FIG 5—Engraving entitled *Rex et Regina de Tunis* by Wenzel Hollar

Patients with Paget's disease affecting the maxilla or mandible are often first detected by dentists as tooth extraction may cause problems and because any artificial dentures will not remain satisfactory for more than a few months.

The finding of pagetoid deformity, facies leontina,

and hypertrophic clavicles in Metsys's painting questions the belief of Sir James Paget that Paget's disease was a condition that had arisen fairly recently.

I thank Professor M Smeyers, art historian, KU Leuven, for his critical advice and Dr V Parsons for providing figure 2.

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Robbie's Fox cards

Sir James Howie

Every year, between October and Christmas, Robbie (Sir Theodore) Fox, who was editor of the *Lancet* from 1944 to 1964, set about creating with his own hand his unique cards – Fox cards, he called them. These were sent at Christmas to personal friends and were certainly effective not only at giving pleasure to their recipients but at conveying something of Robbie's whimsical, humorous, and perceptive outlook on people and life. For example, he says: "I hope that any lack of gravitas in this card won't obscure my particularly good wishes." Indeed, on the contrary, the cards revealed his insistence on making his communications personal, relevant, and amusing. The cards are treasured by those who received them, and it is right that they should be shown to a wider audience.

One card says:

From bottom of psychologist's barrel – These lassies and
laddies aren't goodies or baddies
Instead (by my troth)
We're all of us both
[I know, I know. But even Shakespeare sometimes used
outdated phrases].

Another tells us:

Thought for some other Day
"All beauty is relative but not all relatives are beautiful."

These are just a few examples that appeal to me; all of them are worth studying even if their reduced size requires the use of a hand lens.

Portrait from memory

But what of the man as I remember him? Can I do him as a portrait from memory?

I came to know him in May 1943, when the *Lancet* called him back from military service and he had to give up editing the *Army Medical Department Bulletin*, a publication that brought the War Office more approval than was usual for most of its published communications to serving medical officers. After Robbie's successor had to give up editing this unusual venture

rather quickly and suddenly because of ill health, the pathology department sought Fox's advice about a successor. Fox went through the manuscripts awaiting publication in his successor's cupboard and found some that I had done at the request of the then editor, who had confessed that he needed help from anyone around who could write a little. I was then at Millbank Army Hospital hoping for orders to return to Nigeria, where I had spent two happy and profitable years in what was clearly a microbiologist's paradise. The head of the War Office decided to keep me in London for a time to get the malaria out of my system.

Fox recognised from reading my offerings that I had also written a few things for the *Lancet* and advised that I should be given a chance to edit the *AMD Bulletin*; this owed its surprising and unexpected success to his talent not only for choosing subjects of interest but for getting the various War Office consultants to provide some of the necessary information and eventually to accept his edited version of what he had been offered and had himself unearthed from various sources. He did this really well and was most anxious to see the bulletin continue. So he persuaded the War Office to appoint me to the pathology department, where I edited the bulletin as part of my duties as a deputy assistant director of pathology. Fox assured me that the duties were far from simple but that from his office at the *Lancet* he would give me whatever practical help and advice I thought necessary. He kept his word faithfully. I could count on an almost weekly visit from him and could call him at any time if I needed help and advice, which I certainly did. We became friends – it was one of the best friendships of my life.

How did you learn to write?

Fox asked me how I had learnt to write one evening after I had written an annotation for him which he said he needed for the *Lancet* as soon as possible. I called on him with the handwritten script two hours after he had asked me to do it. "What on earth!" he exclaimed.

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"How did you learn to write?" I told him about a postal course in freelance journalism that I had taken. "And what did that teach you?" I told him that it had taught me to write about one subject at a time; to write simple sentences as found in the popular press; to realise that the title and first two sentences had to capture the

editor's attention or he would read no further; and, if ever invited to write something "as soon as possible," to realise that this meant within the next few hours. "This is marvellous," he said, "I never thought such courses could be so sensible. Come and tell me more. I am dining at the Athenaeum."

So we adjourned to this famous club. "Don't be surprised," he said, "if we are denied admission. I am a very new member." We were received with the utmost courtesy and made our way into the comfortable smoking room. Robbie told me that a weekly paper had run a competition inviting its readers to submit rhyming rules for the Athenaeum Club. The winner was:

A man may not if he expire
retain a seat beside the fire.

I looked at the fire and saw exactly why that was the winning rule. It greatly appealed to Robbie; he enjoyed any example of gently ironic humour that effectively scored a hit. It was his own way of making a serious point, as in the later debate on what should be the role of the BMA in the forthcoming NHS, the bill for which was going through parliament. A leading article in the *BMJ* said that the association's attitude should be to cooperate with the NHS while acting as a watchdog for the profession. "Since when," retorted Robbie's *Lancet*, "has cooperation become an attribute of watchdogs?" That was Robbie all over: compelling and persuasive in argument but gently amusing in presenting the case.

Visits to Green House

Among my happiest recollections are two weekend visits to Robbie's home, Green House, at Rotherfield. There we spent Saturday evening and Sunday walking in the grounds and surrounding woods. His love of nature and his understanding of plants, birds, and animals were a revelation. I had myself enjoyed a country upbringing and thought I knew a good deal about nature; but my knowledge and understanding grew with every walk I made with Robbie and two of his sons. We talked also of general matters. I asked him why the English thought it important to send their children to boarding schools, especially as it was so expensive and often produced very unhappy children. "It's to get boys away from their mothers," he asserted. "Mothers are always in danger of falling in love with their sons; and it's not good for either of them." I said no more on the subject.

My second visit to Green House was at the weekend after the war ended with the defeat of Japan. It was a happy and relaxed occasion until we arrived at the station on the Monday morning to go back to London. There we were faced with a huge poster of the Union Jack with some patriotic slogan beside it which I cannot recall. "Look at that horror!" said Robbie, "It stands for all that I most disapprove of!" I remonstrated with him. "After all," I said, "we were needed in 1940; and I'm sure that many good things were done in the empire by devoted servants of the crown as well as wrong things by greedy exploiters. We must surely be allowed a bit of flag waving now and then; and this surely is one of the times for it." Robbie was thoughtful and then said: "All right, but not with that flag. If we've got to wave a flag let it be the Royal Standard." I

agreed with him that it would have been a better choice. For all his anger with the Union Jack, Robbie was a genuine patriot. Despite his Quaker loyalty he insisted on playing his part in both wars; in the first he served in a Friends' ambulance unit, and in the second he was at first a regimental medical officer before he was evacuated from Cherbourg, after which he worked in the army blood transfusion service before joining the War Office to edit the *AMD Bulletin*.

The good life

Robbie lived a good life in the best sense of the word. His conduct was wholly upright and immensely considerate of others. In the 1950s, when I was a professor at Glasgow University, I had a close association with the *Lancet* and regularly called on him during my frequent visits to London on university business and as a member of the Agricultural Research Council. On one visit Robbie said that we were not to talk business that evening. It was the second time that week that I had been in London and he could see that I was far too busy. "You're tired," he said, "and this evening you are to visit the Russian ballet and watch *Romeo and Juliet*. It will do you a world of good and for once the *Lancet* can wait!" I was truly grateful for such understanding treatment.

One day at Millbank during the war we entertained a newly arrived group of Polish medical officers. Robbie Fox was included in the party. Conversation went ahead on the usual polite but platitudinous lines. Robbie decided to get more life into the party so he said, "Tell me, to what do you attribute the great success of your soldiers with our women?" In a flash the atmosphere took light. The Polish officers were full of suggestions—some probable and some merely conjecture. During a pause Robbie said: "I wonder if this is what you are really telling me. When a man looks at a woman he must convince her of two things. First, there is but one woman in his mind and, second, that he has but one thought concerning her!" This met with unanimous acclaim from our guests and the reception became all that it was meant to be. Robbie slipped quietly away.

On another occasion, when he visited Glasgow to give a lecture at my invitation, we went for a walk at the weekend in the region of Loch Lomond. He talked then with great seriousness and at length about the ethical issues facing the medical profession and his hope that doctors would never forget that the only true guide to their conduct must be the welfare of each individual patient. "That's true," I agreed, and added, "It is also inherent in the Christian religion." "That raises really difficult issues," Robbie replied; and then said abruptly: "You must have known my late friend Tom, who came from your village, where his father was a minister." Indeed, I knew Tom's father very well. My mother, who had married into an "auld kirk" family, was herself a Congregationalist and had thought better of Tom's father's lively sermons than of those sober ones of the established church minister. For the evening service, therefore, she often went with her children to the Free Church. "Do you remember anything specific of Tom's father's sermons?" Robbie asked. I had to confess that I did not; but I could recall the downright sincerity and emphasis of his regular opening to the prayer of confession. His words never varied and they came with great force: "Forgive us Lord; the good that we would we do not; the evil that we would not, that we do." Robbie listened and said: "That indeed is a good prescription for right conduct." That was the nearest I ever heard him come to an acceptance of a faith which, I assured him, raised many difficulties in some points of detail for many of its most loyal believers.

What's in a name?

Robbie was rightly and loyally devoted to his family name. When he accepted a knighthood at the second time of its being offered to him I asked him what he was to be called—Robbie, Robin, Robert, or Theodore? “Well,” he said, “what was inappropriate as a name for me at my prep school might now come into use.” So Sir Theodore he became. “Your father would have been pleased,” I said. “Did you know my father?” he asked.

I did not. But I knew that as Dr Fortescue Fox of Strathpeffer spa he had been a lifelong hero of my 95 year old grandmother for long after she had been able to pay her yearly visit to him for treatment of her arthritis. Just as Dr Fortescue Fox was a hero of my grandmother, so his son Theodore is a hero of mine.

Sir Theodore Fox died in 1989; obituaries were published in the *BMJ* (1 July, p 47) and *Lancet* (1 July, p 56).

Medical imagery in the art of Frida Kahlo

David Lomas, Rosemary Howell

Frida Kahlo held her first solo exhibition in New York in 1938. Included were paintings that narrate her experience of a miscarriage six years earlier in Detroit, where she had accompanied her husband, the Mexican mural painter Diego Rivera. Reviewing the exhibition Howard Devree, an art critic for the *New York Times*, dismissed Kahlo's work as “more obstetrical than aesthetic.”¹ Underlying this reproach is an attitude that art should not concern itself with obstetrics, a view that any cursory glance at Western art would confirm. To describe artistic creation by using metaphors of gestation and birth is commonplace, yet to depict such events is tacitly proscribed. In Western art scenes of childbirth are rare and visual accounts of abortion or miscarriage non-existent. They have remained the province of medical texts. Openly flouting this convention, Kahlo produced a unique body of images such that Rivera could proclaim her “The only human force since the marvellous Aztec master sculpting in black basalt who has given plastic expression to the phenomenon of birth.”²

In the culture to which Kahlo belonged miscarriage was a source of shame: the abject failure of a socially conditioned expectation of motherhood and a travesty of creation in which birth yields only death and detritus. No rituals exist to commemorate the loss associated with miscarriage, which is thus relegated to a private domain of silent grief.³ By speaking out Kahlo

articulated the unspeakable in a hybrid language derived partly from artistic traditions but also from textbooks of anatomy and obstetrics.

Kahlo's medical history is a catalogue of misfortune. She was born in 1907 and was affected by poliomyelitis, which left her right leg withered and her spine scoliotic. When she was 18 a tram accident caused devastating injuries. She was impaled through her pelvis by a steel bar and sustained multiple fractures of the spine, pelvis, right leg, and foot. In subsequent years she underwent numerous orthopaedic operations in vain attempts to alleviate pains in her back and right leg, which was eventually amputated. Her death at age 47 followed soon afterwards. More than one pregnancy was terminated by therapeutic abortion, and she had two (possibly three) first trimester miscarriages of uncertain relation to the accident. Though the severe penetrating injury may have caused uterine deformity, her debilitated physical state manifesting in chronic infections and anaemia was a more probable contributory factor. Her best documented pregnancy was proceeded with only after much equivocation and weighing of the potential risks of a caesarean section. It ended abruptly, however, in a miscarriage in 1932.

Henry Ford Hospital (fig 1) was painted shortly afterwards. Kahlo lies naked on a hospital bed in a pool of blood. The title alludes to the medical setting yet her bed is displaced into a desolate landscape to heighten the sense of isolation and vulnerability. Superimposed on this scene is an array of objects referring to the miscarriage; some evoke it literally while others allude more obliquely and subjectively to the event. These are depicted in a larger scale and a contrasting diagrammatic idiom. In this painting Kahlo is the hapless victim of an event over which she exerts no control. The impression of helpless isolation is aggravated by the lack of a visual language to express her trauma. The awkward disjuncture between two pictorial modes—schematic and naturalistic—seems to gesture towards a grief that is representable only as discontinuity. Where the newspaper critic recoiled in distaste before this spectacle one sees Kahlo striving to render visible a blindspot of high cultural vision. Medical imagery helps her to achieve this; immediately after the miscarriage she began foraging in obstetric texts and evidently drew the fetus and pelvis from this source. Yet its incapacity to evoke the subjective dimension of her response is indicated by the sharp discrepancy between these prosaic forms and the snail, a private allusive reference.

Frida and the Miscarriage, 1932 (fig 2) has a similar composition. The naked body is central and once again surrounded by axially arranged forms: a fetus (the umbilical cord wrapped like a bandage around her damaged right leg), dividing cells, and growing plants. The effect is harmoniously balanced, however, where formerly it was disjointed. Leaves shaped like phalluses

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FIG 1—*Henry Ford Hospital*, 1932. Collection of Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City