature which has been written by English and American authors has been in the form of brief articles for the medical press; these oftentimes have been incorrect and unillustrated. Perhaps the best example of this class is the article by Mr. Henry Morley which appeared originally in *Fraser's Magazine*, in 1853, and later was published in his *Clement Marot and Other Studies*, in 1871. The chief data for Vesalius's biography are to be found in his own writings, in the archives of the Universities in which he taught, and in the controversial literature of the period. Extensive as are these sources they leave much to be desired. A vast mass of Vesalian literature was printed, chiefly in the Latin language, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of it is based on insufficient evidence or on national prejudice. The Germans, the French, the Dutch and the Italians have all taken a turn at it. In modern times the monumental work of Roth, *Andreas Vesalius Bruxellensis*, Berlin, 1892, has served to epitomize this literature and to make clear many points which formerly were not understood. I have taken Roth's book as a basis for this monograph, without using the voluminous references which are found in the work of this thorough historian.

The man who overthrew the authority of Galen; revolutionized the teaching of the structure of the human body; started anatomical, physiological, and surgical investigation in the right channels; first correctly illustrated his dissections; destroyed ancient dogmas, and made many new discoveries—this man, Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, deserves the name which Morley has given him, “the Luther of Anatomy.”

At long intervals a bright particular star appears in the intellectual horizon, endowed with genius of such a superlative order as seemingly to comprise within itself the whole domain of an entire science. These men do not belong to any particular epoch in the development of the human mind. They are the eternal symbols of progress, and their history is the history of the science which they profess. Such men were Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Lavoisier, and Bichat; and such also was Andreas Vesalius the anatomist. Young, enthusiastic, courageous and diligent, Vesalius dared to contradict the authority of Galen, corrected the anatomical mistakes of thirteen centuries and before his thirtieth year published the most accurate, complete, and best illustrated treatise on anatomy that the world had ever seen. His industry, the success which crowned his efforts, the jealousies which his discoveries aroused in the breasts of his contemporaries, the honors which were conferred upon him by Charles the Fifth and Philip the Second, his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and his tragic death—these are events which deserve to be chronicled by an abler pen than mine.

The year 1543 marks the date of a revolution which